

The Information World of Parents

**A study of the use and understanding of
information by parents of primary school
aged children**

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Abstract

Recent decades have seen social change in attitudes towards parenting within the United Kingdom. During this time, parenting has received an unprecedented amount of attention from government through legislation and policy initiatives, as well as becoming a regular topic in the news media, television programmes and for book publishers. Running parallel to these changes has been the growing social normalisation of the internet. The consequence of this social change is that parents today, arguably, face greater pressures in terms of sifting and weighing the wide range of messages and information targeted at them.

Despite this increased focus on parents and parenting, their everyday life information seeking (ELIS) has received comparatively little attention from library and information science. This thesis examines the ELIS of 33 parents of primary school aged children in Leeds, United Kingdom. The main contribution of this thesis is a substantive grounded theory (GT) which explains how parents look for, access and weigh information as part of their parental responsibility. The theory is framed within five GT categories:

- GT category A: Being a parent (core category)
- GT category B: Connectivity
- GT category C: Trust
- GT category D: Picture of Self
- GT category E: Weighing

This substantive theory makes a specific contribution to the library and information science (LIS) field by providing an up-to-date and unique view of parents' information seeking. My research shows that parents search for information in their role of 'being a parent' and provides an explanation as to how a specific group of parents search for, access, and choose information to inform and support them in this role.

Although the research is unique to a specific group of parents, it presents a theory which does not contradict, but rather is in agreement with existing models of information seeking such as Savolainen's (1995) ELIS model, Chatman's (1991) notion of 'small worlds' and Fisher and Landry's (2007) study of the role of affect on stay at home mothers (SAHMs).

This research presents a generative substantive theory that has potentially wide practical application to affect change and inform the way that organisations, services, and professionals convey information to parents.

Candidate's Declaration

I confirm that the thesis is my own work; and that all published or other sources of material consulted have been acknowledged in notes to the text or the bibliography.

I confirm that the thesis has not been submitted for a comparable academic award.

I confirm that the thesis has been submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy from Leeds Metropolitan University in 2010.

Signed: Date:

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List of Presentations and Publications

Presentations

- July 2007 Presented an outline of my proposed research at the Leeds Metropolitan University Post-graduate Research Practice Conference.
- February 2008 Presented a paper at Innovation North's Doctoral symposium.
- March 2008 Presented a short paper at the LILAC 2008 conference held in Liverpool.
- March 2009 Presented a long paper at the LILAC 2009 conference held in Cardiff.

Peer-reviewed Publications

Walker, C.G. (2009). Seeking Information: A study of the use and understanding of information by parents of young children. *Journal of Information Literacy*, 3(2), pp. 53-63.
Available from: <http://ojs.lboro.ac.uk/ojs/index.php/JIL/article/view/PRA-V3-I2-2009-4>

List of Acronyms

A&E	Accident and Emergency
ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
ALA	American Library Association
CILIP	Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals
DL	Digital Literacy
DML	Digital Media Literacy
ECM	Every Child Matters
ELIS	Everyday Life Information Seeking
GP	General Practitioner
GT	Grounded Theory
IB	Information Behaviour
ICT	Information Communications Technology
IL	Information Literacy
INSU	Information Needs, Seeking, and Use
LIS	Library and Information Science
NESS	National Evaluation of Sure Start
PRU	Pupil Referral Unit
PSA	Parent Support Advisor
SAHMs	Stay-at-Home Mothers
SES	Socio-Economic Status
SSLP	Sure Start Local Programmes
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

1 Introduction

The study described in this thesis was designed and implemented in order to fulfil the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) at Leeds Metropolitan University. This thesis presents the rationale for undertaking the study, as well as providing a full description of the methodology, methods, results and interpretation of the results associated with this investigation. This chapter presents the background to the research as well as the rationale underpinning the research and concludes with a descriptive summary of the structure of the thesis.

1.1 A personal project

This research project has had a personal resonance for me, notably because I am the parent of two children, Samuel aged seven, and Evelyn aged two. The challenges of parenting these two children has been markedly different. Evelyn or 'Evie' was born a little early in an emergency situation on the afternoon of Sunday 27th May 2007. Her birth, like so many, was not straightforward. My wife was worried that all was not well with the pregnancy and so we called the foetal assessment unit at St James's University Hospital in Leeds, who asked us to go in immediately for an assessment. Forty-five minutes after arriving at the foetal assessment unit my baby daughter had been unceremoniously pulled from her mother in an emergency caesarean section. The birth was a blur, I remember the consultant, having completed the operation, turning to me in the operating theatre and saying 'thank you for coming in'. We had been close to losing her, the beauty of the moment was that Evelyn was safe. At birth she weighed just 4lb 1oz and she was going to spend the first three and half weeks of her life in hospital.

Ten days later Evelyn was rushed into the neo-natal intensive care unit for three days after a paediatrician discovered a heart murmur--she has a 'PDA' he explained. The doctor did his best to explain what the problem was, but at that time, it just did not make sense; we later looked the condition up on the internet, finding that it was a faulty heart valve that had not closed at birth. A paediatric cardiologist later confirmed the diagnosis. They initially tried to treat the condition with drugs in the hope that they would help alleviate the problem and mitigate the immediate need for an operation. During this time the paediatricians on the ward were running all types of chromosomal and genetic tests to find out why she was so small, these in themselves causing even more anxiety.

The following months were difficult; Evelyn did superbly, despite the valve not closing, meaning that we had the additional worry of a looming operation. At around six months of

age Evelyn contracted pneumonia followed by over three months of infection and worry. My wife and I were in and out of the local accident and emergency (A&E) unit with many nights during this period, spent by my wife and me, on the paediatric ward with our daughter.

During this time Evelyn's growth and development severely slowed. Her tiny, frail body was concentrating on fighting the infections, which it did admirably, with the help of some powerful antibiotics. That was the start of being caught in a new cycle of medical appointments leading to many more tests carried out by a new group of health professionals who included: paediatricians, play therapists, physiotherapists, audiologists, occupational therapists, speech therapists, cardiologists, neurologists and geneticists.

Thankfully, Evelyn is growing and developing; she is now walking and talking and the experience seems to have forged a 'warrior spirit' in this little girl, bringing with it challenging behaviour we never encountered with our son. This experience occurred as I was undertaking my initial research for this thesis. It helped to crystallise in my own mind the importance of being able to know the right questions and where to find and obtain answers, help and support as a parent, especially at difficult times.

1.1.1 A story of two children

The following two stories are true, the aim in recounting them is to help illustrate the importance of parents being able to communicate and find timely, relevant information. Both examples involve two young children who were born in Leeds at around the same time. Both children were born under challenging circumstances; these two incidents occurred during the winter of 2007/8.

The first relates to a baby girl, who had some ongoing medical issues since being born small. She developed a severe cold that then developed into pneumonia. Worry and concern led her parents to monitor her cold closely and as part of this process they checked the NHS direct website and consulted a paediatrician friend for help and advice, who suggested they needed to watch her closely and contact their general practitioner (GP) if they were in any doubt about her condition. Her parents continued to monitor the young girl and clearly recognised that she was not getting better. On telephoning their GP they were told that there were no more appointments and that they should call back at 8 o'clock the next morning for an appointment. Yet, they persisted and explained that the child was having great difficulty and that she really needed to see a doctor. The secretary acquiesced and, after a brief conversation with one of the GPs, asked them to attend the surgery immediately. Once at the surgery the GP made a very quick assessment of the situation, called the local A&E and told them to expect the little girl with a suspected case

of pneumonia. On arrival at A&E the little girl was quickly assessed, given a chest x-ray and admitted to hospital, thankfully making a full recovery, with nothing more to show for the emergency than the extremely frayed nerves of her parents.

The second incident relates to a baby boy, he was the son of a recently arrived immigrant family. His mother had been concerned about his developing cold especially as it was not getting better. She went to collect his siblings from school, taking the ill child with her. While at school the baby seemed to stop breathing. One of the class teachers called for an ambulance which duly arrived, the paramedics administered oxygen which seemed to revive the little child, however, tragically, he died on the way to hospital. The boy was a similar age to the little girl and like her had spent several weeks in hospital when he was born prematurely. His mother explained that she knew that he had a chest infection and that she had tried to get him an appointment to see the doctor but without success. She was unaware that she could have contacted NHS Direct for advice or help or even that she could take him down to A&E directly.

These two cases illustrate the importance of information seeking and knowing. The parents of the little girl in case one, firstly recognised the urgency of the situation, they had a close friend who was a paediatrician, they knew how to navigate 'the system', they knew how to pester the GPs, they also knew that there were alternative routes of help and support available should it be needed. In this they were successful. Unfortunately for the parents of the baby boy they were unable to use the help mechanisms which form the supporting fabric of the British health care system, leading to tragic consequences.

At the onset of this research project, little did I realise how my own personal experiences would be intertwined with some of the parents I would meet. Over these past months I have talked with parents, many of whom have had experiences not too dissimilar to my own. These ongoing experiences have furnished me with a lens and perhaps a greater degree of insight, into the worries, fears, confusion and challenges that many parents face, especially when they have a child who requires additional input and support. I am equally aware of the arguments that this additional insight may cause me to interpret the data in view of my own experiences and therefore make my interpretation susceptible to bias. My answer to this is that indeed 'I hope not'. No researcher can totally unravel themselves from their own views and life experiences. It is fundamentally these views and experiences that provide colour and flavour to any individual researcher's work. However, it is a potential charge of which I am fully aware. In order to help counter this charge my aim is not to hide from my own experiences, rather it is to offer transparency and ensure that my own experiences are laid out for all to see and not to hide them under a metaphorical bushel.

1.2 Research rationale

Being a parent is a journey, and one that is accompanied by challenges, blessings, doubts and wonder. The term 'lifelong learning' can quite easily be attributed to what it means to be a parent in modern Britain. My own experience is that nothing can really prepare you for being a parent. Friends and family will offer you a vast array of advice and information as they aim to support you in your journey or as the poet John Wilmot bemoaned:

Before I got married I had six theories about bringing up children; now I have six children, and no theories. John Wilmot (2nd Earl of Rochester, 1647-1680)

Parenting brings with it a new phase in a person's life; that was certainly the case for my wife and me. Yet for many people, certainly for many of those I have spoken to in the course of this research, there is little in the way of prior grounding in the rights or wrongs of parenting. It seems that many of us fall into *being a parent*, relying on what we have seen and what we have learnt from our family, friends and acquaintances. The much quoted and even clichéd aphorism '*It takes a village to raise a child*' has recently re-entered the popular domain when Hillary Clinton famously used it as a call for collective responsibility for raising children in the United States. However, as will be discussed in chapter 2, social structures, attitudes and mobility have led to new paradigms in the modern post-nuclear family permeating British society. Many families are no longer in a position to rely on family, friends or their local community to help them raise children and so parents are often left to work things out for themselves.

This past decade has also seen a steady increase in the range and type of information available to parents. This has taken a wide range of forms that have included parenting books, television programmes, and even newspapers (Freely, 2000). The past ten years has also seen the coming of age of the internet, with Dutton and Helsper (2007) claiming that by 2007 over two thirds of Britons had access to the internet, of whom four out of five used a broadband connection. There has also been a political move towards a greater focus on family life that can trace its genesis back to the former Conservative government's Children Act 1989 and which is a central pillar of the Labour government's social agenda. The Labour government's focus has been centred on the child. This has underpinned the whole 'Every Child Matters' (HM Treasury, 2003) agenda and associated programmes. The consequence of this has been an agenda that has been focused on decreasing inequality, increasing parental responsibility and parental choice, in addition to a range of messages targeting family life, for example healthy eating advice and parenting skills. This combination of increased access to information about parenting and the wider

politicisation of childhood and family life has resulted in parenting becoming a staple of the British news media and political comment (Freely, 2000). One of the most notable examples is the continuing debate over the safety of the MMR vaccine and the part the media and politicians have played in the whole episode (Guillaume, 2006). Another recent example of a widely publicised report was the investigation by The Children's Society, entitled 'The Good Childhood Inquiry'. This report identified five key areas of concern and anxiety reported by children and their parents. These areas are: issues relating to child safety, child care, child support, child freedom, issues of fairness and issues of respect (Layard & Dunn, 2009; The Children's Society, 2006).

Parents today not only have greater access to information about parenting, through the media and the internet, but also find themselves and their families under greater socio-political scrutiny (Department for Education and Skills, 2007; HM Treasury, 2003). This poses the questions: how and why do parents seek information, how do they assess it, and how do they use it?

There is comparatively little academic research examining the information seeking of parents. One notable, and widely cited British study was conducted by Marden and Nicholas, who noted that '*the public have been wholly neglected by information researchers*' (1997, p.5), this view being echoed by Harris and Dewdney (1994) and Savolainen (2005). There have been numerous studies about information needs in different academic disciplines such as health and social care and family studies. These studies however, have tended to focus on specific aspects of parents' information needs such as their need for health information (Bath & Guillaume, 2004; Dail & Way, 1985; Koepke & Williams, 1989; Simanski, 1998; Smith & Gallery, 2005; Walker, 2005). There are also examples of relevant unpublished research commissioned by the government such as the study commissioned by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) entitled 'Childcare Act: Qualitative Research into Parents' Information' (COI Research, 2007). This report formed part of a wider consultation investigating how local authorities could meet proposed new legal responsibilities placed upon them by the Childcare Act 2006. However, there remains a lack of up-to-date research examining the information seeking and information use by British parents.

1.3 Determining a focus for inquiry

Determining a direction or focus for the research is an important element for any project as Lincoln and Guba state (1985) '*no inquiry, regardless of which paradigm may guide it, can be conducted in the absence of a focus*' (p. 226). This study focuses specifically on the everyday life information seeking (ELIS) of parents of primary school aged children.

Parents operate in a complex world and have access to a wide range of information from a variety of sources. In recent years the government has increased its focus on families especially in terms of its attempt to ensure that all children, regardless of their socio-economic background, are given the same opportunities in life to achieve their full potential (Department for Children Schools and Families, 2007; Great Britain, 2006; HM Treasury, 2004, 2007). This has resulted in increased funding and has been accompanied by a growth in legislation targeting families as well as the creation of the Department for Children, Schools and Families. There has been comparatively little in the way of research, certainly from the LIS context, investigating the information seeking and information use of parents of primary school aged children. Set against this background, the following research questions were originally examined:

- a) What types of information do parents seek in their everyday lives?
- b) How do parents seek everyday information?
- c) What sources do parents use when they seek information?
- d) What criteria do parents use in assessing information and sources?
- e) What factors affect a parent's information seeking?

1.3.1 The research aim

The initial research question led to the development of an overarching and guiding aim for this project:

- the aim of the project is to explore the information world of parents of primary school aged children.

1.3.2 Objectives

During the development of the research proposal the overall focus, design and objectives were modified to reflect the grounded theory methodology ultimately adopted for the research. The following objectives were used as a means of meeting the aim and also to guide the development of the investigation, as well as providing a measure of deliverables.

1.3.2.1 Objective 1: to investigate the reasons why parents of primary school aged children look for information.

This objective deals with trying to determine a parent's underlying motivation or catalyst for their need to search for information. The methodological approaches used to answer this objective are discussed in chapters 4 and 5.

1.3.2.2 Objective 2: to investigate how parents of primary school aged children look for and obtain information to inform and support their parenting.

The second objective follows on from the first as it tries to understand the information journey that parents undertake during the information search process. The methodological approaches used to answer this objective are discussed in chapters 4 and 5.

1.3.2.3 Objective 3: to provide suitable background to the context of parents' information seeking.

This objective will review and discuss the existing social context and LIS literature relating to this study. These discussions will principally be dealt with in chapters 2 and 3.

1.3.2.4 Objective 4: to analyse the findings in relation to the relevant literature.

This objective will be met through the analysis of the findings presented in chapter 6 and also by relating them to the existing literature in chapter 7.

1.3.2.5 Objective 5: to offer an explanation about the phenomenon under study: the information world of parents.

This objective will offer a substantive theory based upon the methodological approach, theoretical analysis and discussions of the findings. It will also be summarised in chapter 8.

1.4 Chapter outlines

This section provides an overview to each of the eight chapters of this thesis.

Chapter two contains a social overview of the modern British family. The chapter starts by examining the context of the British family today. This is followed by a discussion of motherhood and an examination of the reasons why mothers are usually viewed by society as the primary carers for children. The chapter also provides a brief contextual overview of family and parenting in light of government policy over the past decade.

Chapter three is a review of the literature relating to information behaviour (IB). The chapter starts by defining the concept of information for the purposes of this study. A wider review of information behaviour studies follows, focusing in on the everyday life information seeking (ELIS) literature specifically and examining the literature relating to parent's information seeking.

Chapter four details the selection of a methodological approach for this investigation, outlining a discussion justifying the Grounded Theory (GT) method as an appropriate approach to use for this study. This chapter concludes with a critique of the primary method of investigation used in this research.

Chapter five describes how the investigation was conducted. The chapter starts by describing how parents were approached and selected for the project. It goes on to describe the data collection which consisted of 33 interviews. The chapter then describes the methods of data analysis and discusses trustworthiness and validity of the data. The chapter concludes with a brief summary of the practical issues related to the research such as data security, ethics and informed consent.

Chapter six presents the principal findings of the research and shows the development of the five main GT categories of:

- a) Being a parent (core);
- b) Connectivity
- c) Trust;
- d) Picture of self; and
- e) Weighing.

Chapter seven is a full discussion and exploration of the five GT categories, relating the findings in chapter six to existing social and LIS literature discussed in chapters two and three.

Chapter eight concludes and provides a summary of the research process by briefly examining its contribution to the library and information science field, its limitations and its ability to meet the criteria of being a GT study.

1.5 Summary

This chapter has presented both the background and rationale underpinning this research project. The following two chapters will concentrate on setting the social and political context for the research.

2 Modern Parenting in Britain Sociological and Political Context

2.1 Introduction

The principal focus for this research is an examination of parents and their information world. This chapter aims to provide a broad socio-political overview of the position of family life in the United Kingdom.

This chapter will start by briefly examining the context of the modern British family and parenting. The late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have been times of change in terms of social attitudes and the structure of the British family. During this time there has been a growing realisation of inequalities and differing life expectations between children born to affluent parents and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. The chapter will also briefly examine recent British Government policy in relation to families through legislation and also through initiatives such as Sure Start and the Every Child Matters agenda.

2.2 The British family

One cannot effectively study the information seeking and information needs of parents without first considering the context within which the British family sits today. Parenting is a mainstay of society—everyone has parents. Family life and parenting have undergone a huge social and cultural revolution in recent years, mirroring wider changes in British society (Steel & Warren, 2001). The underlying social trends are varied, but key drivers can be identified and these are: the changing position of women in society, growing variation in marriage patterns, generational differences, and the increasing diversity of family forms (Steel & Warren, 2001). The genesis of many of these changes can be traced back to the late Victorian and early Edwardian era. It was during this period that a dualistic view of child development became popular (Hendrick, 2003)—that is to say, physical and spiritual development of the child were seen as equally important. This time saw the growth of child welfare champions and reformers such as Dr Barnado and Mary Carpenter, the penal reformer, as well as the growth of organisations such as the Infant Life Protection Society, and the National Society for the Protection of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) (Hendrick, 2003).

In the wider context of the family, as a place to nurture and look after children, our socially accepted paradigms have changed beyond recognition. There has been a move away from the traditional perception of the 'nuclear family', that is a family consisting of father, mother and children, so prevalent in the first half of the twentieth century, towards a greater diversity of family unit constitution. Today there is a general popular acceptance of lone parent families, as well as a cultural normalisation of children born outside traditional marriage (Rowlingson & McKay, 2005). Another noteworthy change is in terms of a general decline in family sizes. Dex and Joshi (2005) report that in 1946, 20 per cent of mothers had three children by the age of 31, this figure had gone down to just 7 per cent by 1970. There are areas where larger families are still prevalent, these are primarily related to ethnic background such as with Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Black African families (Dex & Joshi, 2005).

2.2.1 Parenting

Parenting may be defined as '*purposeful activities aimed at ensuring the survival and development of children*' (Hoghugh, 2004). The traditional sociological view is that two parents form the axis of a 'normal', or 'conventional family', as consisting of nuclear roles of husband and wife and their children (Cheal, 1999). This *normal* view of family constitution has been the traditional progressive standard model for family life; in other words, it is the state to which most people aspire. Yet, with the procession of modernity, many sociologists see a crisis in family theory as borne out through the diverse and complex reality of the modern family unit. The demography of the British family has dramatically altered in recent decades and is characterised by the changing relationships between men and women as well as a diversifying of family formation (Dex & Joshi, 2005). This has resulted in some academics abandoning the term 'family', perceiving it as too concrete, historically and culturally bound and replacing it with an alternative phrase—'primary relationship', a form of words that Cheal (1999) contends is equally problematic. The size, shape and composition of the British family unit has undergone dramatic change over the past three decades. As mentioned previously, the typical family size has shrunk since the 'baby boom' of the 1950s and 1960s; it has also been estimated that women born in the mid-1980s will have just 1.74 children each (Office for National Statistics, 2007: p. 21) During this time, in England and Wales, the age of first time mothers has risen from 23.7 in 1971 to 27.1 years in 2004 (Office for National Statistics, 2007: p. 21). There has been an increase in divorce rates since the Divorce Reform Act of 1969, as well as a rise in cohabiting couples (Dex & Joshi, 2005). The changes are societal as writers suggest that today there does not seem to be the same pressure on expectant couples to get married and it is equally as acceptable for couples to consider not marrying

but rather cohabiting or even living apart (Burghes & Brown, 1995; Freely, 2000). The consequence of this trend is that there has been an increase in single or lone-parent families, who now make up 24 per cent of families in the UK, compared to 7 per cent in 1971. This figure increases dramatically in the inner-cities, with Lambeth in London topping the 2006 league table with 48 per cent of children in lone families (Office for National Statistics, 2006: p.23-24) compared to the rest of the UK.

One of the social changes that has had a dramatic affect on family life in the past thirty years is that of the role of the mother. The reasons for these changes are varied and complex, however, a central feature relates to the changing role of women in society. Catalysts have included better access to education, socio-economic changes to the fabric of the workforce, and a growing propensity for dual earner households, as women develop greater economic strength (Gelles, 1995; Lewis, Campbell, & Huerta, 2008).

Feminism of the 1960s and 1970s has had a direct influence on these structural changes in terms of winning the moral argument, which has consequently affected socio-political change such as maternity rights and equality legislation in addition to changes in wider social attitudes in terms of sexuality, illustrated by widespread access to contraception (Silva, 1996). These changes have helped give women the option to pursue full and rewarding careers, while at the same time being mothers, thus, arguably, breaking the traditional gendered stereotypical view of 'motherhood' of the post-war years of the 1950s and 1960s. Indeed the whole concept of being a mother and the notion of 'motherhood' as a historical, cultural and social construct has been subject to feminist debate during this time (Hadfield, Rudoie, & Sanderson-Mann, 2007; Silva, 1996; Smart, 1996). These social and structural changes are perhaps best illustrated by an examination of social trend figures. In education for example there has been a recent trend for more women than men, in the 20-39 age group to undertake or hold a degree or higher qualification (Office for National Statistics, 2007: p. 35). Better education for women and other workforce changes, such as the move towards a service economy, have helped to facilitate socio-economic changes within the home as many more women than ever before gain greater personal independence and financial security as the traditional model of the male only family breadwinner disappears. One of the consequences of these changes for family life has been that, for those women who are educated and who are in employment there has been a noticeable trend towards them having children later in life (Bewley, 2005; Dex & Joshi, 2005; Hadfield et al., 2007). This is in contrast to a generation of young mothers who do not possess the same academic or career prospects who are generally becoming mothers at an early age, very often the consequence being children being born into disadvantaged households (Layard & Dunn, 2009).

2.2.2 Mothers as primary carers

Set against the socio-structural changes of women's roles in society it may appear strange that there seems to have been comparatively little research about the identification of the role of fathers as equal primary carers for primary school aged children. Certainly, biological factors aside, the gendered stereotype of a mother being the primary carer of a newborn child is reinforced by current British maternity and paternity legislation¹. This notion is further reinforced by the wider factors associated with a relative rarity of men working in nurseries and pre-schools and to a lesser extent primary schools² (Cameron, Moss, & Owen, 1999). Sociologically, even within the past decade, men working in a nursery or pre-school environment raise surprise and are often greeted by indifference or a lukewarm reception by parents (Cameron et al., 1999). Even within current government policy initiatives aimed at families, focus has generally been on women. An example of this is the Sure Start National Evaluation, which notes that there has been an apparent inability for many of the projects to successfully engage with fathers, with the exception of a few cases, because of a mother-centric approach and lack of male staff and support workers (Anning & Ball, 2008; Lloydm, O'Brien, & Lewis, 2003).

Ehrensaft (1990) at the start of her influential book asks the following question: '*is it possible to consider 'equality' in childrearing between men and women?*' (p. 11). It is not the purpose of this section to debate and investigate the underlying sociological reasons why it is that mothers in the UK take on the role of nurturing primary school aged children; rather it is to acknowledge the reality as borne out through wider literature. The associated literature identifies the development of constructed socialised gender identities as one of the key factors influencing the reason why women still take the prominent lead in parenting (Connell, 1999; Ehrensaft, 1990; Fox & Murray, 2000; Lorber, 1994; Lorber & Farrell, 1991; Murphy, 2007). Feminist writers such as Lorber (1994) are keen to cite examples such as Sussman's (1982) historiography of wet-nursing in eighteenth century France, a practice that consisted of sending newborn babies away to be suckled by rural peasant women for pay, often resulting in the death of the child, as an illustration that the 'maternal' instinct we know today is in reality a socially constructed one (Lorber, 1994; Schwartz & Natalie, 2007). Another similar and oft cited example is Schulte's (1984) study of nineteenth century Bavarian neonaticide, where women would work up to the

¹ Statutory maternity leave in the UK currently stands at 52 weeks which comprises of up to 39 weeks of Statutory Maternity Pay leave. Paternity leave currently stands at two weeks. There is currently an option for parents to take additional unpaid leave.

² Data from the National Office for Statistics, full-time nursery and primary and secondary school teachers: by sex: Social Trends 34, shows that in 2001/02 there were 32,000 (15%) male nursery and primary school teachers in the UK compared with 180,000 (85%) female teachers.

minute prior to the birth of a child, only then to leave it to die, showing little or no remorse—'where the killing of [a] baby was little different from the frequent killing of barnyard animals' (Schwartz & Natalie, 2007 p. 30).

The interplay of responsibility of mothers and fathers has shifted in recent decades, for example in the 1920s there was a cultural move from the nineteenth-century presumption of the father being responsible for the family, towards a view that the '*tender years belonged to the mother*' (Lorber, 1994 p. 158). Nevertheless this cultural move established throughout most of the twentieth-century is beginning to change, as fathers take on greater responsibility for the day to day care of their children, as Jackson (1987) notes the, '*1970s saw an enormous increase in the proportion of British fathers present at the birth of their babies*' (p. 37).

Despite this growing involvement by fathers and a greater propensity in many households towards so called dual parenting, mothers still seem to take on the majority of nurturing and the psychological burden of child care. Ehrensaft (1990) researched middleclass families from academic backgrounds in the United States, who claimed to fully share parenting responsibilities. Ehrensaft identified two key areas where mothers and fathers differed in their approach to parenting summarising them as: 'dressing the child' and 'psychological management'. Within the area of 'dressing the child', Ehrensaft found that mothers had greater concern over what to dress the child in, feeling that it would reflect badly on them socially if their children were not dressed properly, whereas men who dressed the children tended not to worry about the niceties of matching outfits. Ehrensaft claims that this reveals not only a cultural pressure for mothers to ensure that their children look cared for, but that it also has a deeper sense of maternal meaning, noting that:

...women do not trust the men to competently dress the children...[because] the women do not want the men to encroach on a mothering activity that has a great deal more meaning for them (p. 64).

The second difference Ehrensaft noted in her research was that mothers would worry about their children more throughout the day, whereas she found, that fathers tended to be able to compartmentalise their lives better and not worry about the children in the same way.

What is interesting about Ehrensaft's research is that it provides an insight into the complexities of motherhood by illuminating the roles that mothers and fathers fulfil. It shows that despite the move towards equal parenting many women feel that they have a deeper maternal responsibility towards their children, perpetuating the notion of the

mother being viewed as the primary carer, therefore reinforcing the feminist argument of a socially constructed ideology of motherhood (Murphy, 2007; Silva, 1996; Smart, 1996).

2.2.3 British childhood

Research carried out by Layard and Dunn (2009) on behalf of the Children's Society Good Childhood Inquiry presents a picture of the social realities of growing-up in twenty first century Britain. Their aim was to discover why it is that British children, like those in the United States, face more difficult and complex worlds than their counterparts in continental Western Europe. The inquiry was influenced by the findings of the UNICEF (2007) report which was a comprehensive assessment of children's lives and well-being in economically advanced nations. The UNICEF report ranked nations by six dimensions, namely: material well-being, health and safety, educational well-being, family and peer relationships, behaviours and risks and subjective well-being, as measures for assessing child well-being. The report found that Britain was ranked in the bottom third for five of the six dimensions and came bottom overall. Layard and Dunn (2009) undertook to examine the underlying reasons for this, drawing on a wide range of evidence. They conclude that Britain generally does have more broken families and in general British families are less cohesive in the ways that they meet and eat together compared to other similar countries. Layard and Dunn (2009) also claim that wider research suggests that British children take greater risks in terms of drug and alcohol abuse and underage sex and that they are also less likely to stay in formal education. Britain also has one of the largest gaps in terms of inequality and relative poverty among its population which seriously hinders the social mobility of many children. Layard and Dunn also recognised that there are pressures on children from the better off families to perform well at school.

An important issue highlighted by Layard and Dunn (2009) and also UNICEF (2007) is the growing evidence of a causal link between poverty, chaotic home life and life outcomes. Building upon a wealth of research, Duncan, Kalil and Ziol-Guest (2010) suggest that early childhood poverty can adversely affect a child's later adult life chances, in terms of their earning potential, work hours, as well as their later health.

Coldwell, Pike and Dunn's (2006) UK based research examined the relationship between chaotic home life and parenting as predictors to a child's behaviour. They defined 'chaotic' in terms of the home environment and family routines (such as family mealtimes). They examined 118 working-class and middle-class families, each consisting of two parents and two children aged between 4 and 8 years. They conclude that household chaos has an adverse effect on a child's behaviour over and above the quality of the parenting. Their second conclusion being that household chaos exacerbates the

effects of poor or negative parenting. The implications of their findings being that, for some families, parents would benefit from a formalised course of 'parenting' education.

2.2.4 Social inequality and family stratification

Social inequality and chaotic home life have received a great deal of attention in recent years from scholars (Duncan et al., 2010; Reay, 1998) and have also featured heavily in the British media. One example of a widely publicised story in the British media was related to Shannon Matthews a little girl from Dewsbury, West Yorkshire, who was allegedly kidnapped. She was found three weeks later hidden under the bed of a relative, having being placed there by her mother. At the time, the media were accused of double standards because there was a perception that the case did not receive the same amount of publicity, nor did the appeal for information attract anywhere near as much public support as that of the missing child Madeleine McCann, whose parents are both articulate doctors. Andrew Norfolk wrote an opinion piece, in the Times entitled 'Poor little Shannon Matthews. Too poor for us to care that she is lost?' In his article he makes several accusations against the media and the British public, the most fundamental being, that the media and public did not care for Shannon Matthews because she was from '*a deprived background, a dysfunctional family from a down-on-its-luck Yorkshire mill town*' (Norfolk, 2008). The Shannon Matthews story helps to illustrate the national discourse that is happening, both within government and also within the media about the inequalities, quality of parenting and life expectations, between children of different social status growing up in Britain. Unfortunately in this particular case, many of the pre-conceived notions of poor and dysfunctional families were in fact shown to be justified with her mother and her mother's partner each receiving prison sentences, albeit for different crimes, but as a result of the large police investigation which was a consequence of the search for the missing school girl.

As we shall discuss in the following section, tackling social inequality and social mobility have been at the heart of government policy of recent years.

2.2.5 Family and social capital

Trevor Philips, head of the Equality and Human Rights Commission has recently called for greater fairness in the UK. Philips said:

Our growing hour glass economy is the issue of the 21st century, the division between the haves and the have not's and the never-will-haves. The great danger is that economic trends are pushing our country towards the entrenchment of greater and more divisive inequality (World at One, 2008).

Bourdieu's (1984) notion of 'social capital' has recently been embraced by social science in an attempt to explain and differentiate between groups of people, for example with regards childhood health inequalities (Pearson & Oyeboode, 2009) or in relation to parental school choice (Gillies, 2006b), yet it is a term that is sometimes criticised for being ill defined (Stephens, 2008). In the context of family studies Fox and Murray (2000) define social capital as:

...the ways that social relationships are cumulated, stored, and utilized in the service of one's ends or goals, much as human capital, financial capital, and physical capital. Social capital inheres in social relationships characterised by ties of obligation, expectation, and trustworthiness and that serve as information channels (p. 1167).

Social capital and the notion of the differences between the working-class and the middle-classes frame the work of Gillies (2006b) and the research of the Families and Social Capitals Group at Southbank University in London. In her research of working and middle-class parents Gillies (2006a) identifies three practices that working-class parents have been criticised for as part of a wider political and media discourse:

- schooling;
- defence and protection; and
- treats and comforts.

2.2.5.1 Schooling

Much has been written about the difference in the ways parents approach education (Gillies, 2006b; Reay, 1998; Sliwka & Istance, 2006). From her research Gillies (2006a) suggests that middle-class parents view education as an essential foundation. Working class parents want their children to do well at school, but education is often intertwined with their own personal histories of disappointment. Gillies also claims that where middle-class parents feel that they have the power to intervene to support their children, working-class parents often feel a detachment and that schools are often viewed in terms of hostility and failure.

2.2.5.2 Defence and protection

Gillies' (2006a) research also suggests that working-class parents have *to defend and protect their children in ways few middle-class parents did* (p. 116). She notes that middle-class parents tend to worry about stranger danger and that they ensure that their children only play with others in their neighbourhood. However, it was the fear of bullying and harassment from other local children which affected working-class parents. Another example where working-class parents felt a need to vigorously defend their children was

in the context of professionals, such as teachers or health professionals, where they worried about victimisation. For example, where there was friction with teachers, Gilles found that middle-class parents tended to be more conciliatory and would assume a mediating role when talking with teachers, working-class parents were more likely to instigate an acrimonious encounter in defence of their child. Gillies suggests that this is an attempt to re-address a perceived power imbalance.

2.2.5.3 Treats and comforts

The third area of focus relates to the parenting practices associated with ‘treating’ their children. Gillies (2006a) suggests that many working-class parents view treats and comforts as important and that they are more likely to give their children what they wanted. Typically this involved treats such as visits to fast food restaurants, computer games machines and branded goods. Gillies notes that the working-class parents in her study, tended to associate such treats with the notion of worth, especially where money is tight, and so in their view, they convey love and care. For middle-class parents and where money is less of an issue, Gillies’s findings reveal a tension of wanting to give their children what they wanted whilst at the same time curb their materialism. In such cases parents were more likely to help their children save for material goods or buy it if it has educational need.

2.2.6 Summary

This section has briefly examined the context of the British family today. It started by providing an overview of the formation of the family in today’s Britain. Within the examination there has been a brief overview of the role of mothers as primary carers. The review has also briefly examined the growing concerns related to inequalities and also the attitudes and approaches to parenting by parents from different socio-economic backgrounds. This section has also drawn on the research of Gillies (2006a, 2006b) who has identified differences in parenting values and practices between different social groups. The following section will provide a contextual overview by reviewing recent British government policy in relation to families and parenting.

2.3 Political context

Social conservatives in recent years claim that ‘*selfish parents in non-traditional families raise damaged children, who become anti-social teenagers who go on to erode the fabric of our society*’ (Freely, 2000 p. 166). This view, Freely suggests has now become normalised, identifying Tony Blair’s commitment to tackle social crime as well as target education as a priority for the 1997 general election as a contributing catalyst. James

(2009) is in general agreement with Freely, suggesting that the past ten years have seen a particular focus by government on trying to tackle anti-social behaviour and social exclusion through parenting interventions. Freely (2000) observes that the claim of family erosion was by definition right-wing, but has since become normalised and subsumed into a wider argument spiralling into a '*vicious cycle...that dominates the left-of-centre debate on child neglect, child abuse, teenage pregnancy, domestic violence, juvenile delinquency, addiction, and even unemployment*' (p. 167). In view of these political debates it is not surprising that children and families have, in recent years, moved up the political agenda (Dex & Joshi, 2005; Freely, 2000; Gillies, 2006a). Previous British Governments have generally viewed parenting as a private matter, this has allowed inequality and poverty to grow (Ball, 2008). The political change in focus has been complex, but key drivers have come through the United Nations (United Nations, 1989) and also domestically through a wide range of legislation and policy, notably the 1989 and 2004 Children Acts (Great Britain, 1989, 2004). These Acts of Parliament do not stand in isolation, but sit within a matrix of supporting legislation and policy initiatives, the range of these interventions by government are in Table 2-1 compiled by Santer and Cookson (2009) which highlights some of the primary drivers and policies of the past twenty years. It is important to note that Santer and Cookson present a brief overview of key policy initiatives; a more comprehensive list is maintained by the Family and Parenting Institute.³

Table 2-1 A selected highlight of recent UK childcare policy

Date	Act or event
1989	The Children Act emphasised the welfare of the child, parental responsibilities, and cooperation between agencies.
1989	UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
1998	The National Childcare Strategy was launched as part of government's anti-poverty strategy to expand good-quality childcare to enable parents to return to work
1999-2006	Sure Start Programmes emphasised family support and integrated services to tackle child poverty and social inequalities
2000	Victoria Climbié was murdered on the 25 February 2000 and this acted as a catalyst for childcare reform.
2000	Introductory Foundation Stage DfEE 2000.

³ Available from: <http://www.familyandparenting.org/parentingPolicyTenYears>. [Last accessed 5 March 2010].

- 2003 Children's Centres: the Labour government committed itself to providing 2,500 Children's Centres by 2008 and 3,100 by 2010
- 2003 Every Child Matters
- 2003 The Laming report (Laming, 2003) published into the death of Victoria Climbié. The report cited large-scale and systemic failure of social support services contributing to Victoria's death.
- 2004 The Children Act (Great Britain, 2004)
- 2007 The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) was rebranded into the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF)
- 2007 The Children's Plan: Building brighter futures. Detailing the government's commitment to provide more support for parents and families, safe play places for children and further develop the early years workforce
- 2008 Lord Lamming undertakes a review of progress on the recommendation in his original report into the death of Victoria Climbié as a result of the Baby P case.
- 2008 National Academy for Parenting Practitioners was set up in 2007 by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) to provide the parenting workforce with objective evidence based support in order to improve the services offered to parents in England.
- 2009 Child Poverty Bill is an attempt to enshrine in law a commitment to reduce relative poverty for 2.8 million children living in Britain by 2020.
-

Source: (Santer & Cookson, 2009)

New Labour has been credited with the policy shift towards children and families; however, they cannot take all the credit. The genesis of recent policy changes can be traced back to the former Conservative government's Children Act (Great Britain, 1989) that provided a law for the welfare of all children. A notable feature of the legislation was the definition of parental responsibility outlined in Part I: Sections 2 and 3 of the Act. The Act was an important milestone in that it firmly enshrined in law, societal responsibility for the safety of children. Eight years later, New Labour, after their 1997 election win, placed children and families at the heart of their policies, or as Freely (2000) notes:

New Labour [was] the first government in this country to ever acknowledge that the problems of modern family life are too big and too important to be left for individuals to resolve privately. But like all shifts, this one has been decades in the making. If we look back over the newspapers of the past

twenty years, we can see several debates running in parallel and converging under the tutelage of New Labour (p.4).

In 1998, Labour published two significant policy papers: the first was entitled Supporting Families (Home Office, 1998), the second a Green Paper called Meeting the Childcare Challenge (Department for Education and Employment, 1998). These papers helped to define the government's vision for the development of first National Childcare Strategy and paved the way for the establishment of the flagship Sure Start programme in 1999.

2.3.1 Every Child Matters (ECM)

The Green Paper Every Child Matters (HM Treasury, 2003) defined the government's principles for change and was brought into legislation through the Children Act of 2004 (Great Britain, 2004). The Every Child Matters Green Paper was a continuation of government policy that was first established in the 1989 Children Act (Great Britain, 1989). An important influencing factor on the Green Paper was the horrific and tragic death of Victoria Climbié⁴. Victoria Climbié died on the 25 February 2000 in London at the hands of her Great Aunt and her boyfriend. Victoria died despite having been visited by professionals from the social services, health services and the police. Lord Laming noted in his official report:

Not one of the agencies empowered by Parliament to protect children in positions similar to Victoria's – funded from the public purse – emerge from this Inquiry with much credit. The suffering and death of Victoria was a gross failure of the system and was inexcusable. It is clear to me that the agencies with responsibility for Victoria gave a low priority to the task of protecting children. They were underfunded, inadequately staffed and poorly led. Even so, there was plenty of evidence to show that scarce resources were not being put to good use (Laming, 2003 s 1.18).

This tragedy acted as a catalyst for a radical review and overhaul of services and service configuration. The Laming report cited 12 missed opportunities by welfare organisations to help save Victoria and consequently made 108 recommendations for child protection reform. In September 2003, the Green Paper, while intending to deal with child safety, went much further than Lord Laming's recommendations (James, 2009).

⁴ Haringey Council, criticised heavily over the death of Victoria Climbié in 2000, were severely criticised just seven years later over the tragic death of 17-month-old Baby P, in August 2007 at the hands of his mother's boyfriend and lodger. Baby P or Peter as he became known was on the child protection register and had been seen or visited over 60 times by social services and other agencies. Lord Laming was commissioned in November 2008 by Children's minister Beverley Hughes to review progress on the recommendations of his review into Victoria Climbié'.

The Every Child Matters (ECM) agenda is best understood as an overarching name for an approach towards children and families (Barker, 2009). The ambitious ECM agenda covers all children from birth to 19 and seeks to ensure an integrated approach to children and families for all national and local government services, with an emphasis on improving



Figure 2-1 ECM guiding principles

children's wellbeing such as educational challenges, health related issues, and social and domestic concerns. Every agency or organisation working with children has to subscribe to and fulfil the five guiding principles of ECM. These guiding principles are: be healthy; stay safe; enjoy and achieve; make a positive contribution; and achieve economic well-being. Figure 2-1 is a photograph taken at the Children's Centre in Leeds, where the researcher attended the Bingo 'n' Butties group. The five ECM outcomes are visibly situated for all to see; such displays can be found around most schools, children's hospital wards and such like.

To ensure the successful implementation of ECM, the government has also recently published a ten year strategy, the Children's Plan (Department for Children Schools and Families, 2007) specifically outlining how children and families will be supported by

government and local agencies, all working seamlessly across organisations. Sure Start has greatly influenced and has subsequently become integral to achieving many of the ECM outcomes (Barker, 2009). Unlike Sure Start, ECM is concerned with all 11 million children in the UK. Without doubt the whole ECM agenda is an ambitious and far-reaching commitment to helping children and families and ensures, rightly or wrongly, that they will remain central to the political agenda for the foreseeable future.

As to the success of the ECM initiatives, James (2009) notes that there has been greater investment in services as well as a new focus on parents and parenting. ECM has generally been well received by other scholars (Lloyd, 2008). However, there are still concerns, especially related to child protection. Child protection has received considerable attention in recent years in the aftermath of the tragic death of Baby Peter, in circumstances not dissimilar to Victoria Climbié.

2.3.2 Government focus on parents

During the past decade the British Government have recognised the importance of reaching parents; Alan Johnson stated that '*parents and the home environment they create are the single most important factor in shaping their children*' (Department for Education and Skills, 2007P. 1).

The National Family and Parenting Institute (now the Family and Parenting Institute) was created in 1999 as an independent charity following the Supporting Families (Home Office, 1998). The principal aim of the charity was to develop a centre of expertise that would serve as a repository for both the government, professional bodies and voluntary organisation (James, 2009).

During the past decade the government have also developed a number of other initiatives aimed at supporting parents and families. These have included the government's child poverty goal of eradicating child poverty in the UK by 2020. The government have tried to achieved this objective through a range of policies that have included the introduction of child tax credits, maternity grants, child trust funds and the minimum wage (James, 2009). Another notable development was the creation of Sure Start. Sure Start was a flagship programme that ran from 1999-2006 and was a major government initiative that was primarily aimed at reducing the link between childhood poverty and poor life chances by addressing socially disadvantaged communities and families and was closely aligned with government initiatives such as: housing, health care, educational and training opportunities and support systems (Anning & Ball, 2008).

The Sure Start ethos was encapsulated by its defining principles (Eisenstadt, 2002), the first and arguably the most important being that parents be fully involved in the design,

implementation and delivery of local programmes. The second principle was local coordination to add value, in other words local joined-up working between existing professionals working with parents. The third principle was aimed at ensuring cultural sensitivity, which was seen as crucial considering that the programme was aimed at children in poverty, a large proportion of whom were often from diverse ethnic backgrounds. All individual Sure Start programmes were underpinned by four objectives:

- a) improving social and emotional development;
- b) improving health;
- c) improving children's ability to learn; and
- d) strengthening families and communities.

Sure Start received its formal go-ahead from the 1998 Comprehensive Spending Review and was backed by unprecedented financial commitment (Anning & Ball, 2008) equating to a project annual spend of £499 million by 2003-04 (Great Britain, 1998) Chapter 21 of the Comprehensive Spending Review outlined the government's key priorities for helping children and families:

- a) 250 new local Sure Start programmes established in England, to be funded by a new Children's Fund;
- b) a visit from an outreach worker for every new mother in Sure Start areas within the first three months after giving birth; and
- c) measurable improvements in the early development of children in Sure Start areas.

By 2004 Sure Start was estimated to have helped over 400,000 families (Weinberger, 2005). A continuous method of evaluation was adopted through the National Evaluation of Sure Start (NESS). Every Sure Start Local Programme (SSLPs) had to submit regular reports of their activities in addition to an annual report to the NESS. The NESS would try and determine success by examining four key areas as a measure, these being: evaluation of programmes, impact of local programmes, examining changes to local communities and cost-effectiveness (Melhuis et al., 2004). Sure Start received a mixed evaluation, with one of the chief issues relating to its overall cost effectiveness. One of the main criticisms was that there seemed to be little evidence that Sure Start was cost effective, as the positive effects it had had were small, and in some cases it was claimed there were negative (James, 2009). Sure Start was superseded by Children's Centres in 2007 (Department for Children Schools and Families, 2007) with responsibility for continuing the work among disadvantaged families through the work of locally based parent support workers.

2.3.3 Summary

This section has briefly examined the political context of modern parenting. The British Government has focused on family life during the past decade. This has been achieved through policy initiatives, legislation, direct financial investment and also through interventions. This policy direction has generally been welcomed, although there are question marks over the overall value for money and success of projects such as Sure Start at reaching those families that are particularly hard to reach.

2.4 Conclusion

In this chapter we have seen that modern parenting is a complex and socially diverse activity. Reasons for these complexities are diverse, yet we can clearly identify influences such as changes to family composition, changes in parental working, the changing role of women and society, government policy and an increased focus on family life from the media.

In the following chapter we will move away from examining the wider socio-political context of the family life and parenting and will examine the relevant information science literature which underpins the area of investigation known as everyday life information seeking.

3 Information Seeking in Context

3.1 Introduction

Chapter 1 provided an introduction to this thesis and set out the principal research questions and rationale. Chapter 2 grounded the investigation by outlining the sociological context of parenting in modern Britain. This research is situated within the field commonly referred to as library and information science (LIS). Within the LIS context, this research is located within the broad area commonly referred to as user studies and, more specifically within the genre of work known as everyday life information seeking (ELIS). This third chapter will provide a contextual summary of the relevant LIS literature. It is a common misconception that GT based studies do not take account of the prevailing literature (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). On the contrary, it is recognised that familiarity with the literature can help increase the researcher's sensitivity to the data and counter the claim that GT studies produce low level theories (Urquhart, 2007) .

This review of the literature will undertake to critically review the relevant LIS literature and research directly relating to this investigation. This chapter will begin by briefly outlining the historical context of user studies within the LIS setting. The key concepts of information, information needs, information seeking and information behaviour (IB) will be reviewed, followed by an examination of the development of user studies, specifically focusing on the genre referred to as everyday life information seeking (ELIS). The ELIS context will be reviewed with specific attention being given to the literature relating to parents and their information needs and will take account of studies from both the LIS and non-LIS contexts. The chapter will conclude by briefly examining the wider concept of information literacy (IL) as an important contextual backdrop to this research.

3.2 User studies

Arguably, the first user studies can be traced back to the mid to late nineteenth century (Black, 2000; Pateman, 1996). However it was not until the twentieth century that scholars formally examined information needs and seeking. The first academically documented user studies can be traced back to the early twentieth century (Bouazza, 1989; Poole, 1985; Wilson, 1981) and the development of information science.

Information science emerged throughout the 1930s as a distinct discipline promoted by scholars such as Pierce Butler, who published a seminal book *An introduction to library*

science, (Butler, 1933) and was instrumental in the creation of the renowned and influential journal, the *Library Quarterly*.

Butler was by no means the only scholar working in the field. The 1948 Royal Society Scientific Conference and later the International Conference on Scientific Information (National Academy of Sciences, 1959) are generally given credit for providing an impetus for the development of user studies (Wilson, 1994, 1999). The first user needs studies were largely concerned with scientific and technical information, with over 30 such studies being conducted between 1945 and 1960 (Bownson, 1960).

The *Annual Review of Information Science and Technology* (ARIST), first published in 1966, contained numerous reviews of user needs studies. Menzel (1966) wrote the first review entitled *Information Needs and Use in Science and Technology*, this was followed by subsequent reviews (Allen, 1969; Crane, 1971; Crawford, 1978; Herner & Herner, 1967; Hewin, 1990; Lin & Garvey, 1972; Lipetz, 1970; Martyn, 1974; Paisley, 1968). There was a 12 year hiatus between 1974 and 1986 until Dervin & Nilan (1986) published their now influential review.

Crawford (1978) estimated that between 1950 and 1975 over 1000 user studies had been published, a growth rate of over 30 studies a year. It is apparent from the earlier ARIST chapters that the user studies were generally focused on investigating the information needs and information seeking of the scientific and technical communities (Harris & Dewdney, 1994; Savolainen, 2005) along with other professional and educational groups. Atkin's (1971) overlooked bibliography, however, refreshingly contains examples of information seeking and user studies not widely cited; these covered diverse subjects ranging from 'What Farmers Think of Libraries' (Bundy, 1960) to a 1951 study entitled 'Television and Reading' (Kaiser, 1951).

The 1980s saw an important paradigm shift with a move away from a systems-centred approach to user studies towards a user-centred approach (Dervin & Nilan, 1986; Pettigrew, Fidel, & Bruce, 2001). The current approach to information seeking behaviour research is predominantly user centric and concentrates on the interrelationships between the cognitive (*thought*), social, cultural and affective (*emotions*) factors of information seeking (Pettigrew et al., 2001). The approach adopted in this thesis follows the current trend for examining the information needs and information seeking from the perspective of the actor.

3.3 Information, Information seeking, use and behaviour

This section provides a general overview of some of the key terms used throughout the research. Firstly, the concept of *information* is examined, including a discussion about the difficulties of trying to provide a general definition. This is followed by a discussion examining the concepts of information need, information seeking and information behaviour. This section concludes with a brief examination of the development of relevant information behaviour models, in particular Savolainen's (1995) model of everyday life information seeking. This section is important to the thesis because it lays a conceptual and theoretical basis for the research.

3.3.1 Information

Before examining the wider literature pertaining to user studies, it is important to briefly discuss what is meant by the term 'information' in the context of this thesis. Information is a term that has no agreed definition, instead there exists a whole plethora of definitions (Bates, 2005; Bawden, 2001b; Case, 2002; Haywood, 1995; Hjørland, 2007; Krikelas, 1983).

Case (2002) suggests that a starting point for understanding the term information is to view it as two distinct elements, firstly, '*as an act or process, and secondly, as a communication or message*' (p. 42). A hindrance to our understanding of the term is its often ambiguous relationship to the word *knowledge* (Brown & Duguid, 2000). Haywood (1995) takes a hierarchical approach when defining the relationship between information and knowledge. Haywood firstly takes data, which he describes as the '*seemingly random symbols, numbers, letters, words which are then transformed into information when transmitted [to an actor who can] make sense of the symbols through a process of reception, recognition and conversion*' (p. 3). Information is transformed into knowledge through the embellishment of additional contextualisation, whereby it acquires meaning. Choo, Detlor and Turnbull's (2000) view is not dissimilar to Haywood's, insofar as data becomes information when it is attached to meaning and is given cognitive structure, and information becomes knowledge through a process of attributing belief to it.

Krikelas (1983), writing from an information seeking context, views information as a '*stimulus that reduces uncertainty*' (p. 6), a view that is supported by Bouazza (1989). Case (2002) notes that definitions of information focused on *uncertainty* are popular among scholars researching information seeking. The drawback of this definition is that it pre-supposes that information must be useful, in other words it is viewed as something that will reduce uncertainty. This understanding of information brings with it difficulty when trying to fit it into some of the wider information behaviour literature, such as information

encountering and accidental information discovery (Erdelez, 1997, 2004), where information is accumulated before there is an understood or verbalised need and, therefore, cannot be viewed as a purposeful attempt to meet a specific uncertainty or need.

Concluding his discussion on information, Case (2002) suggests that it may not be possible to reconcile the various definitions of 'information', nor does he see it as necessary. The central theme of this thesis is an examination of the information world of parents. It is, therefore, accepted that, no matter how imperfect, it is appropriate to adopt a pragmatic view that will not pre-judge the research.

3.3.2 Information needs

Information needs are often thought of in terms of cognitive needs. They are gaps in knowledge that require an individual to seek out answers that need to satisfy both cognitive (thoughts) and affective (emotional) needs (Choo et al., 2000). Wilson (1997) notes the difficulty of trying to define information needs because they are '*a subjective experience that only occur in the mind of the person in need and is not directly accessible to the observer*' (p. 552). Allen (1996) suggests that information needs occur whenever an individual has a knowledge gap, a notion developed by Belkin (2005) and his concept of anomalous state of knowledge (ASK). Belkin states that an anomalous state occurs when an individual recognises a gap or need but does not necessarily have the ability to articulate the need. Dervin (1983; 1993) suggests that a need arises when there is a *sense-making* gap, between an individual's understanding and their experience of the world. This sense-making gap is then 'bridged' by information. These approaches are often classed as 'cognitive' needs (Choo et al., 2000). Information needs may also have an affective (emotional) basis (Kuhlthau, 2004). This occurs when an individual's affective state will affect their ability to construct meaning about a situation and will either help or hinder the search process, for example Mellon's (1986) notion of library anxiety.

Information needs can take the form of two distinct approaches, either *objective* or *subjective* needs (Case, 2002; Dervin & Nilan, 1986). Objective needs, relate to information seeking that is driven by a purpose such as a work related need, and are characterised by how an individual interacts with a system. Objective needs tend to manifest themselves as an observable behaviour (Walter, 1994). Subjective information needs are characterised by a less tangible approach and have a requirement to understand and make sense of the world. This attribute has been developed by authors such as Belkin (2005) and in particular Dervin (1983; 1993) in her widely cited sense-

making model and, importantly for this investigation, by Savolainen (1993) in her examination of everyday life information seeking.

Concluding his section on information needs Case (2002) suggests that there are difficulties with '*fretting over a definition of information need*' (p. 73). Wilson would agree with this notion as he views the concept of needs as being holistically bound to psychological, cognitive and affective factors. Therefore the focus on a specific *need* is unhelpful and should be viewed against a theoretical setting of information seeking behaviours (Wilson, 2005).

3.3.3 Information seeking

As with trying to define information needs, defining information seeking is equally problematic, this being due, in part, to there being little in the way of any formal definitions (Case, 2002). One of the problems with trying to define information seeking is that many of the existing definitions are too narrow in focus, in that they concentrate on information seeking as a planned process (Case, 2002). Case cites Wilson's definition as the '*purposive seeking for information as a consequence of a need to satisfy some goal*' (Case, 2002: p. 75). Interestingly, Allen (1996) suggests that there are times when people engage in information avoidance or take information shortcuts rather than search for information to meet a need. Choo (2000) notes that the information seeking process is a triad of affective, situational and cognitive factors and suggests, like Allen, that not all information needs lead to information seeking, as people often rely on their own thoughts, feelings and experiences to fill the 'gap' or meet uncertainty, a view also advocated by Kuhlthau (2004). Case (2002) concludes his section on information seeking by suggesting that a better way to view the concept is part of the newer and much wider concept of information behaviour.

3.3.4 Information behaviours

While the individual concepts of information need and information seeking prove to be problematic, but generally accepted, Wilson (2005) has argued that they are at best to be viewed as part of an umbrella term 'information behaviour' (IB).

Wilson (1999) defines IB as the '*activities a person may engage in when identifying his or her own needs for information, searching for such information in any way, and using or transferring that information*' (p.249). Ingwersen and Järvelin's definition is not dissimilar, although broader in scope than Wilson's. They define information behaviour as '*human behaviour dealing with generation, communication, use, and other activities concerned with information*' (Ingwersen & Järvelin, 2005: p. 21). IB is generally considered to be a shorthand for the cumbersome terms *information needs*, *information seeking*, and

information use (INSU) (Courtright, 2007; Dervin & Nilan, 1986) and is the term used by Case (2002) in his review chapter. Kari & Savolainen (2003) suggest that an alternative to IB is the use of *information action*. They argue that IB is a *loaded term* because it is too closely bound to the behaviourism psychological paradigm, which focuses on an actor's observed performance. Despite these arguments and its alleged imperfections in relation to describing the wider phenomenon, the notion of IB is still widely used throughout LIS literature, and will be adopted in this research.

3.3.5 Information behaviour models

A model provides a framework for thinking about a problem and assessing relationships among theoretical propositions (Bates, 2005; Wilson, 1999). Presently there is no unified model or theory of IB. The past forty years have seen an abundance of models and theories associated with information needs and information seeking and more lately with regards IB. This is aptly illustrated in the recent publication by the American Association of Information Science and Technology (ASIST) which collates 70 of the most influential models, theories and meta-theories into a single volume (Fisher, Erdelez, & McKechnie, 2005). Case (2002), in his review, illustrates the theory development by briefly citing five of the most widely mentioned models (Johnson, 1997; Krikelas, 1983; Leckie, Pettigrew, & Sylvain, 1996; Wilson, 1981, 1999).

Krikelas's (1983) Information Seeking Behaviour model is often cited along with Wilson's (1981) *Model of Information Behaviour* and second model of *Information Seeking-Behaviour* as starting points when examining IB. Wilson has evolved his original ideas and earlier models over the past 25 years (Wilson, 1997) by expanding and developing possible obstacles that an actor must overcome. This has been done by a greater emphasis on affective, cognitive and situational barriers. Wilson's work has also served as the basis for development by other scholars such as Niedźwiedzka (2003) who applies it to the information seeking of managers.

Dervin's (Dervin, Foreman-Wernet, & Lauterbach, 2003) *sense-making* is another widely cited and influential model. Dervin describes her model as a '*tool designed for making sense of a reality, assumed to be both chaotic and orderly*' (Dervin, 1983). The model has four constituent parts, a *situation* in time and space which defines the problem; a *gap*, that is identified as the difference between the current situation and the desired situation and can represent either a barrier or a prompt for action; a *bridge*, that is some means of bridging the gap; and finally an *outcome*, that is the result of the whole process. The model is of particular importance because of its focus on the primary cause of the user's activities, namely uncertainty or affective discomfort. Dervin's model does not,

however, deal with the wider issues of feedback or the perceived issues of the size of the gap and the requirement to bridge it. The use of sense-making was considered as a possible methodological approach for this research and is discussed in greater detail in section 4.2.5.

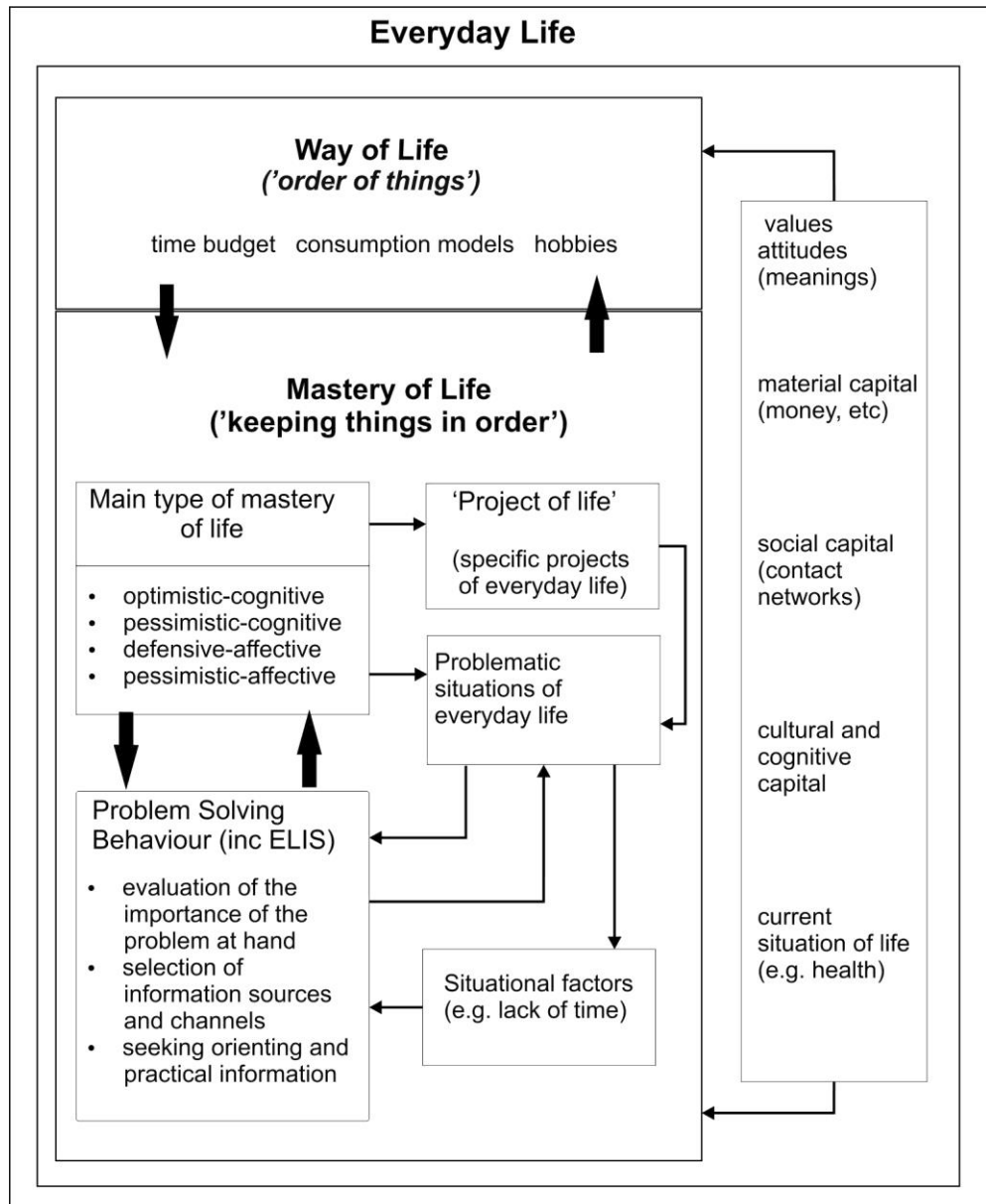


Figure 3-1 Savolainen's Model of Everyday Life Information Seeking

A model that is particularly relevant to the context of this thesis is Savolainen's (1995) model of information seeking in the context of way of life (ELIS). Savolainen's model presented in Figure 3-1 emphasises the social and cultural factors affecting an actor's daily, non-work use of information. The model makes the assumption that an actor selects and uses a variety of sources of information on a daily basis. However, an actor's

choices and patterns of information use are socially conditioned (Savolainen, 2005). Savolainen argues that his IB model differs from previous ones because of the way that he draws on the idea of *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1984). According to Bourdieu, habitus is a relatively stable way of thinking that shapes our daily lives, influences our actions, preferences and choices. Habitus is generally considered to relate to our dispositions or tendencies to do some things in a particular way. Importantly, it does not, however, determine our practices, but rather it describes our pre-dispositions to adopt certain practices.

Savolainen adopts the use of habitus to describe his central theme of 'way of life', which he defines as *'the order of things, which is based on the choices that individuals make'* (Savolainen, 2005: p. 143). Another important element in Savolainen's model is the section called 'mastery of life'. This section is associated with all the elements, physical, cognitive and affective that helps or hinders an actor's approach to life and his ultimate ability to obtain necessary help and information. A third and equally important element of the model is an actor's ability to seek and use information which is determined by his material, social, and cultural (cognitive) capital. 'Way of life' and 'mastery of life' do not determine how an actor searches for information *per se*, rather they provide a context that enables an individual to express a preference within the sources and channels available to them as shaped by their capital.

Savolainen's model also takes into account factors such as an actor's personal situation and values. The notion of 'capital' also plays an important role insofar as an actor's social capital (their networks and support), cultural and cognitive capital (education) and material capital (material resources) all influence their information seeking. The notion of social and cultural capital play an important role in the government's approach to addressing issues of social inequality, as discussed in chapter 2.

Another model that needs to be mentioned is that of McKenzie (2002), whose model is an elaboration of Savolainen's work on ELIS. McKenzie's model is of particular interest to this research because it is based on pregnant women. In this model McKenzie presents a non-systematic approach to gathering information that includes serendipitous information encounters largely because her findings showed that pregnant women were receptive to new information.

3.3.6 Summary

We have briefly examined the concepts of information, information need and information seeking and how they are difficult terms to define. IB is accepted as an umbrella term for

information use and information seeking. There is an abundance of IB models and we have briefly touched on three of the most widely cited ones (Dervin et al., 2003; Krikelas, 1983; Wilson, 1981, 1997). In particular we have briefly examined Savolainen's (1995) model of ELIS because it specifically presents a model that explains the way that actors search for and access information as part of their daily lives. In the following section we will examine the notion of ELIS and its contextual relevance to this thesis.

3.4 Everyday life information seeking (ELIS)

A criticism of information seeking and user behaviour research is of the comparative lack of studies examining the daily lives of citizens (Savolainen, 1995), despite some excellent work in this area (Beer, Marcella, & Baxter, 1998; Chatman, 1984, 1991a, 1992, 1999; Dervin, 1973; Dervin, Ellyson, Hawkes, Guagnano, & White, 1984; Fisher & Hinton, 2004; Harris & Dewdney, 1994; Kuhlthau, 1991; Savolainen, 2005). The previous section examined the principal concepts that underpin current LIS research. In this section, we will be examining in greater detail, the area of investigation labelled everyday life information seeking (ELIS). This examination will include both LIS based ELIS literature and also the literature from other disciplines that have examined aspects of the information seeking and information needs of parents. The importance of this section is that it paints a broad picture of the current state of research into the area of parents' information worlds and provides a specific contextual basis for this thesis.

3.4.1 Defining ELIS

Marden and Nicholas (Dervin et al., 1984; Fisher, Marcoux, Miller, Sánchez, & Cunningham, 2004; Kuhlthau, 1991; 1997a; Savolainen, 2005) note that '*in the rush to investigate the needs of people at work or study, the information needs of consumers or the general public have been wholly neglected by information researchers*' (p. 5), a view acknowledged by a number of other scholars (Case, 2002, 2006; Harris & Dewdney, 1994; Rieh, 2004; Savolainen, 1995, 2005). While acknowledging this general sentiment, there have been a few scholars who have attempted to examine the everyday information needs of people (Chatman, 1992; Fisher & Hinton, 2004; Fisher & Landry, 2007; Fisher et al., 2004; Hayter, 2005; McKenzie, 2003; Savolainen, 1995).

ELIS refers to the type of information seeking that '*people employ to orientate themselves in daily life or to solve problems not directly connected with the performance of occupational tasks*' (Savolainen, 1995 p. 267).

Early examples of ELIS research or citizens' information seeking as it was formally called, were conducted during the 1970s and early 1980s in the United States (Dervin, 1973; Dervin et al., 1984; Warner, Murray, & Palmour, 1973). Through her early work, Dervin developed a model of information seeking, based on three underlying assumptions:

- a) that individuals want to control their own life environments;
- b) in the modern technological world, information is essential for asserting control;
and
- c) by examining the four basic elements of the average citizen's information system (problem, needs, information sources and problem resolution), and their linkages, a better understanding of how ordinary citizens attempt to assert control over their life environments will be reached.

More recent community-based research in the UK has included a study into the Rural Citizen's Information Needs (Beer et al., 1998) as well as a general review of the use of citizen's information by Marcella & Baxter (2000a). It was not until the mid-1990s, however, that a general ELIS model was developed by Savolainen (Savolainen, 1995, 2005). The model has been widely cited (Given, 2002; McKechnie, 2003; Pettigrew et al., 2001) and a later model was then proposed by McKechnie (2003), who aimed to try and address many of the perceived inadequacies of earlier general models. McKechnie firstly claims that many of the existing models are limited in their ability to describe ELIS, because they focus on active information seeking to the neglect of less direct practices; secondly, that many of the existing models are based on academic or professional practices and so are inherently geared towards these approaches; and thirdly, he claims that cognitive approaches to modelling ELIS, such as Savolainen's (1995) model fail to adequately capture the full tapestry of information seeking. McKechnie's own model is based on qualitative research as well as the growing literature of non-active information seeking and research, and as such is very useful for the non-active information seeking perspective that it provides.

Case (2002) categorises the ELIS genre of research as information seeking by 'role,' categorising them as: *citizen or voter, consumer, patient, gate-keeper, and other roles*. Amongst the research in this area are a number of studies, that reflect a wide diversity of approaches for example; Lee and Trace (2009) investigated the role of information for hobbyists whilst Prigoda and McKenzie (2007) investigated the information sharing of members of a knitting group. Two widely cited ELIS studies were by Fisher and Hinton (2004) and Fisher (2004). These studies investigated the information needs and behaviour of migrant Hispanic farm workers in the United States using a GT methodology. Their research emphasised the importance of social networks as a common source of

obtaining information and claimed that official sources were not always trusted by the immigrants.

Harris and Dewdney (1994) examined barriers to information and how formal help systems fail battered women. They concluded with their influential six general principles, illustrating ways in which citizens can overcome information barriers. Kalm's (2008) research investigated household information practices, his thesis asserting that different information roles are adopted by different members of the household.

The internet has featured prominently among studies examining everyday information seeking. Wikgren (2003) undertook a review of health information exchange between groups of people on the internet who used discussion groups. She found that discussion groups proved to be an important channel for access to both formal and informal sources, as well as '*medical facts, orientating information and emotional support, and advice and information from both known and unknown fellow participants*' (p. 227).

Hayter's (2005) research is worth particular mention in that she specifically examined the information worlds of a disadvantaged community in the North East of England. Her qualitative investigation used Chatman's small world theory (Chatman, 1991b) as a basis for her own research, in which she interviewed 21 local residents and 13 key workers. Her findings suggested that the information needs of residents were both difficult and complex and reflected their daily lives. Hayter identified trust as a particular issue affecting their information seeking, this view confirming Chatman's (Chatman, 1987b, 1991b) own work, which itself was based upon the Granovetter's (1973; 1983) theory of 'strength of weak ties' as a way of explaining the acceptance of information from particular sources.

Hektor's (2003) work is also worth a brief mention because his review of the literature was specifically aimed at proposing an ELIS model based on the use of the internet. Through his review of ten studies he identified eight forms or habits of every-day information seeking using the internet, these he categorised as: search and retrieve, browsing, monitoring, unfolding, information exchange, dressing, instruct activity, and publish.

3.4.2 Parents and information seeking

There has been little research into the information worlds of parents from within the LIS community. There are however, examples of research into aspects of parents' information needs conducted by non-LIS disciplines such as health and social care. From a LIS perspective, Case (2006) reports that there were over 2,000 potentially relevant studies that he considered for inclusion into his ARIST review, which were published

between January, 2001 and December 2004. In his section examining ELIS, Case's review deals with the IB of the general public, patients, students, children and young people, immigrants, the poor, the homeless, women and the elderly, but makes little specific mention of parents other than Hersberger's (2001) study. Despite this lack of specific research, many ELIS studies do provide relevant contextual background information (Farmer, 1996; Fisher et al., 2004; Harris & Dewdney, 1994; Owen, 1996). Looking beyond the specific LIS literature, there is a wealth of research examining parents' use of information in non-LIS disciplines, specifically health care studies and family studies. Health care studies present a rich tapestry of research dealing with the specifics of information needs and information seeking of parents when faced with the illness of a child. Family studies, on the other hand include a number of studies examining how parents are influenced through mass-media and the internet (Bath & Guillaume, 2004; Dail & Way, 1985; Hughes & Durio, 1983; Koepke & Williams, 1989; Martland & Rothbaum, 2006; Simanski, 1998; Walker, 2005). Broadly speaking, those studies that have investigated parents' information seeking, can be categorised into three headings: *social and family information*, *health related information*, and *policy directed investigations*.

3.4.2.1 Social and family information

One of the earliest studies relating specifically to the information needs of parents is the synthesis of research compiled by Sparling (1980). Sparling's review is not specifically from a LIS perspective. His synthesis of research is based on a compilation of 15 separate research studies conducted in the United States throughout the mid to late 1970s, which focused predominantly on parents of very young children, typically under the age of 36 months. Another important element of his synthesis is that one-third of the studies he reviews relate specifically to teenage parents.

Sparling suggests that parents are after information about the child as a whole, and that they often require tailored information to meet a specific need. He also concludes that issues relating to the age of the parents, as well as their social and cultural values greatly affect their ability to search for information and also their receptivity to it. Sparling also recognises the importance of family and friends in supporting young parents, and advocates early intervention by agencies to help parents to effectively look for and use information.

Hughes and Durio's (1983) study is another early example of an investigation into how parents obtained childcare information. Their research was based on a questionnaire sent to ($n=2650$) parents throughout Texas, which produced 34 per cent response rate ($n=910$). Parents were asked to indicate where they would seek information about types

of childrearing issues (health concerns, school problems, home and family behaviour, and personality problems). The research found that for general advice regarding education and health, parents tended to seek information from relevant professionals. However, when it came to issues of personal or family-related issues there was much less consistency as to patterns of information seeking. They noted that single parents appeared to be disenfranchised from the information search process. They also highlighted the importance of informal help networks which consisted of family, friends and other parents.

Nicholas and Marden (1997b, 1998) surveyed ($n=33$) parents of pre-school children in London to find out what their information needs were. The parents' information needs are summarised in Table 3-1; the top four information needs relating to child health, child care, child development and schools information. In order to obtain the information parents used, on average, four sources, the two most popular sources being friends and professionals. Interestingly, the research found that friends were often favoured as a source over and above relations, due to them being seen as more confidential.

Table 3-1 General topics on which parents need information

Interview subject	Parents n (%)
Health for the child	32 (91)
Child care	30 (86)
Child development	28 (80)
School	24 (69)
Behaviour	18 (51)
Careers, education and training	18 (51)
Health for the parents	18 (51)
Finance	15 (43)
Total number of parents	n = 33

Source: (Nicholas & Marden, 1997b, p. 26)

This study was conducted in 1997 at a time before New Labour came to power with their childcare policies (see chapter 2). It was also a time when the internet was relatively new and not widely adopted and so it does not feature as a source. A third concern of the research was that it was primarily tasked with finding out what sources parents used and

as such was shallow in scope principally asking the questions 'what' and 'how' without digging into the 'why'.

Another widely cited study is Hersberger's (2001) investigation into the information needs of homeless parents. The research was based on interviewing homeless parents ($n=19$) and adopted Dervin's coding schema for data analysis. Hersberger categorised her findings by presenting them as problem categories, these being: finance, child care and relationships, housing, health, employment, education, transportation, public assistance and shelter. Hersberger draws parallels between her study and the earlier investigations by Chatman (Chatman, 1985, 1987a, 1990, 1996) whose widely cited and influential ELIS studies have focused on the economically poor (Fulton, 2005; Hersberger, 2005).

Fisher has undertaken a number of ELIS studies in recent years that have included migrant Hispanic farm workers and their families (Fisher et al., 2004) and also an examination of the 'information grounds' and the use of need-based services by immigrants (Fisher & Hinton, 2004). She has also studied the information needs of stay-at-home mothers (SAHMs) (Fisher & Landry, 2007). This study is particularly interesting because it builds upon her earlier work *née* Pettigrew (Pettigrew, 1999) on 'information grounds', a concept of information sharing that has equivalence with Chatman's (1991b) 'small world' (Savolainen, 2009b). Importantly Fisher's research investigated the roles of affective (feelings) and cognitive (thoughts) information seeking. This approach differed from many of the previous IB investigations of the past decade, which have generally concentrated on examining the behavioural aspect of user research, focusing on why users search, how they search, what errors they make, and what choices they make (Nahl, 2001).

Since the mid-1990s researchers realised the importance of *affective* and *cognitive* domains of information seeking (Nahl, 1995, 1996; Nahl & Bilal, 2007). Fisher's study found that SAHMs sought information from a variety of sources such as books, the internet, magazines, experts and friends, these findings being broadly in-line with other such studies (Nicholas & Marden, 1998). Information grounds are places where actors encounter information, with Fisher citing structured children's activities, shopping and community centres as places where they obtain information. Fisher also cited how affective aspects of the information process played an important role in the mother's information seeking, noting that this was especially true where the mother felt empowered through the process.

Schneider, Teske, and Marschall (2000) examined how parents in the United States choose schools for their children. They were interested in the approaches parents from

different backgrounds used when looking for a new school for their child. They also found that parents shared information through social networks. They found that social-stratification was a major barrier for some parents, concluding that better educated parents tended to have more reliable networks and consequently better quality information. This then enabled them to make better choices about schools.

Rothbaum (2008), along with colleagues, undertook to examine the different patterns of web use by parents of different socio-economic status (SES). As they interviewed ($n=120$) parents about their use of the web as a means of looking for child and family information. The parents were also asked to provide feedback about their experiences as they searched for information online. The aim of the research was to find out:

- a) the extent and frequency of parents' web use to find childrearing information;
- b) the characteristics of parents' web-search knowledge and behaviour;
- c) the criteria used by parents to evaluate the sites they view; and
- d) the level of parents' satisfaction with search results and sites they view.

They found that parents with higher SES's possessed the more sophisticated search skills and were better at evaluating the information. They reported that, despite these advantages, the higher SES parents did not report greater satisfaction with their overall searches and ability to find information.

3.4.2.2 Health related studies

There is a large body of health related information needs and information seeking studies. Many of the investigations relevant to this review tend to be small scale studies conducted primarily by clinicians or clinical researchers examining the impact of the internet on a range of paediatric information searching by parents. A large proportion of these studies are based upon questionnaires distributed to parents. Areas of investigation covered include: parental information seeking relating to paediatric outpatients (Tuffrey & Finlay, 2002), paediatric heart disease (Ikemba et al., 2002), ophthalmic disorders (Rahi, Manaras, & Barr, 2003), neonatal babies (Perlman et al., 1991), children with disabilities (Blackburn & Read, 2005; Porter & Edirippulige, 2007) food allergies (Hu, Grbich, & Kemp, 2007) paediatric anaesthesia (Wisselo, Stuart, & Muris, 2004) and general paediatric medical diagnosis (Starke & Möller, 2002).

Kai, in two widely cited articles (Kai, 1996a, 1996b), based her GT study on interviewing ($n=95$) parents. The study aimed to find out what parents' concerns were when their children got ill. The main findings were that parents worried about fever, coughs, the possibility of meningitis and failing to recognise a serious problem. These concerns were not helped when clinicians failed to acknowledge these worries

appropriately. Where this happened, Kai found that it often resulted in conflict between parents and doctors, which was further heightened at times of stress. Kai concluded that clinicians need to better recognise parents' difficulties, worries and concerns and she stressed the importance of effective communication between health professionals and parents.

Jackson *et al* (2007) undertook qualitative research examining the needs and psychological experiences of parents of children who had health issues, this study is not too dissimilar to Kai's earlier research. They grouped their results into four categories: *delivery of information; levels of support; relationship between the family and professionals* and *management of events*. Overall, they found that participants preferred 'one-to-one' delivery of information from a member of the clinical staff, supplemented by a personalised binder of information to take away. The results also showed that many of those who participated in the research had mixed experiences of talking with clinicians. They also found, in agreement with other studies, that many parents reported undertaking their own searches for information, particularly using the internet. However, information obtained this way was often difficult to interpret and frequently did not satisfy their need, thus showing a need for greater professional signposting and guidance.

The internet has featured heavily in a number of health based studies, as a means of addressing information access for parents across a wide range of clinical disciplines (Bernhardt & Felter, 2004; Khoo, Bolt, E., Jury, & Goldman, 2008; Semere et al., 2003; Wainstein, Sterling-Levis, Baker, Taitz, & Brydon, 2006).

Sim *et al* (2007), in their British based study, wanted to find out how useful the internet was for parents seeking health information. The study was based on a four page questionnaire that was distributed to ($n=274$) parents. The findings suggested that 94 per cent of parents who had used the internet, found it beneficial to their information seeking about childhood medical conditions. The authors agreed that the internet is a beneficial source of help and support for information about children.

A problem with many of these studies is that they simply rely on a measure of perceived use and benefit of information by relying on a questionnaire as the only source of methodological instrument. These studies are generally narrowly and contextually designed to answer a specific clinically based question, rather than to delve deeper into a wider examination of IB.

Another very interesting health related internet study worth particular mention is the focus group based investigation by Bernhardt and Felte (2004). In their study they conducted two focus groups of mothers ($n=20$) with young children. Their objectives were

to examine the web use preferences and perceptions among mothers of young children, focusing on the three questions:

- a) why do they go to the web for paediatric health information;
- b) where they go on the web for paediatric health information; and
- c) how they determine if the paediatric health information they receive online is trustworthy?

They concluded that women appear to be prodigious information seekers, particularly during pregnancy and for the first few years following the birth of the child. Their study also suggested that this time period represents a 'teachable moment'; a time when mothers were particularly strong information seekers.

The result also indicated that mothers had a preference for sources of information that:

- a) clearly showed why they were on the web, for example from a government source;
- b) were clearly presented by a health professional; and
- c) gave opinions of other parents.

These results have resonance with another study by Dhillon *et al* (2003) who investigated the use of the internet by parents of premature infants. Among their findings was that a significant proportion of parents searched the internet for medical and non-medical information much more prior to the birth of the child, compared with after the birth. They speculated that parents placed a lower priority on the internet at a time of crisis, such as the premature birth of a child, in these cases preferring other more authoritative sources.

Brazy *et al* (2001) undertook to investigate the processes that parents of premature infants used to seek information, as well as to identify the resources they used. The research comprised of a combination of interviews ($n=19$) and questionnaires ($n=64$). They found that parents of premature infants move from being passive information seekers to being active, desiring more information than was being provided by the hospital. Families proved to be an initial source of information, later being superseded by professionals and supplemented by additional sources such as the internet where available. This study is one of many focusing on the information needs of parents of children with neonatal complications.

Huws *et al* (2001) conducted a GT study that focused on the difficulties parents of autistic children had when trying to obtain information. Through their research they developed the core category of *making sense of autism*, a term that has resonance with Dervin's (1983) uncertainty and sense-making paradigm. The research design was based on an existing e-mail discussion list. They monitored the list over three months, and

during this period over 6142 messages were posted from 374 email addresses. In their discussion, Huws noted that parents tried to validate and reciprocate their concerns regarding autism and that the e-mail list allowed gaps in individual parent's knowledge to be filled.

Guillaume, for her PhD, (Bath & Guillaume, 2004; Guillaume, 2006) investigated the information needs and sources of parents when making the decision whether to allow their child to have the measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR) vaccine. Guillaume found that parents tended to be individualistic in their needs and varied in how they had been influenced by the media coverage surrounding the MMR scare. She noted that parents place great importance on finding information that they perceive to be trustworthy and honest. These decisions were based upon their perception of the source of the information. The MMR scare caused an information need for most of her sample, however she noted that '*parents often did not seek to meet the need for information*' (Guillaume, 2006, p: 298).

She notes that parents were generally sceptical of the majority of sources of information that they received. Reasons for this scepticism included: previous experience of a particular source, mistrust of the motivations behind a source, the extent to which they believed they were being supplied with truthful and accurate information and finally, the extent to which the information conflicted with other information. Guillaume's research is very relevant with the issue surrounding the MMR vaccine still a very real concern for parents. Even taking into account the narrow focus of Guillaume's research, it is very useful and paints a picture of the motivations and attitudes surrounding parents' information seeking.

3.4.2.3 Policy directed investigations

In recent years the British government has commissioned a lot of research studies examining various aspects of family life. The majority of this research being lower level surveys that remain within the realms of the grey literature. Broadly speaking, the studies conducted by or on behalf of government can be grouped into three categories. Firstly, published reports that support White or Green papers; one relevant and recent example of this being Byron's review 'Safer Children in a Digital World' (Byron, 2008) which, although published in its own right, also formed part of the Digital Britain report (Department for Culture Media and Sport, 2009). The second form of literature is reports that does not get formally published, but are instrumental in providing an evidence-based approach to policy development. One example, commissioned by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), was entitled 'Childcare Act: Qualitative Research into Parents' Information' (COI Research, 2007). The report formed part of a wider consultation, investigating how

local authorities could meet proposed new legal responsibilities placed upon them in Section 12 of the Childcare Act 2006. The Act stipulates that local authorities will have to provide information to parents, informing them of all relevant child-centred services available. The main objective of the report was to understand how to maximise access to child-related information for parents and to better understand the full range of topics and types of information that they want to know about. The report suggested that parents want to access information in a variety of formats (DVD, printed, electronic), from a range of accessible places (libraries, health clinics, nurseries). The report also suggested a range of topics that parents may want information about, examples of these include: childcare, schools, leisure, parenting, money, child health, family issues and law, employment and travel.

A final type of study provides data for policy monitoring, especially in the wake of Sure Start and Every Child Matters (ECM). This research is generally localised and may form part of a wider academic study, such as feeding into the National Evaluation of Sure Start, or may simply form part of a local evaluation of services. Such studies have a twofold aim, firstly, to show localised consultation with parents as a way of finding out what their needs and wants are, and secondly, as a form of internal reporting and auditing. The major caveat with many of these studies is that they are not intended as academic research. They often take the form of rudimentary questionnaires or simple surveys, based on those parents with whom local outreach workers have developed a relationship or who use existing services. Nevertheless, where data is available and examined in the wider context of academic research, it often provides an interesting view into the lives and information needs of a local community.

3.4.3 ELIS and the information poor

Information poverty and the category of the 'information poor' is a relatively new concept that has been increasingly used in recent years (Britz, 2004). The term is closely aligned with the concept of the digital divide (Haider & Bawden, 2007). Within ELIS, the term refers to the ability of an individual to access information based upon their socio-economic status as well as the various forms of capital they may possess and as such, has generally not been seen in non-ELIS IB investigations, which have traditionally focused on job or role related information seeking.

As the ELIS literature specifically relating to parents is small, we have to examine some wider studies and investigations. In his seminal ELIS model, Savolainen (1995) concluded that different forms of social, economic and cultural capital influence an individual's way of life and their mastery of life which in turn '*affects indisputably practices*

of information seeking' (p. 288). Chatman's writings on the information poor are widely cited and have provided the basis for much ELIS research. Chatman conducted a series of ELIS investigations which influenced her theory of the information poor (Chatman, 1996). Her studies include: an examination of the lives of the working poor, low skilled and the marginalized (Chatman, 1985, 1987a); the lower working-class (Chatman, 1991b); information world of retired women (Chatman, 1992); and a study of information poverty in a women's maximum security prison (Chatman, 1999). Writing about her theory of the information poor, Chatman (1996) notes that she was initially convinced by the argument that economic poverty was linked with information poverty, an association that she later admitted was '*not necessarily true*' (p. 188). Framing Chatman's theory is the notion of the insider/outsider that draws heavily on an article by Merton (1972) and the work of Granovetter (Granovetter, 1973; Granovetter, 1983). According to Chatman, all insiders share a common cultural, social and religious perspective through their 'lived' experiences and this in turn, defines the norms and ways they approach the world. Within the frame of the insider/outsider, Chatman's theory of information poverty established four key concepts: *secrecy*, *deception*, *risk-taking* and *situational relevance*. Secrecy is taken as the intentional non-disclosure of information, the idea being that it will protect a person or a group from unwanted intrusions. Examples in everyday life may be examples of personal non-disclosure to families or friends for fear of the risks. Deception is Chatman's second factor associated with information poverty. It is the '*deliberate attempt to play act...[and]...to engage in activities in which our personal reality is consciously being distorted*' (Chatman, 1996: p. 196). This process then hinders and shrinks the possibility of the individual receiving relevant and useful information. Risk-taking is the third factor and differs from the previous two insofar as their aim is to protect an individual in some way. Risk-taking, on the other hand, requires that an outsider is a trusted source. Before trust can be developed with an outsider, however, the individual has to first entertain and then calculate the cost of disclosure. The fourth and final factor is situational relevance which is conceptualised as *usefulness* or within the term '*utility*' (Chatman, 1996: p. 201). The individual needs to recognise the relevance of these sources. Chatman notes that in everyday situations:

...potentially helpful sources might be ignored: because people who are experiencing a precarious existence do not see a generalized value of many sources provided by outsiders intended to respond to their situation. (Chatman, 1996: p. 202)

In addition to the four key factors, Chatman derived six propositional statements based on an individualistic need; these are outlined in Figure 3-2. In terms of determining the

validity of Chatman's propositions, Hersberger notes, in her own research, investigating the information needs of homeless parents (see section 3.4.2.1), not all of the propositions were supported (Hersberger, 2005). However, Fisher notes that in her own investigation examining the information seeking of Hispanic farm workers (Fisher et al., 2004) that she considered them to be information poor. However, Fisher's investigations were more concerned with the sources used and types of information sought by individuals and so direct comparisons are difficult to assess. Fisher reported informal sources such as 'information grounds' (areas where actors meet and talk) and 'berry picking' (where actors gather small snippets of information on an *ad hoc* basis) as important ways of information seeking. Interestingly, Fisher notes that official sources were not necessarily accessed due to lack of awareness of their existence and that the sharing of information between themselves was the preferred method. From a British perspective, Hayter's (2005) research examining the information poor of a disadvantaged housing estate, generally agrees with many of Fisher's (2004) conclusion as to the importance of local information 'gossip' and the lack of use of official sources, most notably the public library.

- Proposition 1: People who are defined as information poor perceive themselves to be devoid of any sources that might help them.
- Proposition 2: Information poverty is partially associated with class distinction. That is, the *condition* of information poverty is influenced by outsiders who withhold privileged access to information.
- Proposition 3: Information poverty is determined by self-protective behaviours which are used in response to social norms.
- Proposition 4: Both secrecy and deception are self-protecting mechanisms due to a sense of mistrust regarding the interest or ability of others to provide useful information.
- Proposition 5: A decision to risk exposure about our true problems is often not taken due to a perception that negative consequences outweigh benefits.
- Proposition 6: New knowledge will be selectively introduced into the information world of poor people. A condition that influences this process is the relevance of that information in response to everyday problems and concerns.
- (Chatman, 1996: pp. 197-198)

Figure 3-2 Chatman's six propositions of information poverty

3.4.4 Summary

This section has examined a broad area of research and in particular has focused on studies that have been conducted within the ELIS context. Within the ELIS context there are relatively few investigations that have specifically examined the information worlds of parents. There are however, a number of studies from within other disciplines that have examined specific aspects of parents' information needs and behaviours, notably from within the health context. The following section will take a wider view of information seeking and information needs and will place them in the context of new skills required in an information society. This is important because it helps show the wider implications for ELIS research.

3.5 Information and British society

Beyond the narrow and specific scope of IB research lies a wider political and educational context that differs from those discussed in chapter 2. The prevailing view is that there has been a huge growth of information available to the ordinary citizen. Brown and Duguid illustrate this point with the following quote:

On an average weekday the New York Times contains more information than any contemporary of Shakespeare's would have acquired in a lifetime. Anonymous cited in (Brown & Duguid, 2000: p. 11).

The point is not the accuracy of the quote *per se*; but rather that it provides a useful illustration of how people have to evolve and adapt to a world where information is becoming more prevalent. This section will briefly outline the development of new literacies and in particular the notion of information literacy and how it is potentially seen as an essential competency for the twenty first century.

3.5.1 New literacies

The term 'literacy' is a relatively new concept and one that has been traditionally applied to the ability to read and write, in a similar way that being numerate is the ability to perform mathematical calculations (Barton, 2007). Within literacy studies, there has been a trend to differentiate between levels of literacy; examples include: 'basic literacy' which is used to describe a minimum standard an adult needs to live and work effectively in a society and 'functional literacy' which is used to define any individual who is able '*to engage in [their] culture or group...and that is relative to a particular society or group*' (Barton, 2007: p. 190). Traditionally, reading and writing, along with numeracy, have been seen as the three essential life skills, required for the social well being of an individual and also to ensure the general prosperity of a nation. In recent years, there has been a trend

for the development of a new set of skills which are seen, in some cases, as equally important for the general social wellbeing of an individual and also for the economic prosperity of the United Kingdom, one such example being digital literacy (Department for Culture Media and Sport, 2009).

The term literacy is increasingly being adopted to denote a basic level of knowledge in a subject or field and encompasses a diverse range of areas. Back in 1997, Snavely and Cooper listed 34 literacies including environmental literacy, scientific literacy, and critical literacy (Snavely & Cooper, 1997). Within the LIS context, Bawden's (2001a) review of literacies identified 6 types (information literacy; computer literacy; library literacy; media literacy; network and digital literacy), many of which had numerous synonymous terms attached to them.

3.5.2 Information literacy

Paul Zurkowski is attributed as the person who coined the phrase information literacy (IL), when, as president of the Information Industry Association (IIA), he called for a '*national programme to achieve universal information literacy by 1984*' (Zurkowski, 1974: p. 6). Importantly the context of this report was a call for investment in educational programmes for United States knowledge workers. Between 1974 and 1989 the concept received some, but generally, little attention (Behrens, 1994) until the publication of the American Library Association (ALA) Presidential report on information literacy (ALA, 1989). The ALA's report was followed by a year-on-year growth in the literature dealing with information literacy (Bawden, 2001a; Rader, 2000; Virkus, 2003). Academic libraries were the primary source of information literacy's initial growth, principally in the United States, Australia and the United Kingdom (ACRL, 2000; ANZIIL, 2004; Behrens, 1994; Bruce, 1997; Rader, 2000; SCONUL, 1999; Virkus, 2003), however, there is now a wide and diverse range of approaches (IFLA, 2007).

In 2003 the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) supported an information literacy meeting of experts in Prague (UNESCO, 2003). Two years later, there followed a high-level colloquium on information literacy and Lifelong Learning in AlexAndrea (UNESCO, 2005); the result of this meeting was a proclamation affirming information literacy as a fundamental human right for all people:

Information literacy empowers people in all walks of life to seek, evaluate, use and create information effectively to achieve their personal, social, occupational and educational goals. It is a basic human right in a digital world and promotes social inclusion of all nations.
(UNESCO, 2005)

There have been many definitions of IL over the past twenty years (ALA, 1989; ANZIIL, 2004; Armstrong, 2005; Bruce, 1997; Doyle, 1994; SCONUL, 1999; Webber & Johnston, 2000) leading to criticisms from some scholars (Owusu-Ansah, 2005). In the UK, the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) have defined information literacy as:

Knowing when and why you need information, where to find it, and how to evaluate, use and communicate it in an ethical manner. We believe that the skills (or competencies) that are required to be information literate require an understanding of: a need for information; the resources available; how to find information; the need to evaluate results; how to work with or exploit results; ethics and responsibility of use; how to communicate or share your findings; how to manage your findings. (CILIP, 2004)

The majority of definitions, including CILIP's, are based upon a set of core *skills* or *competencies* designed to measure someone's ability to question, access, evaluate and use information, from whatever source it may come. Defining IL by a set of competencies is a common feature of many popular definitions, yet this approach is not without criticism (Foster, 1993; McCrank, 1991; Snively & Cooper, 1997). A criticism levelled at the use of competencies is that there seems to be little agreement of what should be included and also in the language used to describe them. The reality is, however, that when examined closely the different definitions essentially articulate similar elements, but in different ways (Owusu-Ansah, 2005). Other criticisms are those by Todd (2000) whose concern was a lack of depth to the theory underpinning information literacy and also Whitworth (2006) who asks how learning a set of skills necessary for today, helps with the unknowable future, illustrating his point with the question 'how could Universities in the 1980s prepare their students for the internet in 1990s?' Despite these few concerns, IL is viewed by many scholars as an important set of competencies necessary for the information age. The importance of IL is being recognised in areas where it has traditionally received little attention, such as the workplace (Crawford & Irving, 2009).

3.5.3 Digital literacies

Information literacy is one of a number of competing terms within the wider LIS field. It is a concept that is accepted by many in the LIS community as a broad term that encompasses 'other types' of literacy, such as media literacy, computer literacy, as well as the more traditional library skills. However the current direction laid out in the recent Digital Britain report (Department for Culture Media and Sport, 2009) makes no mention of

the term information literacy, preferring the notion of digital literacies in the form of media literacy and digital media literacy. Both media literacy and digital media literacy are generally understood in terms of critical thinking and are applied to the broadcast media, print media and the internet (Bawden, 2001a). This reflects the focus on digital information and media based information, an aspect not necessarily assumed in the more holistic concept of information literacy.

The Digital Britain (Department for Culture Media and Sport, 2009) report claims that there are too many organisations across the country dealing with digital inclusion, digital life skills and digital literacy and that these stakeholders are too fragmented across various agencies and organisations. The report also calls for a new definition of the term, because it is perceived to be too confusing and technocratic. Digital Britain calls for the creation of a new National Media Literacy Plan, tasked with higher strategic direction in the coordination of developing a digital media literate citizenry. Many of the recommendations of the Byron Review 'Safer Children in a Digital World' (Byron, 2008) have been accepted by the Digital Britain report. These include the creation of an authoritative 'one-stop shop' for public information on child Internet safety aimed at parents.

3.5.4 Summary

This section has briefly examined the concepts of both IL and the narrower concept of DL. DL seems to be currently in vogue, as it is favoured by the government's Digital Britain report (Department for Culture Media and Sport, 2009). IL is generally understood as a skills set based competency that provides a framework for individuals to be able to make full use of the information and sources they have at their disposal, a skill that UNESCO (2003, 2005) sees as a fundamental human right. The reason for discussing these areas is because it helps to orientate this research by providing a benchmark for the way in which actors should ideally search for and assess information.

3.6 Conclusion

This review started by briefly examining the different understandings and concepts of the terms information, information needs and information seeking. It examined briefly the context and background of the development of user studies, and the subsequent adoption of the concept of information behaviour as a means of investigating how people search for information. Historically, within the field of information behaviour, one area of investigation that has traditionally been overshadowed relates to everyday life information seeking (ELIS).

ELIS specifically examines the daily information use and seeking of individuals in their 'way of life context'. Within the ELIS context, comparatively few investigations have specifically examined the information behaviour of parents, the most widely cited UK study being by Nicholas and Marden (Nicholas & Marden, 1997a, 1998). There exists wider non-LIS specific literature relating to parents' information needs and information seeking, especially within the health and social care context.

Within the wider context, parents' information behaviours can be set against the skills based backdrop of information literacy and digital literacy. UNESCO have declared information literacy an essential skill and a basic human right (UNESCO, 2003, 2005) whereas the UK government want to affirm their intention to raise levels of digital media literacy across the country (Department for Culture Media and Sport, 2009). The following chapters 4 and 5 move away from the existing literature and discuss the methodological design used in the research.

4 Determining a Methodological Approach

4.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses both the methodological approach and the methods used in this study. The chapter aims to provide a rationale, as well as to justify the mechanisms ultimately adopted for the study. This thesis uses the term 'methodology' to describe the study of social phenomena; the term 'method' is used to describe the technique or procedures used to gather and analyse data.

This chapter argues that a qualitative approach is the most suitable paradigm on which to base this study. The methodological approach adopted for this research was grounded theory (GT). The primary method of inquiry was semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interviews were supplemented by ethnographic observations. The data obtained from the observations was ultimately not used in the final analysis, but did provide a useful context.

This chapter is divided into three main sections. The first examines the suitability of qualitative research for this study, the second section is an examination of GT and its suitability as a methodology. The third and final section looks at the methods employed in the study, particularly focusing on semi-structured interviewing as the main method used. A full description of the practical mechanics of how this research was conducted is given in the chapter 5.

4.2 Suitability of qualitative research

Qualitative research is a process for examining and interpreting data in order to discern meaning, gain understanding and develop empirical knowledge about a phenomenon (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Qualitative inquiry has been around for many decades and can trace its history back nearly two centuries. One of the earliest cited examples of qualitative inquiry was the pioneering work conducted by Henry Mayhew (1812-1887) who observed and chronicled Victorian life in London in his highly influential book *London Labour and the London Poor* (Mayhew, 1985), published in four volumes between 1851 and 1862. Early qualitative research is rooted in the field of anthropology and later, in the early twentieth century, through the early pioneering work of the Chicago School of Sociology. It was not however, until the early 1970s that qualitative inquiry started to gain general acceptance in academia as a valid method of inquiry (Vidich & Lyman, 2002).

Qualitative research was selected because of its ability to capture the complexities of human life and human interaction. Marsha and Rossman (1999):

qualitative researchers are intrigued with the complexity of social interactions as expressed in daily life and with the meanings the participants themselves attribute to these interactions (p. 2).

Bogdan and Biklen (1992) make a similar point:

[The] qualitative researchers' goal is to better understand human behaviour and experience. They seek to grasp the process by which people construct meaning and to describe what those meanings are (p.49).

Qualitative research can, therefore, be regarded as a suitable approach for researchers wanting to investigate complex human social behaviours and interactions which deal with an actor's daily life. As a form of inquiry, qualitative investigations potentially give the researcher a 'window' into the world of the actors being investigated. Qualitative research provides the researcher with an opportunity to investigate the in-depth specifics of a group of actors; however, such in-depth investigation has led to criticism by some scholars. These concerns relate to questions around reliability, problems of representativeness and generalisability, problems of objectiveness and also of ethics (Sarantakos, 2005). These concerns will be discussed later in this chapter.

4.2.1 Library Information Science contextualisation

Bouazza (1989) notes in his short chapter, that the '*first scholarly [user behaviour] publications appeared in the United States in the 1950s; these studies were largely concerned with scientific and technical information*' (p. 145); Bownson (1960) agrees with this assertion when she reflects that there had been some 30 scientific based user needs studies or surveys in the previous ten to fifteen years; these approaches tended to be wholly quantitative in nature. Modern user studies are generally regarded to be traceable to the 1948 Royal Society Scientific Conference in London (Siatry, 1999; Wilson, 1981, 1994, 1999). The conference proved to be the catalyst for the development and use of surveys examining users' use of information. Wilson (1994) notes that the '*field broadened out from the study of library systems to the study of the behaviour and attitudes of information users' in general with effect from the Royal Society Conference*' (p.17). However, it was not until the 1960s, that the terms information seeking or information user studies were specifically used in a context that would be recognised today.

Menzel (1966), in his review of literature, berated the weak methodological design employed by many researchers in the field, claiming that the result was '*dubious reliability and validity.*' Illustrating his point, Menzel cites an opinion poll based study by Adams and

Loclely, who polled the members of the Seismological Society of America by postcard as to their preferred means of indexing. Wilson (1981) commented over a decade later, that the majority of information and information science (LIS) studies follow a '*relatively crude*' conception of the scientific method. Similar sentiments were expressed by Herner and Herner (1967) who wrote in their ARIST chapter that they too observed serious methodological weaknesses amongst many of the studies they reviewed. They summarised these weaknesses as:

- a) relatively few techniques used;
- b) diversity of corpora users to which few techniques have been applied;
- c) a wide diversity and ambiguity of language;
- d) a lack of innovation;
- e) a failure to build on past gains;
- f) the failure to profit from past mistakes; and
- g) a frequent absence of rigorous experimental designs.

More recently, methodological design has continued to receive critical review from a number of prominent writers (Case, 2006; Dervin & Nilan, 1986; Wilson, 1981). Harris and Dewdney (1994), in their influential study, identified a set of four weaknesses with existing LIS studies, these being:

- a) a lack of focus on 'ordinary people';
- b) a system centred focus, namely a tendency to look at the customer in relation to the system, rather than the system in relation to the customer;
- c) problems with methodology, for example in theory terms and in design; and
- d) a need for interdisciplinary research.

Over the past two decades there have been two notable developments in the methodological design and approaches used by scholars in LIS. The first development is a change of focus in the basic assumption that information seeking should be 'systems-centred'. In other words there was a change in emphasis, moving away from viewing information seeking from the perspective of an information provider or system towards a 'user-centred' approach. This change of perspective towards user-centred or emic research has been advocated by scholars and researchers such as Belkin (1984), Dervin (1976), Kuhlthau (1991) and Wilson (1981). The second area to receive considerable attention from LIS researchers in recent years is highlighted by Harris and Dewdney (1994) in their call for greater interdisciplinary research, something also advocated by Dervin and Shields (2005) and Dervin (2003c).

Over the last 40 years, qualitative investigations have grown in number and importance as they have been embraced by the LIS community and as the research focus has moved from looking at 'systems' and 'types of information' to examining how actors both seek for and use information within the context of their roles.

4.2.2 Examples of qualitative LIS research

Within the LIS context, user studies have developed and grown steadily over the past 40 years (Allen, 1969; Case, 2006; Crane, 1971; Crawford, 1978; Dervin & Nilan, 1986; Herner & Herner, 1967; Hewin, 1990; Lin & Garvey, 1972; Lipetz, 1970; Martyn, 1974; Menzel, 1966; Paisley, 1968). User studies cover a wide genre and consist of inquiries that traditionally centred around the information seeking of scientists, managers and academics. This research project is based in the LIS discipline commonly referred to as either 'citizen's information needs' or more recently 'everyday life information seeking' (ELIS). Early examples of ELIS studies were large scale projects conducted during the 1970s and early 1980s in the United States (Chen, 1979; DeGuglielmo, 1975; Dervin, 1973; Dervin et al., 1984; Marcella & Baxter, 2000b; Williamson, 1986). More recent UK based ELIS studies have included an investigation into the Rural Citizens' Information Needs (Beer et al., 1998), the information needs of a disadvantaged community (Hayter, 2005) as well as a general review by Marcella & Baxter (2000a). The research dealing with citizens' information seeking covers a diverse range of studies; Case (2002) categorises this genre of research as information seeking by 'role,' categorising them as: citizen or voter, consumer, patient, gate-keeper and other roles. Amongst the research in this area there are a number of studies that are based on naturalistic or qualitative studies, reflecting a diversity of approaches, examples include: low paid workers (Chatman, 1987a), women prisoners (Chatman, 1999) and older people (Pettigrew, 1999).

Fisher (2004) investigated the information needs and behaviour of migrant Hispanic farm workers in the United States, using a GT methodology. Her paper reports that social networks are a very common form of obtaining information and suggests that 'official' sources are not always trusted by the immigrants. Another oft quoted piece of research is that conducted by Harris and Dewdney (1994) who examined barriers to information and how formal help systems fail battered women. There is, therefore, a growing body of scholarship within the LIS context using qualitative inquiry (Carey, McKechnie, & McKenzie, 2001; Fidel, 1993; Westbrook, 1994). Finally Wilson (1994) suggests that qualitative research is a particularly appropriate method of studying underlying information seeking behaviour because:

- a) *[its] concern is with uncovering the facts of the everyday life of the people we are studying;*
- b) *by uncovering those facts [it] aims to understand the needs that exist which press the individual towards information seeking behaviour;*
- c) *by better understanding of those needs [it facilitates an ability to] understand what meaning information has in the everyday life of the people; and*
- d) *by all of the foregoing we should have a better understanding of the user, be better able to design more effective information services, and be better able to create useful theory of information seeking behaviour and information use (p. 23).*

4.2.3 Problems of credibility

Critics of qualitative research have argued that it is an inappropriate form of investigation because, in the most extreme cases, they claim, it is tantamount to fiction (Patton, 2002). The argument is that qualitative studies are not subject to the same empirical observations that quantitative research adheres to and so the measures of validity and trustworthiness are difficult to establish. Such a charge is bound with positivist scientific objectivism that has served scientific inquiry well for the past two centuries. Patton succinctly summarises the problem:

One barrier to credible qualitative findings stems from the suspicion that the analyst has shaped findings according to predispositions and biases (Patton, 2002 p. 553).

Predominately, in terms of assessing qualitative studies for validity and legitimacy three central axiomatic questions should be examined:

- a) how was the data selected;
- b) how was the data gathered; and
- c) how was the data analysed?

Cho and Trent (2006) claim that there has been a recent increase in concerns over qualitative research in favour of scientific research, noting that the 'paradigm wars' are not yet over. They argue that in recent years, two quite different approaches to qualitative research have emerged which they name 'transactional' and 'transformational'. The transactional approach tends to follow a set of procedures or techniques and the transformational approach is more radical by rejecting validity in a traditional sense, noting that in such cases a work is deemed to be valid if it meets its original ideal or stated aims

(Cho & Trent, 2006). In other words, transformational validity is an attempt to deal with multiple truths and perspectives. Cho and Trent suggest that transformational validity is less widely recognised and that any review of the established text books on qualitative research will reveal a preference for validity that is still largely based upon the transactional approach. Although not perfect, the transactional approach offers researchers a scaffold from which they can assess their work. As with most areas, what constitutes the elements of the scaffold differs in both terminology and implementation of techniques. Lincoln and Guba (1985) for instance promoted the notion of 'trustworthiness' for naturalistic inquiry. For Lincoln and Guba, trustworthiness is a term that replaces validity which they perceive as a 'loaded term', steeped in empiricist positivist overtones. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that rigorous naturalistic inquiry needs to exhibit five elements in order to show that it is trustworthy:

- a) activities for increasing the probability that valid findings will be produced: include, 'prolonged engagement' and 'persistent observations' as well as the use of 'triangulation' of different methods;
- b) peer debriefing: allowing your work to be opened up for scrutiny and review by peers as an opportunity for reflection;
- c) negative case analysis: focusing on the cases within the data that do not conform to the norm;
- d) referential adequacy: where possible the archiving of audio and visual recordings and other raw data for future benchmarking; and
- e) member checks: reflecting back to actors the interpretation placed on their initial contribution to see if they feel that it fits with what they were trying to communicate.

Patton (2002) uses different terms, he talks about *credibility* and *rigor*. However, Patton too focuses on a range of techniques for trying to ensure credibility and rigour such as negative case analysis and triangulation. There seems to be no formally agreed canon of assessment of validity or trustworthiness in qualitative research and this has led to continued criticism as to its appropriateness for academic study. Certainly, the notion that validity can be assessed in the 'traditional' positivist sense of empirical observation is an old accusation levelled against quantitative studies. Nevertheless, advocates of qualitative inquiry, aware of wider criticisms have suggested, albeit often couched in caveats, guidelines and techniques that may help provide a level of validity, trustworthiness, or credibility depending upon the methodology adopted (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002).

Charmaz (2006) and Corbin and Strauss (2008) approach the issue of trustworthiness or validity from the context of grounded theory (GT) based studies. They suggest that GT offers a unique approach to conducting research and they argue that, because the research is based upon the data and that the emerging theory is grounded in that data, it needs to be assessed and tested in a relevant way. They each have their own criteria for testing GT studies; this is examined in section 4.3.8.

Yet, despite these continuing challenges, the unmistakable reality is that qualitative research has *come of age* in terms of its acceptance and widespread use within the LIS community. We have briefly seen how scholars (Dervin & Nilan, 1986; Savolainen, 1993; Wilson, 1981, 2000) have recognised the unique perspectives that qualitative investigation brings to our understanding of information needs and use.

4.2.4 Selection of methodology

Once it was established that qualitative inquiry was an appropriate basis for the project, a decision was required as to the methodological approach. The methodological approach selected directly influences data collection and data interpretation and, therefore, forms the ontological foundation of the project.

The approach selected will also be influenced, in part, by the research question and project aims. Among the methodological approaches considered prior to commencing this research, two in particular presented themselves as particularly relevant, namely sense-making and GT.

4.2.5 Sense-making

Brenda Dervin's sense-making methodology was originally considered as the basis for this project. Dervin has been a chief critic of the state of LIS methodology since her widely cited ARIST chapter (Dervin & Nilan, 1986) and has been at the forefront of the call for greater interdisciplinary research within the LIS field, as well as being an advocate for developing new methodological approaches. Dervin, who is herself from a communications background, has been developing, along with colleagues, sense-making methodology since 1972. Dervin's aim in her sense-making (Dervin, 2003b) approach is to have her metaphorical *cake-and-eat it*, with regards developing a methodology that is essentially qualitative and yet has quantitative attributes. Dervin summarises her sense-making approach in the following way:

The term 'Sense-Making' is a label for a coherent set of concepts and methods used [in an] effort to study how people construct sense of their worlds and, in particular, how they construct information needs and uses

for information in the process of sense-making. Since sense-making is central to all communicating situations, (whether they be intra-personal, interpersonal, mass, cross-cultural, societal, or inter-national) the Sense-Making approach is seen as having wide applicability...Sense-making research, however, rests on concepts and methods which are clearly quantitative and analytic and yet can be described with all attributes usually reserved only for qualitative inquiry (Dervin, 1983: p. 3).

Figure 4-1 is a graphical illustration of the sense-making process described by Dervin and based upon her own updated model (Dervin, 2003b: p. 277).

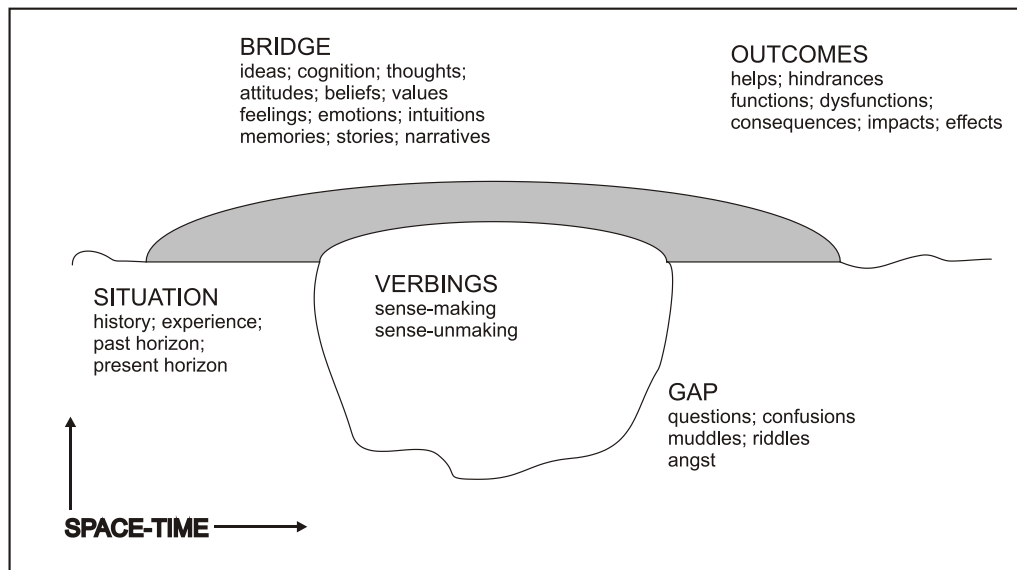


Figure 4-1 Dervin's sense-making model

Sense-making is a methodological approach used in communication theory and information science for studying how humans make sense of their experiences (Dervin, 2003b). Central to the methodology is the examination of the three elements that constitute a sense-making encounter, these being: situation, gap and outcomes (or sometimes 'use')

The term 'gap' is in relation to the assumption that there are '*persistent gap conditions in all existence—between entities (living or otherwise), between times, and between spaces*' (Dervin, 2003a: p. 61). In the LIS context, it refers to the 'questions' or 'needs' that an actor may have; the term 'situation' refers to the occurrences that set the process in motion and may have similarity to the notion of 'information need'. The final element relates to the 'outcome' and determining whether the gap (or need) has been 'bridged'. The process is illustrated in Figure 4-1 above.

Dervin and her colleagues have developed numerous techniques in order to examine the sense-making process. One of the most important of these techniques is the micro-moment time line interview (Dervin, 1983; Dervin et al., 2003). This technique helps to encapsulate the aim of sense-making. It is an interview technique that requires the researcher to ask an interviewee in detail about what happened in a particular situation. It takes a systematised approach by asking what happened first, second, and so forth (Dervin, 1983). Each stage is referred to as a 'time-line step' and represents a question along the line relating to the things the actor needed to find out, learn, understand, or make sense of. Using this technique it is possible to uncover, often seemingly, inconsequential or unconnected events that conspire to affect an information search process.

By focusing on the gap-situation, sense-making differed from many of the methodological approaches of the early 1970s. This is because it moved away from a systems view of information searching towards a user-centric perspective.

Sense-making was eventually discounted as the methodological approach for this study because of its specific and narrow application. As a methodology, its strength lies in being able to examine and analyse in detail specific information encounters. However, it does not provide a way for uncovering the general picture of an actor's information needs, in terms of their wider motivations and their information searching, nor does it adequately deal with the wider issue of feedback or other issues affecting the process. As it is the aim of this research to examine the wider context of parents' everyday life information seeking (ELIS) detailed in chapter 1, sense-making was discounted as a methodological approach to use in this instance.

4.3 Grounded Theory

4.3.1 Introduction

Grounded theory (GT) is commonly described as an inductive method⁵. Glaser and Strauss (1967) note that a GT that is faithful to the everyday realities of a substantive area is one that has been '*carefully induced from diverse data*' (p.239). GT has been applied to a range of studies, including those examining information seeking (Fisher et al., 2004).

This section briefly examines the history of GT as well as providing an overview of the use this methodology. GT emerged from the work of Glaser and Strauss as a result of the

⁵ There has been recent debate about whether grounded theory is in reality an inductive methodology or if it is in fact abductive. See Reichertz (2007) for an introduction to this debate. However, for the purposes of this study, the general acceptance is that grounded theory is inductive.

research methods they employed in their studies into the social organisation of dying, which they published in two volumes: *Awareness of Dying* (1965) and *Time for Dying* (1968). Glaser and Strauss wrote up their methodological approach in their now influential book, *Discovering Grounded Theory* (1967). Grounded theory has its roots in the pragmatist philosophical traditions of George Mead and also in the symbolic interactionism of the Chicago School. These philosophical underpinnings help to explain the emphasis GT places on the iterative approach of constructing theory from the data and in its particular use by Glaser and Strauss in their original study. Importantly this was happening at a time when qualitative research in sociology was losing ground to positivist quantitative approaches. However, since that time and especially since the late 1980s, GT has arguably become the dominant qualitative methodology (Timmermans & Tavory, 2007: p. 494) and as such has developed into a range of different approaches which include 'classic GT method' and 'constructivist grounded theory'. These different approaches have led to Charmaz (2008) describing GT as having '*evolved into a constellation of methods, rather than a orthodox unitary approach*' (p. 161). It is therefore difficult to precisely define what typically constitutes GT as Charmaz (2008) notes:

Students and new PhDs may want the structure and seeming certainty that a procedural application of grounded theory may provide...[but]...learning to tolerate ambiguity permits the researcher to become receptive to creating emergent categories and strategies
(p.168).

Grounded theory has evolved in recent decades with a notable disagreement and divergence in approaches between Glaser and Strauss. Glaser remained consistent with his earlier view which defines GT in terms of discovery (Charmaz, 2006). Glaser holds the view that data 'emerges', meaning that it paints a consistent picture, regardless of who the researcher is. Strauss's position is that the researcher should help the data emerge by 'working the data', analogous to a potter working clay; this by implication means that different researchers could find different emphases depending on the line of analysis they took. The division between the two was highlighted by the publication by Glaser (1992) of his book sub-titled 'Emergence Vs. Forcing'; the term 'forcing' being his view of Strauss's approach.

A new generation of grounded theorists, such as Clarke (2005) and Charmaz (2006) have emerged and have been credited as being influential in moving GT methodology away from the purely interpretative analysis by adopting postmodern and constructivist paradigms (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Charmaz (2006) in particular, is identified as promoting a constructivist paradigm. Charmaz's constructivist view is one that assumes

that the researcher adopts a relativist approach, meaning that '*concepts such as rationality, truth, reality, right, good, or norms must be understood as relative to a specific conceptual scheme, theoretical framework, paradigm, form of life, society, or culture*' (Mills, Bonner, & Francis, 2006: p. 26). The constructivist paradigm also acknowledges multiple standpoints and realities of both the actors and researcher (Charmaz, 2006).

Charmaz along with other scholars, has moved GT away from the positivism that was a mark of both Glaser's and Strauss's approach. Charmaz for instance, along with others, has helped GT evolve and take into account the developments in theory and methodology of the past few decades (Charmaz, 2006). Charmaz's approach is based in the constructivist paradigm that has been a central focus for much of the prevailing LIS and ELIS scholarship of recent years (Savolainen, 2009a) and is an epistemology that has been implicit in this research.

In GT, 'theory' may be understood in terms of being substantive, middle range, or formal (Glaser & Strauss, 1967:pp . 32-34). An investigation examining a particular phenomenon or a specific area is known as a substantive theory (Clarke, 2005). Thus an investigation examining specific parents' information seeking is substantive. Middle-range theory or even formal theory is less specific to a particular phenomenon or group and may build upon a number of substantive theories (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

4.3.2 Selection of GT

The selection of a methodological approach is shaped by the desired outcomes of the research; phenomenology for example, focuses on the 'lived experiences' of individuals and delivers a thematic description of the essence and structures of actors' lives (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). As we briefly saw in section 4.2.5, sense-making is a widely used methodology, both in communication studies and LIS contexts, which specifically focuses on the situation-gap-outcome metaphor. Sense-making and grounded theories were both considered as approaches that would meet the aims of this research. Grounded theory was chosen as the approach to be used for this research because it was felt that it could best answer the research aim. The reasoning supporting the selection of GT was based upon the following:

- a) Constructivist GT is particularly suitable for focusing on the everyday lives of actors and their multiple realities (Charmaz, 2006);
- b) GT takes into account an actor's own words through which to view a phenomenon; (Charmaz, 2006);
- c) GT is suitable where there is comparatively little known about a phenomenon (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Glaser 1978; Strauss & Corbin 1990); and

- d) GT is concerned with developing theory and 'fresh theorising' (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007); and
- e) GT theory has been used in comparable studies (Fisher & Hinton, 2004; Fisher et al., 2004; Huws et al., 2001).

4.3.3 Conducting GT

Despite the ambiguity as to what constitutes a GT approach, many researchers start by examining Glaser and Strauss's original template, which has since been criticised and amended; yet it provides a starting point. Recognising this, Charmaz (2006) helpfully summarises Glaser and Strauss's original position as:

- a) simultaneous involvement in data collection and analysis;
- b) constructing analytical codes and categories from the data, not from preconceived hypotheses;
- c) use of the constant comparative methods;
- d) advancing theory development through each step of data collection;
- e) memo-writing to elaborate categories, specify their properties, define relationships between categories, and identify gaps;
- f) sampling aimed towards theory construction, not for population representativeness; and
- g) constructing the literature review after developing independent analysis.

(pp. 5-6)

Many of the so called fundamentals of what constitutes classic GT research have been challenged over the past 30 years; two examples being: the need to always simultaneously collect and analyse data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) and the notion that a literature review be conducted after the research has been analysed. Urquhart (2007) for example outlines her set of five guidelines for conducting GT:

- a) doing a literature review for orientation;
- b) coding for theory and not for specific themes;
- c) use of theoretical memos;
- d) building emerging theory and engaging with other theories; and
- e) clarity of procedures and chain of evidence.

(pp. 350-354)

Urquhart's five guidelines are in broad agreement with procedures advocated by Corbin and Strauss (2008) as well as Charmaz (2006) and so form a useful template for conducting GT.

4.3.4 Criticisms and limitations of GT

One of the criticisms that has been briefly mentioned is that as a methodology, GT presents a complex and often bewildering approach to research that does not seemingly present a 'how to manual'. GT is also a methodology that requires practice as the novice researcher develops the experience and skills required to successfully work with the data.

Urquhart (2007) seeks to address many of the common criticisms often levelled against GT. The first criticism she notes, is the misunderstanding that a researcher should not conduct a literature review out of fear that it might '*contaminate, stifle or otherwise impede the research effort to generate categories*' (Glaser, 1992: p. 31). A second criticism deals with the different approaches to coding adopted by researchers. With regards to coding Urquhart notes three different approaches by principal grounded theorists, namely Corbin and Strauss, Glaser and, Charmaz. However, despite the different approaches, all three have the common central aim of generating theory rather than providing a simple and superficial description. A third criticism noted by Urquhart is the allegation that GT studies produce low level theory that gives detailed insights about a specific area that is then difficult to scale up to a general theory (Urquhart, 2007: p. 353). She addresses this issue by suggesting that the very strength of GT is its unique reliance on and use of data; however this in reality is also its weakness when compared to wider concepts. One possible solution is to try not to focus too narrowly on limited major concepts. Glaser and Strauss (1967) recommend the development of only two core categories, this being part of the reason they published their original research in two volumes. Such an approach may overly narrow the focus of the developing theme, but Urquhart notes, in her experience, researchers usually develop more than two core themes. A second approach suggested by Urquhart to help mitigate this charge, is to group major categories into overarching themes and relate these themes to an area of theory (Urquhart, 2007).

Another criticism that can be levelled against GT is that it requires experience and time to develop skills such as developing theoretical sensitivity (Charmaz, 2006), however, this same argument can be applied to a whole range of methodological approaches and not just GT.

4.3.5 Data collection and analysis in grounded theory

Grounded theory uses a form of purposive sampling, with sample size being determined by a theoretical saturation. Theoretical saturation is a difficult concept to quantify, but it is considered to have occurred when the researcher decides that further data collection would not produce any significant or additional view of the phenomenon under investigation.

4.3.6 Coding and analysis

In GT, coding is an integrated process that is conducted in an alternating sequence with data collection until the researcher judges that theoretical saturation has occurred.

Theoretical saturation will happen when no more useful codes are found within the data.

Figure 4-2 illustrates the process.

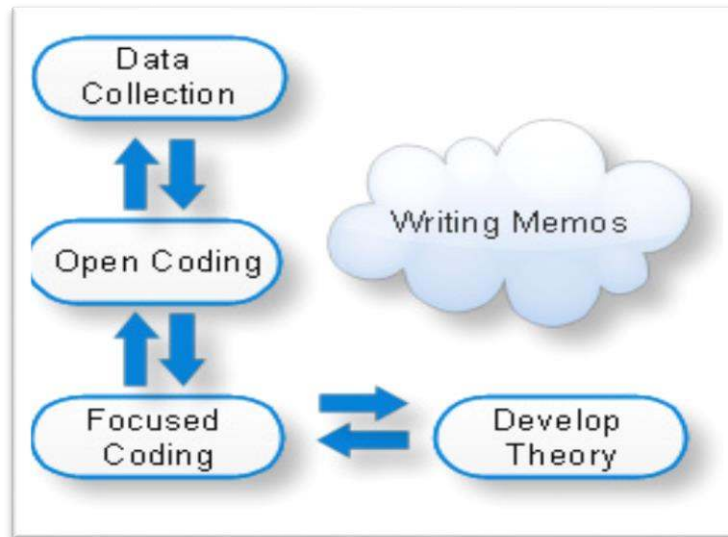


Figure 4-2 The GT coding process

Coding is a core process in GT that enables conceptual abstraction of the data which is then reintegrated into an emerging theory (Holton, 2007). The process involves naming segments of data that will simultaneously categorise, summarise and account for it. Charmaz (2006) describes coding as the *'first step in moving beyond concrete statement...to making analytic interpretations'* (p.43).

The first phase of data analysis is often referred to as 'open' or 'initial coding' (Charmaz, 2006), a technique used in GT to create a set of codes from the data. At its basic level this may comprise any of a number of approaches or even a combination, such as word-by-word, line-by-line, or even by incident. During the examination of the transcripts, the researcher will be interrogating the data by asking questions about what is happening; this may involve basic questions such as: *'what is the data saying?', 'what is happening in this instance?' and 'where does the data fit?'*

The second phase of coding, 'focused coding' relates to the refining of the initial or open coding. It is at this point that the researcher starts to analyse the initial codes, looking for the most significant and/or frequently occurring concepts. The researcher can choose to use a number of techniques to help develop and examine the codes. The most

commonly cited technique is the constant-comparison method. This is the process whereby the data is compared with other codes and categorised in an attempt to identify both similarities and differences. In addition to the constant comparison method, other types of focused coding techniques include axial coding and theoretical coding.

Axial coding relates to the process of identifying the properties and dimensions of a category via a combination of inductive and deductive thinking. Strauss and Corbin (1998) suggest that axial coding is particularly useful for answering questions relating to '*when, where, why, who, how and with what*' (p. 125), however, their position has changed by the third edition of their book, where axial coding received little mention and Corbin and Strauss (2008) suggest that the results provided by axial coding can be deemed to be '*artificial*' (p. 198). Charmaz (2006) suggests that axial-coding is too highly structured and is therefore optional.

Theoretical coding is an analytical process advocated by Glaser (1978) who presents a series of 18 'theoretical coding families'. The aim of the coding families is to try and stimulate the researcher into thinking about properties and dimensions of individual categories.

4.3.7 Memo writing

Memo writing plays an important role in supporting the analysing and development of codes and categories. A memo is a record of ideas, insights, reflections or analysis that the researcher has placed in written form. Memos may occur during data collection, or may be developed throughout the coding process. A memo allows a researcher to develop and explore emerging ideas, allowing them to analyse and test codes, concepts or emerging categories (Charmaz, 2006; Lempert, 2007).

Once a memo has been created, it is stored, providing a repository of ideas, with some memos being developed and expanded as the researcher develops his or her theory. In the later stages of analysis, memos can be used to show the researcher their thought process and allow them to ask questions and add depth to the developing categories.

4.3.8 Standards of evaluation

Section 4.2.3 discussed the notion of establishing credibility or validity in general qualitative research. In terms of testing GT studies Corbin and Strauss (2008) talk about it being 'believable' or 'plausible'. They argue that '*quality and validity are not necessarily synonymous*' (p. 301). In other words, just because a study meets the criteria for being considered valid, it does not, by default, mean that the conclusions are the best possible ones that could have been derived from the data or indeed that the data has been

adequately interrogated. Corbin and Strauss postulate that rigour is structural and should be integral to the overall methodological design of a project. Where this occurs, it helps to ensure that the research is viewed as 'credible' and the results 'believable'. Corbin and Strauss present some general criteria for judging the quality of a GT study:

- a) Do the findings resonate or *fit* with the experiences of those people who participated in the study?
- b) Are the findings useful or applicable, do they offer new insights, can they be used to develop policy or change practice?
- c) Do the developed concepts demonstrate substance and relevance?
- d) Are the concepts fully contextualised, providing the reader of the research with a whole picture?
- e) Is there a logical flow of ideas and do they make sense?
- f) Is there depth in the descriptions of the concepts?
- g) Is there complexity, variation and depth in the findings?
- h) Are the findings presented in a creative and innovative manner?
- i) Did the researcher demonstrate sensitivity to the data and is there evidence that his or her assumptions were imposed on the data or is there evidence that the researcher sought to find contradictions in the data?
- j) Is there evidence of the use of memos as a means of recall and insight through the analysis? (p. 305-306).

As well as providing their own useful set of criteria for assessing GT, Corbin and Strauss (2008) make particular mention of Charmaz's (2006) own guidelines. They suggest that it too is a useful and valid tool for assessing GT. There is overlap between Corbin and Strauss's and Charmaz's criteria. Charmaz helpfully breaks her criteria into the four broad headings: credibility, originality, resonance and usefulness and by doing this, helps to provide a template for researchers to assess their work. Charmaz's criteria are:

a) Credibility

- Are there strong links between gathered data and argument?
- Is data sufficient to merit claims?
- Do categories offer a wide range of empirical observations?
- Has the research provided enough evidence for the researcher's claims to allow the reader to form an independent assessment?

b) Originality

- Do the categories offer new insights?
- What is the social and theoretical significance of this work?

- How does the GT challenge, extend and refine current ideas, concepts and practices?

c) Resonance

- Do categories portray fullness of the studied experience?
- Does the GT make sense to the participants?
- Does analysis offer them deeper insights about their lives and worlds?

d) Usefulness

- Can the analysis spark further research in other substantive areas?
- How does the work contribute to knowledge?
- Does the analysis offer interpretations that people can use in their everyday lives/worlds?

(Charmaz, 2006, p. 182)

4.3.9 Summary

This section has briefly examined the history, context and mechanics of conducting a GT study. It has been argued that GT is predominately associated with qualitative studies and is particularly useful for research that aims to examine the everyday lives and realities of individuals and as such, is particularly suited to this study.

Grounded theory has also developed over the past four decades and has evolved in a number of approaches. A particular approach that is gaining widespread acceptance is commonly associated with Charmaz and is known as constructivist GT. Charmaz's constructivist GT builds upon the recent changes in theory and methodology of the past 40 years. Her approach has particular affinity with this research because of her constructivist approach, a view that is prevalent within current LIS and ELIS literature. A detailed account explaining how GT was applied to this investigation is presented in chapter 5.

4.4 An examination of methods

In the previous section, we discussed the selection of GT as the methodological approach being adopted for this study. This section examines the methods or techniques used during the research. The primary method of investigation used has been the semi-structured interview, the aim being to talk with a selection of parents who have primary school aged children. Additional methods have been used to supplement the interviews, such as observations where they were seen to add a different perspective, for example where they offered either conformity or contradictory views of a phenomenon. The

observations in particular were useful in assessing the categories and viewing them in a real life setting. Issues regarding the practicalities such as sample size and selection, as well as a full description of the methods used throughout the study are dealt with in chapter 5.

In the discussion of the methods employed in her research, Clarke (1997) reminds her readers that '*in the inventory below the techniques as I discuss them appear to be separate and distinct, yet in practice I often merged and overlapped them*' (p. 263). This sentiment is certainly the case for this study; primarily interviews form the core of the data collection method.

4.4.1 Interviewing

The *raison d'être* of this research is to interview parents in order learn more about their information seeking and their information worlds. As interviewing is the primary method of data collection, it is important to examine the method in some depth. Interviewing as a method of qualitative research has been used since the early days of social inquiry. Pioneers such as Henry Mayhew used interviews as a primary data collection tool in their chronicling of life in nineteenth century London⁶. Since that time, the popularity of the interview as a social research method has grown steadily, becoming a favoured tool of sociologists (Benney & Hughes, 1956). A well constructed qualitative interview provides the researcher with a window into the social world of the subject, enabling them to understand experiences and reconstruct events in which they did not participate, crossing gender, ethnic and socio-economic boundaries (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Another reason for the popularity of interviewing, is its flexibility and adaptability as a technique, for example: face to face interviewing, telephone interviewing, focus group interviewing, and more recently, internet and other forms of virtual interviewing (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

In its broadest sense, an interview has been described as '*a conversation with a purpose*' (Guba & Lincoln, 1994: p. 268). Rubin and Rubin (2005) take a similar view when they define the interview as a '*conversation in which a researcher gently guides a conversation partner in an extended discussion*' (p. 4). Building upon the notion of an interview being a conversation, many writers such as Fowler and Mangione (1990) have tried to further refine the definition, recognising that referring to the interview as simply a conversation is an inadequate understanding of what is happening. Fowler and Mangione (1990) propose a two phased definition, stating that an interview should consist of the following two components:

⁶ Henry Mayhew wrote his findings in *London Labour and the London Poor*, published in four volumes between 1851 and 1862.

- a) *the substantive part of the interview or the conversation should consist of questions and answers; and*
- b) *the participants have defined, non-overlapping roles: one person asks questions (the interviewer) and the other answers the questions (the respondent) (p. 11)*

When designing a qualitative interview based study, the researcher needs to give full consideration to the form and structure it will take; in other words, how narrow or how broad the questioning will be (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). There are a number of often synonymous terms used throughout the literature to categorise qualitative interviews, these terms include: structured, un-structured, semi-structured, focused, un-focused and in-depth. Writers such as Powney and Watts (1987) proposed alternative approaches to categorising interviews, suggesting just two categories: '*respondent interviews*' or '*informant interviews*' (p. 17).

In the focused or respondent interview, the researcher has a set of pre-defined questions that may follow a strict order or may be loose and unfocused. The informant interview, on the other hand, is characteristically unstructured in nature—that is to say, the interviewer will adopt a line of questioning to follow-on from what the interviewee is saying (such as in the case of an oral history).

It is important then, that the researcher adopts an interview type appropriate to their line of inquiry. To help ascertain which type should be adopted, the researcher needs to carefully consider his primary purpose. This can be achieved by asking the following question: '*Is the purpose of the research to elicit understanding/meaning, or is the purpose to describe and portray specific events or processes?*' (Rubin & Rubin, 2005: p. 5).

The literature relating to interviewing as a qualitative method covers many decades, originally developing from anthropology and ethnographic research of the early twentieth century. According to Platt (2002), the years between 1935-55 saw the development of interview theory along with a real attempt to critique its method, noting that for many researchers the problems that its practice raised were '*live ones being confronted and disputed for the first time*' (p. 41). As the literature pertaining to interviewing grew, so did those authors who pointed to its potential weaknesses. The early view was that interviewing was positivistic and, if correctly designed and executed, would produce reliable results. There was, however, mounting debate by scholars challenging aspects of the interview such as '*interview styles, rapport, group-membership effects and recording methods*' (Benney, Riseman, & Star, 1956: p. 143). Other areas under scrutiny included quality control, interviewer behaviour and standardization of procedures (Caplow, 1956).

The 1960s saw a steady acceptance of qualitative research and interviewing in general, notably in its use in GT (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and by the 1970s '*interviewing was being taken for granted as an established practice in the survey world*' (Platt, 2002: p. 50). By the mid 1990s interviewing of any kind had become so ubiquitous throughout United States society that the phrase 'interview society' was adopted by a number of scholars (Fontana & Frey, 2005; Gubrium & Holstein, 2002). Scholars such as Scheurich (1997) take issue with the fundamental assumptions of qualitative interview research, which he considers to be wholly positivist and from his post-modern perspective he suggests problems of validity on a number of fronts. Firstly, the '*researcher has multiple intentions and desires, some of which are consciously known and some of which are not*' (p. 61), this he argues is also true for the interviewee. Secondly, Scheurich suggests that the language used to construct the questions is not 'bound and stable' as pre-supposed by a positivist view, rather it is unstable and ambiguous, from person to person, from situation to situation and from time to time. Scheurich's third critique concerns the de-contextualization of the interview during analysis and coding, where he perceives problems of legitimacy arising from the complex ambiguities of language, communication, and interpretation. For Scheurich (1997)

techniques such as line numbering, identification and quantification of comparable meaning, or even discourse analysis, simply serve to hide... [the] presence of the researcher and her/his modernist assumptions' (p. 63).

In other words, the researcher's conscious and subconscious assumptions will always play an important role in the moulding and shaping of data and are, therefore, not as value free as they may at first appear.

In an attempt to deal with such post-modernist concerns, Fontana and Frey (2005) record attempts to legitimize the interview process through techniques such as polyphonic interviewing, '*where voices are recorded with a minimal influence from the researcher and are not collapsed together and reported through the interpretation of one researcher*' (p. 709). However, Fontana and Frey concede that this form of interviewing is still not without its critics. It is interesting to note however, that despite his withering critique, even Scheurich (1997) cannot bring himself to reject interviewing as a research method but rather he states his intention is to undermine positivist concepts.

4.4.1.1 Interviewer bias

One area which has exercised many scholars over the years is the issue of interview bias, or 'interviewer perspective' (Powney & Watts, 1987). This issue has recently been the

focus of post-modern writers such as Scheurich who cite interview bias as a fundamental flaw at the heart of the positivist method. Despite the recent post-modernist attacks, the problem of interviewer bias has been recognised for quite some time, as Caplow (1956) notes, bias is '*introduced by the interviewer's perception of the respondent or the respondent's perception of the interviewer*' (p. 165). In their comprehensive discussion on the issue, Powney and Watts (1987) identify three sources of interview bias:

- a) *the background characteristics of the interviewer, these include, age, education, socio—economic status, race, religion and sex;*
- b) *psychological factors, such as the perceptions, attitudes, expectations and motives of the interviewer; and*
- c) *behavioural factors, including the ability of the interviewer and his ability to probe the interviewee and record data (p.36).*

It is impossible to eradicate bias from an interview. The interview process is a complex activity, which cannot be removed from the thoughts and opinions of the interviewer. The effects can be partially mitigated (Rubin & Rubin, 2005) by the interviewer having a greater awareness of her own paradigms and an understanding of the inherent problems of the technique. A brief discussion pertaining to this issue is related to the piloting of the interview used in the project provided in section 5.3.1.

4.4.1.2 Rapport

Rapport between the interviewer and the interviewee is an important element that aids the interview process (Warren, 2002). With interviews that are repeated over time, the interviewer has an opportunity to develop a rapport with the interviewee. This is not as easy for interviews that are conducted as a one-off; here the researcher has only a small window of opportunity to establish rapport or trust with the interviewee. Both approaches have their advantages and disadvantages, for example: over-familiarity and loss of objectivity may evolve when an interview is repeated over time; conversely an interviewee may need time to establish trust with the interviewer. The onus is on the interviewer to try and foster an open and appropriate manner as best they can (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Yet, it is important to remember, that the whole process revolves around the complex social interactions of human behaviour and involves chemistry, social class and education as well as possible disclosures and the vulnerability of the interviewee, meaning that it may be impossible to establish rapport. Benney and Hughes (1956) ultimately take the pragmatic view when they note that '*the reality is that there is no such thing as an ideal interview...every encounter will reveal some significant things and conceal others*' (p. 143).

4.4.1.3 Ethical interviewing

In 1970 Laud Humphreys' study 'Tearoom Trade' (Humphreys, 1975), caused great controversy in the qualitative research community, surrounding the methods he employed in his PhD research. In his research, Humphreys acted as a 'watch queen' in order to observe acts of homosexuality in public places then, noting down the car registration details of the individuals he observed, he later traced them to their home address where he would interview them under the false pretence of being a health visitor. The resulting controversy led to a wider ethical debate that has helped to inform the current ethics for social science research methods. Although the Humphreys' case is an extreme example, it is important to remember that interviewing deals with human beings and so extreme caution must be taken to ensure that no harm comes to them, especially if they are vulnerable adults or children.

In recent times, the immediate focus for ethical concerns has revolved around the topics of informed consent, right to privacy and protection from harm (Fontana & Frey, 2005). Please refer to sections 5.9 and 5.10 for ethical considerations related to this research). These ethical concerns usually form part of the published research guidelines from most major Universities, providing the researcher with a tightly defined standard to which they are expected to conform. It would be short-sighted however, to think that these were the only ethical considerations affecting qualitative interviewing. Fontana and Frey (2005) note that many scholars feel that most traditional in-depth interviewing is unethical, whether wittingly or unwittingly. The techniques and practices of interviewing, they say, are really ways of manipulating the interviewee, while treating them as objects or numbers rather than as individual humans; '*should the quest for objectivity supersede the human side of what we study?*' (p. 715). Certainly, there seems to have been a lot of soul-searching in recent years as to how the interviewer should interact with the interviewee. One example of the wider issues under discussion is highlighted by Finch (1993) whose feminist discussion argues that a woman-to-woman interview seems to be a '*special situation where the interviewee may open up and be vulnerable in ways she may not normally be for a male researcher*' (p. 168). Finch argues that this presents the interviewer with the dilemma—how far should she go to befriend or empathise with the interviewee (and therefore by implication manipulate the situation) to obtain data? Although Finch argues from a feminist perspective, the same principles are in play for all interviews: it is the interviewer's job, especially in unstructured interviewing, to probe the person being interviewed in order to obtain as much information as possible. This may mean the interviewer, 'acting', or changing persona to fit the situation, blurring the lines

between viewing the interviewee as a fellow human or simply as a subject who needs to be mined for data.

4.4.1.4 Summary

The process of successful interviewing is complex; it can be described as an art that appears on first investigation to be deceptively simple (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). It is important that the interviewer not only has an understanding of the techniques, pitfalls and problems which are incumbent with the method, but also has an appreciation of how he himself can affect, consciously or unconsciously, the outcome of the interview process.

The qualitative interview has faced questions over its central ability to record un-biased and value-free data. Yet, despite these concerns, the interview remains, and will continue to remain, a major investigative tool in the social researcher's toolbox. For a full description on how the interviewing was conducted for this research please refer to section 5.3.

4.4.2 Observations

The primary data collection method used in this research has been semi-structured interviews. Observations however, have helped to offer insight and provide supplementary and contextual information in terms of the ways parents share information, although they have not provided primary data.

Observation as a method of data collection has been an important technique for researchers from the earliest days of qualitative research, with observations forming the basis of Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor* (Mayhew, 1985). Observations have evolved and today take a variety of different forms ranging from clinical or controlled laboratory investigations to ethnographic *in situ* or 'natural' observations (Angrosino & Mays de Pérez, 2003). Sarantakos (2005) for example, identifies seven types of observation:

- *naïve and scientific observation;*
- *participant and non-participant observation;*
- *structured and unstructured observation;*
- *natural and laboratory observation;*
- *open and hidden observation;*
- *active and passive observation; and*
- *direct and indirect observation.*

(p. 208-209)

Two forms of observation that are often associated with sociological inquiry are participant and non-participant observations. With participant observations, the observer observes from within the group, often with his or her identity concealed. In non-participant observations the observer is not part of the environment they are observing, they have a position that is clearly defined outside of the group they are studying (Sarantakos, 2005). Sarantakos (2005) notes that in many cases the reality is that observations lie between the two extremes, somewhere in the middle, between participant and non-participant, forming a type of 'semi-participant' observation.

Every research method has advantages and disadvantages. Many of the same concerns that affect interview research (see section 4.4.1) are also common to observational research. One of the central concerns relates to observations in a natural setting and the ability of researchers to observe and record an unbiased account that accurately reflects the behaviour of those actors being observed (Angrosino & Mays de Pérez, 2003). The charge is that it is difficult for a researcher to understand a process or relate to a group of people of which they are not fully a part. The post-modern critique emphasises the importance of an observer having a thorough understanding of the actors under observation, in terms of gender, class and ethnicity (Angrosino & Mays de Pérez, 2003). How well this is achieved depends upon a whole range of variables that include, power relationships and situational identities (Angrosino & Mays de Pérez, 2003) and also the observer's own competency (Sarantakos, 2005). In terms of possible problems for the observer, Sarantakos (2005) identifies 14 sources, these include: observer inconsistency, observer bias, deception, lack of knowledge, observer distortion and lack of familiarity with the group under observation. Creswell (2007) also suggests that inadequate recording of observations can also lead to problems. Many of these problems however, can be mitigated by adequate planning, proper awareness and observer training (Creswell, 2007; Sarantakos, 2005). As with other methods of qualitative data collection, ethical issues need to be seriously addressed by the researcher. This is particularly true where observations are covert (Angrosino & Mays de Pérez, 2003; Sarantakos, 2005).

As we have briefly discussed, observations present the researcher with an opportunity to view actors in a natural life situation. However, as with any qualitative method of inquiry, it is not a method without potential problems and pitfalls.

4.5 Summary

This chapter has argued that a qualitative approach is a suitable and justifiable way to investigate ELIS. In this chapter we have also briefly examined the development of qualitative research within the LIS context and its adoption, in particular, by researchers

focusing on ELIS. Since the 1970s there has been a paradigm shift, with a greater acceptance and general realisation of the benefits that quantitative research can bring to studies investigating the complexities of human and social interactions, both within the general academic sphere and also within information science.

This chapter has also briefly examined GT and its suitability as a methodological approach for this study. GT is a methodology that has evolved since the late 1960s into a recognised approach which offers researchers a structured way of investigating the complex phenomena of people's daily lives. The last part of this chapter has examined the methods used during this study. The primary method employed was the use of semi-structured interviewing, which was supplemented by the use of observations to provide contextual and background data. The following chapter will provide a detailed account of the way the study was implemented, using the methodology and methods outlined above.

5 Researching Parents' Information Seeking

5.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview and description of the methods used during the investigation. A grounded theory (GT) approach was used as the methodology for this investigation. A justification for the use of this methodology has been discussed in the previous chapter. This chapter focuses on the practicalities of data collection, analysis and the processes implemented throughout the research. The principal method of investigation was semi-structured interviews with 33 parents of primary school aged children living in the Leeds Education Authority area. Additional supporting data was gathered using observations. The following chapters 6 and 7 will present the actual findings of the study and then will discuss the findings in light of existing literature.

5.2 Accessing parents

This section examines the sampling approach used in this study. It discusses how parents were approached and selected for the study and also examines the issue of determining the number of parents to be interviewed. There are many different approaches to sampling in qualitative research; Miles & Huberman (1994) for instance identify sixteen sampling strategies. They note that most qualitative sampling is 'purposive', that is to say that it is not random or non-probabilistic but rather it has been subjectively selected by the researcher. Purposive sampling has been used in this project for the identification and selection of parents. In the context of this research, sampling relates to the identification and selection of interviewees and also deals with how many actors will be interviewed in the context of a GT study.

5.2.1 Defining a population

The population for this investigation was identified in chapter 1 as 'parents of primary school aged children in the Leeds area'. The term 'young children' was considered as a concise way of describing 'primary school aged children', however, it was not eventually used because the term 'young children' has specific meanings in the wider family studies and early years literatures. For example, the term 'young' often refers to children aged 0-8 years, whilst the term 'middle-childhood' is used to refer to older children and the term 'adolescence' is used to refer to young people aged 13 and over. To maintain clarity, it was decided to refer to the sample group as 'parents of primary school aged children'.

In Leeds, where the research was conducted, primary schools comprise of children aged between five and eleven years old.⁷ The reasons for focusing on parents of primary school aged children were:

- a) it provided a range of parents in terms of prior-parenting experience, for example: first time parents, or parents with older children or even teenagers;
- b) it provided access to parents within a manageable geographic location (namely Leeds);
- c) parents with children at primary school would have sought information in the past five to ten years, a period of time that has coincided with a dramatic proliferation of the internet;
- d) it provided access to a range of parents from different socio-economic and educational backgrounds;
- e) it provided a group of parents who would have been affected by the socio-political changes of the past decade; and
- f) parents with children at primary school would have had to make potentially difficult decisions such as whether or not to give their child the Measles Mumps and Rubella (MMR) vaccine or choosing a school for their child.

5.2.2 Approaching Parents

In the first instance a strategy was developed to try and obtain access to groups of parents. My underlying fear was that I would be unable to recruit enough parents for this research; a fear that proved to be groundless.

Despite the increase in the number of qualitative studies investigating information needs and information seeking, there has been comparatively little published with regards to the mechanics of how library and information science (LIS) researchers have gone about conducting their studies (Carey et al., 2001). Recent LIS studies have included a diverse set of influential qualitative investigations that have sought to explore everyday life information seeking (ELIS) in different contexts. These have included an investigation of women prisoners (Chatman, 1999), senior citizens (Pettigrew, 1999), homeless parents (Hersberger, 2001) and battered women (Harris & Dewdney, 1994). In an attempt to meet some of the needs and offer some guidance to current researchers, Carey (2001) and colleagues have usefully reviewed a number of studies, broadly discussing their different approaches. However, there is a comparative lack of practical advice with regards to 'how'.

⁷ Leeds operates a two school system comprising of primary schools and senior schools. Children start primary school in the year they turn 5. Children leave primary school at the end of Year 6 when they are 11 years old.

The challenge of how best to approach and recruit parents who would be willing to participate and be interviewed was discussed with my supervisory team. A number of options were discussed, for example using my personal network. However, this was dismissed because it was felt that the interviewees would be too much like myself and too willing to help out a friend, thus posing problems pertaining to the overall integrity of the project. I also felt that I would be defenceless against the charge of using convenience sampling (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

A second method considered but ruled out, partly out of fear of it not working, was to place advertisements around places where parents congregate and to which they have easy access such as community halls, village post offices, local free newspapers, local churches. Eventually it was felt that as the research was targeting parents of primary school aged children, it would be logical to try and access parents *via* schools. I was under no illusions that this would be an easy option and I recognised that it may be difficult to obtain help from busy head teachers. However, I felt that obtaining their help and support would be an important and potentially viable way of accessing different groups of parents in a controlled manner and more importantly, gaining access to parents who I might not normally meet. Prior to approaching head teachers, support was obtained from two departments within Education Leeds⁸. The first was the Leeds Healthy Schools initiative, who are tasked with trying to support schools in educating children and parents about the benefits of healthy eating. The second contact was from the co-ordinator of Parent Support Advisors (PSA) who was responsible for overseeing local PSAs. PSAs are specialist workers attached mainly to schools located in areas of deprivation. The PSAs role will vary depending on their location; however, their key duties typically include acting as a liaison between the school and parents as well as providing practical support to parents. Crucially, both of these departments expressed interest in the research and the possible implications it could have for them and their practice. They agreed to help me contact head teachers by providing practical help in the form of giving me a copy of the Education Leeds school address lists, Education Leeds e-mail addresses, permission to use the internal school postage system as well as access to 60 parent PSAs throughout the city.

With support from the two Education Leeds contacts, letters were sent through the schools internal post to the head teachers of all 223 primary schools in Leeds. The letter gave a brief synopsis of the research and its aims, as well as outlining potential benefits of participation for the schools (see Appendix F: Correspondence). Accompanying the letter

⁸ Education Leeds is a not-for-profit company formed in April 2001 and wholly owned by Leeds City Council that serves the functions of a local education authority.

was a two page 'question and answer' briefing document highlighting key aspects of the project. A follow-up reminder email was sent two weeks later to head teachers with an attachment of the initial letter. In the first instance, 12 head teachers responded noting their interest. A meeting was arranged with each of the 12 head teachers to discuss the project and explore how it could work. The meeting had a twofold aim, firstly, to assure head teachers that participation in the project would not lead to any significant workload for the school and secondly, that the school would be able to access the results once the project was complete. Following on from the original 12 meetings with head teachers, 5 schools were ultimately used. The basis of selection being that two schools were located in affluent areas of the city, two schools were located in poor inner-city housing estates and the remaining school bordered a 'mixed' area of, comprising a catchment area of former council housing and new private family housing.

Two additional opportunities to access parents also arose. Firstly, the parent support advisor at a local pupil referral unit contacted me when she heard about my project. She had been working with a group of five parents on a parenting skills project and was personally interested in the research. This school was added to the sample because the parents had recently completed the STEPS (Systematic Training for Effective Parenting) programme and, by the very nature that their children attended the school, faced parenting challenges, especially in terms of their children's behaviour.

A second contact came from one of the five schools, a church school; the suggestion was that I should contact a large family church as they may be willing to help. I approached the church and met with their administrator. The administrator said that they would be willing to help and that she would ask parents of primary school aged children if they would mind participating in the project. The decision to add the church parents to the source was taken because:

- a) it provided a contrasting source to parents from the schools;
- b) it provided access to parents who were perceived not to have an ulterior motive, either conscious or unconscious, in terms of supporting or criticising their child's school (both of these motivations were evident with a number of parents using the interviews as an opportunity to support or criticise their child's school); and
- c) it provided an opportunity to see if there were any differences in the information seeking of those people who are members of a collective and supportive network and those who are not (this pre-supposes that a church group is in fact a mutually supportive network).

The final sample involved the interviewing of 33 parents. These were purposely selected from several different sources, referred to as schools A to F and church (see

Table 6-1 Parent recruitment by source, page 112). Amongst the institutions from which the parents were recruited, the church immediately stands out as being the only non-school source.

Schools A and B are 'leafy lane' schools, located in affluent commuter villages on the outskirts of the city. These schools are made up predominately of families from higher socio-economic backgrounds (this is shown in section 6.2). The reverse is true for schools C and D, both of which are situated in the centre of deprived inner-city housing estates that have been designated as Sure Start areas. Both of these schools also have the additional support of PSAs. School E is in a mixed area that borders onto school D. School F is of special note because it is a specialist pupil referral unit that deals with children who have been excluded from mainstream schools; they too have a PSA attached. A detailed demographic account is provided in section 6.2.

5.2.3 Sample and justification

In GT sampling, schemes may change dramatically with the development of the research (Morse, 2007). For example, Morse suggests that both purposeful and theoretical sampling may be employed at different stages with a GT study. In terms of purposeful sampling, Morse (2007) notes that it is useful for identifying actors who are 'going *through a particular stage*' (p. 237), and so helps to set the research context. Theoretical sampling, it can be argued, is in itself a form of purposeful sampling (Hood, 2007), however, it differs in that the research identifies actors who can provide clarity or a different perspective on emerging categories. In the context of this research this is demonstrated through the use of School F, the pupil referral unit, and also the church group, who helped provide a different context to those parents already interviewed.

Although a great deal of effort was made to try and ensure that the sample was defined and well constructed, there are a number of charges that may be made against it:

- a) there is no ethnic minority representation;
- b) it comprises a self-selecting group of individuals who were willing to be interviewed; and
- c) with the exception of two interviews the primary interviewee was the mother.

I address these issues as part of a wider discussion dealing with the limitations of the study in section 8.3.

In traditional or classic GT, sampling continues until theoretical saturation has been achieved. This is the point at which gathering additional data about a theoretical category fails to provide any additional insight or information (Morse, 2007). The text book approach to data collection and gathering suggests that data is obtained, it is then coded,

with these steps repeated until theoretical saturation has been achieved (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

The approach adopted in this research did not always follow the format of one interview followed by coding and then another interview. The process that was used in this research at times resulted in 'groups of interviews' followed by coding. There were three main reasons for adopting this approach:

Firstly, as a consequence of using schools as a third party to arrange and host interviews. School B in particular set aside two dates where they had asked parents to attend the interviews. It was the stated preference of the school's head teacher that interviews be conducted on the school premises and this happened in all but one of these interviews.

The second is similar to the first, but specifically relates to the circumstances surrounding the parents at school D. Three interview dates were arranged by the school's PSA. She was unsure how many parents would keep the interview appointments because of their 'chaotic home lives'. The PSA personally arranged each interview on my behalf, as she said that they would not attend otherwise and she also telephoned each parent an hour before each appointment. Even with this support, two of the parents from this school failed to attend the interview.

The final reason was that the early tranche of interviews were arranged before I fully comprehended the enormity of the length of time it would take to transcribe and then code each interview, an issue not fully identified in the pilot stage (see 5.3.1). The consequence of this, especially in the early stages of the research, was a backlog of interviews needing transcribing and coding.

A consequence of the approach adopted was that there were more interviews conducted than would have normally been the case if I had been able to fully interview and code. However, the benefit was that I was able to interview parents who I would not normally have been able to reach, namely those from schools C, D and F. An additional benefit of this process was that it provided a wealth of data, which enabled me to complete the analysis.

Despite blocks of interviews being conducted, the general principles of GT were met, in that previous data was collected and then coded, which in turn informed later data collection.

5.3 Interviews

The principal method of data collection used in this research has been the semi-structured interview. A full critique of the suitability of interviewing as a valid method of investigation has been given in the previous chapter. This section provides a description of how the interview was created, piloted and conducted as well as providing an outline of the procedures used during the interviewing.

5.3.1 Piloting the interviews

After initial conversations with supervisors and experienced researchers within the University, a draft interview schedule and questions were developed. It was seen as particularly important to thoroughly test the interview questions and the process, especially as it provided, me as the researcher, with much needed practical experience of 'real world' research as well as providing a crucial testing ground for the interview questions, data recording and data analysis techniques (Wilkinson & Birmingham, 2003).

The pilot interviews were conducted during April and May 2008. Five parents were approached for the preliminary phase of the study. Each parent was chosen because:

- a) all were parents of primary school aged children;
- b) all had a different number of children and different experiences as parents;
- c) they was a cross-section of socio-economic backgrounds and academic attainment;
- d) they were known to me as people who would be able to articulately and honestly feedback their thoughts and comments on the whole process; and
- e) two of the pilot sample were parent support advisors, both of whom were single mothers who also worked with a number of parents who were subsequently interviewed.

Each pilot interview was conducted as close as possible to the anticipated research conditions and included test questions and a proposed demographics and consent form.

Immediately following the pilot interviews a debriefing session was conducted with each interviewee, while the experience was still fresh in the minds of both the interviewer and interviewee. During the debriefing, the interviewees were asked to reflect and comment on the style and clarity of the questions. The process also served as a training exercise for me as a novice interviewer, with each interviewee being asked to reflect on the general experience and to comment on the interviewer's manner, style and approachability.

The pilot interviews also gave me an opportunity to test the digital audio recorder in order to determine its optimal settings as well as devise a coding system to link the audio file to the correct interview notes to enable easy identification.

Throughout the pilot process there were initially five versions of the interview schedule, at one point comprising a 25 page document containing 48 questions. It was felt that by constructing such a tightly defined schedule it would help me as the interviewer, to ask neutral, probing questions and would also help guard against falling into the novice interviewer trap of 'loaded' questions (Gilbert, 2008). The first phase interview schedule was not only piloted, but also critically reviewed by experienced researchers. After the first phase of pilot interviews and in the light of the critique generated by the process, it was felt that the format of the questions had several weaknesses: firstly, the look of the document proved to be intimidating; secondly, the size and hierarchical structure of the document was obtrusive and hindered a free flow interview; thirdly, the use of the document resulted in me, as the interviewer, constantly referring to the document rather than concentrating on the interviewee. From the feedback received and discussions with experienced researchers, it was felt that the interview questions should be drastically changed, the result being a 'memory map' identifying key areas which fitted onto a single A4 page (see Appendix G: Interview Instruments). It was felt that a mind map would encourage a free flowing interview, whilst at the same time providing an *aide-mémoire* to the general questions. The consequence of this was that as the interviewer, I was able to follow the general areas I wanted to investigate whilst at the same time allowing for the development of additional questions that presented themes as a result of the GT coding process.

5.3.2 Field interviews

Interviews were conducted at a time and place convenient to the interviewee. At the start of each interview the project was explained to the interviewee and they were talked through and asked to sign the informed consent form, which also doubled as a demographic collection data sheet (see Appendix G: Interview Instruments).

The average interview lasted about an hour, with the shortest being twenty-five minutes and the longest two and a half hours. All interviews were recorded onto a digital audio recorder. The digital recorder generated a file name based upon the number of recordings it had made and this file name was used as a unique identifier. It was felt that making substantial notes during the interview may put some parents off, however, where appropriate, brief notes were made. Interviews were generally conducted at safe or neutral places, usually at school, a 'one-stop-shop' council centre or at the interviewee's

own home. At the end of each interview, the interviewee was asked whether they would mind being contacted again in the future should there be a need for clarification or additional information.

5.3.3 Non-attenders

In total six interviewees failed to attend pre-arranged appointments. Two of the six had been arranged by the PSA at school D and so there was no follow-up other than a single telephone call which went unanswered. The remaining four interviewees had been arranged by myself directly. These parents were telephoned to try and re-arrange a new meeting. All four verbally agreed but later failed to attend a second interview or persistently failed to answer subsequent telephone calls. In these cases, after the second attempt to meet failed, it was felt that the interviewee was either unwilling or uncomfortable with the prospect of being interviewed. This was taken as an indication not to pursue the interviewee and to respect their privacy. It is interesting to note that all those interviewees who did not attend were linked to schools C and D and represented those parents from the harder to reach groups.

5.3.4 Transcriptions

All interviews were transcribed by myself; this was a labour intensive process, yet one which I deemed to be worth the investment in time. It had been suggested that I approach a third party to do the transcription, however, on reflection I decided that it helped to immerse myself in the data, a sentiment supported by Charmaz (2006) as she notes that, by transcribing interviews and field notes '*your first reading and coding of the data need not be your final one*' (p. 20). Another important factor was that the transcriptions would provoke thoughts which were 'captured' in memos for future reflection, see section 5.5.

Ideally all transcriptions happened within as short a period of time as possible after the interview, whilst it was still fresh in my mind. As a rough indicator, a one hour long interview would transcribe to around 5,000 words and took a day to complete. Transcription was helped by the fact that I had used a digital audio recorder which stored all interviews as MP3 files. Express Scribe transcription software was used throughout the process. Where appropriate, the audio features of QSR's NVivo 8 were used, the benefit of this being that a specific segment of an audio file can be electronically highlighted and coded.

Silverman (2006) suggests that the researcher tries to '*capture every nuance of the interview, by [placing] times of pauses into the transcripts to indicate exact pause, or cough and laugh*' (p. 206). Certainly, there are times where a researcher may wish to go to such lengths to capture every nuance of an interview especially where discourse

analysis is the principal method. A pragmatic approach was therefore adopted throughout the transcription process, with pauses and emphases being noted in the transcripts by use of brackets and full stops and bold text.

5.4 Observations

Observations did not play a major part in the overall research process for a number of reasons outlined below. Their main purpose was to provide supplementary and confirmatory data in terms of depth and texture. With the exception of one sub-category (see 6.3.5.2), they did not formally form part of the data set that constituted the data used to code and develop categories. Overall, the field observations comprised of three sets of observations, these being:

- a) school Z primary schools parent's forum;
- b) school C family centre bingo 'n' butties group; and
- c) school C outreach work.

5.4.1 School Z observations

School Z did not provide any interviewees for the main part of the research. I was however, invited by the head teacher to observe the school's parents forum. The school is located in a socially deprived area about half a mile by foot from school C. The forum is run by the school's PSA as a means of interacting with and engaging with parents. At the first meeting I was introduced as a researcher from Leeds Metropolitan University. Because the meeting was generally structured, I felt able to take brief field notes which were written up as soon as possible. The school emailed me details of each meeting and in all I attended four such meetings until the invitations stopped. When I enquired as to the next meeting, I was told that there had been a change in the way the meetings were to be held and an 'outside advisor' was now organising the sessions and she felt that my presence was inappropriate. On further investigation I found that there had been various changes to the structure of the school and that the contacts I had built up were potentially losing their post after a reorganisation. At this point I felt it inappropriate to pursue the matter any further. No observations from school Z were ultimately used in the coding or analysis.

5.4.2 School C's family centre bingo 'n' butties group

I was invited to attend school C's family centre bingo 'n' butties group every Wednesday morning by the PSA and family outreach worker. The bingo 'n' butties group is a multi-agency collaboration between the school and the staff working for the family centre which

shares the school site and facilities. At the first two sessions I attended I was introduced as a researcher from Leeds Metropolitan University. Unlike school Z's parent's forum, the bingo 'n' butties group is organised along informal social lines and I felt that it was inappropriate to make formal notes during the observations. I did however; make informal notes where appropriate, with field notes being completed as soon as possible after the meetings.

5.4.3 School C's family centre outreach work

The outreach work involved working alongside the family outreach worker attached to school C's family centre. The aim of the outreach was to go 'door knocking' in an attempt to meet with parents often referred to as 'hard to reach'; in other words, those parents who did not generally attend local groups such as the bingo 'n' butties meetings or any other events organised by the local family centre. My initial commitment was scheduled for two hours a week over a six month period, however, that was cut short after three sessions, due to internal boundary changes and organisational politics. At each encounter with a parent, the outreach worker identified herself and also identified me as a researcher working with her. Brief notes were taken after contact with a parent and, where appropriate, were written up as soon as possible after the event.

5.5 Memos and diagrams

Memos are described as '*a pivotal intermediate step between data collection and writing draft papers*' (Charmaz, 2006, p. 72). Memos capture thoughts, ideas, reflections and connections of codes, providing a base for analysis. Corbin and Strauss (2008) suggest that there are no hard and fast rules as to what a memo should look like as researchers develop their own style. However, they note that there are several features that should be present to ensure that the memo remains useful, these include:

- a) that memos contain dates and relevant references;
- b) that each memo is appropriately headed; and
- c) that where relevant, memos should include a short quote or phrase of raw data.

Memos have been used throughout the project as a means of capturing thoughts and providing a basis for reflections see Figure 5-1.

Memo: Values and Beliefs

Created: 21/11/2008 : Amended: 22/01/2009

Values and beliefs seem to play a huge part in the ways parents assess information. In the absence of any firm data or knowledge, the person is often guided by 'gut

feeling' (see memo) - what seems right. Often, this may be a judgment about a condition, but all of these are ultimately formulated/informed by the individual's own values and beliefs.

An example with #35 she was beside herself about the decision about the MMR, yet her values were such that she believes in herd protection and so she went ahead despite conflicting information.

Also with assessing information from people, many prefer people who are similar, have the same values and beliefs and so this reinforces their view.

See references: #4, #6, #11

Figure 5-1 Example of a developing memo

Diagrams are another technique that were partially adopted at different times throughout the inquiry and share many similarities with memos (Charmaz, 2006). Diagrams were mainly used to show the relationships between categories and sub-categories. However, while memos take a written form, diagrams offer a means of capturing ideas, and thoughts as a conceptual visualisation of the data and, as such they help the researcher to move out from simply looking at facts (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Again, the features of best practice that are associated with memos are equally transferable to diagrams.

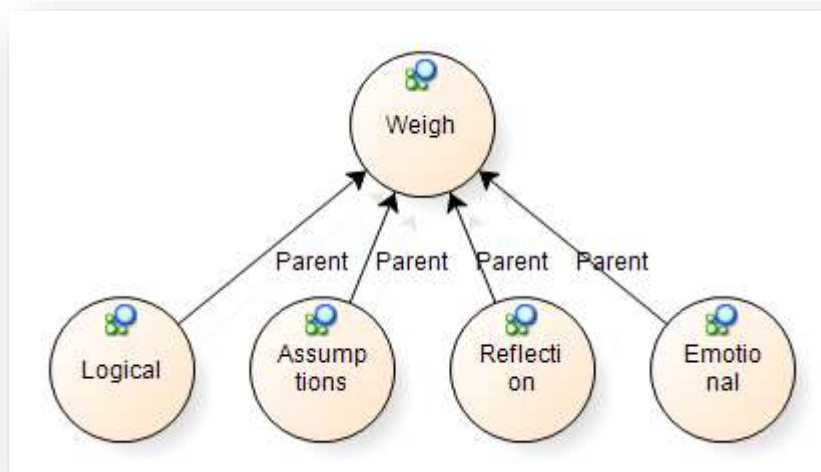


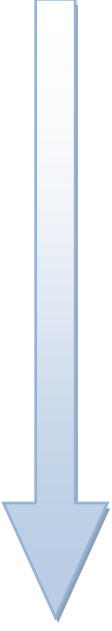
Figure 5-2 Example of a diagram generated using NVivo 8

Post-it-notes stuck on to a white board were also used as a form of diagramming. Post-it-notes provided a kinaesthetic way of creating, moving and linking concepts and codes as well as being able to easily view developing categories and sub-categories.

5.6 Data analysis

This section examines the techniques and procedures used to analyse and code the data for this study. Table 5-1 below summarises the key processes used during the research and analysis stage of this project. These techniques have been discussed previously in section 4.3.3. As previously mentioned, GT has evolved into a number of different approaches over the years. The focus of this research is sympathetic with Charmaz's (2006) constructivist ideals. This sympathy does not exclude the works of other GT authors, notably Corbin and Strauss's (2008) book that has been a central guide in terms of the 'how's' of coding. Two other books have also been referenced specifically in terms of coding practice, these being Glaser (1978) and also Clarke (2005).

Table 5-1 Data collection and analysis phases

Date	Data collection	Data analysis	Analysis method	Memos
January 08- April 08	Devise interview question Pilot interviews and test coding <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First attempt at interviewing and test coding; • Learn how to use software (NVivo); • Practise coding attempt. 	First 'test' review of codes and try open coding	Open coding in NVivo	Memo writing as a continuous process and refine codes
May 08 to June 08	First tranche of interviews <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct and transcribe 5 in-depth interviews 	Initial/open coding	Open coding in NVivo	
July 08 to August 08	Second tranche of interviews <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct and transcribe 15 in-depth interviews 	Develop focused coding	Situational analysis Word frequency Review coding	
September 08 to January 09	Third tranche of interviews and analysis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct and transcribe 13 in-depth interviews 	Focused coding	Situational analysis Review coding	

5.6.1 Choice of software

Qualitative Research Solutions (QSR) NVivo 8 software was used throughout the research project. NVivo 8 is currently the latest version of the software. It was selected over other similar products primarily because of its availability to researchers within Leeds Metropolitan University. This crucially means that the University has in-house people who have experience of using the software and also that there are regular training courses on its use—something needed for such a complex piece of software. Although not perfect, once the basics had been learnt, NVivo proved to be a very flexible and invaluable tool for analysing data and coding. SPSS 17 was also used during the research despite it being a statistical package. It proved to be a useful tool for maintaining data about each interview as well as sorting through the demographic data. As with NVivo, this software is standard within the University and is widely supported.

The use of NVivo as a method for analysing data proved to be both a benefit and hindrance. From the perspective of being able to centrally manage all data and performing tasks such as inputting interview transcripts and managing and editing categories, NVivo proved extremely useful. However, there were a number of areas where I encountered difficulties using the software.

Firstly, there was a very steep learning curve. The software is complex, and at its heart is a powerful relational database. Despite this, the overall appearance of the software is one of familiarity, as it has a passable resemblance to Microsoft Office, this familiarity lulled me into a false sense of security. The result of this was that I had seriously underestimated the time it would take for me to get a working knowledge of the software. This in turn meant it became necessary to attend a formal training course, something I did in November 2008 after I had initially started using the software. The result of this was that I had to make amendments to the way I had created the project file, resulting in a loss of time.

Secondly, the software seems to be generally geared towards a GT approach to qualitative research, in terms of developing categories, diagrams and memos. However, its use of nomenclature within the software proved to be confusing, for example NVivo uses the terms nodes and tree nodes for categories and sub-categories. Although not a substantial inconvenience, it did prove to be a niggling annoyance when added to the already steep learning curve of familiarising myself with the software.

Thirdly, I personally found that working in the 2-dimensional environment of a computer hindered my creative process in terms of analysing the data and developing categories. The initial consequence of this was a need to re-examine my initial categories which, on reflection, were too preconceived and based upon existing literature. This led to a fresh

approach using other methods of looking for connections between codes, for example the use of situational analysis (Clarke, 2005) and the use of 'post-it notes' on a white board to try and visualise the emerging data.

Fourthly, I felt that the software was at times a hindrance because it did not always offer the functions, or work in the ways in which I wanted, for example:

- a) NVivo lacks a built in spell checker and it does not offer an advanced document style. This meant that I found it was easier to create transcripts, memos and notes in Microsoft Word and import them into NVivo, rather than simply using NVivo.
- b) NVivo 8.0 offers an advanced relational database for searching all of the data held within it. However, it proved to be cumbersome and not particularly easy to master. This meant that where I had a relatively simple search, I found it far easier to use Copernic's desktop search software on my desktop computer to search for simple key phrases and words within my transcripts and memos.

Despite these complaints, I found NVivo 8 to be capable as a central repository for my data. From my own perspective, it is unrealistic to expect software to replace the creative elements of the research process that sometimes need more than simply moving data around on a computer screen. NVivo provided a logical and structured repository for the massive amount of data that it eventually held as a result of the interview transcripts and the categories. It was a naïve mistake on my part to think that NVivo would provide a single solution for data collection, coding and analysis. I have found NVivo to be a very valuable tool and one that I will without doubt use again.

5.6.2 Coding

In GT, coding should commence as soon as data is available (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Substantive coding is the process where the researcher works with the data by fracturing it and then analysing it, initially through the use of open coding. This process is repeated until a core category emerges (Holton, 2007). As previously discussed in section 5.2.3, the approach to data collection and coding did not always follow the classic GT method. The divergence from the classic approach notably occurred with interviews from schools B and D where a number of interviews had been pre-arranged on specific days. For example, with parents from school D, eight interviews were conducted during three one day sessions. Similarly with parents from school B, interviews were conducted over a two day period which resulted in a backlog of transcriptions and coding. However, overall, the aim was to allocate interviews within a suitable time frame and to provide a gap to enable transcription and coding to occur as soon after the interview as possible.

The traditional ethnographic approaches to coding tend to require the prior selection of an existing set of codes or the development of a 'code book' often developed from the literature (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Ryan & Bernard, 2003). This method has the advantage, unlike the coding approaches usually adopted in a GT study, that different studies can be compared across interdisciplinary fields because of the commonality of the codes used, therefore allowing for theory to be extrapolated and compared on a large scale. In order for this form of coding to claim accuracy, it is recommended that researchers undertake 'code checking' to ensure that their coding is both accurate and consistent with the pre-defined code book. Another similar method is to use a general social science based code book and adopt codes from a similar type of study. During the early design of this research, prior to the selection of GT, attention was given to the codes derived from Agosto and Hughes-Hassell (2005) who investigated the information seeking of urban young adults.

The coding method adopted during this investigation was ultimately dictated by the use of GT (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) the reasons for this approach having been discussed in chapter 4. Nevertheless, GT does not present a single unified 'how to' approach to coding. The first phase was to conduct 'open coding' (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Although not writing from a GT perspective, Miles and Huberman (1994) usefully identify three common types of codes: descriptive, interpretive, and pattern codes. Urquhart (2007), writing specifically from a GT perspective, takes a similar approach with her three types: analytic, context and data segment, and inferential and explanatory codes.

Open coding takes the form of a line-by-line, sentence-by-sentence or even paragraph-by-paragraph analysis of the raw data (Charmaz, 2006). After the initial line-by-line coding, the codes were refined, by use of a range of techniques which started with the constant comparative method as described by (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), and included attempts at axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) and theoretical coding (Glaser, 1978), although these techniques proved to be difficult and cumbersome to use in this context. QSR's NVivo 8 proved to be invaluable in its ability to aid the development and refinement of emerging codes, or 'nodes' as the software refers to them. It also proved to be an excellent way of linking memos with codes which proved to be integral to the analysis and interpretation of the data.

5.6.3 Reliability of coding

Generally in qualitative methodologies, determining the coding reliability is an area that requires careful consideration. The term 'inter-coder reliability' is often used to describe

$$reliability = \frac{number\ of\ agreements}{total\ number\ number\ of\ agreements + disagreements}$$

the process of determining the reliability and the validity of the data. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that '*definitions become sharper where two researchers code the same data set and discuss their initial difficulties*' (p. 64). Where there is more than one coder, consistency and accuracy need to be ensured. Commonly a formula such as the one below proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994: p. 64) is used:

Figure 5-3 Formula for calculating coding agreement

Miles and Huberman suggest that a correlation of 70 per cent for the first coding attempt should be aimed for, with the ultimate goal of aiming for 80-90 per cent agreement between coders being accepted as the norm. This differs markedly from Denzin and Lincoln (2003a) who suggest agreement could be as low as 70 per cent. This approach to coding has three advantages: firstly, where a common 'code book' has been used inter-coder checking is essential to maintain integrity, to allow for extrapolation and fit within the larger schema; secondly, it helps to support validity or trustworthiness by ensuring that a researcher is not trying, wittingly or unwittingly, to impose their bias and assumptions onto the data; and thirdly, it provides two or more 'sets of eyes' leading to a richer and more complete data set.

Grounded Theory however, differs from other forms of qualitative investigations which use pre-conceived codes or a common 'code book' to help assess validity and trustworthiness. In GT, codes emerge from scrutinized data (Charmaz, 2006), this means that there are alternative approaches to measuring and assessing 'validity' or 'trustworthiness' such as those methods suggested by Charmaz (2006) and Corbin & Strauss (2008). This issue is discussed in sections 4.3 and 8.4.

In this research a second coder, a fellow PhD student at the University, was used to help assess the early open codes and provide a means of triangulation. At an early stage of my own coding, the second-coder took the first transcript and coded it using open coding. Her codes were compared against my own codes. This was a very useful exercise that proved to be very confirmatory. Despite the use of different words to describe various phenomenon the two set of codes were a quite similar. An additional and important benefit of the exercise was that the second-coder helped to provide insight and a different perspective to some of my existing codes. One very notable example was a code 'mother's milk' which she used to describe the whole notion of 'being a parent' a concept that would develop into the GT core category and as such prove to be central to the developing theory.

5.7 Interview Data Analysis

This section provides a summary of the coding process used throughout this investigation and will concentrate on how the codes and categories were developed. Coding is an essential element that provides the outline of the study, it is the 'bones of analysis' (Charmaz, 2006: p. 45). In a GT study, the term 'emerged' (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) is often used to describe the process of how the codes and categories develop out of the data. I have found this term to be, at times, unhelpful and misleading because it can give the perception that the GT approach to data analysis is not systematic or thorough. Glaser (1978) does however, remind researchers that every code used does need to '*earn its way into the emerging theory*' (p. 60). The aim of a GT study is to ensure that the data analysis process is grounded in the data, allowing it to be fully shaped and developed without undue influence from previous studies or the preconceived ideas of the researcher. This section outlines the main process involved during the development of the categories adopted in this research. A full discussion of the developed categories will be dealt with in chapters 6 and 7.

5.7.1 Pilot interview data

Although not primarily intended for use in the main study, the five pilot interviews were analysed and basic codes developed. The reasons for this were twofold, firstly to gain experience of the coding process, where previously I had none. Secondly, it provided an opportunity to use real data and played an important part in learning how to use the basic elements of QSR's NVivo 8 qualitative research software.

The codes developed through the pilot study analysis helped to provide a measure from which to examine the emerging codes in the main part of the study. This was achieved by comparing the developing codes after the first tranche of interviews with the pilot interview codes, the results revealed a degree of similarity and consistency between the two.

5.7.2 The coding process

The goal of analysis is to generate a set of codes and categories that will form the basis of a substantive theory (Glaser, 1978). The first phase of this process is open coding, a process which is shown in Figure 5-4.

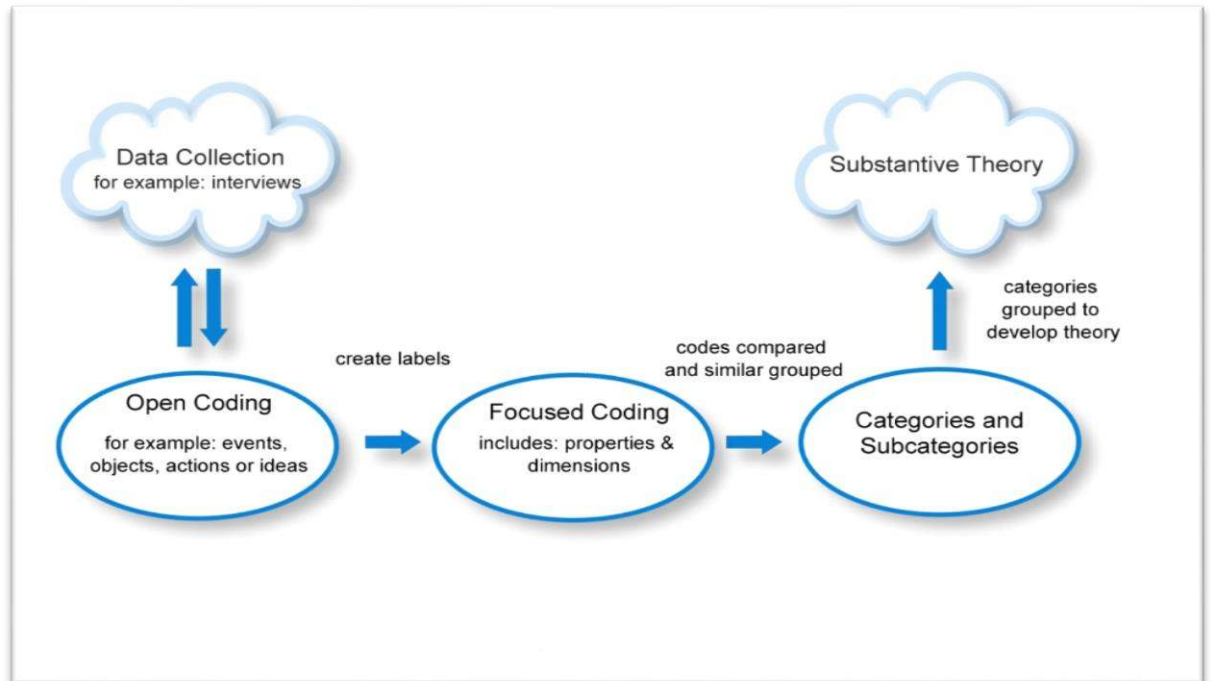


Figure 5-4 Coding steps in grounded theory

It is important to note that the process of coding between the three levels is, in reality, an iterative (Bryant, 2009) process and not necessarily linear as possibly inferred from Figure 5-4.

5.7.2.1 Initial coding

Initial coding, often referred to as open-coding, was the process of examining every sentence and paragraph of each transcript. Transcripts were written up by myself as soon after the interview as possible, ideally being started on the same day. Once a transcript had been completed, it was read through and reviewed with any thoughts or comments annotated in the margins (Figure 5-5).

The aim of this process was to generate codes in the form of ideas, objects, events, action or *in vivo* terms. This process generated a list of over 650 initial codes and

38:44	AC	<p>No, the seeds of doubt were because it had been raised again as an issue, rather than the detail of what was being said.</p> <p>...Rather than the detail of what was said, if that makes sense; so it was almost like- "I don't want to know the discussion because I've heard both sides" comedown on this sides, I don't want to be suddenly be thrown again so it was that kinda of thing but I don't think one thing like Woman's' hour or breakfast TV those kind of programmes, I would listen too, it's back to that thing I would check, you know what I seem to be saying clearly, I would checkout that the person or the organisation the thing, is something I would think yes, it would fit with my values.</p> <p>I think the evidence was fairly strong about the MMR</p>	<p>wavy - doubt -</p> <p>MEMO - Emotional decision</p> <p>EMOTION</p> <p>not heard my constant to my & tracing - too much talking / interaction</p> <p>values - check at do. they fit</p> <p>all evidence is convincing</p> <p>↓ BUT ↓</p> <p>Normal rules don't apply when it is my child</p>
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Figure 5-5 Example of initial coding (transcript 06 p. 16)

Tree Nodes	
Name	Source
Assessing	0
Accessible Information	4
Assess from all angles	3
Assess Information	8
Assessing Books	3
Assessing by Consensus	2
Assessing Trustworthiness	6
Assessing TV	2
Practical Infomaion	1
Catalysts	0
Coming Across Information	0
Bouncing things off people	1
Browsing	2
Eureka	2
Eureka moment	2
Serendipity	5
Hinderences	0
Internet	7
Offload (like to talk)	0
People	1
Places of Help or Advice	2
Query Types	1
The System	1
Trusted Source	9

Figure 5-6 Early example of open coding

provided a first summary of the data. Running parallel with the coding was the creation of early memos which captured initial thoughts, an example of which is given in Figure 5-1.

During this stage of analysis, early concepts are developed. A concept is a labelled phenomenon, 'being an abstract representation of an event, object, action/interaction' (Strauss & Corbin, 1998: p. 103). An example of an early stage of conceptualisation is given in Figure 5-6. Sub-categories provide a deeper view of the category.

5.7.2.2 Focused coding

Focused coding, sometimes referred to as second-level coding involved refining the initial set of unfocused codes into emerging

categories. The codes were refined and grouped into the emerging categories using a number of techniques including:

- a) constantly comparing codes against each other, looking for similarities or differences, this method proved to be the most useful (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008);
- b) axial coding, where codes were examined for properties and dimensions (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) (see Appendix E);
- c) writing of memos and diagrams, showing relationships between concepts and codes;
- d) use of 'post-it-notes' to help to visually chart relationships between concepts and categories (see Appendix E); and
- e) use of concepts maps (Clarke, 2005) (see Appendix E).

Properties and dimensions were developed and examined for a number of the main categories, where it was felt that they may provide clarity, an example of which is given in Appendix E. Properties are meaningful characteristics of a category or sub-category with the dimensions being the variations of the properties. Properties and dimensions have been seen as an important element of axial coding, with Strauss and Corbin (1998) devoting a whole chapter to the coding method. Axial coding is the process of coding categories to sub-categories along the lines of their properties and dimensions. This is a highly ordered process criticized by

Name	Sources
Outcomes	0
Reasons for looking	0
Social Questions	3
Entitlements and Benefits	3
Activity and Leisure Informaion	3
Childcare	2
Sofa Burn	1
Leagal Advice	1
Health Queries	0
Developmental Queries	0
Schools Questions	0
Where to look	0
Internet	8
People	0
System	0
Physical Media	0
Methods of searching	0
Deciding what is right	0
Format of the Information	0

Figure 5-7 Example of early focused coding

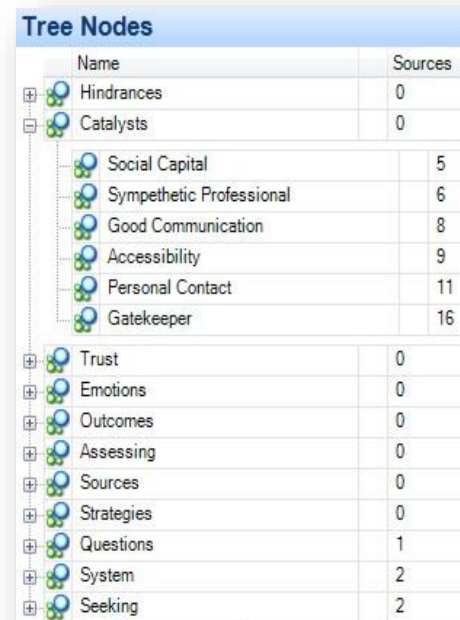
Charmaz (2006) who suggests a more flexible and less structured approach to the coding process, by informally linking categories to sub-categories. Interestingly, in the third edition of their book, Corbin and Strauss (2008) re-evaluate the process of axial coding, removing the chapter and relegating the method to a few paragraphs. The third edition was revised by Corbin after Strauss's death. Corbin's revised view is that the formal

distinction between open and axial coding is artificial and often overly structured. She later suggests that, when the researcher works with the data, their '*mind automatically makes connections between the data*' (Corbin & Strauss, 2008: p. 198) and therefore reduces the argument in favour of axial coding. Despite the recent trend of criticising properties and dimensions it was felt that it might be worthwhile examining them for a number of the main categories, however, they did not prove to be fruitful and were not really developed during the main coding process.

5.7.2.3 Review and reflection of early categories

The first phase of analysis produced 11 emerging categories shown in Figure 5-8. After reflection and discussion with an academic who had recently used GT and NVivo in her own PhD, I concluded that I was unhappy with the form and shape of the categories. My main concerns centred around three issues:

- a) many of the categories were heavily based on what the interviewees were saying on a superficial level, in other words I had not delved deeply into the data, examining the who, what, why, when and where;
- b) too many of the categories reflected existing theory and my preconceived ideas; and
- c) I had allowed the imposed structure of NVivo to shape and mould my thinking. I saw the codes and categories in 'silos' and as such, my thinking needed to break free from these artificial constraints.



Name	Sources
Hindrances	0
Catalysts	0
Social Capital	5
Sympthetic Professional	6
Good Communication	8
Accessibility	9
Personal Contact	11
Gatekeeper	16
Trust	0
Emotions	0
Outcomes	0
Assessing	0
Sources	0
Strategies	0
Questions	1
System	2
Seeking	2

Figure 5-8 Emerging categories

The academic also suggested moving away from NVivo for brainstorming and using techniques such as placing terms and categories onto post-it-notes and sticking them on to a white board to see how they looked and using situational analysis.

As a consequence of these concerns, I reviewed my work to date and tried a variety of techniques in order to develop a deeper understanding of the data. Another strategy mentioned in section 5.6.3 was to ask another PhD student, who is not familiar with ELIS literature to review the first transcript and to manually code it. After she had completed

this task, we examined her codes and compared them to mine. This gave me an opportunity to discuss my emerging categories as well as look at her thoughts and codes. The process provided re-assurance that my codes were not widely different to hers and in a couple of cases gave a slightly different perspective, especially in the use of phrases that she used for some of her codes. After these processes, the existing NVivo data was reviewed and categories and sub-categories re-arranged to reflect the new emerging shape.

A final element, and one that ultimately did not prove very useful, was to try and use coding families as a catalyst for developing in-depth codes. The coding family used was a generic one suggested by Glaser (1978) and is centred around six C's: causes, contexts, contingencies, consequences, conveniences and conditions. As with previous approaches, the aim was not to force the data into these codes, rather it was a means of adding texture and depth to the coding process. The result was not particularly successful and little of this approach was adopted as it seemed as if artificial links were being forced into the codes.

5.7.2.4 Summary

This section started by discussing the first attempt at coding which was considered to be overly influenced by my own preconceived ideas and also by the existing literature. This led to a process of consultation with other researchers and personal reflection leading to a wholesale review of categories. Various techniques were tried to help develop the codes and categories, the most useful one was the use of 'post-it-notes'. The use of these techniques helped to develop and shape the data, allowing it to emerge into the categories ultimately used.

5.8 Credibility and trustworthiness

Issues relating to credibility and the trustworthiness of GT studies have been discussed in section 4.3. Concerns pertaining to credibility and trustworthiness of this study are addressed in the conclusion (chapter 8, section 8.4).

5.9 Ethical and security considerations

Ethical and security considerations are an important aspect of any research that intends to investigate human actors. Researchers of such investigations have a moral responsibility to conduct their research in a socially meaningful and responsible manner (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003b).

In order to fulfil these requirements, the proposed research methods were submitted for full ethical approval to the University's Ethics Committee. This ethical approval was granted in November 2007 as part of the first year's confirmation of registration process. In addition to obtaining full ethical approval it was felt by myself and my supervisory team that I should apply for a Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check prior to entering this field. The CRB provides a check for individuals who work with children and vulnerable adults and helps to provide extra level of security. The CRB was applied for and granted; this was done in accordance with the University's human resource department procedures.

5.10 Informed consent

Prior to the start of each interview I spent some time explaining the study as well as the format of the interview. Each interviewee was talked through the informed consent form and then asked to read and sign it if they were happy with it. Interviewees were then asked if they objected to the interview being audio recorded. Again, it was emphasised that anonymity would be guaranteed and that data would remain confidential and stored in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998. A copy of the informed consent form is given in Appendix G: Interview Instruments.

5.11 Anonymity

Pseudonyms are used throughout this thesis and will be used in all reports and presentations that arise from it. All personal identifiers have been removed from demographic collection forms, these being identifiable only by a unique reference number.

5.12 Data security

Data security deals with maintaining the privacy of those people who have participated in the project as well as securing the data from loss or corruption. All transcripts and interview recordings were stored on a password protected personal computer. Daily synchronisation backups were made onto a virtual encrypted container hosted on an external hard-disk, using the open source security software TrueCryp.

5.13 Summary

This chapter has outlined the approaches taken to construct the research project. It has outlined the key methods of data selection, data collection, data transcription, coding and analysis and the steps used to ensure that the overall project is trustworthy and credible.

The following chapters deal with the data analysis and interpretation, using the data and techniques outlined in this chapter.

The following chapter will also discuss the findings of the research and will consider the five major categories and their sub-categories which emerged out of the analysis. The five major categories that emerge from the data are:

- GT category A: Being a parent (core)
- GT category B: Connectivity
- GT category C: Trust
- GT category D: Picture of self
- GT category E: Weighing

6 Presentation of Findings

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a detailed account of the findings of the research. A full discussion and analysis of these findings will be developed in chapter 7, with a summary and conclusions being drawn in chapter 8. A grounded theory (GT) approach was adopted for this thesis, a full discussion of this approach can be found in chapter 5.

This chapter is structured into two sections. The first section presents a general picture of the interviews in terms of demographic composition. It is recognised that this is not a quantitative piece of research, however, a thorough understanding of the sample composition is helpful for examining the contextual setting (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The second part of the chapter focuses on the analysis of the primary data in the form of semi-structured interviews.

Throughout this chapter, GT codes will be presented to show how they were developed into the final core categories. Following the GT method, initial analysis started immediately after the interview data had been transcribed. Field observation data was also collated and was used as a means of assessing and helping to add context, but did not generally form part of the primary data set with the exception of a single instance. Early emerging codes were entered into QSRs NVivo 8 qualitative analysis software, and were further refined through additional interviews. As is customary in GT based studies (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), the memos were written and reflected upon as a way of developing the data.

6.2 Demographic data analysis

In all, a total $n=33$ interviews were conducted during the research process. The interviewees were approached via institutions, in most cases through schools and in a one case a local church. Table 6-1 is a summary of the distribution of parents from each institution. Schools A and B are considered to be in more affluent areas of the city, although this does not necessarily guarantee an affluent catchment area. Schools C, D and E, are located very near to, or in, areas of social and economic deprivation. School F is a specialist pupil referral unit which deals with children from within the Leeds Education Authority's boundary who have behavioural issues and are considered to be unsuitable for mainstream education. Finally, the institution 'church' is a large inner city centre church comprising a mixed range of parents from diverse social backgrounds.

Table 6-1 Parent recruitment by source

Contact	n (%)
School A	5 (15.2)
School B	4 (12.1)
School C	3 (9.1)
School D	9 (27.2)
School E	2 (6.1)
School F	4 (12.1)
Church	6 (18.2)
Total parents	n = 33 (100)

Following on from the previous table, Table 6-2 summarises each parent's pseudonym, grouped by the institution from which they were recruited. Additionally the table also provides a brief summary of any specific information need they had regarding their children.

Table 6-2 Summary of all participants pseudonym and location

Pseudonym	Institution	Summary	Notes
Gail	Church	No complex needs	
George	Church	No complex needs	
Gina	Church	Health issues	Epilepsy
Grace	Church	No complex needs	
Geri	Church	No complex needs	
Gaby	Church	No complex needs	
Anne	School A	No complex needs	
Alison	School A	No complex needs	
Abby	School A	No complex needs	
Andrew	School A	Health issues	Autism
Andrea	School A	No complex needs	
Beth	School B	No complex needs	
Betty	School B	No complex needs	
Beverly	School B	No complex needs	
Brady	School B	No complex needs	

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Chloë	School C	Health issues	Complex range of neurological disorders including ADHD
Carol	School C	Health issues	Premature birth and ongoing issues
Cyndy	School C	Behavioural issues	Child attempted suicide
Dianne	School D	Behavioural issues	Problems with school
Donna	School D	Behavioural issues	Problems with school
Dani	School D	No complex needs	
Dawn	School D	Behavioural issues	Chaotic home life
Denise	School D	Health issues	Rare bone disease
Deirdre	School D	Special educational needs	Learning difficulties which include Dyslexia
Daisy	School D	Homelessness	Chaotic home life
Dominique	School D	Behavioural issues	Child attempted suicide
David	School D	Abused child	Legal guardianship
Emma	School E	No complex needs	
Ellie	School E	Health issues	Heart problems
Faye	School F	Behavioural issues	Chaotic home life (alcoholism/domestic violence) and learning difficulties which include Dyslexia
Fern	School F	Behavioural issues	Chaotic home life (not living with maternal mother or father due to alcoholism and was born addicted to drugs)
Fiona	School F	Behavioural issues	Undiagnosed issues possibly around ADHD
Flora	School F	Behavioural issues	Undiagnosed issues possibly around ADHD

In Table 6-2 the term 'no complex' need means that there was no ongoing or major issue that the parents had to deal with. This means that the parent would conduct general information seeking as and when a specific requirement or occasion arose, a common example being looking at schools or dealing with minor childhood illnesses. No complex needs represented 45.5 per cent ($n=15$) of the overall sample.

The second largest area is labelled 'behavioural issues' making up 27.3 per cent ($n=9$) of the sample. This label is difficult to specifically quantify, but generally relates to instances where parents spoke of constant difficulties with regards to disciplining their

children. Extreme examples of behavioural issues are illustrated with the two separate occurrences of attempted suicide by a child. In both cases, daughters were having long running and difficult relationships with their mothers. These two illustrations also help to demonstrate the 'fine line' between many of the examples relating to 'behavioural issues', being symptoms of a wider issue in terms of underlying health, educational or social problems, that have yet to be fully recognised. Chloë for example, has had to deal with long-term behavioural issues with her son. For the purposes of this summary, her needs have been labelled as health issues. This is because her son has a confirmed diagnosis of a complex neurological disorder that affects his behaviour; he is now making good progress under the guidance of medical staff. Both Flora and Fiona believe that their sons have ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder), but as yet have no confirmed diagnosis. This means that their problems have been labelled as behavioural issues. It is also important to recognise that the figure of 27.3 per cent of the sample is skewed by the inclusion of the four parents whose sons attend the Pupil Referral Unit which, by the very nature of their presence, means that they have extreme behavioural problems. If we remove these four parents from the sample, behavioural issues would be placed third, slightly lower than health issues at 17.2 per cent ($n=5$) of the sample.

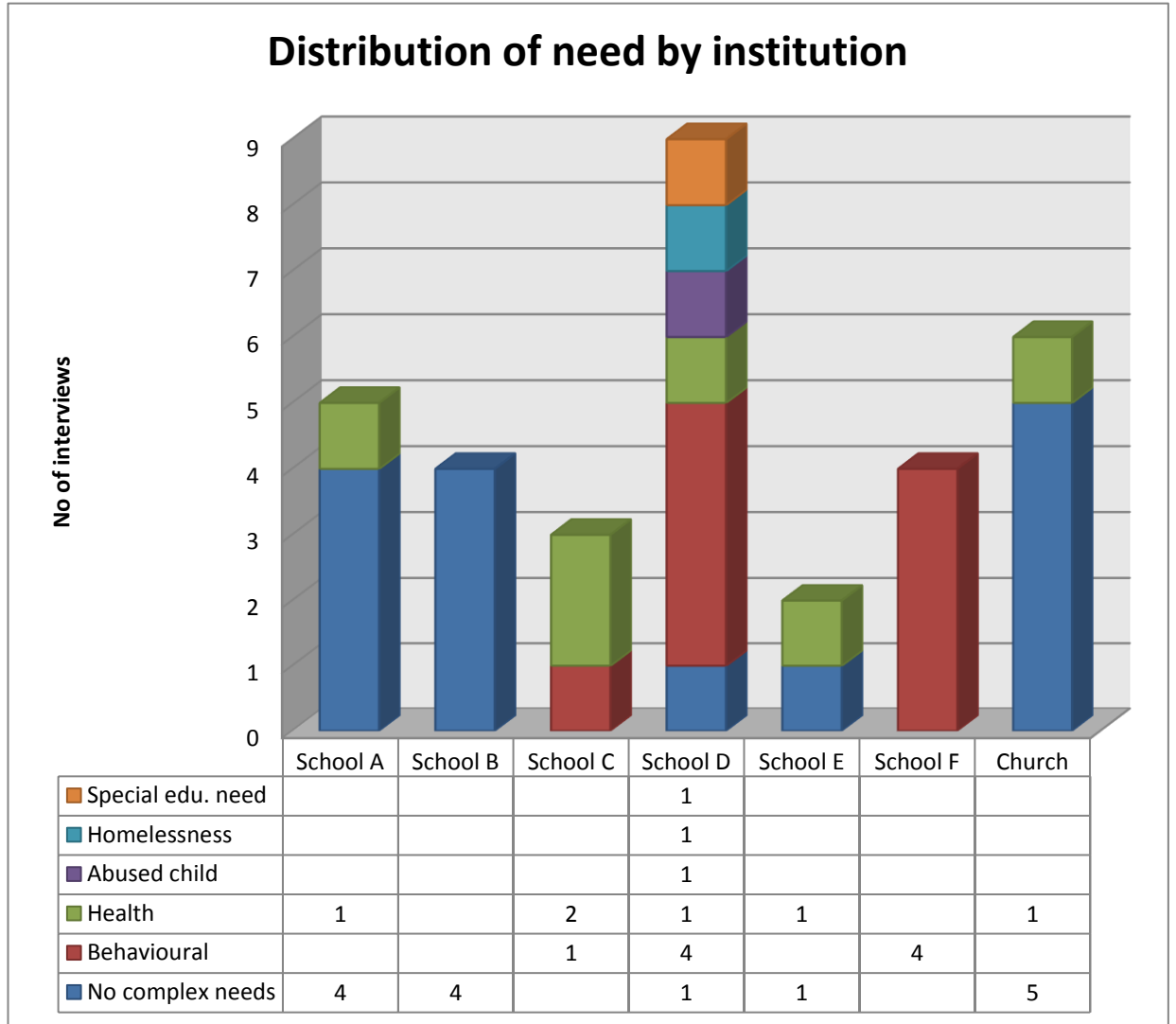
The third largest area is labelled 'health issues' and represents 18.2 per cent ($n=6$) of the sample. This section relates to where a child has a specific medical diagnosis and the parents have to make decisions that support and help the child. Examples include Andrew, whose son has been diagnosed autistic or Denise, a retired nurse, who cares for her granddaughter who has a very rare and painful bone disease which means that she has days when she is wheelchair bound.

The three remaining labels, at just 3.0 per cent ($n=1$), each deal with specific occurrences. The first of this trio is the label 'abused child' and revolves around David fighting for and being awarded legal guardianship of his grandson who was abused and neglected by his mother and her boyfriend. This example relates to a range of information needs revolving around the legal process and also issues relating to parenting a child who had been both abused and neglected during the early years of his life. The second label, 'homelessness' relates to a family who are homeless and concerns their struggle to find an appropriate family council house. The third and final issue relates to the label 'special educational need' and relates to a child who has been diagnosed with dyslexia.

These results are summarised in Table 6-3, which shows the distribution of parental information need by institution. The bar chart attached to the table clearly shows that schools A and B reported no 'behavioural needs' and were comprised almost entirely of

'no complex needs', especially when compared to schools C and D, the two inner city schools.

Table 6-3 Distribution of need by institution



6.2.1 Demographics characteristics

Table 6-4 provides a general summary of the demographic characteristics of the sample. The first variable, gender, clearly shows the bias towards women being the primary contact for the interviews. These figures do not show, however, that fathers were present at the interviews on $n=4$ other occasions where interviews were conducted in the parents' own home.

Table 6-4 General demographic characteristics of interviewees

Variable	Category	n (%)
Gender	Female	30 (90.9)
	Male	3 (9.1)
		33 (100)
Age range	18-25	1 (3.0)
	26-35	3 (9.1)
	36-45	25 (75.7)
	46 and over	4 (12.2)
		33 (100)
Marital status	Married/partner	24 (72.8)
	Lone parent	9 (27.3)
		33 (100)
Ethnic background	White British	33 (100)
		33 (100)
Employment status	Full-time	10 (30.3)
	Part-time	8 (24.2)
	Retired	2 (6.1)
	Not in paid employment	12 (36.4)
	Full-time education	1 (3.0)
		33 (100)

Table 6-4 shows the majority of the interviewees are female (90 per cent), a figure that had been anticipated. What was an initial surprise although, perhaps on reflection, should not have been, was that the mean age of was over 40 years (see Table 6-5). However, when viewed against the recent trend of older first time mothers this should not be particularly surprising, for example, as Social Trends 39 reports in 2007 the average age for first time mothers was 27.5 years (Office for National Statistics, 2009) and the sample includes a majority of parents who have more than one child (see Table 6-6).

Table 6-5 Summary of ages of the interviewees

Mean age	40.12 years
Standard deviation	7.083
Percentile 25	36 years
Percentile 50	40 years
Percentile 75	42 years

Lone parents made up around one quarter of the sample. This is in line with the national average where 77 per cent of children live in a two parent household (Office for National Statistics, 2009).

With regards the ethnic make-up of the sample 100 per cent of the interviewees were white British. This figure is purely accidental. However, with hindsight it is a one that could possibly have been anticipated. Speaking in generalities, ethnic stratification in the city of Leeds is largely, although not exclusively, based around geographic boundaries. In the case of this research, the schools that responded and were later used as a means to contact parents, are in areas where white British is the predominant ethnic race. This is illustrated by School D, where during the interviews parents were complaining about racial tension in a newly formed school, comprising of two previously failing schools that had taken their catchment from two distinct but co-terminus geographic locations.

6.2.2 Children's characteristics

The interviewees had a combined total of $n=80$ children. This figure is broken down as 42 per cent ($n=14$) having two children, 27.3 per cent ($n=9$) with three, 15 ($n=5$) per cent with one child and also the same for four and more.

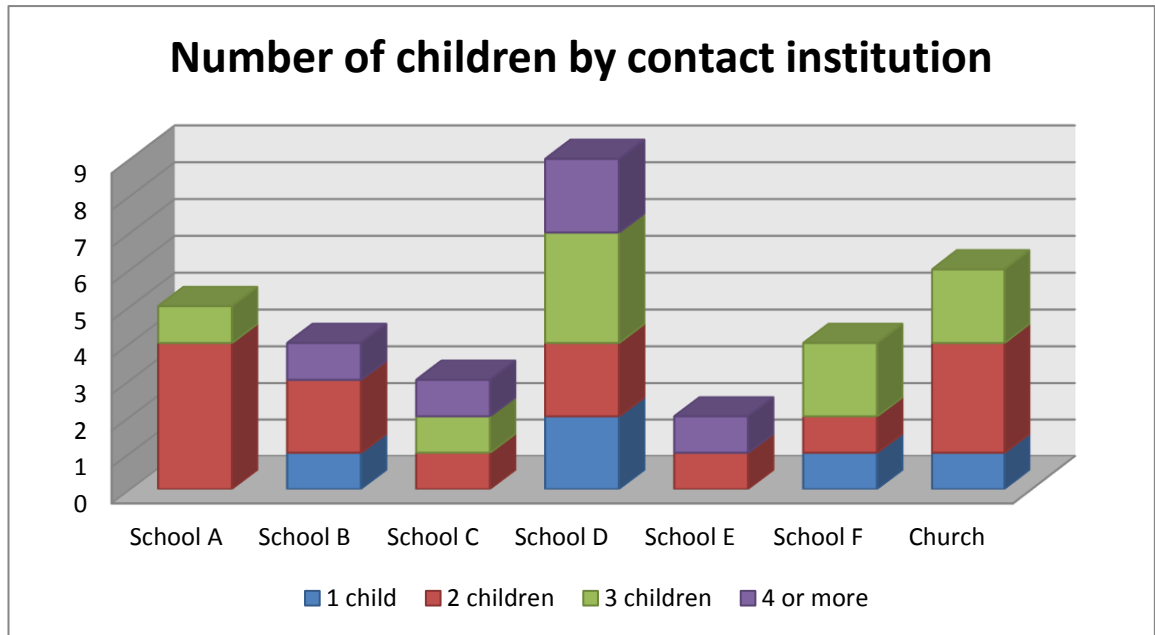
Table 6-6 Frequency of number of children

Variable	n (%)
1 child	5 (15.2)
2 children	14 (42.4)
3 children	9 (27.3)
4 or more children	5 (15.2)
Total number of children	80
Mean number of children per parent	2.4

The family composition is that in $n=9$ cases (27.3 per cent) interviewees were classed as lone or single parents with the remaining $n=24$ (72.7 per cent) interviewees being married or in civil partnerships. Looking beyond the figures, in one case a lone mother was a widow. In two cases the parent was a grandparent and in one other case the primary carer was an aunt, who is herself a lone parent.

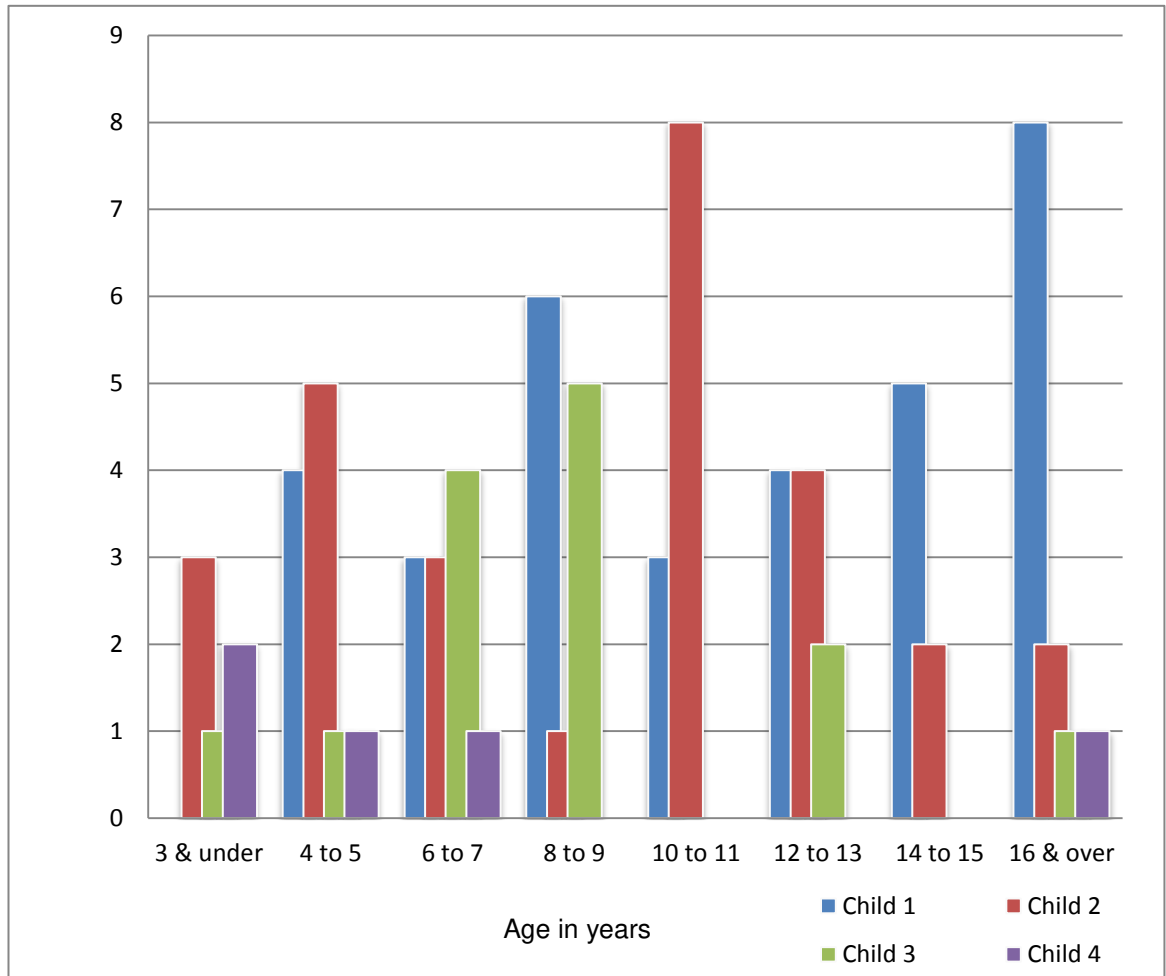
Table 6-7 summarises the number of children per interviewee by contact institution.

Table 6-7 Number of children by contact institution



Examining the age range of the children, there is a discernable cluster of ages around the eight to thirteen year age group. This is not unexpected, due to primary schools being the main source of interviewee recruitment with the church parents also having been selected on the criteria of having a child at primary school. There are however, a large number of older children in the 16 and over category, the most extreme case of the sample, one mother Cyndy, has a 15 year gap between her eldest child who is 25 and her youngest who is 10 years of age. Another example is Gina who has a 12 year gap between her eldest son who is 21 and her youngest son who is 9.

Table 6-8 Distribution of children’s ages



6.2.3 Interviewee educational background

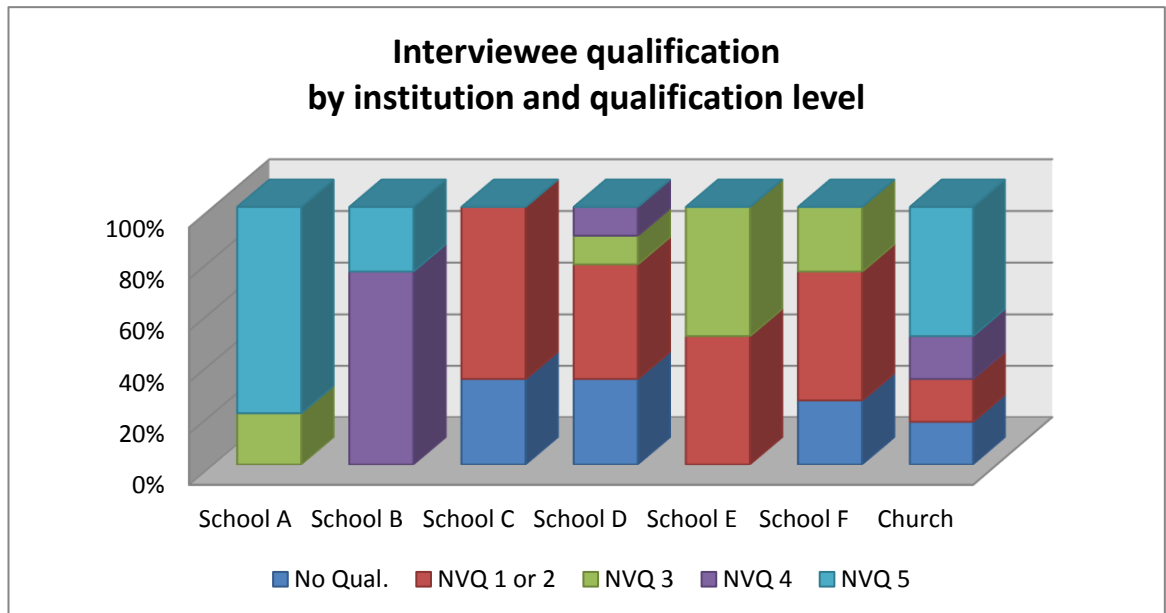
Table 6-9 summarises the range of qualifications possessed by the interviewees, $n=16$ (21.9%) of those interviewed claimed to have either no qualification or qualifications up to and including GCSEs, with $n=13$ (17.8%) reporting that they had at least a first degree.

Table 6-9 Interviewee qualification by NVQ level equivalent

Interviewee by Qualification	n (%)
No qualifications	6 (8.2)
NVQ level 1 or 2/GCSE	10 (13.7)
NVQ level 3/A-level	4 (5.5)
NVQ level 4/First degree	5 (6.8)
NVQ level 5/Post-graduate/professional	8 (11.0)
	33 (100)

These figures can be further extrapolated to show a general spread of interviewees' academic qualifications by recruiting institution. These are summarised both in table form and graphically in Table 6-9 and Table 6-10. The chart clearly shows that those parents recruited from schools A and B and also the church have a virtual monopoly on NVQ level 4 and 5 qualifications, with the exception of one parent at school E, a retired nurse. These findings are in broad agreement with the assumption that those parents interviewed from schools A and B would be better educated than those parents from the inner-city estate schools C and D. It is important to remember that these figures are presented to provide a 'thick description' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of the research data and do not claim to be a statistically significant analysis of the wider population.

Table 6-10 Interviewee qualification by institution and qualification level



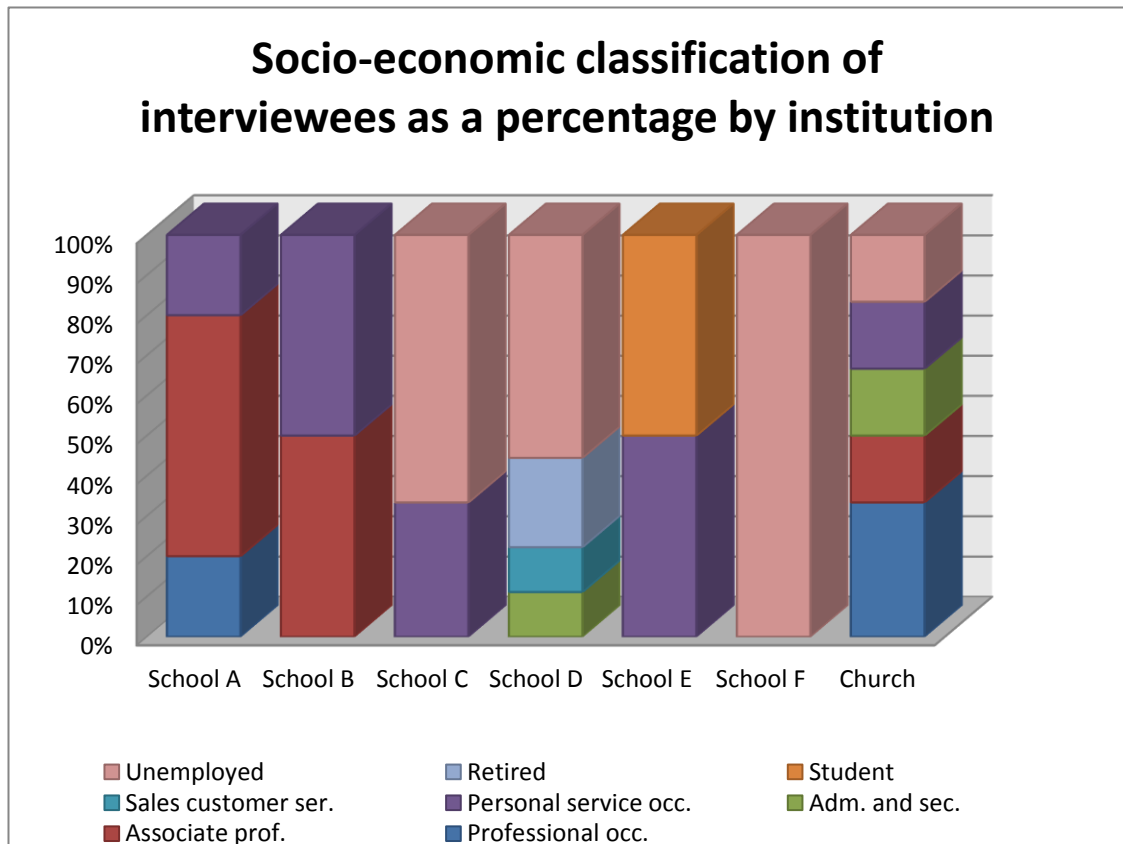
6.2.4 Socio economic status

Table 6-11 and Table 6-12 present a summary of the occupations undertaken by the interviewees. Occupations were classified using the Office of National Statistics Standard Occupation Classification 2000 (SOC2000). The table shows that around 30 per cent of parents who were interviewed fall within the professional occupations (for example: accountants or teachers), or associate professional and technical (for example: environmental health, nurses or welfare officers). The remaining proportion of those parents who were economically active were in the occupation group classed as personal services, administration and sales.

Table 6-11 Interviewees ranked by SOC2000 categories

SOC2000 Category	n (%)
Managers and Senior Officials	0 (0)
Professional Occupations	3 (9.1)
Associate Professional and Technical Occupations	6 (18.2)
Administrative and Secretarial Occupations	2 (6.0)
Skilled Trades Occupations	0 (0)
Personal Service Occupations	6 (18.2)
Sales and Customer Service Occupations	1 (3.0)
Process, Plant and Machine Operatives	0 (0)
Elementary Occupations	0 (0)
Student, Retired and Unemployed	15 (45.5)
	33 (100)

Table 6-12 Socio-economic classification of interviewees as a percentage by institution



6.2.5 Summary

This section has briefly examined the demographic make-up of the sample group. The following five sections will examine the categories and sub-categories that were iteratively developed through the coding process and which form the basis of the substantive GT.

6.3 GT category A: Being a parent

6.3.1 Introduction

By its very nature 'being a parent' brings with it a wide range of challenges and responsibilities. Parents' responsibilities include providing for a child's social, economic, physical and emotional welfare. Challenges are diverse and specific, often relating to an individual child, but commonly may include questions relating to aspects of a child's behaviour, health or educational concerns.

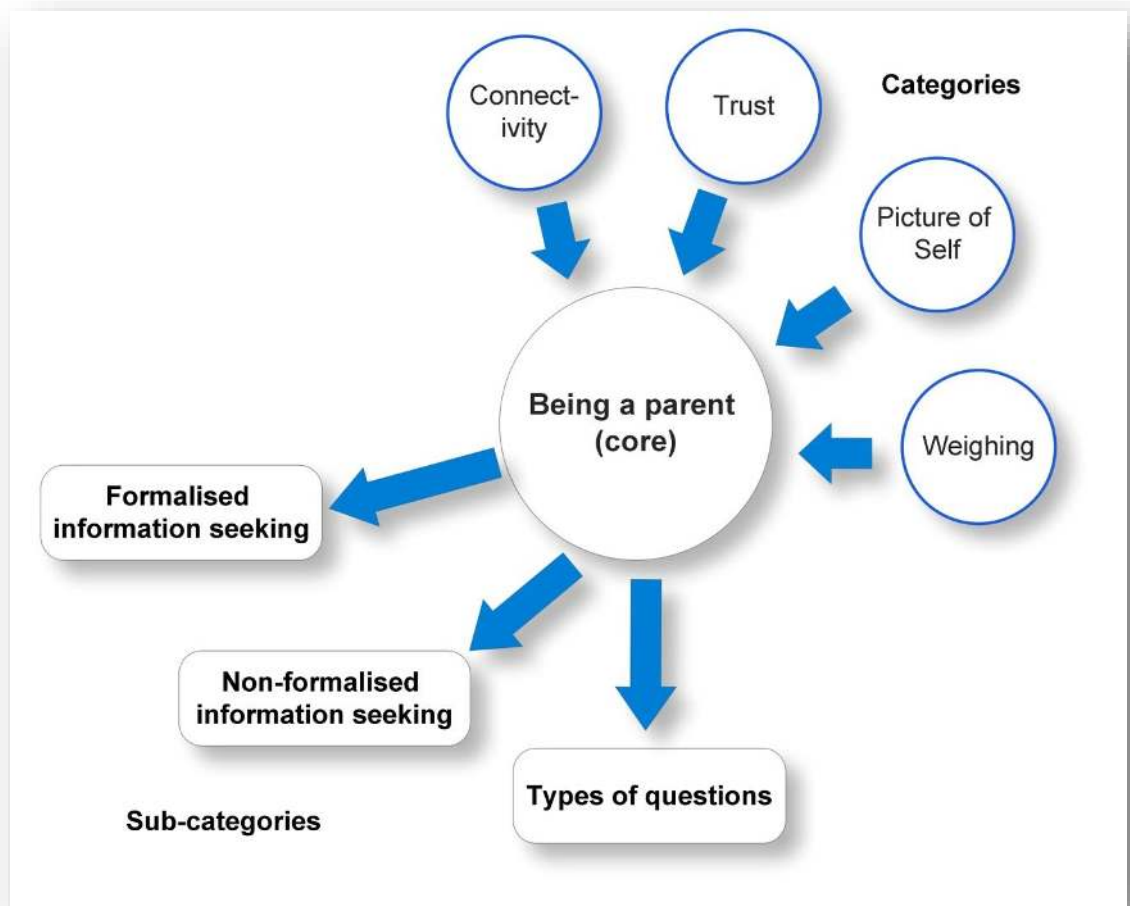


Figure 6-1 GT category A: Being a parent

Even for experienced parents, challenges are 'ever present' as they and their offspring grow and approach new life stages, or as Dianne reflected 'no children are the same'.

With challenges and responsibilities comes an inevitable need for parents to seek answers to their questions. Importantly for the parent, these questions are not always formalised by a conscious and systematic process of information seeking; rather they are the fabric of being a parent. The ways in which parents fulfil their roles is a constant process of information seeking both at a formalised (that is a specific and conscious process) and non-formalised level (that is to say, a process that is not verbalised or that is not necessarily identified as an active information strategy) by the parents. It is important to note that formalised and non-formalised information seeking can occur independently, or they can work together to meet a specific need.

6.3.2 Development of the category

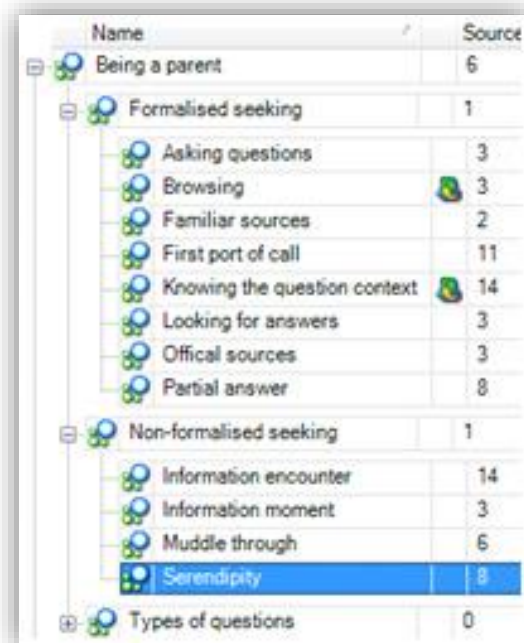
The development of the category 'being a parent' emerged in early stages of analysis through an examination of parents' questions and the motivations and reasons underpinning them (see Figure 6-2).

This first stage of analysis produced the early category of 'questions' which on later analysis and reflection I deemed to have been unduly

influenced by the work of Nicholas and Marden (Nicholas & Marden, 1997a, 1997b, 1998), as well as my

own preconceived ideas of the information search process. Despite these concerns I felt that the category of 'questions' did have validity as a way of collating the motivations of a parent's information seeking, and it has subsequently been kept as a sub-category.

The category 'being a parent' started to emerge and was greatly influenced by the suggestion of a second coder (see 5.6.3) who coined a term 'mother's milk', which described the holistic nature of being a parent.



Name	Source
Being a parent	6
Formalised seeking	1
Asking questions	3
Browsing	3
Familiar sources	2
First port of call	11
Knowing the question context	14
Looking for answers	3
Official sources	3
Partial answer	8
Non-formalised seeking	1
Information encounter	14
Information moment	3
Muddle through	6
Serendipity	8
Types of questions	0

Figure 6-2 NVivo Codes for 'Being a parent'

Further analysis of the data showed two distinct types of information seeking reported by parents. The first was a formalised process where a parent knows they need to find some information and they set about finding it. The second is less tangible and often seemingly sub-conscious level of seeking, this was eventually labelled ‘non-formalised searching’.

Underpinning the whole development of the category was a general notion of parenting as an apprenticeship and for some time this was the primary focus of the development of the category. However, with additional analysis it was judged too narrow a focus, and one which could not logically be justified when taken as a whole, consequently leading to the wider notion of ‘being a parent’. Figure 6-2 shows the final composition of the category. The category has within it three sub-categories these being:

- a) formalised information searching;
- b) non-formalised information searching; and
- c) types of question

6.3.3 Formalised information seeking

Formalised information seeking occurs on those occasions where a parent identifies a specific question or need that requires an answer or an outcome—the key being that a need has been identified. Formalised searches can be broadly separated into two sub-categories of normal needs and complex needs. However, when dealing with the complexities of real life, a caveat needs to be inserted that oversimplification should be avoided.

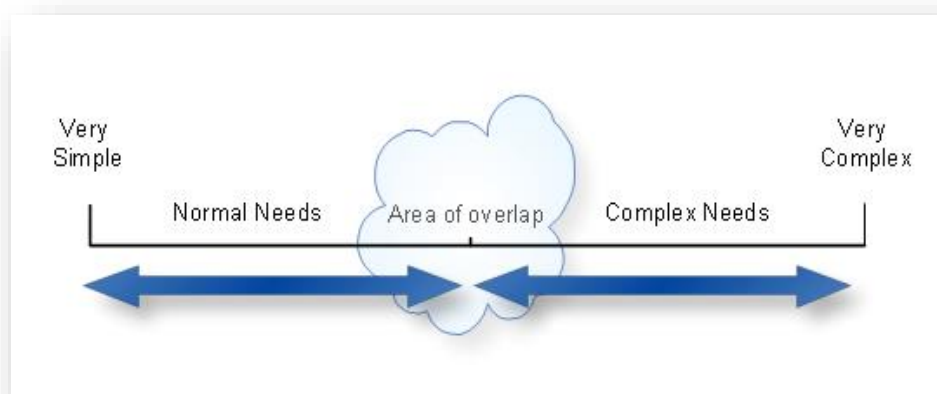


Figure 6-3 Level of need

6.3.3.1 Normal formalised needs

Firstly, the term ‘normal need’ does not aim to describe or make comment on the importance of the need to the individual; rather it is meant purely as a descriptor for a

comparatively simple question. Throughout the interview transcripts, commonly mentioned examples of normal needs include: helping children with homework, finding out about summer school activities, age appropriate bedtimes, common childhood illnesses and disciplining techniques.

There are, however, different levels of complexity within the range of normal needs (see Figure 6-3), which are dependent upon a number of factors such as the ability of the individual to identify a need for information and the complexities of the search process. For example, choosing a primary school for Gina was an easy choice. Gina and her husband knew a great deal about their local school through existing family links and local information and so the 'choice was very simple'. An example where choosing a new secondary school was more complex is illustrated by Denise, whose granddaughter suffers from a debilitating hip disease which means that she is wheelchair bound for much of the time. Denise's aim is to find a local secondary school that will meet the practical and emotional needs of her granddaughter.

Another example of a normal need is when Beth spoke about her notionally simple desire to find a guitar tutor for her five year old son. Her first thought was to go to her local library, but the library staff were unable to help. She then turned to the internet and other local mums without success. Her final attempt was to keep a lookout on the notice board in her local post office, a method which had previously proved successful when she was looking for information about local Beavers Scout groups. In the case of the guitar lessons, at the time of the interview, she had yet to find a teacher. However, she does not see this need as important and does not intend to spend any additional time on it.

6.3.3.2 Complex formalised needs

The term 'complex formalised need' relates to needs which, by their nature, form part of a wider ongoing and difficult situation. One example of a complex formalised need is illustrated by Andrew as he tried to find the best way to help and support his autistic son. This example also illustrates the overlap between formalised and non-formalised searching (see Figure 6-3). Andrew and his wife began to notice differences between the early childhood language development of his son and elder daughter. Their early informal searching centred on looking for reassurance from family and friends, who inadvertently gave false hope by suggesting 'every child develops differently'. Andrew and his wife's concerns continued to grow until they decided to seek professional help from a speech therapist, who referred their son to the local hospital's Child Development Unit where he was, after a period of several months, diagnosed as autistic. Once Andrew's son had received a final diagnosis, Andrew became as knowledgeable as possible about his son's condition.

Another example of a complex need centred on Fiona's continuing fight to get the help and support she needs for her son who suffers from emotional and behavioural problems. Fiona is unhappy with the health professionals who, she feels, refuse to recognise his underlying mental health problems and simply attribute his extreme behavioural problems to a chaotic home life. She also feels that she is not receiving the full help and support she and her family need from social services and the medical profession. She complains that she has not had consistency of support as there is a high turnover of social workers.

6.3.4 Non-formalised information seeking

Non-formalised searching relates to the information seeking by parents which occurs without any premeditated process in mind. Interviewees spoke about times when they shared information informally and naturally or they simply stumbled upon some relevant information that either proved to be useful or they perceived it might prove to be useful in the future. Times and places where non-formalised information encounters occur are varied and in reality can happen at any time or place. One such example is Gina who spoke about a time when she observed a friend dealing 'badly' with a tantruming child and she used this experience to learn how not to deal with any similar situations herself. Other parents such as Andrew, George, Ellie and Alison spoke of how they had observed friends, relatives and other parents dealing with their children and had learned from their examples.

Within the sample, this process was generally spoken of in positive terms, that is to say they watched parents who they thought were doing a good job at parenting, evidence of this being that they had well behaved children. It is impossible to construct any definitive list of situations, places or times where parents interact, however, Figure 7-2 (p. 181) conceptualises the non-formal information seeking process.

6.3.4.1 The media

The media, primarily in the form of television, proved to be a very common source of information for non-formalised searching. Almost all of the parents interviewed said that they had watched the television programme *Supernanny*⁹ and that they had tried aspects of her techniques, notably the naughty step, a method of disciplining children by removing them from a confrontational situation and placing them on a step or a chair for every minute of their age. Interestingly, watching programmes such as *Supernanny* seemed to help reinforce parents' self-belief in the way they were parenting and made them feel that they were doing a 'good job'. The levels of critical awareness applied to television

⁹ *Supernanny* is a popular reality parenting television programme produced by Shed Media and originally broadcast on Channel 4 in the UK.

varied. The general consensus summed up by Alison was that, 'if it is on TV it will be have been checked and should be reliable'. Generally parents felt that they were informed by the programme and were able to use or adapt the techniques they saw being used by her in the programme.

Emma spoke of the time she saw a television programme by chance. The programme was about very early puberty, Emma notes:

[It was the] TV programme that sparked it off for me to think...perhaps that's what is going on; because I don't know everything as a parent and it's not the sort of thing you want to speak to school about because it is a private thing for her and that is what sparked it off and it gave quite useful websites to go on.

In this case, the television programme gave a list of useful internet sites where additional information could be obtained; something Emma followed up. This example illustrates how a chance encounter helped Emma make sense of a non-formalised need which then led to a formalised search. Another example concerns Gail whose friend came across an advertisement in a national newspaper for a hypnosis compact disc which it was claimed, helped children who suffered from bedwetting. Gail's son had been suffering from periodic episodes of bedwetting, and so her friend passed the advertisement on, thinking it would be something that would interest her. Gail, follow this lead and claimed that it was ultimately useful.

6.3.4.2 The internet

A large number of parents reported browsing the internet, often without looking for specific information. Beverly is a prolific user of the internet and used parenting website such as Mumsnet. She has used it for both formalised information searching as well as for simply browsing discussion boards to see what other parents are discussing. Beth came across and subsequently followed an online discussion thread where a mother had a child who was suffering from night terrors. Beth noted that many people replied and suggested techniques that had helped their children. Beth made the comment that many seemed like good ideas, and others were from the 'hippy brigade'. Despite not immediately needing information on the subject, she followed the thread as something that was interesting and that may prove useful as her children grow.

6.3.4.3 Other parents

The contexts and places where these information encounters occur simply rely on two or more parents talking. Encounters can happen at any time, in any place; such as over the telephone, a meeting in person or an online discussion or chat. The most common types of non-formalised searching reported by the interviewees were those which occurred at a social gathering of parents such as at mother and toddler groups, school play grounds or coffee with friends. There was a wide range of topics shared in such informal settings; Beth for example, recounted a playground discussion about children's television watching habits where parents were discussing what they allowed in terms of the amount of time a child spends watching television and the type of programmes they watch. Beverly mentioned a playground discussion about appropriate bedtimes for older children. Interestingly, comments made by Betty suggest that the sharing of experiences with other mothers in this way is primarily about seeking reassurance by comparing their own parenting practice with that of other people.

6.3.4.4 Life

Louise is one of the parents I met during my observations at the Bingo 'n' Butties group. She recounted a chance encounter at a paediatric outpatient's clinic. She recounted how another lady, who also had a child on the ward, mentioned the additional benefits she claimed because of her child's illness. This led Louise to a formal search to investigate whether she too was entitled to claim these benefits. This encounter could be classified as meeting other people, the difference here lay in the emphasis that she had a chance meeting with a total stranger, who happened to mention a specific fact that in turn led to a formal search. Gina also spoke of how she was out shopping and saw how a friend of hers dealt with a young child who had a tantrum.

6.3.5 Types of questions

In the previous section we started to build a picture of the complexities of the information world of parents through formalised and non-formalised searching. Questions are context specific and extremely diverse, although there have been attempts to classify parents' information needs, most notably from the British perspective by Nicholas and Marden (1997b). Despite the complex and diverse nature of types of question, it is possible to broadly summarise the questions into sub-categories. The aim of this is to depict the rich tapestry of the range and type of information needs.

Parents' questions change over time and often reflect their families 'life stage'. For example, parents noted that they generally had different needs and questions when their

children were young, to when they had older children or teenagers. Question types can be broadly summarised as:

- a) early childhood issues: sleep, food, child development, health, behaviour;
- b) later childhood issues: behaviour, school choice, homework, clubs, academic attainment; and
- c) specific issues: children with behaviour problems, children with illnesses, benefit entitlements.

As mentioned earlier (see section 6.2) judgments have to be made as to whether a given question or need fits within an artificially contrived category. For example Fern's son has extreme behavioural needs and attends a pupil referral unit. He has not been formally diagnosed with any condition, although there seems to be an underlying assumption of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Therefore, does he get classified as an educational need or as a health need? The reality is probably both, and this is often reflected in the complex sources of help and advice used, especially where the child is in the 'system' and the family are subject to multi-agency support.

Despite the potential subjective nature of the categorisation of question type, these categories provide a means of viewing the broad tapestry of parents' information needs. The aim of the following six sub-categories is to present a broad summary illustrating the range and type of information needs parents have.

6.3.5.1 Social and developmental

Developmental questions relate to the growth of the child and the milestones that they will meet. These types of childhood questions are apparent as parents look for information relating to issues such as feeding, weaning, sleeping and walking. Andrew and his wife noticed that their son's speech was developing much slower than his elder sister's. They spoke to family and friends who gave reassurance that all was well. Gaby recollected about the times she would meet with other new mothers and read books and articles about caring for young children.

Developmental questions also continue throughout childhood, again covering a large range of topics such as bedtimes, discipline, television use and computer use.

This sub-category also relates to questions arising from the parents' responsibility for meeting the social welfare of the child. Examples of these types of questions range from finding childcare to looking for local clubs and activities. Beth for example, spoke about trying to find guitar lessons for her son as well as looking for a local 'Beaver Scout Colony'. Emma and Andrea each spoke about looking for child friendly holidays.

6.3.5.2 Economic

Questions in this sub-category relate to a wider range of issues substantially centred on navigating the benefits systems. This category did not emerge as an information need through the main interview sample. It did, however, strongly emerge through the observations, notably at the weekly Bingo 'n' Butties group. The aim of the observations was not to provide primary data for analysis (see section 5.4) however, after careful consideration it was felt that inclusion of this sub-category was needed to provide a fuller picture. Parents at the group would ask the parent support advisors (PSA) for help and advice relating to a wide range of issues such as benefits and entitlements. Additionally, professionals from various government agencies regularly visited the weekly group, using it as an outreach opportunity.

6.3.5.3 Health

Health related information needs account for the single largest sub-category. This may be because of its impact on the parents at the specific occasion for which they sought information. Nearly every interviewee mentioned a time when they wanted health information. Information needs in this sub-category cover a diverse range of topics and levels of complexity. Examples include Carol, who wanted to find the best solution for dealing effectively with head lice, or Beth who called NHS direct when her young son had a serious bout of bronchitis.

The ongoing effect of the measles mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine scare continues to cause many parents to worry about allowing their children to be vaccinated. The way in which parents deal with this concern varies widely. Gaby worried about the decision and looked for information, but she believes in collective responsibility and so allowed her children to be vaccinated with the MMR. Beverly on the other hand, undertook a lot of research and came to the conclusion that her children should receive the single jab vaccine and not the MMR.

6.3.5.4 Miscellaneous

There are inevitably questions that do not easily fit into the other sub-categories. One of the more unusual and arguably frivolous examples was given by Donna who was concerned about her new leather sofa and a spate of reports of children who received 'burns' from leather sofas, a phenomena which had received a lot of tabloid press attention.

David's example was unique among the interviewees and his whole interview revolved around the legal battle he and his wife had had to gain legal guardianship of his grandson who had been abused by his mother and her partner, both of whom were drug addicts.

Dani also had used legal help as her eldest daughter, who was still at school, was due to make a court appearance for an unspecified offence.

6.3.5.5 Educational

Parents faced a wide range of issues relating to schooling and education. By far the most commonly stated needs were those expressed by parents with regards to choosing secondary schools. Other parents spoke of difficulties they had with school teachers, Gail for example spoke of how she had sought help from two friends, both of whom were teachers and asked their advice about approaching her son's teacher who she felt was being overly antagonistic towards the children in the class. Other parents such as Fiona, Fern, Dominique and Donna spoke about the problems they had trying to communicate with the schools about a range of issues centred around their child's behaviour.

Fern, Fiona, Flora and Faye all spoke warmly of their school parent support advisor (PSA) yet each complained about communication in general from the school, a pupil referral unit (PRU), and the authorities. Fern's son will be leaving the PRU; however, she was not entirely clear of the process of re-integration into mainstream schooling. Another worrying issue which arose from that same conversation was that she did not fully understand the 'statementing process' nor indeed the statement her son had been given.

Parents from schools A and B who had children moving up to secondary school spoke about the time they had invested trying to ensure that they had chosen the best school for their child. Parents at schools D and E and also school F spoke about the importance of the PSA based at these schools and the influence and support they gave them.

6.3.5.6 Skills (building knowledge)

The responsibility of being a parent is that a parent looks out for their child's social, emotional, educational and health wellbeing. Added to this list is, in most cases, the parents' desire to want the best for their child. Despite a very antagonistic and seemingly dysfunctional relationship, Cyndy spoke about wanting to support her daughter, recognising in her a potential to do well academically. In particular, Cyndy spoke about the difficulties of the previous six months when her daughter had taken an overdose of pain killers and was admitted to hospital. Dominique, another parent, spoke of a similar 'difficult' relationship. Her daughter had also attempted to take her own life, and Dominique recognised that she lacked the skills to be able to adequately tackle the underlying issues to support her daughter. She was also very concerned that she did not want her younger daughter to follow in the same way as her older sister, but was at a loss how to prevent it.

There are times when the parental responsibility becomes a too specialist task and seems biased towards a specific issue. Andrew observed that in his aim to ensure the best support and treatment for his son, he had inadvertently been ignoring his daughter:

You become a parent who specialises in looking after children with a particular special need and the skills are skewed one way...I realised I had not been neglecting her emotionally but neglecting the practical aspects of being a parent. (Andrew)

Andrew explains that he had given up his job to look after his son. He also suggests that his son's autism has 'skewed' his parenting as he has become an expert in looking after an autistic child, at the expense of his daughter who has no such special need.

This sub-category also relates to the everyday scanning of information that seeks to inform and help the parent develop their own parenting skills. It may be an active form of seeking and asking for general help and may be supported by attending a mothers' group, but does not necessarily have a defined purpose. It is the process by which parents develop their own skills, values and opinions. Much is based on what they discuss with friends, and will be formed both positively and negatively from personal experience. Parents will construct, by use of a wide range of sources, the skills, the confidence and the ability to parent. Many sources will feed into this form of parenting knowledge. Building parenting knowledge is an active and developing process, as parents refine and develop their skills, especially through different life stages, for example, babies, to toddlers, to school children to teenagers.

6.3.6 Summary

The section has dealt with the development of the category 'being a parent'. The findings show that parents' information seeking is both complex and varied, as they use a wide range of approaches, classified in this research as formalised and non-formalised searching.

The following section will examine the development of the code 'connectivity' and its influence on the information seeking process of parents.

6.4 GT category B: Connectivity

6.4.1 Introduction

Connectivity is a category that describes the ways in which parents interact with social peers and family, as well as bureaucratic systems or services (see Figure 6-4).

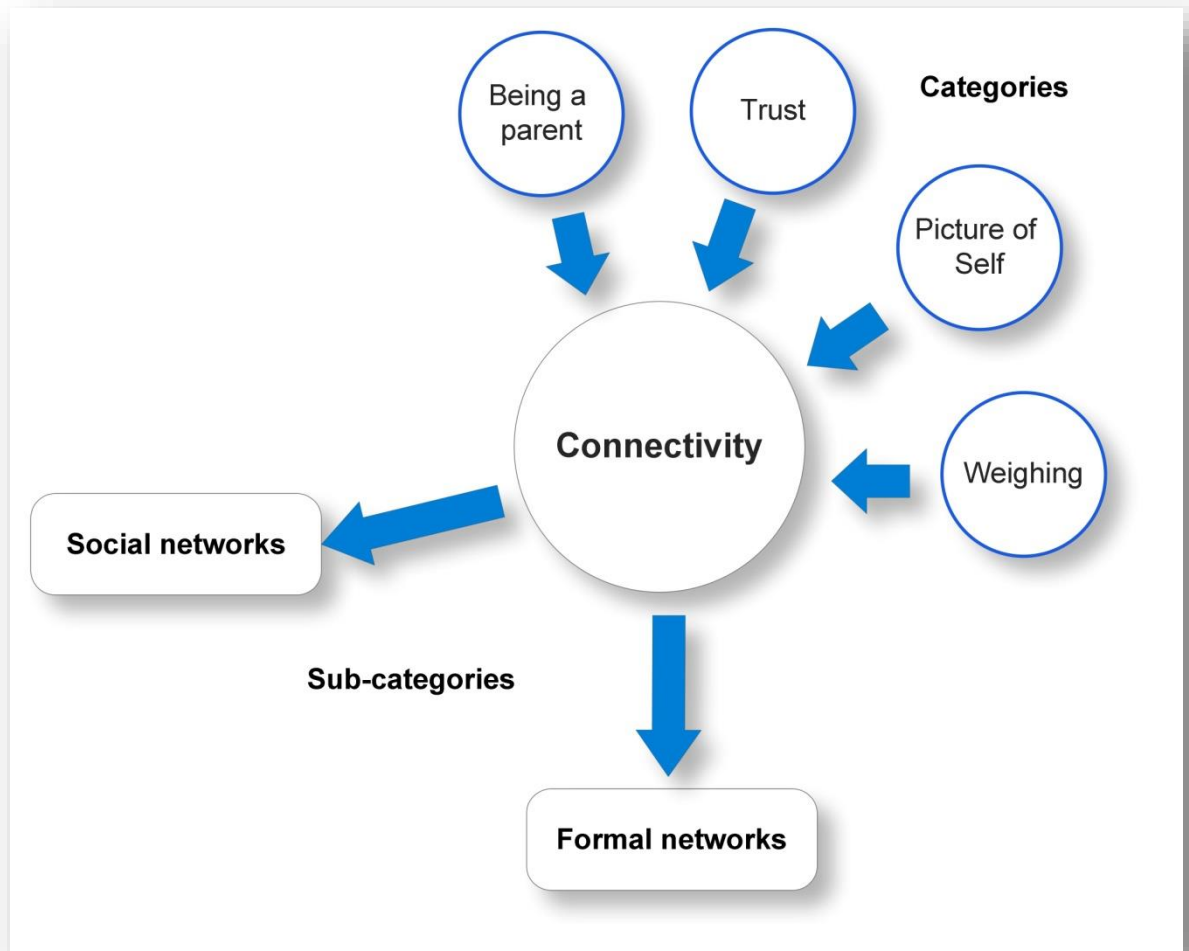


Figure 6-4 GT category B: Connectivity

Underpinning this category is the notion that effective communication plays an important part in parents being able to meet their information needs. Connectivity can be broadly viewed as two distinct sub-categories these being:

- a) social networks; and
- b) formal networks.

6.4.2 Development of the category

The category was one of the very first to emerge. In the earlier stages of development the part played by family and friends or personal relationships in a parent's information seeking became apparent and this is reflected in the naming of the category as 'social connectivity'. This earlier stage is shown diagrammatically in Figure Figure 6-5, however, with refinement and analysis, it was felt that 'social connectivity' was too narrow a term for the category as it over-emphasised the role of family and friends while ignoring other

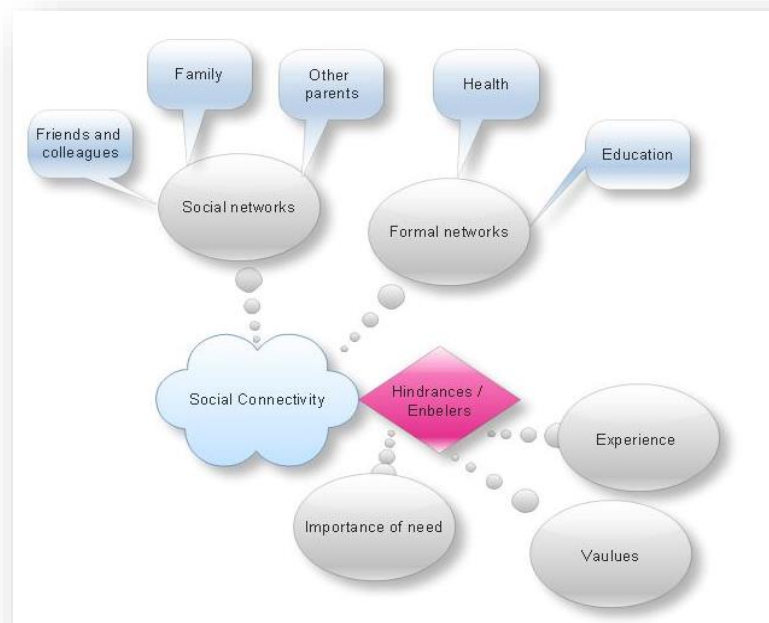


Figure 6-5 Sources of connectivity (early diagram)

sources of connectivity. Personal relationships have emerged as the single most important source of information for parents. Relationships usually manifest themselves in the form of trusted friends or family members. There are many different reasons why someone becomes a trusted person in the life of a parent and this is dealt with in the category Trust (see section 6.5). Another important aspect of this category is the part played by external agencies or organisations such as the NHS, social services, school and even charities and support groups. These have been termed as 'formal networks'. Formal networks also play a role, in different degrees, to a parent's ability to find relevant information. In the early stages of analysis, this category developed under the label of 'systems', and was later changed. With further refinement, it was felt that the label 'formal networks' was one which did not have the connotations of highly systemised forms of help and support and better reflected the wide range of help available to parents in addition to

their social networks.

6.4.3 Social networks

Social networks are defined as those family members', friends, colleagues, neighbours and acquaintances to whom the parent refers for help or information. Although not universal, a large majority of interviewees reported that their own family or close friends played an important role as a primary source of advice, help and support with their information seeking. Early analysis of the data revealed a noticeable distinction between the ways in which parents from different demographics use family and friends as a source of help and information. Some of the parents from the lower socio-economic groups mentioned that they did not like asking their family, friends or neighbours for help, advice or information. When probed, a number of reasons emerged. These included a determination to solve their own problems, mistrust and a perception that their 'business would be 'blabbed' (Linda) or spread around the community as gossip; that everyone else in the neighbourhood was in the 'same boat' (Donna) and had their own problems; they didn't want to be seen as weak; had a fear of social services getting involved, or of being seen as a failure by others. These accounts and attitudes have revealed, in some cases, a degree of social isolation and are often accompanied by examples of 'complications' such as clinical depression. Such examples help to illustrate the human dimension of not being able to adequately find the information or to obtain the right help and support. While it is not claimed to be the sole contributing factor, a lack of information contributes to the wider frustration and despair. One case related to Fiona, a single mother, who is educated and articulate, yet lives in fear of being evicted from her council house because of the behaviour of her youngest son, who is in a PRU because of his outbursts of violent behaviour. Fiona recounts how she has no one to turn to as she feels that neither social services nor the medical profession are helping. The years of struggling to find answers, help and support have, she claims, brought on bouts of depression which further hinder her ability to find the best help for her son.

The reverse seems to be true for more socially mobile parents, those from the higher socio-economic backgrounds. For them, work colleagues and friends provided a great source of information. Parents from the higher socio-economic groups often recounted how they would use their extended networks of professional friends for advice and support. One such example is Lisa, who was having problems with her son's school teacher. She spoke to her sister-in-law and also a friend, both of whom were teachers, and asked them what they thought and how best to deal with the situation.

6.4.3.1 Family members

A parent's own family members play an important part in their information seeking, especially their own mothers and siblings, where they have children themselves. The role of the interviewee's own mother and father as sources of information proved interesting with half claiming to use them as sources of help and advice while the other half said they tended not to or would not.

Andrea for example has many friends who she uses as a source of information over and above her mother. Andrea perceived that her mother's advice and ways were 'old fashioned and out of date', a sentiment expressed by many of the interviewees. In Andrea's case, this is despite the fact that her mother is a qualified nursery nurse with 'many years experience'. Andrea justifies her stance by stating that her mother qualified a long time ago and has since retired. She claims that 'times have moved on and changed'. Andrea's relationship with her mother seems to be good and is certainly does not appear to be acrimonious, as her mother regularly looks after the children as she lives nearby. This shows a paradox, her mother is trusted to look after the children, but is not seen as a good source of advice or information. Another example of a parent who does not use her mother or family as a source of information is Alison. Alison is a senior nurse, who has recently completed a MSc. She expressed the opinion that she feels that her family's world view is quite different from her own, as someone who is educated and a professional. She suggested that their lives and expectations are different, as she notes:

I have a big family that would help...but we are often not on the same wave length...[for example]...my family are concerned you do what the doctors tell you. I am different to that...I think I have choices for things so I would make my own choices and talk to other people, I think I am more in the know... (Alison)

Chloë on the other hand relies heavily on her parents, especially her mother, for support, reassurance and to 'off load' after difficult times with her highly disruptive and often violent son. Anne gave an example, typical of a number of other interviewees, she called her mother for help and reassurance when her daughter developed a rash and she could not immediately find an answer on the internet:

There's no pictures on it [on the web] so I couldn't identify the rash visually...so it was a phone call to my

mother. She replied that 'It's just like heat rash don't worry.' (Anne)

The research data shows that there is a general indication that those parents interviewed from the lower economic social groupings were less likely to use their own families as sources of information. The main reasons given for this are that they preferred to deal with issues or problems themselves and also that came from a 'broken' or a difficult family background as reported by Fern, Fiona, Carol, Donna, Dominique, Daisy and Deirdre.

6.4.3.2 Friends, neighbours and colleagues

Friends and work colleagues play an important part in information seeking for many parents. An example of how parents use their friends is illustrated by Gina who was having problems with her son's school teacher. She spoke to her sister-in-law and also a friend, both of whom were teachers and asked them what they thought and how best to deal with the situation. She reported that their advice helped her to understand the perspective of the teacher at school with whom she was having difficulty. Alison is another example of a parent who uses her network of friends as an important source of information on a variety of topics, ranging from general advice to specifics about childhood illnesses.

It is interesting that there is, within the sample of parents interviewed, a noticeable difference in the attitudes to sharing with friends and colleagues between parents of different socio-economic backgrounds. For those parents from the higher socio-economic backgrounds they are noticeably more willing to seek help from other people. Indeed they rely very heavily on their own social capital, using friends, especially professional friends such as doctors, nurses and teachers, for help and advice.

Again there was a marked difference in the interviewee sample with parents who were less socially connected. For them, there was often a reluctance to share their worries with other people (friends and family). Reasons cited for not wanting to share seemed to revolve around fear, such as 'I don't want my business blagging around' (Fern). Daisy too expressed the belief that she could not speak to her neighbours when she spoke about not wanting to share, talk or even mix with them. She developed friends through the internet, people who do not live nearby or on her local housing estate.

There is also a level of despair as they see their friends and neighbours in a similar predicament, without the prospect of a solution. This was maintained by Donna who expressed that 'they [friends and neighbours] 'have their own problems' or Dianne, during the same interview, when she said:

I not got friends that offer advice like that....they just err...come along with what you think really...
(Dianne)

Another reason for not asking for help was that there was a general fear that someone would call social services. Such fears were expressed by Faye and Donna who perceived social services as a dreaded interference into family life a sentiment supported by Cyndy, Daisy and Fiona.

Dominique summarised why she did not want to ask for help, information or advice in general because, as she noted:

I think if I ask for help...I feel as if I am a failure. As I see it, I have already been a failure cos of what [the] kids have done and that and how my life panned out...I think I would, I would feel like more of a failure if I asked for help. (Dominique)

6.4.3.3 Other parents (acquaintances)

This category differs from the previous one because it refers more to those people with whom the interviewees were acquainted, rather than those they knew well. Typically they were other parents the interviewees knew from a wide range of settings including: the school playground, coffee mornings and clubs and activities. The information gathered at the 'school gate' is important and covers a diverse range of subjects, for example school trips, holiday clubs and head lice. It also affords parents the opportunity to compare their parenting styles and decisions with those of their children's peers. Typically examples here relate to issues such as children's eating habits, bedtimes, pocket money or, even the amount of money the 'tooth fairy' leaves.

6.4.4 Formal networks

Formal networks relate to those personal groups or services such as General Practitioners (GPs), hospitals, schools and children's centres. Unlike the social networks, these networks tend only to be used when there is a specific directed information need. However, they may still provide opportunities for parents to meet and share information, examples of this being children's centres organised parenting events or support groups organised by the health service, such was the case with Andrew who with his wife attended an 'autism support group' or Fern, Fiona, Flora and Faye who all attended parenting classes to help deal with their children's extreme behaviour.

As with the social networks category, the interviewees tended to be divided by socio-economic lines as to how they generally perceive and interact with formal networks. Carol is seen as a community leader by the local PSA and is considered as one of their success stories. Despite this, she still has a wariness of professionals.

My special care nurses were very good they told me I needed medication and the vitamins, and it was really frustrating and really annoying that I knew that every time I would go to that doctor that she would question me. (Carol)

Throughout her interview Carol uses phrases such as 'them and us', 'the suits', 'high professionals' and speaks of the lack of approachability of professionals. In her own interviews Carol is speaking of doctors, nurses, teachers and social services rather than the leading advisors or PSAs who have worked with her. Carol is contradictory in many ways because although she seems naturally uncomfortable around professionals she is prepared to talk with them, as she says:

...if it were for me I wouldn't, but when it's for your kids you do things. (Carol)

Carol seems to gain the strength to interact and operate outside her 'comfort zone' when the focus is the wellbeing of her children, in other words as part of her role of 'being a parent', a sentiment also expressed by Deirdre and Donna. The interviews with other parents from the lower socio-economic backgrounds revealed generally similar attitudes towards professionals. These professionals, such as doctors, teachers and social services were seen in a suspicious light, which seems to be due to a number of factors including general perceptions of inequality, past experiences and perceptions of a mismatch of communication and values.

The role of the PSAs is diverse and often responsive to the specific needs of a particular community. However, they routinely fill the role of advocates and gate-keepers, as well as enabling access to a wide range of advice and educational courses. For those parents who regularly use their local PSA and lack the necessary skills or confidence to find information for themselves, this approach, on the surface, seems to be a great success. However, the caveat is that it seems to create a dependency culture. This is illustrated by Dani, one of the mothers interviewed, 'If I have a problem, which I have in the past, I have come and seen Susan [Parent Support Advisor] straight away'.

The opposite attitude towards professionals seemed to be true for parents from the higher socio-economic group. The view seemed to be that professionals are there to 'serve them' and meet their needs. A lot of this seems to be down to their confidence, ability to communicate and importantly, a view of professionals as equals, people 'just like me', and is closely linked to category D 'picture of self' (see section 6.6). Although, as Abby noted this was not something that was always reciprocated. Abby recounted the attitude of her 'older GP', who she felt, spoke down to her and did not treat her as an educated equal.

6.4.5 Summary

This section has examined the development of the category B: 'connectivity'. The category identified and defined the two sub-categories of 'social' and 'formal networks' and the part they play in parents' information seeking. The interview sample has shown a noticeable difference between parents of different socio-economic backgrounds and how they interact with their social and formal networks in order to find and obtain information.

The following section will examine the development of the category C: 'trust' and its influence on the information seeking process of parents.

6.5 GT category C: Trust

6.5.1 Introduction

Trust is an important category which emerged early in the initial phase of coding. A parent may place their 'trust' in a range of sources such as books, web pages, television programmes, and magazines as well in a specific person, group of people or organisation. Many parents develop 'trusted sources', which become one of the first places they look for information. In most cases, parents spoke about seeking help and advice from people, either family, friends or parent support advisors. The category of 'trust' is made up of several sub-categories outlined in Figure 6-6, these being: accessibility, confidence, like me, qualifications, relationship, and trust inhibitors.

These sub-categories can each act as either a catalyst or hindrance for a parent as they seek to place their trust in a given source of information.

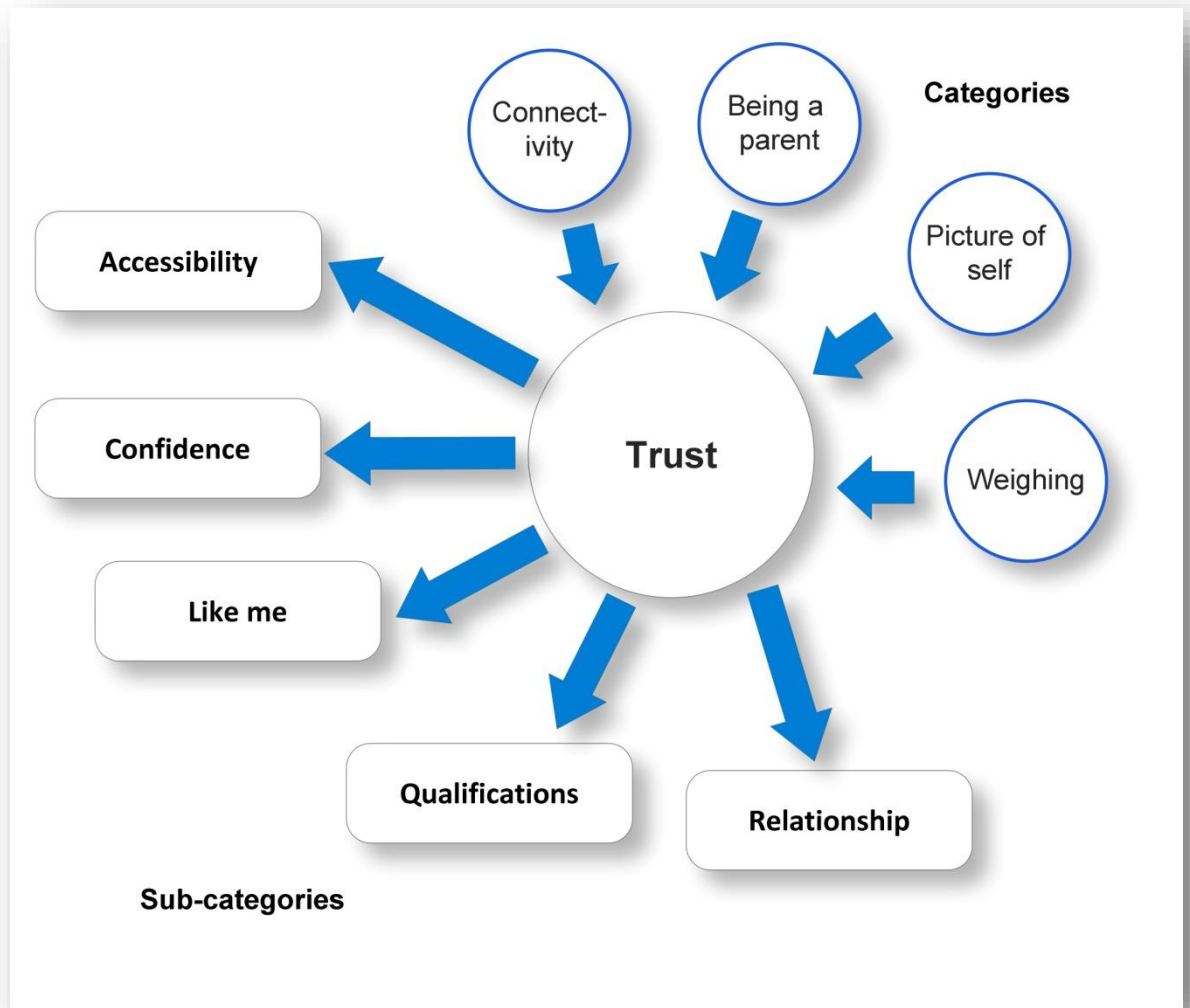


Figure 6-6 GT category C: Trust

6.5.2 Development of the category

The development of this category started with a tension between the two early sub-categories of 'catalyst' and 'hindrance'. After further examination of these two categories I decided to concentrate on the 'catalyst', those things which helped the information search process. The decision was not to reduce the importance of hindrances, however, as I coded, I felt that the concept did not easily fit within the emerging category, and it did not easily 'earn' (Glaser, 1978) its place within the wider emerging category.

The primary focus of the emerging category is to examine the way in which parents look for and are 'enabled' in their information seeking. This process involved a close analysis of the early category by examining it and the individual elements which themselves were partly informed by the properties and dimensions of the category.

6.5.3 Accessibility

The accessibility of a source is an important factor in it becoming trusted. Accessibility can be viewed as the 'first port of call', that is the first source that a parent turns to when they have a query or a need. A parent may have a number of 'first ports of call', such as people, books, or the internet. In this context, accessibility is trusted because it offers a place they can easily access and where they feel they can often obtain an answer which will meet their initial need, either in whole or part.

In addition to a source being readily available, another important element of accessibility is that the parent feels they can understand it. Betty for instance, is a book lover and for her, books are always one of the first places she looks for information. For Betty how a book looks and is presented helps to determine if it is one that she will buy and ultimately use.

[If] it's got a lovely diagram and lots of notes down the side and arrows, 'oh I love that'...you do...its dreadful...you fall for it. (Betty)

Books also proved to be both understandable and accessible for Chloë, who like Betty, is also a book lover.

Just books were the first thing, it was that book that really opened my eyes...my bookshelves they heave and you'd laugh because I often say to my friends that I could open a bloomin bookshop. (Chloë)

The internet is another example of an accessible source used by many parents. Only three of the parents interviewed reported that they did not have access to it. For many parents the internet has become the first place they look when they have a question.

We tend to use the internet, it is easier to find the information and print off the information we need. (Ellie)

or

...our first sources of information certainly for myself because it is so accessible and it so easy to find things relatively quick it is often the first place to look for initial information about a subject. (Gina)

All parents interviewed recognised that the internet had to be treated with caution but, despite this, its relative ease of use and convenience meant that many turned to it.

Worries over not being able to differentiate between what was good and bad led some parents such as Grace and Brady to only use the internet for certain kinds of questions, and definitely not for anything health related.

Interestingly, most parents cited Google as their starting point. Beverly describes the internet as 'like a big library', or Gina describes it as 'just like magic'.

With regards accessibility, about half of the parents described using known sites where they could return to get information. Grace and Anne both described how they direct their children to Wikipedia or the BBC website for help with children's homework. Other parents such as Alison, Gaby or Andrea had consulted NHS Direct online for quick medical information.

When the parents faced complex needs, the internet tended to be just one tool among a number of different approaches used. Andrew exemplified this approach in his search for help with his autistic son, where family, friends, the internet, newspaper articles, support groups and professionals all played a part in his quest to look for information. Interestingly, Andrew's experiences illustrate the limitations of accessibility and trusted people as they gave him and his wife false hope when his young son seemed to be developing slowly, prior to a professional diagnosis of autism.

Another aspect of accessibility is that, in some cases, a specific answer is the only one available to the parent and is therefore 'accessible' by default. This is illustrated by Chloë's experience of finding a book that she thought described her son's problem. She took the book to her son's doctor who dismissed it. She eventually found a paediatrician who agreed with the diagnosis. Denise is another example of someone who used the internet to find help and support for her granddaughter's rare medical condition.

Accessibility can also be a person or service that is easily accessible. One example which was cited repeatedly by the parents from school D was the accessibility of their PSA Susan and generally the staff as a whole at the school. Dani's sentiments were widely echoed by many of the parents interviewed when she said:

Yea I can trust all of the staff here...yea it's a relationship there always has been, they have always been family orientated...it's that kind of environment and you feel quite happy to walk into here and see Susan and have a cup of tea with her. (Dani)

It can be argued that the participants at school D naturally wanted to show their support for Susan their local PSA, who had arranged all of the interviews. This would be expected and considered only natural where there is a popular figure like Susan. However, interviewees from school E also spoke warmly of support and help offered by their PSA, a person had not played any part in the recruitment of parents for this study.

6.5.4 Confidence

This sub-category relates to the confidence a parent has in a source or person which has often developed over time. One example, briefly mentioned earlier is the confidence those parents from school D place in Susan, the local PSA. Dominique expresses the sentiments of many parents when she speaks of her confidence:

I know Susan and that she wouldn't say anything [and keep confidence] (Dominique)

In the above extract Dominique is speaking of the confidence she has when seeking advice and support from Susan. She is not alone, as Deirdre, Dani and Dawn all express similar sentiments. Fern also speaks in similar terms of her support worker, who she describes as:

...the sort of person I can trust and she is honest. She will tell you what the truth is and what she thinks and what she is going to put in your report whether you like it or not. (Fern)

Parents from schools C and F also had a lot of contact with their local PSA and equally speak in very positive terms about their experiences. Fern speaks highly of her support worker, contrasting her with a previous social worker who, she said, was not 'up front' and was someone who 'says one thing to your face and writes another [in reports]'.

Generally, parents spoke about their confidence in health professionals, although there were exceptions. Fiona for example, is disillusioned and lacks confidence with both the health service and social services as they have, from her perspective, failed her and her son. Donna spoke about feeling depressed and not being able to cope with her son, a persistent truant. She attributed his 'wayward behaviour' to two family bereavements. She blames her son's school for not helping him grieve properly. When asked if she had sought help from her local GP for herself or her son, she replied:

I've not been to my doctors for advice or anything because I don't feel that I need them...[I don't want them]... putting me on wappy pills cos that's what they'd do. (Donna)

GPs also came under suspicion from some parents because of the MMR vaccination programme. Both Emma and Gina used the same expression when speaking about GPs 'towing the party line' when they each tried to find out about alternatives to the triple vaccine. They were not alone in having no confidence in the information GPs gave out with regards the MMR, as there seemed to be a general feeling among some parents that their local surgeries were more concerned with meeting targets. Despite lack of confidence regarding this issue by some parents, their general confidence with their GP was not dented with regards other issues and they would still use them.

Television, in particular the Supernanny programme, seems to be a source which is viewed with confidence.

She [Supernanny] just inspires a great deal of confidence. She is not patronising at all. (Gaby)

Most of the parents interviewed had seen Supernanny or a similar programme. Their views of such programmes were generally very positive. In terms of parents' confidence in the programme, Emma calls it 'a bit OTT' but still recognised it as useful. Betty and Gail both had confidence in Supernanny because the techniques she used were similar to ones they had each learnt from childminding courses.

6.5.5 Like me

A parent's personal values and beliefs play an important role in both weighing and accepting information and also in forming a decision about whether or not to trust a source. Gaby chose to accept that the MMR was safe, despite being 'besides myself with worry' about making the final decision. She was finally persuaded to have her sons vaccinated partly because of her own values and belief in 'herd protection', and the responsibility on all parents to 'do the right thing'. Andrew shows a preference to seek help and advice from a friend who he describes as 'just like me' and someone who will reinforce a belief or value, as opposed to another close friend who he described as less cautious.

Abby talks to her boss about parenting. She recognises that she agrees with his approach to parenting and values his experience as a parent whose children are older than hers and so as someone she considers has a wealth of experience.

The church group of Christian parents all expressed, in some form, the part played by a bond of shared faith and it's influence on who they chose to seek information from. The general consensus was summarised by Gina:

I suppose with something like parenting and values I suppose the church people have the same values but if it is a more practical issue and it would be whoever is the right person to talk to, so it would not necessarily be church but err certainly if it is to do with behaviour their values or parenting skills that would probably be through church. (Gina)

Gina's view was generally representative of the other church parents in that speaking to the right person for the particular need was important, although was influenced by underlying Christian values. She noted that many of the church members regularly attended mid-week small group meetings. Each small group typically comprises of ten people who meet regularly to pray, study the bible and share and support one another. Due to the demographics of the church, such groups are made up of a wide range of professionals, who offered support and advice naturally.

One contra voice from the church group was George's wife. George described himself as being able to talk to anyone, however his wife does not feel that she is able to talk to people in the same way her husband does. She is very conscious that she describes herself as working-class and at the same time perceives that a large proportion of the church are professionals and middle-class and are therefore different to her in spite of their despite a shared faith.

those people on a professional level, you sometimes think that those people look down, they probably don't...You know it might just be me and my insecurities and they all come and talk to you. (George's wife)

Several of the church group mentioned specific Christian books on parenting. One of the books was written by an American minister Dr. James Dobson. Dobson's book was not widely liked by those Christian parents who had read it, because they reported that it did not seem particularly relevant to them as British Christian parents. Books by a British

minister Rob Parsons, a writer and broadcaster, were mentioned as popular, widely accepted and perceived as relevant.

Parents' attitudes towards professionals and how they view and interact with them differed noticeably between the different socio-economic backgrounds. Parents from schools A, B and church, with the exception of one member, reported that they freely approached and spoke with professionals such as teachers, doctors and nurses. Principally, this was based on the knowledge that they themselves were either professionals or married to a professional and were able to approach them as equals.

There was a marked difference in the attitude towards professionals reported by parents particularly from school D and E. Carol called people such as teachers and doctors 'high professionals'. She spoke of being put off from meeting with such people, and only doing so because she had to. Carol's general observation and attitude was present in many of the interviews with parents especially from schools D and E. This attitude may help to show the importance of the advocacy and intermediary roles played by PSAs.

6.5.6 Qualifications

Qualifications play an important role for parents determining trust. This sub-category relates to any source or person who is considered to have an authority that is attained either through practical or academic qualifications and is, therefore, better placed to advise or provide information. Qualifications can be viewed on two levels: personal experience and professional qualification.

6.5.6.1 Personal experience

It's my mum and she's raised five children, and she has been there and got the t-shirt five times. (Anne)

Learning from other parents is an important element of information seeking. Interviewees considered another parent qualified through observing them as parents and watching how they parented. Andrew and Andrea both noted how they observed family and friends who had older children to see how they dealt with particular situations as well as asking them for help and advice. Other interviewees reported how they met with other mothers and shared their experiences both offering and receiving advice on a range of issues. Parents such as Anne reported how she valued her mother's experience as a parent. Interestingly, experience does have its limitations with Anne noting that although her mother had 16 years' experience of being a teacher, her ways were old fashioned and

out of date, or as George noted, it was different being a parent in the 1970s and 1980s, from today, a sentiment echoed almost verbatim by Gaby.

Experience often has a caveat for, example, Andrew realised that the advice of his family and friends, no matter how trusted they were, had been wrong because his son's development was outside of their own experience, despite them inadvertently issuing false reassurances. Once Andrew's son had been diagnosed with autism, Andrew sought people, through family contacts and work colleagues, who had gone through a similar process to him. This was especially important for Andrew during the early stages as he tried to comprehend and find the best possible outcomes for his son. Another medical related example is Denise, who wanted to find out more information about her granddaughter's rare bone disease, without anyone to talk to and with no support groups in the UK; she searched the internet and found a support group in the United States

I even rang the [United] States and spoke to a lady, she was really nice, and she has two children with it.
(Denise)

Another example was through the shared experiences created through the STEPS course that Faye, Fern, Fiona and Flora had completed. Each of these parents had sons who suffer from extreme behavioural issues. The course was run by the PSA at the PRU, and provided the mothers with an opportunity to learn practical skills to help them. The course also offered them the opportunity to share experiences. As a result of the course, Fiona and Fern have both met to offer each other mutual support.

6.5.6.2 Professional qualifications

Professionals such as doctors, nurses and teachers are generally seen as a trusted source of information, although this statement requires two caveats. Firstly, trust is influenced by past experiences, both with a specific individual such as a GP or with a professional body such as social workers. Secondly, the term 'professional' is used in a loose sense in this context because it not only covers those people who fulfil defined professional roles such as doctors or teachers, but also includes television presenters such as Supernanny and also authors who write about aspects of parenting, examples of which include: Dr. Spock, Annabel Karmel and Gina Ford.

Those parents in the higher economic grouping and especially those in the church group reported that they would informally approach friends and acquaintances because of their professional qualification. For example, Gail asked two teacher friends at church for help when dealing with a sensitive issue relating to a problem she had with her son's

teacher. Gail also reported that she would ask a friend at church who was a GP for informal advice, although she was aware that she didn't want to 'overdo it'. Similar examples were reported by Gaby and Gina.

Abby spoke about the time she was worried about her daughter, who was generally very clumsy and not very academic. Being a health professional, she thought it might be Dyspraxia. Not being a specialist, she approached a colleague, a consultant paediatrician, who was able to set her mind at rest.

Other examples cited by Alison, Andrea and Anne concern speaking to friends who are teachers and asking them for their thoughts and opinions about local secondary schools and which ones should be considered when applying for places.

6.5.7 Relationship

Relationships play an important role for parents as they search for information. This sub-category is very closely allied with the 'connectivity' category. Trusted relationships generally play an extremely important role and are often seen as one of the stops for parents when they are looking for information or seeking advice.

For those parents in the lower socio-economic groups, their reliance on PSAs and other types of family outreach workers seemed to be generally very positive. The key for many PSAs is to build a relationship with those parents they wish to help. This approach has been exemplified by Susan, who had been in post as a parent contact for many years preceding the recent trend for the development of PSA roles. This has allowed her to become well known and trusted within the community. Problems and issues can arise however, if a trusted advisor moves away and a new person comes into post. The new worker has to start to build trust from scratch and gain the trust of the parents they are working with, something which does not always happen as Louise, a PSA explains:

...this woman moved away and she got a new advisor but she keeps ringing me up...and that causes problems (Louise: Learning Support Worker from observations).

Exemplifying the importance of relationship is Carol, speaking about her local PSA:

I tend to find [information] at the moment, if you want my personal opinion on who has been the best at giving me information so far, it has been Lisa to be honest, the parent support advisor has been absolutely excellent for me and the kids. (Carol)

In another part of her interview, Carol spoke of the difficulty she encountered when her special needs nurse was replaced by a health visitor after her return home from hospital following the premature birth of her son. Carol notes that she had got on well with the nurse, but she could not cope with the health visitor, especially when her advice seemingly contradicted that of her former nurse.

6.5.8 Trust inhibitors

Just because a source or a person is trusted in one area or for a specific question does not mean that it is trusted for different areas or questions; in other words a trusted source can be context specific. Abby for example considers her boss to be a great source of help and advice with his parenting philosophy and experience, but his general world view does not always match her own and so this colours and affects the advice she receives from him.

A number of parents reported that the format of books or internet web pages would colour their view of a given source. Betty's summary is perhaps the most forcefully articulated but it represents the thoughts of a number of parents:

I am really prejudiced...I don't like American books...err [laugh] I don't like Americanised covers, I hate the ones where you start reading and it gives you the scenario and its very, very Americanised. (Betty)

Carol spoke about the difficulties she had with being able to accept parenting advice from her health visitor, who herself did not have children. Mistrust further developed when the health visitor seemed to contradict advice Carol had received from a special care baby nurse about feeding her son, who had been born prematurely. Beth also noted that she found it difficult to trust a GP at her local surgery because 'she is a young lady who doesn't look as if she has had any children and I am not sure ... she can probably deal with the physical symptoms very well'.

6.5.9 Summary

This section has examined the development of the category trust. Trust has been an important category from the early stages of analysis, principally because it has links to the other categories. The section has focused on the six sub-categories of trust, some or all of which are present in order for a person or a source to be classed as 'trusted'.

The following section will examine the development of the category 'picture of self' and its influence on the information seeking process of parents.

6.6 GT category D: Picture of self

6.6.1 Introduction

This category (see Figure 6-7) relates to how the influence of a parent’s own perceptions, emotions and feelings affect their ability to search for information. Parenting is by its nature an emotional process, with a parent’s overarching desire is to see their children happy and healthy. Certainly, for the general ‘day-to-day’ information needs, it could be argued that a parent’s own wellbeing should not necessarily affect their information searching process. However, a parent’s view of themselves in terms of personal

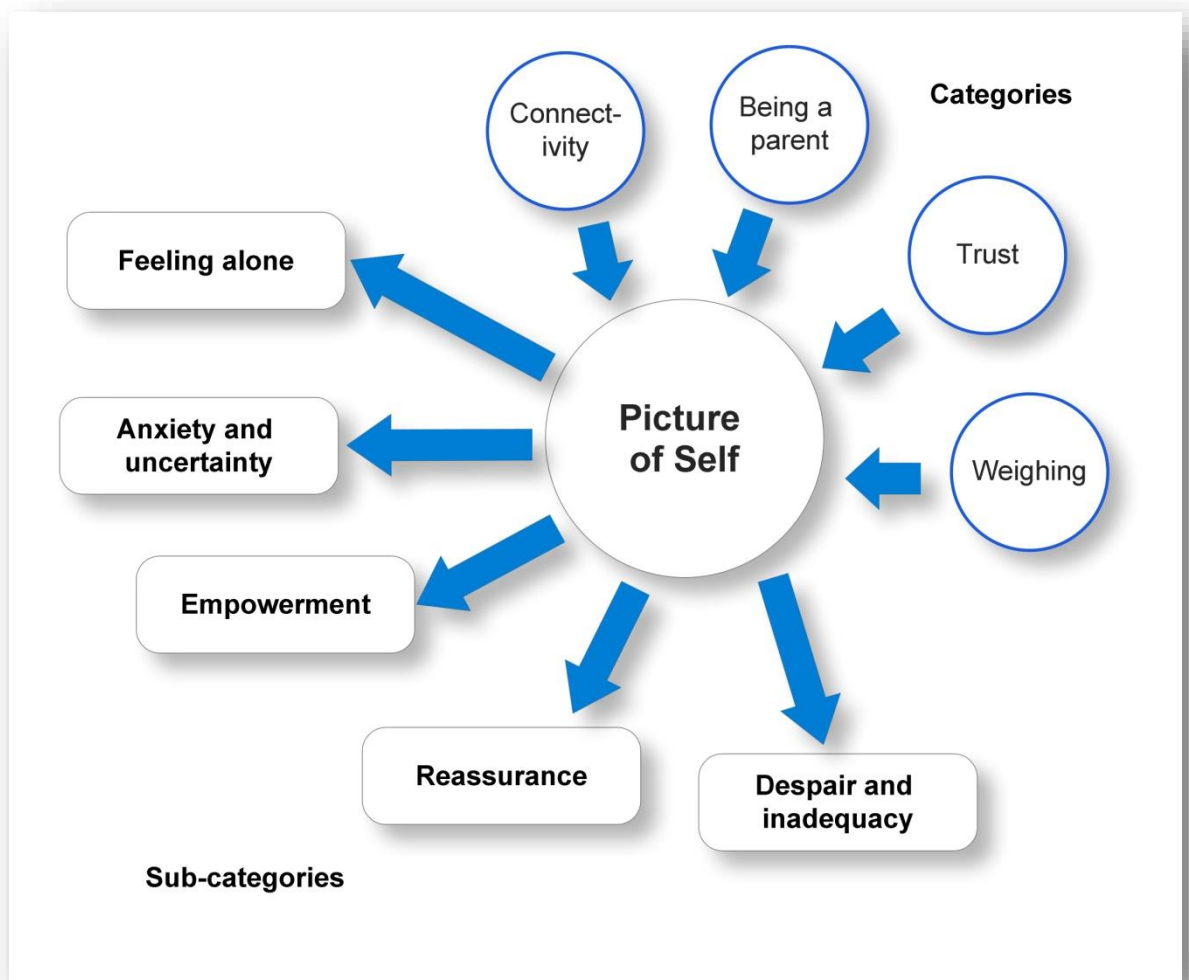


Figure 6-7 GT category D: Picture of self

confidence does play a part in the information search process and can have an influence on the way a parent searches for information, indeed it can act as a motivator (catalyst) or de-motivator (hindrance).

An inability to find information and help can have negative consequences for parents who have a need. This is exemplified by the experiences of Donna, Daisy, Fiona and Cyndy who each have had to face great difficulties. Their inability to find the answers has led to times of fear and anxiety. On a less serious level, but no less real for a parent, is the fear and anxiety of not knowing what to do when a young child has an illness, especially if it is the first time that the parent has had to deal with a particular situation. As Daisy said:

...one of my kids had a rash one time...I rang my husband's mum, 'they have a rash what do I do?' So she was there for me...I panic when it's my kids, they're not allowed to be poorly. (Daisy)

On a deeper and more complex level, there are those cases which have an ongoing element. This is exemplified by Cyndy's long term battle with her daughter, which has had a negative effect on her, her daughter and the rest of the family. This category comprises of five sub-categories: feeling alone, anxiety and uncertainty, empowerment, reassurance and despair and inadequacy

6.6.2 Development of the category

This sub-category principally emerged from the early categories of 'emotions', 'hindrance' and 'catalyst'. The category 'emotions' emerged as a significant factor influencing parents' information seeking, especially when they talked about certain types of decisions, for example, anxiety about choosing the right schools, or the worries they had when dealing with a childhood illness. After the first stage of coding, both 'hindrances' and 'catalyst' were large categories, each with a large element of sub-categories relating to emotions and their effect on the information seeking process. A review of the initial coding process resulted in the removal of the categories of hindrances as 'stand alone' categories and the concepts and codes that helped form them were reviewed and distributed where appropriate to the new emerging categories. To help this process, an attempt was made to use axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), that is the process of examining properties and dimensions to view links and concepts within the data. Ultimately this did not prove to be very fruitful and was not widely developed.

6.6.3 Feeling alone

This category generally relates to those parents who face difficult situations and is almost entirely populated by those interviewees from schools D, E and F. The category draws on the expression of feelings such as feeling isolated or alone. Dominique, who faces a difficult situation, speaks of being alone since she was a young child, and feels a failure in her relationship with her eldest child, as she notes:

I've had to cope for the kid's sake because I didn't want to be seen as a failure. (Dominique)

Her eldest daughter has recently taken an overdose of tablets and Dominique feels helpless, not knowing how best to support her. She notes that she cannot speak to the GP about her daughter because she has recently turned sixteen and they cannot compel her to see a counsellor:

I can't go in there [GPs] and discuss her...I [tried] the other week; I said to talk to her, to [go and] see a counsellor but they said they can't. (Dominique)

Throughout the interview, Dominique does not seem to recognise that she could be helped with support and her mindset seemed to be firmly set in a position of social isolation. She has no family to help her, stating that she has not spoken to her mother for months and besides, her mother does not want to know:

I should but I don't and I should ask for help but I won't but I've been that independent I don't like crying to people. (Dominique)

A reoccurring theme is illustrated by Dominique who simply 'bottles things up and puts a brave face on'; she feels that she is coping. This same theme occurs in many interviews where there are unresolved and difficult situations such as with Cyndy, Dominique, Dawn, Dianne, Fiona and Fay. Another example of a mother who feels as if she is simply managing to cope is Fiona. Her youngest son has very challenging behaviour and currently attends a pupil referral unit. His extreme behaviour over the years is beginning to take a toll on Fiona, who suffers from depression. She perceives that social services have been little help and does not know where to go:

...social workers can do only so much they do just the paper work really and when I have asked for help...I have

had to do it myself. I had to go on the internet and if you are upset or depressed it is very hard to motivate yourself, do that you know, and there hasn't been the backup and the help and I think a lot of people they are giving me, not fully fledged social workers those on assignments to better themselves so when they move on and there is a while until the next one and all the statements have come through and it's not been followed through and it gets you tired sometimes all the fighting (Fiona).

Fiona admits that one helpful source has been a support worker who visits her son, but she claims that he is only meant to meet with her son on a temporary basis and that this is 'too little, too late'. As with Dominique, Fiona feels that she is simply 'coping' and that there is little in the way of real support. The differences in approaches between the two women is that Fiona recognises that she wants and needs help, but feels let down by social services, the school and doctor, whereas Dominique is not as open to help and chooses to cope by herself. A similar sentiment was expressed by Dianne:

Like you talk to your family and friends but it's like your kids are your kids and their kids are their kids...do you understand what I am saying? (Dianne)

And by Dawn

I don't go for advice really. Its kids for you everyone goes through it with kids. (Dawn)

Fern expresses her fear of sharing with other people:

I couldn't trust anybody; I couldn't talk to anyone, because if I did it would get mixed up and spread around. I keep myself to myself.

Despite this Fern, has recently been allocated a personal support worker who she meets with and has begun to value and trust, but this is still in its early stages.

A quite different view of being alone was given by George's wife during their joint interview. In the interviews with the church parents all, with the exception of George and his wife spoke of a close and accepting community of people that provided a safe place to

share and explore parenting issues. She felt that there was a barrier between herself and the other parents in the church, who she perceives as being middle-class, as she says:

Sometimes you know like I went to mothers' meeting and they were like the wives of the men about six of us at it was like 'my name is so and so and my husband is a solicitor', 'I am so and so and my husband is a doctor' and like none of them worked, and it got to me and my husband is a barber and I'm a childminder and I felt a bit, you know, odd, and they kept inviting me but I didn't go back. (George's wife)

This attitude prevented her from fully integrating into the church. Despite this her husband George was less isolated, saying that he could 'talk with anyone'.

Brady spoke of feeling alone when she moved to a new area. She was married and pregnant and although she had the help of her husband she lacked the local networks of mothers and friends.

At that stage I didn't know anyone else...[and]...I didn't really know people at the antenatal class so didn't want to discuss deep things; and there's just some things you don't want to talk to your mother about. (Brady)

Brady noted that, at this time she relied on reading parenting magazines and baby books for the information she wanted, whilst at the same time actively trying to form relationships with other mothers at the local 'mums and tots group'.

Interestingly, the feeling of being alone extends beyond typical social isolation. Abby felt alone when considering whether or not to allow her daughter to have corrective cosmetic surgery which required a general anaesthetic. She noted that her husband did not seem too concerned and despite having trust in the surgeon and being a health professional herself, she still felt the burden of the decision.

6.6.4 Anxiety and uncertainty

Closely following on from the feelings of feeling alone are those of anxiety and uncertainty. These feelings act as barriers and hindrances to the information seeking of parents. The causes of these feelings are diverse and context specific. Recurring examples include issues around child health (for example the MMR debate), and choosing the right school.

Betty spoke about her journey as she decided whether to give her children the MMR. Despite being cognitively convinced that it was safe, her anxiety as a mother was still very powerful, noting that she has an 'emotional surge to protect your children', resulting in her delaying the vaccination until the last possible moment.

Beverly spoke in great detail about her anxiety over the safety of the MMR vaccine. She had heard a lot about it and this scared her, leading to anxiety and a decision not to give her children the vaccine. She came to this conclusion because no one could reassure her that the MMR was safe. Many other parents, in particular, Gina and Gaby spoke in similar terms of the anxiety they had, coming to a decision about the MMR, a decision that for Gaby was made harder because of the constant attention given in the media. She notes that she had decided that it was safe until she overheard a discussion about it on BBC Radio 4's 'Woman's Hour', then she started to doubt herself and became anxious again. Eventually, her son was given it because she believes that it is her personal responsibility.

Andrew and Denise each spoke of the months of anxiety and uncertainty before their children received proper, full medical diagnosis. Denise in particular notes:

I'm a nurse and I had all sorts going through my head.
It's not good to know a lot...like I thought oh God I
hope she hasn't got bone cancer... (Denise)

Andrew and his wife suffered from anxiety and uncertainty as they tried, unsuccessfully, for five months to get a definite diagnosis from health professionals. Andrew notes that he was sure that his son was autistic, but the hospital would not confirm it for him. This was lost time when he and his wife wanted something concrete to allow them to move on and look for ways of helping their son.

Both Cyndy and Dominique have daughters who have taken an overdose of tablets in the past year. Both of these parents have difficult relationships with their daughters, resulting in times of anxiety and uncertainty as they try and make sense of their relationships. Both parents have noted that they and their families have been offered support by the medical profession and social services, yet they both claim that the support offered is, as Cyndy said, 'too little to late'. This constant anxiety and uncertainty has begun to take a toll on the health of both parents as they claim they do not know where to turn and how to deal with their problems. A similar assessment can be drawn from the experiences of Fiona, Flora, Faye and Fern. These four parents each have a son who attends school F, a pupil referral unit. Each of the parents speaks of the anxiety

and the uncertainty brought about by the extreme behaviour of their son and the struggle to find answers.

Daisy has suffered a great deal of anxiety and uncertainty since being made homeless, after being forced to leave her former house after a police incident. Since that time, Daisy, who is currently pregnant, along with her husband and four children, have been homeless. At the time of the interview Daisy and her family had been officially homeless for seven months and were currently sharing a single room at her sister-in-law's house. Daisy spoke of her battle to try and find a new home. Despite having support from Susan, (her local PSA) and a housing charity, she was no nearer to finding a home. She describes being caught in a bureaucratic system that, at times, contradicts itself in the advice it gave her. This inability to have a definite answer about when she is to be re-housed is beginning to take an emotional toll on her and her family.

6.6.5 Empowerment

Empowerment is a catalyst that spurs a parent to look for information or help; it provides the 'knowledge or confidence' that the parent will find relevant information. Betty is a confident and empowered parent. When she was considering giving her daughter the MMR, she actively sought the advice from those people in her social group; firstly her sister who had had to make a similar decision and a close friend who was a chemist and had also given the vaccine to her own sons. Betty finally decided that it was probably safe yet, despite coming to this conclusion, she felt anxious enough to purposely delay the vaccine noting:

...but I did delay until they were slightly older.
(Betty)

Despite many obstacles and barriers, Fiona still finds the strength to continue to fight for her son, despite the 'knock backs' and her need for anti-depressants.

You look on the internet [for answers] but they don't want to listen to you [the doctors]. You have to fight all the way. I don't want something to be wrong with him. So school now basically just contain him. I used to feel angry, but I got more motivated with that. (Fiona)

Carol spoke in similar terms when she related the frustrations she had had regarding concerns that she and other parents had relating to hygiene and security at her children's

newly built school. She spoke about her frustrations at her initial attempts to talk with the school and suggested that her concerns were not being dealt with to her satisfaction:

I feel that summats driving you on, because at the end
it's your kids. (Carol)

Eventually, through her perseverance, a threat to petition all parents, as well as pull her children out of the school Carol was able find a contact at Education Leeds, who she was able to talk to and get a 'straight answer'. She notes that she now keeps this person's number in her diary and if she has any more problems goes straight to him. As an aside, partly because of her tenacity and campaigning nature, she has been asked to be a parent representative at the school--and is also seen by many of the local parents as a local source of help and advice or gate-keeper.

The internet is an important form of empowerment. Brady for example has recently had the internet installed at home because she felt disenfranchised without it. Many of the parents speak of using the internet to look for information. Using a combination of information obtained from books and the internet, Chloë realised that her son had symptoms that were highly suggestive of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD); she took this information to health professionals, she notes:

I'm armed, I know what I'm talking about now, you
know...whereas before I couldn't really, because I didn't
know what was wrong. (Chloë)

Denise equally felt empowered by use of the internet when she found previously unobtainable support to help her with her granddaughter's rare medical condition. The information and support received from the health professionals had been lacking, due to the rarity of the illness. Once she had a confirmed diagnosis, she was able to look for support groups and information online to support her. Andrew, too, is another parent who was helped greatly by the internet as he sought to find ways of best supporting his young autistic son.

The internet played an important role in empowering many of the parents. Dani for example regularly uses internet chat rooms and has developed online 'trusted' friendships, something she claimed not to have locally.

Another important element of the internet is that it is a safe place to ask questions. Alison notes that she can look for information from the comfort of her own room and in her own time. Importantly, Alison also notes that by using the internet, she can ask those

'silly questions' without feeling stupid. In this respect, she sees Google and the internet as a safe place to explore those questions to which she wants answers. Alison noted that she used the internet a great deal just before her daughter went into hospital for an operation. She notes that '[I] used the internet to look for questions to ask at the hospital about her [daughter's] operation'.

The PSAs seem to have an empowering effect on the parents that they meet with. In the sample, PSAs were influential in the lives of parents from Schools, C, D, E and F. They provide a gate-keeper role, by offering information, help and advice on a wide range of issues.

6.6.6 Reassurance

One of the consistent themes emerging from the interviews was the degree to which parents' information seeking was grounded in seeking some kind of reassurance, especially from other parents, who they considered to be more experienced than themselves. A typical example is illustrated by Alison, who sought reassurance from her GP about the MMR vaccine:

...and he [the GP] talked me through it, well I listened more than anything and at the end of the day I realised that the risk of getting measles was going to be more risky than getting autism. (Alison)

Alison is a working mother and a lone parent who relies on the help and advice of her close friend to provide reassurance:

Like my best friend she is very good at calming me down as well. She will say look at this...you are going overboard, look at it this way...

[She] will keep me on an even keel in terms of my emotions and stuff like that...Because I am on my own; I have to say stuff 'Do you think I am doing the right thing here', 'am I doing ok?'...almost brainstorming when making decisions. (Alison)

Parents use their social networks extensively as ways to gain reassurance and to ensure their parenting is within the bounds of normal for their social group. Much of this seems to relate to non-formalised information seeking that naturally occurs at social

places such as the school playground, mums and tots groups, over coffee or through general reading. Beth notes that she and her sister discuss issues regularly over the phone, saying of her conversations:

I would run things through with her and it's nice to have reassurance to know that you're not being an evil hag.

(Beth)

Beth notes that she has recently discussed a wide range of issues with her sister and other people to make sure she is not being a 'bit over the top'. These include: length of time her children can watch the TV, should she allow her nine year old to watch the television drama EastEnders, or whether it is right to allow her daughter to have her own mobile telephone. Parents seem to discuss with other parents their 'house rules' and use these conversations as a measure by which to judge the way they are treating their children when compared with their friends. Here, there is a sense that parents do not want to make their child 'stick out' and be seen as different, as one mother noted.

...like I said, the bed time you ask 'what time is your child going to bed these days?', so I am after reassurance that I am not sending my child to bed you know...which he says I am miles too early... at 8.30... 'oh I'll stick as I am then', just reassurance and just to compare then...[with other parents]. (Beverly)

Anne found a rash on her daughter's arm and despite thinking that it was probably a simple heat rash, wanted reassurance.

[she had a rash and] the instant that any parent sees a rash on a child...'Meningitis'... yea 'get the tumbler out'...you know a rash everybody panics...but it was heat rash. (Anne)

Anne first turned to the NHS Direct website to see if there was picture of a Meningitis rash, but she only found a brief description. For reassurance she then telephoned her mother:

It was reassurance from my mum...'It sound like heat rash, give her some Piriton, see how she is tomorrow'...and she was fine. (Anne)

Daisy's description of a rash that her daughter had is very similar to Anne's experience. Daisy too used a combination of the NHS Direct website as well as her mother-in-law for reassurance. NHS Direct is a source of help and reassurance that has been consistently mentioned by a large number of the interviewees. Part of the reason for its popularity is that it can provide reassurance. Geri recounted a time she wished that she had contacted NHS Direct, when her daughter was young and had an ear ache. Instead, she went to the GPs in what was a difficult situation:

[I] remember having to wait until 7pm to see the GP with a screaming child. If I had known that it was fine to dose her up with Calpol and wait for the morning I would have...maybe if I had rang NHS Direct they may well have said give her Calpol and wait until morning. (Geri)

Andrea and Beth have both used NHS Direct. Andrea was seeking reassurance that her daughter did not have Meningitis, so she rang NHS direct. Andrea also rang when her daughter had an adverse reaction to the MMR vaccination, about the incident she reflected:

Probably reassurance cos I mean they didn't see her and they couldn't assess her over the phone to say it was such and such a rash. (Andrea).

Beth when her daughter was ill rang NHS Direct:

I rang them [NHS Direct] I though they can put your mind at rest I think it is if you are not sure or if you kinda think you know what you want but need confirmation...Even though a doctor was probably more qualified, the person [at NHS Direct] told me that she would be alright...err, so it is quite funny that I was actually seeking reassurance, you know. (Beth)

Both interviewees reflected that NHS Direct provided them with reassurance, despite the fact that they are not talking to a doctor and nor could a full physical assessment of the problem be made properly based on symptoms.

Seeking reassurance also helps to allay the feeling of isolation and 'to know you are not alone' (Chloë). Such examples include child behavioural issues such as fussy

eating or interrupted sleep. With such issues parents can feel isolated and feel that they are the only ones going through it, this is where parents seek reassurance by talking with other parents.

...sometimes for health related things, when the children are little or for various things like that...like err... like my eldest used to suffer from constipation a lot when he was little and I used to think is this normal. And things like that and obviously we did go to the doctors and got feedback from the doctors, but I would also talk with other mums and get reassurance if they would say 'oh yes mine had the same issues and they grow out of it. (Beverly)

Seeking reassurance can have a negative aspect. This issue is highlighted when Andrew and his wife received false reassurance from family and friends about the slow development of their son. They noticed that he was developing more slowly than his older sister had. They received 'reassurance' from family and friends to the effect that 'boys develop differently from girls and not all children are the same'. In truth, Andrew's son was to be diagnosed with autism.

6.6.7 Despair and inadequacy

Despair and inadequacy are closely aligned with anxiety and uncertainty. Generally despair and inadequacy are feelings that hinder a parent's ability to look for information.

Dominique and Cyndy both have daughters who have recently attempted suicide by taking overdoses. Both mothers have very difficult and strained relationships with their daughters, but neither mother knows where to go to find help. Dominique and Cyndy each speak of taking their daughters for counselling after the attempted suicide, Dominique says:

I took her for counselling at the 0-16's and that made her worse. (Cyndy)

Cyndy equally dismisses the counselling that was also provided for herself and her family, complaining that they 'believe her and pander to her'. These two examples are extreme cases of parents who are continuing to deal with a very difficult and ongoing situation which do not have any easy or immediate solution. Both families are currently in

a cycle of despair, not knowing fully how to break out of it. In many ways the problems are deeply rooted within the family relationships. Since the attempted suicides, each family has received help and support from psychologists, counsellors, social services and the children's schools, yet despite this additional help, each parent feels as if nothing has improved, as Dominique notes, she now suffers from depression. Elements that are common to both cases are: there have been long term and ongoing problems, the parents did not know how to ask for help, they did not know who to ask for help, and there was a degree of suspicion towards the professionals called in to help after the events.

Donna is another parent who also has a very difficult situation with her son, she speaks of 'giving up'. Her son is a persistent truant with a 56 per cent school attendance record.

...like he has 56 per cent attendance because he goes to school and gets his mark and waltzes off. (Donna)

Donna is 'full of despair' and claims that she has tried speaking to the school about the problem but cannot speak to his Head of Year, as the original meeting had to be postponed. She feels the school should be doing more to help, but seems to have given up trying. Donna blames his behaviour on two recent family bereavements and complains that the school have done nothing to help him get through it. She herself does not consider contacting the GP for help, either for herself or her son replying to my interview question with the excuse that 'they can't mend a broken heart'.

6.6.8 Summary

This section has examined the development of the category 'picture of self' and the part played by a parent's own emotions and confidence in enabling them to search for information. The category was heavily influenced by the early codes of emotions, catalysts and hindrances.

6.7 GT category E: Weighing

6.7.1 Introduction

This category (see Figure 6.9) relates to the way parents make sense of the information or the support that they have sought. As with all information seeking, the ways in which parents assess and view what they have been seeking is shaped by a number of factors such as context and type of information as well as social factors. Alison is a senior nurse who is well grounded in critical appraisal and evidence-based practice techniques. During

her interview, we were discussing the ways in which she assesses the information she obtains as a parent.

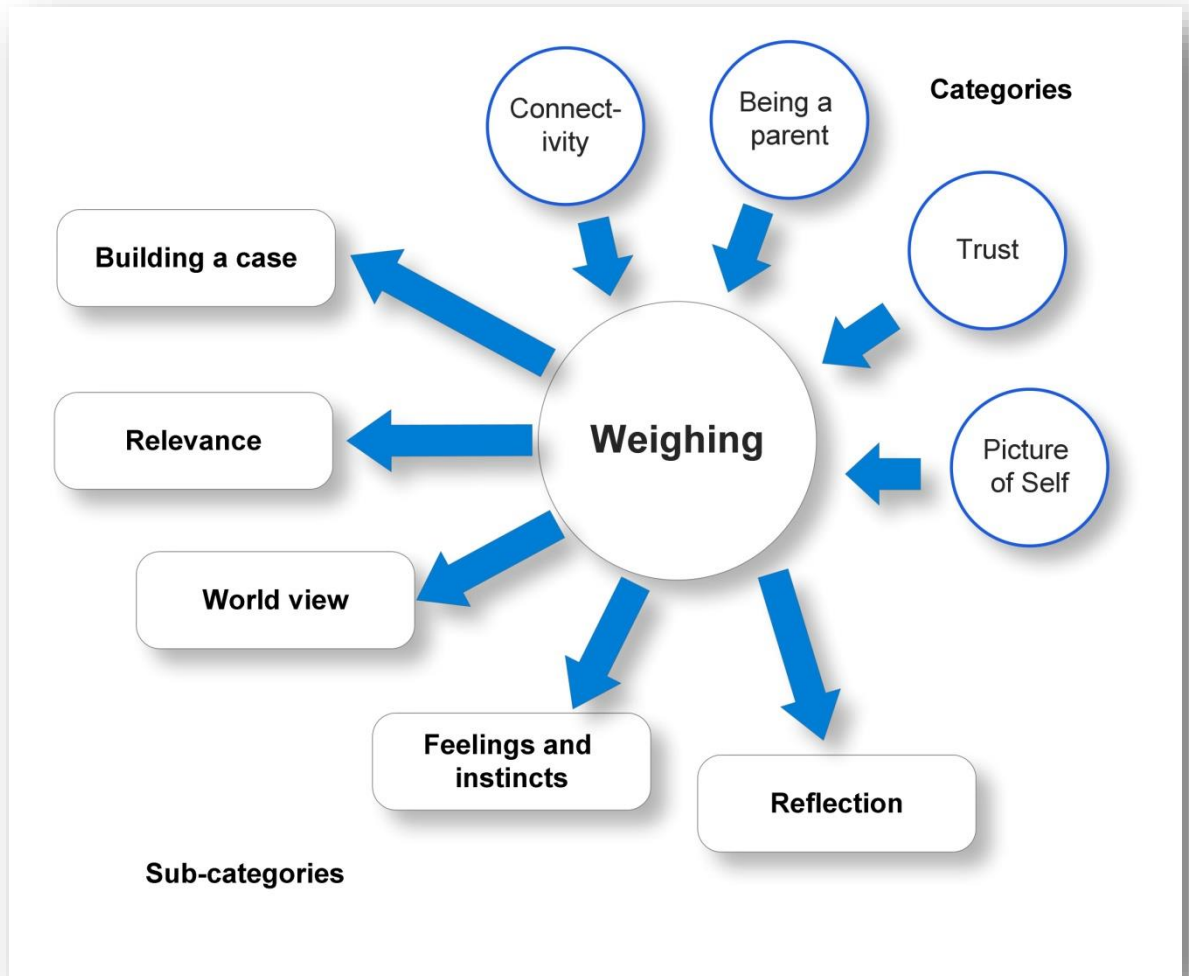


Figure 6-8 GT category E: Weighing

Her initial reaction to the question was to speak as a professional nurse:

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

Alison paused and then reflected, and changed her reply:

...as a parent I don't think I would go as far as that...parenting shouldn't be as difficult as that and you do look for more like logical stuff that sounds

reasonable...It shouldn't be that hard work it's sort of,
if something feels right you go for it. (Alison)

The category comprises of five sub-categories which are: building a case, relevance, world view, feelings and instincts and reflection.

6.7.2 Development of the category

The development of this category has changed drastically over the course of the coding and analysis process. Its genesis was based on the original category of 'assessing', a term that was re-evaluated because I felt that its development had been overly influenced by existing library and information science literature.

The term in its current form developed though several *in vivo* references used by parents when they talked about processing the information they received. Parents used different analogies to describe the process of 'weighing', one notable example was used by two parents when they spoke about placing the information they obtained into a 'melting pot'. Another expression used by a number of parents to describe this process was to reply they used 'instinct', 'what seems right', 'common sense' or simply 'gut feeling'.

6.7.3 Building a case

Building a case occurs when parents consult multiple sources of information in order to draw a conclusion or come to a decision. It can be identified and present for both complex and non-complex questions (see 6.3.3). It is easier to identify the process of 'building a case' for complex questions, for example in the case of a serious illness or when parents choose a new school. However, 'building a case' may also occur for many non-complex information needs especially, for example when parents are seeking reassurance. Three parents Beverly, Gina and Andrea, all spoke about deciding on appropriate bedtimes for their children. Beverly in particular, reported that she had consulted a number of sources which included parenting books, magazines and the internet in the form of parental message boards and she also spoke to other parents in the school playground. She did this to get a feeling of what other parents thought and did. Gina also wanted to discover what other parents did and so set about 'building a case':

...[with] things like that and we got a feeling for how
it varied, or if your child was totally different to
everybody else. (Gina).

In Gina's case, she wanted reassurance that the way she treated her son was not different from the way in which his peers were treated by their parents. Alison spoke about the way she wanted to look at all angles because she likes to 'suss things out'. The way in which Alison does this is by approaching different sources and then:

I suppose I make it by thinking that sounds logical you know...as simple as that really...or that sounds as if it makes sense and that fits in with that...and this is the right type of information. (Alison)

Like many parents, Alison spoke about the big decision of choosing the right secondary school for her daughter and the burden she felt of 'getting it right'. All parents who had children at secondary school spoke about the concerns of wanting a good school for their children. However, in all but a two cases, parents who spoke about actively looking for and trying to choose the best school were those parents from the higher socio-economic backgrounds (schools A, B and church). Parents reported that they used a combination of sources such as: visiting the school, looking at the internet at both the school website and Ofsted¹⁰, speaking with people who had children attending the school, local 'gossip' and consulting their child.

Another widely cited example was the issues surrounding the MMR vaccine. Betty spoke about the pressure she felt to give her daughter the MMR, like many parents, she commented:

I like to step back and consider...and get as much information as I can. (Betty)

after this process of 'considering' she still felt that she could not decide and so she notes:

I then just looked for verbal confirmation from someone I trust like an old family member or my own partner. (Betty)

The sub-category building a case does not necessarily mean that a parent makes a comprehensive or exhaustive investigation into a specific query or need, although examples of this approach are evident in the cases of Andrew (autism information), Beverly (MMR information), Chloë (behavioural information), Denise (bone disease information) and Fiona (behavioural information). However, typically a parent will

¹⁰ Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills

approach a need or a problem by using a combination of techniques and will gather enough information for them to be informed and satisfied--the emphasis being on *enough*. Enough in this context relates to the parents being reassured that they have all the information they require. Examples include: Dani who spoke about a time she wanted to find out more information about dyslexia, she said:

I just read up on it [on the internet] and come into school and show[ed] it to Susan [PSA] to see what she says. (Dani)

Another example cited by a couple of parents including Andrea was after a visit to the GP with her son. Andrea notes that she came home and checked the NHS Direct website for confirmation and reassurance about what the GP had told her.

6.7.4 Relevance

Another method used by parents when weighing information is to determine its relevance. Television programmes such as Supernanny or the American programme Nanny 911 were both cited as potentially good sources of information. However, their relevance was questioned because of the extreme cases they portrayed. Relevance is also used in a similar way when weighing information from other media sources such as books or internet sites. Ellie, speaking about television programmes notes:

...now and again I catch things like Nanny 911...err but they are a hell of a lot worse situations more than mine ever were...I probably wouldn't use them as a source as such; some of the ideas are good in the way that they do things with the kids and teach the parent...Some of the information is pretty good so...[but]...I wouldn't use them as such, maybe use them for a reference. (Ellie)

Emma talking about Supernanny suggested that:

[my children are] quite well behaved and so it is not relevant to me...I think that if err, I had a really naughty child then you would look at Supernanny and look for any help. (Emma)

Emma noted that she liked to read real life case studies in parenting magazines because it helped her to judge a situation from different angles and also to easily assess its relevance to her.

Sharing experiences is a main source of information that parents consistently use. Where experiences are shared, relevance plays an important part in the acceptance process, as parents identify the potentially useful sources and discard what they do not perceive to be relevant. Speaking generally about accepting experiences, Gina stated:

...if it matches your own experience or your own perceptions of your children and how you have brought them up and I suppose that means you're are more inclined to accept it. (Gina)

Another aspect of relevance is that it does not necessarily mean that it is applied universally to all children in any given family; this was highlighted by the common statement that 'my children are very different'. Brady summarised this when she stated:

...it varies so much as a parent; one parent's child could be an absolute dream, we discovered quite early on that our child hadn't read the rule book when she came out, and when I spoke to the health visitors...I did read one book, partly and then dispensed with that—it was the Gina Ford...and one friend swore by it and it worked for her and not me and then when she had her second child she tore it up....But again my child is not the same as the one on the telly and I don't know how valuable it is finding out about this one child... that's fantastic... but mine is different so I tend to try to avoid them, rightly and wrongly...maybe I am just a control freak and no one can tell me how to bring up my child. (Brady)

6.7.5 World view

A parent's world view is closely aligned to the sub-category 'like me' (see section 6.5.5). This sub-category relates to the way a parent's own world view influences the way they assess information. Andrew, for example admitted that he trusted the information from

one of his closest friends over another, because he was 'more like me'. Similarly Betty for instance noted that:

...[with your] moral ideas I think you recall your own parents and I think [that you determine] what is acceptable or not acceptable. (Betty)

Betty notes that she was concerned about the potential risk of the MMR vaccine, especially as she had friends who had chosen not to have their sons vaccinated. However, her ultimate decision was not based on the information she had received, rather it was because of her own moral values: 'I felt morally obliged'. Abby made a similar decision about giving her children the MMR as she was strongly influenced by her values:

I believe very strongly in collective responsibility and that you should have children immunised but I found the decision around my daughter really difficult...I think there was some additional [information]...and I was listening to Woman's Hour and they were talking about it again and it was like actually I don't want any more information now, I have made my decision. (Abby)

A different example of how a parent's world view informs the assessment of information is illustrated by Geri when she was choosing a secondary school for her daughter. Like many parents, she and her husband investigated the local schools by visiting them, reading literature, speaking with other parents, as well as looking at the school's results. However, the issue that helped sway the decision was that:

...both [are] good schools but both are different in character and make up. I think the big pluses for [Any-town School] is that it is the multi-cultural element, true multi-everything it is a true comprehensive it is really mixed. (Geri)

An interesting perspective of how a personal view informs parents' willingness to accept information is highlighted by Dianne who was jointly interviewed with her friend Donna. Donna was talking about how the school's PSA had been helping her with

budgeting to help encourage healthy eating for her daughter, who had a limited diet.

Dianne suggested that, in her view:

A kid doesn't need to eat healthily tho, do they? I mean such as our Katie—she could live off junk food and not put an ounce on her... (Dianne)

Both Donna and Dianne seemed to agree with this assertion, which had been reinforced by them each seeing a television documentary that focused on a young girl who only ate chocolate. Added legitimacy was given to the documentary by a dietician interviewed on the programme who Donna quoted as saying:

...to us it's junk food but to a kid it's not...she has been on that diet all the time it's kept her metabolism going. (Donna)

6.7.6 Feelings and instincts

Feeling and instincts is a sub-category which originally developed out of the *in vivo* term gut feeling. Numerous terms were used by parents in the interviews such as: 'go with it', 'felt right', 'go with the flow', 'gut feeling', 'gut instinct', and 'mother's instinct' to describe a process of weighing the information. Within this sub-category, there is a distinction between feelings which are informed, such as those which have been informed by a logical process of searching and those which are which are not. An example of how feelings play an important part in parents' information seeking can be illustrated by the way they choose a new school for their child. Many parents reported that they undertake a mixed approach of both formal and informal information searching in order to assess which schools to apply for. However, ultimately it was how the school felt, or how their child felt about the school that took precedence over 'hard evidence' such as results and school facilities, as Alison explained:

...it was more to do with the feeling I got from the school, so I took onboard lots of different things but at the end of the day it was how I felt of the school.
(Alison)

Andrew spoke about how he often decided which information to examine closely, when sifting large quantities of information about autism. He noted that there was so much autism information, that he often relied on his 'gut feelings'. Andrew feels that

although he may miss some good information, he has now developed expertise to such an extent that he feels that he can make an educated judgment based on his 'gut feeling', and be right most or 'enough' of the time to make this a valid search strategy.

Chloë spoke of her 'mothering' instinct when describing the battle that she fought for nine years with various health and educational professionals regarding her son's complex needs. Her interview revolves around the struggles she had trying to find answers and how her own instincts told her that there was an explanation and that something could be done to help him. In Chloë's case, her instincts were to be proved correct, when she finally found a consultant paediatrician who gave her the diagnosis she felt was right. Feelings play an important role in the way that a parent assesses and makes decisions. Beverly for instance, undertook research on the internet and talked to friends about the safety of the MMR vaccine. She states that no one was able to reassure her of its safety and she had the feeling that it was unproven. Her attitude towards the GP is an interesting one:

I always felt they [GPs] were a bit biased, because you were aware that the government wanted children to have MMR and they were all given a standard spiel to give you so that you just kinda of got. (Beverly).

This example shows how the complex interaction between lack of trust, fear, need for reassurance and a feeling that the GP was not being totally honest, helped to shape her view that the only safe course of action would be to give her children the three single injections.

6.7.7 Reflection

Abby, Andrea, Betty, Cyndy and Emma all spoke about reflecting on information prior to making a decision. Ways in which parents reflect differed and include bouncing ideas off other people or simply talking through the issues:

...talking to people and talking things through, that's err with friends as well and family. (Betty)

Daisy uses reflection as a way to help her sort through her problems. She accomplishes this by 'talking the issue through'. For Daisy the process of talking it through involves discussing the issue with different 'trusted' sources, for example her local GP's receptionist, health visitor, and local PSA, all of whom provide her with a

'sounding board' for her to structure her thoughts and to seek clarification where she needs it. Andrew spoke about how he deals with seemingly contradictory information:

...occasionally you get conflicting advice and get very analytical. I would look at the two sources of the information and weigh them up in my mind, like how long have the couple been parents, gosh this sounds snobby...what sort of background do they come from are they educated are they able to make good decisions themselves. (Andrew)

Not all parents want to reflect, examples worthy of note come from School C and help to illustrate a disconnect in communication between professionals and some parents. Parents sometimes simply want 'black and white' answers without the need for reflection and weighing. Carol spoke about the breakdown of trust with her health visitor and also her GP, one of the contributory factors being that she was not 'given 'straight answers'. In the specific case of the health visitor, the breakdown of trust occurred because of seemingly contradictory advice given by a 'trusted' health professional and by her new 'un-trusted' health visitor. Carol had been told one thing and was now being told another, both pieces of advice possibly being true, a state of affairs with which Carol could not cope. The second example involved one of the observation parents and a discussion I was having with her about her health visitor. She said that she had asked her health visitor a question about weaning and the health visitor simply reflected the question back, asking 'what do you think?' This angered the parent whose view was that if she knew the answer, she would not have asked the question.

6.7.8 Summary

In this section we have examined the category 'weighing' and its five sub-categories. We started by examining its development as a category through the initial coding of the term assessing. Parents reported that they use a combination of techniques when trying to determine whether to accept information. They generally do not use a systematic or logical approach but rather they rely on trusted sources that are relevant to their needs and that fit with their own views and instincts.

6.8 Summary

This chapter has analysed and described the data obtained through the interviews for this research. It has not provided a comment on the data, a full discussion of which will be given in chapter 7. This chapter firstly outlined the demographic composition of the sample group. This was done in order to provide a contextual background to the data analysis. This was followed by five sections which provided a brief summary of the developed GT categories as well as descriptions of all sub-categories related to it. The five GT categories which emerged from the data analysis process are:

- GT category A: Being a parent
- GT category B: Connectivity
- GT category C: Trust
- GT category D: Picture of Self
- GT category E: Weighing

The following chapter is a critical discussion of these five GT categories as well as description of the development of a 'core' category.

7 Discussion and Analysis: Parents' Information Seeking Context

7.1 Introduction

The previous chapter provided a summary of the substantive findings of the research. The findings are presented in the form of five grounded theory (GT) categories, these being:

- GT category A: Being a parent
- GT category B: Connectivity
- GT category C: Trust
- GT category D: Picture of self
- GT category E: Weighing

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an analysis and discussion of these categories, this being accomplished in two parts. The first part will define the GT core category and then relate it to the remaining categories outlined above. Each of the remaining four categories will then be related to the core category A: 'being a parent'. The second part of this chapter presents a discussion on each of the five categories in terms of their relationship to the substantive theory and also in relation to the wider library and information science (LIS) literature.

7.2 Defining a core category

This study is principally concerned with developing a substantive theory (see 4.3.1) using GT. A core category is generally one which has '*the greatest explanatory relevance and highest potential for linking all other categories together*' (Corbin & Strauss, 2008: p. 104). Holton (2007) goes further by suggesting that a core category could be '*a process, a typology, a continuum, a range, a dimension, conditions or consequence*' (p. 279).

The need to define a core category has been a source of debate in recent years (Holton, 2007). Charmaz (2006) discounts the relevance of the core category, making no mention of it in her constructivist GT approach. Charmaz argues that there has been a focus on '*overt statements, [and] not actions—more than the tacit, the liminal, and the implicit*' (Charmaz, 2004: p. 982). In other words, she prefers not to focus on the overt, (focusing on a core) rather she wants to examine the tacit examples of a phenomenon.

This research has taken a constructivist approach to GT, however, it was felt that it would be helpful, to define a core category, principally for orientating and providing a focus to the research. Underscoring Charmaz's (2004) concerns of potentially overly focusing on a particular phenomenon, two categories emerged as viable core categories, namely: category A: 'being a parent' and category C: 'trust'. Initially the category 'trust' emerged as the preferred core category. It soon became apparent that 'trust' plays an important role in linking the three categories of 'connectivity', 'weighing' and 'picture of self'. Corbin and Strauss (2008) suggest that one of the criteria of a core variable should be that it links the other concepts, something that the category 'trust' seemed to perform. Holton (2007) adds that a core category should also be meaningful, stable and must relate to the other categories. Certainly 'trust' relates to other categories, however, it was not always meaningful when taken as a focus, and was not considered able to 'support' the substantive theory.

The category 'being a parent' emerged as the one most suited to becoming the core category and which met the criteria of being able to link the other categories. It was 'stable' and grounded, relating to the other four categories, and importantly, it was meaningful to the other categories, in that it set a context for their existence, something that the category 'trust' did not achieve. My initial concerns were that, as a category, it seemed too obvious and also that it would be difficult to develop beyond a general description. However, when viewed in the context of determining a parent's information world, it is the central category which initiates, informs, and directs the information search process and one, more importantly, into which all other categories relate. The category in its final form evolved from the early code 'parental responsibility', a theme that explained the motivations underpinning a parent's need to search for information. The category describes both the motivations and the range of complex and non-complex information searching that parents undertake. Central to the category is the underlying assumption that parents want to do the best for their children and one way to achieve this is by trying to make the best decisions for them. However, a parent's information world is either helped or hindered by a range of emotions, values and attitudes, as well as complexity of need and importance of need. These helps or hindrances are shaped and influenced by the remaining four categories of: trust; picture of self; connectivity and weighing. The whole theory is diagrammatically summarised in Figure 7-1 Being a parent on page 176.

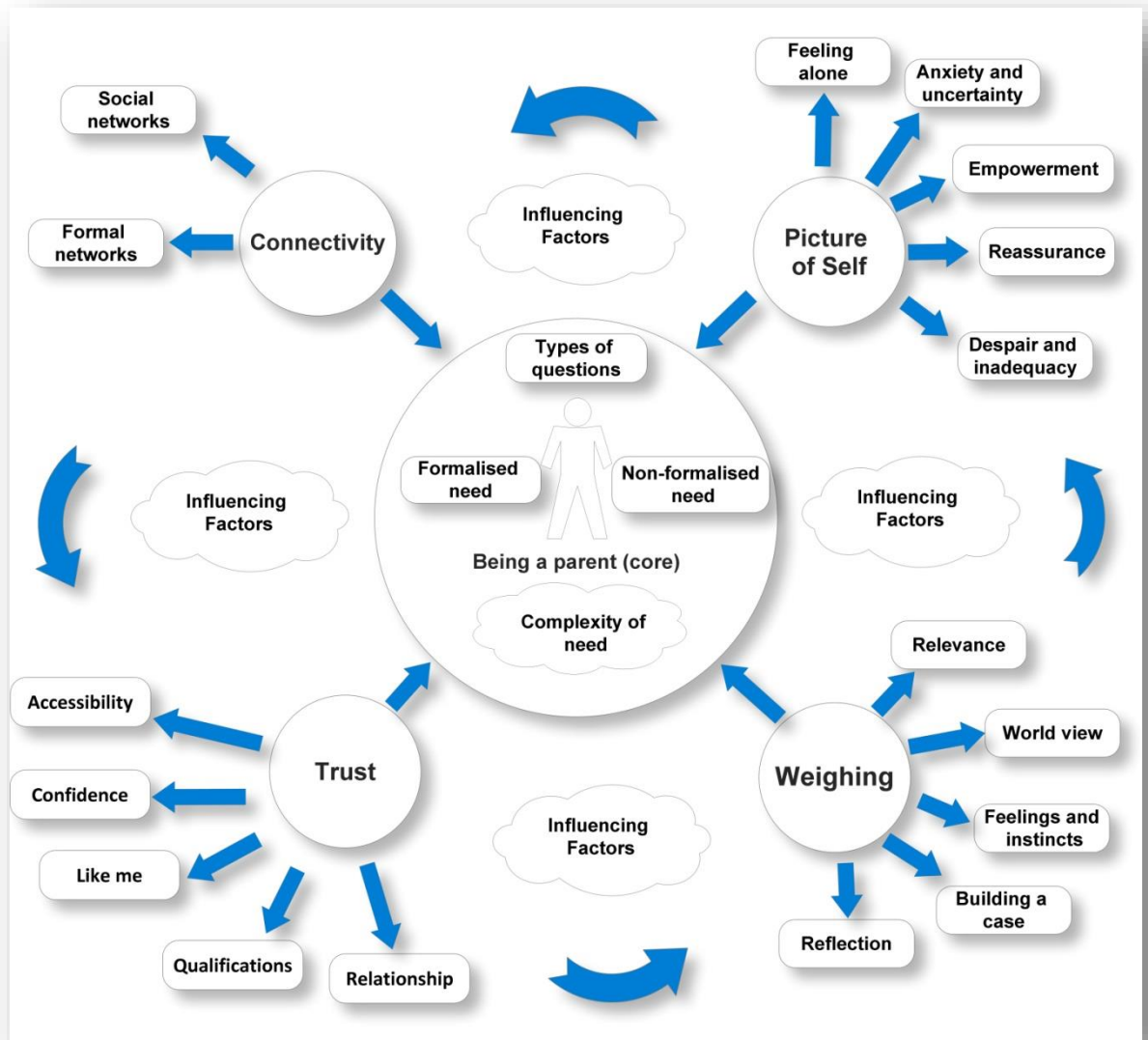


Figure 7-1 Being a parent

This following section discusses each of the five categories in light of the findings presented in the previous chapter, as well as critically relating them to the LIS literature.

7.3 GT category A: Being a parent (core)

7.3.1 Introduction

This category defines and explains the underlying motivation underpinning a parent's need to search for information in order to successfully fulfil their parental responsibility. Chapter 2 outlines the recent social and political trend towards a greater focus and scrutiny, holding parents to greater account for their actions as carers. The data suggests that within their information world, parents both consciously and unconsciously look for

information that will underpin, support and inform their parenting. Influencing their ability to successfully search for information are external elements which include their social connectivity, their trust of people, organisations and sources, their own emotional picture of themselves and their ability to weigh the information.

The findings outlined in chapter 6 clearly show that parents seek a wide range of information within a complex set of underlying motivations. Without any existing or specific formal theory directly relating to parents' information seeking, comparisons have to be drawn from a number of studies which have either attempted to classify types of questions parents have (Nicholas & Marden, 1997a, 1998) or have attempted to examine the ways specific groups of parents search for information (Hersberger, 2001). An important source of comparison is also provided by general models of everyday life information seeking (ELIS) (Dervin, 1983; Kari & Savolainen, 2003; Savolainen, 1995; Wilson, 2005).

Savolainen (1993) is notable in his criticisms of the traditional approach to information needs research. He suggests that an emphasis purely on the cognitive information processes fails to capture the richness of information as constructed through the interaction of the individual and the socio-cultural contexts. Savolainen's own approach is to focus on the socio-cultural context using the notion of 'habitus' as a starting point, a view that is consistent with the dual approach of formalised and non-formalised searching argued in this thesis.

7.3.2 Distinction between formalised and non-formalised searching

In our daily lives we all play many different roles, each having an information need component (Moore, 2002). The data shows that parents inhabit a world of 'being a parent'; this notion was highlighted by a range of comments and emotions expressed by the interviewees, for example:

...you have to get it right. (Alison)

...when it's for your kids you have to be strong. (Carol)

...you want the best for you kids. (Daisy)

Such sentiments permeated through all of the interviews regardless of the parent's socio-economic background as they all expressed the feeling of wanting the best for their children. This was illustrated by Cyndy who has an extremely antagonistic and difficult relationship with her daughter, when she noted:

The thing is she is quite brainy...and year 9 is an important year and if she flumps it she will end up in a back street factory, you know she is really good with numbers and she could be an accountant. (Cyndy)

What differentiated parents was not their underlying desire to want the best for their children, but their ability to effectively help and support their children through their information searching. The differences between the parents' questions and their information needs were wide and varied, especially in terms of both complexity and emphasis, with those parents from schools C, D and F generally recounting examples of more complex needs (although in the case of school F, the pupil referral unit (PRU), this should have been expected). The ability of a parent to successfully navigate and find answers was found to be influenced by a number of factors. Identifiable factors relating to their education and social capital were quite apparent, this having overtones of Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*, which itself is a central foundation to Savolainen's (1995) general model of ELIS (see Figure 3-1). Another example of research which also has resonance with the findings of this thesis is proposed by McKenzie (2002). Her research, which is influenced by the work of Savolainen (1995), consisted of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with pregnant women and analysed accounts of practitioner-patient information seeking. Her findings are summarised in below in Table 7-1.

Table 7-1 A model of information practices

- identification of potentially helpful sources;
- serendipitous encounters;
- being given information without active seeking, for example: I was told/advised;
- planned encounter with potentially helpful sources, for example: seeing the doctor;
- referrals to potentially helpful sources;
- proxy searchers, for example: a sister looked on the web for me and gave me the information;
- barriers to seeking connections;
- making connections with potentially helpful sources;
- connection failures: unsuccessful attempts to make connections with potentially helpful sources, for example: the failure of the social services to help etc;
- barriers to interact with identified sources for example: source contacted did not help, for example: schools not helping in the way the parent wanted.

Source: (McKenzie 2002: p. 5)

McKenzie's (2002) summary is interesting because it highlights areas which were also evident in my data. McKenzie's model takes into account what this research defines as 'non-formalised' searching, which she terms as either 'serendipitous information searching' or '*being given information without actively seeking*' (p. 23). McKenzie also notes the use of proxy searching, a concept that is implicit in the use of parent support advisors (PSAs) primarily for parent at schools C, D and F, but not widely seen among parents at schools A, B and church. Nevertheless, it is implicit within the two categories of 'connectivity' (7.4) and 'trust' (7.5). A third area of similarity, is that McKenzie identifies what she terms as 'connection failure' (p. 23), those instances which hinder or prevent parents from looking for information effectively.

My argument for drawing a distinction between formalised and non-formalised searching is centres on the very different approaches parents adopt for two distinct kinds of questions and searching (see Figure 6-3 Level of need, p. 124). This distinction between the types of searching has parallels with Savolainen's (1995) 'project of life' and 'problematic situations'. There is a relatively wide literature identifying different forms of searching such as 'information encountering' (Erdelez, 1997), 'berry picking' (Bates, 1989) or 'information grounds' (Fisher & Hinton, 2004). However, existing research and models have not adequately addressed the diversity and complexities of question types faced by actors in their everyday information seeking, preferring to either identify the mechanics of the search or the subject of the search. Dervin (1983) for example, implies a complex type of question, whether verbalised or not, in order to make sense of a specific situation or to 'bridge the gap'. Fisher and colleagues (Fisher et al., 2004), identify different forms of searching used by 'Hispanic farm workers'. Other studies have made a distinction between question types, for example a widely cited and now quite old study was undertaken by Nicholas and Marden (1997a, 1998). Their research aimed to determine and examine the types of questions parents have (see Table 3-1; p.47). Nicholas and Marden reported that parents tended to have information needs relating to issues centred around the following areas: child health, child care, child development and schools. The concepts of formalised and non-formalised searching will be developed in the following sections.

7.3.3 Formalised searching

Formalised searching is arguably the easiest form of searching to identify and is the approach historically addressed by LIS research. In the context of this research I have defined it as specific questions, requirements or needs that require an answer or outcome. Within the scope of formalised needs, there is a sliding scale ranging from very simple through to very complex (see Figure 6-3, p. 124). The reason for this is because of the

spectrum of information needs parents reported they had; each need being important in itself, but nevertheless quite different in scope and complexity. For example, Gina spoke about a relatively simple need when she helped her young son search the internet for local history information for his school project. This contrasted with complex needs over many years as Chloë fought for a proper diagnosis (and answers) to determine her son's behavioural problems. Despite being quite different in terms of type and complexity, each of these needs requires parents to purposefully look for information as they each fulfil the role of parental responsibility. These two examples illustrate the difficulties of trying to collate parental information needs. One typical approach has been to group types of information by categories, this was done by Nicholas and Marden (1997a, 1998) and Hersberger (2001). This approach allows the researcher to examine general questions being asked by parents. A potential problem with this approach is that it is possible to inadvertently skew the results so as to reflect the bigger or more memorable questions or information needs which are easier for the interviewees to recall during the interview. The consequence of this is that many of the lower level information needs that form part of a parent's daily life are consequently forgotten or simply not recognised. This bias certainly accounts for the large number of parents talking about issues such as the MMR, health issues, school selection and other 'life stage' or memorable type questions.

7.3.4 Non-formalised searching

Unlike formalised information searching, non-formalised searching is a concept that is more abstract in its composition. Non-formalised searching can be either a verbalised (recognised or acted upon) or un-verbalised information need, operating at either conscious or subconscious levels. An example of the subconscious level is illustrated by Gina, who during her interview remembered an incident of how a friend dealt with a parenting situation which in turn later informed how own parenting style. Similar examples were also cited by Abby and Betty, who each reported that they too watch and look at the way other parents deal with their children without realising they were doing it. As far back as 1977, Wilson noted that people can '*discover information in everyday life*' (Wilson, 1977: p. 36).

Parents used terms to describe times when they assimilated useful information without realising they were either in need of it or that they were really searching. They used a range of terms to describe the process such as: 'I came upon it', 'I stumbled upon', or 'I simply found the information', 'bumble along'. In these instances parents related how they 'came upon' information for which they had not formally been looking, but which met a need. An example of this occurrence was illustrated by Emma who was watching a television documentary about early puberty in pre-teenage girls. Emma

recounted how the programme 'suddenly made sense' of some of the issues her pre-teenage daughter had been going through, but which she had not recognised as something she needed to investigate.

Non-formalised searching is very evident as parents construct their own parenting styles and values, as they develop and adapt the parenting skills through their family life stages. Types of questions can be similar to those asked during formalised searching such as issues relating to child behaviours, access to services, local clubs and societies. The interview sample highlighted four primary places where non-formalised information searching occurred, these being: the media, internet, sharing with other parents and life (see Figure 7-2).

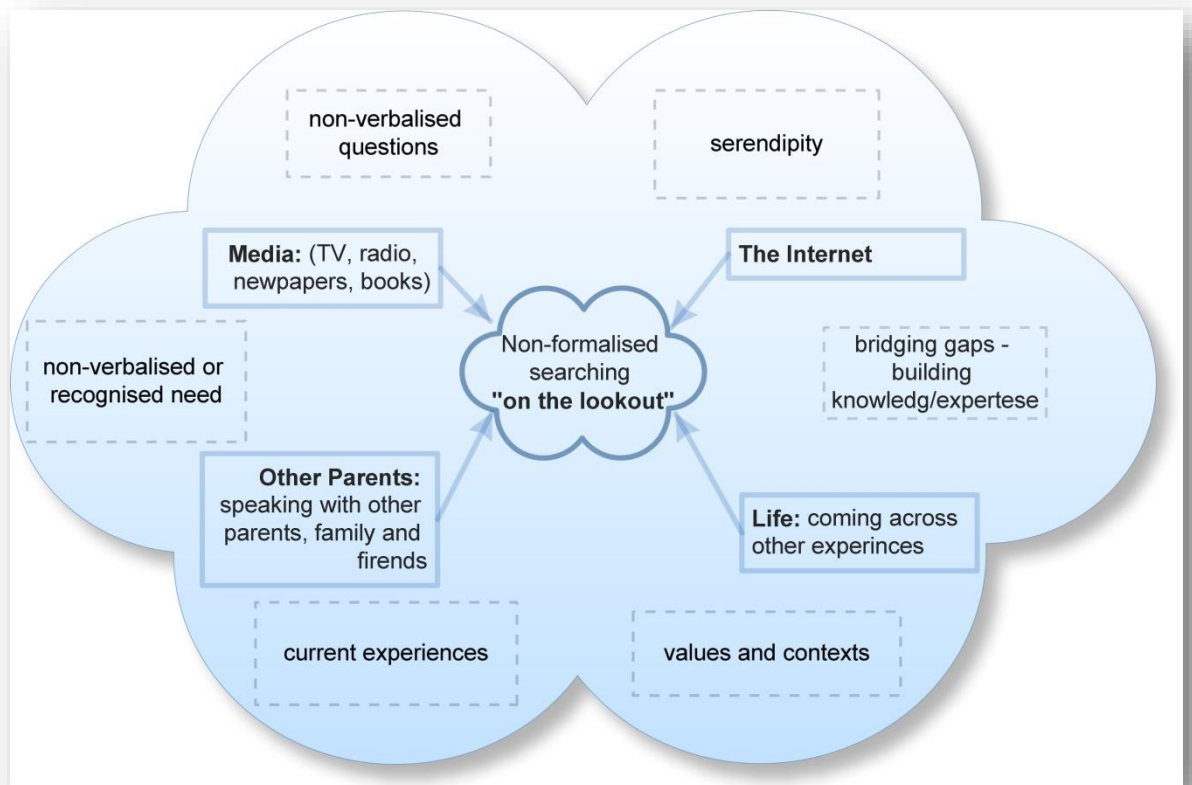


Figure 7-2 Non-formalised searching

With the exception of 'life', the other three places represent common sources where a parent would generally expect to be exposed to some relevant information; this is reminiscent of information browsing, a theory which has developed around the concept of environmental scanning which is related to information acquired about events, trends and relationships (Choo, 2003; Choo & Auster, 1993). Traditionally environmental scanning is

a theory of organisational management. Information encountering (Erdelez, 1997, 1999, 2004) is another example of types of 'browsing' and 'scanning', all of which can fit within either formalised or non-formalised searching. Moore cites it as an important element of social information seeking, describing it as '*building a cognitive map of our world*' (Moore, 2002: p. 298). Serendipity is a LIS concept that can be part of either formalised or non-formalised searching. Foster and Ford (2003) describe serendipity as a:

...phenomenon arising from both conditions and strategies – as both a purposive and a non-purposive component of information seeking and related knowledge acquisition (p. 321).

In summary, we have very briefly seen that the notion of non-formalised information searching has points of commonality with existing theory, especially in the realms of information browsing, serendipity and environmental scanning.

The findings clearly reveal that parents will both consciously and sub-consciously look for information that will improve or help their parenting or will help meet a parenting need. They will expose themselves to sources of potential help or pay particular attention to types of articles or television programmes or involve themselves in social discussions with other parents. Such an approach, where there is no formalised question, will increase the likelihood of a serendipitous encounter, one that will provide them with some information which they will consider to be either useful or potentially useful.

7.3.5 Types of questions

The previous two sections have outlined the difference between formalised and non-formalised information searching by parents. These sections have also highlighted the difficulties in establishing accurately, patterns of information searching by parents. I have argued that because much of a parent's information searching is integral to their role of being a parent, it is forgotten when it comes to interviewing parents. It is easier for a parent to remember, when being interviewed, types of questions they have had which meant they had to specifically search for information, for example: times when a child was ill, or they were looking at schools. Consequently, this makes it difficult for any researcher who wishes to map the information world of parents. These difficulties can be overcome by employing different research techniques, such as the use of focused observations and diaries; this area specifically is one that warrants further investigation (see 8.7).

Despite these difficulties and concerns, an attempt has been made to sketch an outline of parents' information seeking, based on the existing interview data and also with additional material supplemented from observations from the playgroup visits and also the limited contact through the outreach work I conducted with a PSA. The reasoning behind

this was twofold. Firstly, to see if the findings differed markedly from existing research, and also to enable me an opportunity to gain a flavour of the types of information sought by parents. It is important to remember that these findings are weighted towards formalised need, however it is hoped that this skewed effect has been mitigated by the research method and the nature of the semi-structured interviews. The approach adopted during the interviews was that once an interviewee was talking, remembrances were often 'sparked'; when this occurred, it enabled the topic to be explored in further detail.

The early stages of analysis saw the emergence of the category 'life stage', which reflected the types of information parents sought at different times. This early category can be summarised into three broad areas.

- a) early childhood issues;
- b) later development; and
- c) specific issues.

This category was not eventually used; however, it does provide some useful context. There were three main reasons for the rejection of the category, in its early form. The first and, arguably the main problem with the sub-category was that it became too general and was not able to offer the specificity needed for analysis. A second concern was that it was based upon too many exceptions and assumptions. For example: the general assumption that a parent who had a second child would have less information needs than a first time parent because they were now experienced. The reality of this assumption is much more complex, as parents reported returning to trusted sources such as baby books and magazines in order to 'refresh' their memories. A third concern related to the notion that no child is the same and each have their own personalities and needs. This is illustrated by Gaby's comment that her first child was a 'perfect baby...who slept through the night' and her second child did not and was a 'terror'.

During data analysis seven broad sub-categories were defined, representing parents' information needs. These sub-categories are: economic, education, health, life stages, miscellaneous, parents' own skill development and social development.

These sub-categories need to be treated with the following caveats in mind. Firstly, it is difficult to succinctly generalise parents' information seeking. The second caveat relates to the first insofar as a specific information need could arguably be classified under a number of headings, for example: Faye's adopted son has complex behavioural problems which affect his educational needs and also his wider social needs and so on a general level her information needs could be justifiably classified into three sub-categories.

Despite the potential charge of being too general and open to ambiguity, it is concluded that a classification of parents' information needs can provide a useful frame for painting a

broad picture of the types of information parents look for and by adopting this approach for this category, it is possible to draw comparisons with similar work. The most obvious research is that conducted in 1997 by Nicolas and Marsden, whose aim was to discover the information needs of parents. They interviewed 33 mothers in London and their findings are presented in Table 7-2. A direct comparison between the results is impossible. Problems arise between different approaches to the research, the time between the research and also the methods of classifying the categories. Despite such issues, it is possible to draw broad comparisons between the data. Nicholas and Marden reported that issues relating to health of the child were the most widely cited need; this is unquestionably true for my research. Their other categories related to child development, school and behaviour issues which also appeared frequently in my research, although I have used different classifications of education, life stages and social development. Hersberger's (2001) research presents another interesting summary of parents' information needs, albeit from a specific context of homeless parents in the United States. Her research, based on Dervin's sense-making method, found that information about finance was the most sought information, followed by child care information.

Table 7-2 presents a summary of the parents' needs as found in this study, as well as providing a comparison with the research conducted by Nicolas and Marsden (1997a) and Hersberger's (2001). Those issues ranked as '1' were the most commonly mentioned information need identified by each study. Walker and Nicholas and Marden, place the 'health of the child' as the most commonly sought information need. Walker has 'education' as the second most important need. Nicholas and Marden however, have this ranked at 4. Nicholas & Marden also make mention of 'child care', an issue that was mentioned only a couple of times in the interviews that formed this study and is, therefore placed in miscellaneous.

Table 7-2 Comparisons of information seeking between studies

Rank	Walker 2010 (current study)	Nicholas & Marden (1997b)	Hersberger (2001)
1	Health for the child (see section 6.3.5.3)	Health for the child	Finance
2	Education (see section 6.3.5.5)	Child care	Child care and relationships
3	Economic (see section 6.3.5.2)	Child development	Housing

4	Life stages (see 6.3.4.4)	School	Health
5	Miscellaneous (see section 6.3.5.4)	Behaviour	Employment
6	Parents own skill development (see section 6.3.5.6)	Careers, education and training	Education
7	Social development (see section 6.3.5.1)	Health for the parents	Transportation
8		Finance	Public assistance
9			Shelter

Another recent and notable investigation was conducted by Fisher and Landry (2007) is a study focused on the American 'stay-at-home mother's' (SAHMs). This research will be discussed later (see section 7.6) because its primary focus was to investigate the role of affect (emotions) on mother's information seeking.

7.3.6 Summary

This section has primarily focused on the core GT category of 'being a parent'. The role of being a parent is complex and diverse. This complexity is at the heart of what it is to be a parent in modern Britain as individuals exercise their parental responsibilities. In order for parents to exercise these duties, they rely both on formalised and non-formalised information searching. These GT categories were developed out of the experiences of the interviewees. Importantly, for the trustworthiness of this study, the findings showed both comparisons and resonance with existing ELIS research.

A third part of the category of 'being a parent' is the sub-category of 'types of questions' which is a summary of the types of information sought by parents who participated in this study. The main reason for including this data is to help provide a broad contextual setting from which the sub-categories of formalised and non-formalised searching fit. Also, by including this sub-category, it provides an opportunity to attempt to draw generalisable comparisons with previous research studies.

7.4 GT category B: Connectivity

7.4.1 Introduction

The category 'connectivity' was outlined in terms of its definition and context in section 6.4. The locating of the category in terms of a parent's information world is one that is both influenced by, and influences other categories, such as a parent's 'picture of self' and also the 'trust' they have in other people. This category is analogous to a conduit acting as an interface between the parent and other people. This category comprises two types of connectivity, namely the sub-categories of social networks and formal networks. The first sub-category, 'social connectivity' is a concept that includes a parent's interaction with their family, friends, and other parents. The second sub-category, 'formal networks' typically relates to a parent's use of, and interaction with, 'formal' services or professionals such as doctors, nurses, teachers, as well as local parent support advisors (PSAs). The notion of social connectivity and people's perceived preference for socialised sources of information is an important basis for a large body of LIS theory and one which has been well documented within the literature (Case, 2002; Chatman, 1987a, 1991b, 1996, 1999, 2001; Fisher et al., 2004; Harris & Dewdney, 1994; Johnson, 1997; Pettigrew, 1999; Pettigrew et al., 2001; Savolainen, 2009b).

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

7.4.2 Social Connectivity

This is the most common form of information gathering for the day-to-day information needs of parents and comprised a huge amount of data during the analysis. It was possible to identify two general approaches to types of social connectivity, these being separated into family and close friends and neighbours and other parents.

7.4.2.1 Family and close friends

The findings revealed that parents generally reported that they have a trusted source who they would consult at an early stage or a 'first port of call' when they had any information need—these sources typically comprise of their own parents, siblings or close friends.

These are used for both formalised and non-formalised information searching and are valued and trusted; the reason for this trust being dealt with in sections 6.5 and 7.5. The composition of these trusted sources varied widely across all social groups with about half of parents reporting that their own mothers were the first place they would turn to for help and advice. One typical example is Chloë who spoke about her parents being her primary source and the first place she always turns to for help and advice. Andrea was different, preferring to speak with either her older sister or close friends. Andrea justified this by suggesting that it was more important for her to speak with people who are facing or who have recently faced similar parenting issues. Regardless of who the trusted person is, the common defining qualification centred on them being close to the parent and someone who is either ahead of them in terms of parental life stage, or who is collegiate to them and could share experiences. This approach is reminiscent of Granovetter's (1973; 1983) work on weak and strong ties, where he defines an interpersonal tie in the following way:

the strength of a tie is a (probably linear) combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding), and the reciprocal services which characterize the tie (Granovetter, 1973:p. 1361).

Taking Granovetter's central premise of strong ties, these occur between either individuals or communities who have strong links or who are similar, and who have access to similar resources and therefore, have access to the same information. From the perception of the parent, this can either be beneficial or negative because much is dependent upon the quality of the information. Granovetter (1973; 1983), writing from a non-LIS setting, suggests that strong ties, when applied to *social communities may breed local cohesion, [but may] lead to overall fragmentation* (p. 1378). Granovetter's theory has been the basis of LIS scholarship (Chatman, 1999; Savolainen, 2009a) as it helps to offer an explanation of the ways actors look for and receive information. Granovetter's theory, pre-supposes that actors with strong ties will have access to the same or similar resources and will, therefore, need to utilise their weak ties. However, for certain groups of people the notion of the 'outsider' (Chatman, 1996) or 'weak ties', may hinder this process, because the outsider, in certain communities, is viewed with suspicion. This phenomenon was illustrated in a number of the interviews from parents from schools C, D and F and was noticeable with interviewees such as Dianne, Fern and Fiona. Interestingly, this phenomenon was not so visible with parents from the higher socio-economic backgrounds, who generally were only too willing to use and 'exploit' their weak ties.

7.4.3 Neighbours and other parents

Many of the parents reported that they had used their social networks of colleagues and friends as sources of information. As with the previous section (see 7.4.2) the parents described both formalised and non-formalised information searching. Typically, where a friend (not a close friend) or acquaintance was used as a source of information for a formalised question, the parent perceived that they held some unique or special knowledge. This approach was particularly apparent with those parents interviewed from schools A and B and church, especially for information needs relating to schooling and health concerns. Those parents from the higher socio-economic backgrounds were willing to utilise their own wider social networks. This approach lends itself to Granovetter's (1973; 1983) notion of 'weak ties'. The benefit of using weak ties for information seeking is that it provides a potential for unconnected and new information to be disseminated between individuals or communities (Lin, 2002; Savolainen, 2009a).

Within a context of non-formalised searching, the findings also generally agree with the studies of Ball and Vincent (1998) and also Pettigrew (1999). Ball & Vincent's GT research focuses on the issue of school choice. They suggest that the local 'grape vine' and 'community gossip' play an important part in informing parents' opinion about local schools, this same phenomenon was widely noted during the analysis of this research, with an important sub-category being developed called 'grape vine'. The interviews in this research showed, that nearly all parents, regardless of their socio-economic backgrounds, based some or all of their opinions about local schools upon the local 'grape vine'.

Pettigrew (1999) and Fisher (née Pettigrew) has written extensively on the concept, developing and applying it to a range of settings which have included parents (Fisher & Hinton, 2004; Fisher & Landry, 2007; Fisher et al., 2004). Information grounds are '*environment[s] temporarily created when people come together for a singular purpose but from whose behaviour emerges a social atmosphere that fosters the spontaneous and serendipitous sharing of information*' (Pettigrew, 1999, p. 811). This statement seems to be generally true in my data for much of the type of searching categorised as non-formalised and where there is a social element to it. Examples cited by interviewees include discussions with other parents in the school play ground, mothers groups, church groups, and coffee mornings, have all been mentioned as places where parents, both formally and informally, share information about a wide range of subjects, for example: sleep, feeding, bedtimes and pocket money.

7.4.3.1 Social divergences

The findings show that a significant minority of parents from schools D, E and F claimed that they do not have a family member or close friend who they felt that they could turn to for information or advice. These findings initially surprised and challenged my own assumptions which pre-supposed that there would be a community spirit among parents from the lower social groups. The findings revealed that those parents who were facing the most challenges in their daily parenting were those who had, or felt that they had, the least support. It is interesting to note that all of these parents have some ongoing parenting challenges centred around child behaviour. Parents such as Cyndy, Donna, Dianne, Donna, Fiona and Fern all mentioned a range of symptoms relating to their inability to find help or support; these symptoms in their extreme form were attributed to depression and feelings of despair. My findings seem to contradict those of Hayter (2005) whose research among a similar demographic examined the information needs of the residents from a deprived housing estate in the North East of England. Hayter found that among the residents, there existed '*a culture of everyone looking after their own, and the social networks on the estate were effective in communicating locally important information*' (p. 215). An interesting interview that may help to shed light on this apparent contradiction was with two good friends and neighbours Dianne and Donna. They consented to be interviewed on the basis that they would be interviewed together. Despite being very good friends and 'always around each other's house' (Donna), they each spoke about privacy and not wanting to burden friends with their problems, noting that: 'everyone has their own problems'. The emphasis was that everyone has their own problems that they have to work through themselves. Dominique, also from the same estate, spoke about feeling that she has to 'cope' because she doesn't want to be seen as a failure. This attitude of self sufficiency or coping was a common theme that only emerged from parents interviewed from the lower socio-economic groups, this being in stark and direct contrast with the general attitudes expressed by those parents from schools A, B and church. This was highlighted by the apparent willingness of those parents from the higher socio-economic background to share with and ask for help and support from family and friends, or whoever they thought had the relevant experience. Possible reasons for this phenomenon are examined in section 7.6, concerning the category picture of self.

7.4.3.2 Formalised networks

Formalised networks are those that relate to any external agencies and can include doctors, teachers, and social services. Chatman's (1996) notion of 'small world lives' has influenced a lot of recent ELIS research (Savolainen, 2009b), especially her notion of the

role of the outsider. Chatman states that smaller communities prefer to base their information seeking on help and advice sought from within their small world or community, at the expense of believing outsiders. This is something Hayter (2005) specifically examined in her research when she reported that:

...people felt it was vital to keep secrets and problems within the community...people preferred to trust a local familiar source that was potentially unreliable over an unfamiliar external source. (p. 215)

Chatman developed her theory of information poverty in relation to the small world, focusing particularly on the poorer members of society: janitors (Chatman, 1990), women's prisons (Chatman, 1999) and the elderly in a care home (Chatman, 1992). Comparing her established theories to the findings of this research, there seems to be a high degree of agreement. My findings suggest that similar attitudes exist between parents from different socio-economic backgrounds when it comes to approaching formalised networks. The clearest picture is provided by parents from lower socio-economic backgrounds and was contextualised by a range of emotions, attitudes and fears which were expressed in terms of mistrust between themselves and support services, particularly, doctors, schools and social services, who were invariably people they perceived to be different to themselves--'the suits' (Carol). Dianne for example has had a lot of problems with her son's behaviour, blaming it on a range of issues. When discussing where she had turned to for help, she spoke in disparaging and dismissive tones about help and support given by his school and also justified why she had not gone to see her local GP. In her analysis of the situation she was supported by Donna who was interviewed with her. Dianne's view can be characterised by a 'them and us' mentality, an attitude common in a number of interviewees such as in the interview with Donna. These findings being similar with those of Chatman (1991b) and her development of Granovetter's theory of weak and strong ties (Granovetter, 1973; 1983).

As with anything, there are exceptions to the general finding, that parents from lower socio-economic backgrounds do not utilise external agencies or support. For example in Daisy's interview, which was focused on her search for council housing, she spoke of her willingness to utilise any support she could. This included, using her PSA, approaching local housing charities and even her local MP. Two other examples from school D include David and Denise who each have very specific needs and were willing to access all available help. It is interesting to note that David and Denise are both retired grandparents looking after their respective grandchildren. They are also quite different from the other interviewees from school D in terms of their age and their former careers.

The role of the PSAs (see 7.4.3.3) plays an important function in providing parents from schools C, D and F with access to formalised information, to the extent that in some of the interviews (Carol, Daisy, Deirdre, Dani and Fern) it was apparent that the PSA either completely or partially took on the role of a 'surrogate' trusted friend. They help to bridge the gap where a parent feels isolated and where they feel that they do not have a trusted social network from which to seek help and advice. Where these relationships worked they had huge potential to help the parents. The drawback of the PSA's role, however, is that there are far too few to make a significant impact. This was highlighted when I spent time with a PSA on an outreach programme and had numerous conversations with her. The reality is that there are many parents who are deemed to be in need of support and help but are in reality 'hard to reach' because they do not fully participate in the local programmes. Another issue, highlighted at school C, was the need for trust to be built up between the PSA and the parents. This has happened at school D, where Susan, the PSA has been in post for nearly twenty years and a PSA long before the relatively recent development of Sure Start and other government policy. A third concern relating to the PSA role highlighted by Susan herself was that she became the single gate-keeper. Although beneficial to an extent this meant that parents were not inclined to develop or use their own information seeking skills, this was in spite of many local parents attending parenting and self development courses.

Parents from the higher socio-economic backgrounds differed from those parents from the lower socio-economic backgrounds in that they seem only too willing to use and exploit any potential sources of help and advice. It is interesting to note that parents from schools A, B and church reported few problems in relation to their children's behaviour and so, arguably had less stigma attached to their information seeking. There seems to be a general consensus that formal networks consist of people like them. Interestingly this was not always reciprocated as both Gaby and Andrea relayed examples of 'older' GPs holding a view of superiority and not treating them as equals, as they expected.

Around certain issues, notably the MMR vaccine, parents from higher socio-economic backgrounds were generally open to being more suspicious or questioning of official advice or information if they felt they did not agree with it. These parents were better connected and were able to use their social contacts to find information, from trusted sources about issues regarding the MMR or schools. However, where a view was perceived to have been imposed by an official body, behaviour akin to Chatman's (1996) theory of the outsider became visible. This is very visible with Beverly, who belongs to an online community which has resonance with a virtual small world and was naturally sceptical about the MMR vaccine.

7.4.3.3 The parent support advisor (PSA)

Throughout the report I have used the term 'parent support advisor' (PSA) loosely to describe a number of posts fulfilling similar aims. PSAs are located in areas of deprivation and liaise with parents who have particular difficulties. PSAs therefore specifically relate to those parents interviewed from schools D, E and F and act as a central contact or community gate-keeper.

Susan, the PSA at school D, is perhaps a unique example. She has been in post many years, predating recent government initiatives and acts as liaison between the primary school and parents, in what is a challenging inner city housing estate. Susan has a track record of helping parents and she has become a trusted community source of information as parents will still approach her even when their children have left the school. Sally, another PSA, is seen as equally important by those parents who she helps, although she is relatively recent in post as a result of the new children's centres. She complains that she is unable to cement relationships with the parents on the housing estate on which she works because of long term planning and funding issues. Where PSAs are established and have relationships with parents, they can provide an invaluable role in enabling parents to access a wide range of information. PSAs such as Sally and Susan have managed to dismantle some of the potential barriers that a social outsider may face in the context of Chatman's (1991b) small world. This may be because they are not seen as 'suits', but rather as people not dissimilar to those they are trying to reach. In Susan's case, she has a very long track record of helping the community and is so viewed as 'one of them'.

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

7.4.4 Summary

The findings reveal that all parents rely and place great importance on other people as sources of information. These findings support the notion that this role is usually fulfilled by family and close friends, especially for parents who possess high social capital. This

assertion still holds true to an extent for many of the parents from the lower social backgrounds. In particular for parents from schools C, D, E and F, who reported that they generally used and trusted their local PSA, a relationship not available for all parents from similar backgrounds because of a range of factors, chiefly availability and resourcing.

The findings show that a substantial minority of parents from the lower socio-economic backgrounds had formalised needs that they felt were private and were unable to share with their families and friends resulting, in some cases, in disenfranchisement and a mindset centred on struggling. These parents suggested that they only discussed general needs with their families and friends. The reason for this was their own view of themselves as parents (see 7.6) and a desire not to feel that they have failed or to appear weak or unable to cope.

Parents from higher socio-economic backgrounds generally have very positive attitudes towards asking for help and support and see it as a crucial tool in finding help and support.

For the parents I have spoken to, trusted personal contacts seem to be the main source of information, as they tap into and use other people's experiences. In the lower socio-economic areas there is heavy reliance on local PSAs. A concern that I have, having interviewed parents and spoken to PSAs during my own observations, is that a dependency and reliance on the advisors can develop in some cases. This is in stark contrast to the socially mobile parents who actively use their social capital.

The category of connectivity also fits with many of the prevailing theories, notably elements of Chatman's (1991b, 1992, 1996) 'small world' and also the work of Granovetter (1973; Granovetter, 1983). It also fits within the wider ELIS work of Hersberger (2005) and Savolainen (2005), who frames his model in terms of various forms of capital within the confines of Bourdieu's (1984) habitus, where social networks play an integral part of normalised information behaviours.

7.5 GT category C: Trust

7.5.1 Introduction

Trust is an important category that has a direct relationship with the way in which parents look for information. From an early stage of analysis, trust emerged as an important factor and was considered as a candidate for being the core category. However, a decision was finally made to make category A: 'being a parent' the core category because it was felt that it better represented, holistically, the concept of parents and their information world (see 7.2). This does not diminish the acknowledged importance of the 'trust' category,

and, if an opportunity were to arise, further investigation focusing on trust as the core category would be a potentially important study.

Trust as an element of information seeking, has not received the same attention in the literature as other aspects (Hertzum, Andersen, Andersen, & Hansen, 2002; Kelton, Fleischmann, & Wallace, 2008; Tseng & Fogg, 1999) and even within wider sociology, it has traditionally been on the periphery of scholarship, although that has started to change in recent years (Fukuyama, 1995; Misztal, 1996). Fukuyama (1995), not writing from a LIS perspective, views trust in relation to an individual's social capital, asserting that people within a given community will generally distrust outsiders. This view, as with other categories, has resonance with Chatman's small world theory. Chatman emphasises that *'trust is critical...members of a particular small world accept information from those they know and can reasonably trust'* (Huotari & Chatman, 2001: p. 353). Writing from a LIS, context Kelton et al (2008) acknowledge the importance of trust within information seeking. Kelton is primarily interested in the perception of trust when related to digital information. In his brief review of the concept, he notes that trust is understood as a social psychological phenomenon, noting that there is a general disagreement as to where trust is located in psychological space. In an attempt to clarify the situation, Kelton summarises the four prevailing views of trust (see Table 7-3).

Table 7-3 Views 'models' of trust

Level of trust	Definition
Individual	Personality characteristics that are viewed as psychologically based and founded upon one's past experiences and general character. It has been criticised as reductionist by not taking into account social contexts.
Interpersonal	Social tie directed from one actor to another. This is understood to be the most common form of trust based upon a tie or a bond. It is often defined in terms of the attitude the 'trustor' has towards the trustee.
Relational	Emergent property of a mutual relationship. This perspective is not a behaviour or attitude, rather a product of an emergent relationship.
Societal	Societal features of a community as a whole. This view of trust is seen as an important element of a successfully functioning society. This view is not necessarily dependent upon

interpersonal relationships, but is based upon conformance to expectations and social behaviours. It is importantly a pre-requisite for social institutions.

Source:(Kelton et al., 2008: p. 364)

Three of the four views of trust described in Table 7-3 namely, interpersonal, relational and societal, are each discernable through different aspects of my research. For example, parents spoke of using a trusted person as one kind of primary source of information, this being very similar to the interpersonal view of trust. Another example of trust found to be identifiable with the findings, relates to the mutual transfer of information between parents. This was particularly noticeable with the interviewees from higher socio-economic backgrounds, where parents reported that they would, as circumstance dictated, talk with or consult acquaintances who they perceived as having relevant information.

The findings of this research identified five GT sub-categories, each of which were identified as trust enablers. These trust enablers may be wholly or partially present at any given time, but each contributes to the development of trust in any given source. The five trust enablers were identified as:

- a) accessibility;
- b) confidence and credibility;
- c) like me;
- d) qualifications; and
- e) relationship.

7.5.2 Accessibility

Accessibility was found to be an important element of any trusted source. Accessibility does not necessarily mean that a source is trusted *per se*, but rather that a parent feels that they can easily obtain an answer that will satisfy. Previous LIS studies have identified accessibility as an important factor affecting the choice of information source (Julien & Michels, 2000; Warner et al., 1973). In Harris and Dewdney's (1994) influential work, accessibility formed their third principle, namely that '*people tend to seek information that is most accessible*' (p. 21). The sub-category of 'accessibility' can be viewed on two levels. The first relates to its availability or the 'proximity' of the information to the parent. The second relates to 'comprehension' or the ability of a parent to fully and easily understand a particular source.

7.5.2.1 Proximity

Proximity simply relates to the ease with which a parent can access a given source of information. Trusted people, for example consisting of family or friends, were most often cited as the first place a parent may go to for information, simply because of relationship and availability. The internet also seems to be, for a certain section of parents, an increasingly popular 'first port of call' and used even before trusted people were consulted. This seems to be happening because the internet has become integrated into their lives. These parents feel confident using the internet and perceive that they have the skills and abilities to find specific information or a link to a source where a need might be answered.

It is easy to speak in generalities, but the reality is that a parent's information world consists of a wide and diverse range of types and levels of need in terms of complexity (see Figure 6-3 Level of needp. 124). Figure 7-3 summarises the relationship between complexity and importance of information suggested by my data. It is within these contexts that parents make a decision about where to go for information. For example for a number of parents the internet was not trusted, despite its accessibility, for important questions such as those relating to health, however, they considered it a valid source for less important questions. The internet also proved to be useful for parents when they had complex needs and wanted to undertake research on a topic.

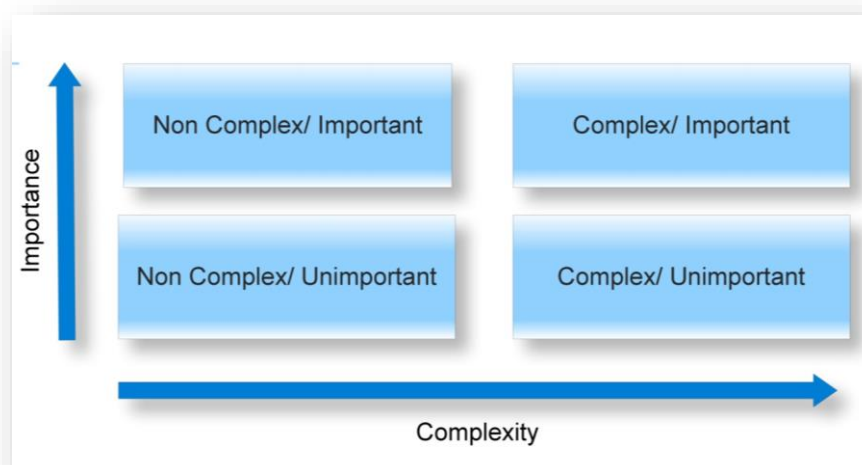


Figure 7-3 Complexity vs. importance

Another point to note about the internet in terms of its accessibility is that parents such as Gina, George, Andrew, Abby, Beverly and Denise all gave examples of where the internet was the only source of help and advice available and, therefore, it became the *de facto* source of information. Whether or not a parent considered the internet or another

source as a suitable place to look, was an individual decision, grounded in a number of factors. Parents take their responsibility seriously; however, they have to be able to access what they need easily. In this context they gravitate towards accessible sources, be this in the form of books, the internet or other people

7.5.2.2 Comprehension

The second element of accessibility is directly related to the ability of a parent to understand the source. Comprehension goes beyond the important element of simply understanding the information, but also includes the complexities of attitudes and nuances of expectations that are often present when communicating with professionals such as teachers and doctors. On a fundamental level, comprehension is the ability of a parent to be able to understand any given source. For example, doctors have long since been aware of the need for clear and effective information and this is illustrated by the work of Kai (Kai, 1996a, 1996b). The interviewees provided examples where parents complained that in some cases, health professionals had not given them enough information, or the 'right kind' of information for them to feel that they fully understood a particular situation, leading them to consult alternative sources (usually the internet) to build a fuller picture and gain a better understanding. This is particularly illustrated with Anne, in the case of her daughter's operation. Despite being a health professional herself, she felt the need to consult multiple sources for her to feel that she could fully understand the implications of the situation and make an informed decision.

A number of parents from schools C and D recounted examples of times they had not fully understood their meetings with professionals in terms of their line of questioning and the answers they gave. For example, Carol had difficulty when various health professionals apparently gave her contradictory advice regarding weaning her young son and she was unable to see that both may be right. In her case she wanted a simple 'black and white' answer. Donna spoke about the frustrations she had had trying to talk with her son's teachers and that they were unable to help in any way, resulting in her son not receiving appropriate assistance. In Donna's case, there seemed, from the interview transcripts, to be a mismatch of expectations between Donna's own responsibilities and what she expected from the school, in terms of looking after her son's emotional and behavioural problems. The consequence of this lack of communication and comprehension over roles and responsibilities meant that little seems to have happened and Donna's own prejudices against the teachers not caring and not helping were subsequently reinforced.

7.5.3 Confidence and credibility

The category confidence and credibility emerged as a sub-category of trust and is closely linked to the sub-category qualifications (see: 7.5.5). It relates to the believability or the confidence a parent has in any given source. A review of the trust literature shows that there are numerous concepts that are present, with a general confusion regarding the terms, with many being treated both as separate concepts and synonymous terms. In an attempt to frame their research investigating the ways in which people assess website credibility Tseng and Fogg (1999) proposed a clarification of the terms by defining trust and credibility in the following manner:

Trust → Dependability

Credibility → Believability (p. 41).

Examining the findings, the parents in my sample spoke predominantly about their confidence in a given source. The findings in this context seem to be weighted towards the parents from school D supporting their local PSA, who had arranged the interviews and this is to be expected. Parents, as a whole, tended suggest that they were generally confident with the help and support offered by health professionals. However, there were times when this relationship temporarily or permanently broke down. An example of a temporary breakdown of trust involved the MMR vaccine, where some parents reported that in this specific context, they were unwilling to trust the view of their GP. An example of a permanent breakdown of trust is exemplified by Fiona, who disagrees with her son's doctors over the causes of his behavioural problems.

7.5.4 Like me

This sub-category directly deals with a parent's use of people 'just like me'. The sub-category was developed from an *in vivo* term used by an interviewee. It deals with the use of people who have a similar worldview, values and outlook. Harris and Dewdney's (1994) fourth principle states '*people first seek help or information from interpersonal sources, especially from people like themselves*' (p. 24). Huotari and Chatman (2001) acknowledge the fundamental importance of the part played by worldviews and a shared outlook on life between actors. It was quite apparent from the interviews that parents would generally, unless there was any specific incident or need, approach people with whom they had a natural affinity and who held similar values and beliefs.

The clearest view of 'like me' was with the church parents, with the exception of George's wife. Church parents spoke about their values and their preferences for sources that promoted similar values and beliefs to themselves. Whilst this attitude is perhaps easier to see with the church parents, that does not mean that it does not exist with other

parents. Andrew notes that, despite having two close friends, it is the one who is more like him to whom he turns to discuss issues relating to his children. Similarly, Abby notes that, despite disagreeing with her boss over many issues, she still accepts a lot of parenting advice because of his similar attitudes to parenting.

There are times where this kind of reliance or trust in other people who have similar views to them has unhelpful or even negative consequences. The first example is exemplified by Beverly's conclusion that the MMR vaccination was proven to be unsafe. Beverly recounted that she had done a lot of personal research into the subject as she agonised over whether to allow her three children to have the vaccination. She spoke with other mothers and undertook internet research eventually she favoured a website promoting alternative views to the official government and medical recommendation. Another example, are the attitudes expressed by Dianne and Donna towards their local secondary school which had recently been formed by merging two previous schools into one. One of the underlying hostilities is that that the 'new' school is now ethnically diverse, whereas previously it has been 'white working-class'. Their perception was that teachers tended to be biased towards the pupils from the Asian community. The result of their own interviews was a reinforcing of their attitudes of isolation (not sharing problems, or looking for help) and a blame of systems, in particular the school, for not offering the right help and support, despite them not asking.

7.5.5 Qualifications

The sub-category of qualifications relates not only to academic or professional competency, but also to perceived experience or 'track record' that parents regard other people to have (trusted sources). Many parents, during their interviews, reported that they liked to speak with other parents who they saw as more experienced, or who had been through similar life stages. In the early stages of analysis, this led to the development of the category 'experience', which later developed into the sub-category 'personal experience'.

A large number of the parents interviewed, especially those from schools A and, B and church, reported that they relied heavily on listening to the experiences of other parents for many of their everyday needs. Where a parent is in a place where they feel safe to share personal experiences and discuss issues, they can learn from other parents. Trust, because of personal experience, happens on different levels. The first level relates to a parent seeing how other parents or 'experts' deal with a given situation. Personal experiences can also be gleaned from watching television and may help to describe the popularity of parenting programmes which enable parents to watch and learn. Emma

noted that that she liked to read parenting magazines that contained case studies so that she could compare them to her own experiences. The second type, relates to other parents known socially and may relate to both formalised and non-formalised information needs. Parents spoke of talking with, or seeking advice from other people who had been in or were in similar situations. Their experiences were trusted because of relationship, in other words, the parents are known to them and they formed an opinion about them as parents and whether or not to trust them.

The third type relates to a specific and often formalised information need. For formalised searching, personal experience helps parents, as they are drawn to sources where they can meet and share with other parents who have had to deal with similar situations. This was the case for both Andrew and Denise who both have to deal with children who have very special needs. For them, a trusted source was one that was able to empathise with their own experiences; consequently they gained not only practical help and advice but also hope.

Parents from schools F and also Carol from school C all spoke highly of a parenting course a number of them had attended. The course called Systematic Training for Effective Parenting (STEPS) is a course run over a number of weeks and organised by the local PSAs. The course centres on the development of personal relationships, a key factor being encouraging the sharing of experiences. Andrew also noted that for him, the sharing of experiences, in a small support group particularly helped him and his wife in the early stages of trying to support their autistic son. However, he noted that after a while, it became repetitive and less useful as he became more confident looking for information on the internet.

The sharing of experiences also has other 'limitations' or caveats that need to be taken into account. Firstly, it relates to the opinion or esteem one parent has for another parent. In other words without a good opinion of a source, trust is difficult to establish. Gail spoke semi-jokingly of attending mothers groups where she recounted the experience of a fussy mother boasting about all the success she had had with her young child--this boasting meant that Gail was less willing to value what was said. Secondly, just because one parent has a particular experience, does not automatically mean that it is good or the right advice. The aphorism used on many teacher training programmes helps to illustrate the point, it states that '20 years experiences can simply mean repeating the same mistakes for 20 times'.

Another aspect of the category 'qualifications', relates to the professional or academic expertise of a source. The role of professionals such as social services, medicine, health and education occupy roles of influence and are primary sources of information for all

parents, to some degree and at various life stages. In terms of formalised information needs, health and education occupied the single largest source across all interviewee types. PSAs and social-services, unsurprisingly, were used as important sources of information for parents from schools C, D and F. In the formalised information context, professionals seem to relate to the 'societal' view of trust (Kelton et al., 2008).

The findings suggested that there were often different attitudes towards professionals from parents of different social classes. For example, Carol spoke about having to learn how to talk with professionals, something she did 'for my kids'. She used terms such as 'suits' and 'high professionals' to describe them.

Family doctors have suffered a loss of trust from many parents as a result of specific issues notably the MMR vaccination programme. This does not mean that parents do not trust doctors *per se*, rather it relates to a specific context or incident. Examples where trust has broken down between professionals and a parent centre around communication, terms of expectations, use of language and the feeling that a parent was not being listened to and taken seriously. Within medicine, there has been recognition that communication can be a barrier to patients' information seeking (Bath & Guillaume, 2004; P. Cameron et al., 1994; Jackson et al., 2007; Kai, 1996a; Rakowski & et al., 1990; Starke & Möller, 2002). The findings show that communication barriers and mistrust do not specifically relate to a single social group. Gina spoke of the frustration she had had with her son's school teacher; Alison, Anne and Beth spoke of times they had had bad experiences with health professionals.

Notable examples of professionals not fully being trusted by parents are seen in the interviews from school F, the pupil referral unit. Flora, Fiona, Faye and Fern each recounted different examples of how their children were caught up in the system, with little help or support. Social services and doctors each received criticism for their perceived failure to help meet their needs fully and provide them with concrete answers. Fiona, in particular, wants answers for her son's behaviour, but does not trust or agree with the medical assessment of his condition. She also blames social services for inconsistent support, due to a number of different key workers dealing with her case. Cyndy is in a similar position with her daughter. She sees social services help as too little, too late since her daughter attempted suicide. Cyndy believes the psychologist the family has met since the episode, takes her daughter's side leading to mistrust and an attitude of apathy towards official help. Professionals also take on the role of outsiders in the small world approach, in particular, those such as social services and other professionals targeting local communities. It is interesting to note that this is not always the case. David cannot praise social services enough for the help and support he has received. His attitude was

that you 'treat other people how you would want to be treated', and he was also careful do everything they asked of him.

7.5.6 Relationship

The final sub-category of 'trust' relates to relationships. The notion of relationships has been mentioned in previous categories, notably 'connectivity' (see 7.4). A parent's own relationships or connectivity provide an important source of information, unless there are grounds for them to be avoided. Harris and Dewdney's (1992) note that actors:

...tend to seek information that is easily accessible, preferably from interpersonal sources such as friends, relatives or co-workers rather than from institutions or organizations (p. 27).

In terms of being a trusted source, relationships are, therefore, an important factor. Where this sub-category really emerged in the research was through the work of PSAs with parents from schools C, D and F. Susan, in particular, has been in a PSA role for nearly 20 years and has managed to develop a lot of trust with many parents in the community (certainly those who were interviewed at school D). Reasons for this approachability were comments that she was approachable, and that they had known her for many years, through successive generations of children attending the school.

7.5.7 Summary

Trust is an important element of parents' information seeking and is an area that still needs further investigation, particularly within an ELIS context. The theoretical background framing 'trust' is supported by Chatman's (1991b) notion of small worlds, a concept that she was unable to develop due to her untimely death in 2002. The importance of other people as trusted sources is also well documented (Harris & Dewdney, 1994; Savolainen, 2009a) and something that is supported by this research.

The findings suggested that, when parents are looking for information, they often apply an informal or 'subconscious' test to help determine the credibility of a particular source. These tests were identified as the five sub-categories of accessibility, confidence and credibility, like me, qualifications and relationship. These elements were seen to have similarities with other studies. It is not claimed that this is an exhaustive list of tests, but it reflects the ways in which parents who participated in this investigation help to define a source as credible or trustworthy.

7.6 GT category D: Picture of Self

7.6.1 Introduction

Recent years have seen an emerging trend in information behaviour research examining the role of affect or emotions within the information seeking process (Nahl & Bilal, 2007). Fisher and Landry's (2007) research is of particular interest as they examined the role of affect on the information seeking of stay at home mothers (SAHMs) in the United States. They identified 25 emotions related to the SAHMs information behaviour, shown in Figure 7-4. Their research focused on generally well educated SAHMs and the way their 'picture of self' developed out of a range of emotions and feelings and how it affected their information seeking. It was not the aim of this research to catalogue and identify emotional aspects of information seeking, however, during analysis the data presented here would seem broadly to agree with much of what Fisher and Landry (2007) found in their study, albeit at a macro level rather than the micro.

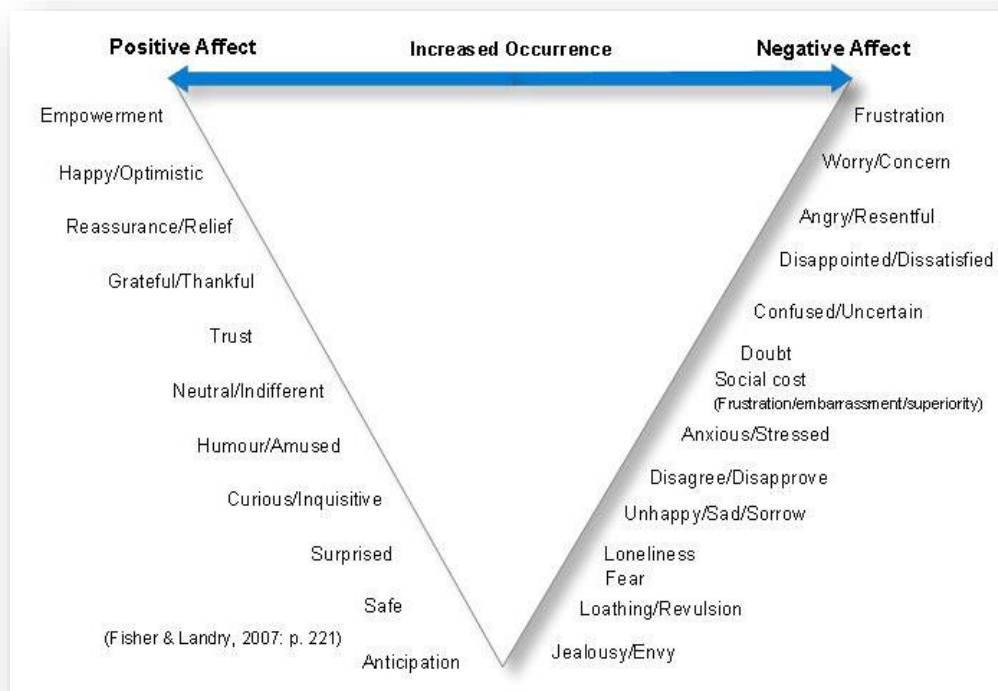


Figure 7-4 Affect Experienced by SAHMs

Areas of agreement between the investigations relate to their identification of negative emotions such as frustration worry, anxiety and the way they can hinder a parent looking

for information. The reverse is true for those parents who feel optimistic, reassured and empowered. There are 5 sub-categories related to 'picture of self', these are:

- a) feeling alone;
- b) anxiety and uncertainty;
- c) empowerment;
- d) reassurance; and
- e) despair and inadequacy.

7.6.2 Feeling alone

This sub-category was originally referred to as 'isolation', a term which I considered to be too strong in its connotations. Chatman (1992), in her investigation examining information poverty within a retirement community, emphasised the importance of social support systems, especially if actors are to engage in the process of sharing information. As previously discussed in section 6.6.3, the emotion was represented by the sub-category 'feeling alone', and was almost entirely expressed by parents from schools C, D and F, with the exception of George's wife from the church group. **Error! Reference source not found.** graphically illustrates the relationship between access to people (connectivity) and trust. It was developed out of a 'situational map' coding exercise, a technique advocated by Clarke (2005).

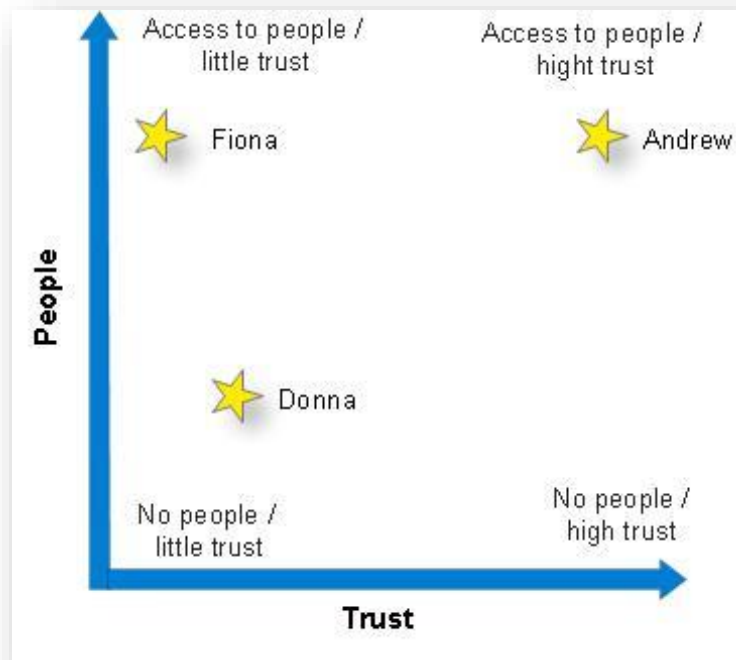


Figure 7-5 People and trust

Error! Reference source not found. graphically represents the causal relationship between 'trust' and 'access to people'. For example, a parent may feel that they have lots of friends, but feel that they are not appropriate to help them look for information, as is the case with Donna. Andrew recognises that he has high social capital, through friends and colleagues, who he knows can provide him with good information and importantly, he is willing to access these people when he needs to. This places him in the top-left position in **Error! Reference source not found.** 'access to people and high trust'.

Feeling alone, arose when parents were unable to find a source of help or advice from social sources, either because they had no-one they could describe as a trusted source or because they felt that existing support systems were failing them, as was the case with Flora, Fiona and Dominique, thus leading to a form of social isolation. This type of isolation contrasted markedly with those parents in the sample from the higher socio-economic groups and those with greater social capital, who were better able to find support from within their social groups.

It is important to note that feelings of being alone cover a wide range of circumstances and do not necessarily simply relate to social isolation. In Alison's case it is linked to her feelings of parental responsibility when she was worried about the possible effects a local anaesthetic would have on her daughter if she consented to elective surgery. This example is interesting because, as a health professional, Alison was able to obtain a lot of information allowing her to weigh the risks. Despite knowing cognitively that the risks were minimal and that her husband did not appear worried, she felt the burden of responsibility. In making this decision, she felt alone and no amount of sharing and information would help make the process any easier.

The third example of feeling alone relates to parents or carers not being able to find answers for illness or behavioural problems. This was exemplified by Denise as she sought for an explanation for her granddaughter's chronic hip problems. Denise desperately wanted to find a support group and she finally found one in the United States of America and she was subsequently able to talk with other parents who had undergone similar experiences.

7.6.3 Anxiety and uncertainty

All parents interviewed reported that they worried about their children at some time. The level or intensity of the worry or anxiety varied widely depending on its root cause, for example, Gina was worried about her son's school teacher and the effect that it was having on him. Alison was worried about her daughter's operation, despite knowing that it was 'routine'.

The MMR vaccine was an issue that caused anxiety among many parents, notably those from school A, B and church, many of whom reported that they were motivated to investigate it. The picture surrounding the MMR and parental attitude towards it were less clear with parents from school C, D, E and F where it seemed to be of less of an immediate preoccupation. Unfortunately, there is not enough data to draw any definitive conclusion as to why this apparent difference is noticeable. A lazy hypothesis might be based on an assumption that parents from the higher socio-economic backgrounds have greater exposure to the debate, largely through the type of media they watch and read, that they are better able to search for information and they are more likely to question advice from official sources. A second hypothesis may also be proposed that the parents interviewed from schools C, D and F had 'bigger problems' to deal with and so, in the scope of life, the MMR debate was of lower priority.

Nearly all parents interviewed reported that they were worried about their children going to the right school. However, it was mainly those parents from schools A, B and church who spoke about their anxiety about making the right decision when selecting schools. In these cases, the anxiety and uncertainty played a positive role, by motivating parents to try and ensure that they were able to select the best school for their children. This motivation did not seem to be present with parents from schools C and D, with the exception of Denise. Parents from schools C, D and E generally seemed to accept that their children attended the local school, despite the local secondary school being seen as poorly performing. This is not to say that they were less concerned on a cognitive level, indeed they voiced anxieties during the interviews. They seemed, however, more 'resigned' that their children would attend the local school and were thus less likely to push or pro-actively search and investigate alternatives without an external impetus. Interestingly, these findings contradict a United States based study (Teske, Fitzpatrick, & Kaplan, 2007), however, it would require a specific investigation to discover the main reason for these differences.

Fisher and Landry (2007) found that worry acted as a motivator for many parents. This conclusion seems to be generally confirmed by this research. It is however, an area that warrants further investigation.

7.6.4 Empowerment

Empowerment is a positive affective emotion and one which acts as a catalyst for the information searching process. Fisher and Landry (2007) also found that '*empowerment was a significant affective aspect of the information process, having the ability to affect decision-making, the confidence to find something out for oneself, and the ability to*

provide information to others' (p. 222). Within the data analysis, two elements to the sub-category emerged, these were: 'skills and education', and 'the internet'.

7.6.4.1 Skills and education

The personal ability in terms of skills and education of a parent seems to have a direct affect on their information seeking. An actor's own skills and abilities ('education') have long been acknowledged as a predictor towards their information seeking (Moore & Moschis, 1978; Niederdeppe, 2008) with Childers and Post (1975) famously identifying low-level information processing skills as one of their three characteristics of information poverty.

The current findings suggest that skills are not simply educational, but also relate to interpersonal and relationships skills that affect the way parents interact socially and also with professionals (see category B: connectivity 7.4). Carol shows that, with motivation, training and support she was able to develop skills and confidence to enable her to speak with a range of professionals, eventually becoming a gate-keeper within her community. Interestingly, Carol talked about not being able to cope when professionals appeared to contradict each other; in her case her health visitor and neo-natal nurse. The apparent contradiction, advice about weaning, caused her not to trust the health visitor who was taking over from the neo-natal outreach nurse who she knew and, therefore, trusted. Carol wanted 'black and white' answers and was unable to cope with the degree of uncertainty that the conflicting advice presented.

7.6.4.2 The internet

The internet as a source of information for parents has received considerable attention from researchers in recent years (Avet, 2006; Dhillon et al., 2003; Hektor, 2003; Khoo et al., 2008; Na & Chia, 2008; Porter & Edirippulige, 2007; Radlick, 2002; Rothbaum et al., 2008; Semere et al., 2003). Its importance as a source of information for parents cannot be overstated, as it is viewed as an essential component of twenty-first century life (DCMS, 2009). Nearly all parents reported that they used the internet for some kind of information searching related to their roles as parents. However, some parents such as Gaby, Grace and Anne spoke about only using the internet for lower level types of information such as for homework. The internet was, however, generally considered to be a great enabler, with a large proportion of parents citing it as the first place they search for information, principally due to its convenience.

Rothbaum's (2008) research is particularly relevant to this thesis. His study focuses on internet use by parents from different socio-economic backgrounds in the United States.

Rothbaum identified three areas where parents from low socio-economic groups were disadvantaged in their use of and access to the internet. These are:

- a) access to the internet;
- b) internet skills deficiencies; and
- c) evaluation of internet sites.

It is difficult to draw direct comparisons between Rothbaum's research and this thesis, due to the difference in focus. However, on a general level, Rothbaum's three main findings stand up to comparison when the data is examined between those parents from schools A, B, E and church, compared with those parents from school C, D and F. In terms of access to the internet, nearly all parents ($n=30$) spoke of having access at home. Those parents from the higher socio-economic groups generally seem to give the impression during their interviews that many had adopted the internet as part of their daily lives, both at home and work. This was in contrast with many of the interviews with parents from schools C, D and F, where a general impression was given that they did not feel confident using the internet. However, as this was not a specific investigation into the use of internet by parents, it is difficult to make hard and fast comparisons.

7.6.5 Reassurance

All the parents interviewed recounted times when their information seeking had been about obtaining reassurance. Parents, out of their parental responsibility, wanted to try and ensure that they were doing a 'good job' or that any decisions they had made were appropriate. Seeking reassurance is an attempt to reduce uncertainty. Uncertainty has been viewed as a central defining criteria for information need (Atkin, 1973). Belkin (2005) advanced the notion that uncertainty can be viewed as an anomalous state of knowledge (ASK). An ASK occurs, when an actor recognises there is an anomaly, gap or uncertainty within their knowledge and seeks to rectify it. In recent years, uncertainty formed a central plank of Dervin's (Dervin, 2003b; 1993) sense-making theory, this in turn influencing the development of the ELIS literature (Savolainen, 1993, 1995), because of its focus on feelings or affect (Case, 2002) as part of the search process.

Parents seeking reassurance is an affect based need to allay their fears about a specific context. Examples given by parents covered the whole spectrum of parenting and included issues ranging from weaning to health concerns. Seeking reassurance can be either formalised or non-formalised. It is important to note that seeking reassurance can provide false hope; this happened with Andrew when he and his wife initially started seeking reassurance from family and friends when they noticed that their son's development seemed slower than that of his older sister.

7.6.6 Despair and inadequacy

Despair and inadequacy was not the most common sub-category to occur, however, it was one that was considered to warrant inclusion because of its impact on those parents who it affected. Despair and inadequacy is an emotional state that occurs either because of or as a component of, an often complex and unresolved information need, notably, within the interview group, it is related to conflict and child behavioural problems. In all of the cases identified within the interview sample, all parents were 'in the system', either being seen by a health professional, had received help or had been assessed by social services. Three of the parents, Fiona, Fern and Faye had sons with extreme behavioural problems who attended school F the PRU. Fiona spoke about her fight to find out what was wrong with her son and her constant search for an answer. She felt that teachers, health professionals and social services had not given her the help, support and answers she wanted or needed as her son's behaviour was not being managed. She attributed her own depression to this situation.

Chloë's son was very disruptive and, like Fiona, she was at her 'wits end' about what to do. For a nine year period, she fought without any success to find proper help and support for him. Despite the despair, she found, by chance a partial answer in a book. The book suggested that her son suffered from Asperger's syndrome, a diagnosis which was later confirmed, in addition to other neurological problems. The consequence of a parent being caught in a situation without an apparent end can be potentially tragic. This was particularly highlighted in the interviews with Cyndy and Dominique who each have teenage daughters who have attempted suicide in the past year, both cases being set against fractious and difficult relationships between mother and daughter.

7.6.7 Summary

A parent's picture of self can have either a positive or negative effect on their information searching. The importance of emotions as a factor of information searching has long been recognised. Firstly through the notion of sense-making and more latterly, through the recent recognition of affect as a paradigm of information searching (Nahl & Bilal, 2007).

In this section I have argued that the parent's picture of self comprises a number of sub-categories which can either stand alone or form part of a number of influencing factors, relating to a parent's ability to look for information. Feelings of being alone, anxiety and despair are examples of emotions that can hinder a parent's ability to look for information. Empowerment relates to a parent's ability to confidently access information. Within the notion of empowerment, a parent may feel confident that they possess the

skills and abilities to communicate with different people, as well as to interact with a variety of sources.

As we have seen, many of the examples cited in this thesis have resonance with existing theory such as the role of 'fear' of disclosure in Chatman's (1991b, 2001) small world theory. It is too simplistic to simply say that those parents from the higher socio-economic backgrounds seem to have a better picture of self than those parents from the lower socio-economic backgrounds. However, those parents interviewed from schools C, D and F generally seemed to face greater challenges in their lives and have generally found greater hindrances in their information seeking as a result.

7.7 GT category E: Weighing

7.7.1 Introduction

Weighing is the way in which parents make sense of the information they obtain. Within the wider LIS literature, there is an emphasis on evaluating information. Researching the way parents use the internet, Rothbaum (2008) and colleagues defined evaluation in terms of a measure of trustworthiness, this being an assessment of quality and credibility of a source.

I argue that parents, as a rule, do not assess or evaluate the information that they receive in the sense of a formal logical examination of data, but rather they weigh the information according to a set of systematic criteria (sub-categories). The category of weighing was developed from an *in vivo* reference used by parents when they were asked to describe the ways in which they 'test' information or make decisions.

The analysis process revealed that parents do not necessarily assess or evaluate information in a logical and formalised manner. Even parents who are versed in appraisal techniques such as Alison, a senior nurse, noted that the way she examines information in the context of being a parent, is dependent upon a range of factors such as feelings and trying to gain a sense of what seems right. The role of affective emotions is also an important factor influencing the way in which many parents make assessments and make decisions that are bound in a complex spectrum of values, opinions, and personal circumstance.

The category weighing has five sub-categories which highlight approaches parents take when weighing information, these are:

- a) building a case;
- b) relevance;

- c) world view
- d) feelings; and
- e) reflection.

7.7.2 Building a case

This sub-category relates to both formalised and non-formalised searching and occurs where a parent 'gathers' data that supports their information need. It is akin to consulting multiple sources of information. It enables a parent to orientate themselves to a way of sifting and gathering enough data to come to some kind of conclusion. Examples of building a case are diverse and may be formalised, as with the need to gather information in order to choose a new school. In such an example, the most pro-active parents spoke about gathering information from a number of different sources, including: the internet, other parents' experiences of a particular school, community gossip and also the feelings and wants of their own children, before finally weighing the information. Beverly reported that she searched the internet discussion groups and also asked lots of parents in the school playground about issues around bedtimes and in this way she built a consensus view that allowed her to come to a decision.

The internet proved to be a popular way for parents to quickly 'build a case' as it enabled them to find examples of what other parents do. Andrew, whose case is more extreme, uses the internet regularly to look for the latest information on treating autism, to help his son. Andrew notes that there is too much information on the internet and so has to look at sites that feel right, as he tries to differentiate between reputable and non-profit information, using his own experience as a guide. Like many parents, Andrew reported that he just reads and reads, noting that the information that appears frequently seems quite reliable--this technique being used by many parents. Andrew recognises the dangers of this approach. However, it is one that seems to be widely adopted by many of the parents and is an area that warrants further investigation.

Parents stop looking for information when they feel they have enough information to make a decision. They spoke about obtaining 'sufficient information' (Betty), 'adequate information' (Abby) or 'just enough' (Faye). These examples help to illustrate the notion of satisficing. Satisficing is a neologism coined by Herbert Simon (1955) that has developed into a notion describing the difference between choosing something that is good enough and choosing what is best (Byron, 2004) the concept has gained some recognition within the LIS literature (Prabha, Connaway, Olszewski, & Jenkins, 2007) as a way of explaining why actors terminate information searching without always obtaining the best quality information. Satisficing has also been linked with Zipf's

(Zipf, 1949) law of least effort, an explanation to describe the way actors search for information. My results do not provide enough detail to examine the influences of these theories, other than to provide a general agreement with them in certain circumstances. The data suggests that the time, energy and resources a parent invests into a search for information is influenced by complexity and importance of the search itself (Figure 7-3, p. Figure 7-3 Complexity vs. importancep. 196).

7.7.3 Relevance

A parents' information seeking is often limited by a number of factors such as the amount of time they can devote to a topic, the amount of energy they have, as well as the range of resources they have at their disposal. For everyday information needs, parents ascertain the most expedient and efficient way of finding and weighing information for any given need and to help this process parents try to determine relevance.

In order to determine relevance, a parent relies on a number of factors such as their world view, accessibility of the information, the trust they have in the source to meet their need, their instincts and ultimately, the practicality of the information--as Andrew notes 'it either fits our situation or it doesn't'. Ellie, for example, when searching web sites, tries to determine their relevance, by scanning the first few pages that Google presents her with. She looks for cues that she feels will provide her with pointers. One commonly cited example of relevance was centred on the usefulness of the parenting television programme 'Supernanny'. In the case of Supernanny, parents were generally very positive towards the techniques used in the programme. However, the programme was not seen as particularly relevant because of the extreme behaviours portrayed by the children. Despite this gap with reality, a number of parents did report trying to use some of the techniques shown such, most notably the 'naughty step'.

7.7.4 World view

A parent's world view was found to greatly affect their receptivity towards types of information given. This has been mentioned previously and links into the small world (Chatman, 1991b, 2001) theory as well as Savolainen's (1995) model of ELIS. An example of the way in which world view affects the acceptance of information was when Gina spoke about not being able to subscribe to the Christian brand of parenting popularised by the American fundamentalist minister Dr James Dobson, whose parenting books advocate 'beating' a child. Gina and other parents from the church group all preferred the much more liberal approach taken by the Christian British author and broadcaster Rob Parson who was cited as a source by Gina, Gail and Gerry.

Another example recounted by four parents Betty, Gaby, Brady and Beth centred on the arguments caused by the popular parenting writer Gina Ford, who is widely cited in the British media as an author who offers parents a strict and no nonsense approach to child care (Sabbagh, 2007).

7.7.5 Feelings and instincts

The phrase 'gut feeling', 'seems logical', 'if it's commons sense', along with other synonymous expressions were used by parents to express the ways in which they described making decisions. The findings suggest that a parent's evaluative processes are often centred on general acceptance of information, based upon experiences, both their own and also those provided through trusted people or trusted sources. The central tenet for a large proportion of parents' information seeking is that they find information that will meet a need or will satisfice.

Parents such as Andrew or Chloë have developed detailed knowledge of their child's challenges and as such, they have personally developed an 'expert body of knowledge'. This means they feel they are able to make informed opinions about information they come across, although Andrew did note that he 'still misses many things' and that he has become an expert at 'guessing' what is good.

In the absence of any form of specifics, parents feel that they have to base decisions about the information they obtain on their own personal frames of reference. In the context of this research, the data does not reveal the basis on which a parent's feelings or instincts are based. Certainly, it would appear that a parent's own sense of reality, their world view, values and social worlds do play a part in shaping the decisions--these areas have been addressed in earlier sections. It is possible to identify the use of tacit knowledge with a few of the parents in the sample, such as Andrew. However, throughout the interviews, a constant theme that emerged was the importance of experience, either their own, or those of other trusted people.

7.7.6 Reflection

Reflection, which was present in many of the interviews, presents itself as an *in vivo* term. Other similar terms were used, for example Gaby used the term 'sifting'. Parents recounted gathering the information and reflecting as a way of sorting the information they had obtained and gaining some perspective. Reflection can be seen as a constructivist approach to information seeking insofar as parents devise and develop a view of a problem by way of sorting, analysing and testing their own experiences against the information they have accumulated.

The way parents reflect was found to be different depending on who they are and also the problem at hand. Betty, for example, spoke about talking regularly with her sister and bouncing ideas off her as a way of sorting a number of issues. These issues ranged from whether to give her daughter the MMR vaccine to what television programmes she should allow her to watch. The difference between reflection and building a case is that when a parent is building a case, they are examining the evidence and seeking reassurance whereas reflection is a process of sorting through ideas.

7.7.7 Summary

My data suggests that parents, on the whole, do not engage in a systematic approach to evaluating information, they do however, weigh information. The way in which parents weigh information is dependent upon a number of factors, such as: its importance, level and complexity. It is then framed by the amount of time and energy a parent is willing to invest in finding 'a good enough' answer. Within the category weighing, five sub-categories were identified representing different techniques and approaches adopted by parents to assessing the information. The sub-categories of weighing are: building a case, relevance, world view, feelings and reflections.

Different parents weigh information quite differently, some parents accept information from some sources more readily than others and, therefore, the tests applied to information differ. This notion is also true for different questions that parents may have. The interviewees generally spoke of wanting just enough information, this linked into the widely cited notion of satisficing, a term coined by Herbert Simon in 1957 (Simon, 1997) to describe how people make rational choices. Simon, argued decision makers rarely have the ability to fully evaluate all of the information they need to make a decision. Satisficing has, along with other similar notions such as Zipf's law (Zipf, 1949) of least effort, received some attention from information behaviour (IB) studies such as (Prabha et al., 2007; Savolainen, 2009a). Weighing, therefore, supports the notion that parents work within a limited amount of time, resources, and skill levels and make the best decisions they can.

7.8 Summary

This chapter has critically discussed the five main GT categories which emerged from the research and related them to the present literature, these are:

- GT category A: Being a parent (Core Category)
- GT category B: Connectivity
- GT category C: Trust
- GT category D: Picture of Self

- GT category E: Weighing

I have argued that category 'A: being a parent', is the core category which emerged out of the research. I have noted that other categories such as trust or picture of self could arguably also be identified as possible core categories. However, due the particular focus of this research, 'being a parent' represents the most appropriate category as it was felt it offered the 'best fit' as a means of describing a parent's information world.

Parents are in need of a wide range and type of information as they try and fulfil their social roles of parenting. I have argued that, for a parent to fulfil their parental responsibilities, they require a wide range of both formalised and non-formalised information.

Parents meet many of their information needs through social connectivity, either through social networks or in cases that require a formalised approach through formal networks.

I have argued that a parent's own social connectivity is one of the most important sources of information for them. Their social connectivity deals with families and friends and also their social peers or social capital. Those parents with higher social capital are able to tap into it and find additional help. The role of the PSA has helped many parents in the lower socio-economic groups by enabling them have a point of contact to help educate and guide them, although I have concerns as to the long term benefits of PSA if parents do not develop their own information seeking skills as a result of simply being handed information.

Trust is important for parents as they use trusted people and rely on trusted sources. Most parents interviewed spoke about trusted people, usually family or close friends, or in some cases their local PSA. Trust is developed through a number of ways, which include a combination of qualifications (formal and experiential), values, credibility and through relationships.

Picture of self, relates to how a parent's affective cognitive state either hinders or enables their effective access to and use of information. There was a general picture that those parents who were socially confident and who were better educated were able to function more efficiently when looking for information. A second element of this category showed how an inability to meet a long term and formalised information need could be a significant contributory factor to a parent's disillusionment and anxiety.

Weighing demonstrates how parents make sense of the information they have obtained. It also demonstrates that parents do not necessarily formally evaluate information *per se* but weigh the information either consciously or sub-consciously

according to a range of criteria that includes relevance, values and world view, feelings and instincts and reflection. Importantly it recognises that a parent's aim is usually to obtain enough information rather than all relevant information (satisficing).

The following chapter will conclude this thesis and will summarise the key findings. The chapter will discuss the limitations of this research. It will also examine the contribution this research has made to the ELIS field, as well as discuss possible directions for future research that have arisen out of this research.

8 Conclusions

8.1 Introduction

This final chapter provides a concluding summary of the research and arguments presented in this thesis. The chapter consists of 5 sections: the first section briefly examines the contribution made by this study to the library and information science (LIS) field. This is followed by an examination of the limitations of the study, an examination of the ability of the study to meet the criteria for grounded theory (GT) and concludes with a summary of the findings and recommendations for future research.

8.2 Contribution to the field and significance of the study

This study was undertaken to investigate the everyday life information seeking (ELIS) of parents. Recent decades have seen social change in attitudes towards parenting within the United Kingdom (Freely, 2000). Parenting has received unprecedented attention from society, law makers and the media and has also undergone socio-structural changes in terms of family size, structure and ethnic make-up; these issues were discussed in chapter 2. This study has focused on the ELIS of parents of primary school aged children. The main contribution of this thesis is the development of a substantive theory based on the data provided by interviews with 33 parents of primary school children in Leeds. By analysing and explicating the relationships, a substantive theory was developed. The theory explains how parents look for, access and weigh information as part of their role and responsibility of 'being a parent' (see Figure 7-1, p. 176 for a diagrammatic illustration of the theory). The theory is framed within five categories:

- GT category A: Being a parent (core category)
- GT category B: Connectivity
- GT category C: Trust
- GT category D: Picture of Self
- GT category E: Weighing

The theory provides a unique perspective on the ELIS of parents by framing their information seeking in the context of the GT core category 'being a parent'. The core category proposes that parents are always looking for information, formally or informally, which will support them in discharging their parental responsibilities. Important to this process and supporting the core category, are four further categories: connectivity, trust, picture of self and weighing. The category 'connectivity' explains how social relationships and a parent's social capital affect a parent's ability to look for information. The category 'trust' explains how parents develop trust in any given information source. The category

'picture of self' explains how a parent's confidence and emotional state affect their ability to search for information. Finally, the category, 'weighing' explains how parents decide whether or not to accept a source of information.

This substantive theory makes specific contributions to the LIS field in the following ways:

- a) it presents a unique substantive theory based upon five GT categories;
- b) it presents the only ELIS investigation to apply GT theory to an examination of the wider information needs and information seeking of parents of primary school aged children;
- c) it presents a timely and up-to-date investigation into the ELIS of a small group of parents of primary school aged children in Britain;
- d) it presents a substantive theory which does not contradict and is even confirmatory with existing theories and models of ELIS, such as Savolainen's (1995) model, Chatman's (1991b) notion of small worlds and Fisher and Landry's (2007) study of the role of affect on stay at home mothers (SAHMs); and
- e) it presents a generative substantive theory that has potentially wide practical application to affect change and inform the way that organisations and governments (schools, social services, health care) communicate with parents.

8.3 Limitations

As with any research, there are areas that could have been performed differently or changed for future studies. This section will briefly examine a number of potential would be questions that may be asked about the research.

Firstly, the charge can be made against the research that only a small scale, low level theory was developed. However, this was a specific study aimed at developing a substantive theory based upon the ELIS of parents in Leeds. Grounded theory methodology was used to develop a much smaller substantive theory to highlight parents' information worlds; a discussion on the limitations of GT methodology is presented in chapter 5. It should be noted that it was not the aim of this study to conduct an investigation with statistical significance and that it needs to be viewed in the context of limitations placed upon it in terms of scope and available resources.

The second charge is that as the author of this study, I was relatively new to using GT methodology during the research project. This can be seen as a limitation, due to the potential mistakes and the investment in time that was necessary to learn the skills needed to conduct and analyse the research. However, I had guidance from experts in the field and felt confident that I could develop a competent theory.

The third charge, relates to a potential concern highlighted in section 5.2.3 that data collection and analysis did not follow a strict 'classic' GT approach. In GT, data collection and analysis is often depicted in a linear approach, however, this is not always necessary, providing that the researcher has enough data to fully explore emerging concepts and also has the ability to collect additional data should it be required (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

The data collection approach adopted for this thesis was pragmatic in order to maximise access to parents, notably those from schools B, D and F where interviews were arranged by the school or the PSA on my behalf. The result of this was that over a period of several months data was collected and analysed, however, some of this data had to be collected in 'clumps', leading to multiple-interviews on single days. There are two reasons why the schools and PSAs wanted to arrange the interviews:

- a) school B cited confidentiality as a concern and it was a stipulation that they would participate providing they could arrange the interviews with parents on school premises. This related to some of the earlier interviews and I agreed to this stipulation, partly out of concern that I would not be able to find enough parents to interview for the study; a fear that, with hindsight was totally without foundation.
- b) the pre-arranged interview dates at school D involved ten parents who lived on a deprived inner city housing estate. The advice from the PSA was that she would contact the parents personally and that she would also remind them on the day of the interview.

The consequence of this approach was that I interviewed more parents than I needed, adding to my workload and the complexity of analysis. However, the benefits of the approach were that it provided access to parents who I would not normally have been able to interview and therefore achieved a 'richer' data set.

Fourthly, although a great deal of effort was made to try and ensure that the sample was purposive and well constructed, there are a number of issues that need to be addressed:

- a) there is no ethnic minority representation;
- b) it is open to the allegation that it comprises a self-selecting group of parents; and
- c) with the exception of two interviews, the majority of interviewees were mothers.

Dealing with point (a) the aim of the project was defined as a study of parents of primary school aged children; which it fulfils. Being qualitative, the research has to focus on the specifics rather than the general and so cannot hope to cover every permutation of ethnic make-up. In addition, none of the schools who responded to my initial approach

were situated in areas of the city associated with high ethnic minority populations. For example, schools C and D are located on estates that are generally categorised as 'white working-class' because of their comparatively low level of ethnic diversity. When the issues of lack of ethnic minority representation became apparent, early on in the project design, a decision was made in conjunction with my supervisory team that it would be better to focus on what was achievable. The justification for this was that I should use those schools who had responded and the parents who volunteered.

Dealing with point (b), regarding the charge that the sample is largely composed of self-selecting parents, to some extent the sample group was indeed self-selecting; namely those parents who thought that they had something to say or who felt that they could help the school. However, in the case of schools D and E, parent support advisors (PSAs) tried to 'invite' parents who they thought would 'turn up' to the interviews. Despite cajoling from the PSA, six interviewees were still 'no shows'. Parents from the PRU, school F, were approached by the PSA and were interviewed as a follow-on from a parenting class they had recently completed. Parents from schools A, B and E were the closest to what could be deemed as self-selecting, insofar as they volunteered by responding to letters which were distributed through the school. The parents interviewed from the church were approached by the church administrator as they were known to fit the profile of having a child at primary school and so were not necessarily self-selecting. Another important factor about the church parents is that they did not feel a need to 'support' a school or a parent support advisor. An issue that related to schools C, D and F is that the parents were known to the PSAs and were 'in the system'. In an attempt to try to meet the 'hard to reach parents' (those not in the system), I volunteered to 'shadow' a PSA at school C. The volunteer work involved accompanying the PSA 'knocking on doors' (cold calling) as she tried to make contact with parents not known to centre staff or using the services. No interviews came from this exercise; however, conversations and experiences gained through this work were noted and have been used to help shape the data.

Addressing point (c), in all but three cases, the primary contact was the mother. This is dealt with in chapter 2.

8.4 Meeting the criteria of grounded theory

Glaser and Strauss (1967) write that:

The researcher's conviction about his own theory will be hard to shake... This conviction does not mean that his analysis is the only plausible one that could be based on his data, but only that the researcher himself has high confidence in its credibility (p. 225-6).

Corbin and Strauss (2008) devote an entire chapter to examining various approaches to judging GT (4.3.8) and present a list of ten criteria that researchers may find helpful. They examine concepts such as 'credibility', 'applicability', 'fit' and 'understandability' as possible ways of assessing a GT study; they make particular mention of Charmaz and her list of four criteria as particularly useful. As this thesis has generally followed Charmaz's approach, it seems appropriate to use her suggestions for testing GT. Charmaz (2006) presents the following criteria for testing GT:

- a) credibility;
- b) originality;
- c) resonance; and
- d) usefulness.

Charmaz (2006) further argues, that GT studies should be viewed in a specific social context as this will enable comparisons with other studies, which is an important element in the process of developing general theories. The findings of this study are specific to a time, place and population. It examines how parents of primary school aged children in Leeds, UK search for and access information. This section uses Charmaz's (2006) criteria for GT, which were discussed in section 4.3.8.

8.4.1 Credibility

Credibility is about determining whether the links between the findings and data are sufficient to merit the conclusions developed. Chapter 6 presents the findings of the research and is an attempt to demonstrate the process involved in the development of the categories through a range of techniques. These have included different coding techniques, the use of memos and diagrams. Credibility has also been sought by relating the findings to existing literature (see chapter 7) and through the submission of the research to peers, subjecting it to objective scrutinization. It has also been reviewed by academics with GT expertise.

This research has been submitted throughout its development to various forms of review. This has included University post-graduate conferences and post-graduate study groups. The research has also been presented at The Librarians' Information Literacy Annual Conference (LILAC) 2008 as a short paper and the following year at LILAC 2009 as a long paper. A journal article based on this research has also been published in the peer-reviewed Journal of Information Literacy (Walker, 2009).

8.4.2 Originality

The criterion of originality examines whether the categories developed in the study offer fresh or new insight into the areas under investigation. This is the first GT study to specifically examine parents' ELIS in the widest sense.

This research also proposes a new way of examining parents' ELIS through the GT core category 'being a parent' and the interplay between its sub-categories of formalised and non-formalised searching. Supporting the core category are the four categories that help complete the theory.

8.4.3 Resonance

The criterion for resonance relates to the fullness of the experiences examined and the ability of the theory to reflect the lives of those people studied. The interviews and data analysis were conducted over a period of time lasting several months in order to allow the data and analysis to develop. In addition to the interviews, I attended a parent's group on a regular basis which further helped to confirm the emerging theory, through observing the daily lives of parents *in situ*.

8.4.4 Usefulness

The criterion of usefulness relates to an interpretation that is useful for daily lives, it also examines the transferability of the theory beyond the narrow scope under investigation. The theory presented in this thesis provides a useful picture of how parents search, access and weigh information as they fulfil their parental responsibilities. The theory presented has wide practical application and implications for the way in which official services and organisations connect and interact with parents, for example health professionals and schools. It may also be possible to examine or compare the theory in other ELIS contexts, although this may require further research.

8.5 Addressing the objectives of this study

The objectives of this study have been outlined in chapter 1. This study has met the original objectives in the following ways:

8.5.1 Objective 1: to investigate the reasons why parents of primary school aged children look for information.

This objective has been fulfilled through the development of the category A: being a parent (see sections 6.3 and 7.3). The notion of being a parent brings with it

parental responsibilities that in turn trigger a wide range of information needs which have been defined in terms of formalised and non-formalised searching.

8.5.2 Objective 2: to investigate how parents of primary school aged children look for and obtain information to inform and support their parenting.

This objective has been fulfilled through the development of the substantive theory. The substantive theory states that parents search for information to help them meet their parental responsibilities. This is primarily achieved through their social connectivity and reliance on trusted sources and is influenced by their own affective state, as well as their need to weigh the information obtained.

8.5.3 Objective 3: to provide suitable background to the context of parents' information seeking.

This objective has been fulfilled by reviewing current socio-political contexts of parenting in modern Britain, explored in chapter 2. It has also been achieved by the examination of the wider LIS and ELIS literature presented in chapter 3.

8.5.4 Objective 4: to analyse the findings in relation to the relevant literature.

This objective has been achieved through the background literature provided in chapter 3 and the discussion of findings in chapter 7.

8.5.5 Objective 5: to offer an explanation about the phenomenon under study: the information world of parents.

This objective has been achieved with discussion provided in chapters 6, 7 and summarised in the conclusions, chapter 8.

8.6 Conclusions and lessons learnt

The findings of this thesis form a substantive theory centred around five GT categories. The five categories each describe elements of the way parents searched for and used information. The categories being defined as:

- GT category A: Being a parent (core category)
- GT category B: Connectivity
- GT category C: Trust

- GT category D: Picture of self
- GT category E: Weighing

8.6.1 Category A: Being a Parent

Being a parent was designated the core category, meaning that it represented the primary focus of the research. The findings showed that parents need a wide range of information in terms of quantity, quality and complexity. To differentiate between the different types of information need, two terms were defined namely: formalised and non-formalised searching. Formalised searching relates to those occasions where a parent has a specific, identifiable question and non-formalised searching occurs where parents search without any premeditated process in mind.

The notion that a parent's information needs and information searching is bound by their role as a parent and their 'parental responsibility' is a new perspective. As parents seek to make sense of this role, they gather, either formally or informally, the information they require to make decisions as part of their parental responsibilities.

8.6.2 Category B: Connectivity

The substantive findings showed that parents meet many of their information needs through social connectivity, something attested to by the LIS literature (see chapter 3). In the case of this research, two types of network were identified. The first is categorised as 'social networks' and includes family and friends, the other was termed 'formalised networks' and relates to contact with health services or teachers. I have argued that a parent's own social connectivity is one of the most important and widely used sources of information. For parents interviewed from lower socio-economic backgrounds, their use of PSAs proved to be an invaluable source of information, although this came at a potential cost, with many parents relying on this support and not developing their own information searching skills. These findings suggest that parents from the higher socio-economic backgrounds generally find it easier to navigate formalised sources, primarily because of their own social-capital.

Parents from the lower socio-economic backgrounds reported that they often found it difficult to communicate with professionals such as doctors or teachers. Many of these parents also reported that they received relatively little help and support from family and friends. Two reasons given for an inability to seek information from family and friends were that either there had been a family breakdown, or there was a recognition that family and friends were in the same position as themselves and so they did not want to burden them further.

One interesting facet of 'connectivity' relates to examples where parents go for advice to people who are similar to themselves in terms of values and beliefs. This did not always prove to be beneficial. Indeed, it was an example of people using their 'strong ties' (Granovetter, 1973; 1983) that is, relying on people like themselves, who have access to the same resources, rather than using wider 'weak ties' to look for alternative views or to access different sources.

8.6.3 Category C: Trust

Trust is an important element of parents' information seeking. Parents regularly use trusted people, often family or friends as their primary source of information. Many parents also spoke about using trusted sources, these being specific internet sites or books that they have found useful. Trust is developed through a number of ways; these may include: qualifications (formal and experiential) of a source, shared values, credibility and also relationships.

A number of parents interviewed from the lower socio-economic backgrounds reported that they were unable to trust members of their local community. Many of the actors from this social grouping also reported a mistrust of professionals. This was manifested through a lack of interaction with official services. In the sample, the one professional group who seem to have successfully cultivated trust with parents were the local PSAs and in particular Susan at school D.

Trust does not specifically relate to other people. Parents reported that they have a variety of 'trusted' sources. The qualification for a source becoming 'trusted' is a combination of a number of factors: These included: accessibility, confidence, similar values and beliefs, qualifications (either academic, as with a doctor or a teacher or through experience, such as with other parents) and through relationship.

8.6.4 Category D: Picture of Self

A picture of self examines how a parent's affective cognitive state influences their information seeking; either hindering or enabling the process. A general picture emerged that those parents who were socially confident and better educated were best equipped to search for information efficiently.

The research found that those parents in the lower socio-economic backgrounds and in particular those dealing with challenging parenting problems (such as behavioural issues), were more likely to report that they suffered from a low opinion of themselves or that they were dealing with feelings of isolation, frustration, anxiety and despair. This was

exemplified by one mother who did not want to ask for help because she felt 'like a failure', because her eldest daughter was unruly and had recently attempted suicide.

As with 'connectivity', those parents who had a greater social capital generally reported that they felt confident about approaching professionals or even asking for help. Indeed, those parents from the higher socio-economic backgrounds reported that they were only too willing to seek help and advice from whatever source they saw as relevant. This was in contrast to those parents from the lower socio-economic backgrounds.

8.6.5 Category E: Weighing

Weighing demonstrates how parents make sense of the information they have obtained. The findings suggest that parents do not necessarily logically evaluate information *per se*, but tend to 'weigh' the information. The findings identified several criteria used by parents when weighing information, these are: building a case by gathering as much information as they can about a subject, looking for relevance or meaning in the information, using their feelings and instincts to make subjective judgments about a particular source and finally, reflecting on the information and the problem. Importantly, with regards weighing, it was found that in most cases, a parent's aim was to simply obtain enough (or satisfice) information to help them make a decision.

8.7 Future work

This is the first GT based study to specifically examine the ELIS of parents of primary school aged children in Britain from a LIS perspective. As a result of this investigation, I believe several areas have been highlighted that warrant further investigation.

Firstly, the reliance on the use of interviewing as a primary method of investigation has revealed that it is not necessarily the most appropriate technique to employ in order to capture, holistically, the full spectrum of everyday information seeking; especially for apparently mundane or inconsequential non-formalised information needs. It is suggested that future studies could be conducted using a number of alternative methods such as ethnographic observations or the use of diaries to specifically identify non-formalised information searching.

Secondly, there was a noticeable difference between the different socio-economic groups in terms of their information seeking and information need. I believe that this study has shown that there is an argument for conducting separate studies, each study focusing on parents from the same socio-economic group. The data from separate studies can then be viewed holistically to aid the development of a formal theory.

Thirdly, following on from the second point, there is also an argument for conducting studies on:

- (a) parents who have a child with an ongoing special or complex need; and
- (b) the impact PSAs have on parent's ELIS.

Fourthly, each of the four remaining categories, picture of self, trust, weighing and connectivity could each provide the basis for their own specific study into their influence on the information seeking of parents.

Fifthly, the study should be viewed in relation to other areas of ELIS, as a way of determining its transferability and usefulness as part of the process of developing a formal theory.

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10 Appendices

10.1 Appendix A: Summary of interviewees

Ref	Pseudonym	Source	Interview Date	Status	Work	Age	NVQ Level	Age of children
1	Chloë	School C	03/06/08	Single	FT	39	1/2	17,15,10
2	Anne	School A	06/06/08	Partner	PT	36	3/4	14,13,9
3	Beth	School B	10/06/08	Partner	PT	38	4/5	5, 3
4	Alison	School A	11/06/08	Single	FT	43	PG	13, 11
5	Carol	School C	13/06/08	Partner	NEA	39	1/2	5, 8
6	Abby	School A	16/06/08	Partner	FT	44	PG	10, 12
7	Betty	School B	18/06/08	Partner	PT	36	4/5	9, 7
8	Beverly	School B	18/06/08	Partner	PT	41	PG	8, 5, 4, 2
9	Reference not used (Interview did not record)							
10	Brady	School B	18/06/08	Partner	PT	40	4/5	6
11	Andrew	School A	23/06/08	Partner	SelfE	42	PG	6, 4
12	Dianne	School D	23/06/08	Partner	NEA	36	None	14, 11, 6
13	Reference not used (attended interview with friends but did not participate)							
14	Donna	School D	23/06/08	Single	NEA	41	None	15, 6
15	Dani	School D	23/06/08	Single	NEA	32	1/2	14, 11, 7
16	Dawn	School D	23/08/06	Single	PT	28	3	9, 5, 6
17	Denise	School D	23/06/08	Partner	Retired	59	PG	10
18	Deirdre	School D	23/06/08	Partner	FT	36	1/2	18,16,8,6
19	Andrea	School A	25/06/09	Partner	FT	39	PG	5, 2
20	Daisy	School D	26/06/08	Partner	NEA	24	1/2	6, 4, 2, 1
21	Dominique	School D	26/06/08	Single	NEA	36	1/2	18, 7
22	David	School D	26/06/06	Married	Retired	57	3	9
23	Cyndy	School C	09/07/08	Married	NEA	40	None	10,13,21,26
24	Faye	School F	14/08/08	Single	NEA	37	1/2	16, 15, 9
25	Fern	School F	15/08/08	Married	NEA	40	None	10
26	Fiona	School F	16/07/08	Single	NEA	41	3	17,13, 10
27	Flora	School F	17/07/08	Married	NEA	43	1/2	18, 10

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28	Gail	Church	17/07/08	Married	NEA	41	1/2	8
29	George	Church	21/07/08	Married	SelfE	42	None	12, 10
30	Gina	Church	23/07/08	Married	FT	54	PG	21, 19, 9
31	Grace	Church	28/07/08	Married	FT	47	PG	16, 10
32	Emma	School E	02/10/08	Single	Student	36	3	9, 4
33	Ellie	School E	08/10/08	Partner	SelfE	32	1/2	12,10,7,4
34	Geri	Church	15/10/08	Married	NEA	45	PG	15, 12, 8
35	Gaby	Church	16/10/08	Married	PT	40	4/5	8, 5

Key:

Work Section

FT = works full-time in paid employment

NEA = not economically active (some mothers refer to themselves as full-time mums)

PT = works part-time in paid employment

SelfE = works and is self employed

Student = full-time student

10.2 Appendix B: Brief profiles of parents interviewed

Ref	Pseudonym	Biographical Summary
1	Chloë	Single mother with two boys and one girl. She has a full-time job as a PSA. Chloë is educated to O Level/GSCE standard and has a child care background. She lives on an inner-city housing estate situated near school C and also close to her mother who helps with child care
2	Anne	Married mother of three children living in a local commuter village in the North east of the city. She is educated to A Level standard and works part-time. She has three children aged between 9 and 14 years.
3	Beth	Married with two young children aged 3 and 5. She is a graduate working part-time in a professional capacity for a local authority. Her husband is an IT professional. Both are practicing Catholics and send their eldest child to a local Catholic primary school, B.
4	Alison	Single mother of two girls. She works as a nurse and is in the process of completing an MSc. She lives in a local commuter village in the North of the city. Her eldest daughter goes to a secondary school, a mixed comprehensive with a good reputation. This school is several miles away requiring a bus journey; the local secondary school is only 2 miles away, however, it has a bad reputation locally.
5	Carol	Carol is a married mother of two children (one boy and one girl) living in a poor housing estate in the East of the city. The children attend the local school. Carol is articulate and has attended courses run by local organisations to help 'develop' herself.
6	Abby	Abby is a professional working for the NHS. She is married and works four days a week; she has two children aged 10 and 12. Abby lives in a local commuter village in the North of the city. Her job involves identifying families with obese children and working to target and help reduce obesity.
7	Betty	Betty works as a teaching assistant at a local primary school in the South of the city. She lives in the local community and attends the local Catholic Church. She has two daughters aged 7 and 9 at the school. She is also a graduate.
8	Beverly	Beverly is a self-employed professional with a post-graduate qualification. She lives in the local community in the South of the city and is married. Beverly has four children aged between 2 and 8 years (three boys and one girl).
9	Reference not used (Interview did not record!)	
10	Brady	Brady is a teaching assistant at a local primary school and has one daughter at the school in year 6. She is 40 years old and a graduate. She has very little experience of the internet and computers in general. She lives locally in the South of the city with her husband and they are regular church goers at the local Catholic church.
11	Andrew	Andrew is a married father of two young children aged 4 and 6. He is an accountant who now works part-time from home, living in a prosperous commuter village in the North of the city. His 4 year old son is autistic which has been a pressure on the family.
12	Dianne	Dianne was interviewed at the same time as Donna. These women were in many respects 'reluctant' interviewees and suspicious of my presence and questioning. Dianne lives on a housing estate in the South of the city and has three children aged 6, 11 and 14.
13	Reference not used (attended interview with friends but did not participate)	

14	Donna	Donna was interviewed at the same time as Dianne. Donna lives on a housing estate in the South of the city and has two children the youngest, a girl who is 6 and her eldest, a boy who is 15. Her son has suffered behavioural problems at school since the death of an uncle.
15	Dani	Dani is a lone parent with a GCSE level qualification. She lives on a housing estate in the South of the city. She has three children aged, 7, 11 and 14.
16	Dawn	Dawn was one of the most challenging interviewees. She seemed very nervous, even insecure, throughout the interview despite efforts to try and coax her out of her shell. Susan, the PSA said that she was one of the most difficult cases she had, and that she had done extremely well getting to and agreeing to the interview, thus putting herself in a very scary situation. She has three children at the school.
17	Denise	Denise is a retired nurse and primary carer of her granddaughter aged 10. She lives in a housing estate in the South of the city. Her granddaughter has a rare bone disorder called Perthes Disease affecting her hip called.
18	Deirdre	Deirdre is married and works full-time. She came in especially for the interview, taking time off work. She has four children 6, 8, 16 and 18. Her 16 year old son has special learning needs.
19	Andrea	Andrea is a professional with a post-graduate level qualification. She is married with two young children aged 2 and 5. She lives with her husband in a prosperous commuter village in the North of the city.
20	Daisy	Daisy is married, with four young children and is pregnant with a fifth. She has been homeless for several months since leaving her previous house after an aggravated break in. She is educated to GCSE level. Daisy and her family are sharing a single room at her sister-in-law's house.
21	Dominique	Dominique is having continuous problems with her eldest daughter who is 18 and has attempted suicide. These problems have been going on for several years and have had an effect on the behaviour of her youngest daughter who is aged 7. She is a lone parent, educated to GCSE level and does some voluntary work.
22	David	David and his wife look after, and now have full legal custody of their young grandson. They have had to fight his mother who is a drug addict for custody. David is a retired tradesman with GCSE level qualifications; he lives on a housing estate in the South of the city.
23	Cyndy	Cyndy has two young daughters living at home aged 10 and 13. She has two older children, a son aged 23 and a daughter aged 25, who has recently lost her own child aged 1. Cyndy is married to the father of the two younger children and is educated to GCSE level. She is a full-time mother. Her husband has recently been made redundant and they live in a council flat on a poor estate. During the interview, various friends and family popped by and all contributed. The focus for the family disquiet is her 13 year old daughter who is 'blamed' for many family problems—she has recently taken an overdose of tablets and is under the care of a psychiatrist.
24	Faye	Faye looks after her nephew. She is a single mother with three of her own children. Her nephew, who was born to a drug addicted mother, was himself addicted to drugs when born. He now has serious behavioural issues and is a pupil at the local pupil referral unit (PRU). She lives at home with her elderly, former mother-in-law, in a village in the North of the city. Faye does not work and is educated to NVQ level 1 and 2.

25	Fern	Fern's son attends the local PRU because of 'learnt social behaviour' and a troubled early childhood. She has a conviction for being drunk and disorderly, is divorced from the son's father, is battling with alcohol addiction and has attempted suicide. She had to fight to gain custody of her son from his father and his new wife. She has no formal qualifications, does not work and lives with her new husband, who also does not work.
26	Fiona	Fiona is a single mother living with three children. She is educated to A-level standard. Her youngest son attends the local PRU because of his behavioural problems. She has tried to work with the professionals who she sees as 'closed' to what she has to say and not willing to listen to her. She feels that communication has been lacking and the only real help is through a support worker and a charity based in the city. Fiona refers to social services as 'Carry on Social Services', and complains that her son's lead clinician does not believe there is anything wrong with him. She currently lives in a council house in the South of the city and worries that she may be evicted because of her son's behaviour.
27	Flora	Flora is married and has two children, a 10 year old son and an 18 year old daughter. She is educated to GCSE level. Her son has behavioural problems and he attends a local PRU. She lives on an affluent housing estate in the South of the city.
28	Gail	Gail is a married Christian with a son. She is the sister in law of Grace (31). She works full-time as a mother, although she occasionally child minds her nephews. She lives in an affluent area in the North West of Leeds.
29	George	George is married and attends the local church. His wife also attends the church, but feels that she has not connected with many of the Christians there due to differences in social class. George is a self-employed barber, his wife a childminder. They have two daughters, one in Year 6, the other in Year 7. They live in the North of Leeds in a private home.
30	Gina	Gina and her husband are a professional couple. Gina is a school nurse and her husband an accountant. They have three sons. The youngest is at primary school and the eldest at University. They are committed Christians attending the church
31	Grace	Grace is a Christian parent who is married with three sons. She is a secondary school teacher and friends with Gail (28). She lives in the North West of the city, in an affluent area.
32	Emma	Emma is a widow who has two daughters to look after. She has recently embarked on a BEd to become a primary school teacher. Her parents live a long way away on the Isle of Wight. She lives in the South of the city in a mixed-housing estate.
33	Ellie	Ellie is a keen member of her local mums and tots group. She is living with her partner and their four children aged 4, 7, 10, and 12. She has a part-time job as a childminder working from home which is located in a mixed housing estate in the South of the city. Her son, aged 10 has ongoing heart problems.
34	Geri	Geri is a married former teacher who looks after her three daughters aged 8, 12 and 15. She is a Christian and attends the local church. She lives in a desirable location in North Leeds. Her elder daughters attend the local and very well regarded school.
35	Gaby	Gaby is a married mother of two young boys who both attend the local primary school. She is a graduate who works part-time. She is a Christian and a member of the church. Gaby lives in an affluent area of NW Leeds.

10.3 Appendix C: Summary of Bingo 'n' Butties observations

Date	No. ♀.	Child	No. ♂	Comments
2008				
17 Sep	16	7	0	I was speaking with the support workers about the difficulty in accessing hard to reach parents--those people whose voices remain unheard and who miss out on much of the community work. One of the workers said that very often 'it is those parents who shout the loudest' who get all the help and support with those in real need being missed out. She explained that the only way to get in contact with some people was to go 'door knocking' and that they were always on the lookout for volunteers. I said that I would happily commit for six months. This is an opportunity to try and meet with those people outside of the connected social group.
24 Sep	12	4	0	Sat with a group of ladies, I still feel that there is a barrier and that I am 'eyed with suspicion', although this seems to be getting better. Topic of conversation: discussions about the local primary schools -- this one and the local Catholic school.
01 Oct	16	7	0	After the session, one of the PSAs talked to one of the ladies to support her with a problem she was having with the council. The PSA was able guide her to the proper council department and person to speak with. There were also a lot of examples of further education and training opportunities which were advertised.
08 Oct	18	7	2	An interesting interaction observed was between two of the ladies having a disagreement about the behaviour of one of their daughters.
15 Oct	15	6	0	The YMCA has pulled out of 'training' for local mothers due to lack of numbers. This has caused anger and resentment. The PSAs are also 'miffed' because they tried to promote the courses. The reason given for the courses being pulled was that not enough mothers attending and so it was not economically viable. As one of the PSAs said, she ran a support group for 9 months before it took off, "with these people you need to keep plugging at it, you can't advertise it and just stop it...it doesn't work like that'.
05 Nov	16	7	0	PSAs were trying to promote examples of further education and training opportunities (This was advertised).
12 Nov	17	8	0	There is still bad feeling between some of the mothers and this was visible. (See: 8 Oct).
19 Nov				Did not attend.
26 Nov	16	6	0	A job centre liaison person attended to explain about benefits. The PSAs also promoted children's activities for the holidays. They also re-enforced the group's 'ground rules' due to hostility between some mothers from previous weeks. One PSA noted that 'some of the mothers are child-like in their attitudes and personalities'
03 Dec	16	7	0	Some ladies were talking about healthy eating and a few remembered a TV programme that had been broadcast a couple of months earlier. The programme was about a girl who only ate

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				chocolate -- this caused some debate. Some parents said that it had been the girl's parents fault for 'pandering to her wants', others took the view that the girl had come to no harm. The debate came to no conclusion. Although no formal answer was given it looked as if it was almost decided to 'agree to disagree'. [*This same example was used by Donna and her friend in their interview].
10 Dec	13	4	0	At the end of the session a parent who is having housing difficulties was taken to one side and given 1-2-1 guidance from one of the support workers. The information was mainly contact details and where to go next for help.
17 Dec	16	7	0	Holiday club information was handed out for the impending holidays. There were some complaints that there was a nominal fee for some of the activities, especially from those parents who did not work. There was also the complaint that if you did not attend these meetings (bingo'n'butties) you will miss out on a lot of the information and may miss being able to book your child onto a place, as it books up very quickly.
2009				
21 Jan	16	7	0	An outreach worker from 'Job Centre Plus' gave a brief presentation to let the ladies know that they would be visiting the group over the next few weeks. This means that if anyone has any questions or problems they could contact him when he attends the meetings.
28 Jan	18	8	0	One lady was telling her friend about a bullying problem at school and that she was thinking about going to the class teacher. Friends sympathized and agreed that bullying happened at the school.
04 Feb				Did not attend
11 Feb.				Did not attend
25 Feb.	9	3	0	One of the ladies was speaking to me and a group about the trouble she has had with her daughter being bullied at school, she had tried speaking to the teacher but nothing has happened. She intends to go and see the head teacher. [This is an unresolved issue that has been going on for some time].
04 Mar	15	5	0	The Job Centre Plus worker has started to visit the group and is offering services to the ladies, such as helping complete their benefits forms, looking for training and job information. His services are being sold on the basis that he can help them ensure that they are claiming all the benefits that they are entitled to.
11 Mar	15	5	0	There was a discussion between two ladies. It was about one of their sons who has had 'red marks' on his body for the past two weeks. What should she do? They decided that it was 'nothing much'.
18 Mar	11	4	0	A 19 year old mother of 2 young children was taken aside by one of the support workers and given help and guidance about college courses and gaining an NVQ.
25 Mar	16	7	0	Did not attend
29 Apr	8	3	0	Contacts were given to parents about Northern College courses for the mothers I was talking to a visiting PSA. She was talking about one of her mothers who had a crisis the other day and that she would only work with her 'key worker' and no one else. She said that she did not know what would have happened if that worker had not been

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				around, the mother would have gone without help.
06 May	No meeting			
13 May	14	5	0	
20 May	10	4	0	The PSAs were trying to get six mothers to commit to a six week course which will teach them to help their children – (e.g. numeracy and literacy to support their children’s work). Three mothers were trying to get others on board so the course would run. In the end only these three mothers wanted to commit.
03 June	16	3	2	‘4 Families’, a government sponsored agency helping to signpost single parents into work, visited the session. Their aim is to help parents get back to work by signposting, benefits information, educational information, child care etc. [Seems similar to the work that the man from the Job Centre was doing?]
10 June	14	4	1	One mother was talking with other parents and the PSA about concerns she had about her 6 month old baby who wanted to pull herself up and start walking. They thought that there was nothing wrong with this.
17 Jun				Did not attend
24 Jun	14	4	0	One mother was speaking with the PSA and asking for help with the council. Someone had tried to break into her house during the night and she wanted to get the council to fully replace her back door that was damaged. She was worried that her house was vulnerable to another attempt. The PSA helped her contact the right council department and to ‘navigate the system’.
01 Jul				Did not attend
08 Jul	11	4	0	The two main notable events of the day were: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PSAs were pushing organised summer activities for children; • ‘4 Families’ were also visiting again.
15 Jul	11	4	0	This was the last meeting before the summer holidays. The next meeting will start in September 09. There was some information about children’s holiday activities.

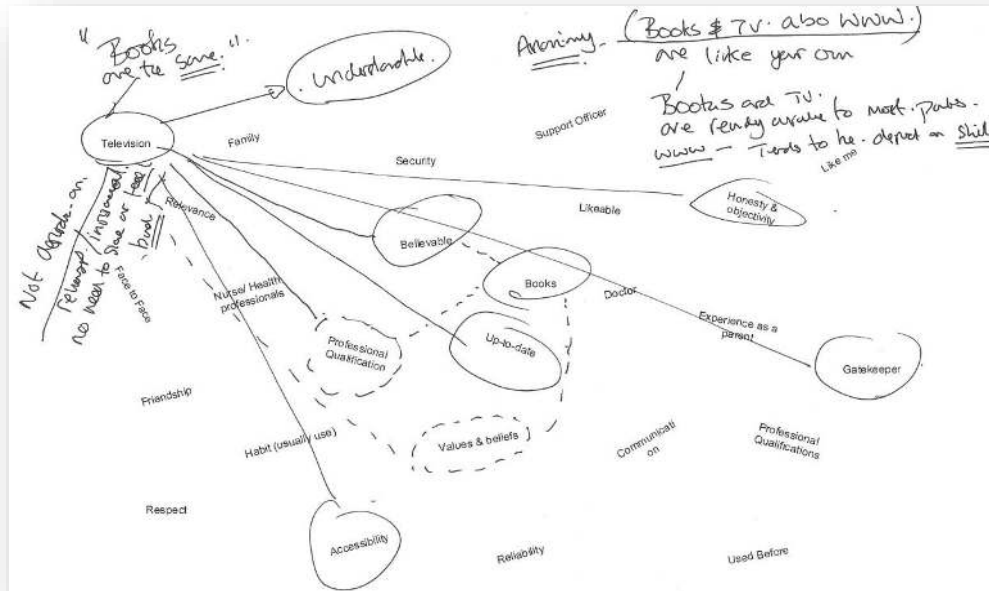
10.4 Appendix D: Summary of Friday outreach observations

The Friday morning outreach was meant to last for six weeks, but due to a number of factors only resulted in three. The aim was to try and meet parents who were termed 'hard to reach', those who do not attend local services.

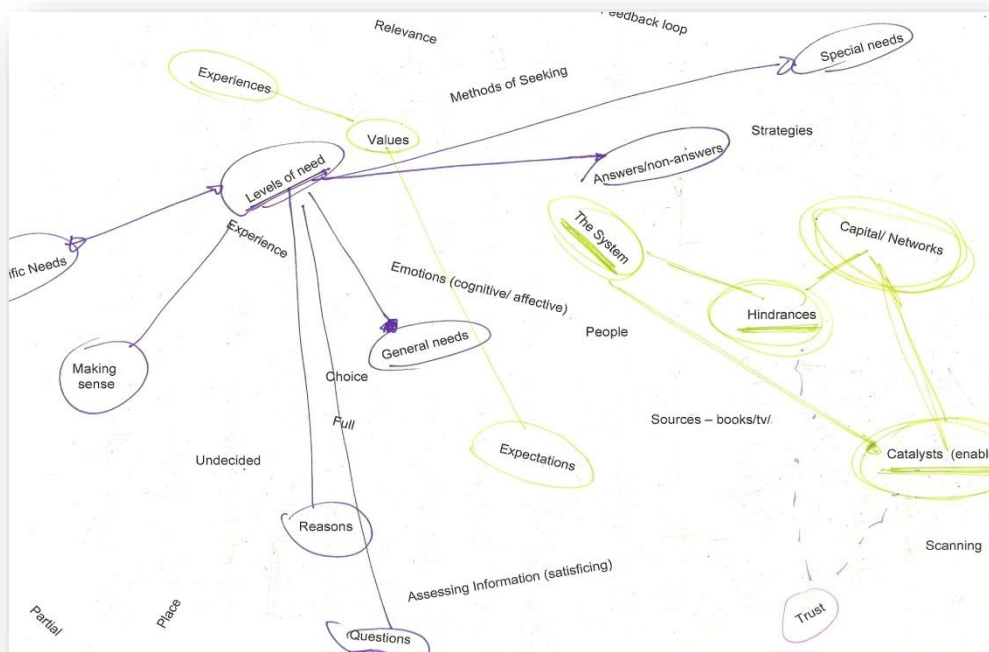
Date	Comments
21/11/08	<p>22 doors; 3 contacts</p> <p>Significant encounter: One contact has three children aged 12, 18 and 4. The 4 year old 'is a horror...his behaviour and doesn't know what to do, or who can help'. This provided an opportunity for the PSA to give the lady information regarding activities for children. She also promised to visit next week and give her information about Kids Scope, an initiative where inter-disciplinary professionals run a 'drop-in' sessions for parents. These professionals include health visitors and child psychologists and it is meant as a way for parents to obtain help and information about any problems they may have.</p>
28/11/08	<p>20 doors: 2 contacts</p> <p>Significant encounters</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Met the lady from last week; gave her information about Kid Scope surgeries. The lady was also given information about 'Christmas Vegetable Box', where she could get fruit and vegetables for free. • Met a father, the PSA has met him before. Despite being a friendly encounter, he was evasive and very non-committal about wanting to attend the local family centre, claiming that the last time he attended, he had his mobile phone stolen.
05/12/08	<p>25 doors; no contacts</p> <p>Significant encounters: None.</p>
	<p>This turned out to be the last outreach before Christmas. The outreach did not resume after Christmas due to a period of staff sickness (the PSA was off for a length of time). When the PSA returned after sick leave, there had be a reorganisation within the department and so this outreach ceased.</p>

10.5 Appendix E: Examples of coding techniques

10.5.1 Messy situational maps



Example of a 'messy situational': Television (Clarke 2005)



Example of a 'messy situational': Level of need (Clarke 2005)

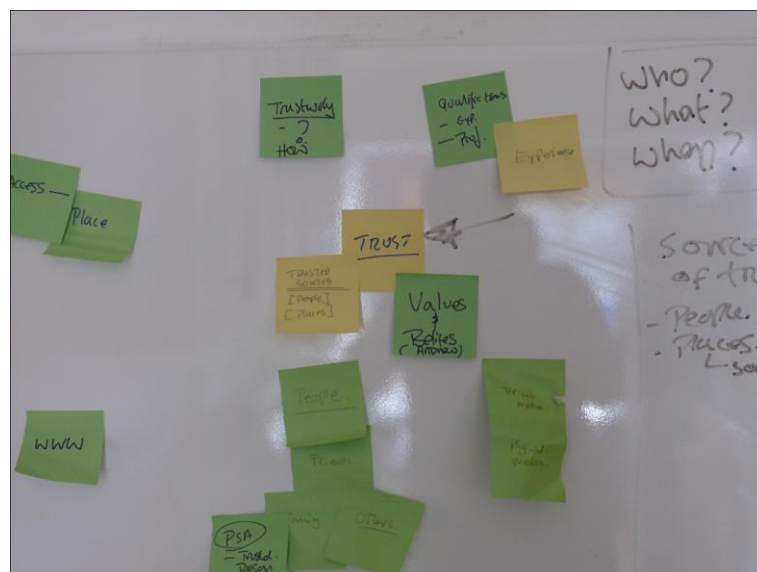
10.5.2 Situational Map

<p>Situational Map: People</p>	<p>Started: 20 March 2009 Amended: 24 June 2009</p>
<p>Individual Human Actors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family; • Friends; • Neighbours; • Professionals; • Teachers; • Doctors (inc GPs); • Health Professionals; • Support Workers (inc Parent Advisors); • Social worker; • Work Colleagues. 	<p>Collective Human Actors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government support organisations e.g. Sure Start, family centres; • Social services; • NHS; • NHS Direct; • Hospitals; • Schools; • Services in general (job centre, DWP, benefits); • Education (parenting skills); • Charities and specialist help.
<p>Political Elements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government policy (Children Act) and priorities; • Local government. provision; • Service provisions; • Services to meet specific needs; • Targets for services and professionals. 	<p>Economic Elements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education and background of parent; • Economic capital.
<p>Discursive Construction of Actors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trust towards a person or group; • Experience of a group or people; • Qualifications of a group or people; • Social networks/world of parents. 	<p>Implicated/Silent Actors</p>
<p>Temporal Elements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health scares (MMR); • Local health issues (nits, flu, colds); • School choice; • Behavioural issues. <p>[these are fleeting issues that affect parents at some time--but may have long term implications]</p>	<p>Socio-cultural/Symbolic Elements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attitudes towards certain groups e.g. professionals; • Stigmatisation; • Past experiences with professionals; • The system.
<p>Major Issues or Debates</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MMR; • Childcare rearing (smack or not to smack); • Food - what to give, when; • Interacting with children; • Parenting skills. 	<p>Spatial Elements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Differences in attitudes between professionals and parents; • We know best - patronising professionals; • Want answers in understandable form.

Other Kind of Elements	Related Discourses
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issues of trust and acceptance from different sources; • Attitudes to power; • Personal self worth and emotional state; • Prior education and experience of navigating bureaucracy.

Example of a situational map (Clarke 2005)

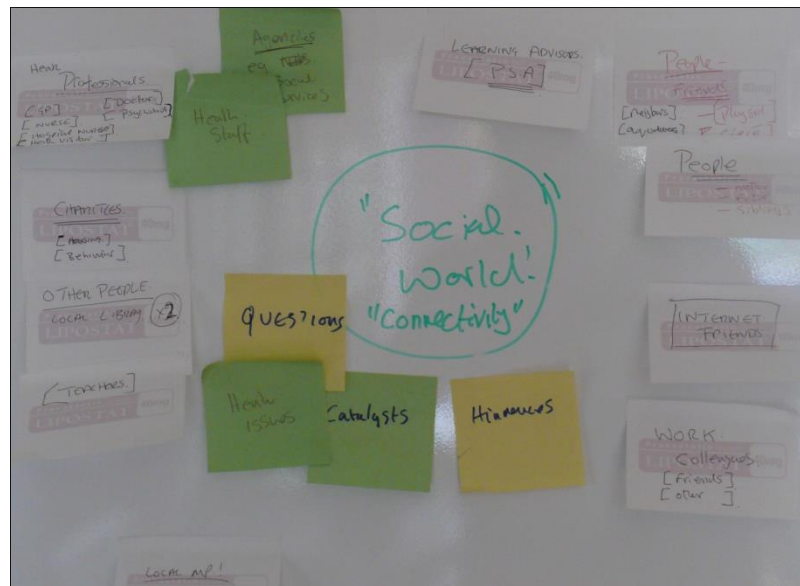
10.5.3 Example of Post-it-notes



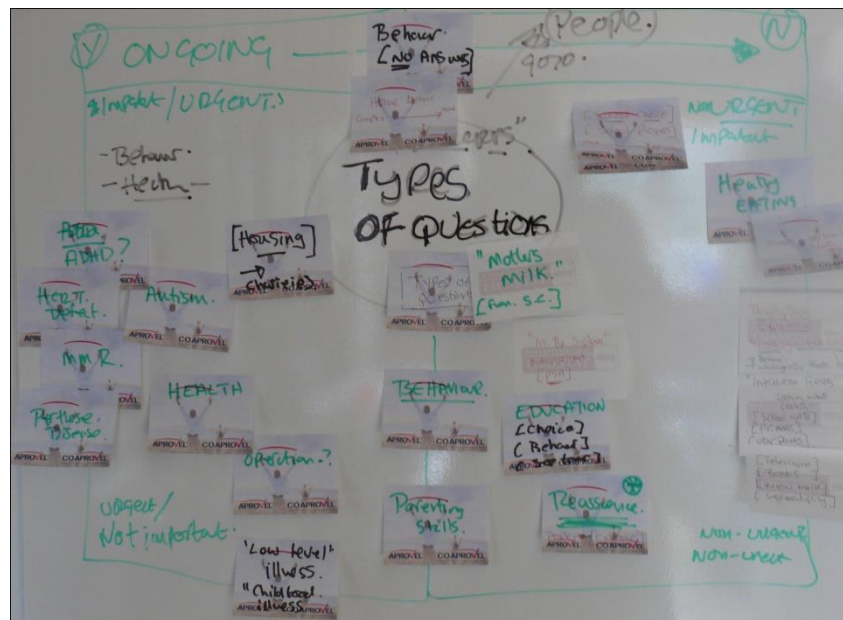
Early brainstorming: the emerging category 'Trust'



Early brainstorming: the sub-category 'social class', a category not used in this form.

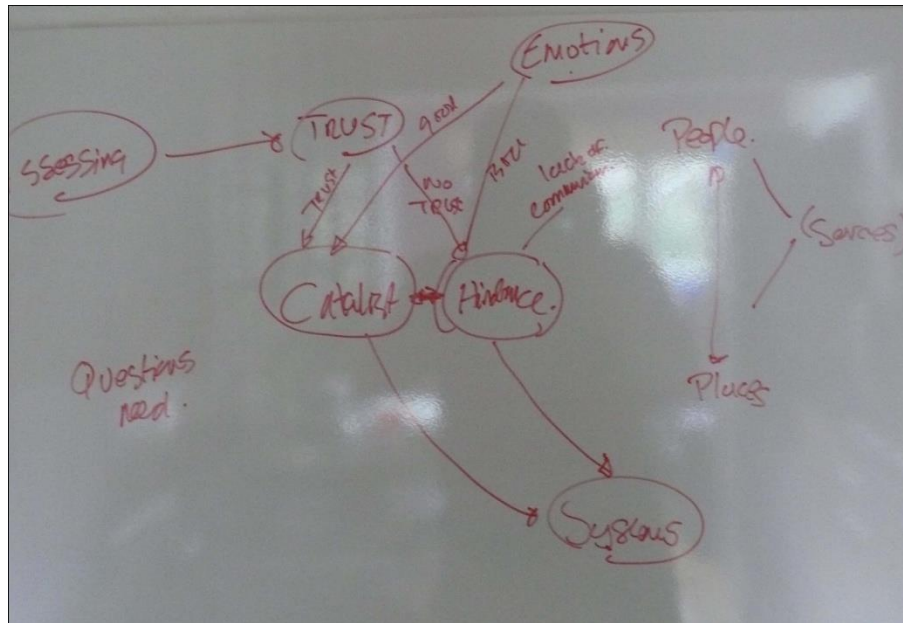


Early brainstorming: the category social world later to become the 'connectivity'

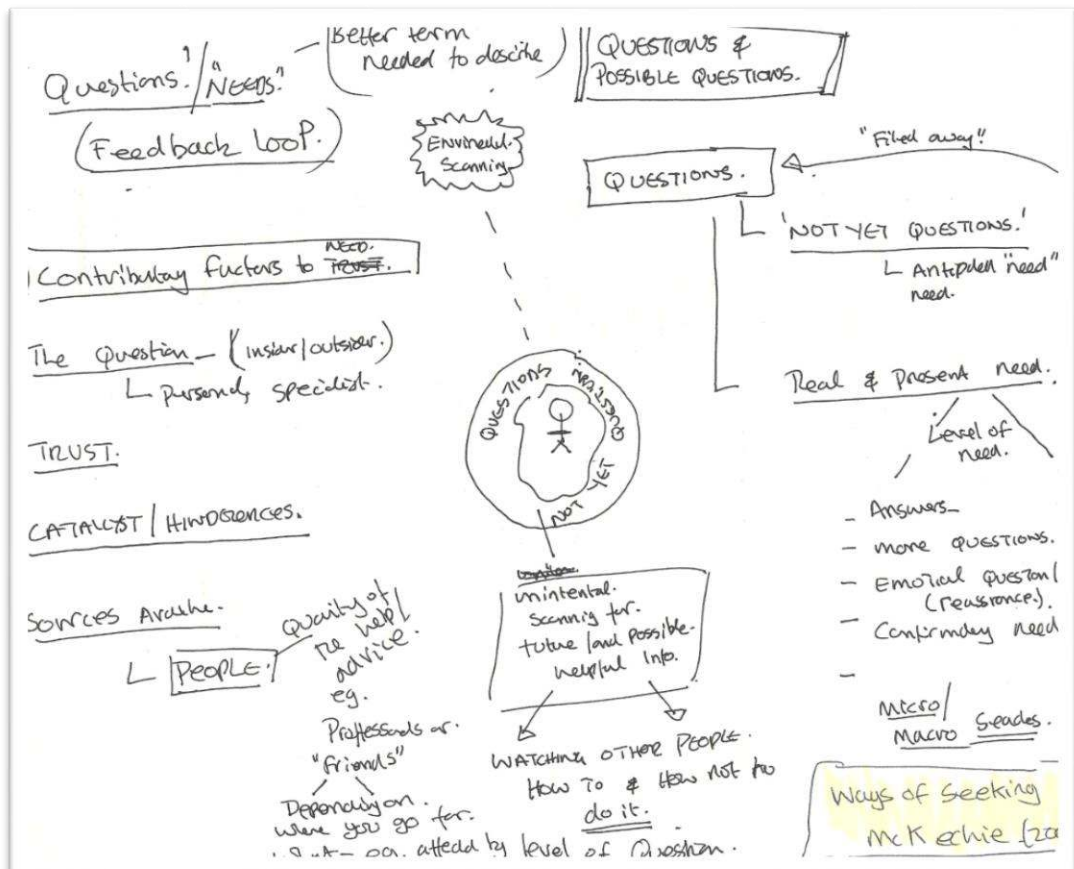


An early collection of categories and sub-categories which would later become 'being a parent originally developed out of 'questions'.

10.5.4 Example of diagramming



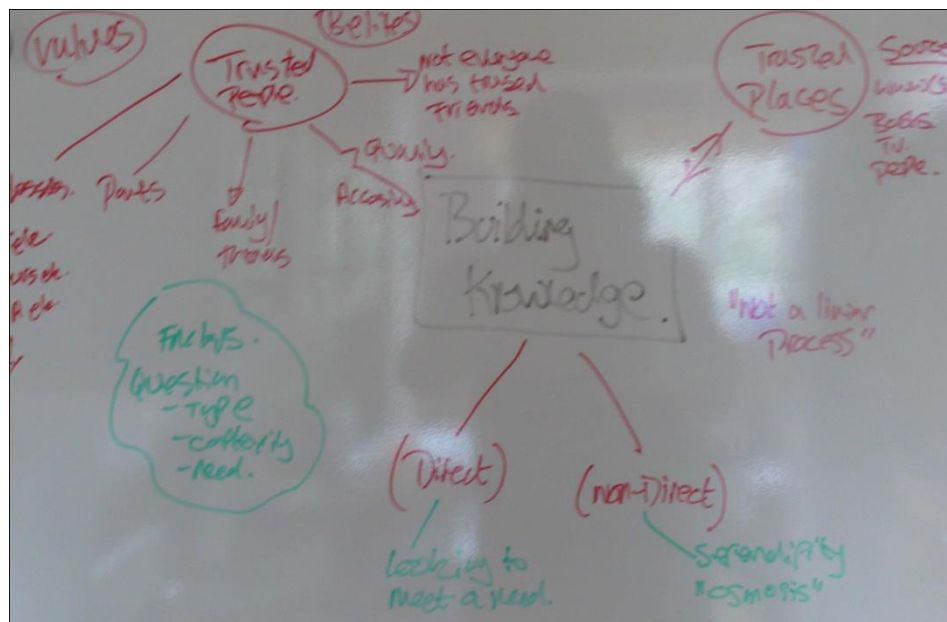
One of the first brainstorming sessions based on the first set of categories many of which were later to be substantially changed after and review of the coding process.



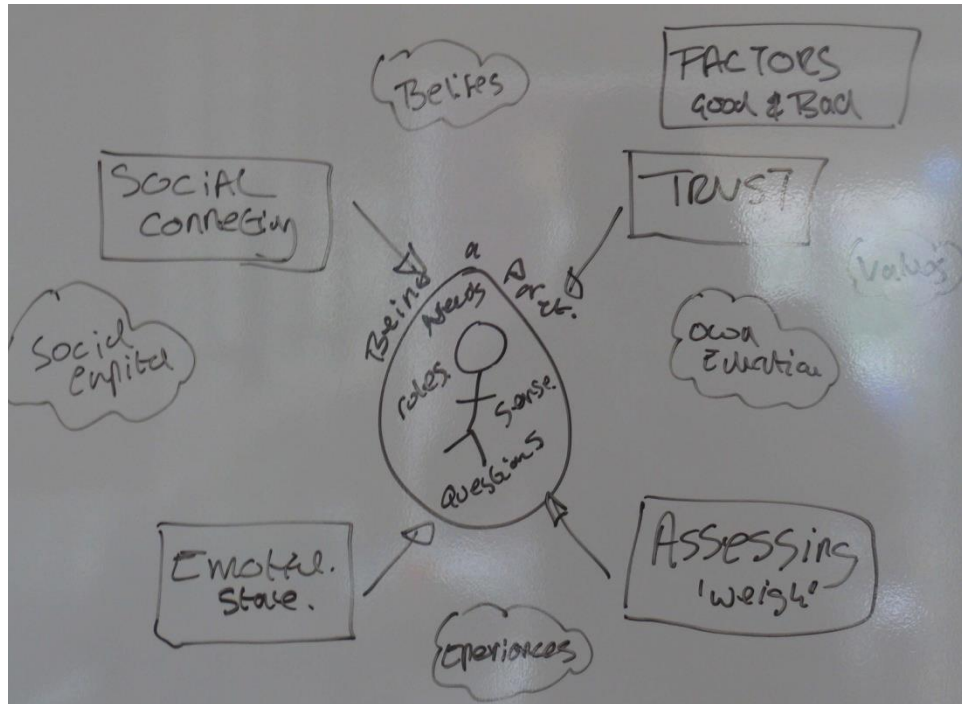
An attempt at visualising the main themes and categories as a cohesive set.



A diagram of showing the development of the category Trust



An example of diagramming the early category 'building knowledge' which would later become the categories 'being a parent' also 'weighing'



A later diagram showing the developing theory.

10.5.5 Properties and dimensions

The following tables show some of the properties and dimensions that were created as an alternative means to examine emerging categories.

Category	Properties	Dimensions
Being a parent	Formalised need	Social, physical, emotional, educational, lack of knowledge
	Non-formalised need	Social, physical, emotional, educational, lack of knowledge
Formalised need	Level of need (complexity/ importance)	Social, physical, emotional, educational, lack of knowledge (skills)
	Question/requirements, immediacy	Answer, no answer, partial answer
	Time	Immediate, not immediate, long term (on-going)
	Conscious process	Conscious, un-conscious
	Recognition of need	Known, un-known
	Verbalised need	Action, no action
Non-formalised need	Level of need (complexity/	Social, physical, emotional,

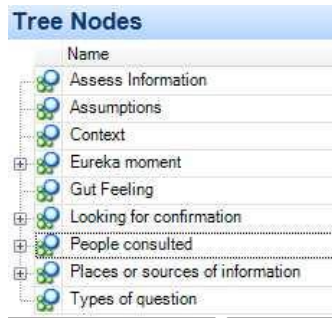
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	importance) sub-conscious, immediacy	educational, lack of knowledge
	time limited need, long term need sharing scanning moment	Answer, no answer, partial answer
Connectivity	Social networks	Family, friends, groups, acquaintances, neighbours
	Formal networks	GP, PSA, teachers, social workers support workers, part of the system
	Internet	Discussion groups, online friends
	Forms of capital	Colleagues, links to other professionals
Trust	Track record (experience)	previous results, no result, no history (unknown)
	Accessibility	Easily accessible, inaccessible, familiarity, understandable
	Believability	Credibility, fits with experience,
	Like me	Values, education, social status, faith, not like me (some to help)
	Qualifications	Professional qualifications, life experience, status, reliable, unreliable, keeps confidences
	Relationship	Personally known, stranger, acquaintance
	Inhibitor of trust	Opinion, status quo
Emotions (Picture of self)	Empowered	Battle, optimistic, hope, confidence,
	Frustration/Anger	Fear, despair, hopelessness, anxiety, worry

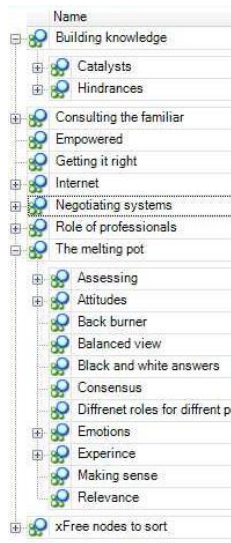
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	Reassured	Seeking approval, not alone, not being different
	Coping	Maintaining, just enough, doing ok
	Hindrances	Blockages, systems, people, attitudes, 'capital', education, affect, experiences, values
	Catalysts	Systems, 'capital', education, social class, affect, experiences, values
	Mistrust	Prevention, experiences, people, values and beliefs
Weighing	Building a case	Type (of information), quantity, quality, no. sources, accessibility
	World view	Current view, new view, openness to new views
	Reflection	Did the information help, do I need more, does it satisfy
	Feelings	Feelings, logical, common sense, by experience, consensus view
	Emotional	Informed feeling, uninformed feelings, common sense, world view
	Relevance	Relevant, not relevant, maybe relevant
	Common sense	Does it make sense

10.5.6 Examples of coding development from NVivo



An example of the first attempt at coding.



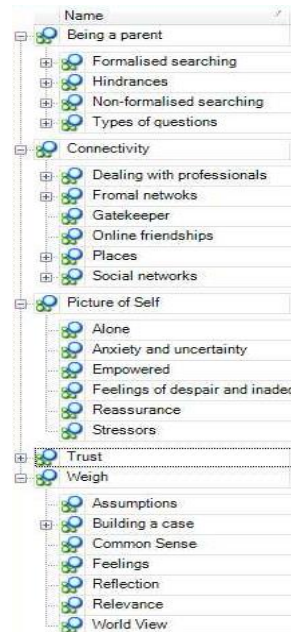
An example of the second stage of coding.



An example of later stage of coding



An example of later coding showing the larger categories prior to sorting



Moving towards a final set of categories.

10.6 Appendix F: Correspondence

10.6.1 Head teachers letter

Priestley Hall - Room 206
Beckett Park Leeds
United Kingdom
LS6 3QS

«Headteacher»

0113 3685530

«School_Name»

0790 0005999

«Address1»

20th February 2008

«Next Record If» «City»

«Post»

Dear Head Teacher

Research into the Information Literacy of Parents

I am currently undertaking PhD research into the information seeking behaviour of parents of primary school children in Leeds. With the backing of the Leeds Healthy School and Wellbeing Programme, with whom I hope to share my research, I am approaching you to ask for your help in facilitating contact with parents.

I am very aware of the time and commitment pressures that Head Teachers currently work under, and so, do not wish to unduly add to this. I hope the attached Questions and Answers sheet will clarify the involvement needed from you and answer any other queries you may have.

If you feel that you could participate in this research project or would like to know more information please either email me at c.g.walker@leedsmet.ac.uk or telephone me on 0790 0005999 or 0113 368 5530.

Kind Regards

Christopher Walker
PhD Researcher

10.6.2 Follow-up e-mail to Head teachers

From: Walker, Christopher G [mailto:C.G.Walker@leedsmet.ac.uk]
Sent: Tue 11/03/2008 23:58
To: [Head teachers]
Subject: Research into the Information Seeking of Parents

Dear Head Teacher

Research into the Information Seeking

A couple of weeks ago you should hopefully have received a letter from me asking for your assistance in facilitating contact with parents to participate in a PhD research project examining the information literacy of parents. This project is with the backing of the Leeds Healthy School and Wellbeing Programme, with whom I hope to share my research.

The aim of the research is to interview a selection of parents from across Leeds to discover how they access, seek for and process information. This research has relevance to how parents receive and interact with information and links into current initiatives such as Every Child Matters and the Children's Plan.

If you feel that you could participate in this research or would like to know more information please either email me at c.g.walker@leedsmet.ac.uk or telephone me on 0790 0005999 or 0113 368 5530.

Kind Regards

Christopher Walker
PhD Researcher

Leeds Met University | Priestley Hall 206 | Beckett Park | Leeds | United Kingdom | LS6 3QS | +44 (0)113 812 8669 | 07900005999 | c.g.walker@leedsmet.ac.uk

10.6.3 Letter to parents

Priestley Hall (Room 206)
Beckett Park
Leeds LS6 3QS

0113 3685530
0790 0005999
10th March 2008

Dear Parent/Carer

Research into the Information Use of Parents (or Carers)

I am currently undertaking research into the Information Seeking of Parents—this is simply finding out how parents (and carers) look for, obtain and use information to make decisions.

In this study, I'd like to talk with you, about how you look for, obtain and use information. Your responses will not be used in any way that would identify you personally and are strictly confidential. My purpose in collecting this information is to find out how parents and carers in general, try to find out information in the context of raising young children. The interview will take approximately one hour, and can be conducted at a time and place most convenient to you.

If you think that you would like to take part in this research or would like to know more information, please either email me at c.g.walker@leedsmet.ac.uk or telephone me on 0790 0005999 or 0113 368 5530. Alternatively, complete the slip at the bottom of the page and either return it to the school or post it directly to me at the address provided.

Kind Regards

Christopher Walker
PhD Researcher

Please contact me so that I can find out more information about the project before committing.

Name:

Tel/Mobile:

Email:

**Please return to the school, or post to Chris Walker, PhD Researcher,
Priestley Hall (206), Beckett Park Leeds, LS6 3QS**

10.6.4 Booking letter to parents

Dear «Headteacher»

Firstly, may I start by thanking you for agreeing to be interviewed as part of this study, examining the information seeking and information needs of parents of primary school aged children. The purpose of the interview is to find out how parents of primary school aged children identify, look for, obtain, assess and use information in a parenting context. It is expected that each interview will last about an hour.

I would like to book a time and date when I can conduct the interview. Interviews can be conducted during the day or evening, at a place most convenient to you. I would be grateful if you could email or telephone me back letting me know the following details:

- **Dates:** A number of dates that you would be free to be interviewed after 1 June 2008;
- **Time:** The time you would be available;
- **Place:** Please state if you would like to be interviewed at home or at an alternative location.

May I also reassure you that all interviews will be strictly confidential and that your responses will not be used in any way that would identify you personally.

Prior to the interview, I would be grateful if you could think about a recent time when you wanted to find out some information as a parent.

Examples may include:

Examples	
Child health issues	Financial issues
Child care issues	Food (e.g. healthy eating)
Educational issues	Behavioural issues

If you have any questions about the study, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you very much for your time

Yours sincerely

Christopher Walker

10.6.5 Holding e-mail sent to parents who had registered interest

From: Walker, Christopher G [mailto:C.G.Walker@leedsmet.ac.uk]
Sent: Tue 06/05/2008 09:37
To:
Subject: Research into the Information Seeking of Parents

Dear

Firstly, thank you for your willingness to participate in my research project.

The research revolves around me interviewing parents to ascertain how they search for, review and use information (sometimes called information literacy). All interviews will be confidential and anonymous conforming to Leeds Metropolitan University's published ethics policy and guidelines. Each interview will last approximately one hour, and can be arranged at a time and place that is most convenient for you. I have yet to formalise the interview questions with my supervision team, but hope to start booking interviews from mid to late May through to October 2008, and so will be in touch again in the next few weeks.

If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me. In the meantime, I look forward to meeting with you in the near future.

Kind regards

Christopher Walker
PhD Researcher

Leeds Met University | Priestley Hall 206 | Beckett Park | Leeds | United Kingdom | LS6 3QS | +44
(0)113 812 8669 | 07900005999 | c.g.walker@leedsmet.ac.uk

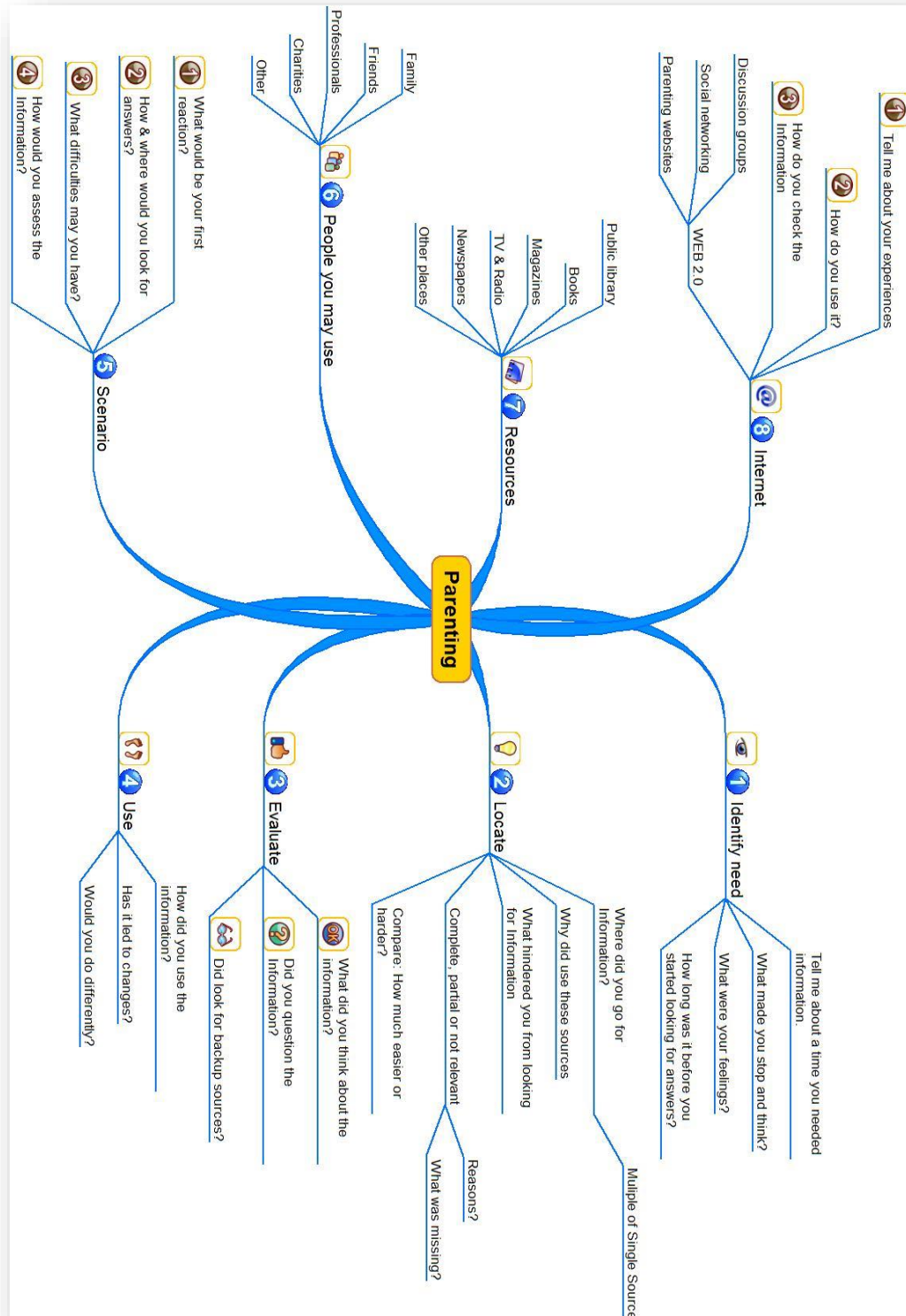
10.6.6 Briefing paper sent to Head teachers and parents

Briefing: Questions and Answers	
TITLE	Information Literacy in the Home: A Study of Parental Use and Understanding of Information
WHAT IS THE RESEARCH?	<p>The research involves interviewing sixty parents of primary school aged children in Leeds, representing a cross section of the socio-economic spectrum.</p> <p>The aim of the research is to examine information literacy (information seeking and information needs) in its widest context and determine how parents identify an information need, search for, evaluate and use the information they obtain.</p>
HOW WILL IT BENEFIT MY SCHOOL?	<p>Participating schools will be able to share in the data collected, at a time when schools are being encouraged to increase dialogue with parents.</p> <p>This research can in turn, be used by schools as evidence to inform future practice.</p> <p>The school will be able to use the research in official documents to demonstrate that they have participated in a project researching parents' information needs.</p> <p>The work will also be shared with other partners at Education Leeds, such as the Leeds Healthy School and Wellbeing Programme.</p>
WHAT WILL MY INVOLVEMENT BE?	<p>Firstly, I recognize the tremendous amount of work and initiatives that Head Teachers have to contend with, and so my aim is to try to take as little of your time as possible.</p> <p>My request is that: You allow me to meet with you, to fully explain the project;</p> <p>You allow me to contact, through your facilitation, a number of parents, who may be willing to be interviewed.</p>
WHAT ARE THE ETHICS OF THE RESEARCH?	<p>As with any project dealing with human participants, this project is subject to the University's ethics approval.</p> <p>Obtaining Informed Consent Participants will be asked to agree and sign an informed consent form.</p> <p>Right of Withdrawal Participants will be informed ahead of time by means of the sheet. At the time of the interview, when the interviewee is asked to sign the consent form, they will be reminded that they may withdraw at any time</p>

	<p>during the interview. They are also informed that they are free to refuse to answer any of the questions.</p> <p>Withdrawal from Study If a participant withdraws from the study all data will be destroyed.</p> <p>Confidentially and Data Protection The research data will be recorded in such a way as to protect the identity of the participants. The transcriptions will be stored separately from the details of participants and the key to the coding of the data. After the transcription all data will be wiped from recordings. Any presentation of data in any publications or lectures will be done in such a way as to preserve the anonymity of participants. Only data relevant to the study will be stored. Electronic data will be secured safely in an encrypted/locked folder and will be password protected. The researcher has been CRB checked by the University.</p>
<p>CONTACT DETAILS:</p>	<p>Christopher Walker Faculty of Innovation North Leeds Metropolitan University Priestley Hall - Room 206 Beckett Park Leeds LS6 3QS</p> <p>0113 3685530 0790 0005999 c.g.walker@leedsmet.ac.uk</p>

10.7 Appendix G: Interview Instruments

10.7.1 Interview guide questions ‘memory map’



10.7.2 Parent demographic data form



Interviewee Code:	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Audio File Name:	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Name:	
Address:	
Date:	
Interview start time:	
Interview end time:	
Length of interview:	

Pre-Interview Checklist	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Read through the Informed Consent Form
<input type="checkbox"/>	Has the respondent read, understood and signed the Informed Consent Form
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ask permission to audio record the interview

Christopher G Walker

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Version 6– last update: 02/10/08

10.7.3 Informed consent form for project participants

Information Seeking of Parents

I agree to take part in the above Leeds Metropolitan University research project. I have had the project explained to me, and I have read the Explanatory Statement, which I may keep for my records. I understand that agreeing to take part means that I am willing to: be interviewed by the researcher allow the interview to be audio-taped complete questionnaires asking me about my information seeking behaviour make myself available for a further interview should that be required

This information will be held and processed for the following purpose(s):
To supply evidence to support the research into the information literacy of parents
To draw conclusions of the information literacy of parents

I understand that any information I provide is confidential, and that no information that could lead to the identification of any individual will be disclosed in any reports on the project, or to any other party. No identifiable personal data will be published. The identifiable data will not be shared with any other organisation.

Withdrawal from the Study

I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I can choose not to participate in part or all of the project, and that I can withdraw at any stage of the project without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way.

Name:(please print)
Signature:Date:

10.7.4 Demographic questions

I would like to finish by asking you a few questions about you and your household. Please remember that your answers are anonymous and will only be used to help classify and analyse this interview.

1. Gender:	
Male	<input type="checkbox"/>
Female	<input type="checkbox"/>

2. Age:	
PLEASE WRITE IN	<input style="width: 100px; height: 20px;" type="text"/>

3. Ethnic group:			
White		Asian or Asian British	
British	<input type="checkbox"/>	Indian	<input type="checkbox"/>
Irish	<input type="checkbox"/>	Pakistani	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other white background	<input type="checkbox"/>	Bangladeshi	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mixed		Other Asian background	<input type="checkbox"/>
White & Black Caribbean	<input type="checkbox"/>	Black or Black British	
White & Black African	<input type="checkbox"/>	Caribbean	<input type="checkbox"/>
White & Asian	<input type="checkbox"/>	African	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other Mixed background	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other Black background	<input type="checkbox"/>
Chinese	<input type="checkbox"/>	Any other group	<input type="checkbox"/>

4. Full postcode:						
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

5. Accommodation type:			
Owens outright	<input type="checkbox"/>	Rents from a housing association or council	<input type="checkbox"/>
Owens with a mortgage or loan	<input type="checkbox"/>	Rents from a private landlord	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pays part rent and part mortgage (shared ownership)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other	<input type="checkbox"/>

6. Employment status:	
Tick all that apply	
Self-employed	<input type="checkbox"/>
Employed full-time (30 hours or more a week)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Employed part-time (less than 30 hours a week)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Unable to work due to illness or disability	<input type="checkbox"/>
Retired	<input type="checkbox"/>

Appendices

Student

Looking after home/family (this is your main activity and none of the other options apply to you)

Please describe your job title:

7. Religion:

None Jewish

Active Christian (all Christian denominations) Muslim

Non Active Christian (all Christian denominations) Sikh

Buddhist Any other religion

Hindu

8. Highest qualification:

No formal qualification

O Level/GCSEs or NVQ Level 1/2

A Level or NVQ Level 3

1st Degree or NVQ Level 4/5

Post Graduate or professional qualification

Other

9. Details of children:

	Age	School Year	M/F	Notes: e.g. nursery, playgroup etc.
Child 1				
Child 2				
Child 3				
Child 4				
Child 5				
Child 6				
Child 7				

10. Status:

Lone parent

Married or heterosexual civil partnership

Not married, living with partner

Same sex civil partnership

Other