


9. Only one recent study advocates a partnership between teachers and students in both the learning and teaching of new information resources. Watson, “If You Don’t Have It,” 176–77.


24. Moje, “All the Stories That We Have,” 39 (emphasis in text).


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Tweens and Everyday Life Information Behavior: Preliminary Findings from Seattle

Karen E. Fisher, Elizabeth Marcoux, Eric Meyers, and Carol F. Landry

As *Time* magazine featured in its August 8, 2005, issue, children age thirteen face pressures today that are far different from those experienced by recent generations (Gibbs 2005). Beyond the earlier onset of puberty for both sexes (Herman-Giddens et al. 2001; Kaplowitz 2004; Kaplowitz et al. 2001; Zuckerman 2001), today’s children live in a world of unprecedented social change due to technological advancements, commercialism, and terrorism—among others, often publicized by different media. While the *Time* articles shared insights into the everyday lives of thirteen-year-olds across the country, it focused little on the role of information in kids’ lives—a phenomenon also unaddressed by researchers of library and information science (LIS) and the academy in general. This chapter thus holds two objectives: (1) to review LIS studies of kids’ everyday information-seeking behavior (more broadly referred to as “information behavior”), and (2) to share the methodology and preliminary findings from a 2005 qualitative study funded by the National Science Foundation about kids aged nine to thirteen and everyday information.
THE TWEENS YEARS: FINDINGS FROM SCHOOL AND BEYOND

During the preteen or “tween” years, roughly from age nine to thirteen, kids undergo significant physical, emotional, and cognitive development. As kids transition from childhood dependence to adult independence, their social interactions demonstrate a switch in emphasis: parents become less important than peers in decision-making processes, identity formation, and in validation of behaviors (Harter 1983, 1998; Kellet & Ding 2004; Kroger 2004). These years also mark two important transitions that affect tweens’ motivation, behavior, and self-perception: the move from the elementary grades to middle school, and then to high school (Wigfield et al. 1996). While sociologists (e.g., Lesko 2001; Miles 2000), educators (e.g., Bransford et al. 2000; Wigfield et al. 1996), and marketers (e.g., Delvecchio 1997; Quart 2004) have focused extensively on understanding tweens, little is known about how life changes influence their information behaviors, particularly those that occur outside the school context. In general, non-LIS studies report that adolescents struggle to carve out a sense of “place”—physical, social, or virtual—in order to cope with the stresses of their changing lives (Ellkind 1984; Perret-Clermont 2004), and that they seek new information types and information sources as they try to make sense of their evolving identities in an increasingly postmodern and uncertain society (Lesko 2001; Miles 2000; Wyn 2005).

The vast majority of LIS research on minors focuses upon the school context—usually specific information-based tasks or assignments—and thus the development of information literacy and problem-solving models that are both descriptive and instructionally prescriptive. The most refined and widely cited models include Kuhlthau’s Information Search Process (ISP) (1990, 2004), Eisenberg and Berkowitz’s Big Six Process (1990), Eisenberg (2004), and Gross’s imposed query (2004). Lesser known but highly similar approaches to the challenge of disseminating and building information literacy skills include the PLUS model (Herring 1996), the Peer-Tutoring Model (Deese-Roberts & Keating 2000) and The Pitts-Striping Model (Stripling & Pitts 1988). While validated repeatedly in academic and library contexts, these models offer little insights into kids’ everyday information behavior and, specifically, interpersonal information seeking. Related “school” studies report that children’s information search-and-retrieval skills differ from those of adults, and that electronic resources pose problems for children with limited conceptions of resource relevance and authority (Agosto 2002; Bilal 2000, 2001; Fidel et al. 1999; Gross 2004; Hirsch 1999; Large et al. 1998). Along this line, researchers identified how specific media include affordances that influence information searching and retrieval, as well as how students use these media to resolve information needs (Kozma 1991; Marchionini 1989). These studies, however, are limited in that they focus on a particular information tool (e.g., CD-ROM or the Internet) or exclude the complex nature of children’s personal inquiries, which may incorporate interpersonal and tool-mediated strategies to solve an information problem.

To date, studies of everyday information behavior have largely focused on adults (cf., Case 2002) or teenagers (e.g., Agosto & Hughes-Hassel 2005; Latrobe & Havener 1997), two populations with significantly greater autonomy and mobility than preteens, and thus greater capacity for creating and using social networks that might facilitate interpersonal information behaviors. Given teenagers’ proximity in age to tweens, the two primary studies of teenagers are particularly significant. Agosto and Hughes-Hassel (2005) performed semi-structured group interviews with twenty-seven urban teens (aged fourteen to seventeen) in two Philadelphia venues to identify their information needs, sources, and preferred media. Using Savolainen’s (1995) ELIS framework, they reported that teens identified friends and family as their preferred information sources, and cell phones as their most preferred method of tool-mediated communication. Top non-interpersonal sources were the telephone, television, school, and the Internet. A typology of their needs listed schoolwork, time/date, social life, and weather as their primary information needs. Furthermore, these teens were highly skeptical of libraries and books as sources of everyday information, casting library staff as negative social types. Latrobe and Havener (1997) studied eighteen teens (sixteen to seventeen years old) in an eleventh grade honors math course. Through surveys and individual interviews, they reported that teens were most in need of course-related information, but also sought information on relationships, work, future plans, recreation, health, and lifestyles. All students reported using teachers, peers, and course-related materials to fulfill their information needs.
A third related study by Shenton and Dixon (2003) found that "youngsters" of all ages turn to adults and peers for information. Conducting focus groups and interviews with 188 students aged seven to seventeen in a rural town in Great Britain, they revealed a typology of thirteen different information needs: advice, spontaneous "life situation" information, personal information, affective support, empathetic understanding, support for skills development, school-related subject information, interest-driven information, self-development information, consumer information, preparatory information, reinterpretations and supplementations, and verification information. The study further identified that some young people take three general social types into consideration when selecting persons to consult about an information need: (1) people of convenience; (2) friends or peers of comparable experience; and (3) experts, such as teachers. Teachers and librarians were cast as negative social types by some students, who were loath to approach them for particular information needs. Unfortunately, Shenton and Dixon's typology fails to distinguish information needs developmentally, or enumerate qualitative differences in strategies among the developmental periods of childhood, preteen, and teen.

Collectively, these three studies are the first to address the everyday information behavior of minors; however, research is needed that focuses upon minors at specific developmental stages and, hence, age groups.

**NSF-FUNDED STUDY OF TWEENS**

Our investigation of the everyday information behavior of tweens (children ages nine to thirteen) is part of a larger study entitled "Talking with You: Exploring Interpersonal Information-seeking" funded by the National Science Foundation (NSF). This larger study is the first to focus specifically on why people turn to other people for everyday information, ranging from finding new jobs and lower mortgages to healthcare, housing, childcare, social activities, and other aspects of daily life. The collective results will be used to derive a theoretical model of interpersonal information seeking that can be used to design and deliver information systems and services. From over thirty populations tweens were specifically chosen for their conceptual interest: it was hypothesized that rich insights would be obtained from a population nurtured from birth to seek information interpersonaly and at a life juncture of becoming independent from the adult-oriented family/school structure, while also marked as society's most technically savvy generation. It was further hypothesized that tweens would engage in media-rich interpersonal information-seeking behavior, using all available synchronous and asynchronous media (e.g., face-to-face, telephone, e-mail, chat rooms, newsgroups, etc.).

Against a backdrop of several information and everyday life theories, including Dervin's sense-making (cf., 1992), Chatman's normative behavior (cf., 2000), and Fisher's information grounds (cf., Fisher & Naumer 2005) along with principles of everyday information behavior discussed by Harris and Dewdney (1994) and Case (2002), the tweens study was guided by the following research questions:

- What types of everyday information do tweens perceive themselves as needing?
- How do tweens seek everyday information?
- What barriers do tweens encounter in seeking and using information?
- What criteria do tweens use in assessing and sharing information and information sources?
- What are the roles of information grounds in tweens' lives?
- What roles are played by different social types regarding information flow?
- How do tweens manage their accumulated everyday information?

These questions were explored using the "TweeN Day" approach, which we designed to optimize the quality and amount of data possibly collected from a minor population during a single five-hour (10 a.m.–3 p.m.) timeframe. Initially we planned a series of focus groups and follow-up interviews with individual tweens in youth agency settings over a three-week period. This design, however, was abandoned because the benefits of prolonged engagement were far outweighed by difficulties of gaining agency access, parental consent, and minor assent, and preventing a high dropout rate.

TweeN Day was held twice: first in May 2005 at The Information School of the University of Washington (UW), and second in July 2005.
at an Outreach Christian Ministry in a low-income neighborhood on the west side of Seattle, as a means of confirming early findings with a less advantaged population. Both Tween Days employed the same approach. At UW, a recruiting flyer was posted on a community listserv, emphasizing that anyone between ages nine and thirteen could participate in the study regardless of an official affiliation with UW. At the Ministry, a key contact distributed the flyer to members of the congregation indicating that anyone could participate.

At each Tween Day, after the tweens arrived, parental consent and minor assent forms were collected, name badges were distributed, and mini-snacks provided, the tweens and researchers were introduced and the study procedures explained. One-hour focus groups comprising five to six tweens each were then conducted, followed by a snack and a second, one-hour focus group comprising the same members and researchers. After lunch, the tweens participated in a Webquest computer lab activity at UW, and a collage-making activity at the Ministry because we could not bring along computers and Internet access. During the activity, tweens were asked to participate in individual, thirty-minute interviews. In return, the tweens received UW T-shirts, a fancy certificate of participation, and a lootbag containing a UW mug and trinkets, an Internet guide, and candy. To improve accuracy and facilitate question asking, all focus groups and interviews were audio recorded. During the focus groups, two researchers were present of opposite sex; the interviews were held in rooms that afforded both privacy and public viewing. While parents were invited to attend Tween Day, at each locale only one female parent was present.

During focus group #1 the tweens were given the scenario of a new kid (their age) moving to their neighborhood. The tweens were asked to describe what everyday life would be like for the new tween and what types of things s/he would need to know. Then the tweens were asked to discuss how the following information sources would be used:

- peers with whom the tween is close
- peers with whom the tween is not close
- adults with whom the tween is close (mainly family, teachers)
- adults with whom the tween is not close
- websites
- television
- books and magazines

Focus group #1 ended with the tweens identifying the information grounds that their new neighbor might utilize. As explained by Fisher and Naumer (2005), information grounds are social settings where people go for a particular purpose (e.g., get a bike fixed, get a haircut, to eat, etc.) but wind up sharing information in the course of interacting with other people.

During focus group #2, the tweens were asked to expand the information grounds previously identified in terms of how frequently one would go there, who else would be present, what one would talk about, what one liked about it, and so on. Tweens were also asked to explain under what circumstances the sources discussed in the focus group #1 would not be used to seek information.

In the individual interviews, tweens were asked to recount a recent incident in which they sought non-school-related information as well as a time when they shared non-school-related information with someone. The recounts were based on Dervin’s (1992) sense-making, micromoment time line approach. After the tweens explained how they manage or keep track of all the everyday information that they pick up, they were asked to explain why they agreed or disagreed with ten generalizations of tweens and information that were designed to be thought provoking.

In total, twenty-one tweens participated: sixteen at UW (ten female; six male) and five at the Ministry (two female; three male). The UW tweens were Caucasian; the Ministry tweens were African American. Average age was 11.5 (11.3 at UW; 12.2 at Ministry). At UW and the ministry, respectively, five and three tweens did not show despite earlier confirmation.

Overall, the tweens were very engaged with the focus groups and interviews, providing rich insights into their information worlds. Before discussing our findings, we wish to remark upon two methodological concerns. First, Tween Day, itself, was neither designed to be nor studied as an information ground in its own right. While it is possible that some elements of an information ground might have occurred, the basic premise and core elements were not in play. Second, a portion of the study focused upon the tweens’ interaction with adults, including those whom they do not know well, while seeking information. We, the researchers, of course, fit into this source category. Based on our analysis of the incidence of observer effect, however, we did not identify
any strong events in which the children’s behavior or responses seemed altered due to our presence, the study methodology or instruments used. Along this line, to ensure trustworthiness (the study’s reliability and validity—in quantitative terms), we implemented several measures as recommended by Chatman (1992) and Lincoln and Guba (1985). Dependability (or reliability) was ensured through: (1) consistent note taking, (2) exposure to multiple and different situations using triangulated methods, (3) comparing emerging themes with findings from related studies, (4) audio taping interviews, (5) employing intracoder and intercoder checks, and (6) analyzing the data for incidents of observer effect. We addressed different forms of validity as follows:

- Face validity: asked whether observations fit an expected or plausible frame of reference;
- Criterion/internal validity (or credibility): (1) pretested instruments, (2) rigorous note taking, (3) triangulated methods, (4) peer debriefing, (5) negative case analysis, and (6) member checks or participant verification;
- External validity: provided “thick description” and comprehensive description of our methods and theory so others can determine if our findings can be compared with theirs; and
- Construct validity: examined data with respect to information behavior principles and theories of normative behavior, sense-making, and information grounds.

Moreover, learning and adopting the tweens’ “language” greatly improved the efficiency of the study and increased the trustworthiness of the data. By employing interview and observational methods we listened for and adopted the tweens’ language, thus allowing for subsequent interpretation from the participants’ perspectives.

In the remainder of this chapter, we share preliminary findings regarding the tweens’ interview responses to the ten generalizations. Collective findings about the tweens’ perceptions of specific sources, their information-seeking and -sharing incidents, as well as their information grounds and information management practices are the focus of a forthcoming report.

To gain insight into how tweens understand the role of social types in the exchange of information, including parents, teachers, and adults in general, the fifteen interviewed tweens were asked to respond to a list of ten provocative “generalizations” about information behavior. These generalizations were largely tied to Chatman’s (cf., 2000) theory of normative behavior—which posits, in essence, that information seeking is a healthy and sanctioned activity within a social group—as well as Fisher’s (Fisher and Naumer 2005) information grounds. Responses were initially analyzed using three codes: agree (full or nearly full agreement); disagree (full or nearly full disagreement); both (equal or nearly equal parts agreement and disagreement) (see table 1.1). We then qualitatively analyzed the tweens’ open responses regarding why they assumed their positions. While the responses from the tweens interviewed at both UW and the ministry were largely in agreement, except for the last generalization, their rationales or stories differed markedly at times. In general, the tweens at UW were from advantaged backgrounds, all had computer and Internet access at home if not in their bedrooms, and were connected in some way to the UW. The tweens from the ministry, on the other hand, did not have a UW link, had televisions instead of computers in their bedrooms, and could only access the latter at school (and they were on summer break during the study) or library, which they seldom visited.

**Generalization 1: Teachers Can Answer Any Question of a Preteen**

Our tweens (14/15) largely disagreed with this statement, asserting general human fallibility where “nobody knows everything” (Mr. Blackwood at UW) or more specifically that “teachers don’t know everything” (Sydney at UW). Other students documented specific instances of teacher fallibility. Aeisha (Ministry), for example, said “No, it’s not true, because when I asked my teacher how many people died on the Lewis and Clark expedition, she couldn’t answer it.” Other
Table 1.1. Tween Interview Responses

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Totals: Disagree (D) 10 13 15 9 6 5 9 4 10 6
Both (B) 2 1 0 4 7 6 5 2 0 8
Agree (A) 1 1 0 2 2 4 1 8 4 1

1. "Teachers can answer any question that a preteen might have."
2. "Parents can answer any question that a preteen might have."
3. "Preteens always tell an adult when they have a question."
4. "Preteens don’t like to seek information unless they absolutely have to."
5. "Preteens don’t like it when people give them information."
6. "Preteens don’t like it when other preteens seek information and then know more than they do."
7. "It’s not cool to tell a preteen something unless he/she asks or brings it up first."
8. "Preteens have lots of places where they can go and share information with other preteens."
9. "Society encourages preteens to gather wherever they want and socialize."
10. "Adults make it hard for preteens to talk about everyday life with other preteens and share information."

* RBB restrictions prevent the researchers from sharing this information due to sample size.

* Totals = 14 for responses #8 & #9. For all others Totals = 15.

Tweens noted that teachers’ subject specialties prevent them from answering wide-ranging questions or in content areas outside their certification. Lauren (UW), the only tween who agreed with the statement, limited her answer to her own experience, saying it is "mostly true to me" but admitted that another student had once stumped the class’s student teacher. Overall, teachers were perceived by these preteens as providing content for specific academic subjects, but limited in the range of information they could provide to curious adolescents.

Generalization 2: Parents Can Answer Any Question of a Preteen

The tweens (14/15) also largely disagreed that parents can answer any question. While most felt that parents were more capable of answering personal or social questions than teachers, there was a palpable distance between teachers and pupils that limited their discourse with teachers to academic matters. As Mr. Blackwood (UW) explained, "The teacher is more focused on making sure you learn things in class; the parent is the person who is looking out for you." Ellen (UW) clarified the difference between teacher knowledge and parent knowledge in saying: "Parents can answer social questions but a teacher can’t. There are a lot of academic questions that a teacher can. Once you’ve got teachers and parents, you’ve got a lot of resources you can talk to." On an opposite note, Aeisha and Peyton, who were interviewed at the Ministry, felt that social information was parents’ greatest weakness as an information source. They explained that a generation gap prevents parents from understanding the problems faced by modern tweens. More generally, Aeisha remarked that the "world changes every generation" and that even though parents were "once our age, things are different now." As illustrated in the following excerpt, Peyton said that social contexts, including more violent schools, are different than in the past, requiring different social information than parents can provide:

**Interviewer:** What types of questions might appear that parents wouldn’t be able to answer?

**Peyton:** [They can answer] about schoolwork, like chores or something, but not like anything about your personal life.

**Interviewer:** Why’s that?
Peyton: Because they might not be able to understand what you’re going through. That situation.
Interviewer: What about parents who say I was that age once?
Peyton: Their time may have been different than our time. People might have been nicer or more talkative back then. Like now, there’s a lot of violence that happens or something like that. But back then there wasn’t any violence that happened between schools. So their time frame is probably different than ours.

Generalization 3: Preteens Always Tell an Adult When They Have a Question

Everyone (15/15) disagreed with this generalization, saying that they have questions that are reserved from their parents, that they either “keep to themselves” or ask only of peers. According to Sydney (UW), posing questions to friends is a way of demonstrating some level of autonomy from adults: “Sometimes I can ask my friends, and they’ll tell me. And so I don’t always need an adult’s help.” Aesha (Ministry) added a different spin saying, sometimes “it’s a question that’s meant for a kid to answer, that an adult might not understand.” The idea that there are kid questions asked of peers and adult questions reserved for adults was a prevalent theme. Brooke (UW) identified three reasons why preteens might not go to an adult with a question: “They might be too embarrassed to ask, too proud to ask, or they just don’t think it’s important enough to ask.” Mr. Henderson (UW) said it would be “uncomfortable” to ask certain questions of adults. Rose (UW) explained that parents will inadvertently embarrass tweens in public if they are aware of information that is “really personal,” such as “the boy you like.” The perceived disconnect between adults and preteens makes conversation with peers “easier,” even if they perceive the information source to be less accurate or helpful, as Peyton (Ministry) explained:

Like a relationship between a girlfriend and a boyfriend, you might not go to your parents for advice or something because they might blow something out of proportion. Something like that. But if you talk to your friends, they probably won’t know what to say, but it will be easier to talk to them.

Within a peer group, our participants said that there are “close friends” or “good friends” whom one can trust with more sensitive information. Other members of the peer group may be called friends, but are less trustworthy—people whom Peyton described “friends that I just say hi and bye to.” Within the broader “friends” social type, our participants identified friends who were strong ties and others who were weak ties, and shared different information with them based on tie strength.

Generalization 4: Preteens Don’t Like to Seek Information or Ask Questions Unless Absolutely Necessary

Most (13/15) tweens disagreed with this statement, feeling that tweens are naturally curious, and at a point in their lives when they are asking questions regularly, if not constantly. Mr. Henderson (UW) explained that the preteen years are “a time when we’re trying to find out about as much as we can.” Austin (UW) also disagreed, remarking: “I think exactly the opposite of that. [G]eneration Y is named that for a reason, spelled w-h-y, and that’s because this generation tends to ask a lot of questions. And usually, our teachers have to slog through a barrage of questions flying at them all day.” Participants who agreed with the generalization, or provided a mixed response, focused on the perceived social cost of asking questions, particularly at school or in group settings. Thus some tweens reserve their questions, hoping they will be answered at “a later time.” Admitting ignorance is scary for adolescents, acknowledged Omar (Ministry), who emphasized that “some preteens are scared because other preteens might laugh at them and say, ‘You don’t know that?’” Madison (UW) provided an example from her experience:

Sometimes people just think . . . that the question will be answered later on. And sometimes preteens get embarrassed because maybe somebody else knows the answer and they’ll laugh at them for something like that. I’ve seen it happen in my classroom before. Somebody asks the question and the other person knows the answer, and starts laughing, and it gets kind of embarrassing.

For tweens in our study, curiosity was balanced by a keen awareness of peer pressure, and the implications of how information seeking might be perceived in a social context.
Generalization 5: Preteens Don't Like It When They Are Given Information

Most tweens (13/15) either disagreed or agree/disagreed with this statement, suggesting that information giving is closely related to the process of information seeking, and a natural part of communication. Kylie (UW) explained that getting and giving information is a reciprocal process, “I like it when I’m given information and I’m a preteen. Because when I ask for information, I like giving it back. And so, I like giving information.” Sydney (UW) emphasized the comforting aspects of information exchange with close ties, such as a parent: “It is fine with me when people give me information. Sometimes my mom tells me something at night before I go to bed, and then I sleep on it, and then I remember it in the morning. It makes me happy to know that people want to tell me information.”

Two participants were in strong agreement with this statement, since they perceived the information given would be critical, rather than constructive. Shaniqua (Ministry) explained that preteens “don’t like to be corrected.” Other responses reflected the importance of situationality and the nature of the information being given. Mr. Blackwood’s (UW) answer was typical of these: “it depends on what [preteens] think of the information.” Adult criticism, reprimand, or notice of failure was the type of information that preteens were not interested in receiving. Austin (UW) provided a nuanced reply, which recognized the constructive value of critical information over time: “I usually like it when I’m given information, unless it’s criticism. And then I’ll like it in the long run, but not in the short run.” All of the negative information types involved academic or behavioral issues addressed to the tweens by adults, which is closely tied to the developmental insecurities of this age group. Tweens perceive that adults are often the providers of negative information or information that they do not wish to receive, reinforcing the tension between preteens and adult social types illustrated in Generalizations #2–3.

Generalization 6: Preteens Don’t Like It When Other Preteens Seek Information and Then Know More Than They Do

Responses were greatly mixed with roughly equal numbers agreeing (4), disagreeing (5) or both agreeing and disagreeing (6) with this statement. Differences stemmed primarily from perceived motivations for information seeking, and how knowledge was used in social contexts and within peer groups. Lauren (UW) summarized the general sentiments on this issue: “Some kids get kind of jealous about what these other kids know about all this other stuff, but some kids just really don’t care.” Four tweens agreed with the statement, indicating that school in particular can be a competitive information environment. Ladarius (Ministry) said that students make fun of each other for being less knowledgeable: “I know at my school they’ll be like, ‘I’m smarter than you,’ and they’ll laugh at you if you get the question wrong.” Omar (Ministry) identified the “know-it-all” type that can make other preteens feel inferior. Mr. Henderson (UW) explained that he is competitive within his own circle of friends, and that information is a source of bragging rights in his social group, albeit with benign intent:

I think that is true because me and my friends, we’re competitive about how much we know. And a lot of times when I find my friends know more, they gloat, they try to rub it into the other one’s face. It’s not like we’re making fun of each other. We have good intentions, we’re not trying to make the other one feel bad.

The five participants who disagreed with the generalization saw information seeking by others as a positive activity from which they could benefit. They chose to see information-rich peers as a resource, rather than a detriment: “If someone knows more than I do, I can ask if I need anything. And it makes me feel good that there is someone I can ask” (Sydney, UW).

Generalization 7: It’s Not Cool to Tell a Preteen Something Unless She or He Asks for It, or Brings It Up First

Most tweens (9/15) disagreed with this statement. They said it was socially acceptable to offer unsolicited information to preteens, which mirrors responses under Generalization #4 where tweens portrayed themselves as naturally curious and taking a positive stance toward information seeking. In explanation, tweens said they occasionally withhold questions themselves, or that they perceive others need information but choose not to ask questions out of insecurity or self-consciousness. According to Shaniqua (Ministry), “it’s okay to [tell a
preteen something] because they might be too shy to ask.” Ellen (UW) revealed that there is potential discomfort on both sides of an information transaction, and that there is a social context that preteens should recognize when they share information:

Normally no, but you don’t want to barge into the subject right away. If you’re uncomfortable about it, or if there’s other people in the room, that she doesn’t want to talk about it. She should try to bring it around at a time when they feel comfortable about it, but it’s not necessarily—you wouldn’t do it if you don’t feel comfortable but it’s not necessary.

The mixed responses revealed the tensions that sometimes surround giving unsolicited information to tweens. Rose’s (UW) response illuminated that giving tweens information is generally good, but can become unpleasant if too persistent: “No, if they did that all the time, it’d probably get annoying, but if they do that occasionally, it would probably be just fine.” Mr. Henderson’s (UW) response points to a poignant perception on the part of tweens: that information giving by adults can make the younger recipient feel subordinate or resentful. He explained: “I think it’s a yes and a no. We want to know stuff as much as we can, but at the same time, when adults are constantly telling us stuff that we didn’t ask for, a lot of times it seems like they’re trying to tell us they’re superior.” These responses emphasize how some tweens are conscious of the inherent power relationships that pervade some information-giving incidents, particularly those that occur between adults and young people. They are also conscious of information giving within their peer group as a kind of social power play, sometimes equating it with “bragging” (Rose, UW) or talking “smack” (Ladarius, Ministry).

**Generalization 8: Preteens Have Lots of Places Where They Can Go and Share Information with Other Preteens**

Only four tweens strongly agreed (with two others agreeing to some extent) that there are many places (i.e., information grounds) where they can go to share information with their peers. These places included physical and virtual environments, as well as communication technologies that facilitate information sharing. Participants identified school, home, friends’ homes, church, shopping malls, and public parks as places they routinely gather with friends to socialize. Within schools, recess and lunch were noted as times of the school day when preteens were most likely to share information. Lauren (UW) explained:

You can always do it at school. You can always do it at recess, you can always do it at lunch. You can do it after school, you can do it before school, if you got there early enough. And if they come over to your house, they can always do it there. So I think there are plenty of places where kids can talk to each other.

Tweens also noted that they use asynchronous virtual spaces, including chat rooms, weblogs, and multiuser websites to “display their feelings” (Mr. Blackwood, UW), “write whatever you want,” or “have an interesting conversation” (Austin, UW). Communication technologies that preteens reported using with their peers were e-mail, instant messaging (IM), and telephone. Six tweens, however, identified significant barriers to information sharing, either for themselves or for other kids they know. These barriers fell into three categories: the safety of public spaces, concerns for tween privacy, and the authority or parents and adults. Omar (Ministry) suggested that some neighborhoods are dangerous for preteens, preventing them from gathering conveniently: “Some kids live in neighborhoods where you can’t just walk down the street and go talk to other kids your age.” Rose (UW) responded that tweens often do not want to share information in the presence of adults, particularly personal issues, and this limits the number of places they can socialize or the type of information that will be shared: “some places have grown-ups, and some preteens don’t really like to talk about private stuff once grown-ups are around.” Tweens were aware of the limitations adults imposed on their information sharing, both on their mobility and on the types of communication media they could use with peers. Madison (UW) explained how some preteens have more freedom and mobility than others, and this is a product of parental or family dynamics:

Sometimes preteens, their parents want them to stay in the house and help do chores and that kind of stuff, so they don’t get to hang out with their friends very much. And other preteens, they’re parents don’t care where they go. So they can go anywhere, and just get information from there. But other preteens
that have to stay home, I think they get information from their family and sometimes they can call their friends if they really need it.

Sydney (UW) did not feel that she had many places where she could talk to friends outside of school: “I don’t have a lot of places except for my room, or if I have my friend over or something.” Kylie (UW) expressed the limitations of parental permission to engage in some forms of information sharing: “I’m not allowed to go on IM or chat rooms, so I basically have the phone, and e-mail, and face-to-face.”

**Generalization 9: Society Encourages Preteens to Gather and Socialize Wherever They Want**

Also linked to the information grounds framework, this generalization was not supported by ten of fourteen tweens, who said that the precise opposite is the truth—that society discourages preteens from socializing. Many acknowledged that this was a social restriction based on adult concerns for a child’s safety and welfare, while others remarked that it was largely an issue of authority and control. Austin (UW) asserted that “kids are kept out of a lot of places . . . for a lot of reasons that I can see.” Omar (Ministry) also saw restrictions based on safety: “Some moms don’t let us go to certain places and they don’t trust the world enough to let preteens to go down there.” Ellen (UW) pragmatically saw school, which many tweens in our study acknowledged as a place where socialization can occur, as a highly structured environment where adults discourage social opportunities:

We have almost no time for socializing except for lunch. We get five-minute breaks between hours. You get five minutes to walk from one end of the school, take a detour to the locker, pick up our five pounds of stuff, walk around to the other side of the school, sit down, unpack all by the end of the bell. And go back to the bathroom and get Kleenex. It feels like a lot of work, and I don’t see how they expect us to socialize in that time as well.

Two barriers to information sharing analyzed under Generalization #8—safety and adult authority—were evident in these responses. While the tweens generally agreed that they have places and tools that mediate their information behavior, there are restrictions imposed by the adult world. Tweens perceptions of these restrictions are important to understanding the relationships that evolve between adults and tweens, and tweens and their peers, particularly as they influence information choices. Peyton (UW), who agreed with this generalization, approached the statement from a different perspective. He suggested that adults encourage good behavior, and use socialization opportunities as a reward: “they’re always saying ‘don’t start anything, or don’t do anything to jeopardize your freedom to go anywhere.’” Shaniqua (Ministry) supported this view, recognizing that “sometimes [adults] want us to have fun.” Mr. Henderson (UW) saw socialization as a learning opportunity that society endorses: “when you’re out there, it kind of encourages you to be able to learn as much as you can.”

**Generalization 10: Adults Make It Hard for Preteens to Talk about Everyday Life with Preteens and Share Information**

Most tweens (14/15) disagreed (or partially disagreed) with this statement, perceiving that adults fulfill an assistive role in their information seeking. Kylie (UW) explained: “I don’t think adults really get in the way very much because they’re usually just there to help you and to help you understand stuff.” Ladarius (Ministry) noted that in school there is a time when talking is not allowed, namely when the teacher is talking, “But you can talk, when it’s time to talk.” This view seems to accept adult restrictions on tween communication as reasonable, and nondetrimental. While tweens did not attribute negative intentions to adults, they attributed miscommunication, misunderstanding, or “not getting it” to the difficulties that adults pose in tween information sharing. Madison (UW) revealed a disconnect between what parents and preteens see as appropriate information sharing, particularly about matters adolescents see as private:

Sometimes parents don’t get it. I know my mom, whenever I tell her something, and she just doesn’t get it, she’ll ask questions and sometimes I just don’t want to answer them. And it does get hard because when you’re talking on the phone about guys or something, and your parents are all saying that you’re too young for guys. You know, and you’re like fourteen. It’s like, hello, I’m a teenager. And it just gets more difficult as you go.

Peyton (UW), who earlier perceived that adults are not capable of understanding some preteen issues, suggested in the following
exchange that adults make communication difficult between adults and preteens:

**Peyton:** Like they might not understand what you’re going through, so they’ll just automatically give an adult answer instead of a kid answer so we could understand. Instead of us getting in trouble or something.

**Interviewer:** So adults make it hard for kids to talk to other kids? **Peyton:** No, not other kids. They make it hard for us [preteens] to talk to them [adults].

According to Peyton, tweens seek information from their peers on social issues because they have difficulty communicating with adults, who might otherwise be a preferred source. He distinguishes between two types of answers: *kid answers*, which can be understood by young people, and *adult answers*, which are perceived by tweens as inappropriate and punitive.

**DISCUSSION**

Collectively, the tweens' reactions to the ten generalizations suggest that they are highly aware of their own information needs and the roles played by and barriers inherent in different sources. Moreover, their reflections indicated that they view information seeking as a healthy activity but that their needs, particularly for social and personal situations, are not easily met: sources are not easy to access and communicate with, and those that can be accessed may not have the best information. The following themes arose from our analysis of the generalization data:

- Trust, as part of social cost, is highly significant: in choosing a source, tweens indicated that the ability to trust someone with their situation (or secret) far outweighed the source’s likelihood of providing accurate information.
- There are levels of disconnect between tweens and adults that affect tweens’ access to information sources, including media, places, and people. Kids are trying to break away, parents are trying to reign them in. The youngest participants found comfort in sharing information with peers, while the oldest ones were skeptical that parents knew what is best for them.

- As tweens mature, adults are seen less often as persons they can consult for information, due in part to gaps in communication practices, perceived understanding of tween social situations, and the well-documented issues regarding tween self-esteem.
- Tweens think their peers are easier to talk to, and thus they are more likely to seek information from them, even if the information is not as good as the advice they would get from adults.
- Tweens withhold information from parents due to such adolescent tendencies as high self-consciousness or low esteem, but they also think parents are: (1) clumsy with sensitive data and might embarrass them, and (2) prone to blowing things out of proportion and punishing them.
- Tweens see differences within the adult group: teachers can only answer academic questions, not social/personal questions; parents are better at social questions than teachers, but still don’t understand many tween issues in a changing social scene. Tweens seem to have primitive conceptions of what adults know; for example, tweens don’t tend to see that teachers can also be parents, or that parents could have experienced tween social issues that are relevant to today’s generation. Moreover, parents are viewed as strong ties; teachers are weak ties.
- Tweens see differences within their own group where some friends are strong ties and others are weak ties. Weak ties cannot be trusted with sensitive information, like dating and relationships, because it might get “blabbed.” Also, some peers use information as a status symbol or form of social capital, almost a kind of “info bullying.” This intimidates tweens who might ask questions and seek information in social contexts. Fear of peer ridicule influences what questions will be asked when, where, and of whom. This conflicts with their natural inclination to be information seekers, and sate their curiosity.

While these themes are also supported by our analysis of the focus group and other interview data, two primary areas for future examination include: (1) testing the generalizations with tweens in other parts
of the country and from varying socio-demographic backgrounds to see how their responses compare with those of the tweens in our study; and (2) conducting further focus groups with tweens of the same gender (to increase participants' comfort levels, although the mixed-sex groups proved provocative as boys responded to generalizations by the girls and vice-versa) and more similar age, as we found that the youngest members of our groups were at different developmental stages than the twelve- and thirteen-year-olds.

NOTES

1. This material is based upon work supported by the National Science Foundation under Grant No. 0414447. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation.

2. The second population of study is stay-at-home mothers. For information about this NSF research, visit our IBEC (Information Behavior in Everyday Contexts) website at http://ibex.ischool.washington.edu.

3. While "other people" has been documented in literally hundreds of studies as the primary source through which individuals seek information (and in context of both everyday and workplace settings), virtually no explanation that reflects its affective, cognitive, and physical elements. Hence the nature and impact of the "Talking with You" project.

4. These frameworks are explained in depth in a forthcoming report.

5. A third Tween Day was held in November 2003 at an elementary school, which was specifically chosen to identify the effects of a school setting on the included in future reports.

6. For an in-depth discussion of the Tween Day methodology, including data analysis, observer effect, and trustworthiness, see Meyers, Fisher, and Marcoux (n.d.).

7. Observer effect is a study limitation that occurs when the participants' behavior influences the quality of the data collected. Since all qualitative data are obtained through observer effect (except perhaps when its occurrence as well as to identify and monitor its impact on the data, especially an alias. In brackets after each alias we list the site at which the event was interviewed, i.e., UW (University of Washington) or the Ministry.

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