



## “My Mom Recommended It to Me”: Understanding Homeschoolers’ Information Practices

**Xiaofeng Li, Clarion University of Pennsylvania, Department of Information and Library Science**

**Shelly Mathis, Grand County Library District**

### **Abstract**

This study explores homeschoolers’ everyday life information practices, with a goal to develop contextualized information literacy instructions in public libraries. Individual, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a total of eleven teen homeschoolers (ages 13 through 17) and seven parents from a rural county in the United States. Qualitative data analysis following the constant comparison technique was carried out. Findings showed that families, peers, libraries, and the Internet constituted homeschoolers’ information environment, in which homeschoolers interacted with these resources in accomplishing their learning projects, pursuing personal interests, and managing everyday tasks. Homeschoolers’ information practices were influenced by factors such as their mother’s information literacy, social engagement with friends and peers, resources available at local libraries, and their own information literacy. This study makes a significant contribution to the scant literature on homeschoolers in the field of library and information science. The findings have several important practical implications for librarians to consider when developing information literacy programs for homeschoolers.

### **Introduction**

Homeschooling has been an educational option in the United States since the 1990s.<sup>1</sup> According to Scott Zimmer, “Homeschooling is the provision of education to children in the setting of a private home rather than at a public or private school. The children are generally educated by

their own parents or by tutors whom the parents hire.”<sup>2</sup> Families choose homeschooling for various reasons. A traditional motivation was to educate based on values, beliefs, and pedagogies that were different from what traditional American public schools offered.<sup>3</sup> However, there are other, more diversified reasons to homeschool, including ensuring a learning environment protected from violence, drugs, and negative peer pressure; meeting the unique educational or disability needs of each child; offering flexibility and freedom; providing racial protection and racially focused education; reducing distractions; and supporting focused learning.<sup>4</sup> Despite the overall small population of homeschoolers in the United States, the population of homeschoolers has grown rapidly due to school closures since the start of the COVID-19 global pandemic in 2020.<sup>5</sup> While research on homeschoolers in Library and Information Science (LIS) is scant, these very few studies showed that homeschoolers were traditionally strong supporters and users of their local public library, although usage was to varying degrees.<sup>6</sup> In a recent study, Sarah Pannone indicated homeschoolers’ need and desire for more programs and curriculum-related resources.<sup>7</sup>

One of these much-needed programs for homeschoolers is information literacy programs in public libraries, as researchers have shown young people today have inadequate skills to evaluate information on the Web and think critically about their information environment.<sup>8</sup> Information literacy is essential in learning in all kinds of educational settings and workplaces, as it involves high-order critical thinking skills and meta-competency, which, according to Annemaree Lloyd, is knowing the strategies of interacting with information effectively in specific contexts.<sup>9</sup> Information literacy skills also help people identify fake news.<sup>10</sup> The need for in-depth information literacy education is increasingly more urgent in today’s information environment.

To help librarians design information literacy instruction for homeschoolers, it is important to first understand how homeschoolers interact with information. As Lloyd argued, librarians should understand the role of information in a specific community and align their information literacy instructions to real-life practices of that community.<sup>11</sup> However, a review of the literature on youth information behavior and practices in LIS showed that much attention was given to students in traditional classroom settings and their information literacy skills in accomplishing school assignments.<sup>12</sup> Thus, the need to understand homeschoolers’ information practices becomes imperative and urgent. Particularly, this present study sets out to unpack how

homeschoolers in a rural community in the United States seek, evaluate, and use information in everyday life. The findings of this study will help librarians plan information literacy programs for homeschoolers.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Information Literacy***

Information literacy is a complex notion that has been discussed in the body of literature in LIS. Traditionally, information literacy is defined as a set of skills. For example, the American Library Association stated that “to be information literate, a person must be able to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information.”<sup>13</sup> While this way of defining information literacy can be instrumental for educators and practitioners,<sup>14</sup> researchers in LIS have challenged this skills-based model of information literacy.<sup>15</sup> Prior research showed that when information literacy instructions were focused on these decontextualized skills—such as finding information from a set of specific information sources and using sources in a preferred order—students were not prepared to handle the complex information environment in out-of-school settings and everyday life.<sup>16</sup> Students might experience challenges, such as synthesizing information, evaluating sources, understanding the relevance of information, and coping with information overload.<sup>17</sup>

To overcome the limitation of this traditional skills-based information literacy model, Lloyd argued for a broad view—to approach information literacy as “a way of knowing” that was socially and culturally practiced within a specific community.<sup>18</sup> For instance, Lloyd found that ambulance officers who were in training demonstrated their information literacy through their increasingly dynamic use of information sources as they became more experienced, drawing upon not only textual information (e.g., textbooks), but also information distributed in their social networks (e.g., collective professional values) and embodied information (e.g., body senses).<sup>19</sup> Using this sociocultural approach to information literacy, Jessica Elmore and Peter Stordy interviewed five parents and children (ages 8 through 17) in the United Kingdom to understand these homeschooled young people’s information literacy experiences.<sup>20</sup> Their findings showed that for homeschoolers to be information literate, it was a natural and social process embedded in practical tasks, rather than a prescribed learning experience. Learning to be information literate was done collaboratively with other people, especially moms and experts

like teachers and tutors, families, and communities. Informed by sociocultural characteristics of information literacy, information literacy instruction would require librarians and information professionals to understand diverse ways of knowing that are accepted among a community, and then teach skills meaningful within the context of the information practices of that community.

### ***Information Behavior and Practices***

Closely related to the body of literature on information literacy is the research on information seeking. As Louise Limberg and Olof Sundin claimed, “Information seeking and information literacy are two sides of the same coin.”<sup>21</sup> A literature review on information seeking reveals a lack of consensus among researchers in using the terms of information behavior and information practices in LIS.<sup>22</sup> According to Reijo Savolainen, information behavior studies took a cognitive perspective, focusing on how an individual’s information needs triggered his/her information seeking and use, and thus focused on active information seeking.<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, research on information practices viewed information seeking and use as actions embedded in one’s social practices, which were bounded by one’s experiences, knowledge, values, interests, tasks, and other sociocultural factors.<sup>24</sup> Pamela McKenzie took a constructionist approach to study context-specific information practices among pregnant women.<sup>25</sup> Her findings showed information practices involved not only active seeking and active scanning, but also being introduced through other people and by non-directed monitoring (e.g., being informed serendipitously by overhearing from the TV).

As this present study aims to investigate how homeschoolers engage with information in everyday life, this study chooses to use the term of information practice and follows Savolainen’s model of everyday life information.<sup>26</sup> The choice of focusing on information practice also aligns with this study’s adoption of Lloyd’s broad approach to information literacy,<sup>27</sup> as both approaches drew upon a sociocultural perspective. Thus, information seeking included the “seeking of orienting information that can serve the need of monitoring everyday events” and the “seeking of problem-specific information that may be used for solving individual problems or performing specific tasks.” Information use referred to “the ways in which people interpret the value of information sources.”<sup>28</sup>

### ***Youth Information Behavior and Practices***

LIS research on both youth information behavior and information practices provides a valuable foundation to understand how children and teens interact with information. Past studies showed that young people had a wide range of information needs that made them seek out information, such as school assignments, personal interests, and social activities.<sup>29</sup> Asking people for information was repeatedly reported in the current literature,<sup>30</sup> indicating the social nature of young people's information seeking. Additionally, the Internet played a central role in meeting their information needs in everyday life and educational settings.<sup>31</sup>

While contemporary youths were commonly referred to as digital natives, studies also showed that young people tended to stay at the surface level and have challenges in evaluating the quality of information, even though they were aware of the mixed quality of information on the Internet.<sup>32</sup> Elizabeth Foss et al. conducted observations and interviews with thirty-eight teens (ages 14 through 17) and identified various types of adolescent searchers.<sup>33</sup> According to them, the most frequently identified type of searchers were the ones who displayed developing skills in searching, as they were mostly focused on the text in the snippets on the search result pages and only checked out the first search result page. Similarly, Olof Sundin and Helena Francke found a group of high schoolers frequently used Google and followed the first few search results as they searched for information in accomplishing school assignments.<sup>34</sup>

Previous studies have identified several information evaluation strategies employed by young people. Sundin and Francke revealed that young people compared multiple sources to see if similar information recurs. Information sources were considered credible if they provided similar information to what they learned before. They also argued that this evaluation approach demonstrated teens' intrinsic plausibility<sup>35</sup>—a term introduced by Patrick Wilson,<sup>36</sup> indicating that people evaluated the truthfulness of a text in comparison to one's own beliefs and knowledge. Leanne Bowler et al. found that young people judged the credibility of digital information based on the perceived risks (e.g., computer viruses) associated with certain websites.<sup>37</sup> Teen searchers with more advanced searching skills selected search results based on prior knowledge of the source.<sup>38</sup>

Past research on youth information behavior and practices showed that many factors influenced young people's engagement with information. Eric Meyers et al. unpacked how motivations, developmental factors, race, socioeconomic backgrounds, and social roles all played

a role in preteens' (ages 9 through 13) everyday life information behavior.<sup>39</sup> Researchers also found that young people's information-seeking practices were heavily influenced by the norms in the communities in which they belonged: for example, what the school taught them and what other people recommended to them.<sup>40</sup> In home environments, mothers played a significant role in influencing young people's information seeking, such as helping them identify sources and giving rules about selecting sources.<sup>41</sup> In schools, students were taught to consider the authority of information creators, either individuals or organizations, to evaluate the trustworthiness of a source.<sup>42</sup> Foss et al. found that for websites such as Wikipedia, where creators involved a community of anonymous authors, students were taught not to use them, and their skeptical attitude toward these sites was further emphasized by parents, teachers, and other adults.<sup>43</sup>

While the literature explored young people's information behavior and practices in various settings, little research examined how teen homeschoolers in the United States engage with information in everyday life. Situated in this background, our study aims to investigate the following research questions:

1. In what ways, if any, do teen homeschoolers seek information in everyday life?
2. In what ways, if any, do teen homeschoolers evaluate information in everyday life?
3. In what ways, if any, do teen homeschoolers use information in everyday life?

It is worth noting that, unlike traditional schools that have a fixed schedule, the context of homeschooling is dynamically immersed in homeschoolers' everyday life. Thus, the study views homeschoolers' engagement with information for learning activities as an inseparable part of their everyday life.

## Methods

This study involved a collaborative effort between an LIS educator and an LIS practitioner, who played an active role in the local homeschooling community, to customize the plan of an information literacy instruction program in a rural public library in Colorado. A qualitative approach was employed to understand homeschoolers' information practices. The qualitative approach has the strengths of collecting in-depth data and unpacking natural events in real life.<sup>44</sup> Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted. The interview questions were informed by John Flanagan's critical incident technique,<sup>45</sup> a data-collection procedure that evokes

participants' recall of meaningful events within a particular context. In this study, teen participants were asked to recall and describe significant situations in which they sought, evaluated, used, and shared information in their everyday life. A full schedule of interview questions for teens and parents can be found in appendix A. Parent participants were asked to talk about how they usually helped their children find, evaluate, use, and share information.

### *Participants*

Data collection was carried out in the summer of 2020. Flyers and consent forms (parental consent forms, child assent forms, and consent forms for parents to participate in the study) were placed in two public libraries in Colorado. The flyer, which described the purpose of this study, was also sent out on a homeschooler email listserv to invite participants. A total of eleven teen homeschoolers (ages 13 through 17, five males and six females) and seven parents (all mothers) were recruited from a rural county in Colorado. It was not the researchers' intention to recruit only mothers, yet mothers were the parents who volunteered. Each participant was interviewed once in person, with an average of thirty minutes for each interview. Audio recordings of all interviews were made.

Within the homeschooling families interviewed, parents or other family members were the teachers. More frequently, the mother assumed the greatest portion of that role. However, learning also occurred from others if families chose to partner with one another in homeschooling cooperative groups, or co-ops. In general, co-ops met on a regular or semi-regular basis for joint teaching sessions presented by various volunteer mothers, field trips, learning and social activities, and community service. The selected county had a mixture of homeschool families who participated in co-ops and those who did not.

With the flexibility afforded by the state's laws, each homeschooling family conducted their homeschooling according to personal preference. Additionally, homeschoolers were involved in extracurricular groups and activities, including community-based groups and extracurricular clubs and sports with the local public schools. Consequently, the following styles of home-based education were represented by the participants interviewed for this study; please note that some participants represented more than one style:

- Classic homeschooling, wherein the mother teaches all subjects to their children (7 teens, 5 parents)

- Structured groups based on a specific curriculum (2 teens, 1 parent)
- Homeschool co-ops for extracurricular learning and activities (1 teen, 1 parent)
- Hybrid homeschooling, the combination of public and home-based courses (1 teen, 1 parent)
- Online private academies, wherein all subjects are taught by academy teachers and facilitated at home by the mothers (1 teen, 1 parent)

Furthermore, the curriculum was chosen by each family rather than dictated by law. Mothers learned about curriculum options by research and recommendations from fellow homeschoolers. Some families preferred using an entire “package” of curriculum from one publisher that covered all subjects, while others selected a different publisher’s product for each subject.

### ***Data Analysis***

All interviews were transcribed and imported to Dedoose, a web-based platform for data analysis. The researchers adopted an etic/emic approach for data analysis.<sup>46</sup> The etic lens was an outsider perspective that was informed by the conceptual framework and previous research, whereas the emic lens was an insider perspective that interpreted the data with an in-depth understanding of the culture in the homeschooling community.<sup>47</sup> Data analysis started with rounds of open coding, following the constant comparison technique.<sup>48</sup> This involved comparing a new sentence to the sentences that were previously coded. If the new sentence held the same idea of another sentence coded earlier, then this new sentence was labeled with this existing code. If a new sentence demonstrated a different idea that was not captured by any of the existing codes, then a new code was created and defined. After that, the researchers also compared codes to codes to identify emerging themes and consider their relationships.

To assess the validity of the etic/emic approach, the researchers initially randomly selected two interview transcripts to code independently, and then met to compare the codes and verify that each of the researchers’ understanding of the data was in sync and accurately described the information phenomena captured in the interviews. While one researcher continued coding the remaining data in Dedoose, the researchers had meetings to compare codes that each developed, to identify similar codes, and to discuss different codes. For example, the researchers discussed different interpretations on the use of Wikipedia: Wikipedia shaming<sup>49</sup> vs. Wikipedia

being complex and time-consuming in homeschooling settings. The researchers chose the emic lens in disagreements, prioritizing the subtle nuances offered by the insider knowledge of the homeschooling community. Overall, codes emerged inductively from data and then were organized with the research-question themes in mind.

## **Findings**

Data analysis showed families, peers, libraries, and the Internet constituted homeschoolers' information environment, in which homeschoolers interacted with these resources in accomplishing their learning projects, pursuing personal interests, and managing everyday tasks. Homeschoolers' information practices were influenced by sociocultural factors, such as mothers' information literacy, social engagement with friends and peers, resources available at local libraries, and access to the Internet.

### ***Information Seeking***

#### *Families*

A common theme in homeschoolers' information-seeking practice was the major role that families played in their everyday life. Notably, mothers played a major role in providing information, because they served as the primary teacher for homeschooled teens. For instance, Teen 8 stated: "If I didn't understand that, then I just went to my mom and asked her." Similarly, Teen 9 remarked: "I might just go to my mom."

Homeschoolers not only sought information actively when they had questions, but they were also given information without them seeking for it on their own, as Teen 1 explained: "Mom just telling me." Mothers' accounts further confirmed their roles of information providers or facilitators through daily conversations, guiding or "prompting," and teaching. Parent 1 noted information was shared: ". . . just [in] a conversation; we just talk a lot to each other." Parent 5 stated: "Sometimes I will look ahead of time just to find good sources, but I usually point them to places." Parent 2 agreed: "I would show them how to do that. And I have told the 16-year-old . . . how to use NoveList to find similar books." It should also be noted that in reporting the findings, if a teen participant and a parent participant shared the same number, it did not mean they were a parent-child relationship. This finding indicated the importance for home educators,

especially mothers, to be aware of the availability of diverse resources and to understand how to use them in facilitating homeschoolers' information seeking.

### *Library Resources*

Eight homeschoolers and three parents indicated the use of library resources for educational, informational, and recreational purposes to various degrees. Teen 7 recalled: "Sometimes when I have a big school topic, like ocean pollution, . . . I'll come to the library, and I'll get nonfiction books." However, the practice of seeking information from library resources was constrained by the challenges of not finding needed books from libraries. For instance, Teen 3 indicated: "So in everyday life, I mean, it's hard for me to find some books here. So, you know, certain books, series I would like." Teen 2 also expressed that they wished librarians would help them find specific books and information "really quickly," because they expressed having trouble finding relevant books using the library catalog. The researcher further asked Teen 2 if they ever asked the librarian for help searching the catalog, and Teen 2 stated: "Maybe I have. I'm not sure."

Data analysis further showed that this practice of seeking library resources was shaped by homeschoolers' and mothers' familiarity with certain resources, mothers' recommendations, and the curriculum's requirement. It was evident that among these homeschoolers, getting information from the *Britannica Online* through their local public library was a common practice. Teen 4 said: "I use . . . the online library *Encyclopedia Britannica* . . . to search information about different things [for a] paper or something." Parent 2 also explained: "Instead of Wikipedia, I put them on *Britannica*. I grew up with it. So that's what I put them on." Additionally, homeschoolers tended to trust the resources provided by the library. Teen 1 explained, "I know online *Britannica* is more trustworthy than Wikipedia because the library has its own edition of this encyclopedia. I figure if the library offers *Britannica* as a source for information, it must be trustworthy."

In addition to *Britannica Online*, six homeschoolers and one mother discussed their use of library books, especially in situations where they could not find relevant information elsewhere. For example, Teen 1 stated: "I went to the library because I just wasn't finding the things I needed to know and the studies I needed to know about online. And I wanted to make sure my information was credible, and so I went to the library, and I think I got most of my information from books."

While homeschoolers sought information from library materials, they did not often approach librarians for information, except for two participants who mentioned their experiences of asking librarians for help. Homeschoolers have shown that they were either aware that librarians could help but chose not to ask or were not aware that librarians could provide information, such as assisting teens in evaluating websites or finding online sources. Teen 3 explained, “I knew that librarians helped people find specific books but not necessarily genres and types of books,” and so did not ask for help “due to being shy.” Teen 5 admitted: “I knew that that’s an option, but I guess I’ve never really done that before.”

### *Open Web Resources*

Homeschoolers’ information-seeking practice relied on commercial search engines and Internet resources including social media. Participants frequently indicated that they “just googled it” for their questions related to school or personal interests. However, it was evident that most homeschoolers were not able to strategically search for online information. Rather, their online searching was “random,” as Teen 7 noted: “. . . a bunch of other random websites.” Likewise, Teen 5 stated: “I feel like I just search for random stuff . . . just searched on Google and then maybe read some articles and then came across that somehow.” Teen 3 indicated his use of “different keywords and whatever.”

Wikipedia was an online source commonly mentioned by three homeschoolers and three mothers. The dilemma of using Wikipedia was evident in teens’ account. For example, Teen 9 stated: “I feel like Wikipedia is not a super reliable source. But sometimes they’re the only source that has information.” Teen 6 noted: “Because they have, you know, . . . good information. But it’s sad when people can go in there and tweak it. Because they can tweak it to . . . say their beliefs or whatever they want.” The mixed feelings of using Wikipedia appeared to be influenced by parents, as some parents were explicitly negative toward the use of Wikipedia. Parent 2 stated:

I’ve just told him, I go, “Don’t use Wikipedia.” This is a big one. Because I told them that one can be modified by anybody, so do not use it. And because . . . that’s just by word of mouth. It’s not like I know that somebody told me, so I just pass along the information. . . . That’s not a good source to use because anybody can go on there and modify . . . the information that’s presented. It’s not a really good one to use.

## *Information Evaluation Practices*

### *Challenges in Information Evaluation*

Homeschoolers often expressed challenges in evaluating information, especially with online information. When they were asked how they would know if a source was credible, comments like “I wasn’t sure” and “I don’t know” often recurred. For example, Teen 1 stated: “Sometimes these sources would contradict each other, which was concerning . . . I could not figure out which one was credible, or if either was credible.” Similarly, Teen 6 indicated: “I know like for history projects and stuff, you can find information. But I’ve never felt like 100% certain that [what] we’re finding [is] accurate.” Consequently, “go[ing] off your gut instinct” and choosing top search results was a common practice for evaluating information among participants. Teen 8 said: “. . . really the first thing that popped up, which will most likely be true, because it’s the biggest thing [that] will pop up.”

Data analysis showed the limited resources available for these homeschoolers to learn about information evaluation strategies. As many mothers played a main educator role, they acknowledged their lack of information literacy to instruct their children how to evaluate information. Most homeschoolers’ parents grew up in a time prior to the arrival of commercial search engines like Google, so they fell short in being able to tell their children how to evaluate information. Parent 2 explained: “I didn’t grow up with all the sources of information that we have today. . . . How do you know just being able to evaluate it? . . . I probably haven’t spent a lot of time because I don’t know. I’m less educated than that, then I don’t know.” Despite this lack of skills, parents tried to teach their children about the mixed quality of information. For instance, Parent 1 noted: “I’m also trying to teach them about the fact that there are good websites and there are bad websites to get information, to collect information from.”

Moreover, most of the mothers relied upon the curriculum to fill the gap in their knowledge base. However, publishers of curriculum also struggled to keep abreast of the ever-increasing levels of digital information and the recommended practices of information literacy. For instance, in reference to what the curriculum contained, Parent 1 explained: “I think it is just [a] very broad overview. They have mentioned it [information literacy], but there has never been any in-depth class teaching [for] them on that . . . it needs to be there, there is just so much information out there.”

While challenges in evaluating information were commonly mentioned in the interviews, these homeschoolers did demonstrate several information evaluation strategies, including checking multiple sources laterally, evaluating information based on its container, and trusting certain source recommenders. Less common strategies included using personal experience, learning the credibility of source authors, evaluating the balance of viewpoints, and checking the currency of sources. Each of these strategies is further illustrated in the following sections.

### *Lateral Checking*

Four homeschoolers indicated their evaluating strategy as a “lateral checking” strategy, meaning that they checked across several information sources to confirm the credibility of a selected source. For example, Teen 3 noted: “Sometimes I had double-checked from different sites [to] see if they told the same story.” Teen 9 used a primary resource with which to compare all other secondary resources, explaining, “I actually . . . used her book, kind of because I know that she wrote that. . . . So, if I was reading something that I wasn’t quite sure about, I would try to . . . find that chapter in the book and . . . go over it and see [if] she actually [did] say that or did she actually . . . experience that?”

### *Container Approach*

The container approach describes how participants evaluate information based on information format—book/print vs. digital format. Two homeschoolers shared that print information, especially books, was considered to be more credible than digital information. Teen 1 explained: “I just knew books could be more credible, because a lot of time is spent making a book, and especially the studies that are written up in a book. And for online . . . yeah, [it’s] sometimes hard to tell whether something is credible or not, and I just wanted to be sure.” Teen 1 further said: “I believe online *Britannica* to be a more reliable source because the website cannot just be added to or taken away from by anyone, unlike Wikipedia. I also think it’s more reliable because *Britannica* originally started as physical books, and I always view books as more truthful and factual.”

### *Recommenders*

Three homeschoolers indicated their evaluation of information was based on who recommended that source. If the recommender was considered authoritative, then they would consider that information source as credible. For instance, Teen 6 stated: “My mom recommended it to me. So, it’s just I thought of [it] as a trustworthy source.” Teen 2 had a similar comment: “I just figured since it was provided by librarians and everything, it was probably going to be trustworthy.”

### *Personal Experience*

Two homeschoolers expressed that they evaluated information based on their experience of using such resources. For example, Teen 8 stated: “Just remembering it from the past and knowing that [it’s] right. And if I didn’t remember it, then I know, it’s probably wrong.”

### *Authors*

Two homeschoolers mentioned that they judged the credibility of a source based on authors’ experiences, backgrounds, and beliefs. When Teen 4 searched information about how to design artificial intelligence (AI) in a game, they trusted information that “was on the website of the people who made that software . . . because they were the developers of the software.”

### *Balanced View*

Only one homeschooler pointed out the need of checking the balance of views in a source. Teen 3 noted: “You see if there’s much bias in it. If it is a lot of bias, then you don’t use that one.”

### *Currency*

Only one teen mentioned the currency of printed nonfiction sources when he/she evaluated the source. Teen 1 stated: “They were really up-to-date, as well; they were written [in] like 2017 or 2018.”

## **Information Use**

When participants were asked to describe how they usually used the information they had just sought, participants found it difficult to articulate how information was used. This might be

because the practice of using sought information was deeply embedded in homeschoolers' social practices in everyday life and thus became difficult to tease out. As data analysis showed, teens actively shared information with their families, friends, peers, and teachers through emails, texts, "show-and-tell" (Teen 11), and assignment presentations. Parent 3 recalled, "A lot of times it's something they're excited about. So, they just talk about it. . . . Yeah, just in conversation with people like, 'Oh, did you know that? I learned this last week.'"

Teens also presented and shared information through social media platforms like blogs and YouTube. Yet, it appeared that when these teens used these online platforms, their intended audience remained families, friends, and peers. It appeared that they were not aware that such social media posts may be stored and viewed by unknown audiences on the Internet in the future. For example, Teen 5 stated: "Every single week for my school, as I said before, I write an end-of-the-week assignment and I post [it] on my blog. And all my friends, they're the same people who do the curriculum, this same curriculum as I do from all over the world. They read my essay. And then they can either like it or dislike it, or they can make comments on it." Parent 5 confirmed: "If it's something that they really liked, they have blogs [and] post it on the blog."

## **Discussion**

As previous research suggests, teaching a list of decontextualized information literacy skills would not be effective. Thus, this study uses Lloyd's broad approach to information literacy and Savolainen's everyday-life information practice to develop a contextualized understanding of how a community of homeschoolers interacts with information and enacts their information literacy to accomplish various tasks.<sup>50</sup> Homeschoolers' information practices found in this study encompass active and non-active modes of information seeking, such as being told by their mothers, aligning with McKenzie's model of information practices.<sup>51</sup> These theoretical approaches led this study to examine not only sources used in homeschoolers' information seeking, but also factors that shape their practices. Particularly, mothers' information practices and information literacy experiences play a major role in shaping homeschoolers' information practices.

While this study shows the importance of social interactions in homeschoolers' information-seeking practice, confirming previous studies on the social nature of young people's information seeking,<sup>52</sup> it also offers some differences unique among homeschoolers. Compared

to traditional students, homeschoolers appeared to lack peers and friends in their information ecology. Homeschoolers' reliance on commercial search engines and the challenges of evaluating search results found in this present study echo many previous studies on young people's information behavior and practices.<sup>53</sup> Compared to traditional students who may have school librarians to teach information literacy, homeschoolers need more support and resources from public libraries. These findings support a recent call for more programs and social engagement opportunities for homeschoolers.<sup>54</sup>

Moreover, the study highlighted homeschoolers' preference for using vetted resources rather than Wikipedia. While Lynn Silipigni Connaway and Joyce Valenza urged educators and information professionals to be aware of Wikipedia shaming in educational settings,<sup>55</sup> it is imperative to recognize the constraints on educators and information professionals who have limited time while trying to accomplish instructional tasks. As previously mentioned, once mothers learned that Wikipedia was an open-source encyclopedia, they instructed their children to use *Britannica Online* instead. Upon deeper reflection, the researchers note that the process of teaching teens how to trace and examine each link in the references for Wikipedia articles is too complex and time-consuming for the homeschool setting. Like teens, homeschooling mothers desire to quickly locate accurate information because their time is often divided between teaching multiple children across different grade levels. Thus, it is easier to direct their teens toward using resources evaluated by professionals.

This study has three key practical implications. First, this study demonstrates the strong need for libraries to provide information literacy instruction to young people that will prepare them to better handle today's information environment. Second, the findings of this study suggest a warrant to enhance the partnerships between librarians, homeschoolers, parents/caregivers, and educators/tutors. Specific to the community of homeschoolers in this study and other similar communities where mothers are typically the primary information expert and educator in the homeschool setting, librarians should consider inviting mothers to participate in information literacy instruction, along with their children. Including homeschool teachers allows libraries to meet this user group at their point of need, as well as increases the likelihood that the new skills will be practically applied at home. Consequently, this inclusive design encourages homeschooling parents and teens to weave the principles into daily living and learning. Last but not the least, public libraries should enhance resources, especially educational

databases in addition to *Britannica Online*, for homeschoolers. Practitioners should assess their communities and reach out to local homeschoolers to learn about what information resources are needed.

It is important to note the scope of this study and the limitations of the findings, as data gathered were from a small group of homeschoolers and their parents in one rural area in the United States. The exact number of homeschool students in this area was unknown because the state's laws did not demand it. The reasons for this were twofold. First, although Colorado homeschooling law requires that parents write a letter of intent to homeschool before the start of each school year, that letter might be submitted to *any* school district within the state.<sup>56</sup> Thus, the state's statistical data for the number of homeschoolers in each county might or might not include resident homeschoolers. Second, parents who registered their students with an independent school or homeschool cooperative group were regulated by those entities.<sup>57</sup> Accordingly, as explained by the Colorado Department of Education, independent schools were viewed as small businesses, so they were not required to submit their registration statistics to the state.<sup>58</sup> As a result, the state's department of education was unable to accurately report the exact number of homeschoolers in this area, although the numbers provided a rough estimate.

Thus, this study does not aim to have generalized findings. Instead, it is hoped that the findings of this study can be transferred to other homeschooler communities where librarians can design information literacy instructions. Additional studies that involve more representative samples of homeschoolers may be needed in developing an information literacy framework for homeschoolers. There is a strong need for researchers in LIS to further explore homeschoolers' information practices and thus provide empirical evidence to help practitioners provide much-needed library resources and services. Researchers may further compare the differences in homeschoolers' information practices across urban, suburban, and rural settings.

## **Conclusion**

This study utilized Lloyd's approach to information literacy and Savolainen's everyday-life information practices to understand the ways in which teenaged homeschoolers sought information, evaluated information, and used information.<sup>59</sup> Findings of this study showed that homeschoolers engaged with families and friends, library resources, and open web resources in accomplishing their learning projects, pursuing personal interests, and managing everyday tasks.

Their information practices were deeply embedded in their social practices and were shaped by major factors, such as mothers' information practices and information literacy experiences. Findings of this study also showed that while homeschoolers exhibited some information evaluation strategies, they experienced challenges in evaluating information, especially with online resources. Finally, this study revealed homeschoolers' use of information for social engagement, either through in-person interactions or social media sites.

This study makes a significant contribution to the scant literature on homeschoolers in LIS. While this is a small-scale exploratory study, there is a strong need for future research to investigate the growing population of homeschoolers in the United States. Additionally, this study demonstrates how library information literacy programs can be developed to address the needs of community members in a specific context. Informed by these findings, the information literacy program that the researcher will provide for the homeschoolers in her community is no longer a decontextualized list of skills. The findings have several important practical implications for librarians to consider when developing information literacy programs for homeschoolers. Particularly, the importance of partnerships among librarians, homeschoolers, parents/caregivers, and educators/tutors is highlighted.

## **Appendix A**

### *Interview questions for participating teens*

1. Tell me the three most commonly sought topics that triggered you to look for information.
2. [I'm going to ask you a series of questions where you can] Tell me about a major task or activity or situation in which you were like, "Oh, I need to know some information (or a lot of information) about \_\_\_\_ [topic] \_\_\_\_."
  - a. What was the task/activity/situation?
  - b. What were the questions you were asking or thinking that you needed to find out?
  - c. Did you find the information you needed at the end? What did you do with that information?
  - d. How did you find that information?
  - e. How did you know if it was credible (trustworthy) information?
3. Remember a time, either recently or in the past, when you were able to find information that you were looking for and felt good about it? Tell me about this. Where did you find it?
  - a. What is it about this time that makes you remember it as easy or successful?
4. Remember a time when you had difficulty in finding some information and did not feel good about it? Tell me about it.
  - a. What is it about this time that makes you remember it as hard or unsuccessful?

5. Remember a time when you shared information with someone, either your friends, family members, or people online. What did you share and how did you share that information?
  - a. Do you remember if that experience of information sharing was easy or difficult?
    1. If the participant said it was easy, then ask: What helped you share that information easily?
    2. If the participant said it was difficult, then ask: What made that information-sharing a challenge?
6. From your viewpoint, what role does the public library play in your everyday life and/or schoolwork?
7. If you had a magic wand, how would you like the public library and/or librarian to help you in your everyday life and/or schoolwork?

### ***Interview questions for participating parents***

1. Please tell me how you usually assist your child in finding information in everyday life and for schoolwork.
2. Please tell me how you usually assist your child in evaluating information in everyday life and for schoolwork.
3. Please tell me how you usually assist your child in using information in everyday life and for schoolwork.
4. Please tell me how you usually assist your child in sharing information in everyday life and for schoolwork.

### **Notes**

---

<sup>1</sup> Brian Ray, “Should Educators Promote Homeschooling? Worldwide Growth and Learner Outcomes,” *Journal of Pedagogy / Pedagogický Casopis* 12, no. 1 (June 2021): 55–76, <https://doi.org/10.2478/jped-2021-0003>.

<sup>2</sup> Scott Zimmer, “Homeschooling,” in *Salem Press Encyclopedia* (Salem Press, 2020), para. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Ray, “Should Educators Promote Homeschooling?”; Angela R. Watson, “Is Homeschool Cool? Current Trends in American Homeschooling,” *Journal of School Choice* 12, no. 3 (July 2018): 401–25, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15582159.2018.1490378>; David Crary, “Home Schooling Is on the Rise in the United States,” *Denver Post*, July 26, 2021, sec. 1A, 8A.

<sup>4</sup> Ray, “Should Educators Promote Homeschooling?”; Watson, “Is Homeschool Cool?”; Crary, “Home Schooling Is on the Rise in the United States.”

<sup>5</sup> US Census Bureau, “Homeschooling on the Rise during COVID-19 Pandemic,” United States Census Bureau, 2021, <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2021/03/homeschooling-on-the-rise-during-covid-19-pandemic.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Jane M. Kleist-Tesch, “Homeschoolers and the Public Library,” *Journal of Youth Services in Libraries* 11, no. 3 (1998): 231–41.

- 
- <sup>7</sup> Sarah Pannone, “Homeschoolers’ Experiences with the Public Library: A Phenomenological Study,” *Children and Libraries* 17, no. 1 (March 14, 2019): 5, <https://doi.org/10.5860/cal.17.1.5>.
- <sup>8</sup> Leanne Bowler, Heidi Julien, and Leslie Haddon, “Exploring Youth Information-Seeking Behaviour and Mobile Technologies through a Secondary Analysis of Qualitative Data,” *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science* 50, no. 3 (September 2018): 322–31, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0961000618769967>; Julie Coiro et al., “Investigating Criteria That Seventh Graders Use to Evaluate the Quality of Online Information,” *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 59, no. 3 (November 2015): 287–97, <https://doi.org/10.1002/jaal.448>; Mega Subramaniam et al., “As Simple as That?: Tween Credibility Assessment in a Complex Online World,” *Journal of Documentation* 71, no. 3 (2015): 550–71, <https://doi.org/10.1108/JD-03-2014-0049>.
- <sup>9</sup> Jessica Elmore and Peter Stordy, “An Exploration of the Information Literacy Experiences of Home Educating Families,” *Library and Information Research* 39, no. 120 (October 13, 2015): 8–28, <https://doi.org/10.29173/lirg655>; Annemaree Lloyd, “Information Literacy: The Meta-Competency of the Knowledge Economy? An Exploratory Paper,” *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science* 35, no. 2 (June 1, 2003): 87–92, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0961000603352003>; Thomas P. Mackey and Trudi E. Jacobson, “Reframing Information Literacy as a Metaliteracy,” *College & Research Libraries* 72, no. 1 (2011), <https://doi.org/10.5860/crl-76r1>.
- <sup>10</sup> S. Mo Jones-Jang, Tara Mortensen, and Jingjing Liu, “Does Media Literacy Help Identification of Fake News? Information Literacy Helps, but Other Literacies Don’t,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 65, no. 2 (February 1, 2021): 371–88, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764219869406>.
- <sup>11</sup> Lloyd, “Information Literacy.”
- <sup>12</sup> Jannica Heinström and Eero Sormunen, “Structure to the Unstructured—Guided Inquiry Design as a Pedagogical Practice for Teaching Inquiry and Information Literacy Skills” (ISIC: The Information Behaviour Conference, Krakow, Poland: University of Borås, 2019), <http://informationr.net/ir/24-1/istic2018/istic1824.html>; Marianne McTavish, “‘I Get My Facts from the Internet’: A Case Study of the Teaching and Learning of Information Literacy in In-School and Out-of-School Contexts,” *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy* 9, no. 1 (January 1, 2009): 3–28; Olof Sundin and Helena Francke, “In Search of Credibility: Pupils’ Information Practices in Learning Environments,” *Information Research* 14, no. 4 (2009).
- <sup>13</sup> American Library Association, “Presidential Committee on Information Literacy: Final Report,” Association of College and Research Libraries, January 10, 1989, para. 3, <http://www.ala.org/acrl/publications/whitepapers/presidential>.

- 
- <sup>14</sup> Heidi Julien and Kirsty Williamson, “Discourse and Practice in Information Literacy and Information Seeking: Gaps and Opportunities,” *Information Research* 16, no. 1 (March 2011), <http://informationr.net/ir/16-1/paper458.html>.
- <sup>15</sup> Elmore and Stordy, “An Exploration of the Information Literacy Experiences of Home Educating Families”; Annemaree Lloyd, “Information Literacy Landscapes: An Emerging Picture,” *Journal of Documentation* 62, no. 5 (September 2006): 570–83, <https://doi.org/10.1108/00220410610688723>.
- <sup>16</sup> Louise Limberg and Olof Sundin, “Teaching Information Seeking: Applying the Findings of Research in Information Behaviour,” *Information Research* 12, no. 1 (October 2006), <http://informationr.net/ir/12-1/paper280.html>; McTavish, “I Get My Facts from the Internet.”
- <sup>17</sup> Limberg and Sundin, “Teaching Information Seeking.”
- <sup>18</sup> Lloyd, “Information Literacy Landscapes,” 570.
- <sup>19</sup> Annemaree Lloyd, “Informing Practice: Information Experiences of Ambulance Officers in Training and On-Road Practice,” *Journal of Documentation* 65, no. 3 (2009): 396–419, <https://doi.org/10.1108/00220410910952401>.
- <sup>20</sup> Elmore and Stordy, “An Exploration of the Information Literacy Experiences of Home Educating Families.”
- <sup>21</sup> Limberg and Sundin, “Teaching Information Seeking,” para. 4.
- <sup>22</sup> Reijo Savolainen, “Information Behavior and Information Practice: Reviewing the ‘Umbrella Concepts’ of Information-Seeking Studies,” *Library Quarterly* 77, no. 2 (2007): 109–32.
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>24</sup> Ibid.; Reijo Savolainen, *Everyday Information Practices: A Social Phenomenological Perspective* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2008).
- <sup>25</sup> Pamela J. McKenzie, “A Model of Information Practices in Accounts of Everyday-Life Information Seeking,” *Journal of Documentation* 59, no. 1 (February 2003): 19–40, <https://doi.org/10.1108/00220410310457993>.
- <sup>26</sup> Savolainen, *Everyday Information Practices*.
- <sup>27</sup> Lloyd, “Information Literacy Landscapes.”
- <sup>28</sup> Savolainen, *Everyday Information Practices*, 83, 149.
- <sup>29</sup> Denise E. Agosto and Sandra Hughes-Hassell, “Toward a Model of the Everyday Life Information Needs of Urban Teenagers, Part 2: Empirical Model,” *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* 57, no. 11 (September 2006): 1418–26, <https://doi.org/10.1002/asi.20452>.
- <sup>30</sup> Andrew Kenneth Shenton and Pat Dixon, “Information Needs: Learning More about What Kids Want, Need, and Expect from Research,” *Children and Libraries* (2005): 20–29.

- 
- <sup>31</sup> Bowler, Julien, and Haddon, “Exploring Youth Information-Seeking Behaviour and Mobile Technologies”; Elmore and Stordy, “An Exploration of the Information Literacy Experiences of Home Educating Families”; Sundin and Francke, “In Search of Credibility.”
- <sup>32</sup> Bowler, Julien, and Haddon, “Exploring Youth Information-Seeking Behaviour and Mobile Technologies”; Coiro et al., “Investigating Criteria That Seventh Graders Use to Evaluate the Quality of Online Information”; Xiaofeng Li, “Young People’s Information Practices in Library Makerspaces,” *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology* 72, no. 6 (January 22, 2021): 744–58, <https://doi.org/10.1002/asi.24442>.
- <sup>33</sup> Elizabeth Foss et al., “Adolescent Search Roles,” *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* 64, no. 1 (January 2013): 173–89, <https://doi.org/10.1002/asi.22809>.
- <sup>34</sup> Sundin and Francke, “In Search of Credibility.”
- <sup>35</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>36</sup> Patrick Wilson, *Second-Hand Knowledge: An Inquiry into Cognitive Authority* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983).
- <sup>37</sup> Bowler, Julien, and Haddon, “Exploring Youth Information-Seeking Behaviour and Mobile Technologies.”
- <sup>38</sup> Foss et al., “Adolescent Search Roles,” 182.
- <sup>39</sup> Eric M. Meyers, Karen E. Fisher, and Elizabeth Marcoux, “Making Sense of an Information World: The Everyday-Life Information Behavior of Preteens,” *Library Quarterly* 79, no. 3 (2009): 301–41.
- <sup>40</sup> Elmore and Stordy, “An Exploration of the Information Literacy Experiences of Home Educating Families.”
- <sup>41</sup> Ibid.; Foss et al., “Adolescent Search Roles.”
- <sup>42</sup> Sundin and Francke, “In Search of Credibility.”
- <sup>43</sup> Foss et al., “Adolescent Search Roles.”
- <sup>44</sup> Lynn Silipigni Connaway and Marie L. Radford, *Research Methods in Library and Information Science*, 6th ed. (Santa Barbara, CA: Libraries Unlimited, 2017).
- <sup>45</sup> John C. Flanagan, “The Critical Incident Technique,” *Psychological Bulletin* 51, no. 4 (1954).
- <sup>46</sup> Connaway and Radford, *Research Methods in Library and Information Science*; Matthew B. Miles, Michael A. Huberman, and Johnny Saldaña, *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2014).
- <sup>47</sup> Connaway and Radford, *Research Methods in Library and Information Science*.
- <sup>48</sup> Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide through Qualitative Analysis* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2006).

- 
- <sup>49</sup> Lynn Silipigni Connaway and Joyce Valenza, “Stop Source-Shaming: Acknowledge Wikipedia in the Research Process,” *American Libraries* 52, nos. 9/10 (October 9, 2021): 49.
- <sup>50</sup> Lloyd, “Information Literacy Landscapes”; Savolainen, *Everyday Information Practices*.
- <sup>51</sup> McKenzie, “A Model of Information Practices in Accounts of Everyday-Life Information Seeking.”
- <sup>52</sup> Shenton and Dixon, “Information Needs.”
- <sup>53</sup> Foss et al., “Adolescent Search Roles”; Sundin and Francke, “In Search of Credibility.”
- <sup>54</sup> Pannone, “Homeschoolers’ Experiences with the Public Library.”
- <sup>55</sup> Connaway and Valenza, “Stop Source-Shaming.”
- <sup>56</sup> Home School Legal Defense Association, “How to Comply with Colorado’s Homeschool Law,” <https://hsllda.org/post/how-to-comply-with-colorados-homeschool-law> (accessed November 17, 2021).
- <sup>57</sup> Home School Legal Defense Association, “How to Comply.”
- <sup>58</sup> R Matson, email message to author, August 4, 2021.
- <sup>59</sup> Lloyd, “Information Literacy Landscapes”; Savolainen, *Everyday Information Practices*.