

# Characteristic of information behaviour of the dropout urban teenagers in North America:

An attempt at comparing between Agosto's model of urban teenagers from LIS field, and literatures from education studies and psychology

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## Abstract:

This paper explores the comprehensive view of urban teenagers' the information behaviours in ELIS (Everyday life information seeking) context. This paper outline the lack of the characteristics of dropout and at-risk teenagers' information behaviours and information needs within LIS (Library and information science) field by reviewing several literatures in both LIS field and other disciplines (education studies, and psychology). Main purpose of this cross-disciplinary research is to amend and improve already existing model of the information behaviours of teenagers in LIS field by applying research outcomes on the characteristics of dropout/at-risk teenagers from other disciplines. Reviewing process is based on a content analysis methodology. This paper found that dropout/at-risk teenagers may lack abilities of building human relationship and tend to feel isolated at some extent, and identified two factors of the lack: *level of the participation in activities, and an actual place where these activities occur*. This paper suggests that researchers in LIS field should take seriously the characteristics of dropout/at-risk teenagers and its two factors into consideration.

**Keywords:** dropout teenagers; at-risk teenagers; information behaviour of urban teenagers; cross-disciplinary research; the behavioural and situational factors of delinquency, depression, antisocial behaviours, and dropout; North America; a content analysis; Library and information Science; everyday life information seeking

Much research on the characteristic of the "dropout" urban teenagers has been made in the field of both education studies and psychology. Most of them in these areas bring the evidence to link the act of dropout with delinquency or depression, which is regarded as part of teenagers' antisocial behaviours such as stealing, fire setting, school expulsion, illicit substance use, and may result in their dropping out of the school in the end. In many cases, researches are conducted a quantitative data analysis with a relatively large sampling size, and provided many significant emotional and behavioural factors of delinquency or depression mood that may cause teenagers' dropout.

In Library and Information Science (LIS) literature, however, little research examining urban teenagers' information seeking behaviour and their information needs in everyday life context, namely Everyday Life Information Seeking (ELIS) exist. Denise E. Agosto is one of the few researchers who dedicate efforts to understand ELIS, especially information needs of urban teenagers in ELIS context. Agosto created a theoretical model of urban teenagers' information needs derived from a qualitative research on urban teenagers. Unfortunately, Agosto selected only more advantaged, nonminority groups of urban teenagers in school as a research object, and thus the information behaviour and information needs of urban teenagers who is not in school, or conducting antisocial behaviours, or suffering from depression mood are apparently missing from his model. This research therefore is intended to supplement the characteristic of the dropout urban teenagers with Agosto's original model of information needs of urban teenagers.

In order to compensate the lack of any satisfied literatures dealing with a comprehensive view of urban teenagers' the information behaviours in LIS field except Agosto's several papers, the author decided to begin with reviewing Agosto's model of urban teens' ELIS which ties 28 information needs topics to the seven areas of teen development. In these reviewing process by using a content analysis methods, the author critically paid much attention to what is missing in Agosto's model in terms of the characteristics of the urban teenagers who is not in the school, or even if who is in the school but in "at-risk" situation which may cause dropping out from the school. The author then searched literatures from outside LIS field, both in education studies and educational psychology. Using major databases in education studies and psychology (ERIC, Child Development & Adolescent Studies, and Education Full Text) resulted in the author collecting 29 literatures addressing on urban teenagers' delinquency or depression mood, and the tendency of the school dropout. Because of that main purpose of this cross-disciplinary research is to amend and improve already existing model in LIS field by applying research results from other disciplines, the author intentionally selected only three literatures from 29 literatures (two are from education studies, and one is from psychology), and reviewed them with a brief discussion of their findings. During the review of three literatures, the author tried to apply their findings to Agosto's model of the urban teenagers' information behaviours. Some further suggestions from this cross-disciplinary research will be made in conclusion section.

Agosto developed a theoretical and an empirical model of the everyday life information seeking and their information needs of urban teenagers in *Toward a model of the everyday life information needs of urban teenagers, part 1 and part 2* (Agosto, 2006). Multiple types of data were collected from twenty-seven inner-city teenagers (aged 14 through 17) by using multiple qualitative research methods including written surveys, audio journals, written activity logs, photographs, and semi-structured group interviews. After data were gathered, a qualitative analysis were conducted by using

data in order to reveal the characteristics of information seeking behaviours and information needs of the urban teenagers. The model consists of seven independent variables representing development areas of urban teenagers, and their 28 information needs topics in everyday life context. Seven independent variables refer to a subset of a teenager's perception of social world as well as their perception of self, what it is called "self". Seven selves are: the social self, the emotional self, the reflective self, the physical self, the creative self, the cognitive self, and the sexual self. Each "self" contains several information needs topics that teenagers were seeking during study, which related to their actual information behaviours. The brief explanation of Agosto's model will be given as follow.

The social self refers to a teen's understanding of and a negotiation with the social world to know about how they fit into the social world. Related information needs topics are friend/peer/romantic relationships, social activities, popular culture, fashion, and social /legal norms. In this area, most teenagers try to build a social relationship with their friends, and conduct social activities such as going to parties or seeing movie. Teenagers in this area also create an imagination of their social relationship through media such as radio, TV, photographs and magazines articles. For instance, some teenagers consider how they fit into the social world by checking clothing and hairstyles of celebrities through hairstyle magazine. Most frequent information source they use in this area is friends, neighbour, and media.

While the social self is a teenager's reflection to the external world, the emotional self is a teen's personal reaction to inner world. Information needs topics in this area include the familial relationships, an emotional safety, and the religious practice. Teenagers may experience positive or negative feelings through these activities. For instance, some teenagers want to establish and maintain the relationship with their parents, but some do not. In addition, the developing mental skill of controlling negative emotions is also categorized in this area. Most frequent used information source in this area is family members, specialists who can support teenager's mental and health concern, and in some cases, church.

The reflective self is more introspective perception of the social world than the emotional self. In this area, teenagers develop their self-identity and personal beliefs about the world, and seek their own place within the world. Information needs topics in this area are self-image, philosophical concerns, heritage/cultural identity, civic duty, college, career, and self-actualization. Usually teenagers seek their academic and post-academic career that will match their self-identity, personal belief and pride. Unfortunately an information source in this area is unclear. Some teenagers use an Internet for searching society's fundamental beliefs, values, and norms, but it is not always the case.

The physical self refers to a teenager's development area of gaining new physical abilities and adjusting himself/herself to new physical environment. This area is very

close to the social self, and in fact, many activities in physical self are overlapping the social activities because most physical activities more or less inevitably involve the social interaction with other people (playing baseball, volunteering during summer, working in an organization, etc.). Information needs topics in this area are daily life routines, physical safety, goods and services, health and job responsibilities. In this area, teenagers often use personal information source (friends), Internet, cellphone in order to prepare for these physical activities.

The creative self is the area where a teenager's aesthetic needs are satisfied. There are two types of aesthetic needs that teenagers are often seeking: creative performance and creative consumption. Some teenagers may attend an art lesson to engage in an actual aesthetic performance (playing play, playing music, and painting, etc.). Some teenagers may prefer to consume creative works (watching TV shows and movies, listening to music, etc.) and to evaluate them to fulfill their aesthetic needs even though the preferences and the evaluations of such products in mass-consumption that the teenagers show and carry out in everyday life is not at professional or even amateur level. Information sources in this area are therefore course materials, Internet, TV, Radio, cellphone, and other various media relating to the creative performance and consumption.

The cognitive self is a teen's intellectual grasp of the physical world through which a teenager can develop skills of translating his or her intellectual knowledge into actual physical practice, for instance, conducting an academic research. This area also includes a teenager's understanding of social rules, norms, customs, and methods, usually in school systems and regulations. Information needs topics in this area focus on the matter of academics, school culture, and current events that may give the opportunities to improve teenager's intellectual knowledge and understanding. Teachers at school, Internet and encyclopedia are considered as an information source in this area.

Lastly, the sexual self is the grasp of issues around the human sexuality as a whole. Teenagers in this area may concern own sexual identity, sexual health, and sexual practices. Agosto reported that female teenagers more worry about sexual health than male teenagers, and teenagers who think of himself/herself as a homosexual more concern own sexual identity than those who do not. Information sources in this area that teenagers frequently use are a doctor, a special counselor, and in many cases Internet and magazines.

Although Agosto's model of urban teenagers' information behaviours and information needs mentions neither *dropout teenagers* nor *at-risk teenagers* who still attend a school but have *distinctly negative feeling* toward people or situation around them in each development area, such as the feeling of *loneliness and the sense of alienation*, some assumptions why dropout and at-risk teenagers tend to have a negative feelings in everyday life context can be identified from a critical review of Agosto's studies. Through a critical review, the author noticed that *the lack of the*

*ability of building good human relationship with others* is a common factor that may cause some teenagers to have negative feelings and situate them in dropout/at-risk situation. In other words, dropout or at-risk teenagers may lack one of, or some of the abilities relating to the human relationship represented by seven areas of the characteristics of the youth development, which is clearly missing in Agosto's model.

The social self: It should be mentioned here that teenagers' social relationship is normally immature and incomplete, and its quality very often depends on whether he/she has good observers (good family, good friends and neighbors, and good media). A poor-family relationship for instance may cause the *poor social relationship*.

The emotional self: In this area, the relationship with their parents or other good observers mentioned above is crucial in terms of nurturing an appropriate emotion to control their increasing aggressive emotion. Like the social self, a poor-family relationship may *negatively affect their emotional development*.

The reflective and cognitive self: Teenagers who *think that they cannot fit into an environment or the situation* that they are belonging and who *feel loneliness and alienation* are supposedly difficult to develop their reflective self.

The physical and creative self: Whereas common sport activities, such as tennis, baseball, football, basketball, and even playing hide-and-seek, require two or more participants, a creative performance tends to let a practitioner to be alone. In other words, teenagers who *heavily involve in an individual work* may be much more difficult to construct an appropriate social relationship with people than those who involve sport activities in daily basis.

Simpkins, Sandra D. et al. in *Predicting participation and outcomes in out-of-school activities: similarities and differences across social ecologies* (Simpkins, S. D. et al. 2005) analysed inner-city teenagers' (aged 6 through 12) out-of-school-time (OST) activities, and divided these activities into five areas: sports, art lessons, recreation and community center activities, club and youth group activities, and religious activities. Simpkins et al. concluded that a teenager who "participate in these activities have lower school absenteeism, are less likely to drop out" (2005, p.51). The research also concluded that these activities "associated with positive social adjustment, such as low problem behavior, drug use, and loneliness" (2005, p.52). For instance, Simpkins et al. found that teenagers who had participated sports, fitness and other athletic activities at high levels responded lower levels of antisocial behaviors such as delinquency than those who participated at low levels or do not. Conversely, non-participants of sports showed high level of dropouts. In addition, teenagers who participated in recreation and community center activities (camping, general after-school programs, and other community activities) and club and youth group responded relatively low level of dropouts. Interesting enough, teenagers who participated in art lesson activities are also shows relatively high level of dropouts. Applying these findings to Agosto's model, two assumptions can be made. First, activities in both the physical self and the creative self

can become a strong predictor of the level of dropouts. Second, on the other hand, social activities as part of the social self could be a weak predictor of the level of dropouts. In sum, we could say that teenagers who engage in individual activities enjoying being alone in most of their time tend to conduct antisocial behaviours such as delinquency, and could end up being dropout.

McCluskey, Ken W. et al. in *Unlocking hidden potential through mentoring* (McCluskey, K. W. et al., 2004) addressed on the most fundamental problem of the mentorship with “at-risk” student who has a great potential to become a dropout. One of goals of the mentorship is to bring out his or her latent talent, and develop their self-identities and decision-making skills over time. The key to success a mentorship program is therefore to develop a trust and a long-term connection between a mentor and a student. However, some negative characteristics of the at-risk student will make it difficult to build a trustworthy relationship. There are two major negative characteristics that many at-risk students indicated: 1) socially “not belonging” and 2) emotionally “feeling isolated”. These two negative indicators will significantly appear in school environment. McCluskey et al. pointed out that “at-risk youth don’t usually fit that mold” (2004, p.4), such as “School routines, schedules, and tests are typically biased in favor of well-behaved, academically-solid, teacher-pleasing students with a reasonable work ethic” (2004, p.4). Applying these negative indicators that at-risk students tend to have to Agosto’s model, the urban teen dropouts may respond negatively towards the social self (not belonging) and emotional self (feeling isolated). The at-risk students may avoid using personal information such as friends, neighbors, and teachers, family members for their social and emotional needs. Because the at-risk students tend to feel isolated as a whole, they may be more likely to prefer to act solely, and to use media for not building their social relationship, but for satisfying own curiosities. As for the reflective and the cognitive self that directly relate to an actual social practice in school and other social world, the at-risk students’ position in the society as an “outsider” is more obvious. Their information behaviour may be displayed in the place or within the context to which social school routines and rules are predominantly attached, namely outside of school life.

Bohnert, A. M. et al. in *Relationships between discretionary time activities, emotional experiences, delinquency and depressive symptoms among urban African American adolescents* (Bohnert, A. M. et al., 2009) focused on teenagers’ discretionary time use patterns and related activities, and divided their activities into two categories: structured and unstructured activities. Sport, art, homework, school-based activities, and other organizational activities are structured activities. Hanging out with friends, chatting with friends, or netsurfing are unstructured activities. Unstructured activities can be classified further into two sub-categories: passive activities such as watching television, and active activities such as hanging out with friends or playing pick-up basketball. After analysing 246 urban African American teenagers (fifth through

eighth grade), Bohnert, A. M. et al. found that more time spent in passive unstructured activities was associated with higher levels of depression only if teenagers lived in less dangerous neighborhoods, whereas more time spent in active unstructured activities was associated with higher levels of delinquency only if they lived in more dangerous neighborhoods. It should be noted here that both delinquency and depression associated with unstructured activities, whether it is passive or active, may result in generating the high risk of dropout. To put it other way, teenagers who engaged in structured activities was mostly associated with fewer antisocial behaviors (lower level of delinquency) and better emotional adjustment (lower level of depression). Applying unstructured activities associated with the high level of delinquency and depression to Agosto's model, we can realize that we may have to monitor teenagers' information behaviour very carefully. For instance, According to Simpkins et al., teenagers who participated in structured activities in the physical self, such as sports and fitness at high levels, was associated with lower levels of delinquency than those who participated at low levels, and the teenagers who do not participate in sports but do participate in structured non-sports activities in the creative self, such as art lesson, may still experience the low level of delinquency. In a same manner, even though we can predict from the study of Simpkins et al. that teenagers who participate in social activities as part of the social self could be weak predictor of the level of depression, this prediction could be appropriate only if the teenagers do not live in less dangerous neighborhoods.

Agosto's model of information behaviour of urban teenagers is based on the independent variable called "self" that refers to teenagers' perception of the world. Applying some findings from three literatures to Agosto's model as described above reveals another two variables should be taken into consideration to add to this model: *a level of the participation* in activities, and *an actual place* where these activities occur. If delinquency and depression are very factor of teens' dropout, and may generate depend on whether and to what extent teenagers participate in negative activities, we have to consider a level of the participation within Agosto's model. Place is also important variable in terms of identifying the actual location where at risk teenagers usually live.

In order to add two other variables to Agosto's model, we then could use Karen E. Fisher's (Pettigrew) the most recent version of information grounds theory, which is based on the people-place-information trichotomy (Fisher, Landry, & Naumer, 2007). In this theory, Fisher used the concept of "membership size" to identify the relationship between social factors and the people-related characteristics from the perspective of information behaviour in everyday life. The membership size is an important concept to enrich Agosto's model of urban teenagers because it "influences the way information is created and exchanged because it affects the *degree of intimacy and of access to broad information types*" (Savolainen, 2009, p.43). This concept is supposed to be very similar to the variable of the level of participation of activities.

According to Statistics Canada (2008, 2010), the dropout rate of Canadian teenagers

who have not graduated from high school and are no longer attending school continue to fall below 10% in last decade. However, as McCluskey, Ken W. et al. pointed out, Statistics Canada (1991) also showed that “talented students can be very much at risk. Many bright young people become bored, discouraged, or alienated and – their abilities notwithstanding – drop out” (McCluskey et al., 2004, p.4). If we can recognize today’s at-risk students as the tomorrow’s potential dropouts, we should be more sensitive to this type of the population. The characteristic of information behaviour of the dropout urban teenagers therefore needs to be expanded to include information seeking behaviour of at-risk students.

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