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Parent Preferences and Evaluations of Various Parenting Resources

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Abstract

A wide array of parenting information is readily available to parents. But, not all of this information is correct or credible. A survey of 57 parents was conducted in order to determine the types of parenting information sources most preferred, how often sources were used, and what criteria, if any, were used to evaluate those sources. Results showed that parents were most likely to consult friends and relatives for parenting information, and least likely to consult social media. Overall, it was found that most parents know how to appropriately evaluate the information they receive, but that others rely only on their "gut" instinct. Discussion follows that outlines possible implications for future practice.

Introduction and Review of Literature

Parenting is by no means an easy task to undertake. Even the most intelligent people can be unsure of what choices to make when raising their children. In today's modern world, a myriad of parenting information is accessible, which can serve to both help and confuse parents. As Carter (2007) shows, a Google search of the term "parenting" returned 62,900,000 results. But, of course, there are books and magazines available for use as well. A search of the word "parenting" on Amazon yielded 29,619 books from which to choose. (Carter, 2007) To say that parents have a multitude of choices for parenting information would be an understatement. Not all of the available sources, however, provide valid and reliable information. The goal of this study is to determine what kinds of information sources parents prefer, how often they use them, and what criteria they use to evaluate the credibility of those sources.

As of yet, there has not been a comprehensive body of study relating to parenting information sources. A study by Berkule-Silderman, et al. (2010) surveyed low socioeconomic status Latina postpartum mothers in one hospital. The study asked questions about which sources of parenting information were used by the mothers and at what ages the mothers intended to initiate reading or TV-viewing in their children. It was found that mothers who received advice from family or friends were more likely to initiate reading to their children. While these results are interesting, they have many limits. First of all, the population surveyed is a very specific group. Results could change depending on race, income level, or even geographic location. Additionally, the surveys were administered in 2005 and 2006. Since then, access to and reliance

on the Internet has expanded greatly. This could also change how parents search for information

and advice.

Velardo and Drummond (2013) conducted interviews with low socioeconomic status

Australian parents to determine what sources the parents used to find information relating to

health and nutrition. Their study found that the parents "almost unanimously" used the internet to

access health information. But, the parents expressed confusion about to evaluate the credibility

of this information, with some describing it as an "information overload." (Velardo

&Drummond, 2013) Additionally, the parents discussed their comfort with accessing their social

support networks of family and friends, especially for nutritional advice. The advice of other

people with children was deemed more practical and relevant. (Velardo & Drummond, 2013)

A prototype video-format parenting program was tested by 162 parents with children

between 3-6 years of age in a study by Metzler, et al. (2012) in order to determine how to deliver

information to parents in a more efficient and affordable format. They found that parents

preferred self-administered programs, such as television, online materials, and written materials.

The parents were least likely to prefer home visits, therapists, and parenting groups. This

particular study did not address whether parents turned to their social support networks of friends

and relatives, however.

Another study (Kozuch, et al., 2015) evaluated the quality of information relating to

infant teething on 16 popular parenting websites. They concluded that it is challenging to

translate clinically proven information into an easily-understood, internet-accessible format.

In contrast to other studies (Berkule- Silderman, et al., 2010, Velardo &Drummond,

2013), this study surveyed both mothers and fathers, from many age groups, races, and income

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levels. The goal was to be able to present a more inclusive study of trends among parents in

general, rather than in a narrow subset. Over time, as more studies are done on this topic, the

tendencies will become clearer.

The information gained in the present study will be valuable to educators, administrators,

health care providers, community and government agencies, and other groups who are interested

in providing advice to parents. A majority of parents are well-intentioned and hope to make

healthy and appropriate choices for their children, but finding reliable information can be

difficult. As early childhood professionals seek to provide parents with information to assist

them in this endeavor, it is prudent to know what kinds of sources parents will prefer, thereby

increasing the chances they might actually read, comprehend, and most importantly, apply the

knowledge they have learned.

Methods

In order to gauge what sources of information are most used by parents and how they are

evaluated, a survey was designed for parents. The survey consisted of 17 questions, which asked

for some basic demographic information, as well as which sources of information were most

used and how those sources were evaluated. (See Appendix for the complete survey.)

The demographic questions asked about the age, gender, race, income level and

education level of the parent taking the survey. Two more questions were asked about the

number of children in the family, and the age range of those children.

For the purposes of this survey, the sources of parenting information were placed in four

categories: Books/Magazines, Internet Sources (Not Social Media), Social Media, and

Friends/Relatives. These categories were chosen as they were determined to be commonly used

by parents today. Additionally, given those four categories, I asked which source parents were most likely to use, and another question about which source they were least likely to use. Questions were also asked about the frequency of use for each type of source, as well as how the source is evaluated by the parent.

The survey was created in an online format using the website SurveyMonkey.com. A link to the survey was distributed via Facebook on the author's personal page, as well in a group titled Parents of Twitter. Some of those people then shared the link on their pages. Participants were ensured that their responses would be anonymous, and the survey would take only a few minutes of their time. The survey included an opening statement that read, "As a part of the requirements for my Honors program at the University of Akron, I am conducting a study to determine which types of parenting resources are preferred by parents and how parents evaluate the information they find through those resources. The survey should only take a few minutes to complete and your participation will greatly assist me in completing the project. If you prefer not to answer any questions, you may leave those blank. I appreciate your taking the time to complete the survey."

The survey was open from October 21, 2014 through November 10, 2014. During this time, 57 participants responded. While this collection method is convenient, it is important to consider how it could potentially present some limitations to the study. Because the survey was only presented online, through social media, it is possible that the people completing the survey would be more likely to report internet and social media use in their responses. Due to the nature of its collection, this survey was not administered to anyone without internet access, which could potentially limit the results.

Results

Demographics

Between the dates of October 21, 2014 and November 10, 2014, 57 people took the survey. Five people identified themselves as male, and 49 as female. Three people declined to identify their gender. The 18-24 year old age group was best represented with 47.37% of the total. Only one person was below age 17, 15.79% were between ages 25-30, 10.53% between ages 31-35, 5.26% between ages 36-40, and 19.30% were 41 and older. (See Table 1.)

Table 1: Ages of Survey Participants

Age Range	Number of Responses	Percentage of Total
17 and younger	1	1.75%
18-24	27	47.37%
25-30	9	15.79%
31-35	6	10.53%
36-40	3	5.26%
41 and older	11	19.30%

The majority of participants for this survey identified themselves as White (89.09%). No one identified as Asian or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander. One person identified as African American, two as American Indian/Alaska Native, and two as being from multiple races. One person indicated that they preferred not to answer, and two people skipped this question. (See Table 2.)

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Table 2: Race/ethnicity of Survey Participants

Race/Ethnicity Categories	Number of Responses	Percentage of Total
White	49	89.09%
Black or African-American	1	1.82%
American Indian/Alaska Native	2	3.64%
Asian	0	0.00%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0	0.00%
From multiple races	2	3.64%
Prefer not to answer	1	1.82%

Most of the participants had one or two children in their family. One person had three children, one person had four children, and one other person had five or more children. Two people skipped this question. (See Table 3.) Most of the participants surveyed had children between 1-3 years old, with the next highest group being those with children under 12 months old. The rest of the age ranges were rather evenly distributed. Two people skipped this question. (See Table 4.)

Table 3: Number of Children of Survey Participants

Number of Children	Number of Responses	Percentage of Total
1	29	52.73%
2	23	41.82%
3	1	1.82%
4	1	1.82%
5 or more	1	1.82%

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Table 4: Age Ranges of Children of Survey Participants

Age Ranges	Number of Responses	Percentage of Total
Under 12 months	15	27.27%
1-3 years	32	58.18%
4-5 years	5	9.09%
6-10 years	7	12.73%
Over 10 years	10	18.18%

The largest income range represented was families making less than $20,000 per year.

The next highest group was the $61,000-$80,000 range. The least represented group was the

$81,000-$100,000 range. Five people skipped this question. (See Table 5.)

Table 5: Yearly Household Income Ranges of Survey Participants

Yearly Household Income Ranges	Number of Responses	Percentage of Total
Less than $20,000	16	30.77%
$21,000-$40,000	9	17.31%
$41,000-$60,000	8	15.38%
$61,000-$80,000	11	21.15%
$81,000-$100,000	2	3.85%
More than $100,000	6	11.54%

The largest educational level represented was those people who had completed some

college, but had not received a degree. The next highest group was those who had received a

graduate degree, followed closely by Bachelor and Associate degrees. The least represented

group was those who had not completed high school. One person skipped this question. (See

Table 6.)

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Table 6: Education Level of Survey Participants

Education Level	Number of Responses	Percentage of Total
Less than high school degree	3	5.36%
High school degree/GED	8	14.29%
Some college but no degree	19	33.93%
Associate degree	7	12.50%
Bachelor degree	9	16.07%
Graduate degree	10	17.86%

Parenting Resources

The next section of the survey asked questions about how parents use and evaluate

different sources of parenting information. When asked which source of information they would

be most likely to use, the majority of respondents selected Friends/Relatives. The next highest

response was for Internet Sources. The least popular response was Social Media. Five people

skipped this question. (See Table 7.)

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Table 7: Results for Question 8

Q8 Which source of parenting information would you be MOST likely to use?

Answered: 52   Skipped: 5
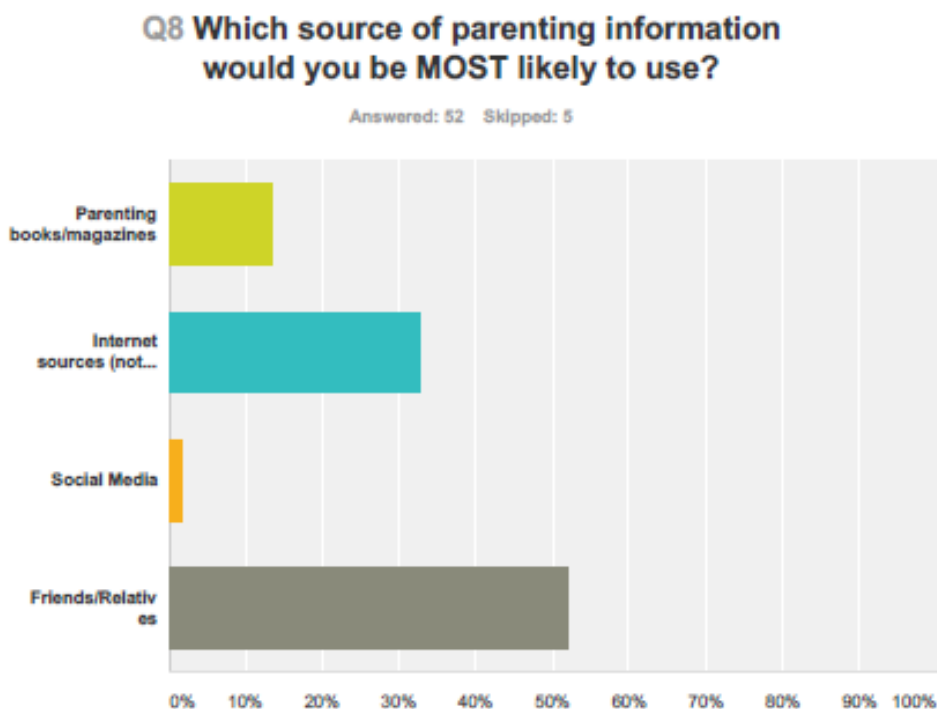
Answer Choices	Responses	
Parenting books/magazines	13.46%	7
Internet sources (not social media)	32.69%	17
Social Media	1.92%	1
Friends/Relatives	51.92%	27
Total		52

Next, participants were asked which source they would be least likely to use. An overwhelming majority of respondents indicated that they would be least likely to use Social Media for parenting information. Another significant portion indicated that they would be least likely to use Books/Magazines for parenting information. Four people skipped this question. (See Table 8.)

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Table 8: Results for Question 9

Q9 Which source of parenting information would you be LEAST likely to use?

Answered: 53   Skipped: 4
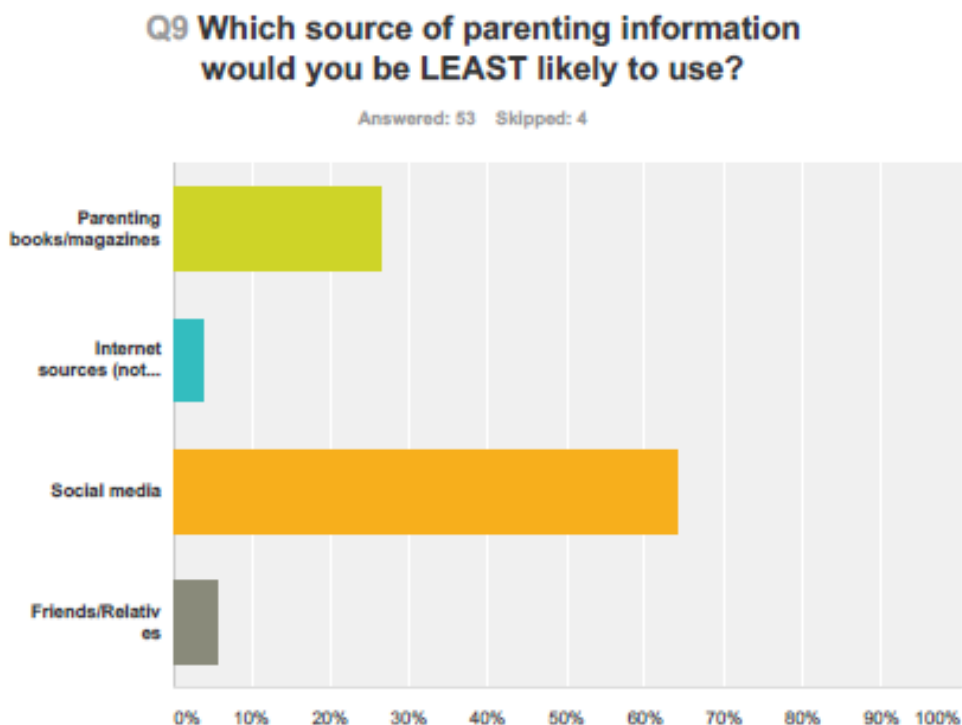
Answer Choices	Responses	
Parenting books/magazines	26.42%	14
Internet sources (not social media)	3.77%	2
Social media	64.15%	34
Friends/Relatives	5.66%	3
Total		53

Parents were then asked about their frequency of use for each of the source categories. For Books/Magazines, most of the participants indicated that they were used less than every six months or once every six months. Only two people used books or magazines every day for parenting information. Four people skipped this question. (See Table 9.) When asked about their frequency of use for Internet Sources, the participants' responses formed an almost-perfect Bell curve. A majority of people fell in the middle, using the Internet for parenting information about
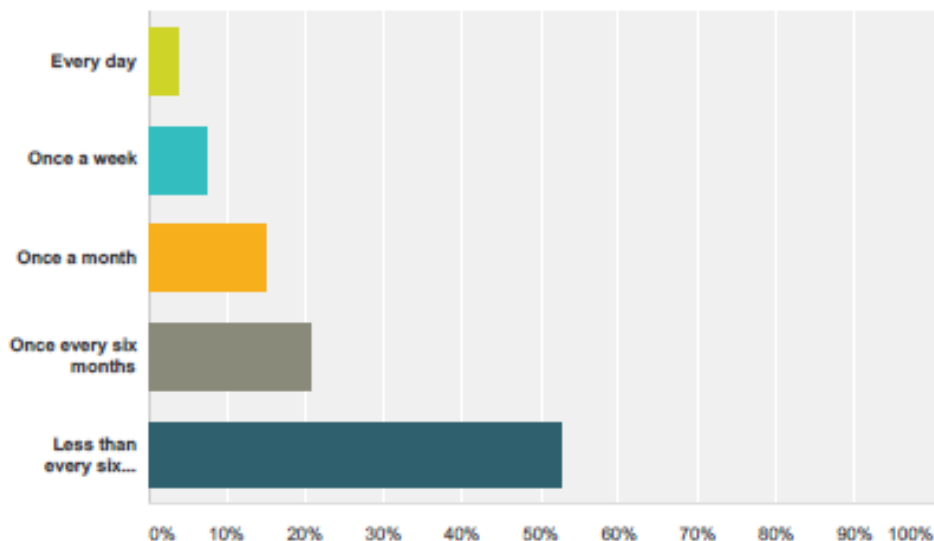
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once a month. The next highest results were for those people who use it once a week or once

every six months. The lowest responses were for those people who use the Internet for parenting

information every day or less than every six months. Three people skipped this question. (See

Table 10.)

Table 9: Results for Question 10

Q10 **How often do you consult parenting books/magazines when you have a question/concern for your child/children?**

Answered: 53   Skipped: 4
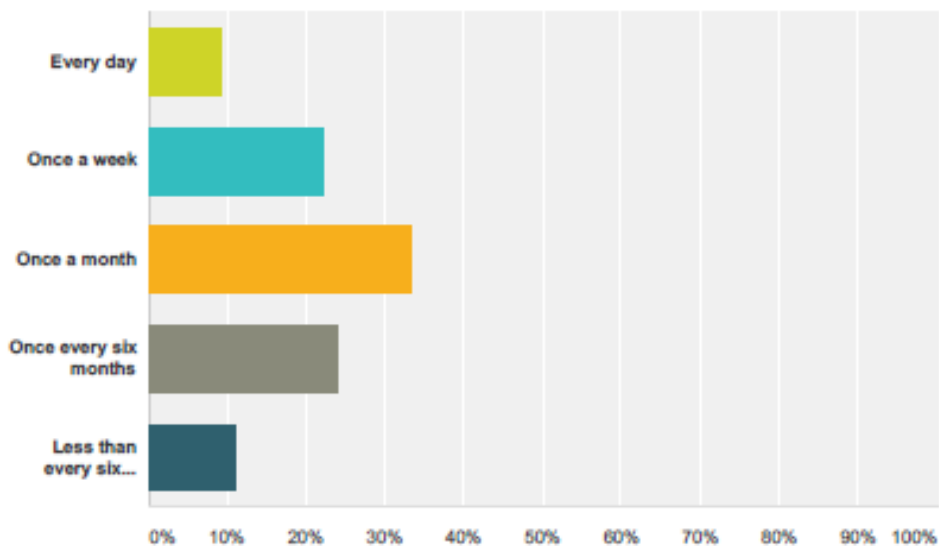

Answer Choices	Responses	
Every day	3.77%	2
Once a week	7.55%	4
Once a month	15.09%	8
Once every six months	20.75%	11
Less than every six months	52.83%	28
Total		53

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Table 10: Results for Question 11

Q11 How often do you consult internet sources (not social media) when you have a question/concern for your child/children?

Answered: 54   Skipped: 3
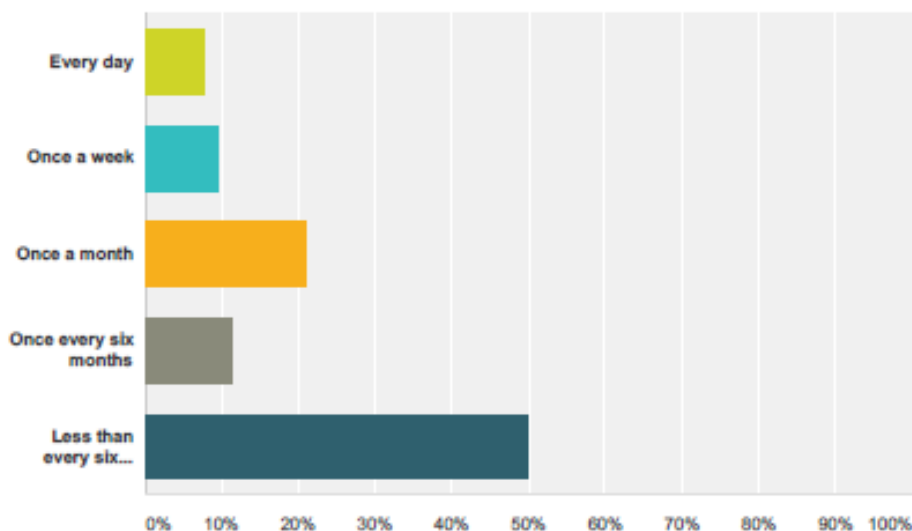

Answer Choices	Responses	
Every day	9.26%	5
Once a week	22.22%	12
Once a month	33.33%	18
Once every six months	24.07%	13
Less than every six months	11.11%	6
Total		54

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Table 11: Results for Question 12

Q12 How often do you consult social media when you have a question/concern for your child/children?

Answered: 52   Skipped: 5

Answer Choices	Responses	
Every day	7.69%	4
Once a week	9.62%	5
Once a month	21.15%	11
Once every six months	11.54%	6
Less than every six months	50.00%	26
Total		52

When asked about their use of social media, most people responded that they used it less than every six months. But, a significant amount of people indicated that they used it once a month and some even once a week or every day. Five people skipped this question. (See Table 11.)

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For the consultation of friends/relatives, most participants indicated that they were used once a week or every day. Another significant amount responded that they were used once a month. Seven people consulted their friends or relatives once every six months, while three people reported less than six months. Three people skipped this question. (See Table 12.)

The next section of the survey asked questions about how parents determine if a source is credible and valid. As shown in Table 13, the largest group was of parents who responded that they looked up the credentials of the author when evaluating a book or magazine. Many other methods were also used, such as relying on others' recommendations, looking at reviews, and trusting one's own "gut" instinct. Still, a significant amount of respondents (17.34%) said that they do not use any specific criteria to evaluate books or magazines. Five people skipped this question. (See Table 13.)

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Table 12: Results for Question 13

Q13 How often do you consult friends/relatives when you have a question/concern for your child/children?

Answered: 54   Skipped: 3
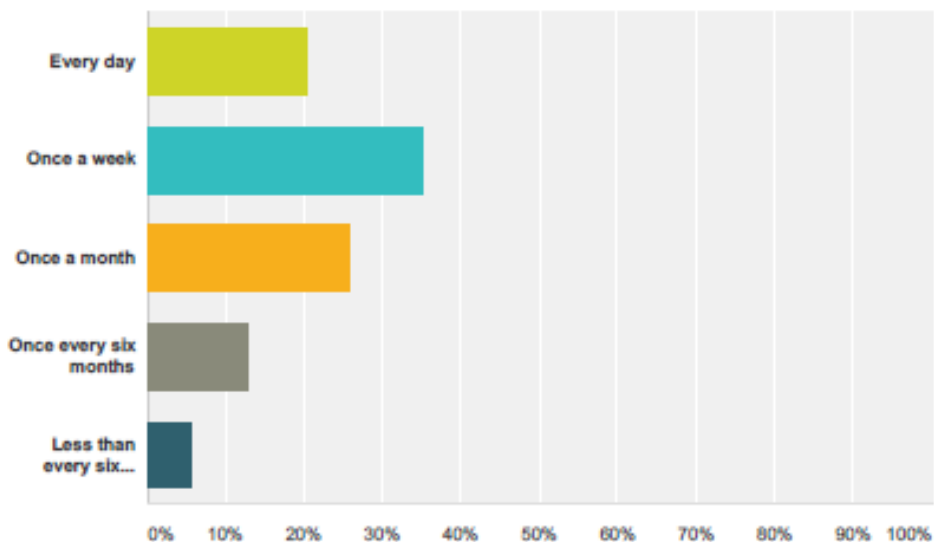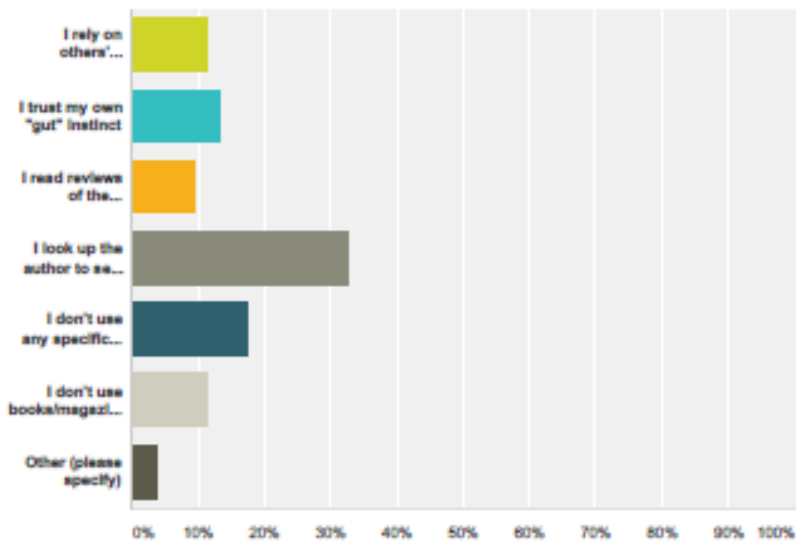
Answer Choices	Responses	
Every day	20.37%	11
Once a week	35.19%	19
Once a month	25.93%	14
Once every six months	12.96%	7
Less than every six months	5.56%	3
Total		54

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Table 13: Results for Question 14

Q14 When using books/magazines, how do you determine whether or not they are credible and valid?

Answered: 52   Skipped: 5

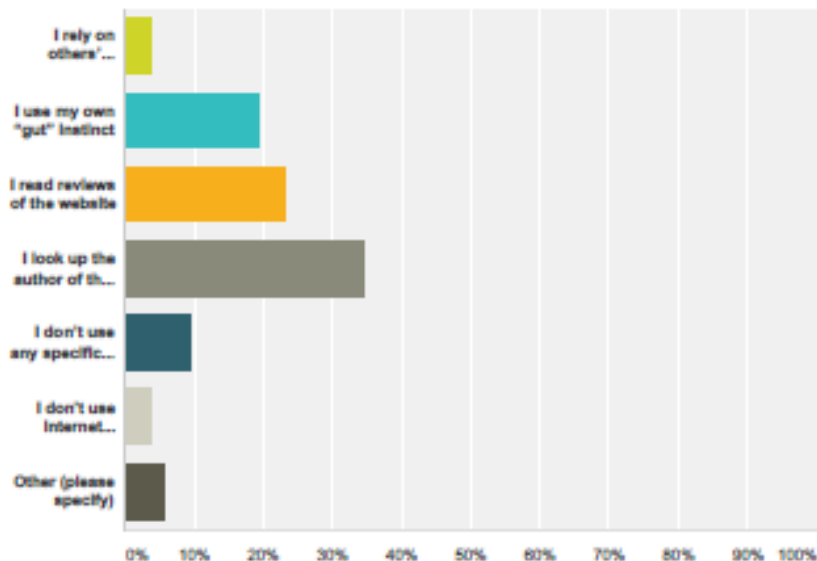| Answer Choices	Responses	
I rely on others' recommedations	11.54%	6
I trust my own "gut" instinct	13.46%	7
I read reviews of the book/magazine	9.62%	5
I look up the author to see what his/her credentials are	32.69%	17
I don't use any specific criteria	17.31%	9
I don't use books/magazines so this question is not applicable to me	11.54%	6
Other (please specify)	3.85%	2
Total		52

#	Other (please specify)	Date
1	Went to conferences	10/23/2014 12:40 PM
2	I see how it compares to the ultimate parenting guide - God's Holy Word!	10/21/2014 5:24 PM

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Table 14: Results for Table 14

Q15 **When using internet sources (not social media), how do you determine whether or not they are credible and valid?**

Answered: 52   Skipped: 5

Answer Choices	Responses	
I rely on others' recommendations	3.85%	2
I use my own "gut" instinct	19.23%	10
I read reviews of the website	23.08%	12
I look up the author of the site to see what his/her credentials are	34.62%	18
I don't use any specific criteria	9.62%	5
I don't use internet sources so this question is not applicable to me	3.85%	2
Other (please specify)	5.77%	3
Total		52

#	Other (please specify)	Date
1	If the site "looks" credible, I will use it .	11/8/2014 8:17 AM
2	I read from multiple sources and compare the answers. If they're similar, then I assume it is credible info.	10/21/2014 7:00 PM
3	I see how it compares to the ultimate parenting guide - God's Holy Word!	10/21/2014 5:24 PM

Similarly to Books/Magazines, the most popular way of evaluating Internet sources was to look up the credentials of the author. But, more people reported that they would read reviews

of the website, or trust their own instincts. One person reported "cross-checking" the information

on other sites to see if it is credible. Also, another person mentioned the "look" of the site in

determining its credibility. Five people skipped this question. (See Table 14.)

For Social Media, most parents reported that they did not use it to seek parenting

information, and thus the question was not applicable to them. Others, however, said that they

trusted their "gut" instincts or they relied on the recommendations of others to determine

credibility. Two parents explained how they evaluate social media parenting information by

cross-checking the information with sources on the Internet. Seven people skipped this question.

(See Table 15.)

When asked about how they evaluate the credibility of advice from Friends/Relatives,

many parents chose the option, "I listen to what they have to say and weigh that against my own

beliefs." Another significant portion indicated that they use that advice in conjunction with other

sources on information. Five people skipped this question. (See Table 16.)

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Table 15: Results for Question 16

Q16 **When using social media sources, how do you determine whether or not they are credible and valid?**

Answered: 50   Skipped: 7
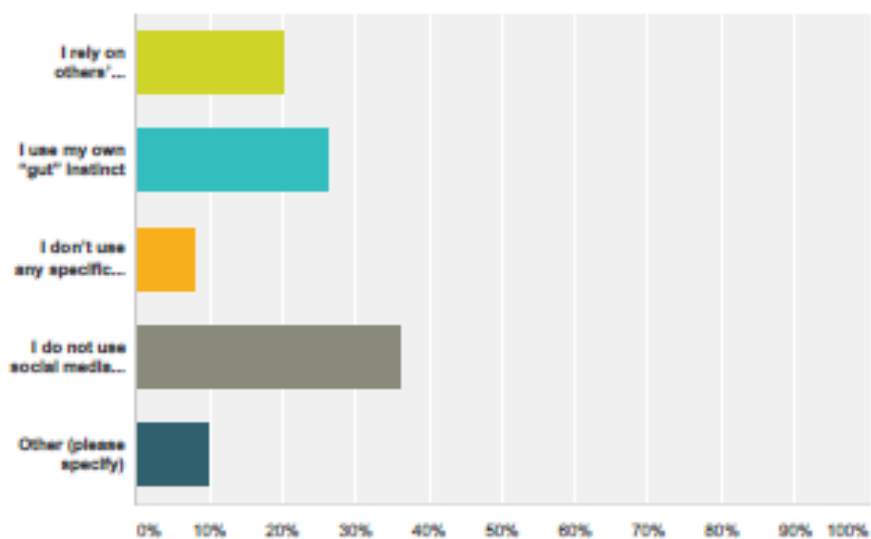
Answer Choices	Responses	
I rely on others' recommendations	20.00%	10
I use my own "gut" instinct	26.00%	13
I don't use any specific criteria	8.00%	4
I do not use social media so this question is not applicable to me	36.00%	18
Other (please specify)	10.00%	5
Total		50

| #	Other (please specify)	Date
1	I use other internet sources to research the claim	10/25/2014 5:00 PM
2	looking up authors and dates of publication	10/22/2014 8:28 AM
3	I see how it compares to the ultimate parenting guide - God's Holy Word!	10/21/2014 5:24 PM
4	I ask other parents	10/21/2014 1:43 PM
5	Cross check the info on the internet	10/21/2014 1:01 PM

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Table 16: Results for Question 17

Q17 When getting advice from friends/relatives, how do you determine whether or not the information is credible and valid?

Answered: 52   Skipped: 5
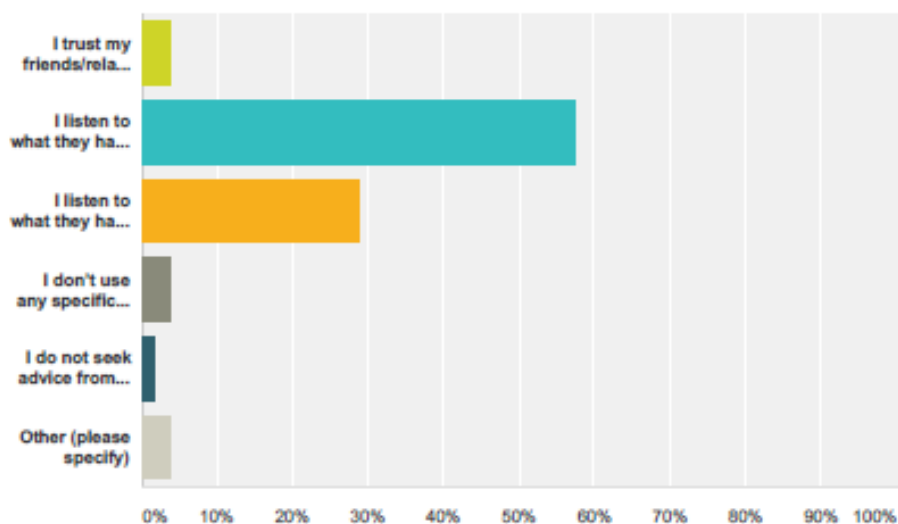
Answer Choices	Responses	
I trust my friends/relatives so I assume the information is valid	3.85%	2
I listen to what they have to say and then weigh that against my own beliefs	57.69%	30
I listen to what they have to say and then use that along with other sources of information	28.85%	15
I don't use any specific criteria	3.85%	2
I do not seek advice from friends or relatives so this question is not applicable to me	1.92%	1
Other (please specify)	3.85%	2
Total		52

#	Other (please specify)	Date
1	my friends and family have medical backgrounds	10/21/2014 7:34 PM
2	I see how it compares to the ultimate parenting guide - God's Holy Word!	10/21/2014 5:24 PM

Discussion

Demographics

The survey participants were predominantly female. It is possible that a group with more male-female balance would show different trends. Also, an overwhelming majority of participants were White/Caucasian. It is certainly possible that answers would change for different racial/cultural groups. A larger-scale study would draw from a more diverse population, and one that is more reflective of the demographic makeup of American parents in general.

Also, it would be prudent to have participants indicate more specifically their age and the ages of their children. For the purposes of this study, the age range for parents ended at age 41 and for children at age 10. This eliminates some parents of teenagers and of adult children. In future work, it would be worthwhile to see if these parents use different sources than parents of infants and toddlers.

Parenting Resources

The survey results showed that the most frequently used source of parenting information was the advice of friends or relatives. The old saying goes, "It takes a village to raise a child." It is not surprising, then, that parents often turn to their support network, or "village" to receive help with parenting questions. According to Elliott (2008), mothers with greater social support network density were more likely to seek out sources of parenting information than those with less social support network density. Sometimes, though, there might be questions for which

parents need a quick, immediate answer, rather than waiting to speak with a friend or relative. For these cases, it is likely that using the Internet to find information would be faster and more convenient than consulting a friend or relative. This is supported by the survey results, which show that Internet sources are the second-most frequently consulted parenting source.

Social media was the source that was reported as least likely to be used. But, when looking at the frequency-of-use questions, it can be seen that social media is actually used more frequently than are books and magazines. When added together, fourteen participants indicated that they used books and magazines once a month or more frequently, as opposed to twenty who used social media once a month or more frequently. Many explanations could account for this. It is possible that parents would prefer to use books and magazines, but that they use social media more frequently because of its convenience and immediacy. When asked which source they would be least likely to use, it is possible that the participants were trying to select what they might perceive as the "desirable" answer, and therefore chose social media, as it could be seen by the parents as an unreliable source. It is also possible that parents might have over- or under-estimated their frequency of use for social media as well as for books and magazines.

Overall, it seems that most parents know how to evaluate the credibility of resources, as seen in the responses to questions 14 and 15. For these questions, most parents answered that they would look up the author of the content to see his or her credentials. This is a good start for evaluating content. Knowing about the author and whether or not he or she is qualified to give parenting advice would help parents to pass judgment on the information. Still, it is important to note that a significant number of parents indicated that they chose to trust their "gut instinct." Depending on their existing knowledge of child development, this may or may not be helpful.

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As Elliott (2008) reported in her studies, parents are likely to turn to their social support network for parenting information. These findings are reinforced in this study. Practitioners in the field of early childhood should keep this in mind when engaging with families. To help ensure that appropriate and effective advice is offered to parents, efforts could be made to educate the community as a whole. Programs designed for grandparents or other relatives could be beneficial as knowledge about child-rearing may have changed since they were raising their own children. For example, a prenatal education class aimed at pregnant women and their mothers could provide many benefits for all involved. Additionally, because it seems that parents prefer advice from within in their social support network, teachers and caregivers are in a unique position to be able to relay developmental information to families. Information from teachers could be delivered informally, through the course of daily conversations. Or, teachers could send information through monthly newsletters. Of course, information has to be delivered in a sensitive way, so as not to offend or alienate a family.

Internet sources and social media seem to present more challenges for the evaluation of their credibility. Because almost anything can be found on the Internet, it can be difficult to sort through what is truth and what is not. The study by Velardo and Drummond (2013) stated that many parents felt that determining the credibility of online sources was a time consuming process, as anyone can post information and claim to have credentials. While many parents trust their instincts in this realm, early childhood professionals could help parents by providing a list of reliable websites to turn to when in need of advice. Additionally, professionals could also assist parents by providing a checklist of guidelines about how to assess the credibility of sources.

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   People are diverse, and so are their preferences for receiving information. Professionals should remember this and seek to offer a wide array of credible information to parents. After all, it does not matter *how* parents gather information. What matters is that the information they receive is correct and helpful.

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PARENT PREFERENCES AND EVALUATIONS

Appendix

Honors Research Project Survey: Parent Preferences and Evaluations of Various Parenting Resources

Demographics

As a part of the requirements for my Honors program at the University of Akron, I am conducting a study to determine which types of parenting resources are preferred by parents and how parents evaluate the information they find through those resources. The survey should only take a few minutes to complete and your participation will greatly assist me in completing the project. If you prefer not to answer any questions, you may leave those blank. I appreciate your taking the time to complete the survey.

1. What is your age?

○ 17 or younger

○ 18-24

○ 25-30

○ 31-35

○ 36-40

○ 41 or older

2. Are you White, Black or African-American, American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific islander, or some other race?

○ White

○ Black or African-American

○ American Indian or Alaskan Native

○ Asian

○ Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander

○ From multiple races

○ Prefer not to answer

3. Are you male or female?

○ Male

○ Female

4. How many children do you have?

○ 1

○ 2

○ 3

○ 4

○ 5 or more

5. What is the age of your child(ren)? Select all that apply.

☐ Under 12 months

☐ 1-3 years

☐ 4-5 years

☐ 6-10 years

☐ Over 10 years

6. What is your approximate yearly household income?

○ Less than $20,000

○ $21,000-$40,000

○ $41,000-$60,000

○ $61,000-$80,000

○ $81,000-$100,000

○ More than $100,000

7. What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?

○ Less than high school degree

○ High school degree or equivalent (e.g., GED)

○ Some college but no degree

PARENT PREFERENCES AND EVALUATIONS

- ○ Associate degree
- ○ Bachelor degree
- ○ Graduate degree

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Parenting Resources

8. Which source of parenting information would you be MOST likely to use?

○ Parenting books/magazines

○ Internet sources (not social media)

○ Social Media

○ Friends/Relatives

9. Which source of parenting information would you be LEAST likely to use?

○ Parenting books/magazines

○ Internet sources (not social media)

○ Social media

○ Friends/Relatives

10. How often do you consult <u>parenting books/magazines</u> when you have a question/concern for your child/children?

○ Every day

○ Once a week

○ Once a month

○ Once every six months

○ Less than every six months

11. How often do you consult <u>internet sources (not social media)</u> when you have a question/concern for your child/children?

○ Every day

○ Once a week

○ Once a month

○ Once every six months

○ Less than every six months

12. How often do you consult social media when you have a question/concern for your child/children?

○ Every day

○ Once a week

○ Once a month

○ Once every six months

○ Less than every six months

13. How often do you consult friends/relatives when you have a question/concern for your child/children?

○ Every day

○ Once a week

○ Once a month

○ Once every six months

○ Less than every six months

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Parenting Resources

14. When using books/magazines, how do you determine whether or not they are credible and valid?

○ I rely on others' recommedations

○ I trust my own "gut" instinct

○ I read reviews of the book/magazine

○ I look up the author to see what his/her credentials are

○ I don't use any specific criteria

○ I don't use books/magazines so this question is not applicable to me

○ Other (please specify)

15. When using internet sources (not social media), how do you determine whether or not they are credible and valid?

○ I rely on others' recommendations

○ I use my own "gut" instinct

○ I read reviews of the website

○ I look up the author of the site to see what his/her credentials are

○ I don't use any specific criteria

○ I don't use internet sources so this question is not applicable to me

○ Other (please specify)

16. When using social media sources, how do you determine whether or not they are credible and valid?

○ I rely on others' recommendations

○ I use my own "gut" instinct

○ I don't use any specific criteria

PARENT PREFERENCES AND EVALUATIONS

○ I do not use social media so this question is not applicable to me

○ Other (please specify)

17. When getting advice from friends/relatives, how do you determine whether or not the information is credible and valid?

○ I trust my friends/relatives so I assume the information is valid

○ I listen to what they have to say and then weigh that against my own beliefs

○ I listen to what they have to say and then use that along with other sources of information

○ I don't use any specific criteria

○ I do not seek advice from friends or relatives so this question is not applicable to me

○ Other (please specify)