Pilot Study of Librarians' Personal

Reading Preference and Attitudes Toward Readers' Advisory

Service

Group 5

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ABSTRACT

Previous studies have focused in the areas of readers' advisory (RA) resources and attitudes towards librarians but there has not been research on the effect of librarians' reading preferences on the readers' advisory transaction. A self-administered survey was created with the goal of exploring: 1) What are librarians' reading preferences? and 2) Do these preferences affect the books they recommend or how they conduct an RA transaction? Surveys were analyzed for trends, revealing that librarians and library staff do favor certain genres and literary foci but also follow recommended RA procedures, especially when in an area they do not read. While this is an encouraging finding, there may be bias towards socially acceptable answers when self reporting. Therefore, it is recommended that this study be followed up by 1) observations of librarians during RA transactions and 2) interviews with patrons. This study fills a void in the literature illuminating whether there is a gap between the guidelines outlined in models of readers' advisory and actual practice.

INTRODUCTION

There is one question many librarians dread…"Can you help me find a good book?" Is this a new question for librarians? No. Librarians have been encouraged to assist readers find "good books" since the 1800s. Samuel S. Green, in his 1876 paper titled, *Personal relations between librarians and readers*, emphasized the benefit of having a library employee to help each and every patron in the selection of a good book. Green felt that it was a librarian's responsibility to intellectually elevate their patrons. Not only should a book entertain, but more importantly, it should educate.

Connecting readers with good books was given a name in the 1920s, readers' advisory. Yet, between the 1950s and the 1980s, readers' advisory services had largely been phased out of library programming (Baker, 1992). The old-style readers' advisory idea lost support for various reasons: providing books began to seem less important than storing, retrieving, and transferring information; in the adult education field, readers' advisory service lost out to continuing education courses; and, most damaging of all, the goal of improving literary taste was called into question as an agenda to promote taste preferences of an elite social class (Ross, 1991). It wasn't until the 1980s that readers' advisory experienced a grass-roots resurgence. Recently readers' advisory services research has increased as the role of the library in the life of the patron is re-examined in light of new technologies and entertainment sources. The rise in popularity of book clubs and the popularity of reader-response literary criticism has shed new light on the importance of everyday reading practices, and the librarian's role in encouraging and directing those practices.

Previous studies have focused in the areas of readers' advisory resources (Burgin, 1996; Shearer, 1996; Saricks, 2005; Stover, 2005), the readers' advisory transaction between librarian and reader (Chelton, 1999; Chelton, 2003; May, et.al., 2000; Moyer, 2005; Ross and Chelton, 2001; Saricks, 2005; Shearer, 1996; Shearer, et.al., 1994; Shearer and Burgin, 2001), and attitudes towards librarians (Gallo, 1985) but there has not been research on the effect of librarians' reading preferences on the readers' advisory transaction. Exploratory studies such as May and Shearer suggest that bias might exist due to librarians' preference, "quite often, the books suggested reflected the reading preferences of the individuals offering advisement" (May, 2000, 41), but it has never been the focus of a study. Librarians who engage, teach, and train in readers' advisory would benefit from knowing if librarians' reading preferences affect their readers' advisory so they can be aware of how their personal bias may effect the reader. The purpose of this study is to reveal biases in the readers' advisory transaction, which could lead to a more refined and reflective practice.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Prior research

In 1992 Baker published *Readers' advisory services: A call for more research*, in which she pointed out several areas in need of further research, including the implementation of readers' advisory services in libraries, the methods employed and their effectiveness, the presence or absence of a readers' advisory interview, and whether librarians' personal tastes were affecting the titles suggested.

A number of researchers answered the call for more research readers' advisory services, which revealed in many cases haphazard and inconsistent service. Chelton (1999) found in her research that libraries have moved their focus to providing information, rather than good narrative stories. In the meantime, "people once served by public libraries are abandoning them for superstores or second-hand bookstores, because we are ignoring them." In an undercover survey of Nassau County libraries, May (2000) found librarians reluctant and ill-prepared for readers' advisory. Furthermore, library staff rarely probed beyond the patron's genre of interest before recommending a title. May found that library staff revealed to patrons over and over again their personal readings tastes, concluding, "responses of this nature underscore the misapprehension of many staff members that they must read a particular genre in order to recommend it." May warned, "In this information-centric age, one fact remains constant and must be emphasized: recreational reading is still the most common rationale for public library visits. Statistics reveal that the majority of circulated materials are for 'leisure, hobbies, or self-improvement'" (May, 2000).

There are three major reasons why research in fiction readers' advisory service has been crippled. One, there was a widespread belief that readers' advisory was an easily performed and self-evident act. Two, the concepts of classification of fiction has lagged behind that of non-fiction. And three, a widespread bias against research into activities categorized as play (Shearer, 1996). Wiegand (2003), a researcher in American Studies wrote about the need for more research in the library and information science (LIS) field examining the library in the life of the user/patron. He illustrates the distinction made by philosophers, and then later American public libraries, of information being "useful" and not. Benjamin Franklin's first book order sent to London included orders for dictionaries, atlases, histories, and works of science, but no novels. This bias has been continued in LIS education, which emphasizes teaching sources of useful knowledge. However, Wiegand states that looking at

circulation records will reveal that people use the library as a place, and source, for reading for pleasure, and this activity should be given more emphasis in research. This research will allow the LIS community to understand more fully the "social and cultural preconditions that frame the library's presence" (Wiegand, 2003).

Readers' Advisory Transactions: the "nuts and bolts"

Before we are able to understand the role of bias in the readers' advisory transaction, we had to thoroughly understand the activity itself. Joyce G. Saricks' book (2005) *Readers' advisory service in the public library*, now in its third edition, is considered the essential guide in this area. Saricks describes five appeal characteristics in a book: pacing, characterization, story line, frame and tone, and style. These are the essential elements that reader's look for when trying to find a book that meets their needs of the moment. She writes, "What I suggest here is simply a more systematic approach that capitalizes on a reader's natural inclinations in describing books to fellow readers." These aim to describe how a book affects a reader, and furthermore, outlines professional guidelines so the readers' advisor can engage in readers' advisory that is more satisfying for the reader. This guide is foundational in understanding the "nuts and bolts" of readers' advisory, and proved to be useful for us in designing our survey, so that we could examine the parts of the transaction where bias might enter.

In 1996, Shearer conducted a study of several North Carolina libraries on the readers' advisory transaction. They conducted the study with the idea of mapping out the readers' advisory transaction. The study used student researchers who approached librarians with the following readers' advisory request: "I just finished *To Kill a Mockingbird* and would like something like it. Can you help me?" In fifty percent of the cases the students received no assistance, in thirty percent of the cases students were told by the librarians what books they should read next, and in only twenty percent of the cases did the librarians attempt to find out what it was about *To Kill a Mockingbird* that the student liked. When the students were asked to rate their experience, high marks were given to those librarians who attempted to find out what the students liked about the book even if they were unable to direct them to another book. Shearer found that readers want to share their personal reading experiences. (Shearer and Burgin, 2001).

Readers' Advisory Tools and Sources

Much of the research in readers' advisory has been focused on tools and resources used in the transaction. However, understanding these foundational studies, which illuminate the sources of information for readers' advisory transactions, is important in understanding how we developed our hypothesis. Because these studies have already illuminated the "nuts and bolts" of the readers' advisory

transaction, they will serve as the foundation for us to build on so we can try and understand the "cognitive" aspects of the transaction itself.

Quillen found four common resources used by librarians when doing readers' advisory - Amazon.com, *NoveList*, *Now Read This*, and *What Do I Read Next?*. According to her, the best practice is to use a combination of sources in order to have a successful readers' advisory experience. Also, special training may be needed to make the best use of these sources (Moyer, 2005). Ross and Chelton highlight that the experience wanted by the reader is not typically categorized by most readers' advisory tools and that reading experiences differ within a single genre. Therefore, when a patron requests a romance book, simply pointing them to an area or one author is unlikely to meet the patron's interest or need. What these studies point out is that readers' advisory is a more complex task than simply demonstrating use of a specialized tool, or pointing out a particular reading area in the library.

The following two studies, while still focused on tools, begin to explore the role of the librarian in the readers' advisory transaction. In May et al.'s (2000) research of readers' advisory services in public libraries in Nassau County on Long Island in New York, she found that the number one resource used by readers' advisors was personal reading experiences over other readers' advisory resources. May found this technique worked well only if the librarian and reader shared the same taste in books. But when the librarian and reader did not share personal tastes in books the readers' advisory service was rated as being very poor (Shearer and Burgin, 2001). According to Burgin's 1993 study of public library readers' advisory services (Shearer, 1996), librarians identified and ranked their most frequently used resources. Those resources were, in order: personal reading, readers' advisory sources, patron comments, booklists, book reviews, book jackets, reading of family or friends. Actions taken in readers' advisory were, in order: consult sources that better identify authors and titles, recommend based on personal knowledge, ask a colleague for help in recommending authors and titles, direct patron to appropriate shelving area, provide patron with bookmark, booklist, etc., instruct patron in use of sources, and other. Thirty-five percent of the respondents to the survey stated they use personal reading as their source, and 83% recommend based on personal knowledge. Another finding from this survey was librarians who read more and of wider breadth rely more on their personal knowledge. Variables most likely to affect choice of resources and actions in the readers' advisory transaction have most to do with variables related to personal reading habits and preferences.

Bias

While no study has specifically focused on bias, findings have emerged from other studies and

guidelines that reveal bias, or at least warn against it. Amongst other findings that emerged from the Shearer (1994) study was evidence of an ethnic bias on the part of the librarians. They discovered that some librarians suggested "read-alike" books to a patron based on the race of the author of the patron's suggested book, and not the appeal characteristics of the book. For the student's posing as patrons, this was very off-putting.

Guidelines for readers' advisory have evolved over time. The *Reference and adult services division developmental guidelines* are a guide for librarians recommending non-fiction or information sources to patrons. They discuss how hesitant librarians are to help patrons make judgment calls on information sources, yet they usually don't have a problem recommending books for pleasure reading. The *Guidelines* recommend, "In all transactions the librarian/information specialist must be impartial and non-judgemental." Unfortunately, the guidelines do not clarify what that means and doesn't explain the difference between impartial judgments and biased judgments (Rice, 1989). Saricks (2005) advocates that a patron should "feel comfortable talking with a readers' advisor about any type of book, from so-called trash to classics." When asked about material that the librarian doesn't like, she recommends focusing on the appeal characteristics of such material. She also posits that librarians exchange the word "recommend" for "suggest" when matching books and readers. In Saricks' view, this makes the exchange friendlier and takes pressure off of the librarian and the reader. However, this technique has not always been supported or even encouraged. In the past librarians viewed their role as one of educator. One readers' advisory service (Chancellor, Tompkins, and Medway) even classified readers into 70 different categories, some of which included "low-brow" and "timid and inferior feeling person" (Baker, 1992).

Demand vs. Value: Satisfying the Readers

From Samuel Green to today, the debate about what types of books should libraries be recommending to readers continues. De la Peña McCook (1993), in her guide to readers' advisory services, describes a debate amongst librarians of patron's demand for books they would like to read versus the intrinsic value of "quality" books that a librarian would like to recommend. There are some librarians who believe that their role is as an elevator of taste, and who have either a moral agenda or a socio-political bent. While it may be a positive bias, this stance is still a bias, and there is an ethical debate amongst librarians whether this bias is appropriate. The bias is perpetuated through readers' advisory services including book talks, bibliographies, and more seriously, by the limitation and structuring of collections to match these tastes or biases. The counter argument is that libraries are

wasting valuable time and money and depriving their users of library materials they need, want, and have paid taxes for (McCook, 1993). Included in this debate is tension over a disdain of patron's personal reading tastes and their actual reading tastes. Furthering an exploration into the actual reading taste of public library users, Ross and Chelton (2001) cite five related elements that are utilized by readers when selecting leisure reading: the reading experience wanted, sources about new books, elements of a book, clues on the book itself, and cost in time or money to access the book.

The degree to which librarians steer readers to "better books" depends on three factors: the philosophy of service, the reader's age, and the reader's preference (Shearer, 1996). Sherri Kendrick's philosophy on readers' advisory also shows how personal interests can steer a reader in one direction. She explains:

> Recommending books is also sharing a little of yourself with a patron. To be successful you need to relate to the patron, learn their likes and dislikes and then connect them with a book....If you didn't have the love of books, I think your reader's advisory service would be limited to suggesting bestseller, or not even taking the questions seriously and just send the patron off to browse in the fiction area because you've got more 'important' questions to answer. (Katz, 2001)

A final answer to this demand vs. value issue comes from systematic study of what the readers actually want. From 1985 to 2000, Catherine Sheldrick Ross and her students in the "Genres of Fiction and Reading Course" conducted in-depth interviews with 194 heavy readers who read upwards of a book a week (Ross and Chelton, 2001). These readers had over time developed a "satisfying system" for selecting books for pleasure reading. Based on the interview data, the main criteria for selecting titles was the reader's mood or what they felt like reading now or in the future.

Models of readers' advisory

There are numerous guides to readers' advisory services which offer ideal models of service (De la Peña McCook, 1993; Saricks, 2005 and Shearer, 2001). Many of these models, or guidelines, emphasize that bias should not enter the transaction. A model that has particular relevance for our study is the diagnostic model (Shearer, 1996,). This model describes the advisor/reader relationship as similar to the doctor/patient model where the reader's need must be discovered through a diagnostic process. Aspects of this model relevant to our topic of research are:

- No assumptions or stereotypes should cloud the judgment of the advisor in determining the tastes of the reader.

- No personal values about literary canon or personal favorites should influence the importance of the reader's need

In another work on readers' advisory models, Shearer and Burgin (2001) discuss four broad areas library staff should have a good understanding of in order to give good readers' advisory. These are:

- An understanding of the reader
- An understanding of the appeal of books
- A background in fiction
- An understanding of the readers' advisory transaction

Instead of responding to a reader's inquiry with "Tell me about a book that you've read and enjoyed," Ross and Chelton (2001) suggest starting the interview with "Tell me what you're in the mood for" or "Tell me what kind of reading experience you're looking for." Saricks (2005) acknowledges that the librarian will not have intimate knowledge of all books; "nothing replaces actually reading a book from cover to cover, assuming we remember in detail everything we read, but trained readers' advisors can talk comfortably about books they have not read because they can extract and compile useful information from various sources" including reviews, book jackets, conversations, and skimming books. This final technique contradicts what many librarians have said, which is that you must have read the book in order to recommend it. If this were the case, then librarians would only recommend books they have read and not rely on other sources to assist in the transaction, and thus would be inserting bias into the readers' advisory transaction.

How are libraries measuring up?

Burgin, Chelton, Gallo, Katz, May, Ross, and Shearer conducted a series of studies measuring readers' advisory service in libraries. Common themes that emerged from these studies are:

- Patrons' perception of the attitude (nice/mean, friendly/unfriendly, etc.) of librarians affects how they feel about the readers' advisory transaction.
- In some libraries, librarians are ill-prepared for readers' advisory.
- Passive readers' advisory is haphazard and inconsistent.
- Formal readers' advisory interviews were not always conducted.
- Personnel interjected their own predilections during the course of the readers' advisory interview. Responses of this nature underscore the misapprehension of many staff members that they must read a particular genre in order to recommend it.

- Researchers had to initiate contact with the librarians.

Our study hopes to further illuminate whether there is a gap between the guidelines outlined in models of readers' advisory and actual practice. While guidelines for not inserting bias into readers' advisory exist, there is not a consensus on what "bias" looks like. There is still a debate about whether libraries should respond to demand versus value, as well as what the reader desires from the readers' advisory transaction.

METHOD

In designing this pilot study, we desired to study librarians' personal reading preferences and attitudes toward readers' advisory service using a qualitative approach, but we also strove to have an aspect of repeatability, should our study one day be expanded upon. For this reason we used an anonymous survey as our chief method of data collection. We aimed for a concise survey of no more than 20 questions that would hold the participant's attention long enough to complete the entire survey.

Sample Selection

The American Library Association estimates that 400,000 people are working in U.S. libraries (public, academic, or school) today.[1] This number includes librarians with a Master's degree, as well as paraprofessionals and clerical staff. In order to obtain a good sample representation, we wished to gather surveys from a variety of locations within the country. Survey invitations were extended to staff at a number of library systems including a large urban public library system in the Pacific Northwest, a large suburban public library system in the Bay Area of California, and a library system in Kansas. A request for survey participants was also made at two meetings of librarians from locations across the Pacific Northwest. One meeting was for public librarians serving as readers' advisors and the other group was a combination of public and school librarians focused on teen services. Lastly, survey invitations were extended to members of a number of library-focused listservs. Some of the listservs, such as Fiction-L, focus specifically on readers' advisory subjects, while others such as NextGenLib deal with library topics of any kind. Our goal was to capture at least 40 surveys from a variety of

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[1] http://www.ala.org/Template.cfm?Section=libraryfactsheet&Template=/ContentManagement/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=114578

sources, not because this is a representative sampling size, but rather because 40 surveys would be a manageable goal with our short time frame. To counter our small sample, we collected surveys from as many geographic areas as possible.

Our sampling frame included the 400,000 individuals working in public, academic, or school librarians in the U.S. We employed opportunistic sampling, using the resources we had easy access to, such as listservs to which we are subscribed, and the library systems where we are employed. This limits our study in that we cannot estimate a sampling error. If this were a large-scale study, a larger sampling selection would be employed.

Data Collection Procedures

First, we conceptualized what concepts and variables we wanted to study. Specifically we wanted to find out: 1) What are librarians' reading preferences? and 2) Do these preferences affect the books they recommend or how they conduct an readers' advisory transaction? For this study we called this effect on recommendations a bias. Our survey (Appendix B) broke down the major genres of literature (i.e. classic, mystery, literary fiction, non-fiction) and asked the survey participants to indicate their interest in them. A continuum of choices was offered, ranging from high interest to no interest[2]. We then asked questions to determine how often, if at all, they provide readers' advisory services.

An important question in the survey asked participants what actions they took when asked for readers' advisory service. The answers for this question serve as indicators of bias. If a participant indicates that they make recommendations solely on their personal knowledge, this would indicate a bias toward those books they have personally read. In a subsequent question participants are asked to indicate how strongly they agree or disagree with a number of statements. The results of this question also serve as indicators of bias. For instance, if a respondent answers that they strongly agree that, "In order to suggest a book to a patron, I need to have read the book myself," this would be an indicator of

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[2] The first part of the survey aimed to determine reader's preferences was inspired by the online reader's advisory form from Williamsburg Regional Library, found at http://www.wrl.org/bookweb/RA/index.html .

bias toward those materials they have read. A number of demographic questions, which determine age, location, position within the library, and the type of library in which they are employed complete the survey.

Of concern is the external validity of survey answers received. The survey URL was open, meaning participants did not log in or otherwise register to participate. In theory, participants could have completed more than one survey, or "spammers" could have potentially submitted incorrect or misleading data. Were this conducted as a large-scale study, participants would be issued a login to prevent multiple submissions by one person. These logins would be stripped from the survey data, ensuring participant confidentiality.

Ethical Concerns

A Human Subjects Division exemption form was filed and approved prior to the administering of our survey. Prior to completing the survey, participants were given a brief description of our research and told that participation was completely voluntary (Appendix A). Every step was taken to ensure the anonymity of survey respondents. No personally identifiable information, such as name, email address, or IP address was collected in conjunction with the survey. The survey software attaches a randomly assigned ID number to the survey results, protecting participants' privacy during and after the completion of the survey.

Those solicited to complete the survey were given the URL for the survey at the conclusion of the invitation to participate. By reading the invitation and clicking on the URL, participants gave their informed consent. Responses were collected anonymously via the Catalyst Web survey tool. Results were analyzed collectively for patterns and trends and for areas needing further study.

RESULTS

The purpose of our survey was to find out more about librarians' reading preferences and whether those preferences affect the books they recommend or how they conduct an reader's advisory transaction. In total 225 surveys were submitted. Our survey contained both quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data such as age and years employed were computed using Catalyst. For the remainder of the data a codebook was constructed (see Appendix) to facilitate the identification of trends and patterns in the data. The open ended questions created a more difficult task. Due to time

constraints, it was not possible to analyze all the surveys completely. For qualitative data, twenty surveys were coded and analyzed.

We asked survey participants to indicate their interest in different literary genres to establish any trends in personal preferences. When looking at book genres and participant interest, answers were translated to numbers, with High Interest equaling 1 and No Interest equaling 5 on the scale. The highest mean and median scores (where N=225), which indicated the least interest, were Inspirational, Romance, Western, and Horror titles. The lowest median and mean scores, meaning the most interest, were Recent Titles (Figure 1).
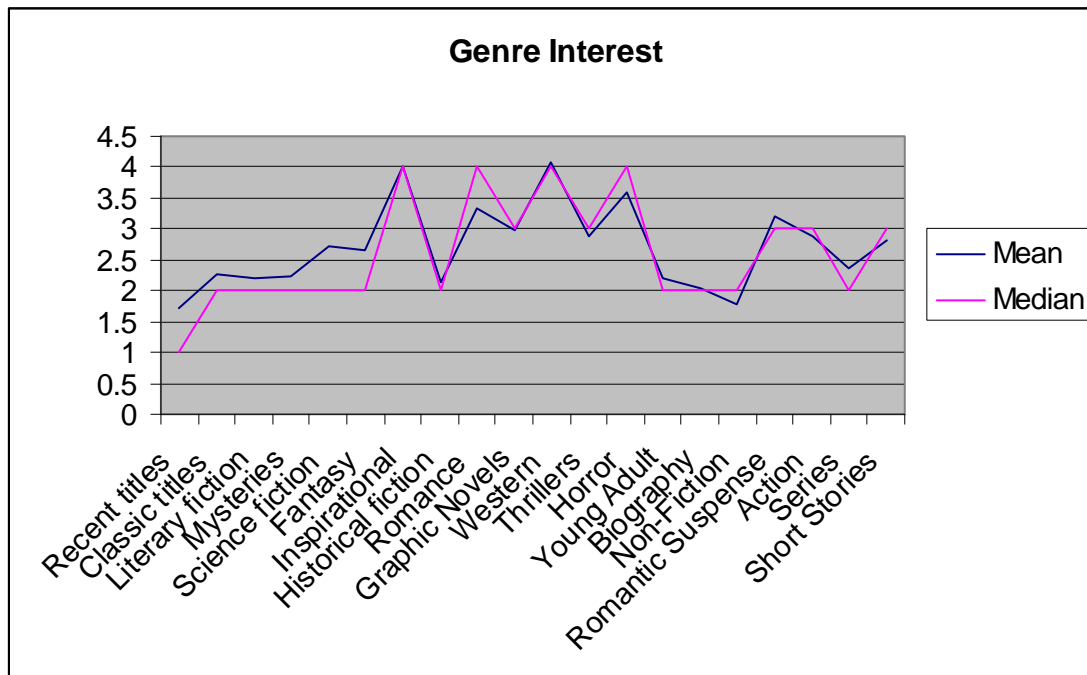

Figure 1

In addition to the quantifiable rating scale, respondents were asked to give a word or phrase that came to mind in association with each of the previously listed genres (minus recent titles and classic fiction). In the first twenty surveys, respondents showed similar clusters of positive associations (i.e. "I just love it!") with genres that received higher interest scores and negative associations (i.e. "Boring") with genres that held less interest. Early results indicate the most negative associations were with Romance and Inspirational genres (Figure 2). Many of the negative comments about romance were along the lines of "silly," while a few librarians seemed to find the Inspirational genre objectionable, often using the word "preachy." Later in the survey, one librarian commented, "I am ambivalent about reading things I have moral objections to, such as many things from 'Christian' publishers, so I rely on

recommendations from other sources for those." For each of the genres, some participants listed specific titles or authors associated with the genre.
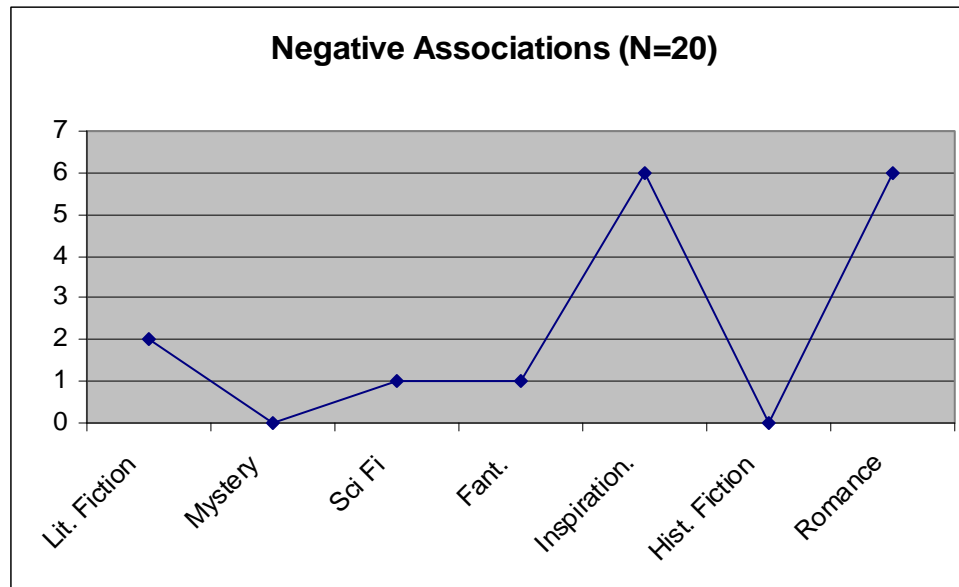

Negative Associations (N=20)

Figure 2

We also wanted to look at whether librarians had preferences regarding the focus of a book. Percentages were calculated to establish which characteristics were important to respondents. Almost 66% of respondents answered that a focus on characters is a very important characteristic of the books they read for pleasure, with plot, setting and language receiving smaller percentages (Figure 3).

Focus: Very Important

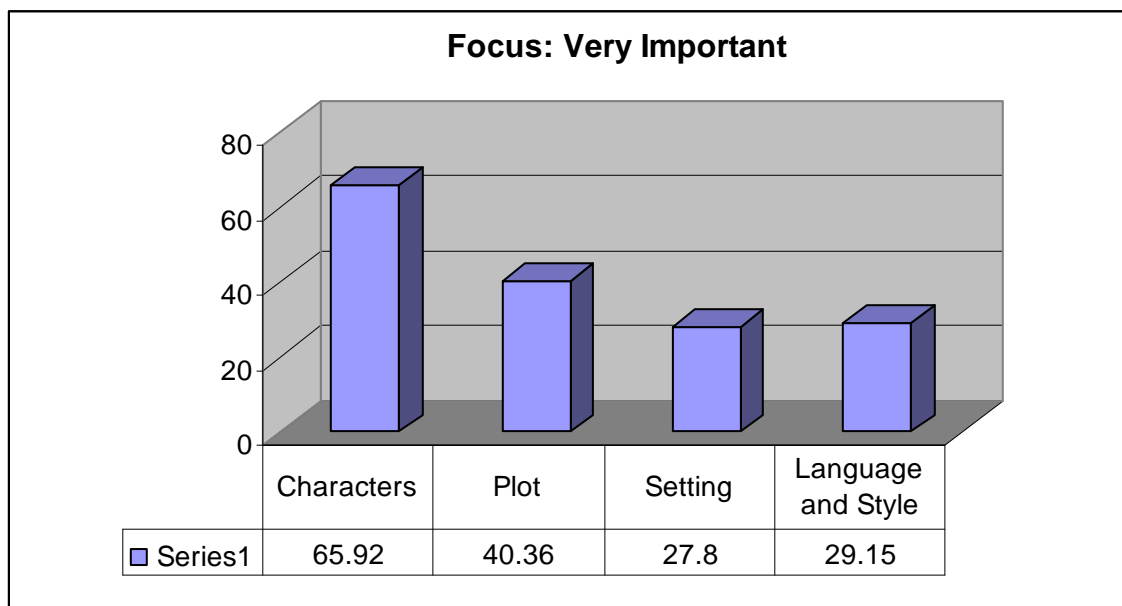|	Characters	Plot	Setting	Language and Style
■ Series1	65.92	40.36	27.8	29.15

Figure 3

While librarians obviously have individual reading interests and opinions about genres, we wanted to know if librarians read beyond their personal tastes. Nineteen of the first twenty respondents indicated they did read beyond their personal tastes, with the frequency of reading evenly split between regularly skimming other books, reading something different once a month, or trying a new author or genre once a year. Respondents expressed multiple reasons for reading outside their personal preferences, with 60% citing professional development (Figure 4).

Reasons why people read outside their own interest and reasons why they do not.

Question	Code	Description	# of responses	% of respondents
Why	PEDE	Personal development	2	10%
	PRDE	Professional development	12	60%
	INT	Reads outside of interest, but no reason given	5	25%
	RECP	Recommended by person	2	10%
	RECA	Recommended by award, review, etc.	3	15%
	BG	Book group	2	10%
Why not	NOIN	No interest	0	0%
	TIME	Time	4	20%

Figure 4

The second part of our survey explored how librarians conducted a readers' advisory transaction. First, we asked the respondent to rate their own level of training in readers' advisory services (Figure 5). The majority of respondents chose "some but would like more" or "there can never be enough training" with few having too much. Other respondents listed their experiences as readers' advisory trainers.

What level of training have you had in reader's advisory services and issues (include workshops, conference sessions, and staff meetings that cover this subject)?

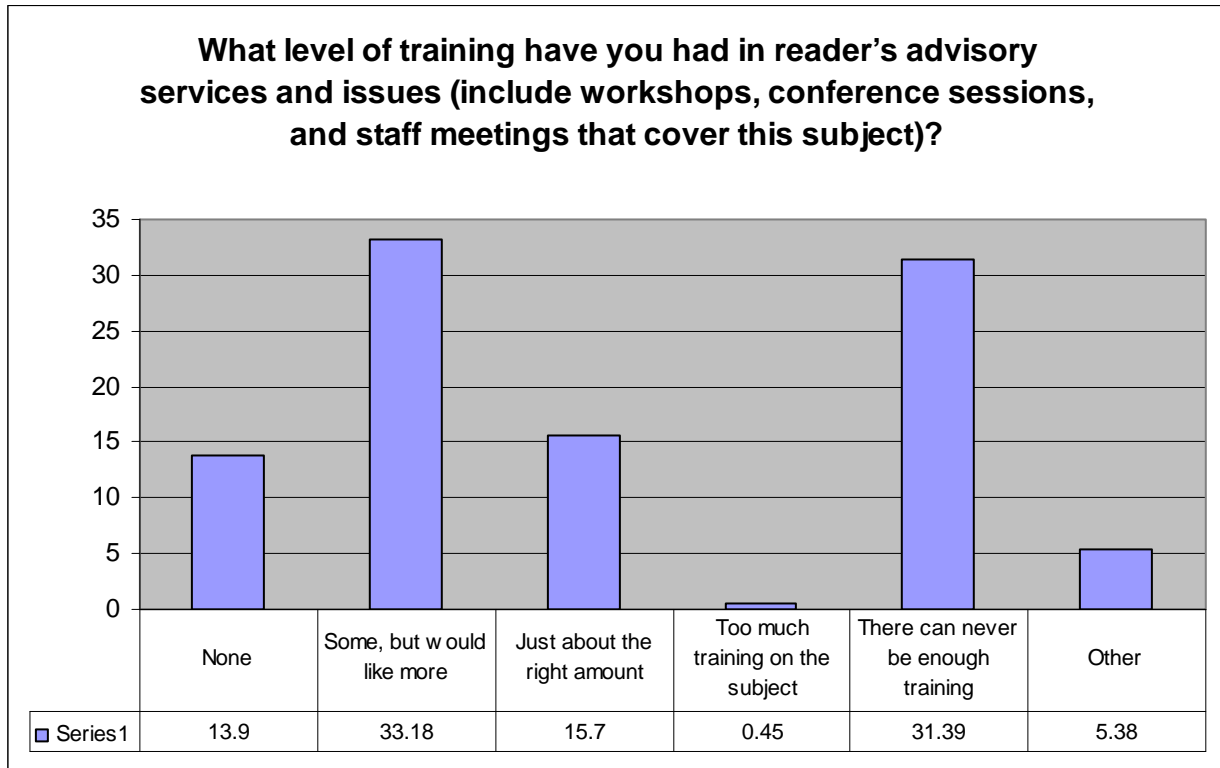|	None	Some, but would like more	Just about the right amount	Too much training on the subject	There can never be enough training	Other
■ Series1	13.9	33.18	15.7	0.45	31.39	5.38

Figure 5

We also established how frequently our respondents served as readers' advisors to patrons (Figure 6). A little over one third of the respondents performed readers' advisory multiple times a day. The next largest grouping of respondents (22.42%) recorded being a readers' advisor 2-3 times a week.

How often do you serve as a readers' advisor to patrons?

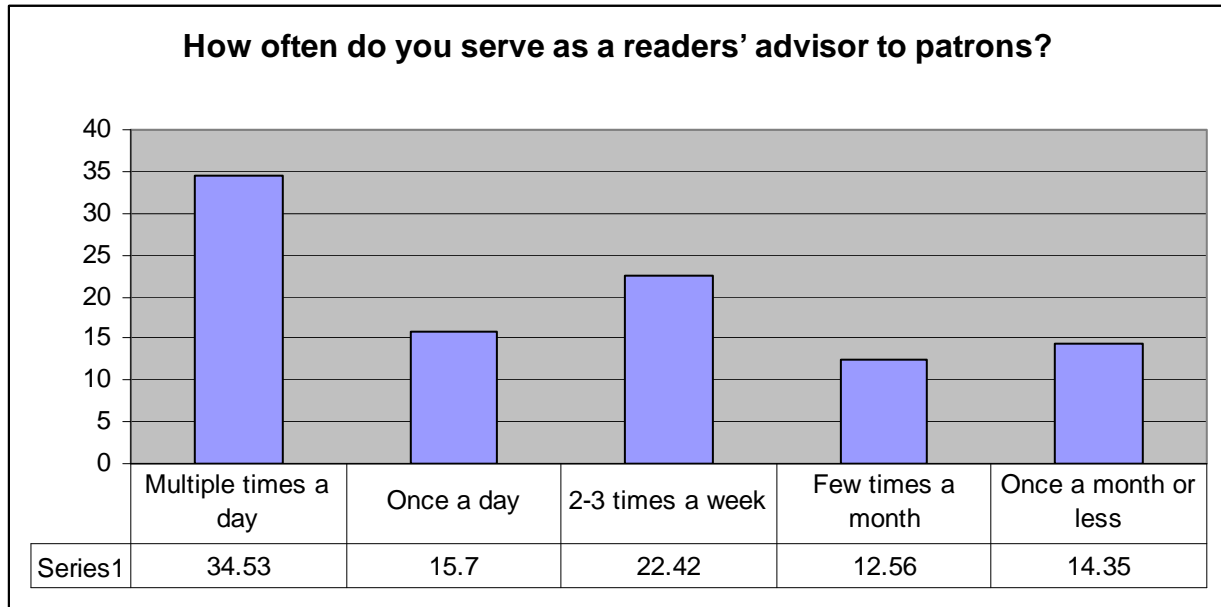|	Multiple times a day	Once a day	2-3 times a week	Few times a month	Once a month or less
Series1	34.53	15.7	22.42	12.56	14.35

Figure 6

A related question asked the average amount of time the respondent is able to spend helping a patron with a readers' advisory concern (Figure 7). We used the word "able" because libraries with heavy usage may not be able to spend much time compared to what they would like to in order to help a patron. But in general, we were interested in finding out how long these transactions were. Sixty seven percent of respondents spend between 2-10 minutes, with most falling in the 5-10 minute range.

What is the average amount of time you are able to spend helping a patron with a reader's advisory concern?

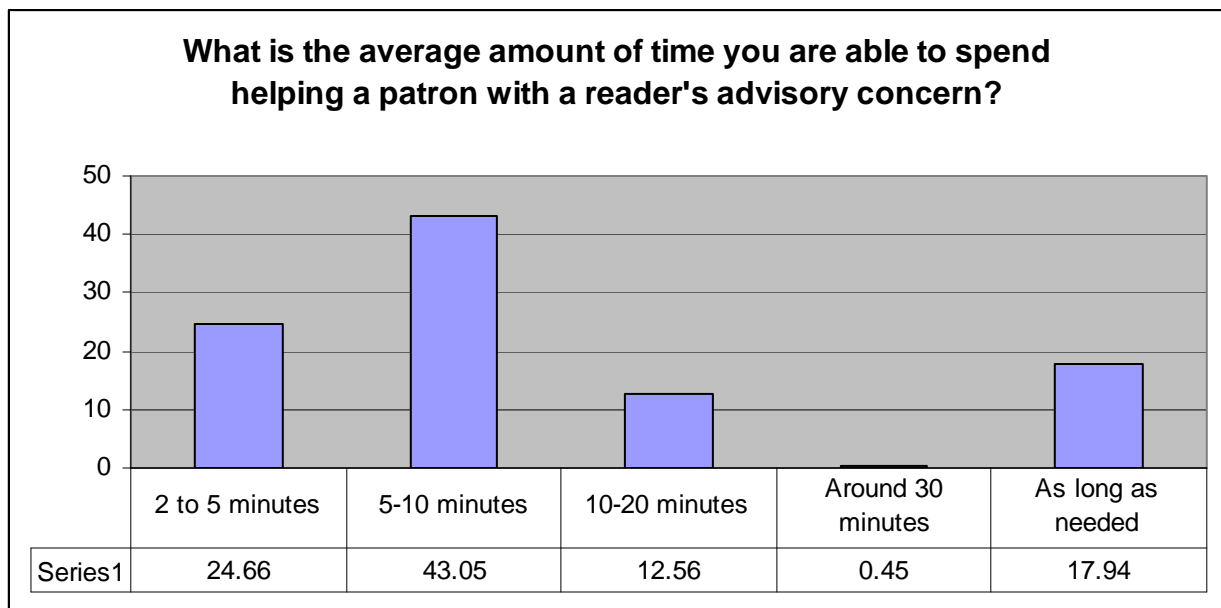|	2 to 5 minutes	5-10 minutes	10-20 minutes	Around 30 minutes	As long as needed
Series1	24.66	43.05	12.56	0.45	17.94

Figure 7

When asked to select those actions they take in response to a patron request for readers' advisory (Figure 8), 91.56% of respondents answered that they ask a series of questions to determine the patron's reading preferences. The next most popular action was to consult professional resources to help find authors or titles the patron would enjoy (87.56%). Almost 79% of respondents (N=177) answered that they make recommendations based on personal knowledge without consulting sources. At almost 65% the least often selected action was "provide the patron with printed material."
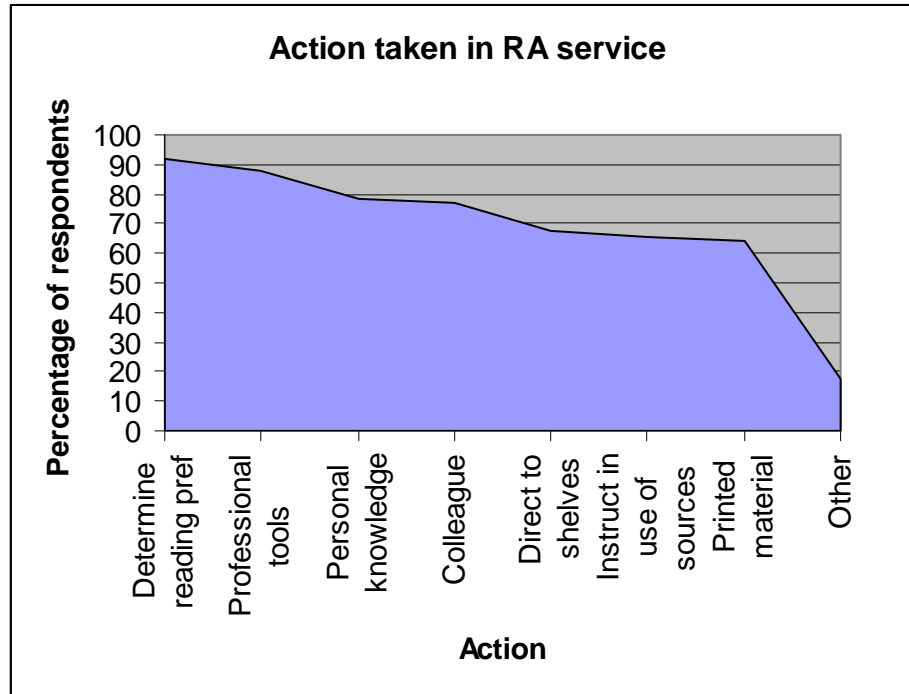

Action taken in RA service

Figure 8

There were two additional open response questions that follow-up on how the respondent handles the reader's advisory interview. One asked, "When a patron requests assistance in locating additional adult fiction or non-fiction authors of titles, what questions, if any, do you ask the patron?" In the first twenty responses, most questions focused on asking what the patron had read previously and what he/she liked about it. A few respondents included questions about the reader's mood or desired features such as size and length of the book. The next question asked, "If a patron asks for help finding books of a type that you personally do not enjoy reading, what steps do you take?" Of the first twenty responses, several described using Novelist, an online reader's advisory database popular in public libraries. Others utilized colleagues and library catalogs. It was interesting to note that many recommended letting the patron know he/she did not read in that genre but could guide him/her based on other people's reviews and readers' advisory tools.

We also explored feelings toward readers' advisory by asking participants to indicate how strongly they agreed with a number of statements. We hoped to uncover any underlying assumptions that might affect how they conduct a readers' advisory transaction. We asked respondents how strongly they agreed with the statement, "In order to suggest a book to a patron, I need to have read the book myself." We reasoned that if a librarian felt they had to have read the book themselves, their suggestions to patrons would be limited to those genres the librarian read most. Results were skewed to one end of the spectrum, with 81.78% either disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with this statement (Figure 9).

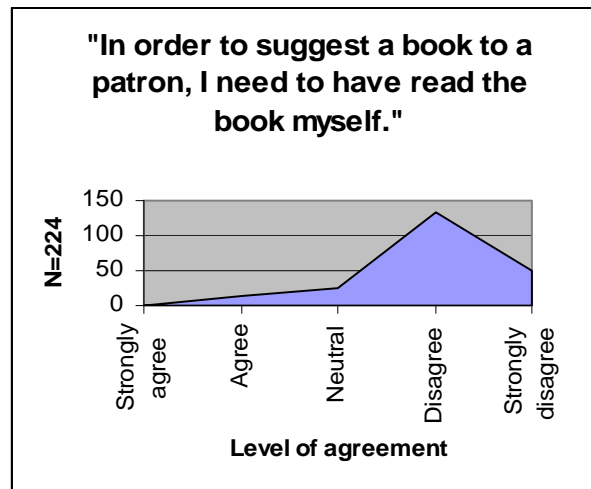**"In order to suggest a book to a patron, I need to have read the book myself."**

Figure 9

We wished to find out whether librarians felt readers' advisory services to be as important as reference services (Figure 10). If respondents indicated that readers' advisory services were not as important, this would be an indicator of a bias against readers' advisory. Ninety two percent of respondents answered that they either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that RA services are as important to the purposes of the library as reference services.

"Readers' advisory services are as important to the purposes of the library as reference services."
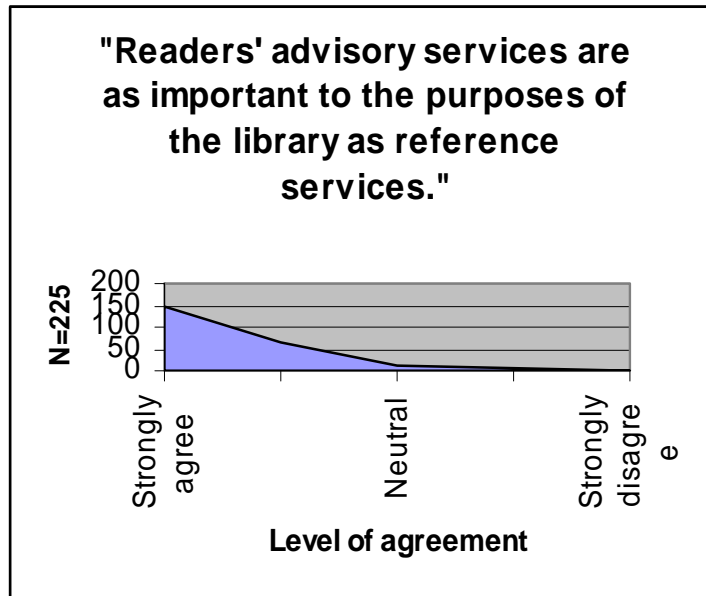

Figure 10

We wished to find out whether librarians agreed with Catherine Sheldrick Ross' statement that mood is a factor in how much a reader enjoys a book (Figure 11). We felt that might be an indicator that professionals are reading or absorbing ideas from academic literature on the subject. It would also indicate that the librarian's view of why patrons select books is in harmony with the research on readers by Ross. One respondent out of 223 disagreed with this statement regarding mood, with the remainder falling on the side of agreement. Ninety three percent of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement.

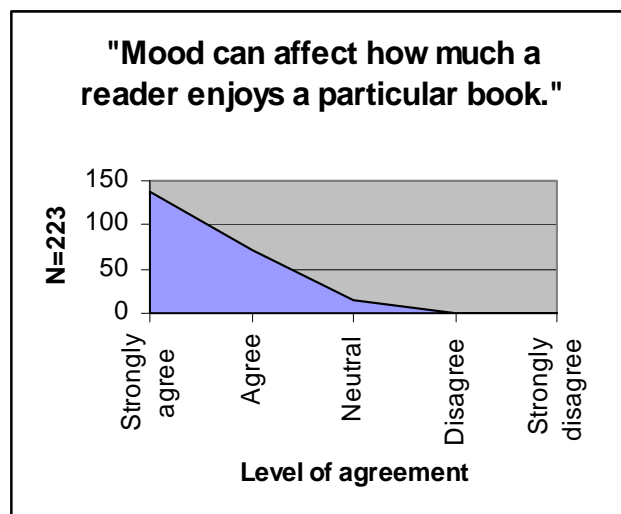**"Mood can affect how much a reader enjoys a particular book."**

Figure 11

We attempted to uncover underlying bias by asking librarians whether they agreed that libraries should provide the books patrons want to read (Figure 12). We also asked whether they agreed that librarians should encourage patrons to improve their reading material. The combination of these questions was presented to uncover any underlying feelings about a librarian's role in readers' advisory. When asked whether librarians should provide the books that patrons want to read respondents' answers skewed toward agreement, with 96.84% agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement. Three percent of respondents were neutral, with not one respondent disagreeing.
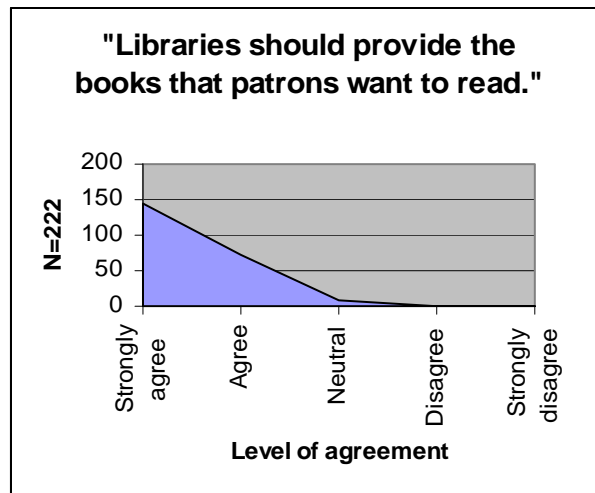

Figure 12

When asked whether librarians should encourage patrons to improve their reading material (Figure 13) respondents skewed toward disagreement, with 72.8% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. Almost 18% of respondents were neutral on this question, and 9.4% agreed with it.
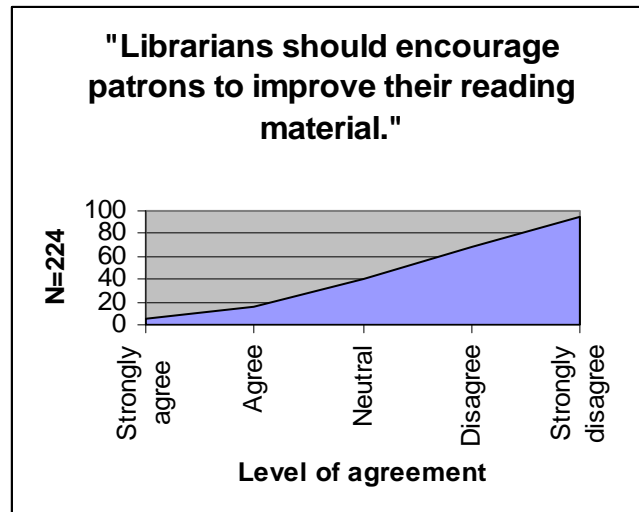

Figure 13

In response to a statement about the books libraries collect meeting certain standards of quality and taste (Figure 14), there was no clear majority. 30% remained neutral while 42% fell on the agree/strongly agree side and 26% went with disagree or strongly disagree.

"Libraries should provide books that meet certain standards of quality and taste."
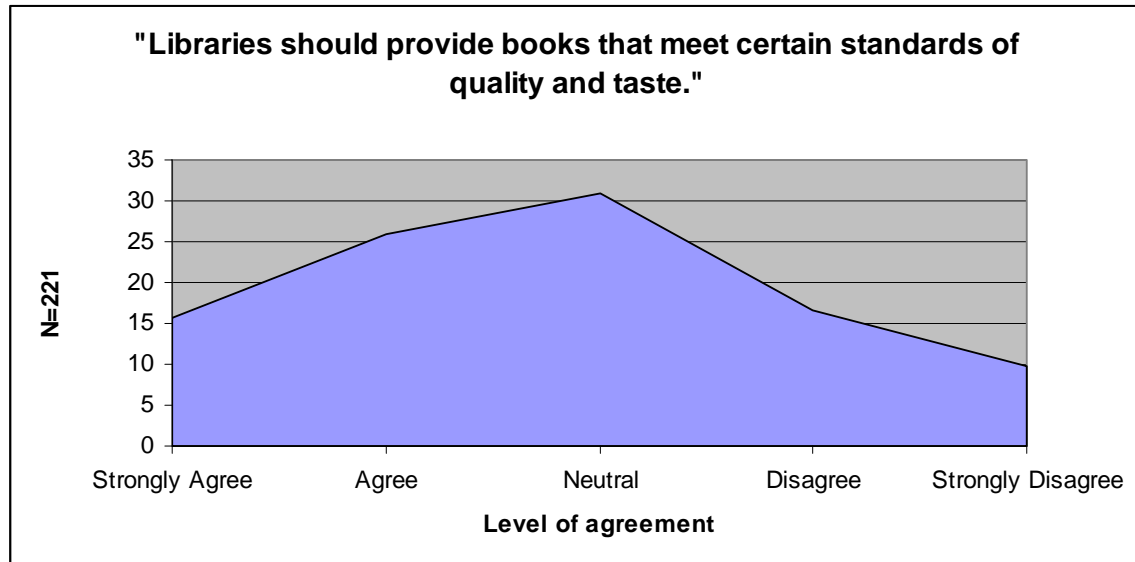
Figure 14

Lastly we wanted to collect demographic information about our respondents to see if any trends emerged that might affect the data. The majority of respondents were female (84.9%) (Figure 15) and worked in public libraries (79.9%) (Figure 16).

Gender of respondents (N=225)

Library of Employ (N=224)
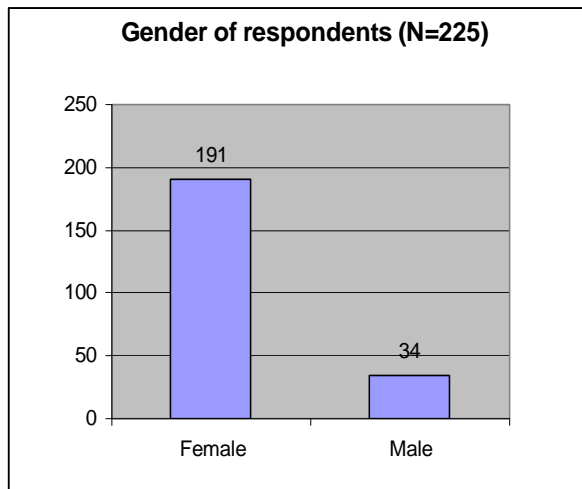
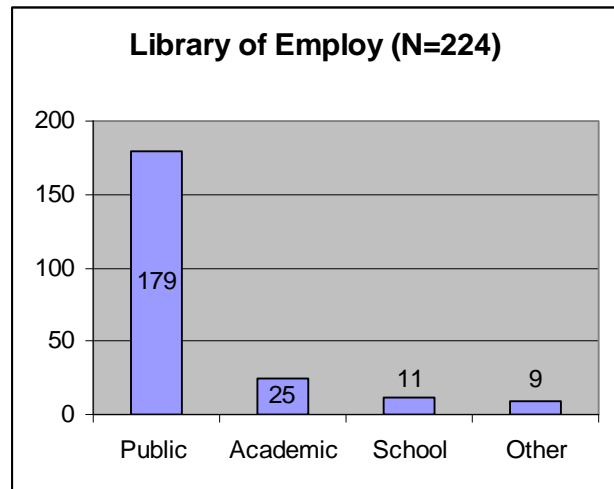Figure 15   Figure 16

Age and location was also requested of the participants (Figure 17), with 95.5% of respondents falling between the ages of 26 and 65. The group with the largest representation was 26-35, in which

37.33% of respondents fell. The respondents represented each region of the country, Canada, and outside the U.S (Figure 18).
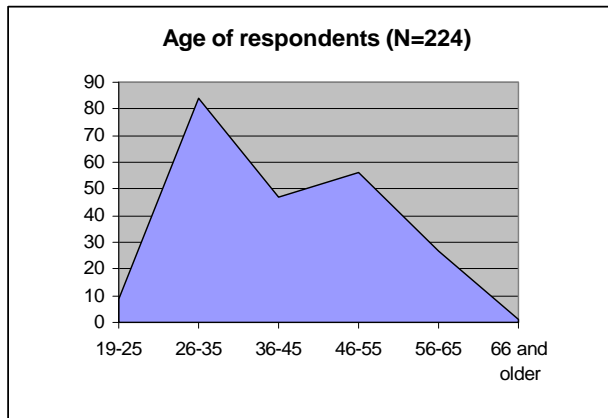
Age of respondents (N=224)

Figure 17

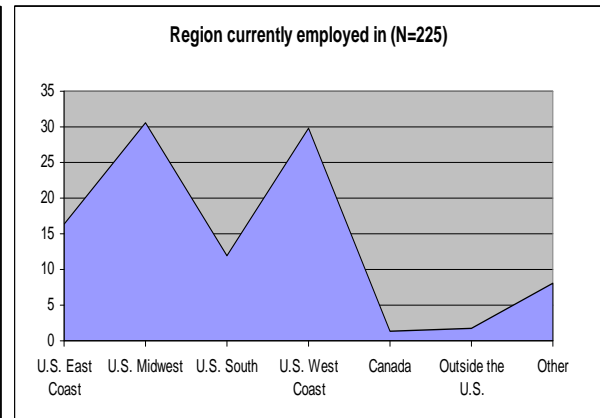**Region currently employed in (N=225)**

Figure 18

Respondents skewed toward fewer years in the profession, though all experience levels were represented (Figure 19). The percentage of respondents currently working as librarians was 63.56% (Figure 20). Respondents were also asked to list their undergraduate major but we have not coded enough entries to observe any significant patterns.

Number of years worked in libraries

Figure 19

Current job designation in library

Figure 20

DISCUSSION

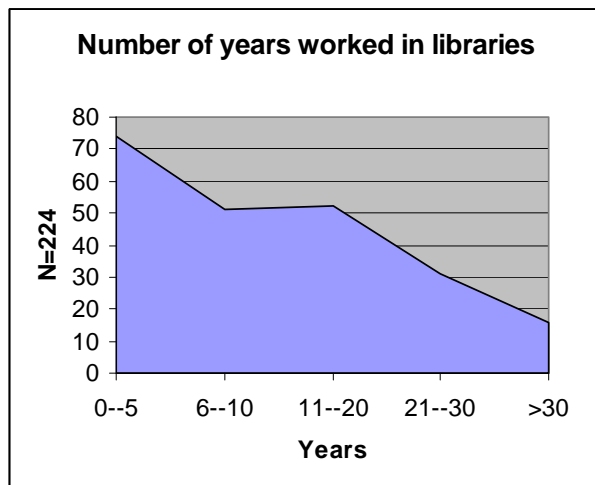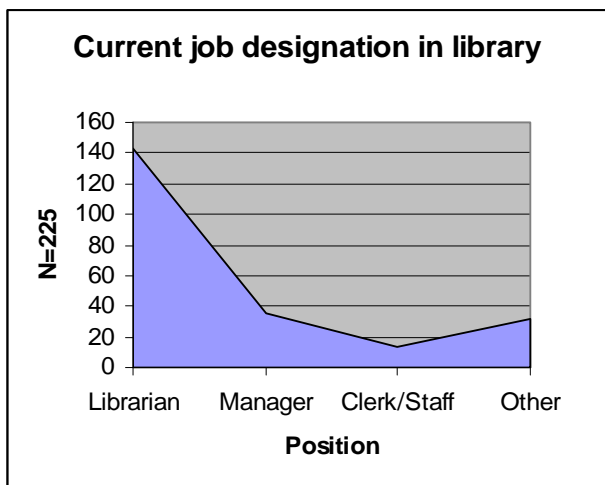This document represents a preliminary report on the rich data set collected through the survey instrument. In the coming months, the researchers plan to code the rest of this data and look for patterns both across survey items and within the records of individual respondents. Yet even in this first run through the data, researchers' ideas were confirmed and challenged while new ideas were uncovered.

Our study was inspired by a researcher's observation that many of the genres most popular with patrons are disliked by librarians. Both the indication of interest level and the word associations on the survey lend support to this notion. Romance is possibly the most universally snubbed genre and indeed received mostly negative responses in this survey. Yet it is the highest selling genre in popular paperback fiction, commanding 54.9% of the market in North America.[3] Sixteen out of forty-seven librarians surveyed expressed negative associations with inspirational fiction, while six of the forty-seven in our sample stated they associated inspirational fiction with Christianity or Christians. Yet this genre topped $2 billion in sales in 2004[4] and is one of the few genres expected to see sales increases over the next three years.[5]

In contrast, the same researcher was surprised to find that the majority of librarians recorded character as the most important focus of their reading for pleasure with plot also being rated highly. She had been expecting that language would be of most importance to librarians. Perhaps this focus on character coincides with the people-centred work that most librarians engage in, a notion for potential future study.

Despite their obvious personal preferences, the majority of responses around readers' advisory services indicated that many librarians followed procedures recommended by experts such as Saricks. Nineteen out of twenty in the subset of our sample said they do read outside of their personal interest with a majority indicating this was for professional development. Ideally we wanted more information about why and how librarians decide to read outside their own interests, but the related survey item was not written in a way that extracted that level of detail.

Of the entire sample group, most took the recommended step of asking a patron questions to determine their reading interests, though it will be significant to determine the kinds of questions asked through an analysis of the open response items. This data should also be considered in tandem with the reported time spent on the average reader's advisory transaction. Out of the 225 respondents, a

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[3] Romance Writers of America (2006). Industry Statistics. Found at

https://www.rwanational.org/eweb/dynamicpage.aspx?webcode=StatisticsIndustry

[4] Kennedy, D. (2005, July 9). Selling rapture. [Electronic Version]. *The Guardian.* Found at
http://books.guardian.co.uk/departments/generalfiction/story/0,,1524388,00.html

[5] Steele, M. (2006, January 10). Christian fiction finds a booming audience. *Columbia News Service.*

http://jscms.jrn.columbia.edu/cns/2006-01-10/steele-christianfiction

disappointing number of 177 still said they made recommendations from personal knowledge without consulting sources. Yet 197 indicated that they would consult readers' advisory resources to find a book for a patron, indicating that perhaps this survey item was not entirely clear for participants.

Most participants agreed that mood can affect enjoyment of a book, a concept that coincides with Ross' research with readers. It is encouraging that a solid majority felt you do not have to read a book yourself to suggest it to patrons since many participants had little interest in certain popular genres. Also encouraging was the majority who felt that readers' advisory services are equally as important as reference services, though this result may be influenced by the fact that a librarian who is supportive of readers' advisory services is more likely to volunteer to participate in our study. Another refreshing find was that no one disagreed that libraries should provide books patrons want to read, though a better question might be something about what librarians think patrons should want to read.

Of note is that while the majority disagreed that librarians should encourage patrons to improve their reading material it was not such a landslide as with other statements. Perhaps some librarians believe in the original mission of readers' advisory services to improve the minds of their patrons. This could also have been influenced by the participating school and academic librarians, who do have a mission of to grow the minds of their students. Future studies may want to limit the sample to public, academic or school librarians rather than opening it to any willing participant.

The opinion question with no clear majority was about libraries adhering to "certain" standards of quality and taste. This is likely another test item that was too vague. All libraries have collection development policies which do outline a sort of standard. This would be better framed in an open ended response item about standards for fiction collections.

While much of the results give us reason to hope that librarians are on the right track towards delivering effective readers' advisory services, we must acknowledge a weakness of any self-reporting survey. Participants may have responded in a manner that puts them in the best light or simply recorded the answer they consider "the right way" to respond based on training or interaction with other librarians. For this reason, we recommend a follow up study of observations of librarians performing readers' advisory services.

Despite employing opportunistic sampling methods, we had a complete range of ages and locations of respondents. The majority of female respondents is acceptable given the make up of the librarian population in general. Respondents tended to be on the lower end of the work experience scale which may reflect the solicitation of participants via the NextGenLib and NewLib listservs. Most

respondents were in front-line staff positions and therefore more likely to have regular interactions with patrons of the kind we were asking about. This coincides with the majority of respondents who regularly performed readers' advisory services. One researcher was interested in comparing the undergraduate major of each respondent to their preferred focus on character, plot, setting, or language to uncover any trends but that question will have to wait until we begin a deeper analysis of this data set.

When asked about their personal level of training in reader's advisory services, more than 64% agreed they would like more training or that there could never be enough training on the topic. Add in the 16.9% who reported never having had reader's advisory training and it appears there is a need for further training and, by extension, further research in this area that has relatively little literature available. The release of this survey generated a surprising amount of interest in the library community considering it is a short pilot study done by master's students. Simply mentioning the future release of this survey in a conversation on the Fiction-L listserv resulted in a request for results from a librarian writing a book on the topic. One survey respondent requested use of the instrument itself for training librarians, another requested the results for training purposes and many other participants requested access to the results for their own edification. We as a research team feel this reflects the sense of urgency in the community around improving readers' advisory services in libraries.

We did collect a set of wonderfully interesting data in this pilot study, but we acknowledge the flaws in our instrument. Other researchers may wish to improve our survey and administer it to a random sample of public librarians that closely reflects the demographics of that population. Similar studies focused around school and academic libraries would reveal more depth and differentiations in readers' advisory services thus benefiting the entire library community. We feel strongly that the results of this survey would be greatly enhanced by two additional types of studies: observations of librarians performing reader's advisory service and interviews with library and bookstore patrons about their experiences asking for help locating a book they would like to read. Creating as complete a picture as possibly of today's reader's advisory services will enrich the training opportunities of tomorrow and improve future library services to all our patrons.

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Appendix A

Dear colleagues,

We are conducting research in reader's advisory services. We would like to invite you to participate by completing a brief survey. The survey consists of 19 questions and should take between 20-30 minutes to complete. Your participation is completely voluntary and the survey is anonymous. We ask for no personally identifiable information such as your name, email address, or employer, nor will the survey software collect your IP address. We do ask for information regarding your geographic location and the type of library for which you work; we ask for this information in the chance of discovering broad trends by geographic area or library setting.

If you at any time feel uncomfortable with a question, please feel free to stop taking the survey.

Thank you very much for your help. If you have any questions not addressed by this invitation, please do not hesitate to contact [Sarah Evans at sarahe@u.washington.edu].
The survey, should you consent to participate, is located at:

> https://catalysttools.washington.edu/tools/survey/?sid=22096&owner=sarahe
> or
> http://tinyurl.com/jyfpu

Sincerely,

> Sarah Evans
> Stephanie Hall
> Emily Inlow
> Heather Tucker
>
> Information School
> University of Washington

Appendix B

Survey Protocol
This purpose of this survey is to explore the personal reading habits and readers' advisory work of librarians. For this survey, readers' advisory is defined as aiding a patron in selecting a book to read for leisure.

Please indicate your personal reading interest in the following genres
[The grid at the top would read High Interest, Slight Interest, Possibly, Little Interest, No Interest at all]
- ❖ Recent Titles
- ❖ Classic Titles
- ❖ Literary Fiction
- ❖ Mysteries
- ❖ Science Fiction
- ❖ Fantasy
- ❖ Inspirational (Religious)
- ❖ Historical Fiction
- ❖ Romance
- ❖ Graphic Novels
- ❖ Western
- ❖ Thrillers
- ❖ Horror
- ❖ Young Adult
- ❖ Biography/Memoir
- ❖ Non-Fiction
- ❖ Romantic Suspense
- ❖ Action/Adventure
- ❖ Multi-Book Series
- ❖ Short Stories
- ❖ Poetry
- ❖ Other: [open response]

For each of the following genres of reading material, record the first word or phrase you associate it with. [Short response allowed for each]
- ❖ Literary Fiction
- ❖ Mysteries
- ❖ Science Fiction
- ❖ Fantasy
- ❖ Inspirational (Religious)
- ❖ Historical Fiction
- ❖ Romance
- ❖ Graphic Novels
- ❖ Western
- ❖ Thrillers
- ❖ Horror
- ❖ Young Adult
- ❖ Biography/Memoir

❖ Non-Fiction
❖ Romantic Suspense
❖ Action/Adventure
❖ Multi-Book Series
❖ Short Stories
❖ Poetry

For the books you read for leisure, what characteristics most appeal to you? Please indicate the level of importance of each characteristic or focus.

    [The grid at the top would read Very Important, Important, Somewhat Important, Unimportant]
❖ Focus on Characters
❖ Focus on Plot (Action and Events)
❖ Focus on Setting, including issues and ideas
❖ Focus on Language and Style

Do you try to read books outside your own personal reading tastes? Why or why not? (If yes, include how often.)

    [Open response]

What level of training have you had in reader's advisory services and issues (include workshops, conference sessions, and staff meetings that cover this subject)
❖ None
❖ Some, but would like more
❖ Just about the right amount
❖ Too much training on the subject
❖ There can never be enough training on the subject
❖ Other [open response]

How often do you serve as a readers' advisor to patrons?
❖ Daily
❖ Weekly
❖ Monthly
    o On average, how frequently during the time period indicated?
        [options for 1-2 times, 3-5 times, 6-10 times, More than 11 times]

What is the average amount of time you are able to spend helping a patron with a reader's advisory concern?
❖ 2 to 5 minutes
❖ 5-10 minutes
❖ 10-20 minutes
❖ Around 30 minutes
❖ As long as needed

In general, if a patron came into your library and requested assistance in locating additional adult fiction or non-fiction authors and titles, which of the actions below would you take? You should

check as many as needed to provide an accurate picture of your usual response to a readers' advisory question.

- ❖ Make recommendations based on my personal knowledge without consulting sources.
- ❖ Direct the patron to the appropriate shelving area in the library.
- ❖ Consult sources that would help me identify authors or titles the patron might enjoy.
- ❖ Instruct this patron in the use of these sources.
- ❖ Ask a colleague for help in identifying authors and titles that might be of interest to the patron.
- ❖ Provide this patron with a bookmark, booklist, or other printed material that contained information about authors or titles the patron might enjoy.
- ❖ Ask a series of questions to determine the patron's reading preferences.
- ❖ Other, please specify.

When a patron requests assistance in locating additional adult fiction or non-fiction authors and titles, what questions, if any, do you ask the patron?

    [Open Response]

If a patron asks for help finding books of a type that you personally do not enjoy reading, what steps do you take?

    [Open Response]

Please rate your level of agreement with each of the following statements

    [Grid at the top would read Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree]

- ❖ In order to suggest a book to a patron, I need to have read the book myself.
- ❖ Librarians should encourage patrons to improve their reading material.
- ❖ Reader's advisory services are as important to the purposes of the library as reference services.
- ❖ Mood can affect how much a reader enjoys a particular book.
- ❖ Libraries should provide the books that patrons want to read.
- ❖ Libraries should provide books that meet certain standards of quality and taste.

Are there any questions that you wish we had asked or anything else you'd like to say on the topic of this survey?

    [Open response]

The following questions are for demographic purposes to determine the range of respondents

Gender
- ❖ Male
- ❖ Female

Age
- ❖ 19-25
- ❖ 26-35
- ❖ 36-45
- ❖ 46-55
- ❖ 56-65
- ❖ 66 or older

Subject of Undergraduate Degree (if completed)
>   [Open response]

Number of years worked in libraries
- ❖ 0-5
- ❖ 6-10
- ❖ 11-20
- ❖ 21-30
- ❖ More than 30

Current position in library
- ❖ Librarian
- ❖ Manager
- ❖ Clerk/Staff

Library setting currently employed in
- ❖ Public
- ❖ Academic
- ❖ School
- ❖ Other:

Region currently employed in
- ❖ U.S. East Coast
- ❖ U.S. Midwest
- ❖ U.S. South
- ❖ U.S. West Coast
- ❖ Canada
- ❖ Outside the U.S.

Thank you for participating!

Appendix C

Codebook for Open Response

QUESTION	CODE	DESCRIPTION
Question 1: Other		
	ERO	Erotica
	CD	Crime Drama
	MEM	Memoir
	CL	Chick Lit
	NONF	Non-fiction (all subgenres)
	GF	Gay Fiction
	YA	Young Adult
	ROM	Romance
	LIT	Literary Fiction
Question 2: For each of the following genres of reading material, record the first word or phrase you associate it with.		
	ACTI	activities/
	AUTH	author
	AWAR	award-winners
	CHAR	character
	DIST	Distrust (veracity of story)
	FORM	format
	LANG	language (writing)
	NEGA	negative association
	NEUA	neutral association
	NEW	New genre
	OLD	dead or dying genre
	PLOT	plot
	POP	popularity/broad appeal or inverse
	POSA	positive association
	READ	type of reader
	REXP	Reading Experience
	SETT	setting
	SUBG	sub-genre
	TITL	title
	N/A	Didn't understand question

Question 4: Do you try to read books outside your own personal reading tastes? Why or why not? (If yes, include how often.)

	YES	Yes
	NO	No
How often?	STAR	Start or skim books regularly
	MONT	Read some on a monthly basis
	YEAR	Try a new author or genre at least once a year
Why not	NOIN	No interest
	TIME	Time
Why	PEDE	Personal development
	PRDE	Professional development
	INT	Reads outside of interest, but no reason given
	RECP	Recommended by person
	RECA	Recommended by award, review, etc.
	BG	Book group

Question 5: What level of training have you had in reader's advisory services and issues (include workshops, conference sessions, and staff meetings that cover this subject)?

	ORGS	Participates in RA organizations and associations
	REGU	Receives regular training and implements it
	TARG	Need targeted instruction
	TEAC	Teach and/or train others in reader's advisory

Question 8: In general, if a patron came into your library and requested assistance in locating additional adult fiction or non-fiction authors and titles, which of the actions below would you take? You should check as many as needed to provide an accurate picture of your usual response to a readers' advisory question.

	RESE	Respondent researches the patron's inquiry and/or has them return at a later time
	PERS	Make recommendations based on personal knowledge
	LICA	Use Library Catalog

LOMA   Locate materials for patron (walk them to the shelf, etc.)

ACTP	Ask what activities patron likes to do.
ADVE	Where did they hear about the book
AUTH	What authors do you usually like?
AMAZ	Amazon
ASLI	Ask on a listserv
COCO	Consult with colleagues
DEPE	Situational dependent
ELIM	What don't they like, including "adult" content
GENE	What genre do they like
GENR	Genreflecting
HONE	Honest with patron about not having read the book (but not saying "I don't like genre")
LICA	Library catalog
LOMA	Locate materials for patron (walk them to the shelf, etc.)
NOVE	Novelist
MOOD	What are you in the mood for?
ONTO	Online tools
OTHREAD	Recommend books that are popular with other patrons
QUAL	Ask questions about qualities of books they've enjoyed in the past
RESE	Respondent researches the patron's inquiry and/or has them return at a later time
SETO	Ask patron if they'd like to learn how to find book for themselves
SOUR	Consult sources, no sources specified
RSUM	Read summary of book to patron
RTIT	What titles have you read recently?
SARI	Saricks
TIME	Ask when they want to read the book
USE	Ask what use patron will make with information in book.
WHAT	What do I Read Next?

ADVE	Where did they hear about the book
AMAZ	Amazon
ASLI	Ask on a listserv
AUTI	What authors/titles do they like
BLIS	Book lists
COCO	Consult with colleagues
ELIM	What don't they like
FEED	Learn more from patron feedback in interaction
FICO	Fiction Connection
GNRE	Genreflecting
GENR	What genre do they like
HONE	Honest with patron about not having read the book (but not saying "I don't like genre")
HONJ	Express honestly personal opinion of patron's genre choice
LICA	Library catalog
MOOD	What are they interested in today
NOVE	Novelist
OTHREAD	Recommend books that are popular with other patrons
POIN	Point or walk patron to section where genre is shelved
QUAL	What elements or qualities are in a book they enjoy
RECE	What have they read recently and enjoyed
RESE	Researches the patron's inquiry and/or has them return at a later time
REVI	Rely on reviews of books to choose recommendations
SETO	Ask patron if they'd like to learn how to find book for themselves
RELI	Reference books by Libraries, Unlimited.
TOOL	Use tools such as book lists, award lists, not specified
WASH	Consult WASHYARG

AERO	Aerospace
ACCO	Accounting
ANTH	Anthropology
ARTH	Art History
BUSI	business
COMM	Communications and related majors

COMM	Communications and related majors
EDUC	Education majors
ENGI	Engineering and related fields
ENGL	English majors
EASC	Earth Sciences
GEOG	Geography
HIST	History
HIST	History
HUMA	Humanities
INTR	International Relations
LANG	Majored in a language
PHIL	Philosophy
PHYS	Physics
POLI	Poli Sci
PSYC	Psychology majors
SCIE	Sciences
SOCI	Sociology
SPEE	Speech
THEA	Theater
WOMS	Women's Studies

Question 17: Job

DH	Department Head
DIR	Director
RA	Reader's Advisor
TELI	Teacher-Librarian
VOL	Volunteer

Question: Type of library

LIBL	Library for the Blind
SCHO	School Library
INST	Institutional

Question 19: Region

SW	Southwest