How adult fiction readers select fiction books

in public libraries:

a study of information-seeking in context

by

Kamy Ooi

Submitted to the School of Information Management,
Victoria University of Wellington
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Library and Information Studies

13 October 2008

Abstract

This study examines from the viewpoint of twelve adult fiction readers, who are members of book clubs, how they go about selecting fiction books to borrow from the public library. The methodological approach taken was a qualitative one in that each participant took part in an individual, semi-structured, face-to-face interview. The central premise of the study was that information seeking occurs in a context and must therefore be understood as influenced by context. In attempting to understand how adult fiction readers select their books then, the study examined a variety of contextual factors that influenced book choice. Personal characteristics such as mood and lifestyle were found to have an impact on book selections. Family and friends, and peers from book clubs, also played important roles in participants' book choices. The mass media, including the Internet, radio, television and the printed press also impacted participants' choice of books. Radio, in particular, was a popular source among participants. The study also examined the role that the public library played in fiction readers' book choices. It was found that while the public library provided a range of readers' advisory tools to assist fiction readers in their book selections, not all the tools were helpful to the study's participants. Library staff also played a largely invisible role in participants' book choices. Implications for public library services are discussed in the study.

Key words: adult fiction readers, book clubs, information seeking in context, readers' advisory tools, public library.

Acknowledgements

Truth is stranger than fiction, they say, and the strangest truth for me is that I have finally completed this research project. Many people have assisted me in the process and I am grateful to all of them.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1

Problem Statement

In public libraries across New Zealand, the United States, Canada and Europe, adult fiction readers comprise a significant segment of the libraries' patrons (Moyer & Weech 2005; Saricks, 2005; Thomas, 2003, Houghton, 1999). In some states in the U.S. it has been estimated that fiction accounts for around 60% of the total adult circulation in public libraries (Shearer & Burgin, 2001, p.xv). While no recent statistics are available for New Zealand, the Public Library Special Interest Group of LIANZA (Library and Information Association New Zealand Aotearoa) estimated in 1994 that adult fiction accounted for 46% of all public library issues (Houghton, 1999, p.1). Public libraries have begun to acknowledge fiction readers as an important user group by providing readers' advisory sources for them. Readers' advisory sources – defined as the tools and resources provided by library staff to assist readers in finding books they will enjoy (Trott, 2005, p.210) – commonly include book lists, book displays, labeling of books by genre and more recently, electronic sources such as fiction databases and web pages. To date, however, little is known of the impact which such initiatives have on fiction readers because few studies have asked readers what they think of them.

Where user studies have been conducted, these have predominantly been based on quantitative surveys which tell us *how often* certain readers' advisory tools are used by readers (e.g. Spiller, 1980; Goodall, 1990; Davidson & Cave, 1990; Speak, 1990), but do not explain in depth *why* readers find them useful or not. Indeed, few studies have looked holistically at what influences adult fiction readers in their choice of books or what sources they turn to, to find new authors or titles. The aim of my study was to address this gap in the research by conducting in-depth interviews with adult fiction readers on the strategies and sources they used to select fiction books in public libraries. My study asks: what roles, if any, do readers' advisory sources play in fiction readers' book selections in public libraries? What other factors influence book choices?

A central premise of my study is that all information behaviour takes place within a context and must therefore be understood as influenced by context (Case, 2007; Williamson, 2005).   For the purpose of my study, "context" is defined as "a person's situation, background and environment" (Case, 2007, p.115). In order to achieve a more holistic understanding of adult fiction readers then, influences from their everyday life environment – which may include sources such as family and friends, social networks such as book clubs, and mass media such as the Internet, television and radio– must be taken into account, along with readers' personal characteristics such as mood and reading tastes. These areas have remained largely under-studied in the Library and Information Studies (LIS) field. In revisiting the question of how adult fiction readers select books from public libraries then, my study sought to broaden the focus of previous research. This more holistic approach to studying fiction readers will contribute to a greater understanding of how well public libraries presently serve adult fiction readers. In addition, bringing the voices of readers into the research through the use of in-depth interviews will contribute to our body of knowledge on fiction readers. It is timely that this be done because "[w]ithout an understanding of readers and their motivations or an understanding of what draws readers to particular books, library staff lack a framework for supporting readers as they navigate through their many choices of books to read" (Smith, 2001, p.68).

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Studies on how adult fiction readers search for, and select fiction books from public libraries can broadly be divided into two strands. The first and larger group focuses on the views of practicing librarians and what they perceive to be the barriers faced by adult fiction readers in the latter's use of the public library. The second and smaller group focuses on the views of readers themselves. Of this second group, most of the studies to date have been based on questionnaire surveys which quantify what readers do. Less common are qualitative studies that examine the experiences of readers from their own words and perspectives (Gorman & Clayton, 2005). In this literature review, I assess the trope of studies to date, outlining their strengths and limitations, and where my own study fits in. I also review two largely under-studied areas: the role of *other people* and the role of the *Internet* and other *mass media* in influencing book choices. I conclude the review by discussing the conceptual framework of my study.

2.1 Selection barriers and solutions as perceived by librarians

A considerable number of LIS studies, written from the perspectives of practicing librarians, take the view that adult fiction readers face barriers in their use of public libraries. Ranta (1991), Yee & Soto (1991) and Harrell (1996) argued that using the library catalogue was a "frustrating experience" for many fiction readers because classification schemes such as Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC), Universal Decimal Classification (UDC) and Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) do not provide adequate subject access for fiction. Baker (1996) and Goodall (1989) argued that the traditional "A-Z" arrangement of fiction books in public libraries hampered readers' ability to browse shelves effectively and contributed to "information overload". In the area of readers' advisory services, several writers have pointed to the poor service which fiction readers receive from library staff, which they claim impede readers' ability to find books they will enjoy (e.g. Shearer, 1996; Smith, 2000; May, Olesh, Miltenberg &

Lackner, 2000; Chelton, 2003). Two unobtrusive studies conducted in the field appeared to support this charge. In the first, Shearer (1996) recruited graduate students from his class to pose as public library patrons. The students were then sent out to public libraries around North Carolina where they sought staff assistance in finding a novel similar to Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Shearer (1996) concluded, based on his students' observations, that the services rendered were less than optimal. Students had difficulties identifying which staff to ask for help and when assisted, found that staff often failed to conduct a thorough readers' advisory interview with them. Shearer's (1996) findings was corroborated by May, Olesh, Miltenberg and Lackner (2000) in a similarly designed study in Nassau County, New York. May and her colleagues found that public library staff often relied on their own reading preferences in recommending books and rarely consulted professional tools to satisfy fiction readers' queries.

The perceived problems highlighted by all the above authors have led to a proliferation of studies that look at ways to better assist fiction readers in their book selections. In the area of classification and subject access, fiction classification schemes such as Pejtersen & Austin's (1983) Analysis Mediation of Publications (AMP)'s system, Beghtol's (1994) Experimental Fiction Access System (EFAS), Ekvall & Larsson's (1997) EDVIN[1] and the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC)'s Fiction Finder (Vernitski, 2007) have been developed for the purpose of improving fiction retrieval in public libraries. To improve services to library browsers, Baker (1996, 1988) conducted an experiment in which she physically separated fiction books by genre, in three public libraries in North Carolina. It was found that the experimented books increased in circulation compared to books that were untreated. In the area of readers' advisory services, Saricks (2005) published a comprehensive manual, offering guidelines on the ways in which readers' advisory interviews should be conducted and the reference tools that could be used. Saricks (2005) as well as Chelton (2003) have also repeatedly called on librarians to pay attention to the "appeal" factors of fiction books – which comprise elements such as character, mood and setting – in order to better match readers to books.

---

[1] EDVIN, a subject term and genre database for fiction and biographies, is not an acronym. It was named after Edvin Trettondal, a former town librarian in the MoIndal (Sweden) community where the EDVIN system was developed (Ekvall & Larsson, 1997, p.84).

Practitioners in the field have also increasingly called for attention to be paid to online readers' advisory services. Hoffert (2003) urged public librarians not to "leave readers' advisory sources to Amazon" (p.46) and suggested that a library-based, online forum be introduced to facilitate book discussion among fiction readers. In similar vein, Trott (2005) called for a more pro-active readers' advisory service in which librarians would offer live chat sessions and email-based reference services to fiction readers. Hollands (2006) advocated a form-based readers' advisory service in which readers would fill in an on-line form detailing their reading tastes and preferences. Librarians would then respond to readers via email, with an annotated list of fiction titles they might enjoy. While all of these initiatives or calls for improvements are laudable, what is noticeably missing from this group of literature is the view of fiction readers themselves. With the exception of Pejtersen & Austin's (1983) study which surveyed fiction readers on their views of the Analysis Mediation of Publications (AMP) system and found a 96% satisfaction rate, the bulk of the studies reviewed here focus only on the views of practicing librarians. Without engaging the views of fiction readers themselves, we do not have a clear sense of how well such initiatives are serving them. An in-depth study that seeks the perspectives of fiction readers is therefore timely.

2.2 Quantitative studies on adult fiction readers

As mentioned, user studies that seek the viewpoint of adult fiction readers have developed at a slower rate than those that represent the perspectives of practicing librarians. Where such user studies have been conducted, these have predominantly been based on questionnaire surveys which require readers to think and respond in the language of the studies. Because such questionnaires come with pre-established categories of answers, they do not invite elaborate or in-depth responses from fiction readers. One of the largest was Spiller's (1980) in-person questionnaire to 500 fiction readers in the U.K. when they were returning fiction books to four public libraries. Among the questions which Spiller investigated was what type of fiction books readers read, how they discovered new authors and what influenced their selection decisions when browsing. Spiller's study was replicated by Davidson and Cave (1990) in New

Zealand a decade later when they administered the same questionnaire to 523 fiction readers in public libraries around greater Wellington. Other surveys include Jennings and Sear's (1986) study of how 135 fiction readers in Kent County, U.K. chose their books, Goodall's (1989) survey of browsing behaviour and Bolam's (2000) investigation into whether fiction readers borrowed or bought their fiction books. Surveys investigating specific groups of fiction readers have also been undertaken: Speak (1990) surveyed elderly readers in Leicester, U.K., Murray (1994) surveyed readers of large print books in Australia and New Zealand, and Bryson (2004) surveyed romance readers using an online questionnaire. The major finding reported in all these studies is that readers tend to choose books either by a known author or through browsing library shelves. But while these studies provide a broad overview of how adult fiction readers select their books, they do not examine in depth, the reasons behind their readers' preferences and actions.

The large scale surveys by Spiller (1980) and Davidson and Cave (1990), for example, raised as many questions as they answered. Both studies reported that fiction readers relied heavily on "friends" to discover new authors, with 50% of Spiller's readers and 40.7% of Davidson and Cave's readers doing so. Conversely, only 1.6% of Spiller's readers and 8.2% of Davidson and Cave's readers relied on "library aids/booklists" as sources for new authors.   However, neither study examined why informal sources such as friends was preferred over formal library ones. Did readers turn to friends because the latter was accessible and could be relied on to make good recommendations? In what ways were library booklists not meeting the needs of fiction readers? Without eliciting the views of readers as to why they prefer one source over another, we do not have a holistic view of how they search for books in public libraries.

Other studies which rely on questionnaires have also left the "why" type questions unanswered. Bryson (2004), Murray (1994) and Speak (1990) all reported that the majority of their readers selected fiction books by browsing. However, none asked their readers *why* they browsed. Chang (2005)'s study of browsing behaviour reminds us that "browsing" is a complex and multifaceted experience, ranging from aimless scanning to goal-directed searching. What were the specific contexts that prompted the readers in the

three studies to browse? Did they do so because they enjoyed the experience, could not locate the author they wanted or knew no other way to find a "good book"? As Case (2007) has rightly pointed out: "questionnaires cannot easily capture the complexity of information seeking, nor can they observe the influence of context…in the actual use of information…" (p.207). In order to better understand how fiction readers select books from public libraries, then, we need to extend our focus from *what* readers do, to *why* they do them. In-depth interviews that allow fiction readers to qualify their search experiences, in their own words, will help to fill the gaps in survey-type studies.

2.3 Qualitative studies on adult fiction readers

While survey based studies still dominate the literature on adult fiction readers, there have also been a number of studies that take a qualitative approach. Three studies that deal with specific groups of adult fiction readers provide useful insights for my own study. The first of these is Radway's (1987) seminal and oft-cited ethnographic study of a group of romance readers in the American Midwest. Radway's work, conducted in the field of literary studies, sought to find out what appealed to readers about the romance genre. Although commonly dismissed in literary circles as a predictable and conservative genre, Radway discovered through her interviews with participants that they did not view it as such. The act of reading romance was viewed by Radway's participants as a form of "empowerment" that "combated and compensated" for the drudgeries of daily life (Radway, 1987, p.102). Radway's findings suggest that in order to understand how fiction readers select their books, we must have some understanding – from the viewpoint of readers *themselves* – as to what appeals to them about specific genres or books. This is not immediately obvious from viewing the book or genre alone.

Two other studies conducted within LIS underscore the above point. Rothbauer (2004a) investigated the reading experiences of 17 young women (18-23 years of age) who self identified as lesbian, queer or bisexual. Contrary to the common perception that such readers would be interested in fiction that dealt with the "coming out" process, Rothbauer (2004a) found through her interviews that, "readers were looking for accounts of lesbian

and queer experience that were at least as complex as their own lives. They were not satisfied with narratives of disclosure that depicted a stereotypical pattern of the life course of lesbian and gay characters…" (p.64). Likewise, in her study of 32 adult readers who read science fiction and fantasy, Kofmel (2002) found "varied and contradictory reading experiences within a familiar genre" (p.iv) As science fiction and fantasy included a broad range of story types, worldviews, ideologies and degrees of complexities, readers in the study reported quite different motives for reading the genre and derived quite different satisfactions from it. What all the above studies suggest then, is that any attempts to understand how adult fiction readers select books from public libraries must start from an understanding of what appeals to readers about specific books or genres. I incorporate this important point in my study.

Along with studies that focus on specific groups of fiction readers, two qualitative studies that examine adult fiction readers in general, have also emerged. Toyne and Underwood's (2001) study, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Board in the U.K. was based on focus group interviews with adult fiction readers. The focus groups were asked what impact the public library had on their reading experiences and whether they found readers' advisory tools useful. A major strength of this study was its use of open-ended questions which helped to elicit in-depth responses from interviewees. Readers from the various groups reported finding the "New Books" display useful because this helped them to discover new authors. Many also liked the returns trolley which they saw as a convenient way of finding "recommended reads". Conversely, library book lists were singled out as being unhelpful – readers expressed frustration that the books listed were often not found on shelves and the quality of information contained on the lists was poor. By allowing readers to explain - in their own words - why they make use of certain readers' advisory tools but not others, Toyne and Underwood (2001) were able to provide a more comprehensive view of fiction readers than that accounted for in earlier survey studies. But while this is a valuable study, Toyne and Underwood (2001) focused exclusively on the *role of the public library* in influencing book choices. Alternative sources such as family and friends, and mass media such as the Internet, were not considered by the authors.

The most comprehensive work to date that has looked at how adult leisure readers select books is the Canadian study by Ross (2001a, 2001b, 2000, 1999). Between 1985 and 2000, Ross and students enrolled in her postgraduate library course at the University of Western Ontario interviewed 194 avid readers, to find out how they chose books for pleasure reading. Book selection was found to be a complex process, involving several related factors. Readers tended to choose books according to their mood and to scan their everyday life environments for clues on finding new ones. In addition, elements and clues from the books themselves – such as setting, characters depicted and cover page – influenced selection choices, as did the actual cost in time and money that it took to access the books. Ross's (2001b) study stands out from many others in the LIS field for it recognizes that the process of choosing a book encompasses *much more* than browsing a book stock or searching a library catalogue. Of particular relevance for my own study is Ross's (2001b) reminder that book selection has an *affective* dimension:

> Fiction readers reported that their mood for reading often depended on what else was going on in their lives. When readers are busy or under stress, they often want safety, reassurance, and confirmation and will reread old favourites or read new books by known authors that they can trust. At other times when life is less stressful, they can afford to take more risks in their reading. At such times, they…might pick books on impulse to introduce novelty into their reading… (p.86).

Studies on fiction readers – at least in the LIS field – have tended to focus on the cognitive aspects of book selection while overlooking the affective dimension. Apart from Ross, only a handful of researchers – notably Pejtersen and Austin (1983) and Smith (1996) have given due thought to the role of affect in influencing book choice. Pejtersen and Austin's (1983) study involved the analysis of 300 conversations between fiction readers and librarians in Denmark. The researchers found that while readers wanted books with a particular subject or setting, they also tended to seek books with a particular "emotional experience" (Pejtersen & Austin, 1983, p.234). Likewise, Smith's (1996) longitudinal study of a single fiction reader found that affect had an important part to play in book selection. Smith's reader tended to select books that mirrored the personal circumstances of her life. As the purpose of my study is to gain a more holistic understanding of how fiction readers make their book choices in public libraries, the role of affect will be a key area I examine.

Along with the attention she accords to mood, Ross's (2001b, 1999) study extends the focus of previous research by recognizing that everyday life sources influence readers' book choices. Arguing that reading "…occurs within a network of social relations", Ross (1999, p.797) highlights the importance of paying attention to everyday life sources such as family and friends, and the mass media, in influencing book choices. But while Ross acknowledges the role of everyday life sources, her own study stops short of examining *which* sources readers find most useful, *what* uses readers make of them and *why*. Nor does she examine how the online environment influences book choices – in part because a large portion of Ross's data was collected before the widespread use of the Internet (Ross, 1999). In revisiting the question of how adult fiction readers select books from public libraries then, my study will attempt to fill the gaps in both Ross's (1999, 2001b) and Toyne and Underwood's (2001) studies by examining in greater detail, the role of other people and the Internet, in informing book choices.

2.4 People as information sources for fiction

Apart from Ross (2001b), few LIS studies have examined the role that other people play in fiction readers' book choices. This is clearly an area worth investigating since "empirical research tells us that many people use formal sources rarely, relying instead on informal sources such as family and friends…" (Case, 2007, p.326). While I have not been able to locate any study that deals directly with the influence of family or friends, two studies on book clubs appear to suggest that readers are not unduly influenced by the views of others. Bessman Taylor (2007) studied six book clubs in Illinois over a five-year period and found that time and again, "…book group members read a variety of works beyond the scope of the book clubs to which they belong" (p.117). Likewise, in her study of online and face-to-face book clubs, Rehberg Sedo (2003) found that her participants read a variety of genres, not just those prescribed by their clubs. More research needs to be done to understand in what capacity fiction readers turn to others (or not) in their choices of books. One other study which examines the role of people as information sources is worth noting here. Michels (2005) interviewed a group of biblical studies researchers and found that while they tended to consult other people to obtain

factual information related to their own work, more often they sought *affective* information in the form of affirmation from their colleagues regarding the direction of their research. Thus, in exploring what roles, if any, family and friends play in fiction readers' book choices, the cognitive and affective aspects of seeking people out must be taken into account.

2.5 Internet and fiction book choices

Few LIS studies have also examined the impact of the Internet on adult fiction readers' book choices in public libraries. The only study that has looked substantively at this issue is Rothbauer's (2004b) research on young women who self-identified as lesbian, bisexual or queer. In deciding what types of fiction they would borrow from the public library, Rothbauer (2004b) reported that her participants overwhelmingly turned first to the Internet to gather information about books. Online book stores such as *Amazon.com* were widely used because they allowed easy searching using terms that participants themselves coined, e.g. "lesbian fiction", "queer fiction". Conversely, library catalogues were used less often because participants did not find subject headings such as "Homosexuality-fiction" to be contextually relevant or easy to use (Rothbauer, 2004b, pp.97-98).

The recent study by Rowlands and Nicholas (2008) also points to the influence of the Internet over traditional modes of searching. The authors surveyed faculty and students at University College London (UCL) regarding the strategies they used to find the books needed for work, study or leisure. It was found that some segments of the population relied heavily on *Google* and *Amazon* for their needs with correspondingly very low dependency on library catalogues. The preferences of Rowlands and Nicholas's (2008) and Rothbauer's (2004b) participants for Internet sources over traditional library ones appear to be influenced, in part, by the greater ease of using online sources - a finding supported by Adkins and Bossaller (2007). In their comparative study of online bookstores, readers' advisory databases and public library catalogues, Adkins and Bossaller (2007) found that "online bookstores use more fiction access points more consistently than either reader advisory databases or library catalogs" (p.366). In

attempting to understand how adult fiction readers make their book choices at public libraries then, the role of the Internet in influencing selection is an important area to consider. My study will examine this currently under-studied area.

2.6 Traditional mass media and fiction book choices

As with the Internet, very little research has been conducted on the role that traditional mass media (e.g. television, radio) play in fiction readers' book choices. Spiller's (1980) survey of fiction readers in the U.K. found that that 17.6% of readers obtained their book ideas from television sources and 11.1% from radio, while Davidson and Cave's (1990) survey of fiction readers in New Zealand found that 5% obtained their book ideas from television and 12% from radio. In both cases, however, the studies do not offer insights on what readers think of these sources or why they use them. A recent study by Rehberg Sedo (2008) sheds some light on this issue. Examining a television talk show in the U.K. and a radio program in Canada - both of which offered book discussions - Rehberg Sedo (2008) found that such programs appealed to television and radio audiences because the program hosts were seen as trusted sources: "[t]he television and radio personalities…act as a sort of 'trusted other', much like a friend or family member who has proven to provide satisfactory book recommendations" (p.200). More research, however, needs to be done to verify Rehberg Sedo's (2008) claim. My study will examine the role that traditional mass media play in fiction readers' book choices.

2.7 Conceptual framework of study

The literature reviewed thus far suggests that the process of choosing fiction books takes place not only within the confines of the public library but *outside* it. Everyday life influences such as the reader's mood, preferences for certain reading material, inputs from other people, and exposure to mass media such as the Internet, television and radio, all impact readers' choices. In order to gain a more holistic understanding of how readers choose books, the everyday life contexts which they exist in must be taken into account. While there is now a considerable body of research that deals with information seeking in context – most notably, Savolainen's (1995) work on everyday life information seeking (ELIS) – a particularly useful framework for my own study is Kirsty Williamson's

"Ecological Model of Information Seeking and Use" (Williamson, 1998, 1997 – see also Appendix A).

Williamson (1998, 1997) posits that information behaviour does not occur in a vacuum. Rather, it owes its existence to a person's "internal construct" which includes elements such as a person's mood and values. In addition, information behaviour is shaped by the wider environment or "ecology" in which a person exists in – which include "intimate personal networks" such as family and friends, "wider personal networks" such as social clubs, "mass media" such as the Internet, television and radio, and "formal institutions" such as libraries and government organizations. The crux of Williamson's (2005) argument is that "…human beings should not be conceptualized exclusively as either individual entities or socially constructed entities. Rather, they should be seen as self creating, but within contexts that involve various kinds of biological and social circumstances and constrains" (p.130).

Although originally developed to study the everyday life information behaviour of the elderly, Williamson's model has great relevance and value for my study, for three reasons. First, its recognition that each person is "self creating" underscores the importance of paying attention to fiction readers' own agency in shaping book choices. Elements such as the reader's mood are accounted for in Williamson's model. Second, Williamson's model provides a more holistic framework from which to understand fiction readers as it recognizes the roles of *both* formal and informal sources in influencing book choices. It highlights the need to pay attention to under-studied "everyday life" elements such as family, friends, book clubs and the Internet in influencing readers. And third, Williamson's model acknowledges that information is both purposively sought and incidentally acquired. While most models of information behaviour assume that information seeking starts from a perceived "problem" or "gap", this is not necessarily true of fiction readers. As pointed out by Moyer (2007), people may seek out fiction as a form of enjoyment or escape and not necessarily because they perceive a gap in their knowledge. However, in the course of reading fiction, they may

accidentally acquire information that is useful to them. Williamson's model therefore provides a more accurate reflection of fiction readers' information behaviour.

2.8 Conclusion

Review of the literature in this chapter suggests that gaps currently exist in our knowledge of how adult fiction readers select books in public libraries. A large bulk of the literature is written from the perspective of practicing librarians which do not take into account readers' views or experiences. Where user studies have been conducted, a number of gaps exist. Quantitative based studies have tended to report what fiction readers "do" without providing an explanation of readers' motives or actions. Qualitative based studies have yielded useful insights on adult fiction readers but influences from readers' everyday life environments – which include sources such as family and friends, and mass media such as the Internet, television and radio – have remained largely under-studied. My study seeks to address the gaps in current research, using Williamson's (1998) ecological model as my frame of reference.

Chapter 3

Research Design

This chapter discusses the research design of the study. It begins with an outline of the study's objectives and research questions, followed by a justification of why the study takes a qualitative methodological approach. A description of the research population, including sampling and recruitment strategies follows. Methods of data collection are then discussed, followed by an explanation of the methods of data analysis. The delimitations and limitations of the study are also considered. The chapter concludes by explaining how the study's findings are organized and presented in this report.

3.1 Study objectives

As discussed in the previous chapter, Williamson's (1998) "ecological model of information seeking and use" forms the conceptual framework of my study. The model posits that in order to understand information behaviour more holistically, the information seeker's everyday life environment – which may include personal networks such as family and friends, mass media such as the Internet and institutional sources such as libraries - must be taken into account, along with the information seeker's personal characteristics such as mood and lifestyle. With these elements in mind, the following comprise my study's objectives:

1. To identify the ways in which the personal characteristics and circumstances of adult fiction readers (e.g. mood, lifestyle) influence their book choices in the public library.

2. To consider what impact personal networks such as family, friends and book clubs have on adult fiction readers' book selections

3. To examine the ways in which adult fiction readers make use of the mass media to inform their book choices.

4. To gather information on whether adult fiction readers make use of the readers' advisory tools provided by their public library, and if so, which ones and why.

5. To determine how satisfied adult fiction readers are with the sources and strategies they use to select fiction books.

3.2 Research questions

In support of the above framework and objectives, my study focused on answering the following research questions:

RQ1: How do the personal characteristics and circumstances of adult fiction readers influence their book choices in the public library?

RQ2: What influences, if any, do personal networks such as family, friends and book clubs have on adult fiction readers' book choices in the public library?

RQ3: What role, if any, does the mass media play in adult fiction readers' book choices in the public library?

RQ4: What strategies do adult fiction readers rely on to select books in the public library? What role, if any, does the public library play in their book choices?

RQ5: How satisfied are adult fiction readers with the book choices they make at the public library, using the sources and strategies that they do?

3.3 Justification for a qualitative study

The central aim of my study was to understand from the perspectives of adult fiction readers, how they go about selecting fiction books in the public library, and what sources

influenced their choices. A qualitative method of inquiry was therefore appropriate because "…qualitative research…attempts to understand the world from the subjects' point of view, to unfold the meaning of people's experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations" (Kvale, 1996, p.1). A quantitative survey would not have been suitable for my purpose as the research questions I ask require a greater depth of explanation and description than can be provided for in a survey. In addition, I chose to take a qualitative approach because this was aligned with the conceptual framework of my study – namely, that all information behaviour takes place within a context, and must therefore be understood as influenced by context. Gorman & Clayton (2005) point out that "…qualitative research is contextual…it uses the natural setting in which events occur as an 'observation post' from which data are gathered" (p.4).

3.4 Research population

Four dimensions are discussed here: the selection criteria for study participants, sample size, methods of recruitment and characteristics of the participants.

Selection criteria

My intention was to conduct in-depth interviews with adult fiction readers to understand what influenced their choices of books in public libraries. As it was impossible to examine in-depth, the experiences of *all* adult fiction readers, purposive sampling was used in the study. This involved selecting participants "who have a range of characteristics relevant to the research project" (Gorman & Clayton, 2005, p.128) and "from [whom] one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to…the inquiry" (Patton, 2002, p.230). Several criteria were used to select the fiction readers to be interviewed. As this was a study on adult fiction readers, participants were limited to those 18 years or older, who borrowed fiction from the public library and who read fiction for leisure. It was important to specify "leisure" as a criterion as those who read fiction for some other purpose – for example, as a compulsory academic assignment – might have quite different perspectives and experiences of selecting fiction books. Participants were also required to have been a member of a public library and a book club

for at least six months. The criterion of "at least six months" was introduced because readers new to the public library system or book club were unlikely to be able to provide in-depth data for the study. My decision to target fiction readers belonging to book clubs was motivated by the following reasons:

(i) Ability to provide "information rich" data -   Fiction readers who join book clubs tend to be avid readers of fiction (Long, 2003; Hartley, 2001). They were therefore likely to be able to provide me with "rich" insights on an activity they were passionate about.

(ii) Ability to articulate views publicly -   As I intended to base my study on in-person interviews, I required participants who were comfortable articulating their views in an interview setting. Book club members, whose core function it is to participate in book group discussions, ideally meet this criterion. As noted by Glen (2004) "members of reading groups have the advantage of being…comfortable with the process of sharing their thoughts on their fiction reading experience with others" (p.17).

(iii) Ability to provide insights on the influences of other people -   As one of the goals of my study was to explore what impact; other people had on fiction readers' book choices, interviewing those with book club experiences would have provided valuable insights. I saw this as a potentially rich source in which I could explore: How much importance do readers place on the views of *others* in informing their own book choice? Does belonging to a book club influence the type of books readers read *outside* the club?

Sample size

Time constraints and my commitment to gather in-depth data meant the number of participants recruited had to be manageably small. While there are no specific rules for sample size in qualitative research, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that "a dozen or so interviews, if properly selected, will exhaust most available information…" (p.235). Following this guideline, then, I targeted to recruit twelve participants for my study.

Methods of recruitment

My reading of the literature had forewarned me that gaining access to participants, particularly for a qualitative study, could be a slow and arduous process (e.g. Carey, McKechnie & McKenzie, 2001; Rothbauer, 2004c). To maximize my chances of recruiting twelve participants within a short time frame, I used four recruitment methods:

(i) New Zealand Book Council Noticeboard – With the permission of the New Zealand Book Council, I placed an online advertisement on its *Book Group Noticeboard*,[2] calling for research participants (see Appendix F).

(ii) Referrals from public library – Wellington City Libraries (2008a) runs book clubs in several of its community libraries. Assistance was sought from library staff via email to verbally publicize my study to book group members, and to recommend prospective participants to me.

(iii) Snowball sampling – Book club members who were initially recruited for my study were asked to recommend other suitable members for participation.

(iv) Word of mouth - Assistance was sought from family, friends and colleagues to "put the word out" to book club members whom they knew, who fit the criteria of my study.

As an added incentive to participate, a $30 book voucher was offered to each person who took part in my study. To minimize bias in the data collected, I followed the recommendations of Gorman and Clayton (2005) and did *not* recruit as participants, anyone whom I personally knew or worked with (i.e. family, friends and colleagues were excluded from this study).

---

[2] The New Zealand Book Council is a not-for-profit organization, funded in part by Creative New Zealand (the Arts Council of New Zealand). It provides a free online book group noticeboard for readers looking to join a book club in New Zealand and for existing book clubs looking to recruit new members. Further details can be obtained from its website: http://www.bookcouncil.org.nz/index.html.

Characteristics of the participants

Disappointingly, I did not receive a single response to my online advertisement with the New Zealand Book Council. However, this did not jeopardize my study as I was able to obtain participants from my other recruitment sources. In the end, twelve participants – all meeting the criteria of my study – were recruited. Six were referrals from friends and colleagues, three others came from library book clubs and the remaining three were recommended to me by study participants (i.e. snowball sampling). Participants ranged in age between 34 and 85 years, and came from diverse backgrounds. Eight were female and four were male. Eleven identified as Pakeha New Zealanders and one as a British citizen. All resided within the Wellington region and used Wellington City Libraries as their public library. Appendix B provides a brief profile of all twelve participants.

3.5 Methods of data collection

Six aspects are discussed here: justification for using interviews as the method of data collection; the pilot study; compliance with ethical guidelines; the interview setting; the interview questions and strategies for establishing rapport with participants.

Justification for using interviews

As mentioned already, my study relied on interviews but an explanation of *why* this was my instrument of data collection is warranted here. Interviews were judged to be the most appropriate form of data collection as my intention was to gain a holistic understanding - from the viewpoint of fiction readers – how they went about selecting fiction books in the public library. I wanted to know not only what fiction readers did but *why*. Interviews were therefore appropriate because "…interviewing can enable a researcher to explore causation, that is, to enquire into *why* individuals…behave in a way that they do – something that most quantitative research cannot really answer" (Gorman & Clayton, 2005, p.125). I decided to interview participants individually rather than as a group. Individual interviews had the advantage of allowing me to draw out the nuances in each person's experience, unaffected by the views of others (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). I also decided to conduct face-to-face interviews, rather than by telephone or

email communication. My reading of the literature had suggested that rapport with interviewees was easier to achieve in a face-to-face setting, where both visual and verbal clues were available (Williamson, 2002; Pickard, 2007).

Pilot study

Prior to commencing my interviews with participants, I conducted pilot interviews with two adult fiction readers. These proved to be extremely valuable exercises. Apart from giving me practice with interviewing techniques, my pilot interviewees pointed me to areas that I had not anticipated were important to fiction readers in their book choices. Both my pilot interviewees, for instance, spoke enthusiastically of listening to the radio for ideas on fiction books. They informed me that they knew "many other people" who did the same. With this insight in mind, I expanded my interview questions to include a section on radio and other traditional mass media. In accordance with research practices, data from my pilot interviews were not included in my actual study (Creswell, 2003).

Compliance with ethical guidelines

Before I began my actual interviews, I applied for and obtained approval from Victoria University's Human Ethics Committee to proceed with my study. In compliance with the committee's ethical guidelines, I ensured that the identities of my participants remained confidential by using only pseudonyms to refer to them in this report. Participants were asked to select pseudonyms and nine chose to do so. I assigned pseudonyms to the remaining three. I also complied with other ethical practices such as ensuring that participants fully understood the nature of my study before consenting to participate. Information sheets were sent to all participants before the interviews commenced.

Interview setting

In line with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) recommendation that qualitative study be carried out in the "natural setting" of participants, I asked participants to suggest an interview venue and time that was convenient to them. My only condition was that the venue had to be reasonably quiet to allow for audio-recording of our conversation. In all, six of the interviews were conducted in the homes of participants and one in mine, three in the

workplaces of participants, one in a public library and another in a café. Interviews were conducted between 23 June and 28 July, 2008.

Interview questions

I conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews as highly structured ones (usually with pre-determined categories of answers) were unlikely to give me rich and diverse data. I also avoided completely open-ended interviews as these post a risk of generating data that was too broad and unwieldy (Williamson, 2002). Semi-structured interviews had the advantage of containing a standard list of questions that I wanted answered while "…allow[ing] individual respondents some latitude and freedom to talk about what is of interest or important to them" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006, p.125).

The scope of my interview questions were guided by my study objectives and research questions. My interview questions consisted of both "grand tour questions" (Leech, 2002) and more specific ones. Grand tour questions are broad questions that ask respondents to give a verbal tour of something they know well. Leech (2002) states that "the major benefit of the [grand tour] question is that it gets respondents talking, but in a fairly focused way" (p.667). A grand tour question like*: "Walk me through a typical visit to your public library when you go to borrow fiction. How do you search for what you want?"* was designed to encourage respondents to speak freely in their own words. For each research question that I wanted answered, I begun with a broad grand tour question and then "drilled down" to more specific questions. The interview questions are presented in Appendix C. Interviews with participants lasted approximately an hour each and were audio-recorded with participants' consent.

Establishing rapport with participants

One of the potential pitfalls of conducting interviews is that the personal characteristics of the interviewer (such as age, sex and race) can bias the data collected (Williamson, 2002). I did not automatically assume that my identity as a non-New Zealand, ethnic minority would have an adverse bearing on my data but I was certainly mindful that it could. To this end, then, I made a concerted effort to establish rapport with participants,

following the insights shared by a previous study (Carey, McKechnie & McKenzie, 2001).   My disclosure to participants that I was an avid fiction reader helped to establish a "common bond" between us. I also attempted to put participants at ease by verbally assuring them before the interviews commenced that I would not be scrutinizing them for their reading tastes. Anecdotal evidence from previous studies (e.g. Trott, 2005; Glen, 2004, Rothbauer, 2004c) had suggested that some readers fear being judged for their book choices. I felt it was important to assure participants on this point. I also made a concerted effort to cater to participants with specific needs. For instance, one of my elderly participants indicated that he preferred reading material in large print as opposed to small. When forwarding to him, the paperwork associated with this study (i.e. information sheet, consent form and interview transcript), I made sure to print the documents in a large font size. Two of my other participants indicated a lack of confidence in using email so I communicated with them via phone and postal mail. I also attempted to establish trust with all participants by promptly answering their queries regarding the study. Assurances about the confidential nature of my study were also verbally voiced to participants during the interviews. All of these gestures, though modest and small, helped, I think, to create rapport with participants. I believe this contributed in part to the rich and insightful data I was able to gather for this study.

3.6 Methods of data analysis

The twelve interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent. The interviews were then transcribed and participants were given the opportunity to check the accuracy of the transcripts. Following feedback from participants, I analyzed the transcripts using qualitative content analysis (Creswell, 2003). This largely involved textual reflection, looking for common themes and issues that related to my research questions and objectives. Categories for analysis were developed using several methods. Initial categories came from the interview questions and were fairly broad, e.g. "book club", "Internet", "readers' advisory tools". Other coding categories emerged from the interviews themselves, in terms of what participants had to say. For example, I developed a new category called "financial considerations" after it became apparent

during the interviews that "user pays" services in the library were impacting participants' book choices.

In order to provide a thorough analysis of my data, I followed the recommendations given by Pickard (2007) and Creswell (2003). I read through all the data initially to gain a "broad sense" of what was there. I then conducted multiple close readings of each transcript, noting common themes and patterns as they emerged. As I became more immersed in, and familiar with my data, broad themes were broken down into smaller categories. For instance, the broad category of "Internet" was sub-coded into "websites visited", "information sought", "feelings towards Internet" and so on. I also followed the recommendations of Kvale (1996) by looking not only for data-driven themes but *conceptual* ones that went "beyond the text". For instance, I paid attention to dimensions such as use of language (e.g. slang), tone of voice of participants (e.g. enthusiasm, sarcasm), and pacing of speech (e.g. speaking hurriedly or hesitantly). Validity in data analysis has been defined as "…the extent to which something actually measures what it is intended to measure" (Gorman & Clayton, 2005, p.25). To increase the validity of my analysis, I made a conscious effort to also note instances where data ran counter to my proposed themes. I have deliberately included this discrepant information in my report because "…discussing contrary information adds to the credibility of an account for a reader" (Creswell, 2003, p.196).

3.7 Delimitations and limitations

My study includes only twelve participants and the findings cannot therefore be generalized to the wider adult fiction reading population. Nonetheless, some of the findings presented could be followed up or tested in a different context. The concluding chapter of this report offers some suggestions for further study. Additionally, while my sample size is small, the data collected is rich and insightful. It will help to illuminate the findings of previous studies as most of these have been survey-based and lacking in explanatory detail. And while my study is confined to the Wellington region and to one public library network (i.e. Wellington City Libraries), it is anticipated that the findings

will be of relevance to public libraries elsewhere. This is because some of the issues examined - for example, library book displays and the genre labeling of book spines – are common practices in other public libraries as well. The main limitation to the study pertained to data collection. As mentioned previously, the interviewer's personal characteristics may bias responses (Williamson, 2002). An attempt was made to address this limitation by establishing rapport with participants, as discussed in a previous section of this chapter.

3.8 Organization and presentation of findings

The next four chapters of this report address my first four research questions while my final research question is addressed in the concluding chapter. The organization of my chapters follows the structure of Williamson's (1998) ecological model. Chapter 4 focuses on the innermost circle of Williamson's model (i.e. "the user") and asks what role fiction readers' personal characteristics and circumstances play in their book choices. Chapter 5 examines the second and third innermost circles of Williamson's model (i.e. "intimate" and "wider" personal networks) and looks at the role that family, friends and book clubs play in readers' book selections. This is followed by Chapter 6 which addresses Williamson's fourth circle (i.e. "mass media") and the influences these have on book choices. Chapter 7 examines the outermost circle of Williamson's model (i.e. "institutional sources") and considers what role the public library plays in readers' book selections. The concluding chapter examines readers' satisfaction with the search strategies they use to select fiction books.

In each of the chapter that I report my findings, I have included verbatim quotes from my interviews - as recommended by Pickard (2007) - so that readers of this report can judge for themselves the accuracy with which I have analyzed and interpreted my data. Verbatim quotes also help to provide "rich and thick description" (Creswell, 2003, p.196) – a hallmark of qualitative research.

Chapter 4

The role of personal characteristics and circumstances

on fiction book choices

This chapter focuses on the innermost circle of Williamson's (1998) ecological model – "the user". It addresses Research Question 1: "How do the personal characteristics and circumstances of adult fiction readers influence their book choices in the public library?" The terms "personal characteristics" and "personal circumstances" are fairly broad and an explanation is provided here as to how they are treated in this chapter. *Character* is defined in the dictionary as the "features and traits that form the individual nature of a person or thing" ("character", 2006, n.p.). In this chapter, drawing on the ideas of both Ross (2001a) and Williamson (1998) as well as data from my interviews, the personal characteristics I will focus on are readers' moods, the values they hold and the reading tastes they possess. *Circumstance* is defined in the dictionary as "a condition that accompanies or influences some event or activity" ("circumstance", 2006, n.p.). In this chapter, I examine readers' circumstances in terms of their lifestyle (Williamson, 1998), "what else is going on in their lives" (Ross, 2001a, p.13) and the impact of financial costs on their book choices.

This chapter begins with a background sketch of why participants in this study read fiction. It goes on to examine the ways in which their personal characteristics and circumstances influence their fiction book choices in the public library. I conclude with a discussion of the chapter's findings and suggest what implications they have for public library services.

4.1 Why readers read fiction books

Participants in my study saw themselves as avid fiction readers. Most had read fiction since childhood and spoke of being raised in families where fiction reading was supported and encouraged. Participants read fiction for a variety of reasons. Some read it as a form of "escape" from daily life, others read it to gain new perspectives on issues

and yet others liked it for its literary craft and imaginative process. The excerpts below represent the sample range of views that participants shared with me on why they read fiction:

> Why do I read fiction? Because I love the imaginativeness of it, really. That anything can happen and it's not constrained as opposed to biography… (Hilary)

> I just love stories. …Books are my imagination and also puts things outside the circle for me so I get a new perspective on looking at things. (Quinn)

> You get fiction…[to] escape from whatever problems you have. I had a terrible marriage and I read all through my marriage, I just escaped into fiction. (Anna)

> Purely pleasure. Going into the imaginary, I suppose, of things I've never been able to do or allowed to do – race around with guns, chasing voluptuous women which Linda [wife] doesn't allow me to do! (Herbert Austin)

Research on information seeking has commonly portrayed the searcher as experiencing a sense of uncertainty (Krikelas, 1983), an "anomalous state of knowledge" (Belkin, 1980) or a "gap" in sense-making (Dervin, 1989). The searcher then turns to an information source in the hope of getting answers to solve his or her "problem". The insights shared by my participants, however, suggest that this is a rather narrow view of information seeking. Participants sought and read fiction, not because they hoped it would solve a pre-conceived "problem" or "need" but as a form of entertainment or escape. In her work on pleasure readers, Ross (1999) has strongly argued that not all information seeking arises from a problem. Rather, readers seek books "…for the pleasure anticipated in the reading itself" (Ross, 1999, p.785). The insights shared by my participants support this more flexible view of information seeking.

4.2 Role of mood in book choices

In her study of pleasure readers, Ross (2001b) has argued that "[t]he bedrock for choice in pleasure reading is the reader's mood" (p.86). However, this was not wholly borne out by the findings of my own study. I asked my participants if mood influenced their choice of fiction books in the public library and received a mixed response. Seven of the twelve

participants confirmed that mood did play a role in their choices, as the sample comments below show:

> Some genres I wouldn't go near to if I was feeling depressed. Because I know I'd probably come down a peg or two with them. (Tricia)

> I find like if I'm in a reflective or poor mood, I always like to try and read more comedic books… just to help me move me up. …[L]ike James Patterson, one or two of his books are more comedic than thrillers so I read them just to bring myself up if I'm in a lousy mood. (Quinn)

However, five other participants rejected the notion that mood played a role in their selection. The responses given included:

> I don't consciously think my mood affects my selection of books. …It's not, "Oh, I'm feeling happy, I'll go into the library". It's that my books are due, I go to return my books, I go to pick up new books. It doesn't feel as if my mood comes into it. (Dolores)

> Like many men, I'm not very focused on my own moods. …No, I would be much more guided by what I knew about the book and the writer rather than by my mood. (George)

The results of my study, then, do not fully support Ross's (2001b) claim that mood is the primary factor influencing fiction book choices. For some participants at least, factors other than mood were more important.

4.3 Influence of "what else is going on"

While not all participants agreed that their mood directly influenced them, most shared with me that events going on in their lives at any particular time (Ross, 1999) *did* have an impact on their book choices. Five participants, for example, reported that going on vacation influenced the type of fiction books they borrowed. They paid attention to details such as the book's storyline and physical size:

> Going on holiday does influence me because I don't want to take a big book with me. Not a big book since it's heavy to carry. And I don't want it to be too heavy – I mean too heavy in content, because I read that when I come back to normal life. There's enough time for heavy content. (Tricia)

Life events - such as becoming a new mother – also influenced book choices. Elinor shared with me that she selected a certain type of fiction book to read when breast-feeding her newborn:

> You need something that is easily interrupted and picked back up again and something that's very light that's useful for the breast-feeding mother. Something that's in episodes like a book of linked short stories… I liked to read Garrison Keillor while breast-feeding. I read *Lake Wobegon Days* while I was breast-feeding Louise. (Elinor)

For others, daily events occurring in the wider world influenced what they chose to read. The conflict in Afghanistan and the media coverage of the Taleban, for example, perked Anna's interest in borrowing fiction works by Afghan writers:

> Sometimes…what I have been reading lately has been influenced by what is going on in the world. Like reading *A Thousand Splendid Suns* [by Khaled Hosseini]…it's about life in Afghanistan under the Taleban. …And I think that had been influenced by things I've seen on the news about the Taleban, you know, I want to know more about these people and what they think and that, and so I read fiction…about it. (Anna)

It was evident that "what else is going on" (Ross, 1999, p.790) in participants' lives had both a cognitive and affective dimension, and both aspects impacted book choices. Hilary, for example, shared with me that she did not want to read fiction stories involving family break-ups as this was a painful subject for her. She had encountered such experiences in her own life "…and it's just not something I want to be reading more about". Another participant, Kelster, focused on reading certain kinds of fiction books when experiencing stress in her life:

> [I]f I'm undergoing…like a lot of change at work or something like I've moved to a new home, I might read something that's a little lighter or I might read crime. ...[S]omething that's, you know, problem-solving or quite light as opposed to something that's a bit heavier. (Kelster)

The insights shared by my participants strongly support Ross's (1999, p.790) argument that book choices are influenced by events going on in readers' lives.

4.4 Personal values and reading tastes

"Values" – one of the elements identified in Williamson's (1998) ecological model as having a bearing on information behaviour, has been defined in the dictionary as a "principle, standard or quality considered worthwhile or desirable" ("values", 2006, n.p.). A person's "values" may take many form including social, cultural, moral or political values and Williamson's (1998) own study discusses the concept in terms of social and cultural values. In my interviews, there was some evidence that the value judgment that fiction readers' made on books influenced their reading choices. Anna, for example, informed me that "I don't read war stories cos I'm a pacifist and I don't read war". Similarly, Tricia explained that she used to read a lot of detective stories "…but now I don't like them because they're violent and I don't like violence. …I have very low tolerance for even the idea of violence". Another participant, Hilary, mentioned that she often borrowed fiction books from the public library for an elderly friend but had to be careful not to select books with obscene language as this upset her friend. Hilary herself avoided reading fiction books that centered on paedophiles or drugs, explaining that "I'm selective about the alternative world I create".

Along with their personal values, participants' reading tastes guided what they chose to borrow and read from the public library. I asked participants to give me examples of authors or genres that they enjoyed reading and they responded with an eclectic range. Classic authors such as Charles Dickens and Jane Austen were mentioned as were crime writers such as Elmore Leonard, mystery writers such as P.D. James and Patricia Cornwell, fantasy writers such as Raymond Feist, thriller writers such as James Patterson, historical writers such as Philippa Gregory and Colin Falconer, and contemporary writers such as Ian McEwan, Alice Sebold and Jodi Picoult. A number of New Zealand writers were also mentioned including Lloyd Jones, Emily Perkins, C.K. Stead and Fiona Farrell. I asked participants what appealed to them about their favourite authors or genres and again, received a wide range of responses. Quality of prose was important to some participants while for others, character, storyline, setting or tone determined the book's appeal. In her ground-breaking study of readers' advisory services, Saricks (2005) had argued that fiction readers "…are usually not looking for a book on a certain subject.

They want a book with a particular 'feel'" (p.40). Saricks (2005) identified four elements of appeal that made up a book's "feel": (1) pacing; (2) characterization; (3) story line; and (4) frame. The insights shared by my participants strongly support Sarick's argument that fiction readers tend to be drawn to one or more of these appeal factors, when selecting books. The table below provides examples of how the insights shared by my participants map to Sarick's appeal factors.

Table 1: Selecting fiction books by appeal factors

Sarick's Appeal Elements	Examples from Interviews
PACING	• Enjoys fast-paced books by Jeffrey Archer: "…he has an amazing way of writing a book that I can't put down." (Herbert Austin) • "I enjoy books of action and description". (George)
CHARACTERIZATION	• "I need my protagonist to be a sympathetic character". (Elinor) • "I just love…identifying with characters…" (Kelster) • "I like the weird and wonderful now and again". (Anna)
STORY LINE	• "I enjoy relationship stories, particularly stories that have a twist at the end". (Hilary) • "I like things where you could see it happening, where there is a story to be told, perhaps there's a story that needs to be told". (Zoe) • "I just liked…stories about people growing up and about their families, their friends, their ups and their downs and over their life span…" (Tricia)
FRAME *(i.e. setting, atmosphere, background, tone)*	• Enjoys books with "a satirical or humourous edge", a "comedic component" or those with "black humour." (Frank) • Enjoys Colin Falconer's novels for their historical setting and atmosphere: "…it's really fascinating – the jewelry, what they eat, how they dress, the way they have to get themselves organized to go off with the sultan for the night…yup, that sort of stuff, very good!" (Felicity)

While my initial focus was to find out how participants' reading tastes impacted their book choices, an interesting sub-theme that emerged from the interviews was that readers who liked specific genres did *not* read indiscriminately from those genres. Quinn, for example, was an avid reader of science fiction but avoided books by the sci-fi author, Isaac Asimov because "…the ideas [he] present[s] are just too hard to get into. The story line just doesn't grab me". Another participant, Anna, who also enjoyed science fiction, informed me that

> …[o]ne lot of science fiction that I don't read is about time travel. I simply cannot believe that you can flip through to the future or back into the past… So I just don't bother with books about traveling through time. (Anna)

Hilary, an avid reader of the romance genre, initially read *Mills & Boon* novels but avoided them after awhile because "[with] *Mills & Boon*…we're talking about tame. They got to be very tame…because everyone was very sedate, very prosaic and just so, so formulaic". Hilary explained that she eventually moved on to select romance novels from the *Silhouette Desire* series because these had more "feisty" characters that satisfied her reading needs. Frank was another participant who was selective within the genre he read. While he generally avoided genre fiction – believing them to be "too predictable" – he enjoyed crime novels but would only select those he deemed to be of high quality such as Elmore Leonard's. The insights shared by my participants suggest that it is not enough for LIS researchers to collect data on the types of genres that fiction readers like reading – as has frequently been done in survey-type studies (e.g. Spiller, 1980; Davidson & Cave, 1990). More needs to be done to uncover what readers like or dislike about the genres they read and *why*. My findings here support the earlier results of Rothbauer (2004a) and Kofmel (2002), who found that the reader groups they studied were selective within the genres they read.

4.5 Lifestyle influences

Williamson's (1998) ecological model identifies "lifestyle" as another element that impacts a person's information-seeking behaviour. This was clearly evident in my study. I asked participants to describe for me, a typical day in their life and how the selection

and reading of fiction books fitted into their lifestyles. The predominant theme that emerged was that most participants led busy lives. Time- or rather, the lack of it- played an influential role in how they selected fiction books in the public library. Elinor and Zoe, for example, were two busy mothers whose young children often accompanied them when they visited the public library. The need to tend to their children left neither participant much time to browse in the library, as the following excerpts show:

> My typical visit to the public library involves my children being there. We go straight to the children's section, I settle them down with a book and then I skive off *[laughs]* and go and look at the adult books until I hear them screaming and then I go back! …I have to be quite quick with my choices because I need to get back to them. (Elinor)

> It's usually because I'm in a hurry…he's [two year-old son] had enough and wants to go home. Cos we usually do my stuff last, you know, cos we go and get his books, his DVDs and it's like, "You just sit in the buggy and eat some pretzels" while I rrggghhh!!! *[uses hands to demonstrate rushing motion grabbing books]*…that always works! (Zoe)

Because they had so little time to browse, Elinor and Zoe tended to pre-plan what they would borrow before visiting the library, drawing their ideas from sources such as the Internet, newspaper reviews and recommendations from friends (these topics are covered in greater detail in later chapters). Both relied heavily on the public library's online catalogue which they accessed remotely from home, to confirm book holdings and to place online reservations for items out on loan. Using these strategies then, they had the assurance of knowing the items they wanted were available when they next visited the public library – which saved time. Both Elinor and Zoe *did* browse when they visited their libraries in person but limited this activity to specific areas such as the "New Books" display. Neither had time to browse the main "A to Z" fiction shelves where books were arranged by authors' surnames.

The experiences reported above were not peculiar to Elinor and Zoe. Seven other readers whom I interviewed similarly spoke of leading busy lifestyles with work and study pressures. Like Elinor and Zoe, most planned in advance what they would borrow before visiting their libraries, drawing their ideas from a wide range of sources. When they *did*

visit their libraries in person, browsing was often limited to specific areas such as the "New Books" display or the returns' trolley.

A busy lifestyle, then, influenced the way in which many participants in the study searched for fiction books in the public library. At the other end of the scale was a participant with much time on her hands. Anna, a 68 year-old retiree, informed me during our interview that "I'm always looking for things to do because retirement is boring". Anna lived within a five-minute walk from her community library which she frequented and browsed at a leisurely pace. Tellingly, she was the only participant in my study who reported browsing the "A to Z" shelves for fiction books – in part because she had the time and because it was an activity she enjoyed: "I just start at the "A"s and wander around…" Anna's strategy of browsing through the shelves was also influenced by another lifestyle factor: computers and the Internet played a minimal role in her daily life. While she had Internet access at home and did occasionally surf the Web, Anna shared with me that, "I'm not very good with computers… I don't go clicking on the computer…" Unlike Elinor and Zoe, she did not use the public library's online catalogue at all, preferring to browse the fiction shelves in her own time and to consult library staff for help if an item could not be located. The few examples elaborated here suggest that fiction readers' lifestyles *do* have a bearing on the search strategies they use to locate fiction books in the public library.

4.6 Financial considerations

Williamson's (1998) ecological model identifies "socio-economic circumstance" as another element that influences a person's information seeking behaviour. While this is undoubtedly true, I did not explore this element directly in my study for the following reason. My study consisted of only twelve participants and the small sample size meant I could not claim categorically that some participants selected fiction books in a certain way, and others in another way because of their socio-economic background. Yu and O'Brien (1999) have also highlighted the limitations of studies that have attempted to do so. They point out that:

> [i]n reality, reading habits are not simply determined by any single factor…
> [D]ifferent factors often compound in complex ways within individual
> readers, resulting in highly individualistic approaches to fiction reading.
> Consequently, it is not uncommon for…readers of the same occupation to
> demonstrate very different reading habits. (p.37)

As a variation to Williamson's (1998) concept, then, I limit my discussion to fee-based services in the public library and participants' perceptions of them. It became very clear during the interviews that fee-based services had a bearing on how participants selected fiction books in the library. Two issues in particular generated much sentiment and comments from participants: (i) charges for fiction "Best Sellers" and (ii) charges for reserving fiction books.

Fiction books belonging to the public library's "Best Sellers" collection are items with high patron demand. At the time of my interviews (June – July, 2008), libraries belonging to the Wellington City Libraries network charged borrowers $5 per "Best Seller" item, for a seven-day loan (see Wellington City Libraries, 2008e). While many participants in my study expressed an interest in reading fiction books from this collection, they were deterred from doing so by the cost involved and the brief loan period. The comments below are a sample of participants' views:

> I object to paying for books so I don't often get the best sellers. (Elinor)

> The problem is if it's 500 pages long, it's not a good idea [to borrow the book] because you've got to finish them within a week … Otherwise, the overdue fees are much more. I think it's $1 a day as opposed to 60¢. And then you have to pay to get it out as well because it's a popular book. (Felicity)

> Since I retired, I have to think about whether or not I should pay $5 just to read a book. (Anna)

> I do occasionally [take out a best seller] but generally I don't…when you're on a limited budget, the cost is too expensive. (Quinn)

The only participant to speak in favour of the best sellers was Zoe. She saw it as a convenient display where she was assured of a "good read". She explained that the financial cost of borrowing from this collection did not deter her as it was cheaper than

buying the book: "I figure – well, even if I have to pay three days' worth of fines, I think it's $1 a day, it's still $8. It's still cheaper than paying $38 for the book. So yeah, I do use it".

Zoe's view was the exception in the study, however. Most of my other participants hesitated to select fiction books from this collection. While they were reluctant to do so, some looked to the "Best Seller" display for clues on what the "good books" were, and then proceeded to see if they could obtain a similar but *free* copy on the main "A to Z" shelves. This was a strategy used by both Dolores and Tricia:

> I look at those ["Best Sellers" display] and I don't like paying that amount of money so often I get the name of an author from there and then go and look on the [main] shelves to see if there are any other books there. (Dolores)

> I look at them ["Best Sellers" display] but I won't take them out on principle because I don't believe in paying that much money for a book for a week. But sometimes it'll lead me to go back to the catalogue to see if there's a free copy. (Tricia)

Financial considerations, then, influenced the ways in which participants searched for, and selected fiction books in the public library. This point was again evident when participants shared with me their views on reservation charges. At the time of the study, adult fiction readers were charged $2 for reserving a book or for transferring a book from another branch library to their own, for pick-up (see Wellington City Libraries, 2008e). Because each best seller book had another copy available that was free-of-charge, participants tended to try and borrow the *free* copy, which they often had to reserve because of the book's popularity. While there was still a $2 charge involved for the reservation, participants like Elinor, Anna, Quinn and Hilary were willing to pay for the service as it provided a more economical way of getting a "good book" compared to borrowing its best seller version at $5.

Not all participants felt kindly towards the reservation service, however. Tricia, who objected to paying for best sellers, similarly voiced her displeasure at having to pay for a

reserved book: "…on principle, I almost never reserve a book now because I'm loathed to give them all that money they ask for. Loath! I loath it!" Another participant, Kelster, also refused to reserve books, deeming the service too costly. Her strategy was to check the library's online catalogue constantly to ascertain when items were available: "I check where it's available, where it's at and if it's not there, I keep checking until it's returned". If she had an activity planned that took her to a different suburb – for example, visiting a friend – Kelster took the opportunity to visit that suburb's library as well. Using this strategy then, she was able to access fiction books from other community branches without paying reservation charges. The examples highlighted here suggest that financial considerations do influence how fiction readers search for, and select, fiction books in the public library. While socio-economic circumstances undoubtedly had some influence on whether participants used fee-based services or not, usage cannot be attributed to this factor alone. Some participants objected to fee-based services on principle, believing that public library services should be free.

4.7 Discussion

The insights shared by my participants suggest that fiction readers' personal characteristics and circumstances do influence how they select fiction books in the public library. Readers' moods or "whatever else is going on" in their lives impacted readers to varying degrees along with the personal values they hold, the reading preferences they have and the lifestyles they lead. Financial considerations, in terms of whether to pay for fee-based services or not, also influenced how fiction readers select their books. What implications do the findings reported here have for public library services?

(i) Assist selection by mood

For a start, it is clear that the selection of fiction books involves not just a cognitive but an affective dimension. Because some readers do select fiction books based on mood, more should be done by public libraries to assist readers in this process. By and large, fiction books in public libraries are arranged alphabetically by authors' surname or genre. Neither of these categories assists the reader who searches by mood (van Riel, 1999).

Public libraries can help by ensuring that the book lists they provide readers – both in print and online- include information on mood. For instance, book lists can be organized by "happy and sad endings" or by "upbeat and cynical tones" (Ross & Chelton, 2001, p.54). Periodic book displays can also feature mood-related themes such as "uplifting stories", "dark humour" or "hard hitting novels". Recent initiatives such as the *Whichbook.net* database also allow fiction readers to search for books by mood (Opening the Book Ltd., 2008). Librarians should keep abreast of such developments and bring them to the attention of fiction readers – for example, by providing links to these freely available resources from their library's own website. Of course, not all books featured on such databases will be locally available for library patrons to borrow. Interlibrary-loan services can be offered to readers who are keen to pursue this option.

(ii) Assist selection by "what's going on" in readers' lives

The findings of my study also strongly suggest that life events or whatever else is going on in readers' lives (Ross, 1999) influence the type of fiction books they select. Public libraries need to pay more attention to this phenomenon. Currently, displays for fiction tend to be limited to common ones such as "New Books" or "Best Sellers". There is scope for public libraries to offer thematic displays that better reflect the "rhythms of life" (Holt, 2001, p.283). These could include fiction books that deal with common life events / cycles such as marriage, parenthood, moving to a new place, bereavement and so on. Thematic displays could also reflect "what's going on" in the wider world – for example, novels with a specific political or geographical setting (Armstrong, 2001). While smaller libraries may not have the space to run such displays, librarians can still assist readers by other means. Thematic book lists, for example, can be made available to readers in print form (Saricks, 2005) or through the library's website (Hoffert, 2003).

(jjj) Assist selection by values and appeal factors

The results of my study also showed that fiction readers' personal values – in terms of the value judgments they impose on books - influenced their decision to read a book or not.

While some readers do avoid books on the basis of violent or sexual content, or strong language, there is probably little that public libraries can or should do, to "warn" readers of such books. While warning labels are common enough in the music, television and film industries, Pattee (2007) makes the point that they should have no place in public libraries:

> [B]y forcing a reader to accept any prejudgment - of "cleanliness" or "dirtiness" - of expression, we are playing a dangerous game with reader rights. …[L]abeling material on behalf of readers and using language that strongly implies a moral prejudgment of the materials' content is just wrong. …[R]atings labels can and will be inconsistently applied… (p.31)

Rather than assigning warning labels to books then, a more conducive solution may be to bring to the attention of readers, books that they *do* want to read. Ross and Chelton (2001) suggest, for instance, that fiction readers who like reading non-violent mysteries may appreciate a "Bloodless Mysteries" book list. There needs to be more dialogue with fiction readers at the ground-level to find out what their needs and preferences are. Conducting focus group interviews will be useful in this instance (Hutton & Walters, 1988).

My study, confirming Sarick's (2005), also found that fiction readers tended to select books by *appeal* factors rather than subject. Public libraries can help by improving the depth of their readers' advisory sources to readers. A common failing, as pointed out by Hoffert (2003) and Baker (1993), is that public libraries tend to supply book lists to readers, with *no* annotations. Without knowing what the books are about, "…patrons can't make sense of the books and will have to go elsewhere for the information they need to make any choices" (Hoffert, 2003, p.45). As fiction readers tend to select books by appeal factors such as pacing, characterization and storyline (Saricks, 2005), it is timely that public libraries provide annotated book lists that incorporate these elements.

(iv) Align services to support different lifestyles

The findings of my study also showed that fiction readers' lifestyles impacted the ways in which they searched for, and selected fiction books in the public library. Busy lifestyles, in particular, limited the extent to which fiction readers were able to browse for books

when they visited the public library. There is much that public libraries can do to assist such readers. Ensuring that book displays are located in strategically visible and accessible areas of the library –for example, near the circulation desk - will assist those who browse in a hurry (Baker & Wallace, 2002). In addition, as busy readers increasingly rely on online sources as part of their search strategy, public libraries can play a proactive role by customizing services for them. One possibility is to ask fiction readers to complete a "reading profile" and to then send them email alerts when new books matching their profile arrive (Hoffert, 2003; Armstrong, 2001). Columbus Metropolitan Library and King County Library in the U.S. offer this service to their patrons (Hoffert, 2003; Holt, 2001). Newer technologies such as RSS (Really Simple Syndicate) feeds can also be used to alert readers to new fiction titles (Kajewski, 2007) and some public libraries have begun to offer this service (e.g. Christchurch City Libraries, 2008; DeKalb County Public Library, 2008). But while there is much that public libraries can do to assist the tech-savvy and those who lead busy lifestyles, there is a corresponding need to recognize that other library users lead quite different lifestyles, with different information needs. In particular, Hider (2008) reminds us that "…the internet revolution is not homogenous – different people have different levels of information literacy requiring different services" (p.39). Fiction readers such as my study participant, Anna, continue to prefer print sources or direct staff assistance, over online ones. In providing services to fiction readers, then, public libraries need to ensure that they cater to different groups - irrespective of background or lifestyle.

(v) Subsidize fee-based services
The findings of my study also revealed that fee-based services impacted the ways in which fiction readers selected their books. Most of the participants in my study refrained from borrowing books from the "Best Sellers" collection because they deemed the cost too expensive and the loan period too short. While in reality of course, public libraries have finite funding and are often forced to recover part of their costs from library patrons, there may be scope to offer fee-based services at a *subsidized* rate to financially vulnerable groups. For example, retirees or those on Community Services Card could be

offered a reduced rate for best sellers where the blanket charge at the moment is $5 (see Wellington City Libraries, 2008e). More research needs to be done as well to find out – from the viewpoint of library users - how well fee-based services are serving them. Baker and Wallace (2002) commented six years ago that "[n]o one is currently studying, in an in-depth fashion, the length of time it takes public libraries to fill reserves" (p.109). I have not been able to find any empirical study myself on this issue, nor on what users think of the "best sellers" charges. Public libraries should consider surveying or interviewing their patrons to find out how well fee-based services are meeting their needs. Questions that should be examined include: Who are the library patrons currently making use of fee-based services? Are they of a particular income group? Are there potentially interested groups who do not use the services at the moment because of financial constraints?

This chapter has examined in some detail the role of personal characteristics and circumstances in influencing book choices. The next chapter moves "beyond" the reader to look at how family, friends and book club impact book choices.

Chapter 5

The influences of personal networks on

fiction book choices

This chapter addresses Research Question 2: "What influences, if any, do personal networks such as family, friends and book clubs have on adult fiction readers' book choices in the public library?" For the purposes of this study, "personal networks" is taken to mean the network of people whom fiction readers *personally* know – that is, their family and friends, and the peers they meet through their book clubs. Other people who may potentially influence readers but whom they may not personally know- such as library staff - will be examined in a later chapter. Williamson's (1998) ecological model identifies two types of personal networks: "intimate personal networks" comprising family and friends, and "wider personal networks" comprising clubs, churches and voluntary organizations (pp.35-36). Both types will be examined in this chapter. I look firstly at the role that family and friends (intimate personal networks) play in fiction readers' book choices. I then examine the impact of book clubs (wider personal networks) on fiction readers. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the study's findings and suggests what implications they have for LIS research in general, and library services, in particular.

5.1 Fiction readers in participants' everyday life

In keeping with my study's overall commitment to understand fiction readers in the context of their own lives, I begun by asking participants if the people in their everyday life – that is, their family and friends – were fiction readers. It was important to establish this, as participants whose family or friends are non-readers will obviously not be able to rely on such sources for book ideas. All twelve participants reported knowing someone in their daily life who shared their interest in reading fiction.   Examples given included spouses, siblings, parents, friends, flatmates and work colleagues. Individual

circumstances, of course, varied – some knew fiction readers in both their home and work environments; others came from families with little interest in reading fiction but had friends or colleagues who did. Overall, however, all twelve participants knew someone personally who shared their interest in reading fiction.

5.2 Influences of family and friends on book choices

Participants were asked if they looked to family or friends for ideas on what fiction books to read. All twelve participants confirmed that they did, but were selective in whom they looked to. *Trust* appeared to be an important factor – participants overwhelmingly said they turned to family or friends who "knew my taste" and whose views could therefore be trusted. Herbert Austin, for example, relied on the recommendations of two close friends who shared his interest in detective novels: "I don't think I've ever read a book from either of them that they've said was very, very good and not thoroughly enjoyed [it]. So I trust them implicitly". Likewise, Zoe was inclined to trust the views of family and friends, whose past recommendations she had enjoyed: "You get to know who are the people whom, you know, if they recommend something to you and you enjoy it, they recommend something else, you think, 'Well, I liked that first one so I'll try that'". In Zoe's case, her trusted source was her mother-in-law, whom she often traded books with. Kelster was another participant for whom a trusted source was important. She explained that she would turn to specific family members or friends for recommendations if they were knowledgeable in the fiction area she wanted to read:

> …[I]f you were really hot on say, stories about dogs and things involving
> dogs and I wanted to read something good about dogs, I'd come and see you.
> …[A]nd if you say, 'Look, Kelster, this one's really good…', I'd take your
> word for it because I know you like that area. (Kelster)

Dolores was also selective in whom she looked to for recommendations. She tended to trust friends who were "avid fiction readers", rationalizing that they had a wider pool of knowledge from which to make recommendations, rather than friends who read sporadically. Another participant, George, would only trust the recommendations of family or friends if they were compatible to his own taste: "...I would judge it [book

recommendation] by what I knew about that person's interests and enjoyment – will that be likely to correspond with mine or not".

I was not able to discern from my interview data if participants generally preferred the recommendations of family members over friends, or vice versa. Three participants tended to consult family members rather than friends, four others relied mainly on friends and the remaining five relied on both family and friends' recommendations. The common thread across all interviews, however, was that participants looked to people they trusted. This largely confirms the results of Ross's (1999) study which found that for pleasure readers, "[r]ecommendations are important but only from a trusted source with tastes known to be compatible [to the reader's]…" (p.789). My findings also support the results of an empirical study which looked at the notion of "trust" in information sources, among a group of software engineers and users of e-commerce websites. The authors of the study – Hertzum, Andersen, Andersen and Hansen (2002) found that "…trust is…fundamental to people's assessment and choice of people… sources" (p.593).

5.3 Rejecting recommendations from family and friends

At the same time that participants looked to family and friends for ideas on what to read, they were quick to reject the recommendations of those whose tastes they deemed too incompatible to their own. Herbert Austin, for example, did not rely on his wife's recommendations: "…she doesn't influence the things I read because we have very diverse interests in reading. …Historical novels [which his wife enjoyed reading] do nothing for me so I would say that she doesn't influence me". Likewise, Zoe explained that her mother read a very specific type of fiction - "historical Victorian Jewish family sagas!" - which did not interest her at all, so she did not look to her mother for recommendations. For some participants, it was not merely a difference in genre taste that prompted them to avoid the books suggested by family or friends. Recommendations were also rejected if appeal factors such as style and language were incompatible – as Hilary explained:

I have a friend who's tried for years to get me to read certain books…I couldn't be too rude and just say no *[laughs]*. But I did try it [book recommended by friend] and it just didn't appeal to me but I *knew* that it wouldn't. …it wasn't a style that interested me. (Hilary)

Other reasons given for rejecting family and friends' recommendations included fiction books that were:

- "too esoteric" (Elinor - rejecting friend's recommendation)
- "too light" (Anna – rejecting teenage daughter's recommendation)
- "too complex" (Felicity – rejecting adult daughter's recommendation)
- "too emotional" (George – rejecting wife's recommendation)

The views expressed by participants reveal an interesting point, which is that family and friends are *not* always relied on as sources of information, even if they are conveniently available to the information seeker. Studies in LIS have tended to claim that people seek out family and friends as preferred sources of information because "…interpersonal sources…are typically easier and more readily accessible than the most authoritative printed sources" (Cave, 2007, p.153). While this may be true, it was not wholly borne out by the findings of my own study. My participants had readily accessible sources in the form of family and friends but they did not automatically turn to such sources for book recommendations. Family and friends whose suggestions were deemed too incompatible were bypassed for more "trustworthy" ones. The findings of my study support Johnson's (2004) claim that the use of other people as sources of information is *not* always a "least effort" option, motivated by convenience. Johnson's (2004) own study, which examined the information behaviour of a Mongolian community found that "…respondents…take great pains to scan their networks for the best sources they feel will help them, rather than those most readily at hand" (n.p.). The results of my study have some semblance to Johnson's. In searching for ideas on fiction books to read, participants looked to family and friends whose views they trusted, rather than those most conveniently available.

5.4 *Incidentally acquired information*

While participants actively sought the views of family and friends on what to read, sometimes the information acquired was *incidental.* Throughout my interviews, participants shared with me instances where they obtained book ideas from family and friends, without purposively seeking such recommendations. Felicity articulated this point to me:

> I don't actually say [to family or friends], "Oh, I'm looking for a good book – what do you suggest?" or "Have you read anything good lately?" It might just happen…like Diane [friend] was around here last night - …and she said, "Oh, I've just read this great book lately, you know" so it's just all part of this general conversation, really… (Felicity)

Felicity said she often picked up good fiction titles just by engaging in everyday life conversations, without explicitly asking anyone for recommendations. Other participants also spoke of instances when book ideas came to them incidentally. Hilary, for example, said that she often obtained ideas on what to read just by being in her workplace's staff room. As she had many colleagues who read fiction during lunch, Hilary often acquired book ideas just by glancing around at what others were reading. The views shared by my participants suggest that the process of selecting fiction books in public libraries can involve both a purposive and incidental dimension. Family and friends may be actively relied on as sources of information but their influences can also be incidental. The findings of my study support Williamson's (1998) observation that "…people find information unexpectedly as they engage in other activities" (p.24).

While family and friends impacted participants, both purposively and incidentally, they were not the only people to do so. This chapter looks now at the role that book clubs play in fiction readers' book choices. Before proceeding, a definition of book club is useful. "Book club" is taken in this study to mean "…a collection of readers who get together regularly to discuss books" (Book Browse, 2008, n.p.)

5.5 Reasons for joining book clubs

All twelve participants in my study belonged to book clubs that met in person to discuss fiction books. When asked what prompted them to join their book clubs, participants said they wanted to expand their reading by obtaining book ideas from fellow readers. Quinn, for example, felt that the range of books he normally chose for himself had become too predictable, and joining a book club would expand his options: "I…decided that I needed to try and get out of the areas, read a bit more broadly to other areas I had never looked at…" Similarly, Anna had become bored with her reading choices and joined her book club in the hope that it "…might give me more interesting things to read".

Significantly, ten of the twelve participants also mentioned joining book clubs for *affective* reasons – to meet new people, to develop social ties with fellow readers, to share a common interest in books – as the following excerpts show:

> Partly for social reasons and partly to get ideas about books. … I wanted to expand my network…to meet new people but also to get new ideas about books. …[C]os I hadn't been reading novels for *ages* and I wanted to…get good ideas about who [and] what new authors I should be reading. (Dolores)

> I was new in Wellington, I wanted to meet people and it was an interest that I have which is books and fiction. …I studied English [at university] and had a lot of friends who discussed books…so just finding new people to carry on doing that with. (Frank)

> It's a book group in my church and I decided that I liked books. I wanted to get to know some of the women better and so I went along to the book club. (Tricia)

In joining their book clubs, then, participants were motivated by cognitive reasons – to extend their reading knowledge, as well as by affective ones – to meet and socialize with other readers. The perspectives shared by my participants is consistent with Michel's (2005) finding that "people sources" are often relied on by information seekers for both the factual *and* affective support they provide.

5.6 How book clubs select fiction books to read

Participants in my study came from seven different book clubs which varied in how they were run. Some belonged to clubs in which members took turns to host the group in their

homes, and to select books for discussion. Others belonged to clubs that operated more as a "book sharing" scheme whereby members brought their own books to the club and placed them into a common pool to be shared and borrowed by fellow members. One library-sponsored club selected books recommended by librarians, with inputs from club members. Five of the clubs operated from the homes of members, one was church based and another met in the public library, facilitated by a librarian.

5.7 Influences of book clubs on readers' book choices

Participants were asked what impact, if any, their book clubs had on them as fiction readers. Herbert Austin was the only participant who felt his book club had minimal impact on him, as he joined his club for purely social reasons – to keep his wife company: "…they [book club] read stuff that I wouldn't in the least be interested in. I don't go to the book club for reading material, I go purely as Linda's partner, socially". All the other eleven participants in the study, however, spoke well of their clubs, which they said had greatly broadened their reading choices. Prior to joining her book club, for example, Elinor had mainly read fiction works by female New Zealand writers but her book club exposed her to new interests:

> …[T]hat's a good thing about a book club. Some of the books I never would have chosen and yet have found to be real great. Like *The Life of Pi* [by Yann Martel], never would have read *The Life of Pi*, from the jacket with the tiger. I'm not into allegories at all but I just absolutely adored it. (Elinor)

Elinor's sentiments were echoed by other participants in the study. Frank said his book club helped to put him in touch with British authors where he had previously read only American and New Zealand ones. In Zoe's case, her book club helped to move her away from mystery thrillers and exposed her to more contemporary fiction. George too, spoke of the benefits of joining his book club because it had introduced him to New Zealand writers such as C.K. Stead and Fiona Farrell, whom he enjoyed reading.

I asked participants if being in a book club influenced the type of fiction books they chose to read *outside* their clubs, and again, the answer was an emphatic "yes". Time and

again, participants reported that authors they had been introduced to in their book clubs generated their interests in reading other works by the same authors. This in turn influenced the kind of fiction books they borrowed from their public libraries. Kelster, for example, reported that a book club member had introduced her group to a fiction book by Michael Chabon – an author she normally bypassed because she did not read satirical fiction. However, having tried the recommended book, which she enjoyed, Kelster decided to borrow two other titles by the same author from her public library. Other participants in the study recounted similar experiences:

> …[I]f I read something within the book club that was good, then you'd look for that author again. …[T]here was the odd book that we read and I went and then looked for another book by that same author in the public library. (Felicity)

> One of them [book club member] came along and introduced us to an author and a type of book that we all said we really, really enjoyed. …[S]ince then, I've thought about going and looking at getting out another of the author's book. (Dolores)

Apart from introducing them to new authors, participants in my study said their book clubs prompted them to think more carefully about the types of fiction books they borrowed from the public library. For some participants, this meant being more discerning in their selections; for others it meant being more open to trying new types of books:

> I don't think I've read a thriller since I've been in the book club because I do think more about what I'm reading. …It [book club] has sort of taken me out of my little comfort zone…I'm taking more time to look for something rather than just…grabbing a couple of thrillers. (Anna)

> I've actually increased those groups [of fiction] that I generally read. ..I'm going more outside of those now than I was prior to joining the book club. (Quinn)

5.8 Rejection of book club recommendations

While participants overwhelmingly said their book clubs benefited them as fiction readers, this did not mean they liked or accepted all the recommendations that came their way. Participants' reading preferences - in terms of intrinsically knowing what they liked or disliked - continued to play a mediating role in their book choices. While book clubs generally made participants more receptive to new types of books, some recommendations were rejected because they intrinsically did not appeal to participants:

> …[I]t's a struggle a bit [to read some book club recommendations]. Some of these historical romances are quite thick; never seem to have an end. Not my cup of tea! (Frank)

> Yeah, particularly my book club, like there are some people's recommendations that I think *[puts on a grimacing tone]* "Oh, yeah…"… I'm thinking of one girl in particular -…the books she likes are very heavy and deep and I find them quite hard-going so I tend to steer away from them. (Zoe)

> [S]omeone in my book club gave me…she really felt that in my lifetime, I should read a *Mills & Boon* and it's still sitting there *[laughs]*, I read about two pages and thought, "Oh no, spare me…" (Dolores)

The findings of my study confirm the results of Bessman Taylor's (2007) and Rehberg Sedo's (2003) studies, both of which found that book club members continued to read a variety of fiction books *outside* those prescribed by their clubs. It can be said then, that while book clubs *do* influence how fiction readers select their books in the public library, it is not the only factor at play. Personal reading preferences continued to play a mediating role in readers' book choices.

5.9 Reflections on using personal networks

I concluded this section of my study by asking participants how they felt about consulting other people – that is, their family, friends and book clubs – for ideas on the fiction books to borrow. In particular, I wanted to know what participants thought were the advantages or limitations of doing so. All twelve participants said there were benefits in consulting other people and significantly, none pointed to any limitations. Dolores's statement sums

up the views expressed by other participants: "I think it would be a lot more limiting if I didn't talk to them [other people] because…a recommendation can take me to a whole new author. …I don't see it as a limitation". While participants did not always like the fiction books recommended by their family, friends or book club, they did not see this as a limitation – acknowledging that differences in taste existed among readers. As Zoe said, philosophically: "I guess it's like anything, you have friends whom you have common tastes in clothes or common tastes in food – it's the same with books".

5.10 Discussion

What, if anything, do the insights shared by participants in this chapter tells us about the role of personal networks in fiction readers' book choices? The findings suggest that adult fiction readers' personal networks – that is, their family, friends and book clubs - *do* influence how they select fiction books in the public library. Participants in my study value the opinions of people they know and trust, and turn to such sources for recommendations. At the same time, their choices on what to borrow and read were mediated by their own reading tastes. Recommendations that were deemed too incompatible were rejected. Participants did not see this as a drawback, accepting that differences in taste existed among readers. Overall, participants spoke well of their personal networks and believed they contributed positively to their experiences as fiction readers. In the course of the interviews, several themes also emerged which have implications for LIS research in general, and public library services, in particular. They are discussed below.

(i) Seeking trusted sources rather than convenience

The findings reveal some interesting dimensions about the information seeking process. In seeking ideas on what fiction books to read, participants relied on the recommendations of people they trusted, rather than those most conveniently available. Family, friends and book club peers whose views were deemed too incompatible to participants' own were bypassed as information sources, even when they were conveniently available. The results of my study suggest, then, that in using other people

as sources of information, information seekers are not always motivated by convenience or the principle of "least effort"- as is often assumed in LIS studies (Case, 2007, p.153). Factors other than convenience also influence why certain people are consulted and others not – highlighting the need to understand *context* in information seeking. As Johnson (2004) rightly points out: "…the choice of a person as a source of information is complex and needs to be investigated at a more finely-grained level to determine what factors affect who is chosen and under what circumstances" (n.p.). Studies on fiction readers – indeed, studies on *any* group of information seekers - need to pay more attention to the influence of context, rather than assume *a priori* that convenience shapes information behaviour.

(ii) Support serendipitous encounters

My study also found that while participants actively sought the opinions of family, friends and book club peers for ideas on what to read, at times the information came to them incidentally. Casual conversations with family and friends, for example, may lead to book ideas, even though no recommendation was sought on the part of participants. Thus, the process of selecting fiction books may involve both purposive and incidental influences. Studies in LIS have tended to depict information seeking as purposive – to close cognitive "gaps", "uncertainties" or an "anomalous state-of-knowledge" – while overlooking its incidental dimension (e.g. Dervin, 1989; Krikelas, 1983, Belkin, 1980). In order to understand information seeking more fully, attention also needs to be paid to instances where information is incidentally acquired, rather than purposively sought, as argued by Williamson (1998). This has implications for library services as well. If fiction readers select their books in part because they accidentally encounter useful information, then public libraries have a role to play by ensuring that the services they offer support serendipitous encounters. The provision of clearly visible book displays, for instance, enhances browsability and can assist fiction readers who select books by serendipity (Ross & Chelton, 2001).

(iii) Promote collaboration among readers

The findings reported in this chapter also indicate quite clearly that fiction readers value the opinions of fellow readers. Participants in my study looked to family members, friends and book club peers for ideas on what to read, although not all recommendations were accepted. As fiction readers clearly value the opinion of fellow readers, there is scope for public libraries to play a bridging role by bringing the views of readers together. This would particularly benefit readers whose own personal networks lack fiction readers and who therefore cannot rely on such networks for book ideas. One promising way in which public libraries can bring the views of fiction readers to each other is by offering online book groups. While library-sponsored book clubs that meet in-person are common enough (Armstrong, 2001), online ones are comparatively rare (Hoffert, 2003). Nevertheless, some public libraries, particularly in the U.S., have begun to explore this option. The Memorial Hall Library (2008) in Massachusetts, for example, offers an online discussion group called *Book Talk*, which enables members to discuss fiction books on an online message board. The Tippecanoe County Library (2008) in Indiana offers an email-based discussion group called *The Book Clique*. There may be scope as well to utilize newer social software to bring the views of readers together. For example, the Roselle Public Library (2008) in Illinois runs a blog-based discussion group called *Blogger Book Club*. The Princeton Public Library (2008) in New Jersey offers a book club for its readers using wiki software. There is potential for other public libraries to explore these options as well.

(iv) Re-look present services

While public libraries should explore new ways in which they can allow greater collaboration among readers, present services should also be re-looked. Currently, a common strategy used by public libraries to facilitate views among readers is to offer "Reader's Choice" recommendations. Some, such as Wellington City Libraries (2008a) display "Reader's Choice" stickers on the cover of fiction books to indicate recommended reads from fellow readers. While this is a step in the right direction, the findings of my study suggest that fiction readers rely on the recommendations of people

they *trust*. For "Reader's Choice" to be effective, fiction readers would need to know *why* the endorsed books have been chosen by other readers. Stickers alone, proclaiming the merits of a book, are unlikely to persuade readers. Supplementary information, explaining why certain books are endorsed, should therefore also be made available to prospective readers (Hoffert, 2003). I discuss this point in greater detail in Chapter 7 of this report.

The findings in this chapter suggest that fiction readers' personal networks play an important role in their choice of fiction books. They are not, of course, the only "external sources" to influence readers. The next chapter looks at the role that the mass media play in fiction readers' book choices.

Chapter 6

The role of mass media in fiction book choices

This chapter addresses Research Question 3: "What role, if any, does the mass media play in adult fiction readers' book choices in the public library?" Mass media has been defined in the dictionary as "a means of public communication reaching a large audience" ("mass media", 2006). It is taken in this chapter to mean the Internet and newer web-based technologies such as blogs, wikis and social networks (Kajewski, 2007; Maness, 2006) as well as media in its more traditional form such as the printed press, television and radio (Williamson, 1998). I begin this chapter by examining the role that the Internet and newer web-based technologies play in fiction readers' book choices. I then consider the role played by traditional media. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the study's findings and suggests what implications they have for public library services.

Internet and newer web-based technologies

6.1 Uses of the Internet in everyday life

In order to contextualize what role, if any, the Internet played in fiction readers' lives, I begun by asking participants if they used the Internet as part of their everyday lives. Eleven of the twelve participants confirmed they did. The only person not to do so was 85 year-old George, who informed me that "I belong to a pre-computer age and I'm guided by what I can read. I don't engage in screens or electronic material at all". The other eleven participants said they used the Internet as part of their professional and/or personal lives. Frank and Kelster were both employed in the IT field and used the Internet substantially in their jobs. Two academic librarians in the study, Hilary and Tricia, also used the Internet regularly in their work as did Dolores, a client-relations portfolio manager. Quinn, a full-time university student also relied heavily on the

Internet for his studies. The Internet was used by participants in their personal lives for activities such as email communication, keeping up with local and global news, online shopping and online banking.

6.2 Uses of the Internet as fiction readers

Participants were asked what uses, if any, they made of the Internet, as fiction readers. Of the eleven participants who did use the Internet as part of their daily lives, two did not use it at all to access information on fiction books, believing they had adequate sources other than the Internet to rely on. The remaining nine participants used the Internet primarily to look for book reviews and to search for biographical information on fiction authors. Not surprisingly, perhaps, *Google* was the search engine most used. Most of the websites which participants visited were found through *Google*, although in the case of author websites, the URL (website address) was sometimes obtained from the cover or dust jacket of fiction books.

Using *Google* as their starting point, participants turned to a variety of sources for online book reviews. Some relied on the online version of major newspapers for their reviews, including *The New York Times*, *The Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Times Literary Supplement*. Others turned to online bookstores such as *Amazon.com*, *Fishpond.co.nz* and *Ferrit.co.nz* for this information. *Amazon* in particular, was singled out by several participants as a "good source" and I discuss it in greater detail in the next section. One participant, Zoe, also relied on the website of *Waterstone's*, a physical bookstore chain in the U.K. She explained that as new books "appeared quicker" in the U.K. than they did New Zealand, browsing reviews on *Waterstone's* gave her useful ideas on what to read, when the books became available in New Zealand. Another participant, Frank, explained that he liked to visit the website of the online magazine, *Salon.com*, because it provided in-depth reviews on a wide range of books

In using the Internet to search for book reviews, some participants looked for reviews on a *specific* book – for instance, a novel that had been recommended to them by a friend.

However, others like Zoe and Frank also browsed broadly for book reviews *without* a specific title in mind. Their purpose in visiting websites such as *Waterstone's* and *Salon.com* was to gain a sense of what new fiction books were "out there" and whether these had been well received by critics or not. This contradicts Kayahara and Wellman's (2007, p.831) argument that while readers use online bookstores to find reviews on specific titles, they do not browse the online bookstores for reading ideas.

Along with book reviews, participants in my study also used the Internet to obtain information on fiction authors. Author websites were a popular choice with participants, who wanted to know what their selected authors looked like, where they got their book ideas from, what other books they had written and what ones they were still intending to write. Quinn explained that the authors he liked tended to write "more than one style of fiction novels" so he regularly visited their websites to keep up with new developments.

Participants were asked if the information they obtained from the Internet influenced their choice of fiction books in the public library. All nine participants confirmed that online sources influenced them. Dolores explained that when contemplating reading a book, she would go online to find out how the book was regarded by others: "I want to see what the reviews [are] like, if they'd been all negative, I wouldn't have chosen that book". Similarly, Frank said that the information he obtained form the Internet influenced his choices:

> I often use the Internet to find books that might be of interest, so I might see
> a review of a book or an article about a book that might peak my interest and
> I'll hunt the book out. (Frank)

For some participants like Zoe, visiting the websites of fiction authors gave them ideas on what to read:

> [T]here's a couple of author websites that I read occasionally. Tracy
> Chevalier who's an American writer…she has a really good website where
> she writes down what she's been reading and that's quite interesting…I often
> look at that for ideas… (Zoe)

6.3 Impact of Amazon.com

The popularity of *Amazon.com* with readers has been commented on in a number of studies (Rowlands & Nicholas, 2008; Orkiszewski, 2005; Rothbauer, 2004b; Hoffert, 2003; Coffman, 1999). I was interested to know if the participants in my study shared the same sentiment and what uses, if any, they made of *Amazon*, as fiction readers. Six of the participants I interviewed reported that they were frequent visitors of *Amazon*, though not all used the website for the same purpose. Two used it strictly to buy books which they could not obtain in New Zealand and the remaining four used it for both purchasing and browsing purposes. For those who browsed, the customer reviews on *Amazon* was seen as a useful tool for gauging how "good" a book was, which in turn influenced their decision to read the book or not. In addition, participants appreciated the other features offered on *Amazon*. Hilary liked the website's "Search Inside the Book" feature because it allowed her to read sample excerpts from the book. Zoe liked receiving customized book recommendations which *Amazon* sent her via email based on past purchases she had made. Felicity liked the ease with which one could search on *Amazon*: "…it's got quite good search engines…*Amazon's* great". The participants who regularly visited *Amazon* said that it was a useful site because it gave them "good information" on fiction books. But not everyone was a fan of *Amazon*. Frank explained that he never visited *Amazon* for book reviews because he thought the quality of the reviews was poor:

> …[I]f it's on fiction, they'll just go, "Yeah, this book is really good or I think it sucks" which isn't particularly useful on finding out about the book. There's no thought or reflection given to the reviews and the rules so I don't tend to give any credence to what they say on the site. (Frank)

Thus, while *Amazon's* popularity was evident among some participants – confirming the findings of previous studies (e.g. Rowlands & Nicholas, 2008; Rothbauer, 2004b) - not all participants in the present study liked it. For some individuals such as Frank, *Amazon* had little impact on them as fiction readers.

6.4 Influences of Web 2.0…or not

With the increasing popularity of Web 2.0 technologies such as blogs, wikis, RSS feeds, podcasts and social networking sites, I wanted to know what uses, if any, participants made of them as fiction readers. Seven of the twelve participants in the study said they were aware of one or more of these social media but very few had used them for the purpose of finding information on fiction books. Only Frank and Zoe had done so, by downloading podcasts of their favourite radio shows when these featured book reviews. No one said they relied on blogs or wikis for ideas on fiction books. And while four of the participants had signed themselves up on social networking sites, none seriously considered the sites as sources for book ideas. Quinn recounted that he did find some information in the past but this was rare:

> I do use it [*Facebook*] but rarely for books. Very rarely. I think I've been on
> *Facebook* maybe three years and I think maybe found two fiction books –
> that's it. I tend to talk more to people than using those sites, yeah. (Quinn)

Similarly, Frank belonged to a social networking site but "…that's just to keep in contact with friends, I don't discuss books there or anything like that". For some participants, social networking sites were not an appealing source for information because of privacy and security concerns:

> I just find them very intrusive, actually. I haven't yet got the point of them,
> maybe because I'm a bit older. I worry about the social networking but also
> there's a marketing element to it and who gets all that information. It's so
> publicly available… (Dolores)

> I did go onto *Facebook* and I did register with *Facebook* but I started getting
> pestered by someone I didn't want to be pestered by so I went off it. (Elinor)

> I see my kids do it. I think they're both on *Bebo*. ..But I suppose maybe I'm
> too private to want all that sort of thing…it just doesn't appeal. (Hilary)

A study released by the PEW Internet and American Life Project confirms that it is predominantly teens whom have embraced and made extensive use of social media such as blogs and networking sites (Lenhart, Madden, Rankin Macgill & Smith, 2007). For the participants in my study – who are in a considerably older age group (34-85 years) – such sources did not hold the same level of appeal. In most instances, they had little

impact on participants and did not influence their choice of fiction books in the public library.

6.5 Public library's website

Many public libraries now have their own websites in which a section is devoted to readers' advisory information (Saricks, 2005; Hoffert, 2003; Baker & Wallace, 2002, Johnson, 2001). Wellington City Libraries, which all my participants belonged to and used, offers such a resource for fiction readers. Its fiction web page is a comprehensive one with information on new books, recommended reads, book reviews and links to other fiction websites (see Wellington City Libraries, 2008a). In all twelve interviews that I conducted, I was struck by the fact that not a single person mentioned using this web page, when elaborating to me the websites they normally visited. When I asked participants directly what uses, if any, they made of the public library's *website*, almost all responded with a description of how they used the library's *online catalogue*. Dolores's answer below typifies the many others I received:

> The public library? Oh, I use their website a lot but it's usually for a purpose…the catalogue is usually the thing I'm using – to see if authors are in there or if the book that the book club is reading is available or checking my own details on when the books are due back. So I use it for that purpose. (Dolores)

Participants saw the public library's online presence as a purely functional one - to inform them via its catalogue (which they accessed remotely from home or at work) if items were available, when they were due back and so on. Few considered that the library could play a useful role in helping them to choose books because few were aware that the library offered such a resource. Indeed, when I pointed out to participants that the library had a fiction web page, only one person, Hilary, recalled seeing it. None of my other participants were aware that such a resource existed and many were visibly

surprised when I described it to them. A few commented that they would probably find such a web page useful – had they known about it.[3]

Participants' lack of awareness is perhaps understandable, given that fiction web pages are not always marketed well to library users (Hoffert, 2003; Nordmeyer, 2001; Stevens, 2000). In a study evaluating public library websites, Nordmeyer (2001) had found that "[s]ome of the readers' advisory sites examined were difficult to find from the initial home page of the library. The casual browser of those sites would probably not stumble onto the fiction section easily" (p.140). This appears to describe the situation faced by my participants. Currently, Wellington City Libraries' home page does not provide a direct link to its fiction web page (see Wellington City Libraries, 2008b). To access the fiction page, users must first know to click on the home page's "Popular Topics" link and then choose the "Fiction" option. As most of the participants in my study were unaware of this resource, the public library's website had little impact on them as fiction readers.

6.6 Reflections on using the Internet

Near the end of our discussions about the Internet, I asked participants how they felt about using it as fiction readers, and what they saw as its advantages or limitations. Most replied that they were confident in their use and saw it as a valuable tool for acquiring information on fiction books. Ease of use and access to a wide range of information were seen as its main advantages:

> There's just so much information out there that you normally wouldn't have on your fingertips. …It is my main source…I do rely on friends and what friends read and what they like but you know, friends are busy or they live in other cities and stuff, and as you get older, people move apart…so Internet becomes a good source of information. (Frank)

> I think it's [Internet] really helpful. I think because we're so far away and cos things happen more slowly here [New Zealand], it really gives you access to what's going on with the rest of the world in terms of fiction, so yeah, I think it's great… (Zoe)

---

[3] Following the interviews, I contacted participants and supplied them with the web page link. Hilary, the only participant to know about the web page when I interviewed her, thought it was a useful resource, though not one she often consulted, citing lack of time.

The main disadvantage, as participants saw it, was that quality of information was not always guaranteed. As bluntly pointed out by Kelster: "…no one's actually checked it before they've published it. Anyone can publish on the Internet…so it could be a whole lot of crap". This sentiment was echoed by Dolores who felt that searching on the Internet was sometimes a "hit-and-miss" experience. She used the Internet primarily to search for book reviews but was sometimes disappointed with her results: "I use the Internet…to hear different people's perceptions on…books… [I]t's hard if the review is mainly giving a synopsis of the book and doesn't say very much about their response to the book…"

While most of the participants reported that they were comfortable with using the Internet, a few were visibly more apprehensive. Generally, those who were elderly used the Internet less often, citing lack of confidence. Apart from 85 year-old George who did not use the Internet at all, my next two oldest participants - 70 year-old Herbert Austin and 68 year-old Anna – used the Internet very minimally. Anna said she occasionally surfed for factual information related to fiction books she was reading. For instance, after reading a novel set in Afghanistan, she went online to find out more about the treatment of women under the Taleban. However, the Internet was not her preferred source of information for fiction books because "…I'm not very good at it". Herbert Austin also used the Internet minimally and not at all for fiction books. Again, lack of confidence was the reason cited:

> Occasionally, I'll use *Google* – not very good at it. I'm not very computer
> literate. Usually I have to shout to Linda [wife] because the computer
> doesn't do…what I tell it [to]…which I find irritating so I don't use it a lot,
> no. Certainly not to find books. (Herbert Austin)

While the more elderly of my participants made less use of the Internet, level of usage was not influenced by age factors alone. One of the surprising findings of my study was that participants who were younger were *not* necessarily keener to use the Internet to find information on fiction books. My youngest participant, 34 year-old Elinor, relied on online bookstores such as *Amazon* and *Fishpond* for book ideas but the Internet was not

her first choice for information. She preferred an older medium – radio. I discuss the influence of radio in a later section of this chapter but Elinor's preference for traditional media was echoed by some of the other younger participants in the study. Kelster, a 36 year-old IT project manager shared with me that the printed press was her preferred source of information for book reviews rather than the Internet. When I expressed surprise at this answer, given her background in IT, she explained:

> [B]ecause I work in IT, I'm in front of the [computer] screen all the time. So when I go to relax, I like the…newspaper and the magazine because it's a break. ….If I wasn't on the computer all day, everyday, it might be a bit different. I might want to go home from work and then go online. But sometimes I get home from work and that's the last thing I want to do. (Kelster)

The insights shared by Kelster highlight once again the importance of understanding information seeking in context. In using the sources that they do to search for ideas on fiction books, participants were influenced by the circumstances and context of their own lives. In Kelster's case, print sources were preferred in her recreational life to "balance" an IT oriented working life. Thus, demographic characteristics such as age, while potentially influential, cannot alone explain information seeking behaviour. There is a need to pay attention to context as well because " '[c]ontext' – a person's situation, background and environment – partly determines one's perceptions during information seeking. Context will affect the choices of sources that are attended to..." (Case, 2007, p.115)

Traditional media

All twelve participants in my study made use of traditional media such as the printed press, radio and television for ideas on what fiction books to read. I discuss each of these in turn.

6.7 Printed press

Nine of the twelve participants in the study consulted the printed press for ideas on fiction books to read. The remaining three who did not do so, cited lack of time or preference for online sources. For those who relied on printed material, weekend newspapers such as *The Sunday Star Times* and *Weekend Dominion Post* were the most consulted sources along with magazines such as *The Listener* and *North & South*. Participants said the book reviews obtained from these sources influenced their book selections in the public library:

> [P]art of Saturday morning is reading the paper properly…there's almost a whole section on books. And I will – at times if they look good, then I'll rush off to the computer and reserve them at the public library. (Hilary)

> Yeah, if I'm reading a newspaper or magazine, I always look for the book reviews. ..[T]hat is where I read about the book on the shinning suns – *A Thousand Splendid Suns* [by Khaled Hosseini] – I read about it, I got that in a newspaper and went straight into the library and asked if they had it and got it out. (Anna)

Interestingly, eight of the participants who consulted the printed press for book reviews also relied on the Internet for this information. They did not use one media source in exclusion of another, seeing the benefits of both. Hilary, for example, relied on the Internet for book reviews because "…it makes searching or finding out…so much quicker. Because I can just click onto *Amazon* or whatever and just look up titles…" However, she also liked reading book reviews in *print* form because the weekend paper allowed her to "sit back" and relax while reading. In a study that investigated the usage levels of the Internet and traditional mass media in Australia, Nguyen and Western (2006) had found that "[t]hose who relied on the Internet the most for news and information still used traditional sources substantially" (n.p.). This largely reflects the findings of my own study too, with most participants reporting that they relied on *both* print and online media for their fiction book reviews. But there were exceptions. Frank, for example, did not consult the printed press because:

> …New Zealand newspapers and magazines don't give much space for book reviews. …[T]hey have a one paragraph review or it's just mentioned in passing and you know, newspapers are expensive, I can read the content online nowadays – there's no real advantage to buying the printed version of the newspaper, in my mind. (Frank)

Thus, in seeking out sources for book reviews, participants took different paths. Some such as Hilary saw the printed press and online sources as complementary and relied on both for ideas. Others such as Frank questioned the quality of local print sources, preferring to rely on online ones for information.

6.8 Radio

Radio proved to be an extremely popular source of information for book ideas. *All* twelve participants in my study said that they tuned in to the radio for ideas on fiction books to read. Two programs on Radio New Zealand - the *Nine to Noon* program hosted by Kathryn Ryan and *Saturday Morning* hosted by Kim Hill – were particularly popular with participants. They clearly had an impact on the type of books that participants chose to borrow from the public library:

> Kim Hill…she usually interviews fiction writers… and I'll note those names… [T]hen I'll go and see if the public- Wellington Public [Libraries] has got them. (Tricia)

> I listen to interviews with authors – the sort of people that Kathryn Ryan or Kim Hill would talk to. Yes, I am influenced by those programs. (George).

> I would mostly listen to the *National Radio* and if I hear a book review on there that sounds like me, I'll be mad keen to get the book… (Elinor)

> With the *National Program*, they select books that are from different genres…and so, I always listen in and if there's one in particular that I like, I'll go and get them out. (Quinn)

Part of the programs' appeal was the radio personalities involved. Participants spoke of "liking" or "trusting" the two hosts – Kathryn Ryan and Kim Hill. In her transnational study of book broadcast programs in the U.K. and Canada, Rehberg Sedo (2008) has suggested that such programs appeal to radio and television audiences because the program hosts are perceived as "trusted other": "…much like a friend or family member who has proven to provide satisfactory book recommendations" (p.200) in the past. The insights shared by my participants largely confirm this suggestion. In addition, the radio programs appealed to participants because of their interview format. The interaction

between program host and guest was seen as beneficial, as they helped participants to gain multiple perspectives of the book under review:

> I quite like the person that's reviewing the book and the person running the show – Kathryn Ryan. She sort of asks questions so there's this "to and froing" – you know, it's not just somebody reviewing a book and saying, "Well, this is a book about Los Angeles…" She's asking the…reviewer questions, which is really quite good. (Felicity)

> …I think they [radio interviews] represent the book quite well whereas…a written review – obviously, the reviewer's got their agenda, they've got their word count. I've been misled by written book reviews but very rarely by the interview kind of set up… [T]he conversation they have between them [Kim Hill and book reviewer] gives you a better idea of what the book's like by having two people rather than the reviewer just pitching at you. (Elinor)

For other participants, radio appealed to them because they saw it as a "relaxing" medium by which to acquire information on fiction books. Sometimes this was information that they purposively sought; others times not. Dolores was one such participant who acquired serendipitous ideas on what to read by tuning in to the radio. She explained that she occasionally suffered from insomnia and would tune in to Radio New Zealand's book reading session in the wee hours of the morning. While her intention in tuning in was to help her relax and get back to sleep, sometimes this also led her to acquire ideas on what fiction books to read:

> …[T]here is something very nice about being read to so just lying there relaxing in the dark and just being read to. And sometimes that can just help me get back to sleep…Sometimes it might give me enough information to actually think, "Oh, I'd like to read that book myself!" (Dolores)

In her ecological model of information seeking and use, Williamson's (1998) has posited that information acquired from the mass media occurs both purposively and incidentally. Dolores's experience with using the radio confirms this point.

For some other participants such as Zoe and Frank, radio appealed to them because it increasingly integrated with newer media forms, allowing them to acquire information on fiction books – as and when it suited them. As reported in an earlier section of this

chapter, both participants regularly downloaded podcasts of radio programs they were interested in. Zoe explained that this was beneficial to her:

> We have an iPod so I download – and it's quite good [because] it means I
> don't have to listen to the whole *Nine to Noon* program but I can just
> download the book reviews and I listen to those. It's great. (Zoe)

For my participants then, radio was an important source of information for book ideas for a number of reasons. The program hosts were seen as "trusted sources" and the interviews they conducted gave participants in-depths insights on the books under discussion. In addition, radio was a flexible medium which one could access at any time of the day. Its integration with newer social media such as podcasts allowed participants to acquire information on fiction books, as and when it suited them.

6.9 Television and Film

Participants' selection of fiction books were also influenced by what they saw on television or in the movies. Quinn explained that if he liked a particular television series, he would often try to find out if a book version existed. He explained that this was what got him interested in reading Kathy Reich's crime novels:

> For TV, it tends to be if I like the program, I see if it's actually available – if
> someone's actually written books about that. For example, *Bones* on TV3.
> That was actually a book series before they made the [TV] program and the
> author is Kathy Reichs. …[B]ecause I like *Bones*, I've read the books [by
> Kathy Reichs]. (Quinn)

Ten other participants recalled instances where they had watched movies adapted from novels and this had then generated their interests in reading the novels. Examples of movies cited which were adapted from fiction books with the same title include: *Atonement, East of Eden, Girl with a Pearl Earring, The Godfather, One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, Jurassic Park, The Painted Veil* and *The Time Traveler's Wife*.

Participants found that if they did not enjoy the movie, sometimes this deterred them from reading the book. Tricia, for example, said: "…I saw *Brokeback Mountain* on

television and I didn't like all of it. I don't know that I'll go read the book [by Annie Proulx]…" Likewise, Frank said: "…depends on whether the movie is any good. If it's a bad movie, I probably won't read the book". Sometimes if participants were intending to watch a movie adapted from a book, this prompted them to read the book first in "preparation" of the movie. Elinor, for example, read Mario Puzo's *The Godfather* in preparation of watching the movie by the same title and Philip Pullman's *Northern Lights* in preparation of watching its screen adaptation, *The Golden Compass.* It was evident that among this group of participants, the traditional visual media – in particular, film - played a role in influencing their fiction book choices in the public library.

6.10 Reflections on using traditional media sources

Participants were asked how they felt about using traditional media sources for information on fiction books, and what they saw as their main advantages or limitations. All twelve participants spoke well of these sources and none highlighted any real limitations. Frank made the point, however, that for him, newer media such as podcasts were "better" because they allowed him to search more specifically for information that he wanted. Obtaining book reviews on line could be done quicker just by downloading what he wanted, whereas with traditional media, "…it's not targeted so if they have an interview with an author, it would be one item among the lot…" that he had to sift through. Overall, however, participants expressed satisfaction with using traditional media sources and saw them as fundamental to their fiction book choices.

6.11 Discussion

The findings reported in this chapter suggest that the mass media, in its various forms, do influence how adult fiction readers select their books in the public library. Book reviews obtained from the Internet along with biographical information on fiction authors provided readers with ideas on what fiction books to read next. Online newspapers, online bookstores and author websites were popular sources of information for study participants. Conversely, newer media such as blogs and social networks had little

impact on participants. The public library, in terms of its online presence, fared poorly as well. Almost none of the study participants were aware that the public library offered a fiction web page, so none looked to it for ideas on what to read. While the Internet was a popular medium with participants, usage level was uneven. Those who were elderly tended to use online sources less, preferring traditional media such as the printed press and radio. Some of the younger participants too, indicated a preference for traditional sources over online ones. A key finding of this study, then, is that fiction readers do make use of the Internet for book ideas but rely *simultaneously* on traditional media for ideas as well. Radio, in particular, proved to be a popular source of information for participants – old and young alike. The findings reported in this chapter have a number of implications for public library services:

(i) Ensure provision of both print and online sources

First, as some fiction readers – particularly the elderly - continue to prefer print medium over online ones, public libraries should ensure that the readers' advisory sources they provide readers are available in *both* forms. This point has not been actively addressed by researchers. Much of the current literature in LIS is preoccupied with how public libraries can better deliver *online* services to fiction readers (e.g. Weaver, 2007; Hollands, 2006; Trott, 2005; Hoffert, 2003). However, as rightly pointed out by Nguyen and Western (2006): "…there are many audiences or user groups with different sets of media preferences, rather than only one audience or one user group with a relatively homogeneous set of preferences" (n.p.). There needs to be greater acknowledgement of the fact that for some groups of fiction readers, print sources remain the preferred medium of information for fiction books. In their provision of book reviews, book lists and other readers' advisory tools, then, public libraries should ensure the availability of both print and online sources to meet the needs of different readers.

(ii) Increase access to library's online resources

In using the Internet to search for information on fiction books, none of my participants relied on the public library's fiction web page because almost none were aware that it

existed. This seems a pity given that the library's fiction page provides resources germane to fiction readers. More needs to be done to promote such resources to readers. For a start, it needs to be clearly visible to readers and easily navigable to be of use to them. Nordmeyer (2001) has suggested that the library's home page should provide a direct link to its fiction web page. In addition, it needs to be clearly titled, so readers understand its purpose (Hoffert, 2003). Other promotion techniques to bring it to the attention of readers could include email communication with library patrons, announcements in the library's newsletters and circulation of flyers to highlight its existence (Baker & Wallace, 2002; Nordmeyer, 2001).

Promotion of online services, however, only goes part way to serving readers. My study also revealed that very few participants had utilized the newer social media such as blogs, wikis and social networking sites for ideas on fiction books, in part because of privacy and security concerns. As public libraries increasingly move to offer participatory services to patrons under the banner of Library 2.0 (Maness, 2006), the concerns raised by my participants need to be addressed. To encourage participation in newer services while preserving privacy, for example, Casey and Savastinuk (2006) have suggested that library patrons be allowed to post anonymous comments: "[l]ibrary users should not be required to identify themselves publicly in order to participate in virtual services" (p.41). Libraries could also offer guidelines on the safe use of social media to assuage the concerns of library patrons (Casey & Savastinuk, 2007).

More could also be done to assist elderly readers who are interested in using online resources. My study found that elderly participants tended to make less use of online sources because of an unfamiliarity with, or lack of confidence in, using the Internet. The public library could consider offering Internet training sessions to those who are interested. To date, this has not been widely implemented in public libraries. A survey carried out in New York State, U.S. found that 78% of public libraries are not offering Internet training specifically for elderly users (Webb, 2002). There is scope, then, for public libraries to consider this option, for elderly readers who are interested.

(iii) Streamline services with traditional media sources

My study also found that fiction readers looked to traditional media such as the printed press, radio and television for ideas on what to read. Again, public libraries can play a proactive role in assisting readers who rely on such sources. Providing a bulletin board of book reviews - cut from newspapers or magazines – will be useful to those who rely on the printed press for ideas (Ross & Chelton, 2001). Likewise, a listing of fiction books that have been dramatized into film or television series will be helpful to readers who want to read what they have visually viewed (Armstrong, 2001). My study also found that among participants, radio was a very popular source of information for fiction books. In part, this was because radio was a flexible medium, allowing participants to engage in other activities (e.g. driving) while listening to it (Nguyen & Western, 2006). However, it also appealed because participants enjoyed the interview format of radio programs. The interactions between program hosts and guests helped them to gain multi-dimensional perspectives on fiction books, which participants liked. This has implications for readers' advisory services. It suggests that in seeking information on fiction books, participants want quality sources that will help them decide whether to read a book or not. In selecting sources for book reviews then, librarians need to ensure that they select quality and in-depth ones that will meet the needs of fiction readers. As the fiction readers in my study found the interview format on radio useful, public libraries should look into supplying book reviews that mirror this format. One possibility is to provide online links to author interviews (Kajewski, 2007). There may be scope as well to organize book talks or "meet the author" events in the library although these would likely be feasible only in larger, well-funded library systems (Armstrong, 2001).

The findings reported in this chapter showed that the mass media played an important role in fiction readers' book choices. The next chapter explores the role of the public library in fiction book selections.

Chapter 7

The role of the public library in fiction book choices

The preceding three chapters revealed that fiction readers' everyday life contexts – which include "personal influences" such as mood and lifestyle; interactions with family, friends and book clubs; and uses of the mass media, influenced the type of fiction books they chose to borrow from the public library. While the public library *is* the main source that many fiction readers go to, to obtain their books, how much of a role does it play in their book choices? This chapter examines this issue. It addresses Research Question 4: "What strategies do adult fiction readers rely on to select books in the public library? What role, if any, does the public library play in their book choices?" I begin by looking at the strategies that adult fiction readers use to select their fiction books in the public library. I then examine what uses, if any, they make of the readers' advisory tools provided for them by library staff. I also discuss the role of library staff in fiction readers' book choices as well as participants' perceptions and uses of bookstores. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the study's findings and suggests what implications they have for public library services.

Strategies for book selection

7.1 Selection by author

Participants were asked to describe a typical visit to their public library and the strategies they used to select fiction books. Most of the participants reported that they tended to visit the public library with a book title or author already in mind. Sometimes this was a known and trusted author, whose work they had read and enjoyed in the past. At other times, it might be a new author whom they had learned about through the mass media, or from family, friends or book club:

> I always search for my main authors first to see if they've got any new books
> out. (Quinn)

I tend to write down some of the authors I've enjoyed and then I will look for their books that way. (Felicity)

Most of the time, I would know I'm probably going to get…one [book] that was recommended from either the book club or from a colleague or one that I've heard mentioned about rather than just going through the shelves. (Dolores)

I already know what I want when I go there [library]. I usually choose books from book reviews in the newspaper. (Elinor)

Participants' strategy of selecting fiction books by a pre-determined author is consistent with those found in earlier research (e.g. Spiller, 1980; Speak, 1990; Ross, 2001a). In Spiller's (1980) study, 54% of readers surveyed said they tended to select fiction books by a "known author" while in Speak's (1990) study, 77% of readers reported that "author" was the most important factor influencing book choice.

7.2 Selection by browsing

While the participants in my study tended to select fiction books by author, most also resorted to some form of browsing. For the purpose of this study, "browsing" is taken to mean "…scanning the environment, prompted by interest or expectation, but without a clearly-defined goal or plan" (Case, 2007, p.329). Only two participants, George and Frank, reported that they rarely browsed. George informed me, very firmly, that: "In the public library, I'm like a man going shopping – I go for a definite purpose. I don't just swim around". Frank explained that he rarely browsed because "I normally have an idea of what I want to read before I come in [to the library]. So…I don't tend to just go in there and browse".

Of the remaining ten participants who *did* browse, most reported browsing in specific areas such as the "New Books" display, the returns section or shelves where specific fiction genres were stocked. Only one participant, Anna, reported browsing the main "A to Z" shelves where fiction books were arranged by author surnames. For most of my other participants, however, the busy lifestyles they led (as discussed in Chapter 4) gave

them little time to browse the main shelves. Participants also avoided browsing the "A to Z"s because the choices available seemed overwhelming. As Dolores explained: "I would find it quite hard to go to the "A to Z" shelves, I would never do that. Not just browsing – oh, there's so many of them! I wouldn't know where to begin, really".

Most of my participants, then, restricted their browsing activity to specific areas such as the display or returns section. The usefulness of these "browsing areas" is discussed in greater detail in a later section of this chapter. Once participants begun browsing within a specific range of books, they relied on a number of clues from the book such as its blurb, cover and sample text to help them decide whether to borrow the book or not. The blurb of the book was important to many participants, as the excerpts below show:

> I'll read the blurb first and if the blurb doesn't grab me, then I put it back. (Zoe)
>
> If the reading at the back, you know, the abstract looks interesting, then I might get that. (Dolores)
>
> If I'm doubtful, I'll read the back or inside cover to get a rough idea of what the story is about. (Herbert Austin)

Previous studies by Spiller (1980) and Davidson and Cave (1990) had also found that the blurb was influential in fiction readers' book choices. Eighty-eight percent of browsers in Spiller's (1980) study and 78.4% of browsers in Davidson and Cave's (1990) study reported that the blurb was the most important factor influencing their choices. But while the blurb was relied on by most of my participants, not everyone found it useful. Elinor felt the blurb could be misleading, while Anna thought it provided too much information, at times:

> I find jacket blurbs quite misleading so that's why I prefer to go for a review or a recommendation rather than the blurb. Particularly if they say "If you like so and so, you'll love this one". That's a load of rubbish! (Elinor)
>
> Sometimes I must admit I put them [books] back because there's too much information on the thing [blurb]… It just has so much – the story involves this and this and this… it's a bit of a spoiler, sometimes. (Anna)

Overall, however, the blurb was popular with my participants and regarded as an important clue for discerning books. Along with the blurb, participants also looked to the cover of fiction books to assess their suitability:

> The cover – my eye will pick that out and that will give me a bit of clue particularly if it looks of a historical nature – the dress of the people or the vehicles or the buildings… So I select on the basis of… what might be a possibility from the cover, so the cover's important. (Felicity)

> I don't read war stories, I don't like love stories… Quite often, you look at the thing and it's got a slutty looking cover and you think, "Oh, it's a love story" and put it back. Or it's got a soldier on it and you put it back. …I look at the book cover for clues. (Anna)

Some of my participants also read sample pages of the text to ascertain the books' appeal:

> I usually randomly open the book and read half a page and think, "Yup, that's me or no; it's not me at all". (Zoe)

> I do usually read…the first page, I do that sometimes just to get an idea of whether the language is engaging enough. (Hilary)

When browsing for fiction books, then, participants relied on a number of clues to help them decide whether to borrow a book or not. The book's blurb, cover image and sample text were used by participants' to assess its worth. My findings here are consistent with those found in earlier studies (e.g. Spiller, 1980; Davidson & Cave, 1990; Ross, 2001a) which reported that the blurb, cover and sample text of books were influential factors in fiction readers' book choices.

Influence of readers' advisory tools

Many public libraries now commonly offer readers' advisory tools to assist fiction readers in finding the books that they want (Saricks, 2005, Thomas, 2003; Armstrong, 2001). I was interested to know what uses, if any, participants made of such tools and whether they influenced readers' choice of fiction books. Participants were asked to share their views on the following:
- "Best Sellers" / "New Books" displays
- Returns trolley

- Frontal displays on main shelves

- Genre labels on book spines

- Physical separation of books by genre

- "Librarian's Choice" recommendations

- "Reader's Choice" recommendations

- Library's fiction web page / fiction databases

7.3 "Best Sellers" / "New Books" displays

Participants' perceptions of the "Best Sellers" display were discussed at length in Chapter 4. To recap, participants generally saw the display as a useful resource but were deterred from borrowing directly from this collection because of the financial cost involved. Some noted the book titles from this display and then proceeded to see if they could obtain a similar but *free* copy of the book from the main "A to Z" shelves. Like the "Best Sellers" display, the "New Books" display was seen by participants as a useful resource for generating ideas on what to read. Eight of the participants in the study reported that they always browsed this area. Hilary made it her first priority: "I go there first and just see who's there and it might give me some ideas… [I]t's a good starting point". Unlike the "Best Sellers" display, there was no charge for borrowing items from the "New Books" display at Wellington City Libraries. As such, participants tended to speak more positively of this resource than they did the "Best Sellers".

7.4 Returns trolley

In many public libraries, books that are newly returned by library patrons are placed on the returns trolley or "Just Returned" shelves as a browsing tool for prospective readers (Saricks, 2005; Armstrong, 2001). Four of my participants did not browse the returns trolley and so, could not comment on its usefulness. However, eight others said they found it helpful. Zoe and Felicity's views, presented below, echoed those made by other participants:

> I sort of figure…well, if someone else has read it, it's an indication that it's in circulation so it must be alright. …I guess it's kind of like going to book club – someone else has read it so you think, "I'll give it a go". (Zoe)

> I look in the "Just Returned Today" – they have trolleys with those. Obviously, if someone else's enjoyed something there…I've picked things up often that way. (Felicity)

In their study of fiction readers in the U.K, Toyne and Underwood (2001) had found that the returns trolley was popular with readers because it was seen as "…a convenient method of securing a 'recommended read'" (p.86). The results of my study support this argument.

7.5 Frontal displays on main shelves

In many public libraries, fiction books in the main "A to Z" section are shelved by their spines but these are sometimes interspersed with books arranged face out (frontal display) to facilitate serendipitous discovery (Trott & Novak, 2006; Baker, 1996). Participants were asked if frontal displays on the main "A to Z" shelves were useful to them. Responses were rather mixed. Five of the participants liked this arrangement because it was more "attention grabbing" than looking at rows of book spines. Elinor was one of the five who felt it impacted her book choices: "[I'm] more likely to pick [them] up and therefore, a certain percentage of the ones I pick up, I'll get out". Six others said it had no effect on them as they did not browse the "A to Z" shelves. One participant, Kelster, did not like the frontal display at all. She felt that it impeded her ability to find a book quickly on the "A to Z" shelves:

> No, I don't [like frontal displays]. Cos you don't know where they are and it might be the book I'm looking for and it's up there [as a frontal display]. It's not in its line. I'm looking along the spine to find it and it's not there. It's annoying. (Kelster)

Thus, while some writers have commented on the merits of having face out displays on the main "A to Z" shelves (e.g. Trott & Novak, 2006; Baker, 1996), not all the participants in my study found this a useful browsing tool.

7.6 Genre labels on book spines

In many public libraries, genre labels are attached to the spine of fiction books in the main "A to Z" shelves to help users identify the genres they want to read (Saricks, 2005; Baker, 1996). In Wellington City Libraries (2008c), for example, koru labels are used to denote "New Zealand fiction". Participants were asked if they found such genre labels helpful in their book selections. Again, responses were mixed. Three of the participants thought the labels were useful in identifying the genres they wanted to read. Herbert Austin, for example, had belonged to a public library system where coloured labels were used to symbolize different genres. As a busy person with little time to spend in the library, he found this helpful: "I go in, I check my books in the returns, I'll go along [the shelves] – yellow one, yellow, yellow one – that one, that one, that one, and I'm off and out!" Elinor too, found the labels helpful because they alerted her to favourite genres while steering her away from those she disliked:

> It means I can steer clear of the ones with little detective hats on them!
> *[laughs]* So I know not to pick those ones up. And if I'm in the mood for
> romance, then a heart sticker on there will [help]. (Elinor)

Not all the participants in the study, however, found genre labeling useful. Frank questioned the broad scope of some of the labels and felt they hampered his efforts to find the books he wanted. He enjoyed crime novels, for instance, but was sometimes unsure if these books were subsumed under the "murder mysteries" label:

> *[in a frustrated tone]* …I find the labeling in this library very strange.
> There's no crime section, there's a murder section, so if there's a robbery,
> where does that go, you know? So that's not particularly helpful, I don't
> find. (Frank)

Seven other participants in the study reported that the genre labels had little impact on them because they had never noticed them. In Tricia's case, she also found the labels unhelpful because "I don't really know what the labels mean". On the whole then, genre labels were useful only to a few of my participants. While an experimental study of genre labels had found that they "significantly increased" the circulation of fiction books that were marked (Baker, 1988, p.374), genre labeling appeared to have had less of an

impact on my participants. In most instances, the labels did not play an influential role in their fiction book choices.

7.7 Physical separation of books by genre

Physical separation of books by genre is practiced in many public libraries (Maker, 2008; Trott & Novak, 2006; Saricks, 2005). In Wellington City Libraries (2008c), fiction genres such as "murder mysteries" and "science fiction and fantasy" are shelved separately from the main "A to Z" collection. Participants were asked for their views on this arrangement and whether they found it helpful. Eight of the participants indicated quite strongly that they liked this arrangement because it made it easier for them to browse within genres they liked. Felicity, who was an avid reader of historical novels, said she wished the library would extend this separation to historical fiction. She explained that she was sometimes at a loss of what to borrow when visiting her public library:

> I go to [name of community library] but I find it a wee bit difficult
> sometimes because I'm very fond of historical fiction. They don't have them
> set out in categories [like] "historical fiction" – the library's not really big
> enough. ...Sometimes I go down there and I think, "Oh, what am I going to
> get out today?" and it's a bit hit and miss, really. (Felicity)

Felicity felt that a "historical fiction" shelf would assist her in finding "like-minded books" when she ran out of ideas on what to borrow. Like Felicity, Zoe also wanted to see more books physically separated out by genre categories. She complained that while "[t]he library has their mystery thrillers and they've got their chick lit, the rest of it is just "A to Z" and that's too much!" While most of the participants were in favour of genre separation, not all thought this was a good idea. Elinor pointed out that physically separating books could limit one's serendipitous encounter with potentially good titles: "…it probably stops you from accidentally coming across a great author who happens to be in a genre that you don't usually read… [I]t would close off some opportunities". Anna worried that if a book belonged in more than one genre, it would be difficult to know in which genre category, she would need to look the book under - if arranged under separate genre shelves. Overall, however, the majority of my participants liked the idea

of physically separating fiction books by genre. Consistent with the findings of Baker's (1988, p.374) study, many preferred "physical separation" as a tool for browsing compared to genre labels placed on book spines.

7.8 "Librarian's Choice" recommendations

Wellington City Libraries (2008a) displays "Librarian's Choice" stickers on the front cover of some fiction books to indicate recommended reads from library staff. These books are also displayed separately from the main "A to Z" fiction. Participants were asked if such endorsements from library staff influenced their book choices. Of the twelve participants in the study, only Dolores confirmed that "Librarian's Choice" stickers sometimes persuaded her to borrow a book. She rationalized that the book must be of "good quality" if recommended by a librarian. Four others said they had never noticed the stickers, while another five recalled seeing them but did not think the stickers influenced their book choices. Sometimes, this was simply because they did not like the selections – as Zoe explained: "I've often had a look at the "Librarian's Choice" shelf and I think they have some unusual taste. It's not to my taste". In Hilary's case, she said she never relied on the stickers because "I don't know who the librarian is or how old the sticker is". A few such as Kelster, felt that while "Librarian's Choice" stickers was a good idea, they were not altogether helpful as no explanations were given as to *why* the endorsed books had been chosen[4]:

> Sometimes it would be quite nice to know what the reason is – why they
> picked it. I don't know if you've sometimes seen in bookshops – they
> actually do the same thing and they put a little reason. So it would be quite
> nice to know why the librarian chose it and not just, "This is good". Because
> they might have liked it [for] a certain character but I'm looking at it for the
> scenery… So it's like they're halfway there but not quite. (Kelster)

Kelster's comment regarding bookshops is interesting and points to the service expectations of readers who also frequent bookstores. I examine this issue further in a later section of this chapter. On the whole, however, it can be said that "Librarian's

---

[4] The "Librarian's Choice" books have accompanying folders on the display stands. These folders give brief synopses (supplied by Amazon.com) of the books but do not provide *reasons* as to why the books were endorsed by library staff.

Choice" recommendations had little impact on participants' choice of fiction books in the library.

7.9 "Reader's Choice" recommendations

Along with "Librarian's Choice", Wellington City Libraries (2008a) also offers fiction books with "Reader's Choice" stickers on the cover of books. As the name suggests, these are fiction books that other library patrons have read and wish to recommend to fellow readers. "Reader's Choice" stickers had very little impact on my participants. As was the case for "Librarian's Choice", some had never seen the stickers and could not comment on their usefulness. Those who were aware of the stickers did not find them persuasive – again, because they were unsure why the endorsed books had been chosen. While "Reader's Choice" books were accompanied by folders on the display stands to explain why the books had been endorsed, none of my participants were aware of, or consulted, the folders. Interestingly, while Dolores sometimes looked to "Librarian's Choice" for recommendations, her trust did not extend to "Reader's Choice". She explained:

> I do go more by people's recommendations, as in people I *know* recommendations, rather than just "Reader's Choice" cos I don't know who that reader is. They may have a particular bent for something that's quite gruesome… (Dolores)

In Chapter 5, I had reported that fiction readers tended to rely on the recommendations of people they trusted. As they were unsure why the "Reader's Choice" books had been endorsed, they did not see this as a particularly useful or trustworthy source for book recommendations.

7.10 Fiction web page / fiction databases

Wellington City Libraries' fiction web page and fiction databases did not have any effect on participants' book choices. As discussed in the chapter before, most of my participants were unaware that the library had a fiction web page. They were equally

unaware that the library subscribed to two databases, *Fiction Connection* and *What do I Read Next?* (see Wellington City Libraries, 2008d). The responses from Frank - "didn't know about it, to be honest", Zoe - "never heard of it" and Quinn – "no, no, didn't know about those" were typical of those I received from other participants. Like the fiction web page, the fiction databases were not obvious from the library's home page, as there was no direct link to these resources. As none of my participants were aware of the databases, they had no effect at all on participants' book choices.

7.11 Role of library staff in fiction book choices

Participants were asked if they consulted library staff for help in choosing fiction books. Overwhelmingly, the answer was "no". Some, such as Herbert Austin, were doubtful that staff could match them to the books they wanted: "…if I asked a library staff to pick me a book, they'd probably pick something I didn't like". A number of participants were also hesitant to approach library staff for help because of a perception that staff were too busy:

> I might ask them to help me find a specific book but I never ask them for recommendations. …[T]he library staff always seem to be so busy, you know, they're either shelving or they're issuing so you sort of feel like you're interrupting them if you ask them for help… (Zoe)

> …[U]sually you have to interrupt them to get them to come and help you because they're shelving or doing something like that so I'm conscious not to take up too much of their time. I'm sure they're overworked. (Kelster)

Some participants, such as Dolores, were uncomfortable with the idea of seeking recommendations from staff because they did not know the latter personally:

> It's a slightly different scenario, isn't it, to going and sitting and having a chat with a colleague or friend cos that's a bit more spontaneous and you've got that relationship there and that connection. Whereas to go and ask a complete stranger about a book…I don't know that I would. (Dolores)

Dolores was surprised when I pointed out to her that in the U.S., readers' advisors were available in some public libraries to assist leisure readers in their book selections (Saricks, 2005). She said she might be persuaded to approach staff for recommendations

if *her* library offered such a service: "[u]nless they set themselves up as a particular service, you know, if they promoted that [and] they had a name thing that said, "Come talk to us". Otherwise, I'd just feel like I'm interrupting them".

Only two participants in my study, Quinn and Anna, sought the assistance of staff in recommending fiction books. Quinn explained that the staff in his local community library were "good people - friendly and easy to approach" and so he felt comfortable asking them to recommend titles to him. Interestingly, while he also frequented the public library's central branch in town, he never approached the central staff for recommendations. When I asked why he made this distinction, he said of his community library: "…it just seems to have a more close knit feeling to it – the relationship feeling to it, which I think makes them a bit easier to approach rather than here [central library]". Like Quinn, Anna also felt comfortable asking her local community librarians for recommendations, describing them as "lovely people". Although she was not always satisfied with their recommendations, she appreciated their assistance and saw them as an important source for her book ideas. Quinn and Anna's accounts were the exception in this study. Consistent with the findings of Rothbauer's (2004b) study, librarians remained "untapped and invisible resources" (p.99) for most of my other participants.

7.12 Influence of bookstores

One of the hallmarks of qualitative research is that it allows respondents to talk about issues of interest or importance to them (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). During my interviews with participants, nine of them volunteered information on bookstore use[5] , without my solicitation. Participants' comments were interesting and relevant to this study because their experiences of using bookstores shaped to some extent, their views on how well the public library was serving them. The nine participants who volunteered information all bought books from bookstores[6]. They patronized a wide range of

---

[5] This refers to physical bookstores, not online ones.
[6] These included fiction and non-fiction books. Some were occasional buyers who bought a book every three to four months while others were more frequent. One participant reported buying "at least" one book

bookstores including major chains such as *Borders*, *Dymocks* and *Whitcoulls*, smaller independent shops such as *Unity Books*, and second-hand stores. Interestingly, while participants were generally reluctant to ask library staff for help in choosing fiction, they were willing to seek the assistance of bookstore employees, who were variably described as "proactive" (Zoe), "helpful" (Quinn) and "very good on service" (Felicity). Participants recognized that bookstores had a financial incentive to serve them. They therefore expected a level of service from bookstores that was rarely mirrored in their descriptions of libraries. Zoe was one such participant who sought the recommendations of bookstore staff but not librarians. She explained:

> …[I]n the bookshop, it's in their interest to help you because you'll then go
> to spend money in their shop. Whereas in the library, it doesn't matter if you
> take books off the shelf or not, they probably prefer you didn't cos then they
> don't have to put it back again! (Zoe)

Kelster shared quite similar sentiments, informing me that bookstores "…try and sell things to you…[whereas] the library is there to line up the books". Like Zoe, she looked to bookstore staff, but not librarians, for help in choosing fiction. Participants reported being generally satisfied with the recommendations they received from bookstore staff.

The distinctions that participants drew between bookstores and public libraries extended to other areas as well. Participants overwhelmingly said that bookstores were easier to browse than public libraries. George, who did not browse in the public library, reported browsing in bookstores. He explained that this was because "…libraries have books in shelves, whereas bookshops tend to lay out their books on tables and browsing is much easier in a bookshop like that". Frank expressed similar sentiments: "I browse in bookstores but not in the library. ...I never find it [library] organized in a way that I like browsing". Participants such as Frank, Felicity and Zoe liked the fact that in bookstores, fiction books were extensively sorted into genres and categories. They saw this as conducive to browsing and wished the same practice could be extended to public libraries.   As elaborated by Zoe:

---

per month. Reasons for purchasing included not being able to obtain a copy from the library, wanting to have one's own copy of a "special book" and as gifts to family and friends.

> I think that's why I like *Borders.* Even though it's huge, it's really well organized. So you can go in there and…they have shelves where they have Booker Prize winners, Orange Prize winners, Pulitzer Prize winners, then they'll have another shelf that's got: these are "classics", these are "contemporary classics" so all that sorting is done for you. …If the library did that, that would be amazing. (Zoe)

Participants also highlighted other areas in which they thought bookstores performed better than their public libraries. These included:

- "Staff recommendations" with clearly visible tabs explaining why the selected books were endorsed - (Kelster, Felicity, Frank)
- Newer stock for fiction books - (Hilary, Felicity)
- More in-depth stock for specific genres - (Quinn, Elinor)
- Better promotion of new books, e.g. email notifications sent to bookstore customers (Dolores, Zoe)

7.13 Reflections on using the public library

At the end of our discussion, I asked participants how they felt about using the public library as fiction readers and what they saw as its advantages or limitations. Although participants had criticized aspects of library services when we discussed individual readers' advisory tools, generally participants said they were "happy" or "satisfied" with their public libraries. Almost all the participants said they appreciated being able to borrow fiction books "for free" or "at no risk"; if they did not like the books they had selected, they could simply return them. This was seen by participants as the greatest advantage that libraries had over bookstores. In terms of what they perceived to be the public library's limitations, most reiterated that charges for best-sellers should be less expensive. Two of the participants felt that aspects of the fiction collection were quite "old" and "grotty" and more stringency was needed to withdraw books. Several of the participants also called for "better" shelf arrangements – along the bookstore model – to facilitate their browsing of fiction books.

7.14 Discussion

The findings in this chapter revealed that adult fiction readers employed a number of strategies to select fiction books when they visited their public library. Searching for a known author was the most common strategy used, supplemented by some form of browsing. Once readers began browsing within a range of books, clues from the books – including the blurb, cover image and sample text – were used to determine the books' suitability and appeal. The public library provided a range of readers' advisory tools to assist fiction readers in their selection process. In doing so, however, my study suggests that its efforts were only partially successful. While initiatives such as the "New Books" display, the returns trolley and the arrangement of fiction books by genre assisted participants by narrowing their browsing choices to a manageable level, other efforts were less successful. Book recommendations in the form of "Librarian's Choice" and "Reader's Choice" had little impact on participants, in part because they were often unsure *why* the endorsed books had been selected. Participants also made no use of the library's fiction web page and fiction databases because they were unaware that such sources existed. Library staff also assumed a largely invisible role in participants' book choices. Participants were reluctant to seek the recommendations of library staff in part because of a common perception that the latter were "too busy". This contrasted sharply with their accounts of using bookstores where staff were found to be helpful and pro-active. The findings reported in this chapter point to a number of areas in library services that need re-looking:

(i) Increase visibility of, and access to, library staff

Participants in my study overwhelmingly reported that they did not consult library staff for help in choosing fiction, in part because of a perception that staff were "too busy" to assist. More needs to be done to redress this perception. In the U.S. where the readers' advisory movement is more established (Saricks, 2005; Thomas, 2003) readers' advisors are often available at the reference desk to assist readers. Increasingly, this service is being explicitly promoted to readers with signage such as "Not Sure What to Read? Ask Here" (Saricks, 2005, p.137). In New Zealand, such overt promotion has not taken hold.

Thomas (2001) found in her study of New Zealand public libraries that none had advertised their readers' advisory services to readers. In part, this was because not all staff felt comfortable making direct recommendations to readers.

While each library - in consultation with its patrons - must answer for itself how it can best meet readers' needs, the current invisibility of readers' advisory services is a serious concern. More needs to be done to promote this service to fiction readers. At the very least, readers should be made to feel comfortable approaching the reference desk for assistance. Staff can then make recommendations or put readers in touch with the fiction reference tools (e.g. fiction database, book lists) that can assist them. Some form of overt signage as advocated by Saricks (2005) is therefore helpful, to impress upon readers that they can seek assistance if they so wish. As rightly pointed out by Trott and Novak (2006), "…we need to make it as easy as possible for patrons to remain independent [in their book selections] if they prefer it but also as comfortable as possible to receive assistance when necessary" (p. 37). Library staff could also benefit from attending training courses for readers' advisory services. Libraries Alive! (2008), for example, runs readers' advisory workshops for library staff in Australia and New Zealand.

(ii) Learn from bookstores

My participants also highlighted a number of service areas where bookstores were seen to perform better than public libraries. There is scope for public libraries to learn from bookstores so they can more effectively serve their own readers. The first is that bookstore staff tend to be pro-active in a way that librarians are not (Rippel, 2007; Woodward, 2005). Rippel (2007) notes that in bookstores, "…staff make contact with customers to show help is near. In many libraries, by contrast, staff are not trained to…invite patrons to ask questions" (n.p.). In order to better serve fiction readers, then, library staff should assume a pro-active role as is done by staff in bookstores.

Libraries can also learn from bookstores in the area of book recommendations. Participants in my study did not find "Librarian's Choice" and "Reader's Choice"

stickers helpful because they were unsure why the endorsed books had been selected. "Staff Recommendations" at bookstores, by contrast, were seen as useful because the endorsed books were often accompanied by visible tabs, explaining why staff had selected the books. Libraries can increase the usefulness of "Librarian's Choice" and "Reader's Choice" recommendations by adopting a similar strategy. Rippel (2007) has suggested as well that template cards explaining why the selected books had been recommended could be inserted into each book. This would allow library users to make a more informed decision on books, than endorsement stickers alone.

While there is much that libraries can learn from bookstores, this is not to suggest that libraries should blindly emulate the latter as the two have different goals and missions. Although most of the participants in my study   wanted fiction books to be arranged separately by genre – as is commonly done in bookstores – this is probably one area where libraries should refrained from copying bookstores completely. Bookstores are profit-driven. Their extensive arrangement of books by genre is primarily a marketing tool, designed to target and sell as many books as possible (Maker, 2008). Transporting this model completely to the public library system would generate problems. For a start, it would be difficult to determine which book goes where as "…many authors are writing books that could feasibly be placed in a variety of genres" (Trott & Novak, 2006, p.34). Separation by genre may also lead fiction readers to believe that they can only find enjoyable books within the genres they normally read. It would close off opportunities for serendipitous discovery (Maker, 2008; Saricks, 2005). Space constraints in many public libraries also make this an unfeasible arrangement as additional shelves will be required for segregation (Trott & Novak, 2006). Rather than rearranging all books into genre categories, then, librarians can better serve readers by ensuring that relevant tools are in place to support the latter. These include placing read-alike lists in the stacks near appropriate authors, rotating genre book displays and providing direct staff assistance to readers (Trott & Novak, 2006).

(iii) Market and fine-tune existing library services

My study also found that participants made no use of the public library's fiction web page and fiction databases because they were unaware that such resources existed. The need to increase the visibility of the library's web page was discussed in the chapter before but the same principle applies to fiction databases. More should be done to increase the visibility of the databases to readers. This means providing clear and easily navigable links to this resource from the library's homepage (Hoffert, 2003; Nordmeyer, 2001) as well as marketing its presence to readers via email notifications, newsletters and flyers (Baker & Wallace, 2002). A number of participants in my study had also expressed frustration that they were unable to find books at their regular shelf location because these had been put on display. Baker and Wallace (2002) suggest that this problem can be mitigated to some extent by placing shelf dummies where the displayed books would normally be. Cards could be inserted with the shelf dummies, providing readers with directions on where to find the display.

(iv) Dialogue with fiction readers

Above all else, the insights shared by my participants suggest that no two readers use the same strategy in looking for fiction books. The readers' advisory tools that benefit some readers are seen as ineffective by others. While no public library can please *all* library patrons *all* of the time, it is nevertheless important to please as many as possible (Maker, 2008). More needs to be done to engage in dialogue with fiction readers to find out "what works" for them or not, and *why*. The research to date suggests that this is rarely done in New Zealand. Houghton's (1999) survey of 48 public libraries in New Zealand found that only 20% had surveyed their customers regarding the provision of fiction. This rather dismal rate was confirmed by Thomas (2001) who found that only two of five large public libraries in New Zealand had conducted user studies on services for leisure reading. It is therefore timely that librarians engage in greater dialogue with the readers they serve. As suggested in a previous chapter, focus group interviews with fiction readers will help to gauge how well readers' advisory tools are presently serving them (Hutton & Walters, 1988).

Chapter 8

Conclusion

In this concluding chapter, I address my study's final research question (Research Question 5): "How satisfied are adult fiction readers with the book choices they make at the public library, using the sources and strategies that they do?" I also offer some concluding remarks for the study and suggest some areas for future research.

8.1 Satisfaction with book choices

As I brought my interviews to a close, I asked participants to share with me how satisfied they were with the fiction book selections they made at the public library, using the sources and strategies that they do. Participants generally said they were happy or satisfied with their choices, as the following excerpts show:

> Good. I very rarely hit a dunger. Sometimes I do and I just don't finish the book. (Elinor)

> I'm quite happy. ...I've got good author names from the book club and that generates the name now for when I go to the library and look for others from the same person. (Dolores)

> I usually enjoy what I select. (Tricia)

Some of the participants indicated a mixed response, where they were sometimes pleased with what they selected and other times, not:

> Sometimes very happy – I get three very, very good books. Other times, three useless ones and I go back to the library and get three more. (Herbert Austin)

> Yeah, fairly pleased. Sometimes a bit disappointed. Usually…it's because I'm taking a risk. [E]very now and then, I like to try…an author I haven't heard of before. Sometimes it's a good thing, sometimes it's not. (Kelster)

> I would say 6-7 out of 10 [satisfaction rate]. (George)

One participant, Zoe, reported that she was "less satisfied" with her fiction choices at the public library now, compared to in the past. She explained that this was because she had become more discerning in her reading taste and therefore "…to find books that I'm really interested in now, I find harder there [public library]". Zoe resolved this problem to some extent by buying books, if she was unable to obtain them from the public library. Generally, however, most of my study participants indicated that they were satisfied with the fiction choices they made at the public library. Quite a few pointed out to me that they could always return unsatisfactory books and borrow new ones if they happened to select "wrongly".

8.2 Concluding remarks

In my effort to understand how adult fiction readers select fiction books in the public library, I have in this study, attempted to go beyond looking at what readers "do" once they are in the library to also examine more broadly, the everyday life influences that impact their book choices. In the preceding four chapters, using Williamson's (1998) ecological model as my conceptual framework, I examined in some detail the role that fiction readers' "internal environments" and "external contexts" played in their book selections. Personal characteristics and circumstances such as mood, reading taste and lifestyle influenced readers' choices. So too, did external sources such as family, friends, book club and the mass media. The public library also played a role in my participants' book choices but it was a largely passive one. Book displays and the arrangement of some fiction books by genre assisted participants who browsed; but library staff, the book recommendations they made via "Librarian's Choice" and the fiction resources they provided in terms of a fiction webpage and databases, had little impact on my participants. In most instances, the public library was not the first source that participants turned to, to obtain ideas on what to read. Family, friends, book club, and the mass media played a more influential role with my participants, along with personal characteristics such as reading taste and mood.

8.3 Suggestions for future research

While my study has attempted to provide a more in-depth and holistic view of how adult fiction readers select their books in the public library, there is scope to explore this topic further. The following are offered as suggestions for future research:

(i) Conduct study with younger adult fiction readers

I was not able to recruit anyone younger than 34 years of age, in my study. It may very well be those in their late teens or twenties may have quite different experiences of, and strategies for, selecting fiction books in the public library. In particular, newer technologies such as blogs, wikis and social networking sites are likely to play a more prominent role in the lives of younger adults (Lenhart, Madden, Rankin Macgill & Smith, 2007) compared to those who are older. Certainly, among my group of participants, these newer forms of social media played a very minimal role in their lives and I was not able to shed much light on the issue. Conducting a study with younger adult fiction readers would therefore be timely.

(ii) Conduct study with elderly fiction readers

My study included a number of elderly participants and they highlighted a number of barriers in their search for fiction books. In particular, apprehension towards computers and the Internet discouraged them from using online sources. More research needs to be done to determine how public libraries can best meet the needs of elderly fiction readers. And while the participants in my study were all physically mobile and frequent visitors to their libraries, there exists elderly patrons who face the additional challenge of mobility. More research needs to be done to find out how well library services are meeting their needs.

(iii) Conduct study in another geographical setting

The focus of my study was confined to the Wellington region and to one public library network (i.e. Wellington City Libraries). A future study could look into whether fiction readers in another geographical setting – for instance, in a rural environment – would exhibit the same search strategies for books as that accounted for by my participants.
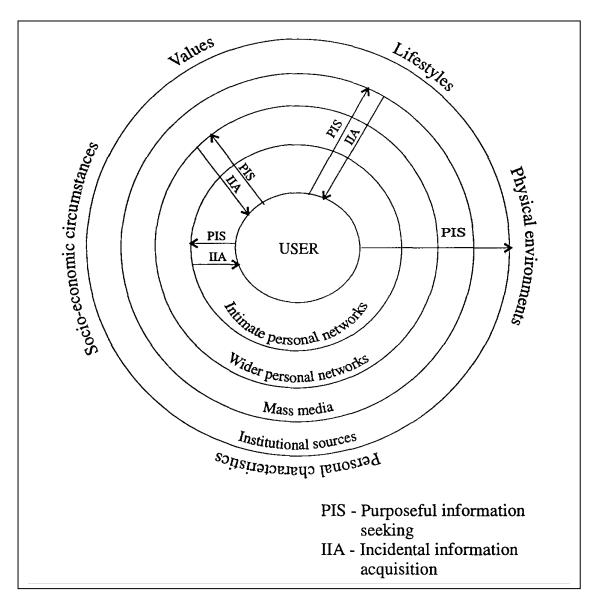
Would issues such as less proximity to bookstores and libraries in a rural context, for example, result in quite different strategies for selecting fiction books?

Much remains then, to be examined, before we can understand more fully the information seeking behaviour of adult fiction readers. It is hoped that the present study has contributed in some way to our body of knowledge on this important user group.

Words: 24,381

Kirsty Williamson's Ecological Model of Information Seeking and Use

Source: Williamson, K. (1998). Discovered by chance: The role of incidental information acquisition in an ecological model of information use. *Library & Information Science Research, 20*(1), 23-40, p.36.

APPENDIX B: List of participants

Participants are listed alphabetically by their pseudonyms. Interviews were conducted from 23 June, 2008 – 28 July, 2008.

1. Anna

   68 years old. Retired home-care worker. Book club member for 8 months and public library member for 60 years. Enjoys science fiction and mystery thrillers.

2. Dolores

   48 years old. Portfolio manager. Book club member for 18 months and public library member for 40 years. Enjoys historical and contemporary fiction.

3. Elinor

   34 years old. Medical doctor. Book club member for 8 years and public library member since childhood. Enjoys contemporary literary fiction.

4. Felicity

   62 years old. Retired contracts administrator. Book club member for 12 years and public library member for 50 years. Enjoys historical fiction.

5. Frank

   40 years old. IT consultant. Book club member for 10 months and public library member since pre-school. Enjoys literary and satirical fiction.

6. George

   85 years old. Retired civil engineer and clinical psychologist. Book club member for 9 years and public library member for 30 years. Enjoys New Zealand fiction and the classics.

7. Herbert Austin

   70 years old. Retired engineer and restorer of vintage cars. Book club member for 2 years and public library member for 45 years. Enjoys spy, adventure and detective type fiction.

8. Hilary

   52 years old. Academic librarian. Book club member for 6 years and public library member for 20 years. Enjoys romance novels, mystery thrillers and contemporary fiction.

9. Kelster

   36 years old. IT project manager. Book club member for 3 years and public library member for 29 years. Enjoys historical fiction, crime novels and contemporary fiction.

10. Quinn

   37 years old. University student. Book club member for 10 months and public library member for 20 years. Enjoys science fiction and fantasy, and thrillers.

11. Tricia

   54 years old. Academic librarian. Book club member for 3 years and public library member for 23 years. Enjoys contemporary fiction.

12. Zoe

   39 years old. Stay-home mother, previously school teacher. Book club member for 2.5 years and public library member for 33 years. Enjoys New Zealand fiction and contemporary fiction.

<u>**APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**</u>

How adult fiction readers select fiction books in public libraries:
a study of information seeking in context

Introductory Comments

Thank participant for meeting up with me
Introduce myself: MLIS student, fiction reader
Review information sheet and consent form
Assurances- no judgment on reading tastes
Permission to start recording

Part 1: Personal characteristics & context

1.   Tell me about yourself and your experiences of being a fiction reader.
-    How long have you been a fiction reader?
-    Why do you read fiction?

2.   What types of fiction do you like reading:
-    Who are your favourite authors or books?
-    What appeals to you about a particular author / genre?

3.   Are there any types of books or authors you would not read? Why not?

4.   In deciding what to read, does the mood that you're in influence your book choice? If so, can you give me an example of how it has influenced you?

5.   It has been said that "reading selections change with the rhythms of life"[7] such as family or work stress, vacations, retirement. How has "what's going on" in your life influenced the type of fiction you choose to borrow and read?

6.   How much time do you spend reading fiction? How does it fit in with the rest of your everyday life activities?

Part 2: Role of the public library

7.   Walk me through a typical visit to your public library when you go to borrow fiction.
-    How do you search for what you want?
-    How do you decide what to borrow – what do you look for?

---

[7] Holt, G. (2001). Conceptualizing a center for the reader. In K.D. Shearer & R. Burgin (Eds*.). The Readers' Advisor's companion* (p.283). Englewood, CO: Libraries Unlimited.

8. The public library commonly provides a variety of readers' advisory / fiction promotion tools to assist fiction readers in their book selections. I am interested to know if you make use of any of these sources and if so, which ones you find helpful and why. Which ones don't you use and why?
    -   Book displays – e.g. new displays, returns trolley, frontal displays.
    -   Genre labelling on book spines
    -   Separation of books by genre
    -   Book recommendations - e.g. "librarians' recommendations", "readers' choice".
    -   Library's fiction web pages / databases
    -   Any others you wish to highlight?

9. Do you ever ask library staff for help in choosing fiction? Why or why not?

10. How do you feel about using the public library for your fiction book needs? Advantages and limitations?

Part 3: Role of personal networks

11. Tell me about the people in your everyday life, e.g. family, friends, colleagues.
    -   Are they fiction readers like you?
    -   Do you look to anyone for ideas on the type of fiction to borrow and read? If so, whom and why?

12. Tell me your experiences of being in a book club.
    -   What prompted you to join?
    -   How does your book club choose what to read?
    -   What impact, if any, has being a book club member had on the type of fiction you read outside your club?
    -   How, if at all, has it influenced the type of fiction you borrow from the public library?

13. How do you feel about consulting other people as sources of information on fiction books? Advantages and limitations?

Part 4: Role of mass media

Internet

14. Tell me what role, if any, the Internet plays in your life as a fiction reader.
    -   How accessible is the Internet for you – do you use it as part of your daily life?
    -   What uses do you make of it as a fiction reader?

15. What types of online sources do you use? (e.g. Amazon, fiction websites, Web 2.0).

16.	What types of information do you seek from such sources? How do they help you decide what to borrow and read from the public library?

17.	Public libraries now commonly provide resources and information on fiction books on their own websites:
	-	What uses do you make of your public library's website for your fiction book needs?
	-	How does it compare to the other sources you use on the Internet?

18.	How do you feel about using the Internet as a fiction reader? Advantages and limitations?

Printed press, television, radio

19.	What influences, if any, do daily media sources such as the printed press, television and radio have on the type of fiction books you borrow from the public library? What uses do you make of them?

20.	How do you feel about using these sources as a fiction reader? Advantages and limitations?

Part 5: Summing it up

21.	In this interview, we have explored the role of everyday life sources, e.g. other people, mass media, public library - as well as your personal characteristics, e.g. reading taste, mood, in informing the type of fiction you borrow from the public library. Using the sources and strategies that you do, how satisfied are you with the book choices you make – do you enjoy reading the fiction you borrow?

22.	Is there anything important to you as a fiction reader that I have not asked you about? Any comments you wish to add?

APPENDIX D: Information Sheet

INFORMATION SHEET FOR POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS

How adult fiction readers select fiction books in public libraries: a study of information seeking in context

I am a graduate student in the Master of Library & Information Studies program at Victoria University of Wellington and I am conducting a study on adult fiction readers as part of the requirements of my degree. Victoria University requires ethical approval for all research involving human participants and my proposed study has been approved by the School of Information Management's Human Ethics Committee.

Purpose of study
The aim of my study is to find out how adult fiction readers search for and select fiction books to borrow from the public library. I am interested to know what sources and strategies readers rely on to make their book selections and what factors - both *within* and *outside* the library – influence their choices. Insights gained from readers will help to provide a better understanding of how well public libraries presently serve fiction readers and highlight what improvements, if any, need to be made to library services.

Participation criteria
I am keen to interview fiction readers who meet all of the following criteria:
- are 18 years or older and who read fiction for leisure
- are members of a public library and have been so for at least six months
- have at least six months experience in a book club / book group
- are readers who *do* borrow fiction books from the public library

Research procedures
If you meet all of the above criteria and would like to participate in my study, I will ask for your written consent to do so. Your actual participation will consist of a single interview with me, conducted face-to-face and lasting approximately 60-90 minutes. This interview will be audio-recorded, transcribed and you will be given the opportunity to check the accuracy of the interview transcript. The interview will be scheduled at a time that suits you and in a location that is mutually convenient and suitable for audio-recording. During the interview, I will ask you to share your views and experiences on a range of topics including:
- what types of fiction books you like reading
- how you go about selecting fiction books in the public library
- whether affective factors such as "mood" influence your book choices
- whether the people in your everyday life, e.g. family, friends, colleagues, book clubs, influence your choice of fiction
- what uses you make of the mass media, e.g. Internet, printed press, radio – to inform your book choices.

Voluntary participation
Participation in my study is voluntary and you do not have to answer any questions you find objectionable. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time before the final analysis of data on August 15, 2008. Any data that you have provided before this date will be destroyed

immediately. Withdrawal from the study does not affect the book voucher given to you at the time of your interview (see *Remuneration* below).

Remuneration
Each person who participates in my study will receive a $30 *Booksellers* book voucher during the interview. This is a universal book voucher redeemable at all major bookselling chains in New Zealand, e.g. Borders, Dymocks, Whitcoulls, Paper Plus, and at many smaller bookstores in the country.

Confidentiality
The research is confidential and your identity will be kept strictly confidential. You will be assigned a pseudonym and this is the name that will be used in my final report. Anything that is said that could identify you will not be reported. My supervisor and I will be the only persons who have access to the data collected and this will be securely stored, in locked drawers and through the use of password protected files. All data collected will be destroyed within a year of the completion of my project.

Dissemination of research findings
A copy of my research paper will be deposited in Victoria University's Library. A copy of the report may also be deposited in the University's institutional repository. Results from my research may be published in academic or professional journals or be presented at conferences. A summary of my research findings will also be forwarded to all study participants (in early November of this year) who indicate on their consent forms that they would like a copy.

If you are interested in participating in this research project or would like further information, please contact me or my supervisor. Contact details are listed below:

Researcher: Kamy Ooi
                Master of Library & Information Studies student
                Victoria University of Wellington
                Home: (04) 8021300 extn 20515
                Mobile: 0211355743
                Email: ooikamy@student.vuw.ac.nz

Supervisor: Dr. Chern Li Liew
                Senior Lecturer
                School of Information Management
                Victoria University of Wellington
                P.O. Box 600, Wellington.
                Phone: (04) 463 5213
                Email: chernli.liew@vuw.ac.nz

APPENDIX E: Consent Form

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

How adult fiction readers select fiction books in public libraries: a study of information seeking in context

I agree to take part in this research project. I have been provided with adequate information relating to the nature and objectives of the study, I have understood that information and have been given the opportunity to seek further clarification or explanations.

I consent to procedures associated with being interviewed for this study, including the audio recording and transcription of my interview. I understand that I will be given the opportunity to check the transcript of my interview and to provide feedback to the researcher.

I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time before the final analysis of data on **August 15, 2008,** without providing reasons. I understand that if I withdraw from the study before this date, any data that I have provided will be destroyed.

I understand that any information or opinions I provide will be kept confidential and reported only in a non-attributable form.

I understand that when this research is completed, the data collected will be kept for a year, after which it will be destroyed.

I understand that the results of the study may be published in academic or professional journals, or be presented at academic or professional conferences.

I understand that a copy of the research paper will be deposited in Victoria University's Library and another copy may be deposited in the University's institutional repository.

Signature: _____

Name: _____

Date: _____

I would like to receive a summary of the research via: *(please tick and provide details)*

Email address: _____

Postal address: _____

APPENDIX F:

Recruitment advertisement placed on New Zealand Book Council noticeboard,

24 June – 28 July, 2008

http://www.bookcouncil.org.nz/community/groups/bookgroupnoticeboard.html

---

FICTION READERS NEEDED FOR RESEARCH STUDY

Are you 18 years or older and love reading fiction? Do you borrow fiction books from the public library? Have you been a public library member *and* a book club / book group member for at least six months? If you meet all these criteria, please consider participating in my study and receive a $30 book voucher for your participation!

I am a graduate student in the Master of Library & Information Studies program at Victoria University, who is conducting a study on how fiction readers search for and select fiction books to borrow from the public library. I am curious to know what sources and strategies readers rely on to make their book selections and what factors – both within and outside the library – influence their choices. Your participation in the study will consist of an informal interview with me, lasting 60-90 minutes and scheduled at a time and place that is convenient for you. I will ask you to share your views on a range of topics including the type of fiction books you like reading; how you go about selecting fiction in the public library; whether social networks such as your family, friends and book club influence the type of fiction you read; and what uses you make of the Internet and other mass media to inform your book choices. Your identity will be kept confidential and only a pseudonym will be used to identify you in my actual report.

Each person who participates in my study will receive a $30 *Booksellers'* book voucher. This is a universal book voucher redeemable at all major bookselling chains in New Zealand, e.g. Borders, Dymocks, Whitcoulls, Paper Plus, and at many smaller bookstores in the country. Whatever fiction genre you read, I would love to hear from you! My study has been reviewed by Victoria University's Human Ethics Committee and complies with its guidelines for research involving human participants. If you would like further information or are interested in participating in my study, please contact me. My name is Kamy Ooi and my email address is: ooikamy@student.vuw.ac.nz.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adkins, D. & Bossaller, J.E. (2007). Fiction access points across computer-mediated book information sources: A comparison of online bookstores, reader advisory databases, and public library catalogs. *Library & Information Science Research, 29*(3), 354-368.

Allen, B. & Reser, D. (1990). Content Analysis in Library and Information Science Research. *Library & Information Science Research, 12,* 251-262.

Armstrong, N.M. (2001). "No, thanks – I'd rather do it myself": Indirect advisory services. In K.D. Shearer & R. Burgin (Eds.). *The readers' advisor's companion* (pp.179-190). Englewood, Colo: Libraries Unlimited.

Auckland City Libraries (2008). *Auckland City Library Website – Library Book Clubs.* Accessed May 1, 2008, from http://www.aucklandcitylibraries.com/exploreyourcommunity/events/bookclubs/librarybookclubs.htm.

Baker, S.L. (1996). A decade's worth of research on browsing fiction collections. In K.D. Shearer (Ed.). *Guiding the reader to the next book* (pp.127-147). New York : Neal-Schuman Publishers.

———. (1993). Book lists: What we know, what we need to know. *RQ, 33*(2), 177-180.

———. (1988). Will fiction classification schemes increase use? *RQ, 27* (Spring), 366-376.

Baker, S.L. & Wallace, K.L. (2002). *The responsive public library: How to develop and market a winning collection.* (2nd ed.). Englewood, Colo: Libraries Unlimited.

Beghtol, C. (1994). *The classification of fiction: The development of a system based on theoretical principles.* Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press.

Belkin, N.J. (1980). Anomalous state of knowledge as a basis for information retrieval. *Canadian Journal of Information Science, 5,* 133-143.

Bessman Taylor, J. (2007). *When adults talk in circles: Book groups and contemporary reading practices.* PhD Dissertation. University of Illinois. Retrieved April 14, 2008, from Proquest Dissertations & Theses database.

Bolam, F. (2000). *Buy, borrow or beg? An investigation into how fiction readers get their books.* MA thesis. University of Sheffield. Retrieved February 14, 2008, from http://dagda.shef.ac.uk/dissertations/1999-00/bolam.pdf

Book Browse. (2008). *Book discussion groups at Book Browse.* Accessed October, 12, 2008, from http://www.bookbrowse.com/bookclubs/.

Bryson, M.K. (2004). *Public Library Services to the Romance Reader: An online survey of romance readers*. MSc in Library Science paper. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Retrieved January 30, 2008, from http://etd.ils.unc.edu/dspace/bitstream/1901/91/1/marybryson.pdf.

Carey, R.F., McKechnie, L.E.F. & McKenzie, P.J. (2001). Gaining access to everyday life information seeking. *Library & Information Science Research, 23*(4), 319-334.

Case, D.O. (2007). Looking for information: a survey of research on information seeking, needs, and behavior. (2nd ed.). Boston: Elsevier/Academic Press.

Case, D.O., Johnson, D., Andrews, J.E., Allard, S.L. & Kelly, K.M. (2004). From two-step flow to the Internet: The changing array of sources for genetics information seeking. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology,55*(8), 6670-669.

Casey, M.E. & Savastinuk, L.C. (2007). *Library 2.0: A guide to participatory library service.* Medford, NJ: Information Today.

———. (2006). Library 2.0: Service for the next generation library. *Library Journal, 131*(4), 40-42.

Chang, S-J. L. (2005). Chang's Browsing. In K.E. Fisher, S. Erdelez & L.E.F. McKechnie (Eds.). *Theories of information behavior* (pp.69-74). Medford, N.J.: Information Today.

"character". (2006) *Dictionary.com Unabridged (v1.1)*. Retrieved August 27, 2008, from Dictionary.com: http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/character

Chelton, M.K. (2003). Readers' Advisory 101. *Library Journal, 128*(18), 38-39.

Christchurch City Libraries. (2008). *CCL New Fiction – weekly listing* [RSS feed]. Accessed October 8, 2008 from http://librarydata.christchurch.org.nz/html/internetbranch/rss/fiction_for_rss.xml.

"circumstance". (2006) *WordNet® 3.0*. Retrieved August 27, 2008, from Dictionary.com: http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/circumstance

Coffman, S. (1999). Building earth's largest library: Driving into the future. *Searcher, 7*(3), 34-47.

Creswell, J.W. (2003). *Research design: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, Calif : Sage Publications.

Davidson, J. & Cave, R. (1990). *Fiction in Wellington: a survey of user preferences in public libraries in greater Wellington.* Wellington, N.Z.: Victoria University of Wellington, Dept. of Librarianship.

DeKalb County Public Library. (2008). *RSS feeds*. Accessed October 8, 2008 from http://www.dekalblibrary.org/rss-feeds.html.

Dervin, B. (1989). Users as research inventions: how research categories perpetuate inequities. *Journal of Communication, 39*(3), 216-232.

Ekvall, I-L & Larsson, S. (1997). EDVIN – a search system for fiction based on the experience of users' needs*. Information Services & Use, 17,* 81-84.

Fidel, R. (1993). Qualitative methods in information retrieval research. *Library & Information Science Research, 15*(3), 219-247.

Foster, A. (2004). A Nonlinear Model of Information-Seeking Behavior. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology, 55*(3), 228-237.

Gibbs, G.R. (2002). *Qualitative Data Analysis: Explorations with NVivo.* Buckingham: Open University Press.

Glazier, J.D. (1992). Qualitative and Nonqualitative Research Methodologies: Thesis, Antithesis, or Synthesis?" In J.D. Glazier & R.R. Powell (Eds.). Qualitative Research in Information Management (pp.201-214). Englewood , CO : Libraries Unlimited.

Glen, L. (2004). The creativity of reading fiction: An exploration of the creative processes and responses of fiction readers. MA Dissertation. University of Sheffield. Retrieved April 19, 2008, from http://www.shef.ac.uk/is/research/centres/cplis//Dissertations/Glenn_Louise_MALib. pdf.

Goodall, D. (1989). *Browsing in public libraries*. Loughborough : Library and Information Statistics Unit, Loughborough University of Technology.

Gorman, G.E. & Clayton, P. (2005). *Qualitative research for the information professional: a practical handbook.* (2nd ed.). London: Facet.

Harrell,G. (1996). Use of fiction categories in major American public libraries. In K.D. Shearer (Ed.). *Guiding the reader to the next book* (pp.149-157). New York: Neal-Schuman Publishers.

Hartley, J. (2001). *Reading groups.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hertzum, M., Andersen, H.H.K., Andersen, V. & Hansen, C.B.(2002). Trust in information sources: seeking information from people, documents, and virtual agents*. Interacting with Computers, 14,* 575-599.

Hesse-Biber, S.N. & Leavy, P. (2006). *The practice of qualitative research.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Hider, P. (2008). Use and non use of an Australian regional public library. *Australasian Public Libraries & Information Services, 21*(1), 33-40.

111

Hoffert, B. (2003). Taking back readers' advisory. *Library Journal, 128*(14), 44-46.

Hollands, N. (2006). Improving the model for interactive readers' advisory services. *Reference & User Services Quarterly, 45*(3), 205-212.

Holt, G. (2001). Conceptualizing a center for the reader. In K.D. Shearer & R. Burgin (Eds.). *The readers' advisor's companion* (pp.269-285). Englewood, Colo: Libraries Unlimited.

Houghton, C.R. (1999). *The attitudes and qualities of selectors of fiction in New Zealand public libraries.* Master of Library & Information Studies Research Paper, Victoria University of Wellington.

Hutton, B. & Walters, S. (1988). Focus groups: Linkages to the community. *Public Libraries, 27*(3), 149-152.

Jennings, B. & Sear, L. (1986). How readers select fiction: a survey in Kent. *Public Library Journal, 1*(4), 43-47.

Johnson, C.A. (2004). Choosing people: the role of social capital in information seeking behaviour. *Information Research, 10*(1), n.p. Accessed September 1, 2008, from http://informationr.net/ir/10-1/paper201.html.

Johnson, R.S. (2001). The global conversation about books, readers, and reading on the Internet. In K.D. Shearer & R. Burgin (Eds.). *The readers' advisor's companion* (pp.191-206). Englewood, Colo: Libraries Unlimited.

Kajewski, M.A. (2007). Emerging technologies changing our service delivery models. *The Electronic Library, 25*(4), 420-429.

Kayahara, J. & Wellman, B. (2007). Searching for culture – high and low. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 12*(3), 824-845.

Kofmel, K.G. (2002). *Adult readers of science fiction and fantasy: a qualitative study of reading preference and genre perception.* PhD Thesis. University of Western Ontario. Retrieved January 16, 2008, from Proquest Dissertations & Theses database.

Krikelas, J. (1983). Information-seeking behaviour. *Drexel Library Quarterly, 19*(2), 5-20.

Kvale, S. (1996). *Interviews: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Leech, B.L. (2002). Asking questions: Techniques for semistructured interviews. *PS: Political Science, 35*(4), 665-668.

Lenhart, A., Madden, M., Rankin Macgill, A. & Smith, A. (2007). *Teens and social media [PEW Internet & American Life Project Report]* Retrieved September 22, 2008, from http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP_Teens_Social_Media_Final.pdf.

Libraries Alive! (2008). *"Rewarding Reading" training courses.* Accessed October 5, 2008, from http://www.librariesalive.com.au/rewarding_reading.htm.

Lincoln, Y.S. & Guba, E.G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Long, E. (2003). *Book clubs: women and the uses of reading in everyday life.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Maker, R. (2008, May). Finding what you're looking for: A reader-centred approach to the classification of adult fiction in public libraries. *The Australian Library Journal,* 169-177.

Maness, J.M. (2006). Library 2.0 theory: Web 2.0 and its implications for libraries. *Webology, 3*(2), n.p. Accessed September 13, 2008 from http://www.webology.ir/2006/v3n2/a25.html

"mass media". (2006). *The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition.* Retrieved September 12, 2008, from Dictionary.com: http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/mass media

May, A.K., Olesh, E., Miltenberg, A.W. & Lackner, P. (2000). A look at reader's advisory services. *Library Journal, 125*(15), 40-43.

Memorial Hall Library. (2008). *Book Talk: An online book discussion group from the Memorial Hall Library.* Accessed September 8, 2008, from http://www.mhl.org/booktalk/.

Michels, D.H. (2005). The use of people as information sources in Biblical Studies research. *Canadian Journal of Information and Library Science, 29*(1), 91-109.

Moyer, J.E. (2007). Learning from leisure reading: A study of adult library patrons. *Reference & User Services Quarterly, 46*(4), 66-79.

Moyer, J.E. & Weech, T.L. (2005). The education of public librarians to serve leisure readers in the United States, Canada and Europe. *New Library World, 106* (1-2), 67-79.

Murray, J. (1994). I'll read anything as long as it's a mystery: The readers of large print materials. *Australasian Public Libraries and Information Studies, 7*(2), 98-108.

Nagata, H., Sakai, K. & Kawai, T. (2007). Public library and users' lifestyle in a changing context. *Performance Measurement & Metrics, 8*(3), 197-210.

New Zealand Book Council. (2008). *New Zealand Book Council - Online Book Group Noticeboard.* Accessed February 19, 2008, from http://www.bookcouncil.org.nz/community/groups/bookgroupnoticeboard.html.

Nguyen, A. & Western, M. (2006). "The complementary relationship between the Internet and traditional mass media: the case of online news and information" *Information Research*, *11*(3), paper 259, n.p. Accessed September 17, 2008, from http://InformationR.net/ir/11-3/paper259.html

Nordmeyer, R. (2001). Readers' advisory web sites. *Reference & User Services Quarterly, 41*(2), 139-143.

Opening the Book Ltd. (2008). *Whichbook.net.* Accessed September 14, 2008, from http://www.whichbook.net/

Orkiszewski, P. (2005). A comparative study of Amazon.com as a library book and media vendor. *Library Resources & Technical Services, 49*(3), 204-209.

Pattee, A. (2007). Rethinking "Racy Reads". *School Library Journal, 53*(1), 30-31.

Patton, M.Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods.* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications

Pejtersen, A.M. & Austin, J. (1983). Fiction retrieval: Experimental design and evaluation of a search system based on users' value criteria (Part 1). *Journal of Documentation, 39*(4), 230-246.

Pickard, A.J. (2007). *Research methods in information.* London: Facet.

Princeton Public Library. (2008). *Book Lovers Wiki.* Accessed October 12, 2008, from http://booklovers.pbwiki.com/Princeton%20Public%20Library.

Radway, J.A. (1987). *Reading the romance: Women, patriarchy and popular literature.* London: Verso.

Ranta, A.J. (1991). The new literary scholarship and a basis for increased subject catalogue access to imaginative literature. *Cataloguing & Classification Quarterly, 14*(1), 3-26.

Rehberg Sedo, D. (2008). Richard & Judy's Book Club and 'Canada Reads': Readers, books and cultural programming in a digital era. *Information, Communication & Society, 11*(2), 188-206.

———. (2003). Readers in reading groups: An online survey of face-to-face and virtual book clubs. *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies, 9*(1), 66-90.

Rippel, C. (2007, January). What libraries can learn from bookstores: Applying bookstore design to public libraries. *In Focus.* Accessed October 3, 2008, from http://www.lyponline.com/infocus/In_Focus.htm.

Roselle Public Library. (2008). *Blogger Book Club: All the FAQs!* Accessed September 8, 2008, from http://www.roselle.lib.il.us/YouthServices/bookclub/bookclub_faq.htm#who

Ross, C. S. (2001a). Making choices: what readers say about choosing books to read for pleasure. *The Acquisitions Librarian, 25*, 5-21.

———. (2001b). What we know from readers about the experience of reading. In K.D. Shearer & R. Burgin (Eds.). *The readers' advisor's companion* (pp.77-95). Englewood, Colo: Libraries Unlimited.

———. (2000). Finding without seeking: what readers say about the role of pleasure reading as a source of information. *Australian Public Libraries & Information Services, 13*(2), 72-80.

———. (1999). Finding without seeking: the information encounter in the context of reading for pleasure. *Information Processing and Management, 35,* 783-799.

Ross, C.S. & Chelton, C.K. (2001). Readers' advisory: Matching mood and material. *Library Journal, 126*(2), 52-55.

Rothbauer, P.M. (2004a). "People aren't afraid anymore, but it's hard to find books": Reading practices that inform the personal and social identities of self-identified lesbian and queer young women. *Canadian Journal of Information & Library Science, 28*(3), 53-74.

———. (2004b). The Internet in the reading accounts of lesbian and queer young women: Failed searches and unsanctioned reading. *Canadian Journal of Information & Library Science, 28*(4), 89-110.

———. (2004c). *Finding and creating possibility: Reading in the lives of lesbian, bisexual and queer young women.* PhD Thesis. University of Western Ontario. Retrieved December 28, 2007, from Proquest Dissertations & Theses database.

Rowlands, I. & Nicholas, D. (2008). Understanding information behaviour: How do students and faculty find books? *Journal of Academic Librarianship, 34*(1), 3-15.

Saricks, J.G. (2005). *Readers' advisory service in the public library* (3rd ed). Chicago : American Library Association, 2005.

Savolainen, R. (1995). Everyday life information seeking: Approaching information seeking in the context of "way of life". *Library & Information Science Research, 17*(3), 259-294.

Shearer, K. (1996). The nature of the readers' advisory transaction in adult reading. In K.D. Shearer (Ed.). *Guiding the reader to the next book* (pp.1-20). New York: Neal-Schuman Publishers.

Shearer, K.D. & Burgin, R. (2001). Preface. In K.D. Shearer & R. Burgin (Eds.). *The readers' advisor's companion* (pp.xi-xvi). Englewood, Colo: Libraries Unlimited.

Smith, D. (2001). Reinventing readers' advisory. In K.D. Shearer & R. Burgin (Eds.). *The readers' advisor's companion* (pp.59-75). Englewood, Colo: Libraries Unlimited.

———. (2000). Talking with readers: A competency based approach to readers' advisory service. *Reference & User Services Quarterly, 40*(2), 135-142.

———. (1996). One reader reading: A case study. In K.D. Shearer (Ed.). *Guiding the reader to the next book* (pp.45-70). New York: Neal-Schuman Publishers.

Speak, M. (1990). A survey of reading patterns of elderly people using the Age Concern Centre Library, Leicester. *Health Libraries Review, 7*, 8-13.

Spiller, D. (1980). The provision of fiction for public libraries. *Journal of Librarianship, 12*(4), 238-265.

Stempel, G. (1981). Content analysis. In G.H. Stempel & B.H. Westley (Eds.), *Research Methods in Mass Communication* (pp.119-131). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Stevens, C.A. (2000). Readers' advisory web sites. *The Acquisitions Librarian, 23*, 5-19.

Thomas, J. (2003). Promoting recreational public reading. *New Zealand Libraries, 49*(8), 283-286.

———. (2001). *Promoting leisure reading to adults in New Zealand public libraries.* Master of Library & Information Studies Research Paper, Victoria University of Wellington.

Tippecanoe County Public Library. (2008). *The Book Clique FAQ.* Accessed September 8, 2008, from http://www.tcpl.lib.in.us/ref/bkgrpfaq.htm

Toyne, J. & Usherwood, B. (2001). *Checking the books: the value and impact of public library book reading. Report of research funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Board.* Sheffield: Centre for the Public Library and Information in Society, Department of Information Studies, University of Sheffield. Retrieved December 25, 2007, from http://cplis.shef.ac.uk/checkingthebooks.pdf

Trott, B. (2005). Advising readers online: A look at Internet-based reading recommendation services. *Reference & User Services Quarterly, 44*(3), 210-215.

Trott, B. & Novak, V. (2006). A house divided? Two views on genre separation. *Reference & User Services Quarterly, 46*(2), 33-38.

"values". (2006). *The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition*. Retrieved August 17, 2008, from Dictionary.com: http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/values.

van Riel, R. (1999). A book to match your mood. *The Library Association Record, 101*(5), 292-293.

Vernitski, A. (2007). Developing an intertextuality-oriented fiction classification. *Journal of Librarianship & Information Science, 39*(1), 41-52.

Weaver, M. (2007). Contextual metadata: faceted schemas in virtual library communities. *Library Hi Tech, 25*(4), 579-594.

Webb, L.M. (2002). Availability of Internet training programs for elderly public library patrons. *Reference Librarian, 77,* 141-151.

Wellington City Libraries. (2008a). *Fiction web page.* Accessed September 8, 2008, from http://www.wcl.govt.nz/popular/fiction.html.

———. (2008b). *Homepage – Wellington City Libraries..* Accessed September 8, 2008, from http://www.wcl.govt.nz/.

———. (2008c). *Fiction library guide.* Accessed September 29, 2008 from http://www.wcl.govt.nz/pathfinders/fiction.html.

———. (2008d). *My gateway info: Books and Authors.* Accessed September 29, 2008 from http://www.wcl.govt.nz/mygateway/books.html.

———. (2008e). *Borrowing.* Accessed October 11, 2008, from http://www.wcl.govt.nz/about/borrow/

Williamson, K. (2005). Ecological theory of human information behavior. In K.E. Fisher, S. Erdelez & L.E.F. McKechnie (Eds.). *Theories of information behavior* (pp.128-132). Medford, N.J.: Information Today.

———. (2002). Research techniques: Questionnaires and interviews. In K. Williamson (Ed.). *Research methods for students, academics and professionals: Information management and systems* (2nd ed.) (pp.234-249). Wagga Wagga, N.S.W.: Centre for Information Studies, Charles Sturt University.

———. (1998). Discovered by chance: The role of incidental information acquisition in an ecological model of information use. *Library & Information Science Research, 20*(1), 23-40.

———. (1997). The information needs and information-seeking behaviour of older adults: An Australian study. In P. Vakkari, R. Savolaien & B. Dervin (Eds.). *Information seeking in context: Proceedings of an international conference on research in information needs, seeking and use in different contexts, 14-16 August, 1996, Tampere, Findland* (pp.337-350). London: Taylor Graham.

Woodward, J. (2005). *Creating the customer-driven library: Building on the bookstore model.* Chicago: American Library Association.

Yee, M. & Soto, R. (1991). User problems with access to fictional characters and personal names in online public access catalogs. *Information Technology & Libraries, 10,* 3-13.

Yu, L. & O'Brien, A. (1999). A practical typology of adult fiction borrowers based on their reading habits. *Journal of Information Science, 25*(1), 35-49.