

HELPING READERS FIND BOOKS:
An Evaluation of Four Readers' Advisory Sources

by
Christine Lynn Quillen

A Master's paper submitted to the faculty
of the School of Information and Library Science
of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Science in
Library Science.

Chapel Hill, North Carolina

July, 2001

Approved by:

Advisor

Christine Lynn Quillen. *Helping Readers Find Books: An Evaluation of Four Readers' Advisory Sources*. A Master's paper for the M. S. in L. S. degree. July, 2001. 71 pages. Advisor: Brian W. Sturm.

This paper examines four reference sources used for readers' advisory services:

Amazon.com, NoveList, Now Read This, and What Do I Read Next?. The sources were compared to determine the strengths and weaknesses of each; each source was then analyzed for its treatment of ten discrete titles including an examination of the depth and breadth of coverage and an assessment of the use of subject headings. Results showed that all of the sources had specific strengths and weaknesses and that a combination of sources in the hands of a skilled professional is probably the best approach when using these tools for readers' advisory.

Headings:

Fiction -- Selection

Public Libraries – Reference services

Reader guidance

Reading interests

Subject access

Subject headings -- Special subjects -- Fiction

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To Brian Sturm: I couldn't have done it without you. Thanks for being a truly wonderful advisor and all around great person. "Nike methodology" seems to have worked.

To Dr. Kenneth Shearer, Joanne Abel, and Duncan Smith: for teaching me as much as I could learn about readers' advisory. I'm forever in your debt.

To Allison, Betsy and Donna: We ARE the "fab four". Y'all are marvelous. Thanks for listening to me go on and on and on and..... about readers' advisory. You provided just enough of a distraction to keep me sane this semester.

To Allison: for your 11th hour reading of my paper. Your critique was invaluable.

To Donna: for listening to me whine, complain and you know what about my paper. We WERE separated at birth. There is that!!!!

To Ray: for being a great friend, 11th hour backrubs, and for making me work on my paper – You're terrific. Also for all your help with my introduction (now it makes sense, I think) and the magic you performed on my bibliography – I owe you.

And to my Dragon: for always believing in me. Your friendship means the world to me. You've given me back so much of myself that I thought was gone forever. Thanks for sharing your faith and hope with me when I lost mine. With all my heart and the bottom of my left foot.

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INTRODUCTION

One of the primary reasons adults come into the library is to find a good work of fiction. Finding a good book can be a major challenge when confronted with a seemingly endless collection that has been arranged based on where the author's name falls in the alphabet, rather than by what the book is about. While some research has been done to try to determine a better way to organize library collections, a better answer hasn't yet been found, so libraries' fiction collections are still arranged alphabetically for the most part, and readers are often overwhelmed when faced with the challenge of choosing one book from many in a typical library's collection. Having trained staff who actively work with the fiction collection and who encourage patrons to ask for assistance in finding something to read can help to solve this problem, but the sheer number of authors writing makes finding a book for a patron a challenge for even the most well-read librarian. Add to that the challenge of determining what exactly the reader is looking for in a novel, and the librarian really has her work cut out for her.

From the very beginning of the history of public libraries, libraries and librarians have conveyed to their public the idea that reading fiction was somehow less important than reading non-fiction. Librarians have put great effort into trying to elevate the reading levels of their patrons rather than trying to help them to find things that they will enjoy. A number of articles and early annual reports mention the efforts of librarians to reduce the circulation of fiction in the library. While this has changed significantly with the passage

of time, my experience has been that many people still feel that librarians are too busy to be bothered with “insignificant” questions about a good book to read, and libraries in general have not done a very good job of changing this perception. "Popular fiction has been around forever but rarely has society viewed it as important in and of itself. Rarely have we acknowledged that it has a crucial place in culture. Rarely have we come to terms with the fact that popular fiction is not simply a degraded form of literary fiction” (Krantz, 1998).

Baker (1996) discusses a study (Sear & Jennings, 1986) in which 84 percent of fiction browsers did not ask library staff for help. She states that the four most common reasons were “1. patrons like to make up their own minds about the fiction they select; 2. staff look busy and/or unapproachable; 3. staff wouldn’t know what readers would like; and 4. a question about fiction (which is unimportant) would be perceived as being frivolous and waste staff time” (p. 129-130).

In the last several years, personal computers have become very popular and many people have Internet access at home. Through the resources available online, people are able to find answers to many questions that they used to go to the library for in the past, and libraries are going to have to put more emphasis on services like readers’ advisory, if they are going to continue to thrive.

People’s lives are becoming increasingly busy, and they want to maximize what little leisure time they have. Public libraries need to become places that people identify with leisure time and the idea of the library, as only being a place for serious research, needs to change. One only has to look at how popular Oprah’s book club and her book club choices are to see that the general public is desperate for someone to give them some

guidance about good books to read. Publishers have caught on to this trend and have begun to publish reading guides for books that they think will catch on with reading groups. Bookstores are aggressively marketing reading group guides and are also organizing reading groups and providing spaces for organized reading groups to meet. Public libraries haven't been very aggressive in marketing their reading programs to an obviously interested public, and if public libraries are not careful they are going to continue to lose public support.

Much has been written in library literature about the value of fiction. Smith (1998) found that "rather than being ephemeral, a deep and complex relationship exists between readers and their stories" (p. 1094). He found that as readers read they reconstruct the stories told by the authors to find personal meaning and that when talking with readers about books they chose to emphasize different parts of the book making a book a unique experience for each person who read it. Ross (1991) also found that many of the people identified strongly with certain characters in fictional works and were able to make connections between the experience of the character and events going on in their own lives, which gave them the strength to cope. She believes that a reader's preoccupation with certain events in his life acts as a filter, allowing him to concentrate on the particular part of the story that deals with his own concerns even if the part that he is concentrating on is not a major plotline or does not involve a principal character. In a follow-up study written in 2000, Ross found that when people chose books for pleasure reading, they often turned out to be things which were helpful in dealing with personal issues that they were experiencing. Ross found that, for readers, books served a variety of purposes including: alerting readers to new possibilities and experiences; serving as

models for identity; providing reassurance; providing a connection with others when going through a difficult or somewhat unique experience; and encouraging them to make changes in their lives.

In addition to these rather idealistic reasons for getting people to read and developing our collections, there is a much more practical reason for public libraries to be concerned about their fiction collections: circulation figures are directly related to budgeting. There are a number of different statistics about what percentage of circulation statistics can be directly attributed to the fiction collection. Ott (1997) says that 60 percent of public library users come to the library for pleasure reading, but he does not differentiate between fiction and non-fiction. Shearer (1998) found that the circulation of fiction made up 67 percent of the total circulation in North Carolina during 1996. Fialkoff (1997) argues in her editorial that 80 percent of adults who come into the library do so to find a good book and cites the Gallup, Harris and Roper polls as the source for this figure. She goes on to discuss the Kellogg/Benton Foundation report which found that the purchase of new books was personally important to 75 percent of those surveyed when asked what libraries should spend funds on.

If the majority of public library patrons are interested in finding a good book, it would seem that one of the main foci of library schools should be trying to educate future librarians to help meet these needs, and yet library schools rarely offer classes that deal with fiction. Watson (2000) found that of the fifty-six accredited schools offering degrees in library science, only fourteen offered courses in readers' advisory services. In examining syllabi from the fourteen schools that did offer a class, she found that topics dealt with most frequently included: reading promotion and guidance; resources; the

evolution and rationale for readers' advisory services; popular publishing; and reading styles and theory. Watson found that vendors and publishers have stepped in to try and fill the gap left by library schools somewhat and mentions *What Do I Read Next?* and *NoveList* as two electronic resources that can help librarians in assisting patrons. She also found that librarians have created a number of Web sites to help patrons and their colleagues, but she feels that library schools need to offer formal coursework in this area so that future librarians can meet the needs of their patrons.

Wiegand (1997) wrote two blistering articles about library education and the attitude towards reading for *Library Journal* and for the *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science*. In the articles, he mentions how librarians have been known for "slighting certain kinds of reading, in part because we have never bothered to investigate seriously why people want to read them, in part because the academy has never supplied us with an intellectually plausible rationale identifying the values readers attach to these kinds of reading" (1997b, p 314-315). He discusses how very little of the research that is done on reading has found its way into our profession's research and goes on to say that when the Association of Library and Information Science Education (ALISE) adopted a strategic plan in October 1996, they mention of the word "library" only once in the document and the word "reading" was completely missing from it. Wiegand feels that the profession is turning its back on its core users and that something needs to be done before it gets any worse.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Brief History of Readers' Advisory Services

In describing the history of Readers' Advisory services, Boone (1996) suggests that there are five distinct periods in the United States: Pre-formal (1876-1920), Formal (1920-1940), Null (1940-1980), Renaissance (1980 – present) and Electronic Revolution (1990- future). In her study, she found that very little was written about readers' advisory service in the pre-formal period, and she cites only two articles from this time. The first appeared in the October 1876 issue of *Library Journal* and was written by Samuel S. Green. Green (1876) believed that the librarian could exert a great deal of influence on what a patron was to read, but that the patron should be given something that he or she wished to read.

The second article by John Adams Lowe (1909) suggested that the card catalog be used as a way of improving a patron's reading choices. He suggested if a patron were to ask:

For example: Does your library have a complete set of "Mary J. Holmes' Writings?" No matter whose fault it is that they are there. You don't like to have your patrons read them. How would this plan work? Put into your card catalog, at the end of Holmes, Mary J., a colored card to attract especial attention, with this legend: "If you find the books by this author to your liking see" In other places insert cards which shall politely direct readers from the less attractive to the better. So through every section of the catalog guides might be placed, suggesting a higher path to the best in literature. This same kind of guide card might be used to advantage to direct readers to authors which have some similar characteristics. Readers sometimes find a strain of similar mood or spirit in the stories of Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, Margaret Deland and

Myrtle Reed. But the scheme should not be limited to fiction. In history, in biography, in science, in fact, throughout the entire collection one finds books which suggest the reading of others. We all like the thrill of having discovered something. Let the reader find the cards in the catalog for himself, as if put there by chance, or as if meant for him alone, and you have made him happy (p. 265).

Ross (1991) talks about the "fiction problem" (the public wanted to read fiction and librarians considered it to be a waste of time) and explains that during the early 1900s many libraries utilized a two-book system to discourage fiction reading: one of the two books checked out by the patron had to be non-fiction. She also describes how many librarians went to great lengths to reduce their fiction collections, sometimes by removing the most popular books from the collection. She mentions several annual reports that comment positively on the librarian's efforts to reduce fiction in the collection.

Readers' Advisory services became more formalized beginning in the 1920s. Boone (1996) discusses three events that were important during the Formal period: 1. an increase in personalized services to individuals through reference queries which led to libraries offering Readers' Advisory; 2. a \$24,000 grant from the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching to the ALA Commission of Library and Adult Education, which they used to publish *Adult Education and the Library*, the "Reading With a Purpose Series" and formed the Subcommittee on Readable Books in 1925; and 3. Alice Bryan's decision to employ psychologists at Columbia University's library school to teach library school students bibliotherapy. Ross (1991) says that Readers' Advisory services during the 1920s and 1930s were designed to "promote self-disciplined, educational reading on socially significant topics" (p. 504).

Boone (1996) describes a "typing" formula that was employed by Chancellor, Tompkins and Medway in their work *Helping the Reader*, which was published in 1938.

The authors came up with 70 possible reader types that a patron could possibly fall into along with a list of books that could be recommended for that type. Types ranged from a person's living situation to career to perceived character flaws, and the books chosen were not meant to inspire, but to be morally instructive.

As the 1930s came to an end, America began to be drawn into World War II, which had a profound effect on libraries and Readers' Advisory services. There was less time available for leisure pursuits like reading, and readers' advisory services were decreased and eventually began to fade away. Saricks and Brown (1997) note that there was a Reading Guidance Institute held at the University of Wisconsin Library School in 1965, which leads one to believe that there was still some interest in the idea of Readers' advisory services.

During this time few librarians were keeping any kind of statistics to validate the need for Readers' advisory services and this had a major impact on them being phased out. Baker (1992) states that readers' advisory service has been undervalued and underfunded because we have not been able to demonstrate its importance. She found that many readers' services were completely phased out from 1950 to 1980 and that in the early 1970s less than one fifth of public libraries surveyed had a readers' advisor position (p. 166).

Chelton (1993) saw hope for a return to Readers' Advisory services and said that readers' advisory services hadn't entirely disappeared in the last two decades, but they have been sent underground by a communal professional preoccupation with measurement and evaluation, management, technology, and "information" narrowly defined as only factual or bibliographical. This banishment ended officially when the

American Library Association's (ALA) Public Library Association published *Planning and Role-Setting for Public Libraries* in 1987, suggesting that a legitimate role for a public library was that of a popular materials center. To meet the needs of adults who read for pleasure, librarians are reacquainting themselves with genre conventions and brushing up on their readers' advisory skills.

The next phase in the history of readers' advisory services began in the early 1980's. Duncan Smith (1997) cites four significant events that occurred in the 1980s that had a profound effect on readers' advisory: 1. the publication of Betty Rosenberg's *Genreflecting: A Guide to Reading Interests in Genre Fiction* in 1982. This was the first new work on readers' advisory resources to be published in several years, and it has since been updated four times, with the fifth edition being published in 2000. The remaining three events all took place in 1989: 2. The publication of *Readers' Advisory Services in the Public Library* by Joyce Saricks and Nancy Brown; 3. Saricks' suggestion in the book that librarians ask patrons to "Tell me about a book you've read and enjoyed"; and 4. The presentation of the Allie Beth Martin Award to Saricks by the Public Library Association, which reaffirmed their commitment to readers' advisory services.

The final period in Readers' Advisory services as described by Boone (1996) is the "Electronic Revolution". She states that the first attempts at automating readers' advisory services began in the 1980s when the personal computer became widely available. She says that a number of libraries began developing their own local computer databases to use in tracking fiction for readers' advisory.

In the 1990s, there were two readers' advisory tools that were widely available in public libraries: *NoveList* by EBSCO and *What Do I Read Next?* by Gale Group. Both of

these products were available electronically and allowed patrons to search in a variety of ways for books to read. Further discussion of these two databases appears in the Methodology section of this paper.

“How to do” Readers’ Advisory

Every day people all over the country walk into libraries and tell librarians about books they have just read and loved and ask for more like them. Finding another book that the patron will enjoy can be quite a challenge for the librarian. Unlike works of non-fiction, the librarian cannot go over to the online catalog, type in a subject and find a similar book. Many libraries do not assign subject headings to their fiction and even if they have, a book on a similar subject may not be what the patron is looking for.

Frances Clarke Sayers, a well-known children's librarian from the New York Public Library, toured the United States some years ago speaking to librarians and teachers about the joy of reading. One of the stories she told was about a little girl who came to her library and asked for Alice in Orchestralia. Sayers said that she launched enthusiastically into a description of other books on orchestras and instruments, but did not get much response. Finally the little girl said, “I'm not reading orchestras; I'm reading Alices.” (Ross, 1991, p. 503).

Joyce Saricks and Nancy Brown (1997) suggest that there are four appeal factors that draw people to read a work of fiction: language, setting, story and characters. Readers also read for a variety of reasons, and what may appeal to them today may not appeal to them tomorrow, next week or next month. Additionally many readers read only in one genre and are not interested in exploring others, so it can be tricky to determine exactly what it is that a reader is looking for.

The best way to determine what kind of book the patron is looking for is through the use of open-ended questions. In Saricks and Brown’s work, they suggest that the librarian ask the patron to “Tell me about a book you really enjoyed.” (Saricks and

Brown, 1997, p. 70). Once this opening question has been asked any number of follow up questions can be asked to further clarify what kind of book the patron is looking for.

Chelton (1993) suggests a list of about 15 questions to ask the reader to specify exactly what it is they are looking for including: “Do you like the main character to be male or female, old or young?, Do you like foreign or U.S. settings?, and Do you like happy or sad endings?” (p. 33).

Ross and Chelton (2001) found that one of the most important factors for book selection by readers was mood. In a study of 194 committed readers, they discovered that when people were very busy or experiencing a lot of stress, they wanted books that were familiar or safe and would often re-read old favorites or read a new book by an author that they had enjoyed in the past. When readers were feeling more in control of their lives, they were more likely to choose a book by an author with whom they were unfamiliar. Ross and Chelton suggest that librarians should ask, “Tell me what you’re in the mood for” or “Tell me what kind of reading experience you are looking for” and say that this question should precede the Saricks and Brown question because the reader may be looking for a different emotional experience this time around.

Balcom (1988) opens by describing the work of an active readers' advisor so that libraries can evaluate their own services. He says that a readers' advisory librarian should commit to making a certain number of annotated bibliographies per year, should read widely so that he/she can make connections between authors which may not be obvious, and should plan displays that highlight the works featured in the bibliographies he/she produces. Balcom says that librarians should be pro-active and not wait for patrons to ask for help but should, instead, take the initiative and ask patrons if they are finding things.

He feels that there needs to be strong administrative support for readers' advisory and that administrators need to encourage staff to read broadly and share what they have read.

Balcom goes on to say that while active readers' advisory service may not double the circulation in the library, it will increase the customer satisfaction level of patrons, which will carry over into fund-raising efforts and the approval of bond issues when needed.

Rolstad (1993) outlines a five-step workshop for training support staff about readers' advisory. The five steps include: 1. explaining the mission of readers' advisory; 2. providing staff with a basic understanding of some of the tools that are used in readers' advisory; 3. discussing how genre fiction fits into the collection; 4. explaining the techniques used to determine what a patron is looking for; and 5. discussing local efforts in providing readers' advisory.

Saricks (1997) begins by explaining that the staff's attitude is very important when doing readers' advisory because often staff need to be reminded that the needs of a patron looking for help with fiction are just as important as finding the answer to a regular reference question. She also says that staff need to be reminded of Betty Rosenberg's First Law of Reading: "Never apologize for your reading tastes." Once the attitude of the staff towards fiction has been established, staff need to be provided with the necessary tools to assist readers. In addition to the physical tools, staff need to be taught three approaches to looking at books: 1. they need to be able to articulate a book's appeal to patrons; 2. they need to be able to group a book with other books that share the same appeal; and 3. they need to be able to place a book within a genre, if appropriate. A plan for remembering what has been read also needs to be created, and Saricks recommends keeping a simple list of title and author chronologically in a notebook. She

says that being able to place the book in time is often enough to bring back the story, characters and general feeling of the book.

Research into Readers' Advisory

There are still many librarians who believe there are some types of fiction that have no value because they are “addictive, mind-weakening, too predictable, not bracing enough, and not capable of forcing readers to face up to things” (Ross, 1991). Ross interviewed a number of readers to find out what they were looking for in a book. One reader said that she looked for different books depending on whether she was looking for escape or intellectual stimulation or when she is tired. Other readers said that sometimes they wanted to read a book about something that was going on in their life and that it made them feel that they were not alone when they found books that described emotions and feelings that were similar to their own. Other readers that she spoke with said that reading was something that they had to do, like eating or sleeping, and they did not know what they would do without books. Ross found that readers' own situations act as a filter, causing them to pay particular attention to certain parts or characters when those characters' roles addressed their own needs.

In her study, Ross (1991) found that there were a number of things that readers liked and disliked about libraries. Some of the most important things that she found were that readers really remember librarians who made a difference in their lives; readers feel that libraries encourage risk taking because they can check out a book for free and are not obligated to finish it if they find that they do not like it; readers find the collection intimidating because there is so much to choose from and there is little help in sorting

through it all; and readers feel that bookstores do a better job of helping them to find the books that they want to read.

Baker (1992) found that very little research has been done to document the effectiveness of readers' advisory services and suggests that is why many libraries phased them out between 1950 and 1980. She suggests that research needs to be done to determine which readers' advisory techniques are being used; what is being done to help readers select their own books; how readers select books; and what type of administrative support needs to be established in order for services to be effective.

Shearer & Bracy (1994) responded to Baker's call for more research by publishing the findings of a study where they sent students into public libraries to request assistance in finding a book that was like another book that they had enjoyed. Shearer & Bracy reported that there was a great range of knowledge and experience held by the advisors who assisted the students, but that students "saw some of the advisors as cold, mechanical, or offputting at times. A few students felt themselves to be treated so badly at the close of transactions that had resulted in many successful hits that they preferred not to subject themselves to such insensitivity again" (p. 457). Shearer & Bracy also concluded that "successful readers' advisory transactions are about relating Reader A's experience with Book A to the likelihood that Reader A would value the experience of reading Book B" (p. 457).

In 1996 *Guiding the Reader to the Next Book* edited by Kenneth Shearer was published. This book continued Shearer and Bracy's work on readers' advisory services and includes articles by Shearer, Baker, Smith, and others.

Baker (1993b) discusses the importance of administrative support for readers' advisory services. She writes that administrators need to provide training and support for both the non-professionals staffing the services desks and the librarians and that both groups should be encouraged to read broadly so that they are familiar with the diversity of literature available and can make appropriate recommendations. She also suggests a number of things that readers' advisory librarians can do that do not require individual interactions with patrons including: 1. placing readers' advisory tools like *Genreflecting* close to the fiction; 2. creating displays; 3. distributing book lists; 4. scheduling reading discussion groups; 5. doing book talks for community organizations; and 6. working with technical services to provide increased access to fiction in the catalog.

Evaluating Sources

Katz (1997) explains that in order to provide patrons with the best possible information, a librarian must be able to evaluate sources to determine whether a source is "good, bad, or indifferent. ... Simply stated, however, a good reference source is one that answers questions, and a poor reference source is one that fails to answer questions" (p. 24). Katz goes on to enumerate the points that should be considered when evaluating a reference source: 1. Purpose: why was the source created and does it meet that objective; 2. Authority: what are the author's qualifications for writing on the subject; 3. Scope: what is covered in the source and is the information timely; 4. Audience: who was the work written for; 5. Cost: is the source worth the cost involved in purchasing it, and 6. Format: how is the source arranged and is it user friendly.

Bolner (1997) gives eight points, which should be considered when evaluating a source. They include: 1. Authority: is the author an expert on the subject; 2.

Completeness of information: is the subject covered in detail; 3. Accuracy: are the facts correct or are there obvious errors; 4. Currency: have there been major changes since the source was published; 5. Objective or biased treatment: does the author have some bias in presenting the information; 6. Publisher: is the publisher of the information recognized as an important contributor to the field; 7. Documentation: are the sources used for the information listed; and 8. Illustrations: are maps; figures or charts used where appropriate to enhance understanding of the material.

Smith (1995) mentions several of the same features that both Katz and Bolner suggest are important when evaluating reference sources: Format, Scope, Authority, Accuracy (although she calls it treatment) and Cost. Smith also says that it is important to evaluate reference sources based on their Relation to Similar Works – is the new source different enough to justify its purchase, Arrangement – is the source arranged chronologically or alphabetically and is it well indexed, and Special Features – any characteristics which differentiate the source from others.

Fiction Classification and Subject Headings

The problem of classifying fiction in libraries has been with the profession for many years. Borden (1909) discusses how library patrons came in wanting the newest novels, which were hyped by newspaper reviews and publishers announcements, while other equally good novels languished on the shelves because patrons don't know about them. He says that patrons, when looking for a book, don't ask if it's a good book or if it is interesting or who the author is, but want to know "what *kind* of book is this? Is it a detective story; a love story; a problem novel; a character sketch; a sea yarn; an army story; or what?" (p. 264). Borden suggests that libraries organize their fiction by grouping

like types together and says that he had great success with this system in the two years since he began it.

In many public libraries today, fiction can still only be searched in the catalog using the traditional access points of title and author. This approach does not allow a search by the patron on a theme or subject of particular interest that may be dealt with in a work of fiction. To help get around this problem many librarians have opted to genreify their collections so that popular genres are shelved in a separate section from the general collection, or they have put spine labels on the books to indicate which genre the book falls into. This allows the patrons to quickly recognize romances from mysteries or thrillers from science fiction but still does not allow patrons to search for a romance set in England or a mystery that involves cats. Book displays often feature novels that have similar story lines or themes, such as Christmas fiction, Epistolary novels, or Women's Friendship. Librarians also put together book lists featuring a number of annotated book titles dealing with the same topic. These are often very popular with patrons and it stands to reason that offering subject access to the fiction collection has the potential to increase circulation as the kinds of things that patrons are looking for become more accessible (Macewan, 1997).

Baker (1987) studied three libraries in North Carolina that had collection sizes of 2,500 fiction volumes, 6,000 fiction volumes, and 15,500 fiction volumes to see if fiction classification would increase circulation. She found that circulation increases were directly related to the size of the collection when materials were physically separated out: the smallest library reported only a modest increase in circulation, the medium sized library had a larger increase and the large library experienced a huge increase. She also

found that labeling the spines of books without physically separating them increased circulation for those books among browsers but did nothing to increase circulation among patrons who reported that they were not browsing. Baker notes that while both methods of classification increased circulation, separation increased use substantially more than labeling.

Quite a bit of literature has been written on the problem of fiction classification, but it seems that there are few solutions. Some libraries, such as the Hennepin County Public Library worked on creating their own schemas for providing subject access to their fiction, but little was done in an organized fashion until 1991, when the OCLC/LC Fiction Project was started.

The OCLC/LC Fiction Project is a cooperative venture with the Library of Congress, OCLC, and six U.S. academic and public libraries to provide subject access to works of fiction by adding subject and genre headings to LC bibliographic records. Additionally, Fiction Project participants may choose to submit subject proposals to LC through OCLC for fictitious characters, imaginary places, and other types of headings found in works of fiction. Since the inception of the OCLC/LC Fiction Project in 1991, participants have enriched over 14,000 bibliographic records, and over 916 new and changed subject headings have been approved and added to LCSH. (Library of Congress, 1998)

Baker (1986; 1988; 1993a; 1993b) has spent a lot of time analyzing the problem of fiction classification schemes. Baker and Shepherd (1987) discuss three basic principles that should be taken into account when subdividing fiction. The three basic principles are: 1. that fiction classification should make it easier for patrons to find books; 2. the classification scheme should help to guide patrons to the kinds of books that they are looking for and four subdivisions are suggested: “broad subject... genre area.... format of work... [and] literary quality” (p. 246); and 3. that fiction classification should expose readers to the works of authors whom they might not otherwise come across.

They also mention two additional principles that are still used in some libraries, but about which there is some dispute. The other two principles are that fiction classification should not separate fiction but should instead use spine labeling for genres, and that works by the same author should not be separated even if the author writes in more than one genre.

Baker (1986) notes that many library patrons choose their books through browsing. In describing browsers, she says that they “directly approach the library’s shelves to look for the materials they desire, rather than formally identifying them through the catalog or some other bibliographic tool.... [they] are not looking for specific documents, but rather for any document which will satisfy their information need.... [and they] come to the library without having in mind a specific title” (pp. 315-316). She suggests that browsers suffer from overload when confronted with the hundreds or even thousands of books available on the shelves and says that book displays and book lists are both effective ways of helping browsers to narrow their selection, which will result in less overload and increased library use.

Harrell (1996) studied a sample of libraries that served a population of 50,000 or more and found that out of 85 respondents, 94 percent used some form of genre classification in their adult fiction collections as a method of passive readers’ advisory. The most popular categories to be genrified included: large print, detective and/or mystery and/or suspense, science fiction and/or fantasy and westerns. Format was significant in determining genre for love stories, classics, and gothics, which were more likely to be identified as part of a genre if they were paperback while detective/mystery/suspense, science fiction/fantasy, westerns, and short stories were more likely to be interfiled with hard covers or not identified as part of a genre if they were

paperbacks. The libraries surveyed used three different methods or some combination of the three methods for indicating that a book was part of a particular genre: 1. notation in the catalog, 2. separate shelving from the general fiction, and 3. spine labels. Sixty-nine percent of the libraries in the study used all three methods in combination, while the others used either one method or some combination of two of the three methods.

Cannell and McCluskey (1996) asked readers of their article to imagine walking in on their first day at a new library and finding that the entire non-fiction catalog has been arranged alphabetically by author's name and the only access to these works in the catalog is through title and author. They suggest that the current method of arranging fiction does the same disservice to the patron that classifying non-fiction that way would. The authors go on to describe a genrification project that took place at the Cliffdale branch of the Cumberland County Public Library in Fayetteville, North Carolina. Seven months after genrifying their 35,000-item fiction collection, the Cliffdale branch had increased their circulation by an average of 36 percent while the Headquarters and Hope Mill branch, which had not genrified, increased their circulation only 10 percent and the Bordeaux branch increased only 1 percent.

Wilson, Spillane, Cook, and Highsmith (2000) studied a fiction collection in an academic library. Their sample included 1,407 books that were added to the collection between 1993 and 1994. The books included in the sample had been assigned between 0 and 7 subject headings. The 13 books in the sample with seven subject headings assigned had the most circulations per item at 4.692, while the mean circulations per item for the sample as a whole was only 2.53 circulations per record. Their data was not statistically significant, however, and the researchers did not make any attempt to identify the method

of access for the works or even if the catalog was used to locate the items. The authors conclude by saying that while they personally value the addition of subject headings to fiction, they could not justify the time necessary to add them; they do not feel that the time should be taken to remove them if they are already present in the record in an academic library setting; and they feel that the study should be replicated in a public library to see if the results are statistically significant.

Tools for use in Readers' Advisory

There are a number of different readers' advisory reference tools available, but the challenge can be in identifying the right one in response to a patron's query. Chelton (1999a) provides a five page listing of books, journals and websites in response to a question posted to the Fiction-L list serve. An article in *RQ* ("Readers' advisory reference tools," 1996) provides an annotated list of 200 possible sources to be used for readers' advisory and divided them into core, expanded and comprehensive categories. Baker (1990) created an annotated list of general sources and sources for individual genres. Baker also suggests looking in *Public Library Catalog* under "Bibliographies of Literature" and checking the yearly updates of *American Reference Books Annual* to discover additional sources. For this study, I chose to look at 3 electronic sources (*NoveList*, *What Do I Read Next?* and *Amazon.com*) that were regularly used at the Durham County (NC) Public Library and that seem to be in use on a wide scale in public libraries across the country and a print resource (*Now Read This*) that is organized based on appeal factors.

Research Questions

1. What are the strengths and weaknesses of each of the four readers' advisory sources?
2. How do the four sources compare, when used to look at 10 selected fiction titles?
3. How do the four sources compare with regard to subject access to the 10 selected titles?

METHODOLOGY

Definition of Terms

Readers' Advisory: Process by which a librarian assists a patron in finding a book to read.

Readers' Advisory Aids: Print or electronic sources used by the librarian or the patron to help find a book to read.

Subject Headings: Descriptors used in the Readers' Advisory Aids to categorize the book.

Appeal Factors: Saricks and Brown identified four main aspects of a story that people look for when selecting a book. They are: language, setting, story and characters.

Amazon.com: A commercial bookseller's website that is used for Readers' Advisory by some librarians.

NoveList: EBSCO's electronic database used for Readers' Advisory. *NoveList* has 32,000 subject headings to describe the 100,000 fiction titles that are included in the database.

Now Read This: A print source authored by Nancy Pearl that is used for Readers' Advisory includes 1,000 titles, which were published between 1978 and 1998.

What Do I Read Next?: An electronic database produced by Gale that is used for Readers' Advisory. *What Do I Read Next?* includes 96,000 titles including both fiction and non-fiction.

I spent a semester as a field experience student at the Durham County (NC) Public Library and was able to watch and assist the fiction librarian with Readers' Advisory transactions. I noticed that when questioned about a book with which she was unfamiliar, she would often use *NoveList* or *Amazon.com* to find additional information about the book so that she could make an appropriate recommendation. Occasionally she would use either *Fiction Catalog*, a print resource by H. W. Wilson Company, or *What Do I Read Next?* I was curious about how these sources compared and what the merits of one source over the others were and so decided to conduct this study. During this time, I also came across *Now Read This*. While I never noticed the librarian using this particular source when conducting a readers' advisory transaction, I was curious about its usefulness because of the use of appeal factors to organize the book.

After spending some time familiarizing myself with the various resources, I chose not to include *Fiction Catalog* in this study because subject headings are not listed with the books but are included in the back of the book as a way of indexing the various titles.

Since *Now Read This* included the fewest number of titles, with 1000 books indexed, I chose to pick the books for the study from this source. I first tried to compile a list of mystery novels since that is the genre with which I am most familiar but found that mystery was not used as a subject heading. I checked a list of titles found in the Crime section of *Genreflecting* to see if they were listed with some other subject heading, but found very few. I then decided to try romance novels. Comparing a list of titles from the romance section of *Genreflecting* to *Now Read This*, I found that a number of the books listed had as subject headings either "Male/Female Relationships" or "Love/Stories".

Using the subject index of *Now Read This*, I found 25 Titles that had both subject headings.

Next I compared the four sources, to see if the 25 titles were present in all (See Table 1).

Table 1: Title Availability in Readers' Advisory Sources

Title	Author	<i>Now Read This</i>	<i>NoveList</i>	Amazon	<i>What Do I Read Next?</i>
As She Climbed Across the Table	Lethem, Jonathan	Y	Y	Y	Y
Bird Artist, The	Norman, Howard	Y	Y	Y	Y
By the River Piedra I Sat Down and Wept	Coelho, Paulo	Y	Y	Y	
Charades	Hospital, Janette Turner	Y	Y	Y*	
Dog Days	Cheek, Mavis	Y	Y	Y*	
Edson	Morrissey, Bill	Y	Y	Y*	Y
Flamingo Rising, The	Baker, Larry	Y	Y	Y	Y
Four Letters of Love	Williams, Niall	Y	Y	Y	Y
Free Association	Buddenwieser, Paul	Y		Y*	
Harry and Catherine	Busch, Frederick	Y	Y	Y	
Hello Down There	Parker, Michael	Y	Y	Y	
Last Great Snake Show	McLaurin, Tim	Y	Y	Y*	
Love Enter	Kafka, Paul	Y	Y	Y	Y
Love, Stars and All That	Narayan, Kirin	Y	Y	Y	Y
Loving Women	Hamill, Pete	Y	Y	Y*	Y
Mating	Rush, Norman	Y	Y	Y	Y
My Summer with George	French, Marilyn	Y	Y		Y
Of Such Small Differences	Greenburg, Joanne	Y	Y	Y*	Y
On Love	De Botton, Alain	Y	Y	Y	
Patron Saint of Unmarried Women	Ackerman, Karl	Y	Y	Y*	
Transit of Venus	Hazzard, Shirley	Y	Y	Y	Y
Unbearable Lightness of Being	Kundera, Milan	Y	Y	Y	Y
The Way Men Act	Lipman, Elinor	Y	Y	Y	
What Looks Like Crazy on an Ordinary Day	Cleage, Pearl	Y	Y	Y	Y
Year Roger Wasn't Well	Stuart, Sarah Payne	Y	Y	Y*	
Totals		25/25	24/25	24/25	14/25

Y* -- these books were available at *Amazon.com* but were out of print, and the information about them was limited, so it was decided not to include them in the sample because comparison with the other sources would be unfair.

NoveList had 24 of the 25 titles listed (96 percent), *Amazon.com* had 24 of the 25 titles listed (96 percent), though nine of the twenty-four listed were out of print (60 percent), *What Do I Read Next?* had 14 of the 25 titles (56 percent). After eliminating the titles that were either out of print or not present in all four sources, there were 10 titles remaining:

As She Climbed Across the Table	Jonathan Lethem
The Bird Artist	Howard Norman
The Flamingo Rising	Larry Baker
Four Letters of Love	Niall Williams
Love Enter	Paul Kafka
Love, Stars and All That	Kirin Narayan
Mating	Norman Rush
Transit of Venus	Shirley Hazzard
Unbearable Lightness of Being	Milan Kundera
What Looks Like Crazy on an Ordinary Day	Pearl Cleage

These ten titles were then compared across the four sources to see what information was provided by each resource for the title. After comparing the various sources, a list of twenty-five items (title, author, publication date, publisher, number of pages, ISBN, price, cover picture, format, subject headings, plot synopsis, professional review, customer/patron review, reading level, genre/type, time period, characters,

setting, awards, recommended titles, recommended authors, expert picks, best-seller lists the book appeared on, appeal factors, and suitability for book groups) was drawn up, and each title was assessed in each source to determine whether or not that feature was included.

Since *Amazon.com* is a commercially designed website and its purpose was not Readers' Advisory (like the other three sources), a few things need to be noted about how information was collected from that site. Searching at *Amazon.com* was done by selecting books as the default and then choosing the first book with the right title and author in the event that the book was listed multiple times because it was printed in a variety of formats. At the bottom of the page for each *Amazon.com* entry there is a section entitled "Look for similar books by subject". When choosing subject headings from *Amazon.com* the browse section was not used at all; only the entries listed under "Search for books by subject" were used. Each *Amazon.com* book also had a section entitled, "Editorial Reviews". If there was a review, which was not credited to a professional review source but to *Amazon.com* or listed as a book description, it was considered a plot synopsis for the purpose of this study. If a book listed at *Amazon.com* was said to have a genre, it was because a specific genre not contemporary or general was listed in the "Browse for books in" section. For the purpose of this study, recommended titles in Amazon means that a specific set of book titles was listed under "Customers who bought this book also bought" section, and recommended authors in Amazon means that a specific list of authors was listed under "Customers who bought titles by [author's name] also bought titles by these authors" section.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

General Comparison of Sources

Amazon.com.

Amazon.com has a number of interesting features that distinguish it from the other three sources reviewed in this paper. Most of the books featured at *Amazon.com* have pictures of the cover of the books; a clickable link to all books the author has published if he or she has written more than one work; customer reviews; the ability to set up wishlists; information about other formats in which the book is available (book on tape, e-book, etc); average customer rating of the book; the ability to list your own copy for sale or purchase a used copy; the ability to review the book or send information about it to a friend; and the database allows "and" searches. (The inclusion of "and" searches is a particularly useful feature to have available when the librarian or the patron does not have complete information about the book but may know part of the title and part of the author's name). In addition, for some of the books they sell, *Amazon.com* also offers excerpts from the book; table of contents information; reading group guides with summary information and questions; and "Listmania" reading lists, which are lists created by customers that can include anything that is available at their site (books, music, kitchen & housewares, etc) along with comments about the item. *Amazon.com* also offers pricing information and ISBN numbers, both of which can be helpful if the librarian decides that he/she wants to consider a title for purchase.

Amazon.com is, however, a commercial site and as such the company's mission is a little bit different from a library's. The site is very obviously a commercial site, and their focus is on getting people to spend money. In doing so, they have provided the library world with a very useful readers' advisory tool, but there are some limitations. When looking at the titles listed under "Customers who bought this book also bought", one should be careful to actually look at the reviews of those items because sometimes the items listed there have no relation to the original book and may completely miss the mark for readers' advisory. The browse section and subject searches are also of limited use when trying to find fiction because so much of their fiction is categorized as simply "contemporary" or "general" and because they are ineffective at assigning subject headings to their fiction.

NoveList.

NoveList also has some unique features that are not available in any of the other sources. From the opening page, it is possible to access staff development resources that have been designed specifically for librarians; book talks; information about new authors; feature articles; book discussion guides for selected books; and "best fiction" award lists. The user can search for books in a variety of ways including: title; author; subject (through "Describe a plot" or "Browse subjects"); and explore, which is a guided genre search and allows the user to start with a specific genre, pick a sub-genre, and get a list of books that fall into that category. *NoveList* also provides users with series information where appropriate, and links to websites about the book or author for some of the books featured.

NoveList also has some drawbacks. It is only possible to "and" together subject searches, so searches cannot be done on part of the title and the author's last name or the author's last name and a subject or character description. The number of results returned by the database can also be overwhelming. It's not uncommon to get back a list of several thousand hits when doing a search. Using multiple search terms can help with this problem somewhat because when the hits are returned, the user is also told if the book has a description and the percentage of subject headings that were matched. Some of the titles included in the database do not have plot synopses or professional reviews, just bibliographic information and subject headings, which can make recommending the book a challenge.

Now Read This.

Now Read This is the only one of these sources to provide information about appeal factors, which Saricks and Brown (1997) say is one of the most important aspects in matching a book to a reader. In addition, *Now Read This* indicates whether the title is appropriate for book groups, notes what awards the book has won, and has detailed indexes (subject, author, and title) for locating a work.

The biggest drawback to *Now Read This* is in some ways its biggest strength. *Now Read This* covers 1,000 titles, and all of the books covered are mainstream fiction that were published between 1978 and 1998. This excludes a lot of books, but for the books that are covered the information provided is focused and very detailed. Also, because it is a print source it is static. A static source can be a problem because, as shown earlier, nine of the 25 books originally chosen were listed as being out of print by *Amazon.com*, which means that the library can't easily obtain a copy of the book if there

is patron interest or if the library's copy is damaged or lost. Also, unless there are frequent updates to a static source, it quickly loses its usefulness.

What Do I Read Next?

What Do I Read Next? also offers several unique features that are not available in the other sources. In addition to standard title and author searches, users can create a custom search, which "ands" together any of the following: author, title, genre/story type, subject, location, time period, character descriptor, character name and a "full text" keyword search option. *What Do I Read Next?* also provides a "Who? What? Where? When?" search option that allows the user to select some combination of a character descriptor, a subject, and a time period from pull down menus and fill in a location to get book recommendations. Other unique features include lists of award winners, recommended reading lists created by librarians and subject experts, and bestsellers; a genre search; and the option of searching by series title. *What Do I Read Next?* also includes non-fiction, and users have the option of selecting whether or not to include non-fiction works in their results.

The biggest drawback to using *What Do I Read Next?* is that coverage of titles does not seem to be consistent. In the original search of the database to see if the 25 titles selected for inclusion were in all four sources, the publication date for *Loving Women* is not included in the information about the book. There is also no plot description. For other titles included in the database, there are no subject headings or plot descriptions, so unless the user is familiar with the title, he or she would probably want to consult another source before deciding on that title. For example, when searching for books that had the

word "alibi" in the title, 7 hits were returned, but only 4 titles had plot descriptions and subject headings.

Detailed Comparison of Sources

Table 2 presents the cumulative results of my analysis of the ten books across the four readers' advisory sources. (For the individual analyses of the ten books, see Appendix A.)

Table 2: Evaluation Criteria

	Amazon	NoveList	Now Read This	What Do I Read Next?
Title	100%	100%	100%	100%
Author	100%	100%	100%	100%
Publication Date	100%	100%	100%	100%
Publisher	100%	100%	100%	
Number of Pages	90%	100%	100%	
ISBN	100%			
Price	100%			
Cover Picture	100%			
Format	100%			
Subject Headings	100%	100%	100%	100%
Plot Synopsis	50%	30%	100%	100%
Professional Review	90%	90%		
Customer/Patron Review	100%			
Reading Level		100%		100%
Genre	70%	50%	100%	50%
Time Period		40%		100%
Characters	20%	100%	80%	100%
Setting	40%	100%	80%	100%
Awards		60%	40%	50%
Recommended Titles	90%	100%	100%	100%
Recommended Authors	90%			
Expert Picks				40%
Best-Seller Lists Book Appeared On				30%
Appeal Factors			100%	
Suitability for Book Groups	40%		70%	

While the detailed findings that follow about the ten books chosen for this paper are interesting, it would be unwise to try to generalize them for any of the sources. Ten books is a very, very small sample when compared to the number of books that is available in each of these resources.

All of the sources included titles, authors, publication dates, subject headings and some kind of review for the ten selected titles. In *What Do I Read Next?* genre, time period, character and setting are broken out as separate categories in addition to subject headings, while the other three sources list these under subject headings. It's interesting to note that *What Do I Read Next?* is the only source to exclude both the publisher and the length of the book. While it is unlikely that a reader would be influenced either way about a particular book because of who published it, in my experience, many readers do consider the length of a book when choosing something to read. *Amazon.com* is the only one of the four sources to include pictures of the cover, information about the format of the book, customer/patron reviews, and recommended authors. While this information is much more important for a commercial source that is trying to sell books, people are often influenced when selecting a book to read by whether the book is hard cover, paperback or large print and by what the cover looks like. People also like knowing that others have recommended the book. In discussions with classmates and colleagues, they mentioned that before the check out process in libraries was automated, check-out cards with the patron's name written in on them were used when a book was checked out. During the time of this practice, they recalled having made decisions on books based on who else had read it. Sometimes, if they picked up a book and were uncertain about it, but recognized the name of a previous patron, they would take a chance on it.

The recommended authors feature in *What Do I Read Next?* is very interesting. However, when you consider how difficult it is to figure out a book's appeal, determining an author's would be even more of a challenge and it probably isn't the most useful feature.

It's interesting to note that *What Do I Read Next?* and *Now Read This* only use plot synopsis in describing the books while *Amazon.com* and *NoveList* use a combination of plot synopses and professional reviews. For both sources, nine of the ten books had professional reviews, and a plot synopsis provided information about the other book. Both sources also had some books, which had both a plot synopsis and a professional review.

Table 3 shows the same evaluation criteria as Table 2, but the criteria are listed in order by average inclusion in the sources. Title, author, publication date, and subject headings are included 100 percent of the time for the books studied, which is consistent with these criteria being of primary importance for readers' advisory. Recommended titles are included 98 percent; setting is included 80 percent; publisher and characters are included 75 percent; number of pages 73 percent; and plot synopsis is included 70 percent (this figure is somewhat misleading because for all of the books that did not have a plot synopsis in either *Amazon.com* or *NoveList* there was a professional review of the title) of the time. Appeal factors and cover picture are both only available for 25 percent of the titles which would lead one to believe that these elements are not as important, but this researcher would argue that is not the case and the exclusion of these things in the sources is a drawback to the sources.

Table 3: Inclusion of Evaluation Criteria

	Amazon	NoveList	Now Read This	What Do I Read Next?	Averages
Title	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Author	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Publication Date	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Subject Headings	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Recommended Titles	90%	100%	100%	100%	98%
Setting	40%	100%	80%	100%	80%
Publisher	100%	100%	100%		75%
Characters	20%	100%	80%	100%	75%
Number of Pages	90%	100%	100%		73%
Plot Synopsis	50%	30%	100%	100%	70%
Genre	70%	50%	100%	50%	68%
Reading Level		100%		100%	50%
Professional Review	90%	90%			45%
Awards		60%	40%	50%	38%
Time Period		40%		100%	35%
Suitability for Book Groups	40%		70%		28%
ISBN	100%				25%
Price	100%				25%
Cover Picture	100%				25%
Format	100%				25%
Customer/Patron Review	100%				25%
Appeal Factors			100%		25%
Recommended Authors	90%				23%
Expert Picks				40%	10%
Best-Seller Lists Book Appeared On				30%	8%

Treatment of Subject Headings

Table 4 shows how many subject headings were found for each book across the four sources and shows the average number of subject headings across the ten books for each of the four sources. For a detailed listing of the actual subject headings listed for each book see Appendix B. *Amazon.com* has between 2 and 8 subject headings for each of the ten books with the average number of subject headings being 5.2; *NoveList* has

between 4 and 12 subject headings for each book with the average being 8.1; *Now Read This* has between 5 and 11 subject headings for each book with the average being 7.6 and *What Do I Read Next?* has between 6 and 31 subject headings for each of the books with the average being 15.8; while the average number of subject heading across all four sources for all ten books was 9.175. While it might be assumed that the sources that list the most subject headings are the best at describing the books, this researcher would argue that in some cases fewer subject headings is better if the subject headings more precisely describe the book in question. In some cases, *What Do I Read Next?* uses very generic subject headings. This was also found to be true for *Amazon.com*.

Table 4: Subject Headings

Title	<i>Amazon.com</i>	<i>NoveList</i>	<i>Now Read This</i>	<i>What Do I Read Next?</i>
As She Climbed Across the Table	8	9	6	11
Bird Artist, The	6	9	11	9
Flamingo Rising, The	5	10	7	16
Four Letters of Love	6	7	5	14
Love Enter	4	8	5	28
Love, Stars and All That	2	4	10	31
Mating	6	8	7	12
Transit of Venus	6	5	8	6
Unbearable Lightness of Being	6	12	8	17
What Looks Like Crazy on an Ordinary Day	3	9	9	14
Averages	5.2	8.1	7.6	15.8

In general the subject heading for *Amazon.com* tended to be the most general, including things like “fiction”, “fiction – general”, “general”, “literary”, and/or “reading group guide”. Amazon also had the fewest average number of subject headings assigned to each book.

NoveList and *Now Read This* had about the same number of subject headings assigned for each of the books in this survey and their overall averages were pretty close. The subject headings assigned seemed fairly specific for both sources, but some of the subject headings used by *NoveList* seemed a bit too detailed. In *What Looks Like Crazy on An Ordinary Day*, *NoveList* prefaces a number of subject headings with African-American and ends them with Michigan (ex. “African-American community life -- Michigan”, “African American hairdressers -- Michigan” and “African American widows -- Michigan”). It would make more sense to list “African-American” as a separate subject (“Michigan” is a separate subject heading for this book) from “hairdresser”, “community life” or “widows” since there is nothing inherently unique about these things just because they are combined with “Michigan” or “African-American” and it is unlikely that a librarian is going to encounter too many patrons who are looking specifically for books peopled with African-American hairdressers who live in Michigan. It is much more likely that most patrons would be looking particularly for one of those subject headings or some combination of two or more, but wouldn’t rule out a book if only one descriptor were applicable. *The Flamingo Rising* is treated similarly in *NoveList*’s database with subject headings being followed by “Jacksonville, Florida” when they are complete on their own and “Jacksonville, Florida” should have (and does) its own subject heading (ex. “Family – Jacksonville, Florida” and “Teenage Boys – Jacksonville, Florida”).

What Do I Read Next? provides an incredible level of detail that seems a bit unnecessary when describing settings and time periods. For the book, *Love, Stars and All That*, there are 31 different subject headings including: “Whitney”, “Vermont”, “New England”, “North East”, “East”, “United States”, and “North America” which are used to

describe one of the locales in the book. In *Love Enter*, 28 different subject headings are used including: “1980s”, “1990s”, “1987”, “1992” and “20th century” to describe the time the book took place. My guess is that relatively few librarians are going to encounter patrons who will say that they have to read a book set in 1992, but are more likely to have a patron say that they are looking for a book set in the 1990s and still more likely to have a patron ask for a book that is set in the twentieth century.

CONCLUSION

All of the sources reviewed are good sources for assisting patrons with readers' advisory questions, but none of them is the perfect source. Using a combination of sources and being able to identify which source is the best for use in a particular query is the best way to handle readers' advisory questions until a single, more complete source is available.

- *Now Read This* is the best source for do-it-yourself readers' advisory because of its limited scope, well defined subject headings, short descriptions, and use of appeal factors. Placing a copy of this book and a copy of *Genreflecting*, which provides similar information for genre fiction, somewhere that patrons can readily access them would be helpful in any library, but would be particularly useful in medium to large size libraries where patrons have more books to select from and may be less likely to want to "disturb" the librarian with a question about fiction.

- *NoveList* and *What Do I Read Next?* can both be very overwhelming for an individual interested in finding something to read because they rely heavily on subject headings, and there is often more involved in choosing pleasure reading than just subject headings. Placing the terminals, which have access to these resources, near the desk of the fiction librarian would allow the librarian to offer unobtrusive assistance when necessary.

- The *Amazon.com* approach, which provides so much information in a variety of ways (customer reviews, professional reviews, browsing by genre, lists), is one that should be emulated by libraries and readers' advisory databases.

- More attention should be paid to appeal factors when creating readers' advisory aids.

- The best approach to readers' advisory is combining a variety of resources by a librarian who knows what sources are available and when to use them.

Suggestions for Further Research

There are a number of possible ways to expand on or add to this study. Looking at a larger sample of books in the resources would provide more information about different features since this researcher noted several quirky things in some of the databases, but was unable to replicate them using the chosen sample.

Doing a similar study, replacing *Now Read This* with *Genreflecting* would provide useful information about how well the sources cover genre fiction as opposed to mainstream novels.

Amazon.com has recently included a feature that allows a customer who is signed in to the site to rate books that he or she has read and get recommendations based on those ratings. *Ratingzone.com*, which appears to be a non-commercial site, offers a similar ratings-and-recommendations feature, and comparison of these two sources to see how well they do at making recommendations would also be very useful.

Conducting an examination of sources most frequently used by libraries would provide useful information to see what librarians found most useful. I chose the three

electronic sources based on my experience at Durham County (NC) Public Library, but there may be other sources that are used more frequently.

Comparing these sources against the online catalogs of several public libraries would also be useful in determining what progress has been made in providing better subject access to fiction and where we still need to improve. Durham County Public Library does include limited subject headings for more recent fiction in their catalog and also had a related works feature, where a patron could get a listing of similar titles.

APPENDIX A: BOOK TABLES

Table 5**As She Climbed Across the Table**

	Amazon	NoveList	Now Read This	What Do I Read Next?
Title	Y	Y	Y	Y
Author	Y	Y	Y	Y
Publication Date	Y	Y	Y	Y
Publisher	Y	Y	Y	
Number of Pages	Y	Y	Y	
ISBN	Y			
Price	Y			
Cover Picture	Y			
Format	Y			
Subject Headings	Y	Y	Y	Y
Plot Synopsis	Y		Y	Y
Professional Review	Y	Y		
Customer/Patron Review	Y			
Reading Level		Y		Y
Genre/Type	Y	Y	Y	Y
Time Period				Y
Characters	Y	Y	Y	Y
Setting		Y		Y
Awards				
Recommended Titles	Y	**	Y	*
Recommended Authors	Y			
Expert Picks				
Best-Seller Lists Book Appeared On				
Appeal Factors			Y	
Suitability for Book Groups			Y	

* Has a clickable link to get a list of recommended titles. Not included as part of title's entry.

** Has a clickable link to get a list of books with same topic and a link for books by same author

Table 6**The Bird Artist**

	Amazon	NoveList	Now Read This	What Do I Read Next?
Title	Y	Y	Y	Y
Author	Y	Y	Y	Y
Publication Date	Y	Y	Y	Y
Publisher	Y	Y	Y	
Number of Pages	Y	Y	Y	
ISBN	Y			
Price	Y			
Cover Picture	Y			
Format	Y			
Subject Headings	Y	Y	Y	Y
Plot Synopsis	Y	Y	Y	Y
Professional Review	Y	Y		
Customer/Patron Review	Y			
Reading Level		Y		Y
Genre/Type	Y	Y	Y	
Time Period		Y		Y
Characters		Y	Y	Y
Setting	Y	Y	Y	Y
Awards		Y	Y	Y
Recommended Titles	Y	**	Y	*
Recommended Authors	Y			
Expert Picks				Y
Best-Seller Lists Book Appeared On				Y
Appeal Factors			Y	
Suitability for Book Groups	Y		Y	

* Has a clickable link to get a list of recommended titles. Not included as part of title's entry.

** Has a clickable link to get a list of books with same topic and a link for books by same author

Has a reading group guide available online at Amazon

Table 7**The Flamingo Rising**

	Amazon	NoveList	Now Read This	What Do I Read Next?
Title	Y	Y	Y	Y
Author	Y	Y	Y	Y
Publication Date	Y	Y	Y	Y
Publisher	Y	Y	Y	
Number of Pages	Y	Y	Y	
ISBN	Y			
Price	Y			
Cover Picture	Y			
Format	Y			
Subject Headings	Y	Y	Y	Y
Plot Synopsis		Y	Y	Y
Professional Review	Y	Y		
Customer/Patron Review	Y			
Reading Level		Y		Y
Genre/Type	Y	Y	Y	
Time Period		Y		Y
Characters		Y	Y	Y
Setting		Y	Y	Y
Awards				
Recommended Titles	Y	**	Y	*
Recommended Authors	Y			
Expert Picks				
Best-Seller Lists Book Appeared On				
Appeal Factors			Y	
Suitability for Book Groups	Y		Y	

* Has a clickable link to get a list of recommended titles. Not included as part of title's entry.

** Has a clickable link to get a list of books with same topic and a link for books by same author

Has an excerpt and reading group guide available online at Amazon

Table 8**Four Letters of Love**

	Amazon	NoveList	Now Read This	What Do I Read Next?
Title	Y	Y	Y	Y
Author	Y	Y	Y	Y
Publication Date	Y	Y	Y	Y
Publisher	Y	Y	Y	
Number of Pages	Y	Y	Y	
ISBN	Y			
Price	Y			
Cover Picture	Y			
Format	Y			
Subject Headings	Y	Y	Y	Y
Plot Synopsis			Y	Y
Professional Review	Y	Y		
Customer/Patron Review	Y			
Reading Level		Y		Y
Genre/Type	Y	Y	Y	
Time Period				Y
Characters		Y		Y
Setting	Y	Y	Y	Y
Awards				
Recommended Titles	Y	**	Y	*
Recommended Authors	Y			
Expert Picks				Y
Best-Seller Lists Book Appeared On				
Appeal Factors			Y	
Suitability for Book Groups	Y		Y	

* Has a clickable link to get a list of recommended titles. Not included as part of title's entry.

** Has a clickable link to get a list of books with same topic and a link for books by same author

Has a reading group guide available online at Amazon

Table 9**Love Enter**

	Amazon	NoveList	Now Read This	What Do I Read Next?
Title	Y	Y	Y	Y
Author	Y	Y	Y	Y
Publication Date	Y	Y	Y	Y
Publisher	Y	Y	Y	
Number of Pages	Y	Y	Y	
ISBN	Y			
Price	Y			
Cover Picture	Y			
Format	Y			
Subject Headings	Y	Y	Y	Y
Plot Synopsis			Y	Y
Professional Review	Y	Y		
Customer/Patron Review	Y			
Reading Level		Y		Y
Genre/Type			Y	Y
Time Period		Y		Y
Characters		Y		Y
Setting		Y	Y	Y
Awards		Y		Y
Recommended Titles		**	Y	*
Recommended Authors				
Expert Picks				
Best-Seller Lists Book Appeared On				
Appeal Factors			Y	
Suitability for Book Groups				

* Has a clickable link to get a list of recommended titles. Not included as part of title's entry.

** Has a clickable link to get a list of books with same topic and a link for books by same author

Table 10**Love, Stars and All That**

	Amazon	NoveList	Now Read This	What Do I Read Next?
Title	Y	Y	Y	Y
Author	Y	Y	Y	Y
Publication Date	Y	Y	Y	Y
Publisher	Y	Y	Y	
Number of Pages		Y	Y	
ISBN	Y			
Price	Y			
Cover Picture	Y			
Format	Y			
Subject Headings	Y	Y	Y	Y
Plot Synopsis			Y	Y
Professional Review	Y	Y		
Customer/Patron Review	Y			
Reading Level		Y		Y
Genre/Type	Y		Y	
Time Period				Y
Characters	Y	Y	Y	Y
Setting	Y	Y	Y	Y
Awards		Y	Y	
Recommended Titles	Y	**	Y	Y
Recommended Authors	Y			
Expert Picks				
Best-Seller Lists Book Appeared On				
Appeal Factors			Y	
Suitability for Book Groups				

* Has a clickable link to get a list of recommended titles. Not included as part of title's entry.

** Has a clickable link to get a list of books with same topic and a link for books by same author

Table 11**Mating**

	Amazon	NoveList	Now Read This	What Do I Read Next?
Title	Y	Y	Y	Y
Author	Y	Y	Y	Y
Publication Date	Y	Y	Y	Y
Publisher	Y	Y	Y	
Number of Pages	Y	Y	Y	
ISBN	Y			
Price	Y			
Cover Picture	Y			
Format	Y			
Subject Headings	Y	Y	Y	Y
Plot Synopsis	Y		Y	Y
Professional Review	Y	Y		
Customer/Patron Review	Y			
Reading Level		Y		Y
Genre/Type	Y		Y	Y
Time Period				Y
Characters		Y	Y	Y
Setting		Y	Y	Y
Awards		Y	Y	Y
Recommended Titles	Y	**	Y	*
Recommended Authors	Y			
Expert Picks				
Best-Seller Lists Book Appeared On				Y
Appeal Factors			Y	
Suitability for Book Groups			Y	

* Has a clickable link to get a list of recommended titles. Not included as part of title's entry.

** Has a clickable link to get a list of books with same topic and a link for books by same author

Table 12**Transit of Venus**

	Amazon	NoveList	Now Read This	What Do I Read Next?
Title	Y	Y	Y	Y
Author	Y	Y	Y	Y
Publication Date	Y	Y	Y	Y
Publisher	Y	Y	Y	
Number of Pages	Y	Y	Y	
ISBN	Y			
Price	Y			
Cover Picture	Y			
Format	Y			
Subject Headings	Y	Y	Y	Y
Plot Synopsis	Y		Y	Y
Professional Review		Y		
Customer/Patron Review	Y			
Reading Level		Y		Y
Genre/Type			Y	Y
Time Period				Y
Characters		Y	Y	Y
Setting	Y	Y	Y	Y
Awards		Y	Y	Y
Recommended Titles	Y	**	Y	*
Recommended Authors	Y			
Expert Picks				Y
Best-Seller Lists Book Appeared On				
Appeal Factors			Y	
Suitability for Book Groups			Y	

* Has a clickable link to get a list of recommended titles. Not included as part of title's entry.

** Has a clickable link to get a list of books with same topic and a link for books by same author

Table 13**Unbearable Lightness of Being**

	Amazon	NoveList	Now Read This	What Do I Read Next?
Title	Y	Y	Y	Y
Author	Y	Y	Y	Y
Publication Date	Y	Y	Y	Y
Publisher	Y	Y	Y	
Number of Pages	Y	Y	Y	
ISBN	Y			
Price	Y			
Cover Picture	Y			
Format	Y			
Subject Headings	Y	Y	Y	Y
Plot Synopsis		Y	Y	Y
Professional Review	Y			
Customer/Patron Review	Y			
Reading Level		Y		Y
Genre/Type	Y	Y	Y	
Time Period		Y		Y
Characters		Y	Y	Y
Setting		Y	Y	Y
Awards		Y		Y
Recommended Titles	Y	**	Y	*
Recommended Authors	Y			
Expert Picks				Y
Best-Seller Lists Book Appeared On				
Appeal Factors			Y	
Suitability for Book Groups	Y		Y	

* Has a clickable link to get a list of recommended titles. Not included as part of title's entry.

** Has a clickable link to get a list of books with same topic and a link for books by same author

Has an excerpt, table of contents and reading group guide available online at Amazon

Table 14**What Looks Like Crazy on an Ordinary Day**

	Amazon	NoveList	Now Read This	What Do I Read Next?
Title	Y	Y	Y	Y
Author	Y	Y	Y	Y
Publication Date	Y	Y	Y	Y
Publisher	Y	Y	Y	
Number of Pages	Y	Y	Y	
ISBN	Y			
Price	Y			
Cover Picture	Y			
Format	Y			
Subject Headings	Y	Y	Y	Y
Plot Synopsis	Y		Y	Y
Professional Review	Y	Y		
Customer/Patron Review	Y			
Reading Level		Y		Y
Genre/Type			Y	Y
Time Period				Y
Characters		Y	Y	Y
Setting		Y		Y
Awards				
Recommended Titles	Y	**	Y	*
Recommended Authors	Y			
Expert Picks				
Best-Seller Lists Book Appeared On				Y
Appeal Factors			Y	
Suitability for Book Groups				

* Has a clickable link to get a list of recommended titles. Not included as part of title's entry.

** Has a clickable link to get a list of books with same topic and a link for books by same author

Has an excerpt available online at Amazon

APPENDIX B: SUBJECT HEADING TABLES

Table 15**As She Climbed Across the Table**

Subject Headings	Amazon	NoveList	Now Read This	What Do I Read Next?
	Black Holes (Astronomy)	Black Holes (Astronomy)	Academia	1990s
	Discoveries in Science	California	Love Stories	20th Century
	Fiction	College Teachers	Male/Female Relationships	California
	Fiction – Science Fiction	Humorous Stories	Physics	North America
	General	Humorous Stories, American	Science and Scientists	Professor
	Occupational Neuroses	Love Stories	Women Scientists	Satire
	Physicists	Love Stories, American		Science Fiction
	Science Fiction – General	Scientific Discoveries		Scientist
		Women Physicists		Southwest
				United States
				West
Total	8	9	6	11

Table 16**The Bird Artist**

Subject Headings	Amazon	NoveList	Now Read This	What Do I Read Next?
	Artists	ALA Notable Adult Books	Adultery	1910s
	Fiction	Artists	ALA Notable Books	1911
	Fiction - General	Bird artists -- Newfoundland	Art and Artists	20th Century
	Historical fiction	Canada -- History -- 1800-1932	Birds	Artist
	Newfoundland	Historical fiction	Canada	Canada
	Reading Group Guide	Mystery stories	Love Stories	Lighthouse Keeper
		Newfoundland	Male/Female Relationships	Murder
		Small town life -- Newfoundland	Mothers and Sons	Newfoundland
		The Teens (20th century)	Murder	North America
			Newfoundland, Canada	
			Small-Town Life	
Total	6	9	11	9

Table 17

The Flamingo Rising

Subject Headings	Amazon	NoveList	Now Read This	What Do I Read Next?
	Fiction	Adoption	Coming-of-Age	1950s - 1960s
	Fiction – General	Coming-of-age stories	Family Relationships	20th Century
	General	Drive-in theaters -- Jacksonville, Florida	Fathers and Sons	Adolescence
	Reading Group Guide	Family -- Jacksonville, Florida	First Novels	Atlantic States
	Romance – General	Florida	Florida	Business Enterprises
		Historical fiction	Love Stories	East
		Jacksonville, Florida	Male/Female Relationships	Family
		Love stories		Florida
		Teenage boys -- Jacksonville, Florida		Gulf States
		United States -- History -- 1945-1975		Jacksonville
				North America
				Popular Culture
				South
				South Atlantic States
				Southeast
				United States
Total	5	10	7	16

Table 18

Four Letters of Love

Subject Headings	Amazon	NoveList	Now Read This	What Do I Read Next?
	Fiction	Father and son - - Ireland	Family Relationships	1990s
	Fiction - General	Ireland	First Novels	20th Century
	General	Love Letters	Ireland	Art
	Ireland	Love stories	Love Stories	Artist
	Love stories	Love stories, Irish	Male/Female Relationships	Brother
	Reading Group Guide	Painters -- Ireland		Coming-of- Age
		Young women - - Ireland		Europe
				Father
				Ireland
				Love
				Musician
				Sister
				Son
				Western Europe
Total	6	7	5	14

Table 19

Love Enter

Subject Headings	Amazon	NoveList	Now Read This	What Do I Read Next?
	Fiction	Americans in Paris, France	Computers	1980s
	Fiction - General	Medical Students – New Orleans, Louisiana	Epistolary Novels	1987
	General	Epistolary Novels	France	1990s
	Popular American Fiction	Foursomes (Interpersonal relations)	Love Stories	1992
		Friendship	Male/Female Relationships	20th century
		Bohemianism -- Paris, France -- History -- 20th century		Contemporary
		Los Angeles Times Book Prize winners		Doctor
		Art Seidenbaum Award for First Fiction winners		Europe
				France
				Friendship
				Gulf States
				Internet
				Louisiana
				Love
				Lover
				Medicine
				North America
				Paris
				Relationships
				Romance
				South
				Southeast
				United States
				Wealthy
				West
				Western Europe
				Writing
Total	4	8	5	28

Table 20

Love, Stars and All That

Subject Headings	Amazon	NoveList	Now Read This	What Do I Read Next?
	Fiction	Berkeley, California	Academia	1980s – 1990s
	Fiction - General	East Indian women in Berkeley, California	Astrology	20 th Century
		Men/women relations -- Berkeley, California	College Students	Asia
		Women graduate students -- Berkeley, California	Culture Clash	Asian Americans
			First Novels	Aunt
			Humorous Fiction	Berkeley
			India	Bombay
			Interracial Relationships	California
			Love Stories	College Life
			Male/Female Relationships	Colleges and Universities
				Dating (Social Customs)
				Delhi
				East
				Emigration and Immigration
				Immigrant
				India
				Love
				Multicultural
				New England
				North America
				Northeast
				Professor
				Relationships
				Southern Asia
				Southwest
				Student – Graduate
				United States
				Vermont
				West
				Whitney
				Writer
Total	2	4	10	31

Table 21**Mating**

Subject Headings	Amazon	NoveList	Now Read This	What Do I Read Next?
	Botswana	Americans in Africa	Africa	1990s
	Fiction	Botswana	First Novels	20 th Century
	Fiction – General	Courtship	Love Stories	Africa
	Literary	Kalahari Desert	Male/Female Relationships	Anthropologist
	Love stories	Men/women relations	National Book Award Winners	Botswana
	Women anthropologists	National Book Award winners	Science and Scientists	Leader
		Women -- Botswana	Utopian Novels	Narrator
		Women anthropologists -- Africa		Poverty
				Relationships
				Romance
				Southern Africa
				Utopia
Total	6	8	7	12

Table 22**Transit of Venus**

Subject Headings	Amazon	NoveList	Now Read This	What Do I Read Next?
	Australia	Australians in England	Australia	Coming-of-Age
	Australians	Australians in the United States	Australian Authors	Love
	England	Brothers and sisters -- Australia	England	Orphans
	Fiction	Men/women relations	Love Stories	Relationships
	Fiction - General	National Book Critics Circle Award winners	Male/Female Relationships	Romance
	United States		National Book Critics Circle Award Winners	Sisters
			Orphans	
			Sisters	
Total	6	5	8	6

Table 23

Unbearable Lightness of Being

Subject Headings	Amazon	NoveList	Now Read This	What Do I Read Next?
	Fiction	Czech fiction -- 20th century -- Translations into English	Adultery	1960s – 1970s
	Fiction – General	Czech Republic	Art & Artists	20 th Century
	Kundera, Milan - Prose & Criticism	Czechoslovakia -- History -- Soviet invasion, 1968	Czechoslovakia	Artist
	Literary	Europe -- History -- 1946-1975	Czechoslovakian Authors	Central Europe
	Literature: Classics	Historical fiction	Love Stories	Czechoslovakia
	Reading Group Guide	Los Angeles Times Book Prize Winners	Male/Female Relationships	Doctor
		Love stories	Novels in Translation	Eastern Europe
		Men/women relations	Political Fiction	Europe
		Physicians		Love
		Soviet Union		Lover
		Totalitarianism -- Czechoslovakia		Photojournalist
		War stories		Politics
				Prague
				Professor
				Relationships
				Sexual Behavior
				Spouse
Total	6	12	8	17

Table 24

What Looks Like Crazy on an Ordinary Day

Subject Headings	Amazon	NoveList	Now Read This	What Do I Read Next?
	Fiction	African-American community life -- Michigan	African American Authors	1990s
	Fiction – General	African-American H I V-positive women -- Michigan	African Americans	20 th Century
	General	African-American hairdressers -- Michigan	AIDS	AIDS (Disease)
		African-American sisters -- Michigan	First Novels	Carpenter
		African-American widows -- Michigan	Love Stories	East
		Children of women cocaine addicts -- Michigan	Male/Female Relationships	Great Lakes States
		Michigan	Sisters	Hairdresser
		Oprah's Book Club selections	Small-Town Life	Idlewild
		Small town life -- Michigan	Women with AIDS	Michigan
				Midwest
				North America
				Romance
				Sister
				United States
Total	3	9	9	14

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