

A qualitative study of fiction discovery
and public libraries

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A dissertation submitted to the University of Wales in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Magister in Scientia Economica (MSc) under Alternative Regulations

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2016

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore the ways in which readers discover fiction which is new to them, and to investigate the current and potential role of public libraries in this. In-depth information was gathered through qualitative interviews with sixteen participants. Findings showed that avid readers tend to keep lists of interesting books and have no problems in getting ideas or finding a good read. They do not tend to feel that the library plays a significant role in helping them to make discoveries, but may in fact be unconscious of the library tools they do use. The topic would benefit from future research that focuses on people who read less, as they are likely to experience more problems, and to welcome more intervention, when choosing a new book. The conclusions are that libraries do have a role to play in helping readers to discover fiction; currently widely-used tools such as displays and reading groups are very useful to readers. Libraries should bear in mind that they form one part of readers' holistic worlds, where there are multiple sources of book inspiration, many of which are found outside the library. Several recommendations for public libraries are made, including fostering communities where readers can review, recommend, and share books; ensuring that stock and displays reflect influences from readers' lives; and being aware of and catering for all kinds of readers.

Declaration and Statements

Declaration

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed (candidate)

Date24th October 2016.....

Statement 1

This work is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Where *correction services have been used, the extent and nature of the correction is clearly marked in a footnote(s).

Other sources are acknowledged (e.g. by footnotes giving explicit references).
A bibliography is appended.

Signed (candidate)

Date24th October 2016.....

[*this refers to the extent to which the text has been corrected by others]

Statement 2

I hereby give consent for my work, if accepted, to be available for photocopying and for inter-library loan, and for the title and summary to be made available to outside organisations.

Signed (candidate)

Date24th October 2016.....

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Acknowledgements

Thank you to Bournemouth Libraries for their support, and to all the participants.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background to the study

Public libraries provide access to huge numbers of fictional works, and access is usually provided by author and title. Books are generally arranged on the shelves alphabetically by author surname, and often divided into genres such as Crime, Science Fiction, and so on. For customers looking for non-fiction books on a certain topic, access is detailed and goes far beyond author and title of the work. This study aims to explore how, currently, fiction readers are served by their libraries. Are libraries full of readers hopelessly lost, overwhelmed, and wondering where to begin? What kind of tools are already in place in libraries that help readers to navigate the stock, and which ones are commonly used and appreciated by readers? Is there anything that libraries could do to help readers further, and is there a demand for such help?

1.2 Aims and objectives

The aim of this study is to explore how fiction-readers discover fiction (authors and titles that are new to them), whether and how they use public libraries to do this, and any ways in which libraries could help readers to discover new fiction that they will enjoy. The objectives are:

- to find out how readers tend to discover fiction new to them
- to explore their use of public libraries, in terms of browsing and pre-selecting books
- to explore perceptions of the library's role: are they there simply to provide books, or to offer guidance?
- to find out how readers respond when they read a disappointing book
- to see if there is a perception that borrowing a book carries a risk, i.e. the risk of an unsatisfactory book, and to explore the amount of care people take when selecting books

The following research questions are addressed:

- How do readers discover new fiction, and how much help do they want?
- What role does the public library have to play in helping readers to discover fiction?

1.3 Scope of the project

The initial scope of the project related to people who read a lot of fiction, and who were users of Bournemouth Libraries. The scope extended as the study developed, to include people in different locations throughout the UK, and non-library users, as well as people who read less avidly, although most participants were keen readers. The findings cannot be claimed to be generalised to the population as a whole, and it is recognised that results may be specific to the particular socio-economic contexts from which they were generated.

1.4 Structure of the report

The report begins with a review of the literature on the subject of fiction discovery in public libraries, and related topics. It explores findings on the historic treatment of fiction by public libraries, and the current research on the ways in which people access fiction. The Methodology chapter explains the qualitative approach taken to the study, and describes the sixteen interviews carried out. It also details how the data was analysed, and discusses the limitations of the research, and lessons learned. The following chapter presents the results from the data, and then there is a chapter discussing the findings. The Conclusion provides a summary of the study and reflects on the usefulness of the results found, potential practical applications for libraries, and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Approach to the Literature Review

In reviewing the literature, I aimed to get an overview of all relevant research that had been carried out relating to fiction selection and discovery, to establish what current and past research said, and where more research would be useful. My search was ongoing between December 2015 and May 2016. I made a subject search of various individual online journals (accessed via Aberystwyth University's Primo library catalogue), and of LISA (Library and Information Science Abstracts). Typical search terms used were: 'fiction', 'selection', 'discovery', 'Amazon', 'browsing', 'recommendations', 'risk', and 'public libraries'. I also used the references of each article or book that I read to find other relevant works; the references of those works in turn provided further avenues, and so on. Bryman's *Social Research Methods* (2012), and Hart's *Doing a Literature Review* (2005) were useful in preparing to undertake the review.

2.2 How access to fiction has been provided over time

Public libraries cater reasonably well for fiction readers who have a specific book in mind that they want to borrow, and know the author and / or title. Schemes such as Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) provide access to fictional works via author and title; searchable library catalogues contain these details and items are usually easy to locate on the shelves. However, an argument has long run through the literature that fiction readers who want something new to read but have no particular book in mind are not served well enough by public libraries. The need to better serve fiction readers (especially those who do not know what they are looking for) has been expressed in different ways over time.

Much of the literature relating to fiction in public libraries begins by acknowledging that there has been an historical inequality between the treatment of fiction and non-fiction. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, fiction was viewed with suspicion and sometimes distaste (Bierbaum, 1995, p. 389; MacLennan, 1996, p. 24; Hypén and Impivaara, 2011, p. 61; Vernitski and Rafferty, 2011, pp. 49-50). Different ways of redressing this imbalance have been proposed.

The older literature on fiction retrieval tended to propose classification schemes that would provide access to fiction in a similar way to traditional classification schemes for non-fiction.

Systems were designed that would provide access to fiction via aspects other than author and title. As early as 1933, Haigh developed an adaptation of Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) for fiction (Beghtol, 1989, p. 137), and in 1976 Davis devised an expansion of DDC which used negative numbers to denote fictional works (Davis, 1976, pp. 174-175). In 1958 Walker devised a special scheme for fiction which Beghtol dubbed the 'Problem Child' system (Beghtol, 1990, p. 21). Pejtersen's AMP system (Analysis and Mediation of Publications) provided access through four dimensions: subject matter, frame or setting, author's intention, and accessibility (Pejtersen and Austin, 1983, pp. 233-234). Beghtol developed her Experimental Fiction Analysis System (EFAS) in 1994, with four facets: characters, events, spaces, and times (Bierbaum, 1995, p. 389). In the nineteen-nineties some libraries participated with the Library of Congress in a project to add subject headings to fictional works, providing four categories of access: form / genre, characters, setting, and topic (Down, 1995, p. 62). However, these schemes, even at the time of their invention, were rarely implemented. As Vernitski and Rafferty write, 'In general, the development of special schemes has been theoretical rather than practical' (2011, p. 51).

Over time, the literature on fiction retrieval moved away from a focus on classification, or similar, schemes, and began to consider other ways of enhancing access. One reason for this shift may be the increasing use of the internet: possibilities developed for systems and tools that did not exist before.

Finnish libraries created a 'fiction web service' called Kirjasampo (Hypén and Impivaara, 2011, p. 61); librarians can add recommendations, which can then be accessed by other librarians, creating a pool of knowledge (Hypén and Impivaara, 2011, p. 65; Hypén and Mäkelä, 2011, p. 287). Finnish libraries also developed a fiction thesaurus, called Kaunokki (Saarti, 1999, p. 89; Saarti and Hypén, 2010); as recently as 2016, Kaunokki was being used as the basis of an enriched library catalogue (Mikkonen and Vakkari, 2016, p. 62). Mikkonen and Vakkari (2016) found that the enriched library catalogue they studied was easier for readers to use than the traditional catalogue; it contained a variety of access points, including browsing covers in a virtual carousel, viewing a subject-term cloud, and user-created bookshelves (p. 62). These features are also present in the fiction-discovery website Goodreads (goodreads.com), which is owned by Amazon. Most of the online systems designed for helping people find fiction have in common the idea of a community of users,

all tagging, reviewing, indexing, recommending and sharing information and thoughts about books (MacLennan, 1996, p. 26; Hilderley and Rafferty, 1997; Bates and Rowley, 2011, p. 434). These are also features of LibraryThing, a website which has been the subject of a lot of research (Bates and Rowley, 2011, p. 436; Šauperl, 2012, p. 301; Richards and Sen, 2013).

2.3 Reasons for enhancing access to fiction

As we have seen, the literature points to libraries' historical undervaluing of fiction compared to non-fiction, and the lack of detailed subject access to fiction. Some other reasons are given for enhancing the access generally given to fiction:

Much of the literature states that in the 21st century, fiction accounts for a large proportion of loans from public libraries, and uses the fact to argue for a greater investment in enhancing access to it (Spiller, 1980, p. 238; Baker and Shepherd, 1987, p. 245; Goodall, 1989, p. 118; Saarti, 2000, p. 6; Saarinen and Vakkari, 2013, p. 736). Mikkonen and Vakkari (2016) report that fiction accounted for 44 percent of book loans from public libraries in 2013 (p. 60). The Public Lending Right's figures for 2014/2015 are that 'Fiction and Related Items' accounted for 41.5 percent of all UK public library loans (Public Lending Right, 2016). Fiction still accounts for a significant proportion of public library borrowing.

Aside from the popularity of fiction, some other reasons for investing in enhanced access are given in the literature. The danger of readers being overwhelmed by a large unbroken run of books is stated (Baker, 1986, p. 238; Baker, 1996, p. 132; Saarti, 1997, p. 160). Baker (1996) also points out that if readers experience 'hardships in finding titles', they will desert the library (p. 132). Goodall is also thinking strategically when she points out that high demand for a small number of authors leads to customer dissatisfaction when titles are unavailable; therefore it is in libraries' interests to 'promote the current stock and create interest in new authors' (1989, p. 66). It has also been claimed that it is in the library's interest to help readers to choose books they are likely to enjoy; some literature links the success of readers finding good books with the success of the library. Totterdell and Bird (1976, quoted in Goodall, 1989, p. 23) go so far as to say that if a reader cannot find a good book, it is 'a failure on the part of the library'. While borrowing figures are sometimes used to measure libraries' success, the level of enjoyment or satisfaction with the books, once borrowed, is rarely studied (Pejtersen and Austin, 1984, p. 34; Baker, 1986, p. 255).

Libraries need to be concerned not only with how much is being borrowed, but how much the borrowed books are being enjoyed. All in all, the literature in this field agrees that work to improve access to fiction is warranted.

However, it is important to remember that recognising the value of fiction, and of providing a good-quality fiction service to readers, is important but it does not necessarily follow that current conditions are inadequate from readers' viewpoints. We must determine the nature and extent of readers' difficulties, if any, with discovering fiction. This study aims to address this question.

2.4 Current widespread ways of enhancing access to fiction

It is worth bearing in mind that when many of the fiction classification schemes mentioned above were proposed, it was not common practice for public libraries to divide their fiction collection by genre, on the shelves. Dividing by genre has been advocated as a relatively simple way of helping readers find what they are looking for (Spiller, 1980, p. 240; Baker, 1996, p. 141; Saarti, 1997, p. 159), and it seems likely that this is commonplace today in the UK.

There are certain features currently common to most UK public libraries, which help patrons to navigate the fiction shelves and find items they have a good chance of enjoying. The fact that books are on the shelves to allow browsing, is itself a help to the reader, but the fact that most libraries divide their fiction collection into genres, to some extent, is also a helpful feature. Most libraries also use displays, and have 'New Books' shelves, and accessible areas which display returned fiction. All of these things have been mentioned in the literature as features that are used by readers searching for new books (Baker, 1986, p. 237; Toyne and Usherwood, 2001, cited in Ooi and Liew, 2011, p. 752; Saarinen and Vakkari, 2013, p. 750). The guide 'Who Writes Like...?' which allows users to look up an author and see a list of similar authors is another common resource, although as McIvor points out, the fact that many libraries keep this guide behind the enquiry desk means that readers are usually not aware of it (1998, p. 167).

The librarian is another resource that can help guide readers to fiction they may enjoy, but the literature shows that readers rarely ask library staff for help in choosing fiction (Spiller, 1980, p. 256; Baker, 1996, p. 129; Yu and O'Brien, 1997, p. 188; Ooi and Liew, 2011, p. 764).

Often, librarians and other staff are relying on their personal reading and memory, to advise readers (Burgin, 1996, p. 77; Shearer, 1996a, p. 9; Smith, 1996b, p. 90; Saarti, 2000, p. 6; Mikkonen and Vakkari, 2012, p. 222; Šauperl, 2012, p. 286). This means that their advice is really no more valuable than the advice of a friend – in fact potentially even less so, given that readers may not know librarians’ personal tastes and therefore whether they can trust their recommendations. Moreover, studies have shown that even professionally trained librarians are often ill-equipped to deal with requests for guidance about fiction. Shearer (1996b) noted that librarians often ‘shy away’ from fiction guidance requests, because of ‘the potential humiliation’ of being unable to successfully help (p. 172). Spiller (1980) said that ‘Most librarians might also admit to some doubts as to their capacity to act as fiction advisors’, and that many feel that they ‘cannot be expected to be specialists in fiction’ (p. 257). Moyer and Weech (2005) studied the content of education programmes for trainee public librarians, in North America and Europe, and looked at the extent of the training provided in readers’ advisory skills. They concluded that ‘students who plan to become public librarians graduate without the knowledge of how to serve fiction readers’ (p. 77). In 1996 Shearer also noted the need for more training in readers’ advisory skills to be incorporated into the Information and Library Studies curriculum (1996b, p. 177). There is clearly a need to either train librarians more effectively so that they themselves are resourced to help readers with fiction enquiries, or else to develop tools that readers can use independently, or in conjunction with library staff.

Many public libraries in the UK today have developed programmes of what is often called Reader Development. This assumes that, in terms of fiction, libraries have a responsibility beyond pointing people in the direction of the fiction shelves and letting them get on with it. Bournemouth Libraries’ Reader Development policy defines Reader Development as ‘the act of bringing books and readers together through active intervention by library staff’ (Bournemouth Borough Council, 2002, p. 2). It also states that ‘increasing individuals’ confidence and encouraging them to try new things’ (p. 2) is an essential component. The organisation Opening the Book is a major champion of Reader Development in UK public libraries, and also believes that libraries have a role in intervention to help readers find good books, and to help them expand their reading.

As promoters of reading we need to respect readers and their choices, but also to understand that we can intervene in readers' choices and encourage exploration.

(Opening the Book, no date)

Reader development encourages people to try something new and different, offering surprises. ... empowering them to start taking a few risks.

(Opening the Book, no date)

We need to establish how these tools that libraries use to help readers are being used, and whether readers feel that they could be improved. To consider this question, we need to determine how readers go about selecting fiction. Does the majority of selection occur inside or outside the public library itself? And what tools do people use, inside or outside the library, to discover and decide on books or authors that are new to them?

2.5 Selection inside or outside the library

There is some debate in the literature about whether more selection of fiction takes place inside the library, or outside it. In other words, do readers tend to already have a title or author in mind, that they want to read, and simply go to the library to pick it up, or do they tend to go to the library hoping to find a good book, and browse the shelves searching for something suitable? There are complicating factors: a reader might start off by browsing, but then recognise a book they have previously heard about in their everyday life, i.e. outside the library environment, and which they have previously felt an interest in. Readers might also employ a mixture of known-item and unknown-item searching, or might browse inside the library but only in a limited way, for example, only scanning the returns and New Books shelves, rather than the whole fiction run. Readers may employ different selection methods on different occasions, and it may vary according to their circumstances. Spiller points out that people sometimes have a book in mind but then forget the details, and are therefore forced into browsing (1980, p. 245). Saarinen and Vakkari (2013) said that the distinction between readers with a book or author already in mind, and those searching for something good, 'had a great impact on how they accessed novels' (p. 746). Spiller also implied that this distinction in readers' intention is highly significant; he said that all novels borrowed could be categorised in one of two ways: either they had been previously

identified by the reader and then either searched for, or recognised; or they were previously unknown to the borrower and selected by browsing within the library (1980, p. 245).

Spiller's 1978 survey of around 500 readers in the UK found that 54% of novels were chosen on the basis of author, and 46% by browsing; however, most people normally used a combination of both methods (1980, p. 245). Deborah Goodall's 1989 paper, *Browsing in public libraries*, analysed eight studies that had been carried out regarding English public library use. Several of these studies found that browsing was a more popular approach to selecting fiction, than pre-selecting an author or title to borrow before coming into the library. Taylor and Johnson (1973) found that 65.4% of public library users were browsing for anything good (cited in Goodall, 1989, p. 21); Jennings and Sear (1986) said that 61% of books were chosen by browsing (cited in Goodall, 1989, p. 27). Ainley and Totterdell (1982) quoted a figure of 55% of users as browsers in larger libraries, and 75 – 80% in smaller branches (cited in Goodall, 1989, p. 35). Harrison (1984) concluded that browsing was overwhelmingly the most common method for readers of discovering new authors (cited in Goodall, 1989, p. 85). Goodall's own 1987 study of 200 public library users in Nottinghamshire found that nearly nine out of ten readers chose books by browsing (cited in Goodall, 1989, p. 28). An interesting study was carried out by Ooi and Liew in 2011, which contradicts these findings. They found that 'the selection of fiction books at the public library occurred, to a large extent, outside it' (2011, p. 748). They claimed that the role of the public library, in terms of the selection process, is minimal. When they entered the library, their participants 'tended to have a book title or author already in mind, drawn from their everyday life sources and tempered by their personal preferences and circumstances' (2011, p. 763). Mikkonen and Vakkari (2012) found that 'searching of fiction occurs in everyday life environments often as a serendipitous activity' (p. 215). This discrepancy in the literature is interesting, but it should be borne in mind that Ooi and Liew's study was on a much smaller scale than the other studies cited here, and its value in terms of generalisation is limited. However, it raises a question about the behaviour of readers: how much do people pre-select their fiction reading? Ooi and Liew's 2011 study is much more recent than any of the studies analysed by Goodall in 1989, and it is possible that with the growth of the internet, or any changes in society in general, behaviour might have changed over time.

Opening the Book (no date) has carried out research which found that approximately half of readers entering public libraries were looking for a specific book, and the other half were browsing. However, of the 50% who were looking for something in particular, they claim that half of those people cannot find the book they wanted, then make a substitution, thereby becoming browsers. Therefore the actual figure of library customers who are browsing is more like 75%. They write:

Libraries are mostly designed to meet the needs of the 25% of people who know what they want and can find it - the A-Z shelves, the categories of fiction, the Dewey system, the catalogue. ... Reader development has drawn attention to the neglected majority. What can you offer the 75% to help them browse more effectively?

Some recent literature has pointed out that research has tended to concentrate on selection behaviour within the public library, and that selection outside of the library remains an under-studied area (Adkins and Bossaller, 2007, p. 355; Ooi and Liew, 2011, p. 749; McKay, Smith and Chang, 2014, p. 146). This study hopes to contribute to redressing that balance, by looking at readers' selection methods, both outside and inside the library.

Evidence for readers discovering new authors and titles outside of the public library is found elsewhere in the literature. Ooi and Liew (2011) found that readers got book ideas from traditional media such as newspapers, television and radio, as well as from the internet (p. 762). They also found that personal networks were a significant source of book recommendations, but that readers would only take recommendations from people they trusted, whose taste they knew and liked (p. 758). Spiller (1980) asked respondents how they discovered new authors, and found that personal recommendations and newspaper reviews were both very significant, with browsing less so (p. 246). Buchanan and McKay (2011) studied search strategies in bookshops, and reported that customers often requested the latest literary prize-winner, or books that had recently been made into films or television series (p. 273). In other words, they had pre-selected the titles they were interested in from outside sources, and used the bookshop only to acquire them. Ross (2001) wrote that:

In order to be alerted to the existence of new books that will provide the reading experience they want, committed readers typically put out antennae that scan their everyday environments for clues. They tuck away for future use

in memory or in lists the names of books and authors mentioned in magazine and newspaper reviews; books given currency because they have been made into films or television productions; and authors and titles that come up in conversation

(Ross, 2001, pp. 11-12).

Spiller (1980) found something similar:

... most respondents had a small list of 'favourite' authors, long since exhausted, and were anxious to discover new names. A handful of respondents carried about with them notebooks full of authors' names; the majority carried something between five to ten names in their heads, and if these drew a blank on their first shelf search they resorted to browsing

(Spiller, 1980, p. 247).

2.6 How do readers feel about browsing?

In 1989 Goodall stated that the emphasis of research should be on 'how and why library users browse' and what public libraries can do to help them (p. 39). We cannot assume that all browsers in public libraries are browsing for the same reasons, or with the same feelings; it may not be their first choice of selection method. Goodall stated the need to determine whether browsers were browsing by choice, or 'because of lack of knowledge, or because of "library imposed barriers"' (p. 32). Ooi and Liew (2011) criticised studies on how readers select fiction in public libraries, saying that they fell short of exploring the reasons for browsing: was it 'because they enjoyed the experience, could not locate the author they wanted or knew no other way to find a "good book"?' (p. 751). And as recently as 2014, McKay, Smith and Chang noted that the literature did not adequately explore 'what frustrations, if any, users have with the shelf-browsing experience' (p. 152).

The literature does report readers finding browsing the library shelves a difficult or frustrating experience (Baker, 1996, p. 129; Ross, 2001, p. 9). Information overload, caused by large unbroken runs of books, is well-documented (Baker, 1986, p. 239). But more worryingly, a number of researchers have concluded that libraries themselves make browsing and selection difficult for readers. Goodall's damning statement, 'librarians arrange their libraries for users seeking specific books and train their staff to deal with specific enquiries' (1989, p. 24) chimes with Mann's accusation that librarians wrongly assume that browsers do not need any help (cited in Goodall, 1989, p. 26). It is important to

bear in mind, however, that Goodall was referring to libraries where there was no division at the shelves by genre, and so her criticisms would not necessarily apply to most public library shelves today. However, even currently, *Opening the Book* (no date) claims that 'Libraries are mostly designed to meet the needs of the 25% of people who know what they want and can find it'. They claim that overload caused by large numbers of books in A-Z runs is still a problem, and carried out an observational study that showed that most people browsing start at A and never get beyond the letter G. Their solution is to 'make the choices more manageable', and counsel that:

Manageable choices need not be narrow choices - it is crucial to offer a range, to vary the approach, to include books which are not well-known, the ones which need your help for readers to discover them.

(*Opening the Book*, no date)

The language used in some of the literature to describe a situation where readers cannot locate their chosen book, or they have run out of books on their 'to-read' lists, is negative: Spiller (1980) says that such readers 'resorted to browsing' (p. 247), and Baker and Shepherd (1987) say they are 'forced to choose from a large number of unknown authors and works' (p. 246). Thus for some readers, browsing is a last resort when the books they know they want are not available, or they do not have any new authors or titles in mind.

Conversely, many readers find browsing a pleasurable experience, and enjoy discovering new books through serendipitous scanning of the shelves (Ross, 2001, p. 6). Spiller (1980) reported that for some readers, browsing 'represented freedom of selection, a conscious rejection of the critical establishment, and a confidence in their own critical faculty' (p. 246). Elswiler, Wilson and Kirkegaard Lunn (2011) studied casual-leisure information behaviour and found that 'the finding of information is often of secondary importance to the experience of finding' (p. 227), and that this focus on the browsing experience should be taken into account in designing casual-leisure information retrieval systems (p. 232). In February 2016 a bookshop was opened in East London called *Libreria*, where the emphasis is on providing browsers with an immersive, creative experience. Fiction and non-fiction books are arranged 'in suggestive themes designed to provoke browsers into making unexpected connections ... examples include the sea and the sky ... and mothers, madonnas and whores' (Clark, 2016, para. 6). This embrace of the experience of exploring, browsing

and discovering does not amount to simply presenting readers with an unbroken run of thousands of fiction books, from A – Z by author, and expecting them to have a wonderful time; clearly, elements of curation, guidance, and careful presentation are required.

2.7 The risk of borrowing a book

Libraries allow readers to try books that are new to them, with little or no cost in terms of money or time. Ross (2001) wrote that, ‘Since readers are reluctant in bookstores to indulge in ... a “cold buy,” libraries are a resource that supports readers in taking risks with new and unfamiliar authors, genres, or subject areas’ (p. 14). If a reader is not enjoying a book they have borrowed, they can simply stop reading it, and they have probably spent very little time or money on it. Readers are also usually allowed to borrow a large number of titles, which spreads the risk of an unsatisfactory book out among the books chosen. However, the literature suggests that readers often doggedly persist in finishing books even if they are not enjoying them (Spiller, 1980, p. 252; Sear and Jennings, 1986, cited in Goodall, 1989, p. 95; Goodall, 1989, p. 98).

Despite the freedom offered by libraries, to try new things at little cost, the idea of the risk of an unsatisfactory book is often discussed in the literature. Yu and O’Brien (1997) talk about readers’ attempts to ‘reduce the risk of ending up with a disappointing book’ (p. 195). Smith (1996a, pp. 48-49) cites a study by Radway (1984) which found that romance readers often read the end of a novel before they started it, because ‘they did not want to invest their time, money and selves in a book that would not satisfy them’. McKay, Smith and Chang (2014) write that ‘there is a perceived cost to borrowing a book’ (p. 152). In her 2001 study of 194 avid readers, Ross mentions the idea of risk several times. Reading series books was ‘a way of reducing the risk of choosing books and maximizing the likelihood of reading pleasure’ (Ross, 1995, cited in Ross, 2001, p. 11). ‘Readers in the study adopted various strategies to establish the right balance ... between safety and the certainty of success on the one hand and novelty and surprise on the other’ (Ross, 2001, p. 14). She describes how one of her interviewees had an elaborate procedure for selecting new books: ‘Taking this amount of care to avoid unsatisfying choices was worth the trouble because a bad reading experience threatened her pleasure in reading in general’ (p. 12). Clearly, many readers take careful steps to minimise the risk of ending up with a book they might not enjoy, and maximise the chance of ending up with an enjoyable read. Some of these steps

are taken in pre-selecting books before visiting the library; other steps are taken as part of the browsing process – making judgements based on the blurb, the cover, or an excerpt of the text (Goodall, 1989, p. 83). There might be moods or circumstances where readers are more or less open to risk, for example wanting a ‘comfort read’ at a stressful time (Ross, 2001, p. 13), or wanting entertaining books for a holiday or long journey. The concept of minimising risk is significant, because it may suggest a demand from readers for something beyond the simple provision of books – for help in discovering new fiction.

2.8 Use of the internet in selecting and discovering fiction

The review will now explore what the literature has found regarding readers’ use of the internet to help them in selecting and discovering fiction.

Ooi and Liew’s 2011 study found that nine out of twelve of their participants used the internet regularly, to look at book reviews or information about authors (2011, p. 760). They cite a 2004 study by Rothbauer, which found that readers ‘overwhelmingly’ turned to the internet for book information (cited in Ooi and Liew, 2011, p. 753). There is little research to confirm these findings, or explore them in greater depth, to determine which websites people find useful, and how they use them.

There is a consensus in the literature that library catalogues need to improve (Hinze *et al.*, 2012, p. 308; McKay, Smith and Chang, 2014, p. 146; Mikkonen and Vakkari, 2016, p. 60), to ‘[evolve] in pace with the discovery and search tools now commonplace at commercial sites such as Amazon’ (Yang and Wagner, 2010, p. 691).

One common recommendation for improving library websites and catalogues, or for developing new online systems for fiction discovery, is to shift the emphasis from searching to exploration. As Elswailer, Wilson and Kirkegaard Lunn put it, ‘Information retrieval is most commonly associated with keyword search’ (2011, p. 216). While keyword search is adequate for users who know the book they want to read, and know the author and / or title, it is not as suitable for those who want to explore, browse, and discover something new (Marchionini, 2006, p. 42; Pearce *et al.*, 2011, p. 246; Saarinen and Vakkari, 2013, p. 750; McKay, Smith and Chang, 2014, p. 145; Mikkonen and Vakkari, 2016, p. 66). While recommender systems, and features which show users what other users looked at or bought can be very useful for the fiction searcher, these ought not to be confused with

systems which let the user browse and explore, because, like keyword search boxes, they require the user to input a novel or an author as a starting point (McKay, Smith and Chang, 2014, pp. 146 and 151). Some researchers have developed online systems geared towards explore rather than search, for example Marchionini's Relation Browser (Marchionini, 2006, p. 45), and Pearce *et al.*'s 'exploration engine' (Pearce *et al.*, 2011, p. 246). There are several current websites which are designed for fiction exploration and browsing: owned by Amazon, Goodreads is probably the most used and well-known, claiming to be 'the world's largest site for readers and book recommendations' (Goodreads.com, no date, *About Goodreads*). It gives its users personalised recommendations, and is based on a community of readers interacting and collaborating, sharing lists and reviews, to help each other discover new books. On Whichbook users can set sliders between points, including happy-sad, optimistic-bleak, funny-serious, to help them find a book they will like, without having to input another book first (openingthebook.com/whichbook, no date).

The literature acknowledges that there are advantages to shelf browsing over online browsing (Hinze *et al.*, 2012, p. 305; McKay, Smith and Chang, 2014, p. 145), and work has been done on how to translate those advantages to online environments, and at the same time exploit the distinctive features of online, to create a superior browsing experience. For example, Kleiner, Rädle and Reiterer's Blended Shelf works on large touch-screen whiteboards, and represents the collection in 3D; it offers multiple access points, and books of interest can be dragged to a deposit area (Kleiner, Rädle and Reiterer, 2013, p. 581). It mimics browsing behaviours displayed in the physical library, such as piling books of interest on the floor, looking at spines, touching books and flicking through them (Hinze *et al.*, 2012, pp. 308, 309 and 311).

The literature highlights various features common to online bookstores and enriched library catalogues, which it is recommended that all libraries take up. Features shown by research to be liked by users and useful to them in discovering books, include tag clouds (Mikkonen and Vakkari, 2016, p. 61); multiple access points (Adkins and Bossaller, 2007, p. 354; Mikkonen and Vakkari, 2016, p. 67); the ability to search using everyday language (Bates and Rowley, 2011, p. 434); and user reviews (Adkins and Bossaller, 2007, pp. 362 and 365). Yang and Wagner's (2010) list of twelve 'commonly acknowledged features for next-

generation catalogs' (p. 693) includes multiple features common to online bookstores such as Amazon (amazon.co.uk).

Adkins and Bossaller (2007) point out that Amazon and similar sites have been called 'potential competitors to the library' in Library and Information Studies literature (p. 358). It is often stated that libraries must compete with such sites, if they are to survive (Saarti, 2000, p. 6; Orkiszewski, 2005, pp. 204-205; McKay and Conyers, 2010, p. 80; Yang and Wagner, 2010, p. 691). In considering how contemporary readers think and behave, it is important to consider Amazon; as Orkiszewski (2005) puts it, 'Amazon has become enmeshed in contemporary culture' (p. 204). A note of caution regarding Amazon and other commercial websites, is sounded by those who point out that their underlying purpose is to sell books and make maximum profit, and that this motivation has an impact on the services they provide; for example, Amazon might avoid identifying the intended audience for a book, as this would limit its potential customer base, and will focus much more on current books rather than older ones (Adkins and Bossaller, 2007, pp. 363 and 356). Despite this warning note, much of the literature proposes emulating online bookstore features, working with them, not against them (Orkiszewski, 2005, p. 204). Librarians often supplement their catalogue searching by looking up book information on online bookstores (Adkins and Bossaller, 2007, p. 358). White (2007) writes that Google and Amazon should not be viewed as a threat to libraries; rather, 'they validate much that libraries have always done', and libraries can work with them 'to deliver a truly compelling set of services' (p. 29).

The literature points up several areas where further research is recommended: in exploratory information systems (Kuhlthau, 1991, p. 369; Pearce *et al.*, 2011, p. 247; Oksanen and Vakkari, 2012, p. 199); fiction searching on commercial websites such as Amazon (Adkins and Bossaller, 2007, pp. 355 and 366; Oksanen and Vakkari, 2012, p.199); or more generally, book selection online (McKay, Smith and Chang, 2014, p. 146); and use of library catalogues, especially enriched catalogues (Mikkonen and Vakkari, 2012, p. 222; Mikkonen and Vakkari, 2016, p. 60). Regarding the use of Amazon in fiction searching, Oksanen and Vakkari (2012) suggest that further research tries to establish to what extent Amazon-like features are useful to readers in accessing a good novel (p. 199). Ooi and Liew (2011) note the need to study why informal sources appeal to readers, and how they can inform design of 'better library systems and tools' (p. 765). Adkins and Bossaller (2007)

recommend researching 'the usability of online bookstores or reader advisory databases for fiction seeking' (p. 355), and 'the actual fiction-seeking practices of readers using CMBIS [Computer Mediated Book Information Sources] to determine how these readers make book selection decisions in the absence of the physical book' (p. 366). These recommendations for research are in small part addressed by this research, as it will seek to explore how readers use online resources to search for and discover fiction.

2.9 Conclusion

The literature has long argued for better access to fiction for public library users; readers who want to discover new fiction are particularly badly served. Libraries aim to help readers in fiction selection and discovery in a number of ways, including division by genre, and displays of new books. However, there is increasing scope for the development of online tools to help in this area; simultaneously, there is a need for libraries to keep abreast of features used in commercial websites such as Amazon. It is important to study not only how readers select and discover fiction, but also why they use the methods they do, and how satisfied they are with those methods. More research would be welcomed to explore whether readers tend to select books before they arrive at the library, or while they are there; what reasons they have for browsing and how they feel about it; how far readers are interested in minimising the risk of borrowing an unsatisfactory book; and readers' use of the internet in discovering and selecting fiction. This study aims to generate current and in-depth data in these areas.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The objective of this research was to generate rich data on the subject of fiction discovery. The research strategy chosen was qualitative, and the research method was semi-structured interviews. This chapter explains why these approaches were taken, describes the interview process including sampling, ethical considerations, and content of the interviews. It reports on how the interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed and then analysed to piece the data together and relate it to the research aims, and finally it reflects on the limitations of the research and the lessons learned through it, with some recommendations for future research.

3.2 Justification of the approach selected

This research set out to generate new data around the subject of fiction discovery: specifically, the ways in which readers discover new fiction authors and titles, how they feel about the process of discovery, the part played by the public library in that process, and whether and how the library could help them. The aim of the investigation was not to gather large amounts of statistical data, but rather to delve more deeply into the whole world of the fiction reader – how sources outside the library, as well as inside, led them to make new discoveries – and into the motivations, feelings and thoughts around the process and the library's role in it. A qualitative approach was judged to be the most appropriate way of gathering this kind of in-depth data. Bryman (2012) writes that qualitative interviews engender 'rich, detailed answers', and that they are led by, and focus on, the interviewee's point of view (p. 470). Rapley (2007) notes that 'allowing [interviewees] the space to talk' (p. 25) is central to a qualitative interview, and enables rich data to be gathered. The use of qualitative tools not only allows for 'deeper insights and a more sophisticated understanding' (Soteri-Proctor, 2010, p. 412), it also enables the researcher to 'identify unanticipated factors that contribute towards understanding phenomena' (Soteri-Proctor, 2010, p. 417). Alasuutari (2010) describes the role of qualitative research as being more than providing background to or inspiration for quantitative study; rather it 'produce[s] different lenses on social reality, lenses that make society and its phenomena understandable' (p. 147). The use of a qualitative approach was consistent with the aim of generating new ideas from the participants themselves, and being led by their thoughts and

experiences. A case study approach was not considered to be appropriate, because the aim was not to study a case (for example of Bournemouth Library users) in particular, but fiction readers in any context. Observation would have been inadequate for producing the in-depth data it was hoped would be achieved.

3.3 Methods

The methods employed in this research were a review of the literature, and qualitative, semi-structured interviews.

3.3.1 Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were deemed to be the most appropriate form of qualitative interview, allowing interviewee-led flexibility, while also helping the researcher to ensure that the aims and objectives of the research were being met. Interviews were carried out with sixteen participants, five of whom were male, and eleven of whom were female. Half of the participants fell into the 65 – 74 age bracket; four were in the 55 – 64 bracket, two in the 25 – 34 bracket, one in the 35 – 44 bracket, and one in the 18 – 24 bracket. Eight of the participants were retired. Eight participants were located in Dorset, seven in Merseyside, and one in Northern Ireland. The interviews took place between July and August 2016, in various locations, including library meeting rooms, the interviewees' own homes, homes of mutual acquaintances, and the researcher's home. The average length of the interviews was thirty minutes, with some lasting up to fifty minutes. All interviews were face-to-face, and three of the interviews involved two participants being interviewed together. All interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed. Each participant was given a Study Information Sheet, which explained the nature of the project, the researcher's affiliations and contact details, and the details of the participants' involvement (see Appendix A). Some participants had received the Study Information Sheet prior to the interviews, but all were given the opportunity to read it again before the interview began. Each participant also signed a Consent Form (see Appendix B), which demonstrated that they understood the project they were participating in, the nature of their participation, and their consent. All participants understood that their involvement was voluntary, and that they could withdraw at any time without having to give a reason. They understood that their personal details would be kept confidentially by the researcher. They all had the opportunity throughout the study to contact the researcher with any questions or concerns. In this way, all ethical

concerns, as far as possible, were met. In preparation for conducting the interviews, advice was taken from the literature, including Kvale's (1996) criteria of a successful interviewer – the need to be familiar with the subject, clear, gentle, sensitive, steering, critical, remembering and interpreting (cited in Bryman, 2012, p. 475).

3.3.1.1 Sampling

As this research took a qualitative approach, purposive sampling was used. Based on the research question, the researcher aimed to find participants who were avid fiction readers. It was felt that recruiting participants from reading groups would be an effective way to achieve this, since reading group members are almost certainly avid fiction readers. This approach was also taken by Ooi and Liew (2011) in their study into fiction selection behaviour, their reasons being that such participants were likely to be passionate readers, and also comfortable with talking about books and reading (pp. 754–755). The initial recruitment drive took place through the reading groups based at Bournemouth Library: three participants were recruited in this way. A notice was also put into the Bournemouth Libraries newsletter, but this received no response. Six participants were library customers known to the researcher, and recruited directly. After that, snowball sampling took place, whereby one person suggested an acquaintance who would be willing to participate, and that person then suggested another, and so on. Seven participants were recruited in this way. Rapley (2007) writes that 'recruitment routinely happens on an ad-hoc and chance basis' (p. 17), and this is consistent with the experience of this study. The sampling was what might be described as 'sequential sampling' (Bryman, 2012, p. 418), because the sampling criteria changed as different opportunities presented themselves. The initial intention was to interview avid fiction readers, probably all from reading groups, who used libraries, and lived in Dorset, where the researcher was based. Opportunities then came about to interview readers who were avid fiction readers, but who did not belong to reading groups or even use libraries, and who used different library services in different parts of the country. It was felt that it would be useful to take the opportunity to broaden the scope of the criteria, and generate data from different perspectives. In the end the only criterion applied was that the participants read some fiction, although the majority were avid readers.

3.3.1.2 Content of the interviews

An interview guide was used when conducting the interviews (see Appendix C). This guide varied in each interview – not all questions were asked of every participant, and new questions were sometimes added. The guide was also updated after several of the interviews, on reflection of the interviews that had gone before. This is consistent with usual qualitative practice, which uses a flexible and adaptable interview guide (Bryman, 2012, p. 470). The attached guide (Appendix C) represents what was used somewhere near the end of the process. Participants were asked generally about their reading life, habits and preferences. Questions then moved on to explore how the readers tended to discover new fiction, encouraging them to tell stories of times when this had happened. For participants who used libraries, there were various questions about their use of libraries: how often they visited, whether they usually went in to get something they had already thought of, or whether they browsed in the library. Browsing was discussed to find out what methods people used, and how they felt about the experience. Participants were asked whether they felt their book-discovery was usually deliberate or somewhat serendipitous, whether they felt there was any risk involved in borrowing or buying a new book, and how they responded when they read a book that was disappointing. Reading group members were asked about the role of the groups in their reading lives, and all participants were asked how the internet featured in their reading, for book information or discovery. There was discussion about the lists of interesting books that most of the participants kept, and how those lists were added to. For each reader, data was generated about how they read, chose, and discovered new fiction, and their feelings around all of these things. Participants were invited to make suggestions and recommendations for libraries, as to how they could help readers more with fiction discovery, and to comment on what they felt the library's role was in this area.

3.4 Methods of data analysis

Bryman (2012) reminds us that 'there are few well-established and widely accepted rules for the analysis of qualitative data', but that some form of coding plays the main part in most analysis (p. 565). In reading through the transcripts, multiple, detailed codes were noted down, then organised under six broader themes. An outline was then written so that the six themes flowed in a logical way. Each transcription was then analysed, and a theme-number

noted in the margin next to each point; some points came under more than one theme. It was then possible to gather all the data relating to each theme in turn, and to see how the whole could be shaped into a logical argument. An excerpt from a coded transcription is attached (see Appendix E), as well as a list of the codes and their meanings (Appendix D).

3.5 Limitations and lessons learned

With sixteen in-depth interviews, it was felt that information had been gathered relating to all aspects of the topic, that would meet the aims and objectives of the project. However, the broadening of the sample beyond library users and a single geographic location suggested that it would be beneficial to undertake more interviews, with a broader range of readers, and even non-readers. This study has produced meaningful data, but it is small in scale, and scaling up with further interviews would be valuable.

The results of the study strongly suggest that there is likely to be a difference between avid and non-avid readers in terms of fiction-discovery behaviour. It was valuable to study avid readers, but the study showed that these readers tend to be happy with the methods they have in place for discovering fiction, whereas those who read less may experience more negative feelings, frustrations and difficulties around choosing and discovering fiction. Therefore, it would be beneficial for future research to concentrate more on less committed readers.

The study was also biased towards women (eleven of the sixteen participants were female), and those in an older age category, with half of the respondents being retirees. This was not deliberate on the part of the researcher, but was a reflection of those who volunteered for the study. Future research could select a broader range of ages and lifestyles, and be balanced more equally between men and women. This would enable more points of view to be heard, and generate data with a greater degree of representativeness.

The approach to the research was inductive, with the data from each interview informing the questions asked in the next interview, and the interview guide being adapted as the process went on. Some examples were: changing the wording of a question to make it easier to answer; for example 'Tell me about the last time you discovered a new author?' became 'Tell me about a time you discovered a new author', because it was a broader question and easier to answer. Other new questions emerged, such as 'Do you ever wish

there was a more effective way of finding a good book?', and 'Do you ever feel concerned that you could be missing out on good books because you aren't aware of them?' It was very beneficial to analyse and consider the data throughout the interview process, rather than only at the end, when all interviews had been completed, because the following interviews were informed in a positive way by the previous ones. Nevertheless, when it came to analysing the data, it became clear that there were some gaps, where some questions that would have been beneficial, had not been asked, and some opportunities to delve deeper into some topics had been missed.

I attempted to be reflexive and self-aware throughout the process. For example, Interviewee 3 enjoyed Christian fiction, and also did not use libraries. I made an initial assumption that her non-use of libraries was due to the lack of availability in libraries of the genre that she liked, but in fact it became clear during the interview that there were other reasons behind her non-use of libraries, and so it would have been a misrepresentation to claim a link between the two facts. It was important to be aware of the pitfalls of misinterpretation when analysing and presenting the data, and I ensured as far as possible that no false assumptions were made. If I was unclear about the meaning of anything a participant had said, I did not include it in the presentation.

Another way in which reflexivity was practiced was in recognising that my role may have affected some of the participants' responses. I am employed at Bournemouth Library: this was made known to all participants in the Study Information Sheets they received; several of the participants were Bournemouth Library users, and some of those knew or recognised me in my professional role. As part of the aim of the study was to generate data about libraries, and how people felt about libraries, my association with the library may have influenced the answers of some participants. I was aware of this when analysing the results, and although I did not perceive any unwillingness to be open about perceptions of the library service, I recognise that my role may have had an impact.

3.6 Methods summary

A qualitative approach was taken in order to explore the ways in which readers discover fiction, and the role of libraries in that. This took the form of semi-structured interviews with sixteen participants, that aimed to be led by the readers and to explore multiple

aspects of the fiction discovery process. Purposive and snowball sampling was used to recruit participants. The criteria for participants changed through the process, as different opportunities presented themselves to interview a wider variety of readers, and this was felt to be beneficial to the study. Ethical considerations were met, by the provision of Study Information Sheets and Consent Forms, and the handling of data in a way that complied with The Data Protection Act (1998). Transcriptions of the interviews were analysed using a coding system, and results will be presented and discussed in the following chapters. There are some limitations to the research, mainly due to researcher inexperience and the small scale of the study, but lessons were learned for the future, and recommendations for future research have been recognised.

Chapter 4: Results

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results from the data, gathered by interviews with sixteen study participants. Firstly, there is a description of the sample. Findings are then divided by theme: the type of readers the participants were and how they discovered fiction; non-library sources of books and ideas; libraries as sources; the nature of book-discovery and the motives and feelings around it; the role of reading groups, and finally the role of the internet and alternative-format books in participants' fiction-discovery behaviour. Finally there is a summary of the findings.

4.2 Participants in the Study

The data for this study was gathered by conducting qualitative interviews with sixteen participants, all of whom were fiction readers. Interviews lasted thirty minutes on average. Five of the participants were male, and eleven were female. Most participants were in the 65 – 74 age bracket (eight participants); four were 55 – 64, one was 35 – 44, two were 25 – 34, and one was 18 – 24. Half of the interviewees were retired. Eight respondents lived in Dorset, seven in Merseyside, and one in Northern Ireland.

4.3 Findings

4.3.1 Type of readers and their fiction-discovery behaviour

Most participants (fourteen out of sixteen) were avid fiction readers. They described themselves as almost continuously reading, as being 'never without a book' (Interviewee 1), and they were skilled at ensuring that there was no gap between finishing one book and starting the next. Only two of the participants did not describe themselves as avid readers: one was a busy professional, who felt he had no time to read fiction, and the other was the mother of a toddler and a teenager who did not have time to read any more than one reading group book per month. Both of these participants expressed a desire to read more when their circumstances would allow.

Eleven participants said they kept a list of books that they want to read, either written down or in their heads. Some readers had complex lists which also detailed the books they had already read, which books were available in which library branches, due dates, and so on. Five of the readers did not keep any form of list, but two of these had an extensive

collection of physical books waiting to be read; four participants kept lists and also had collections of unread books.

Participants tended to feel that they did not actively seek out new books to add to their lists, or to acquire, but that the process of discovering new books seemed to happen naturally, through for example, friends' recommendations, or hearing about a book on the radio. Only one of the participants felt that he had to search for new books to read, when he was going on holiday – one of the few times in the year when he read fiction. Most participants spoke of having abundant lists of books, and / or physical stockpiles of books, that were regularly added to faster than the books could be read. The process of adding to the list was not something that the readers felt they purposefully engaged in.

I often get – because, you know, everybody does know that I read, and a lot of my friends are readers, I often – I always seem to get a recommendation of a new author, just as I seem to be running out. ... It tends to just sort of happen.

(Interviewee 5)

And then someone else will say, well have you read – I would recommend that one – and that's another one to add to my list. Never have time for them all! And as for going back to read them again, I can very rarely manage that.

(Interviewee 11)

I've got a long list of books that I think look good and want to read. And if I find one that looks good I'll just add it to that list, and – it's so long! 'Cos I'm currently volunteering at a charity bookshop, I buy way too many books from there. So if there's one that I recognise as, oh yeah that's one that I wanted too, I'll put it aside, or I just come across one that looks good, I'll pick that up as well.

(Interviewee 6)

4.3.2 Sources of ideas and books: non-libraries

All participants used non-library sources to get books, and ideas for what to read next – most used these sources in conjunction with libraries. Twelve of the participants used libraries; four used libraries either very little or not at all. Twelve used bookshops, twelve used media (radio, television, newspapers and magazines), seven used online sources, seven used charity shops, nine were members of reading groups, and five cited other sources, such as a U3A (University of the Third Age) bookstall and literary festivals. All of the participants who were library-users also used non-library sources in conjunction with

libraries, sometimes due to lack of availability in libraries, or lack of availability in bookshops.

All sixteen participants said that personal networks were important sources of recommendations, books, or both. No participants spoke of personal recommendations being purposely sought, but described scenarios where friends and family spontaneously offered books or recommendations. Lending or recommending books was portrayed as being a pleasurable part of peoples' relationships, and interviewees spoke of the joy of giving, as well as receiving, books and recommendations. Interviewee 16 had a longstanding book exchange arrangement with a friend:

...a friend and I, we sort of buy books and we exchange them, so she'll say oh I've bought this, it's really good, and then we'll sort of just exchange books that way.

Readers seem to be enthusiastic about sharing their passion:

...friends – everybody knows that I read, so they're always eager to tell you about a book they've just read about or have read.

(Interviewee 4)

Another participant read a lot of Young Adult fiction, as a way of 'connecting with' her teenage daughter, who was reading the same books (Interviewee 12). Two participants also mentioned receiving books as gifts, which is further evidence of the pleasure of book giving and receiving:

My girls are very keen readers, and have both belonged to book clubs in their time, so quite often if they have a book and really love it, they say Mum would really like it, and I get it for my birthday.

(Interviewee 3)

Five participants said that they trust recommendations from some people more than others, depending on whether they perceive those people to have similar reading taste to themselves. Two participants said that recommendations from trusted people would make them likely to read something they would not otherwise have tried.

Three participants spoke positively about the cards that Waterstones bookshop puts out on the bookshelves, with hand-written reviews and recommendations from staff. When asked

whether they trusted the recommendation even though they did not know the person who had written it, or their reading taste, all three said they did. Interviewee 15:

I think anybody who's prepared to put a review like that up loves reading, and therefore, yeah, I would respect that opinion.

4.3.3 Sources of ideas and books: libraries

Twelve of the participants used libraries. Non-users did not use the library because they sourced their books from elsewhere: one either bought physical books online or downloaded them onto his tablet, but he was unaware that he could borrow e-books from the library and expressed interest in using this service when he was made aware of it. One non-library-user had an extensive collection of books that he owned, and did not need to add any more to his stock. Most of the participants who were library users expressed some negatives with the library services they used. Six of these participants were users of Sefton Libraries, in Merseyside, and six were users of Bournemouth Libraries, in Dorset. Sefton Borough has faced significant changes to its library services in recent years, closing several branches and re-modelling the central Southport branch. Sefton library users reported using the library less since the changes, and finding it less convenient due to the loss of local branches, lack of parking near the library, fewer staff and reduced opening hours.

4.3.3.1 How people used libraries and which aspects they liked

Aspects of libraries that participants found useful and appealing were: free books, free reservations (Sefton users), the range of books and good stock, helpful staff, the ability to order requests, availability of more unusual books than can be found in bookshops, and the fact that books can be borrowed and returned between branches. All library users also made use of some or all of the following: general displays, displays of new books, and returned books areas.

4.3.3.2 Browsing

Out of the twelve library users, four almost always pre-selected the book(s) they wanted to borrow, and only came into the library to pick them up (for Sefton Library users this was usually a book that they had reserved online); one almost always made their selection in the library, without knowing what they wanted to borrow when they came in; five used a

mixture of both approaches, and for two respondents this is unknown. One interviewee described how she employs a mixture of pre-ordering and browsing:

Even when I've gone in determined to get one particular book, or I'm actually going in to pick up a book I've ordered, reserved, I do often look at the displays, yes, I find them – you know – they're eye-catching aren't they, like you say you're always on the look-out for something new, so yes I do look at the displays.

(Interviewee 5, Sefton Libraries user)

Four users said that they actively enjoy browsing, though one qualified this by saying, 'I have to be in the right mood for it, yes. And I have to feel that I've got the time for it.'

(Interviewee 5). One interviewee spoke about not 'having to' browse, because she always had a list of books she wanted to read, and she just came into the library to get something from her list.

4.3.3.3 The library's role in helping readers to discover new fiction

Participants were asked whether they ever discovered new fiction in the library, or using resources such as the library website. Interviewee 5 said:

I don't know. I don't think they help me to choose. The displays can do, as we have mentioned, but apart from that, I don't think they do help me to choose really. I can't think how they do.

Library-facilitated reading groups were often mentioned as sources of new discoveries, and displays helped people to find new things. Interviewee 16 felt that the library 'definitely' played a role in helping her discover new fiction. Two users spoke warmly of library staff recommending books, as a positive way in which they made new discoveries. In both cases these recommendations were based on librarians' knowledge of the customer, and the recommendations were offered unsought. Other respondents did not ask staff for recommendations and did not have a relationship with staff that naturally led to seeking or receiving advice. One interviewee said that, before the changes in Sefton Libraries, she sometimes asked librarians for advice –

But the atmosphere I feel now is not conducive. They sort of have a desk with computers in front – so they're behind their computers, so it's more of a barrier. And it's all – I say everything's computerised, you check your books in and you

check your books out on the computer. The personal touch isn't there so you wouldn't be quite so inclined.

(Interviewee 8)

4.3.3.4 Participants' recommendations for library services

Two participants felt that libraries would benefit from having an Amazon-style system which showed what other readers had borrowed after borrowing a particular book: 'that might be a good way of discovering similar things' (Interviewee 6). Four participants mentioned that they liked the hand-written review cards put on the shelves by staff in Waterstones, and thought that libraries could do something similar. Other suggestions were to draw more attention to new books, exploit online resources more, improve the catalogue, be aware of what is currently popular on television, and have a table of bestsellers to browse through.

4.3.4 Book discovery

4.3.4.1 Security versus adventure in reading

Some readers sought security in a list of known and trusted authors: eight of the participants mentioned that when they discovered an author they liked, they read everything by that author, and some mentioned that their favourite authors are still publishing new books, and so they to some extent are kept going by a group of the same authors. Five participants specifically mentioned that they enjoyed reading series. Other readers welcomed opportunities to broaden their reading habits: all but one of those who were reading group members enjoyed the fact that the groups made them read books they would not ordinarily have chosen; one interviewee described how recommendations from librarians had broadened the scope of her reading. Some readers mentioned genres, like science fiction and horror, that they would never read, but others characterised their reading tastes as broad and adventurous.

Interviewees were asked how they responded when they started reading a book and then found that they were not enjoying it: did they persevere with it to the end or stop reading it? Did they feel they had wasted their time and / or money, or accept that they inevitably wouldn't like every book? Four people said that they give up reading disappointing books, but eight said that they tended to persevere until the end. The most common reason given for persevering was to find out what happens in the end. One interviewee felt that reading

fiction is not entirely about pleasure, but also edification, and so personal enjoyment is not the most important aspect of the reading experience:

I think this comes from the – if you like, the um, the Catholic in me, and maybe the Scots Presbyterian in me that I've always grown up with a sense of edification, so if I feel that the book is going to, um, nourish me in certain ways and stimulate me intellectually, I feel as though I should force myself to go through it, even though I'm not really enjoying it.

(Interviewee 2)

Some expressed feelings of disappointment and frustration if they don't enjoy a book:

I feel disappointed, because you'd looked forward to getting stuck into a new book, and it's not worked out.

(Interviewee 5)

Others were more philosophical:

So yes, I have ploughed through some books, but I don't regard it as a waste of time, I regard it as – well, right, I don't like that one – you can't win them all, can you?

(Interviewee 10)

Participants were more likely to persevere with reading group books than other books, and books that had been lent to them or recommended by a friend or family member; one participant said that they would give up on a library book, but persevere with a book they had paid for. Three participants said that they almost always enjoy the books that they choose, and so the fact that they rarely give up on a book may be a reflection of their ability to choose well rather than anything else:

I don't actually give up that frequently, so I must choose books that suit me.

(Interviewee 8)

I think I'm getting quite good at identifying ones that I will enjoy.

(Interviewee 6)

4.3.4.2 Amount of care taken when choosing books

Readers took varying degrees of care when selecting books, either to borrow or to buy, with some undertaking research and weighing up a number of factors to try and determine the likelihood of enjoying the book, and others making a fairly quick selection and giving something a go.

Interviewee 2 takes a lot of care in choosing:

Reading a book is much more of an investment for me. It's going to use my time, which has always been occupied by all kinds of things, since early childhood, so if I was going to read a book, there would have to be something compelling about the book, about the writer, how they express themselves and the content, um, so I wouldn't just pick up a book and take it on a whim.

While Interviewee 9 felt positive about borrowing something untested:

I don't feel it's a risk, I feel it's quite exciting – if you get the opportunity to read something that's totally new to me, I find that quite exciting really. So no, I don't feel it's a risk. I think it's – it's an opportunity to explore something that you don't know anything about really.

The amount of care taken sometimes varied depending on whether books were being borrowed or bought, and depending on circumstances, for example going on holiday or on a journey:

Yeah if I'm going on a journey, maybe going on a train, I want to make sure it's one that I won't want to give up on – make sure that I'll actually enjoy it. But if I'm buying one second-hand, I'm far more liberal as to whether I'll buy it, than if I'm buying it new, 'cos it costs about ten times as much.

(Interviewee 6)

Well you do have a different attitude I suppose [when borrowing or buying a book]. If you're buying the book you want to be more certain that you're going to enjoy it, whereas yeah as you say at the library, well it doesn't matter, I'll give it a go. ... Because you know – you haven't invested anything in it.

(Interviewee 8)

4.3.4.3 *To what extent did people express a desire for help in discovering new fiction, either from the library or elsewhere?*

Most interviewees were content with the methods they had for discovering new fiction, and did not express any desire to have more help from any quarter. Some felt that it was enough that the books were there, and they did need any navigational assistance:

I've never felt that [I don't know what to read next], 'cos it's always occurred to me that there's hundreds of books for me to read, whether it be classic literature, English literature, modern literature ... so I'm not conscious of, um, having to find things.

(Interviewee 2)

I feel that there's books out there, there's certainly an awful lot of books that I enjoy that are out there already.

(Interviewee 9)

When asked if she ever wished there was a more effective way of finding a new book, Interviewee 9 said:

No, 'cos I quite like the browsing aspect of it, yes. ... I do like just looking 'round and just seeing what's available really.

Two participants expressed a desire for some kind of guidance, or help beyond simple provision of books. One, Interviewee 8, was a library user (though she no longer used the library frequently since the changes made in Sefton libraries), and the other had not used a library for years, but said that he felt the same in libraries as in bookshops.

I think grabbing your attention, highlighting certain things is a good idea. It makes it more personal and it makes it less intimidating in a way. If you just go in and there's rows and rows of books you think, right, where do I start, sort of thing, if you've finished all the, I don't know, Thomas Hardy or whatever, you know, what do I read next sort of thing – give me a starting point.

(Interviewee 8)

I find that if I go into a bookshop, I find it very confusing. There's so many books, and there's so many different authors ... Well, especially when I go on holiday, I'm stuck for something to read, and I'm never quite sure what would be best, so if I want a crime fiction, you go to the old – do you go to the old, trusted, you know, Patricia Cornwells or PD James', you know if it's crime thrillers that you want, do you look at authors that you know ... I find it very

confusing going into bookstores, because you pick up books and you read the information on the back of the book and you flick through the book and the chapter headings and so forth ... when I'm faced with a whole sea of books by maybe many authors I've never heard of, it's very difficult to pick one out even, even just from the jacket sleeve comments.

(Interviewee 15)

4.3.5 The role of reading groups

A significant proportion of the participants – nine out of sixteen – were members of reading groups. One was a member of a non-fiction reading group, and one had recently stopped attending a group when her local library closed down, but was considering joining another group. Some of the groups were run by the U3A, but all were facilitated through libraries.

All fiction reading group members felt that the groups were a significant way for them of discovering new authors, and they often mentioned going on to read more books by authors first encountered through the groups. One reading group member found she did not enjoy many of the books chosen, and this was a source of frustration ('But I mean, when you can get two books out of ten that are good, it's not really high enough' – Interviewee 13).

All other participants were enthusiastic about the fact that the reading groups led them to read books they would not otherwise have considered reading, and also to persist with books they might not otherwise have finished:

The book club is very good, because it definitely makes you read things you might not normally pick up.

(Interviewee 8)

We find we read books that we wouldn't have chosen, and that's good – that was really why I joined the book group. Because I found I was getting very narrow in my choice of books, em, and I wanted to broaden it. Having broadened it I'm – I find that difficult as well, because, as some – we met last night, and one of the ladies said last night, it's been a chore reading this book. And she said, to me reading a book is for pleasure. And she said if I dread reading the book, it takes all the pleasure out of it. But we decided that that's what being a member of a book group is about. Is taking the rough with the smooth. Em, so, we have broadened our taste in reading. Not altogether successfully [laughs].

(Interviewee 10)

I've definitely read books I wouldn't have ever dreamed of reading. I wouldn't even have thought of picking up some of them. I mean some of them, I wish I hadn't picked up. ... But some of them, like *The Curious [Incident of the] Dog in the Night Time* – I'd never have thought of reading that, and actually it was really good, really different and really interesting ... So it does sort of open up possibilities and different things I wouldn't have thought of before.

(Interviewee 12)

4.3.6 The role of electronic devices for reading, and the internet

4.3.6.1 Use of electronic devices for reading, and reading in other formats

Five of the participants regularly used a tablet or e-reader to access fiction; for one person, this was their main way of reading. The attributes of e-reading that these participants liked included: cheapness of purchasing books, the large capacity, their lightweight nature, the convenience, and the fact that print size and so on are changeable. None of the participants borrowed books on their e-devices, variously because they were not aware of the service (either through Amazon or through libraries), they felt that books were cheap enough to buy, and that the subscription cost of the Kindle lending library was prohibitive. Three participants used audio books as well as hard-copy books, and one said that his 'main way of accessing literature' (Interviewee 2) was through BBC Radio 4 serialisations, which he often accessed via I-player on his phone.

4.3.6.2 Use of library catalogues or websites

Only two participants talked about using either the library catalogue or website. Both were users of Sefton Libraries, and both complained that they found the catalogue difficult to use, saying that it performs well for known-item searches, but badly for browsing.

4.3.6.3 Use of the internet for book purchase, book information, and book discovery

Six of the participants used the internet to purchase fiction (one of these did not use it herself, but her son sometimes purchased items for her). Two of these participants specifically said that they bought their books – physical books or e-books – from Amazon. Reasons given were that books on Amazon were relatively cheap, that it was possible to buy second-hand and therefore save money and also be environmentally friendly, and the extensive stock.

Most of the participants (ten out of sixteen) used the internet to find information about books. Three reading group members said that they used Google to search for information on their current reading group books and their authors; one member also looked at reading group comments online. One mentioned using Google and authors' websites to find out the chronology of books, and to see what else an author has written. Another participant sometimes discovered an interesting book while browsing in a bookstore, then used Google to find out more information about it and decide whether or not to buy it. One participant used Amazon to find out whether an author had a new book coming out, or whether or not books were in print.

Six participants talked about using the internet to help them to discover books. This was usually incidental, but sometimes deliberate, as in the case of Interviewee 6:

I also just like randomly google things, so I come across books from just random googling. [What sort of things would you google?] Like all sorts, just – like sometimes 'books similar to' like, something that I've read that I've liked, or just random, like, 'disturbing dystopian books' or just like 'utopia sci-fi', just like, oh, I wonder what that genre's like, if there's anything good on there, and I'll just google a genre and read a bunch of lists saying here's some recommendations.

Most of the participants who used the internet used Amazon. Some people found the user reviews on Amazon useful, though one said he found them too subjective. People enjoyed the recommendations features of Amazon, i.e. 'Frequently Bought Together' and 'Customers Who Bought This Item Also Bought', and the ability to read pages from the books. One participant enjoyed reading Christian fiction, and described how she finds using Amazon better than using the local Christian bookshop (Keith Jones), but still prefers personal recommendations to help her discover something new:

In the very early days, I used to go to Keith Jones, but because it was quite limited, what they had on the shelves there, I would then try an author that I'd never heard of before. But now you've got Amazon, and they recommend books to you – if you liked this you might like that – and I do look at them, but I don't often stray to a new author without having perhaps tried it from someone else.

(Interviewee 3)

Two participants mentioned using the Amazon-owned website and app Goodreads, but neither of them had used the site or app for some time. One occasionally used it to look up

a book he was considering reading, and described seeing which lists users had put the book into, and then browsing through the lists for anything else that looked good. Other websites used by participants were Fantastic Fiction (fantasticfiction.com), and TV Tropes (tvtropes.org), a wiki about popular culture, including fiction.

4.4 Summary of Findings

The avid fiction readers, who formed the major part of this study, tended to ensure that they always had a book to read, and that there was no gap between finishing one book and starting the next. Most kept a list of books they wanted to read; some also had large collections of books they had not yet read. These lists or collections tended to be continuously topped up, through various sources: the most commonly mentioned was recommendations from friends and family, or being lent copies of books. Participants also spoke of getting ideas from newspapers, television and the radio, or through browsing in bookshops or libraries. Other sources used were charity shops, reading groups, and websites. Most participants felt that this process of discovering new books happened easily, and was not something they purposefully engaged in.

All of the participants who used libraries (twelve of sixteen) made use of general displays, displays of new books, and shelves of returned books. Most used a combination of pre-selecting books and choosing by browsing in the library. Most people spoke positively about browsing, but did not use it as a major way of discovering or choosing books.

Participants varied in the amount of care they took when choosing new books by authors unknown to them. Some conducted careful research to determine whether a book was worth reading; others were willing to give something new a go without much information. This sometimes varied for individual readers according to circumstances – for example more care might be taken when choosing a book to read on a long journey.

A significant proportion of participants were members of reading groups, and all found the groups very useful in helping them to discover new fiction. Most felt that the groups made them read fiction they would not otherwise have discovered or chosen, and enjoyed this aspect of them.

Less than half of participants regularly used electronic devices to read. Most participants used the internet to find information about books; it was less common to use the internet

deliberately to discover new fiction. When discovery did occur online, it tended to be serendipitous.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Introduction

The findings from this study are found to expand on and support the existing literature. The discussion focuses on: the type of readers who took part, and how they tended to discover fiction; readers' use of non-library sources for acquiring books, and ideas for what to read next; use of libraries; use of library catalogues and the internet; and the library's role in helping readers to discover fiction. Finally, the Conclusion considers the role of libraries in consideration of these findings.

5.2 Type of readers and their fiction-discovery behaviour

Most of the readers interviewed for this study were avid fiction readers, who were skilled in ensuring that they always had something to read. Most kept lists of interesting books and authors, and felt that these lists were topped up naturally, without a purposeful effort on their part. Ross, in her 2001 study, wrote that:

In order to be alerted to the existence of new books that will provide the reading experience they want, committed readers typically put out antennae that scan their everyday environments for clues. They tuck away for future use in memory or in lists the names of books and authors mentioned in magazine and newspaper reviews; books given currency because they have been made into films or television productions; and authors and titles that come up in conversation.

(Ross, 2001, pp. 11-12)

This study supports Ross' finding: avid readers have systems in place that 'catch' ideas for what to read like a spider's web catches flies: the readers tend not to actively seek out new ideas, but have built up networks and habits (friends who enjoy reading, newspapers that contain reviews, radio programmes that mention authors, et cetera) that naturally generate a steady stream of ideas for new authors and books.

5.3 Sources of ideas and books: non-libraries

There is some disagreement in the literature about whether library users tend to select their books using non-library sources, and come into the library already knowing what they want to borrow, or whether selection takes place largely inside the public library. Ooi and Liew's 2011 study found that selection mostly took place outside the library. The results of this

study were that all participants used non-library sources to select new books, and most used libraries as well. Four out of the twelve library users in this study almost always pre-selected the books they wanted to borrow, one almost always selected in the library, and five used a mixture of both approaches. Research has tended to focus on selection within the library, while selection outside of the library remains a relatively under-studied area (Adkins and Bossaller, 2007, p. 355; Ooi and Liew, 2011, p. 749; McKay, Smith and Chang, 2014, p. 146). This study suggests that selection within the library is not as dominant as the literature once supposed; libraries must recognise that their readers engage with them as part of a broad network of sources – peoples' reading contexts include libraries, but are made up of many different elements. This study builds up a small picture of how readers cross-reference the library with other sources, for example using bookshops to buy books unavailable in libraries, discovering an author through a newspaper review and borrowing the book from the library, or even using a bookshop to browse and then coming into the library to borrow the book.

The study found that the most important source of ideas and books outside of the library, was personal networks (recommendations, or lending / giving of books). This was important to all the participants, in discovering new books. Ooi and Liew's 2011 study found that readers would only take up recommendations from people whose taste they knew and liked (p. 758). This study's results support these findings to some extent, with five participants saying that they would trust recommendations from certain people more than others (not all participants were asked about this directly). In terms of recommendations from organisations or people not known personally, the literature shows that people do not tend to trust recommendations from library staff, because they do not know them personally or their taste (Spiller, 1980, p. 257; Ooi and Liew, 2011, p. 764). However, interestingly, three of the participants in this study spoke very positively about the recommendation cards found in Waterstones bookshop, where members of staff write a short review of books they have enjoyed and put them on the shelves. When asked whether they were put off by the fact that they did not know the reviewer or their taste, all three said they were not ('I think anybody who's prepared to put a review like that up loves reading, and therefore, yeah, I would respect that opinion.' – Interviewee 15)

5.4 Sources of ideas and books: libraries

We have seen in the section above that most library users employed a mixture of browsing and borrowing pre-selected items when they came into the library. In terms of browsing, all participants found that general displays, displays of new books, and areas of recently returned books formed a significant part of their browsing experience. This agrees with the literature, which reports displays as being useful features for readers hoping to discover new fiction (Baker, 1986, p. 237; Toyne and Usherwood, 2001, cited in Ooi and Liew, 2011, p. 752; Saarinen and Vakkari, 2013, p. 750). One participant spoke of how she found the returned books shelves appealing, partly because she took the fact that the books had recently been read as an implicit recommendation, and also because they represented a varied selection, an interesting random sample of the whole stock (Interviewee 8).

Several authors have called for future research to focus on the experience of browsing in the public library, the reasons behind it and what frustrations readers have with it (Goodall, 1989, p. 39; Ooi and Liew, 2011, p. 751; McKay, Smith and Chang, 2014, p. 152). The literature shows that some readers find browsing frustrating, difficult, and use it as a last resort when their list of books has been exhausted (Spiller, 1980, p. 247; Baker, 1996, p. 129; Ross, 2001, p. 9). Conversely, other readers find it to be an enjoyable experience (Spiller, 1980, p. 246; Ross, 2001, p. 6). This study also found elements of both experiences. When asked if she ever chose a new book at the library by browsing, one interviewee replied 'Oh no. Because of my lists you see. No, no, I don't have to at the moment, no' (Interviewee 1). She saw browsing as something she would have to resort to if her list of books to read was exhausted. Four respondents said that they enjoyed browsing, but one qualified this by saying, but 'I have to be in the right mood for it, yes. And I have to feel that I've got the time for it' (Interviewee 5). Interviewee 9 said:

...I quite like the browsing aspect of it, yes. ... I do like just looking 'round and just seeing what's available really.

The same interviewee also spoke of feeling excited when she borrowed something totally new:

...if you get the opportunity to read something that's totally new to me, I find that quite exciting really. ... it's an opportunity to explore something that you don't know anything about really.

Significantly, none of the participants in this study used browsing as their main way of discovering or choosing fiction. None said that they avoided browsing *because* they found it frustrating or difficult; however, it may be that the fact that none of the participants relied on browsing as their main way of discovering fiction is itself evidence of the inadequacy of browsing as a fiction-selection method. The character of a person's browsing, and how they feel about it (aspects they enjoy, frustrations, et cetera) probably varies depending on whether they are using it alongside other methods of finding books, or whether they are relying on it as their main source of new reading. This research did not seek to distinguish readers in this way; future research could focus on a wider variety of browsing behaviours to generate more interesting data about browsing motivations and frustrations.

Two participants in this study voiced negative aspects of the browsing experience, and spoke of library shelves being 'intimidating', 'confusing', and 'difficult'; they experienced feelings of 'where do I start', and being 'faced with a whole sea of books' (Interviewees 8 and 15).

The literature shows that library staff are rarely asked for help to choose new fiction (Spiller, 1980, p. 256; Baker, 1996, p. 129; Yu and O'Brien, 1997, p. 188; Ooi and Liew, 2011, p. 764), and this study agrees with those findings, with only two participants talking about receiving recommendations from librarians. The literature also suggests that librarians are sometimes ill-equipped to deal with requests for advice on fiction, and are not adequately trained for it (Spiller, 1980, p. 257; Shearer, 1996b, p. 172; Moyer and Weech, 2005, p. 77). One participant in this study was an ex-librarian who also said that he had found it difficult to respond to such requests when he was working.

Nine of the participants were members of reading groups, all of which were facilitated by libraries. All of these readers felt that reading groups were a significant source of discovering new books, and all but one enjoyed the fact that the reading groups broadened their reading habits and led them to discover books they would not otherwise have found. This suggests an appetite for discovery that is led by an outside agency, i.e. these readers did not independently discover these authors, but encountered them through the groups. In the U3A reading groups featured in this study, the members chose the books, but the selection was from among a list given out by the library. In the groups that were run by and met in libraries, the members sometimes chose the books but sometimes not; in every case

the books were supplied by the libraries and therefore only a certain selection of books was available, as the libraries had to have enough copies to supply them to the groups. Through reading groups, libraries actually play a significant role for some readers (reading group members) in helping them discover new fiction, but this is something that may not be consciously recognised by the readers as being part of the library service. It was also pointed out by two participants that most of the reading groups take place during the day and therefore attract mostly retirees, and are not available to a large proportion of people.

When asked what they would like to see in libraries that would help them in discovering and choosing fiction, participants said that they would like to see Amazon-like features, whereby they could see what other readers had borrowed as well as borrowing a particular book, or see user ratings and reviews, or have review cards as is common practice in Waterstones. This tallies with the literature's recommendations that libraries need to look at Amazon and similar sites, and update their services with similar features (Orkiszewski, 2005, p. 204; White, 2007, p. 29).

5.5 The use of library catalogues and the internet

The literature suggests that library catalogues need to improve (Hinze *et al.*, 2012, p. 308; McKay, Smith and Chang, 2014, p. 146; Mikkonen and Vakkari, 2016, p. 60). In this study, two participants expressed frustration with Sefton Libraries catalogue, and said that it was adequate for known-item searching but not for browsing. Yang and Wagner (2010) write that library catalogues need to '[evolve] in pace with the discovery and search tools now commonplace at commercial sites such as Amazon' (p. 691).

Most participants (ten out of sixteen) used the internet regularly to find information about books. This ties in with the literature which found that readers regularly went online to search for book reviews or information about authors (Ooi and Liew, 2011, p. 760). For this study's participants, the most commonly mentioned websites used were Google, Amazon, and authors' websites. Fantastic Fiction, Goodreads, and TV Tropes were also mentioned. Most of the discovery of books that took place online was incidental. Amazon was also used extensively to purchase books. Features people liked were the cheapness of the books and the option to buy second-hand (thereby saving money and being environmentally-friendly), the recommendations features, i.e. 'Frequently Bought Together' and 'Customers Who

Bought This Item Also Bought', the ability to read a sample of the book, and the user reviews. These features were also mentioned by some participants when asked what features they would like to see developed in their libraries, for helping them to discover fiction. The fact that book discovery on the internet tended to be more incidental than deliberate is consistent with the fact that the participants in this study did not tend to purposely seek out new books, from any source. Moreover, Amazon was the website most commonly used, and it is not primarily set up for discovery and exploration, but for known-item searching.

5.6 The library's role in helping readers to discover fiction

The study aims to consider the extent and nature of the work that libraries should do to help readers discover fiction. It considers readers' current behaviour and their expressed frustrations and desires. The literature was examined, the interviews were shaped by, and the results analysed with the following things in mind: the amount of care people take over choosing new books (i.e. how much concern they have or do not have that an author new to them is a 'risk'), their reaction to books that they read but do not enjoy (whether they persevere with reading or give up, and whether they accept a 'bad' book philosophically, or whether it frustrates them and makes them feel they have wasted their time), and the extent to which they express a desire for help and guidance in choosing and discovering books.

In analysing the interview transcriptions for this study, each participant was assessed in terms of: the amount of care taken when choosing books, the amount of frustration felt if a book was not enjoyable, and the amount of guidance they said they would like to have to help them discover new books. Each of these criteria received a mark, for each interviewee, of between 1 and 3, where 1 was 'not much', 2 was 'medium', and 3 was 'a lot'. This was to investigate whether people who take more care choosing their books, and are frustrated by books they do not enjoy, have more desire for help with choosing. However, the data showed no clear relationship in this way. One interviewee scored 3 on all counts: he took a lot of care choosing a book, felt he had wasted time and money if he did not enjoy a book, and expressed the strongest desire of any participant for guidance in choosing. However, other results were not consistent with this. One interviewee took a moderate amount of care in choosing, was highly annoyed by unsatisfactory books, but was adamant that she did

not need any help ('No. I don't want anybody to help me look for a book.' - Interviewee 13). Another participant took a lot of care in choosing his books, but did not mind too much when a book was not enjoyable, and also said that he did not need or want any help in choosing his books. The data suggests that the amount of guidance people would like is not necessarily related to the amount of care they take in choosing books, or the extent to which they feel reading a book by a new author is a risk.

Most participants did not express any desire for help in discovering new fiction:

I don't want anybody to help me look for a book.

(Interviewee 13)

I've never felt that [I don't know what to read next], cos it's always occurred to me that there's hundreds of books for me to read, whether it be classic literature, English literature, modern literature ... so I'm not conscious of, um, having to find things.

(Interviewee 2)

I feel that there's books out there, there's certainly an awful lot of books that I enjoy that are out there already.

(Interviewee 9).

No, cos I quite like the browsing aspect of it, yes. ... I do like just looking 'round and just seeing what's available really.

(Interviewee 9)

Only two participants expressed a clear desire for more guidance when it came to discovering new fiction:

I think grabbing your attention, highlighting certain things is a good idea. It makes it more personal and it makes it less intimidating in a way. If you just go in and there's rows and rows of books you think, right, where do I start, sort of thing, if you've finished all the, I don't know, Thomas Hardy or whatever, you know, what do I read next sort of thing – give me a starting point.

(Interviewee 8)

I find that if I go into a bookshop, I find it very confusing. There's so many books, and there's so many different authors ... Well, especially when I go on holiday, I'm stuck for something to read, and I'm never quite sure what would

be best, so if I want a crime fiction, you go to the old – do you go to the old, trusted, you know, Patricia Cornwells or PD James’, you know if it’s crime thrillers that you want, do you look at authors that you know ... I find it very confusing going into bookstores, because you pick up books and you read the information on the back of the book and you flick through the book and the chapter headings and so forth ... when I’m faced with a whole sea of books by maybe many authors I’ve never heard of, it’s very difficult to pick one out even, even just from the jacket sleeve comments.

(Interviewee 15)

These participants spoke of library shelves being ‘intimidating’, ‘confusing’, ‘difficult’, and expressed feelings of ‘where do I start’, and being ‘faced with a whole sea of books’. Interviewee 8 was a library user, but used the library much less frequently than she had done in the past. Interviewee 15 was a non-library user, but had used libraries in the past, and stated that he experienced the same negative feelings in libraries as he did in bookshops. He was a busy professional, who mainly read non-fiction books relating to his career, but found that when he went on holiday and wanted some fiction to read, it was difficult to know how to choose something. It may be significant that almost all of the participants interviewed for this study were avid readers. Interviewee 15, who expressed the strongest desire for guidance in fiction selection, was, by contrast, an occasional fiction-reader, and non-library user. It was decided to select mostly avid readers for the study; however, it is possible that avid readers are a group of people who tend to have their established networks and systems for discovering and choosing new fiction, and therefore have little need of extra help, whereas non-avid readers actually may experience more difficulty, inside and outside the library, and therefore would appreciate more guidance. Such readers are of course as important as avid, committed readers, and it could well be that, with more help from libraries in navigating the huge number of published books, they would actually read more, and use the library more frequently. This is a potential weakness in this study; further research could look more at all kinds of readers, determine if there is a relationship between the level of avidity and desire for help, and investigate what sort of help less avid readers would value.

Libraries also need to remember that it is in their interests to ‘promote the current stock and create interest in new authors’ (Goodall, 1989, p. 66), even if readers are not specifically

asking for guidance, because if everyone wants the same small group of titles, availability will not be able to keep up with demand, and customer satisfaction will decrease.

For the most part, the readers in this study did not express a desire for further help in finding books. At the same time, most seemed at a loss when asked if and how they felt the library helped them to discover new books. They did not tend to feel that the library was significant in helping them to discover new authors.

I don't know. I don't think they help me to choose. The displays can do, as we have mentioned, but apart from that, I don't think they do help me to choose really. I can't think how they do.

(Interviewee 5)

However, the same participants spoke of using displays, reading groups, returns shelves and genre sections to help them choose books, so it seems likely that they were to some extent unconscious of the features that they do use on an everyday basis.

5.7 Conclusion

Although most participants did not feel that the library played a significant role in helping them to make new discoveries of fiction, and most did not express a desire for more guidance or help from the library or any other source, this does not mean that libraries should do nothing. There are measures which most UK public libraries currently take, to help their readers navigate the fiction stock: dividing books by genre on the shelf; providing displays and returned-books areas; free access; multiple loans; increasingly helpful catalogues, with features such as pictures of the cover, summary of the plot, and user reviews; and provision and support of reading groups. All the library users in the study found displays and returns useful, and all of the reading group members reported the groups as significant ways for them to discover fiction. It seems likely that these features already in place are to some extent taken for granted, or so expected, that users hardly notice them, but they do in fact find them very valuable, and do use them when making selections and discoveries. The study has shown that there are many different types of reader, and that even in one individual, there may be different behaviours and motivations at different times. Some people choose a book lightly, without making much effort to judge whether it will be a worthwhile read; others see even borrowing a book as an investment,

and so carry out careful research before they make their final selection. Some readers love to browse and discover at the library shelves while others always have a book in mind when they enter the building. Libraries must support all kinds of readers, and all sorts of behaviours, in considering their role in facilitating fiction discovery. The following chapter discusses some specific applications for libraries that can be drawn from the results.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The aim of this study was to explore how fiction-readers discover fiction (authors and titles that are new to them), whether and how they use public libraries to do this, and any ways in which libraries could help readers to discover new fiction that they will enjoy.

The literature review demonstrated a conviction that public libraries have a responsibility to do more than simply provide fiction books on their shelves, in an alphabetical run, with author and title access. A qualitative approach was taken, with semi-structured interviews with sixteen participants, selected by purposive sampling. These interviews generated rich data around the subject of fiction discovery.

The main findings were that avid readers tend to keep lists of books which interest them, do not have trouble getting ideas for their next read, and do not feel the library plays a significant role in helping them discover fiction. The results suggested that non-avid readers may have more difficulty in making discoveries and may welcome more help from libraries. Readers used a mixture of selecting inside and outside the library, and varied in the amount of care they took when choosing new books. Personal recommendations were an important source of discovery for all participants, and library-users found displays and reading groups useful tools in discovery. Libraries were one piece making up the jigsaw of readers' reading worlds. The internet was mainly used for book purchasing and information – less so discovery.

There are multiple potential applications of the findings for libraries. Public libraries do have a role to play in helping readers to discover new fiction, perhaps especially readers who do not read as much as the participants in this study. Tools already in place in the libraries in this study are valuable in helping readers to navigate the fiction stock, especially displays and reading groups. Most of the reading groups whose members took part in the study met during the week, and during the day, and therefore were inaccessible for most working people; as reading groups were shown to be so valuable, libraries might consider expanding them so that some groups are run after 5pm, or at weekends, to widen their accessibility. Libraries are only one piece of the jigsaw of peoples' reading lives. Therefore, stock selection and displays could reflect popular books, bestsellers, current television or film adaptations, and current events. Libraries should be aware that readers choose both

inside and outside the library, sometimes take a lot of care before selecting a book and sometimes like to choose quickly; they should aim to cater for all types of reader and behaviour – for example in ensuring that adequate information is available about the books on the library catalogue, but also providing a display that offers a quick pick; considering both browsers and people who pre-select. Readers are not always aware of library e-book lending; this could be promoted and developed further. Since readers like using the internet to search for book and author information, this could be provided through the library website, perhaps with links to other good-quality sites; features that enable exploration and browsing could be built in. Staff could be better-trained to help readers discover fiction. Libraries have the potential to provide their readers with fun, immersive and creative browsing experiences, fostering an excitement around discovery and exploration. Personal recommendations are important to readers, and avid readers tend to make lists of books to read; perhaps libraries could do more to foster communities of readers – reading groups, interactive opportunities to review, discuss and recommend books, encouraging readers to create and share lists of books they love. Libraries could continue to emulate features from physical or online bookstores, such as cards with staff reviews on the shelves, or ways to compare books, see something similar, and share reader reviews. However, libraries also have a uniquely non-commercial character, and this enables them to give access to books that other sources will not, and broaden readers' horizons even more.

6.1 Recommendations for further research

The study has explored the topic of fiction discovery, and the role of public libraries therein. It has generated useful data, but further research could do much to build on the findings. Future studies could explore library browsing in more detail, and internet use as it relates to fiction. The main way this research could be built on, would be to focus more on less-avid readers, as their requirements around fiction discovery are likely to differ from those of the readers in this study. It would also be beneficial to study more participants, and a broader range of ages and socio-economic groups.

Word count: 14,482 words

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Style used: Harvard

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Appendix A: Study Information Sheet

Invitation to take part in an interview

My name is Joanna Geering, and I am studying for a Masters degree in Information and Library Studies, by distance learning through Aberystwyth University. As part of my degree, I am undertaking a research project, under the supervision of Dr. Allen Foster. The project aims to explore the ways in which fiction readers discover new authors and books, what tools or methods they find useful, and if and how they feel the public library can help them.

I would like to ask if you would be willing to help me with my research, by participating in an interview. If you agree to take part, I expect that the interview will last around 30 minutes, and will be informal in style: the aim will be to hear about your experiences of discovering fiction. I will be audio-recording the interview, and transcribing it later.

Your involvement in the project

Your personal data will be kept only as long as is necessary. At all times, I will ensure as far as possible the security of your data. I may use quotations from your interview in my report, but your name will not be used, and it will not be possible to identify you from the quotations used. Your data will be used only where it is relevant and appropriate to the aims of the research project.

A full copy of the finished report will be available to you if you request it.

Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you may withdraw at any point, without having to give a reason.

If you would like more information or have any queries, please contact me (see end of letter for contact details).

Thank you very much for your time.

Joanna Geering, The Bournemouth Library, 22 The Triangle, Bournemouth, BH2 5RQ.

[E-mail address and telephone number.]

Appendix B: Interview Consent Form

INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

1. I have read and understood the Study Information letter provided, and have been given the opportunity to discuss the study with the researcher.
2. I have received enough information about what my involvement in the study will be.
3. I understand that my participation is voluntary, and that I can withdraw at any time without having to give a reason.
4. I understand that, while my words may be quoted in the published report, my personal details, such as my name, will remain confidential.
5. I consent to participate in this study:

Name of participant (in block capitals):	Signature of participant:	Date:
Name of researcher (in block capitals):	Signature of researcher:	Date:

Appendix C: Interview Guide

1. What sort of books do you like to read? Do you remember how you got into reading novels? Are there any books you remember loving as a child?
2. Can you tell me a bit about the last book you read that you really enjoyed? How did you go about choosing that book?
3. Tell me about a time you discovered a new author or a new book? How did you find out about it? (how did they feel about that process of discovery)
4. Was that experience typical of how you usually discover new fiction? How does it usually happen? (Prompt if needed: browsing library shelves, displays, personal recommendations, radio, TV, newspaper reviews, internet, social media, any other)
5. Are you ever without a book?
6. Catherine Ross did a study of how readers discovered fiction in 2001, and said this: “committed readers typically put out antennae that scan their everyday environments for clues [for what to read next]. They tuck away for future use in memory or in lists the names of books and authors mentioned in magazine and newspaper reviews; books given currency because they have been made into films or television productions; and authors and titles that comes up in conversation”. Another researcher (Spiller) talked about people having a small list of favourite authors that were soon exhausted. Can you identify with this? In what way / in what way not?
7. Do you think that the way you find new books has changed over time? (think back to different times in your life, eg when you were a teenager, a student, if you had children, etc)
8. If you use the internet / social media: I'd like to find out about your use of websites, so I have a few questions about that:
 - Which websites do you use? (prompt: Amazon, Goodreads, library website)
 - Can you talk me through an example of how you usually use it?
 - Which features of it do you like?
 - When in your week or day do you normally do it? (Is it a purposeful activity, or done more casually in in-between moments?)

- Do you find it a good way of discovering new books? (Do you normally enjoy the books you discover in this way?)
 - Do you prefer to find books online, or in other ways? What's good about browsing online?
9. Do you ever browse for books in the library? (If never: why is that? What is it about it you don't like, or is it that you don't feel the need to do it?)
- If yes:
- Do you tend to browse the whole General Fiction / Crime / etc run, or do you stick to displays / New Books / returns, or a mixture?
 - Is browsing something you always do, or only sometimes?
 - Is your decision to browse or not, and how you browse, affected by your mood or circumstances? (eg by how much time you have, what sort of thing you feel like reading?)
 - How does the library visit fit into your life?
 - Do you usually find something good when you browse in the library?
 - Are there any negatives to browsing, for you?
 - Do you find it useful to have different genres in different sections?
10. Do you usually come into the library knowing what you want to borrow, or not knowing?
11. Would you say you usually seek out new books on purpose, or do you tend to get ideas about what to read next without seeking them out?
- (refer back to Ross and Spiller's antennae / list ideas – do you have a more active / purposeful approach to finding fiction when you run out of names on your list?)
 - Talk me through a time when you came across a new book accidentally
 - Talk me through a time when you tried to find a new book to read on purpose
 - Which way do you prefer to discover new books?
 - Which way you think is more successful in terms of ending up with a book you enjoy?
12. When you borrow a book from the library, do you feel there's a financial cost involved? (eg travel costs, reservation fees) Do you feel there's a cost in terms of time (either in the library or in reading a book that isn't worth it)? How much effort do you feel you put in to discovering or borrowing books?
13. Do you feel like there's a bit of risk involved in borrowing an unknown book, because you might not enjoy it?

- do you stop reading a book if you're not enjoying it? If not, why not? Do you ever feel like you've wasted your time (or money) on a book?
- Do you borrow multiple books, feeling that you'll probably enjoy at least one of them?
- Do you not really mind if you get a few dud choices, because it didn't cost you anything / much?
- Does it vary according to circumstances, eg when you're going on holiday or a long journey, do you feel it's important to get a book you have a high chance of enjoying?
- How carefully do you choose books, in order to try and make sure you're going to like them? What strategies do you use to do that?

14. What role do you feel the library plays in helping you to discover new books?

- Do you see the library more as a provider, and you use other sources to help you discover?
- Have you had any experiences of trying to discover a new book in the library, eg by asking staff? How was that experience?
- Are there any ways you feel the library makes it harder for you to discover new fiction? (eg by having too many books in the General Fiction run)
- Is there anything you feel the library could do to help you discover new books?

15. Do you ever feel you could be missing out on good books because you don't know about them? Do you ever wish there was a more effective way of finding a good book?

16. Personal details:

- Age bracket (18 – 24, 25 – 34, 35 – 44, 45 – 54, 55 – 64, 65 – 74, 75+)

Appendix D: Interview Coding – List of Codes and Meanings

Main themes were numbered 1 – 6.

1. Type of reader. (avid reader, not often without a book, keep list of books to read, how actively they seek out new books, how life and circumstances affect reading habits)
2. Sources of ideas and books: non-libraries (non-use of libraries, physical and online bookshops, personal recommendations / giving of books, media, attitudes towards buying and keeping books, other sources)
3. Sources of ideas and books: libraries (how used, problems with, staff, displays, browsing)
4. How people feel about discovering new books (broadening reading, liking certain authors, amount of care taken when choosing a book by an unknown author, reaction to a disappointing book, amount of help they would like with choosing books)
5. The role of reading groups in readers' fiction discovery
6. The role of electronic devices and the internet in readers' fiction discovery (use of e-devices, use of internet to find information about books, use of internet to purchase books, use of internet to browse and discover books, use of library catalogues)

Appendix E: Excerpt from coded interview transcription

Excerpt from Interview 8 – Code numbers in superscript at the end of each paragraph

Interviewer: So when you used the library more, when the local libraries were open, did you browse quite often in the library?

Interviewee 8: Yeah.³

Interviewer: And did you –

Interviewee 8: I wouldn't know what I was looking for, half the time. I mean even if you read a book by somebody that you enjoy, you come to the end of their books, don't you? So yes I'd browse quite a bit, and em, I used to enjoy looking through the returned books – I often found that was a good source – ooh, well somebody's obviously just read it – and you know, brings ones you might not have noticed.^{3, 4}

Interviewer: Yes it sort of narrows down –

Interviewee 8: Yes, narrows down the field, yes. And it's varied, whereas, in the library they're just under alphabetical or possibly categories, but em, sometimes what you end up reading doesn't fit into any one category specifically. Yeah, the returned books I used to find very useful.

Interviewer: I think you said before that you're probably quite good at choosing something you're likely to enjoy. What sort of things do you look at when you're choosing a book to try and judge if you think it's going to be a good read?

Interviewee 8: The title, has to take my interest. And if it's got a cover it's not got to look like a bodice-ripper, I'm – I think I'm too old for bodice-rippers now, excuse me. Em, so yes, and then I suppose you read the first chapter. Unless it happens to be somebody you've heard of, or a book you've heard of, or somebody's said oh I read that, and, but on the whole yeah, it's the title. The author, the name of the author, if it's someone you've heard of, the book cover and then yeah, you read a little bit, just to see. Or yes, I suppose I read the synopsis. Yes, I do read the synopsis.⁴

Interviewer: And you think you're quite good at picking books that you then go on to enjoy?

Interviewee 8: Yes. But perhaps I'm not very demanding. As I've got older I think I em, I choose more easy reading. I don't want to sort of delve into deep philosophy particularly, it's a recreation for me, and – and my brain's got lazy. But that's not – not all old people are like that! Some are still intellectually curious and – and adventurous, but I think I'm a bit lazy.^{4, 1}

Interviewer: Do you feel like – if you're choosing a book by an author you haven't read before, that it's a bit of a risk, because you might not like it, or do you think it doesn't matter because it hasn't cost me anything to get it anyway and I can just return it –

Interviewee 8: Oh, if I use the library?

Interviewer: Yes.

Interviewee 8: Well you do have a different attitude I suppose. If you're buying the book you want to be more certain that you're going to enjoy it, whereas yeah as you say at the library, well it doesn't matter, I'll give it a go.^{3,4}

Interviewer: So you'd take a bit more of a risk on an unknown –

Interviewee 8: Yes, yeah. Because you know – you haven't invested anything in it.^{3,4}

Interviewer: Although do you feel like that's changed at all since you've had to go to Southport library because it's a bit more of an effort to get there?

Interviewee 8: Oh yes, yeah. I don't go in the same as I used to.

Interviewer: So where do you tend to acquire your books if you don't get them from the library so much any more?

Interviewee 8: I suppose Waterstones. And I do pick them up in charity shops occasionally. If I'm going on holiday I always visit a charity shop to pick up half a dozen books, and then I just leave them – when I finish reading them I just leave them, so there's all these English books scattered around Italy and France and things. I'm sure I'm not the only one. Because I've not really engaged with the Kindle. My husband reads on the Kindle. Whereas I like a physical book. Although I can see advantages in travelling, not carrying these half a dozen books to start with. But I always think well you know, that just means I've got room to bring stuff back, because I'll have ditched all these books –^{2,6}

Interviewer: Do you ever feel as if you're stuck for what to read next, or do you always tend to have something in mind to read next?

Interviewee 8: No I – I mean sometimes I do run out. I mean often I build up a collection of books that people have given me or that I've picked up here or there, and then I'll come to an end, and I'll think ooh! What am I going to – so I will re-read old favourites sometimes. I mean I'm the sort of person who would read the back of the cereal packet rather than sit on my own and not read anything. I can't go – if I go to a café by myself, I – some people will just sit and watch the world go by but I need a book, always.¹