

**Amy J. Richard. Genre Fiction Classification: A Study of the Durham County Library. A Master's paper for the M.S. in L.S. degree, July, 1999. 40 pages. Advisor: Jerry D. Saye.**

This study assesses the impact that the separation of the fiction collection into genre categories has on fiction users at the Durham County Library (DCL) Main Branch. Grouping fiction by genre has been shown to increase and facilitate browsing in public libraries by decreasing information overload. Fiction users also have been shown to generally respond favorably to the implementation of a genre fiction classification system, and circulation has been shown to increase after implementation.

Results show that a majority of DCL Main Branch fiction users primarily select fiction by browsing and use various informal selection methods when browsing; the majority of fiction users feel the genre fiction classification system is an improvement on the previous alphabetical system; and circulation did not increase due to the genre fiction classification system.

Headings:

Browsing

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GENRE FICTION CLASSIFICATION: A STUDY OF THE DURHAM COUNTY  
LIBRARY

by

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## STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Librarians have always known that library fiction users employ various methods when choosing materials from the fiction collection (S. Baker, 1986; Spiller, 1980). Various studies have shown that the most used method when selecting materials is browsing, followed by recommendations by friends or the librarian (S. Baker, 1986; Morse, 1970; Willard and Teece, 1983).

Several studies also have shown that browsing is the selection method most used by public library users (S. Baker, 1988; Borden, 1909; Goldhor, 1981; Greene, 1977; Shelton, 1982). Grouping fiction according to subject category or genre type has been shown to facilitate browsing in libraries (E. A. Baker, 1899; S. Baker, 1986; Briggs, 1973; Goldhor, 1981; Rutzen, 1952; Spiller, 1980). It also helps to decrease the element of information overload that is experienced by library users when faced with too many choices in the collection (S. Baker 1987, 1986; Morse, 1970; Rutzen, 1952). By offering fewer choices (i.e. separating the fiction collection into subject or genre categories), the library fiction user can

go to the specific area of interest and make a selection more easily than when faced with ranges of shelves of thousands of books.

The Durham County Library (DCL) Main Branch has a fiction collection of over 54,000 books. In 1997, only sixteen percent (16%) of total circulation was from adult fiction. This is compared to overall statistics of North Carolina public libraries that show 37 percent (37%) of all book circulation comes from adult fiction (Shearer, 1996). A number of factors may contribute to the low circulation rate at the DCL Main Branch. They include: (1) the fiction collection is on the third floor with little direction to lead library users to its location; (2) until January 1998, the fiction area was not staffed by individuals whose primary job or training was to help readers find what they wanted; and (3) the large collection of books gave library fiction users a feeling of information overload.

The DCL has since taken some much needed steps to rectify the problem of low adult circulation at the Main Branch. The Adult Services Librarian and a core of volunteers now provide readers' advisory service to library users from the third floor fiction area. To help ease the problem of information overload, the Adult Services Librarian separated the fiction collection into the

following genre categories: adventure, fantasy, general fiction, horror, mystery, romance, science fiction, short stories, and western. These categories are used in the *NoveList* which is available on CD-ROM at the DCL Main Branch and through NCLive.

The genre separation project was completed over January 15-18, 1999 with the help of the Adult Services Librarian, DCL staff, and volunteers. The project included physically moving the materials to distinct shelves, labeling spines with genre stickers, and adding the genre category to the location in the online catalog.

Although many public libraries in North Carolina have implemented this type of fiction classification scheme to better help their fiction users find desired materials, few have documented their results following separation of the fiction collection. This research should be useful to all public libraries considering the implementation of a genre fiction classification scheme.

#### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

There have been several studies on the methods library users employ to select their materials. Most studies indicate that library users select primarily through browsing (S. Baker, 1986; Goldhor, 1981; Spiller, 1980).

S. Baker has shown that a large number of public library fiction users select fiction through browsing (1988).

Fiction classification schemes have been used in libraries for over 100 years to facilitate browsing (E. A. Baker, 1899; Borden, 1909; Briggs, 1973; Baker and Shepherd, 1987), and specifically in public libraries (E. A. Baker, 1899; Baker and Shepherd, 1987; Borden, 1909; Harrell, 1985). The earliest study that records the effectiveness of fiction classification schemes was conducted by Borden (1909). Borden concluded that in order to give his users what they wanted he should separate the collection according to subject. He also ascertained when a user selects fiction, "he selects one that looks good to him and asks a question; and this question if it be the usual one, should throw a broad light over the whole question of book classification - What kind of book is

The next documented research on the effectiveness of fiction classification schemes was by Briggs (1973). Briggs separated the fiction collection of a California junior high school library into eight different genre categories. These categories included: story collections, fantasy, sports, mystery and suspense, girl's stories, science fiction, historical fiction, and general fiction.

After two years of using the new classification scheme, school library users were surveyed to find out their opinion of the scheme. Of the school library users, eighty-eight percent (88%) found the classified fiction system easier to use. The librarians also found it was easier to guide readers to the kind of books for which they were looking. Briggs' findings support what Borden earlier reported; that library users favor fiction collections classified by subject or genre categories to collections arranged alphabetically by author.

Spiller (1980) conducted a survey of 500 library users in four British libraries to discover what types of fiction were issued in public libraries, how novels were chosen by library users, whether they were reserved and whether read, and also to record library users' observations. Spiller found that sixty-nine percent (69%) of respondents sought novels of a particular kind (or genre) when selecting fiction. Additionally, fifty-nine percent (59%) of respondents preferred categorization of the fiction collection to aid in choosing novels of a particular type or genre. Respondents stated categorization was better for library users in a hurry and for library users selecting wholly or largely from one category. Respondents also

stated that when selecting fiction they generally browsed or selected books by a favorite author.

Spiller's findings support the results of a study conducted by Sharon Baker (1987, 1988). Baker conducted a study of three libraries in North Carolina to determine if fiction classification makes selecting fiction easier and quicker for library fiction users. Library fiction users confirmed that classification helped guide them to the titles they chose. Library fiction users also said they "wanted the libraries to continue classifying fiction because such classification made their selection easier and quicker and enabled them to become familiar with other novelists in a particular genre" (1987, 76). The study also showed that library fiction users who selected classified titles chose significantly more titles than library fiction users who selected non-classified titles. This knowledge suggests that fiction classification may help library fiction users select works of a particular genre.

Jennings and Sear (1986) conducted a survey of library fiction users in Kent, England, to ascertain how public library fiction users choose fiction and, in particular, how often they look for specific authors and titles and how often they browse. The survey found that browsing is the

most popular method of choosing books. It also was found that while browsing, library fiction users discover new authors. Twenty percent (20%) of the books were chosen on the basis of genre. Given the fact that fiction is not categorized in Kent, it indicated some persistence on the part of the library fiction user and the need for libraries to classify fiction according to genre type.

Several studies show that separating large fiction collections into smaller genre categories will encourage browsing and increase the use of materials in those genre categories (S. Baker, 1988, 1987, 1986; Goldhor, 1981; Herald, 1995; Ross, 1991; Shelton, 1982; Willard and Teece, 1983). With the supporting research, it is sensible for public libraries to design their fiction collections to be "browser friendly".

Browsing is an enigmatic topic. Browsers often are not looking for specific titles or authors and can become overwhelmed by the choices presented by a large fiction collection. S. Baker addresses this issue in her study of the effects of display on circulation of books. Baker (1986, 316) identifies three major characteristics of browsers:

- 1) Browsers directly approach the library's shelves to look for materials they desire, rather than formally

identifying them through the card catalog or some other bibliographic tool.

- 2) Browsers are not looking for specific documents, but rather for any document that will satisfy their information need.
- 3) Browsers have no specific title in mind, therefore, they are open to influence from a variety of factors when selecting materials.

Baker recognizes the potential for information overload in library fiction users is high, especially when the user is not looking for a particular item, but is browsing for materials to satisfy his/her needs. From this information, it makes sense that fiction classification by genre will increase use of materials because it will expose a large number of browsers to a small set of materials. This exposure helps to focus the browser's attention on the smaller set of choices and therefore narrows the choices.

"Historically, public libraries have not been organized in a way hospitable to browsers" (Willard and Teece, 1983, 55). Willard and Teece administered a study designed to determine whether library users came to the library to browse or came for specific materials. Of the 226 usable interviews, 109 library users (48.2 %) reported they had come to the library to browse. Only 41 people (18.1%) came to borrow a specific item or find particular information. These findings support classifying large

collections in separate subject or genre categories. This would aid library users who primarily browsed for fiction.

In an experiment involving two Jamaican libraries, Goldhor (1981) found that visible location, subject shelving, and booklists are solutions that limit the collection and therefore, alleviate information overload. Goldhor's study found that placing randomly selected biographies on a highly visible shelf location increased use versus interfiling the materials in the collection.

Goldhor also included in his study a survey of how library users selected their materials and how satisfied they were with their selections. Forty-six percent (46%) of respondents used browsing to select materials and a large portion of the respondents were satisfied with their choices.

When faced with many different choices, browsers will often adopt strategies to simplify their choices. Morse (1970) supports this fact. "Habitual browsers in a library [eliminate choices] intuitively when selecting which section of the library they will browse during a particular stay" (p. 394). Morse found that the worst possible library for a browser is one in which he could not differentiate between sections. The most efficient library is the one in which there are relatively small sections of

high interest potential for his present desires, so he can ignore the rest. Thus, a "browser-friendly" library would be one in which fiction materials are arranged by subject or genre category, not alphabetically by author.

Although there is an abundance of research praising the genre separation of fiction collections, Pejtersen (1978) argues a different perspective. Pejtersen disagrees with the genre classification because she feels its exclusivity makes it inadequate by ignoring relevant combinatorial possibilities of fitting books to library users' needs. Furthermore, she states the genre classification is not complete, since the classes are too narrow in their description of aspects.

Pejtersen also makes the point that an advantage of a non-exclusive classification is when considering a book, which is, for example, both a love story and a mystery. It is sometimes difficult to distinguish between the dominant genre. In this case it is easier not to separate fiction, since all aspects must be classed. Pejtersen also states that using a non-classified system increases the librarians' knowledge of the collection. The librarians will need to become familiar with the collection in order to direct library users to the types of materials for which they are searching.

Pejtersen's system has not been tested outside of laboratory conditions. One fault of the system is that it fails to establish that library fiction users would use this type of system. According to Spiller's (1980) study, library fiction users want smaller sections in which to browse, and indicates library fiction users would not be willing to use Pejtersen's system.

There are many studies about the positive effects of classification of fiction collections in public libraries, but only one study can be found that surveys the classification of adult fiction in large public libraries in the United States. Harrell (1985) surveyed large library systems (serving a population of one hundred thousand or more) in the United States to determine how they classify and arrange their adult fiction collections.

Harrell found that ninety-four percent (94%) of the libraries surveyed use genre categorization to arrange and organize a part of their fiction collections. The most popular categories include: science fiction and/or fantasy, westerns, and detective and/ or mystery and/or suspense.

Harrell also addressed what methods the libraries used to denote types of fiction. The three principal methods are: (1) separate shelf arrangement; (2) spine labels; and (3) notation in the catalog (p. 14). Harrell emphasizes

that not just one method is the best when denoting fiction. Several of the libraries responded that they use a combination of the methods.

Harrell's study states that the purpose of the research was to identify the various methods used by libraries in classifying, arranging, and displaying adult fiction. No attempt was made to evaluate any of these methods. In order to understand fully the organization and classification of fiction, this issue needs to be addressed.

In a study conducted by Singleton (1992) it was found that a majority of North Carolina public libraries use some genre categories for their adult fiction collections. "Thirty-two, or about 94.1%, of the libraries surveyed used some sort of genre fiction classification" (p.20). These results are similar to Harrell's 1985 study that found about 94% of large American public libraries use genre categories to classify portions of their fiction collections. Further, it was found that libraries using a greater number of genre categories have a higher percentage of adult fiction circulation than those libraries having fewer or no genre categories.

In summary, the literature shows that library fiction users select fiction primarily through browsing;

classifying fiction collections according to subject or genre category (either by shelving or spine labels) facilitates browsing and helps library fiction users find desired materials; and that classifying fiction collections by subject or genre category increases use of the collection.

#### DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY

This study is an assessment of the impact that the separation of the fiction collection into genre categories has on its library fiction users at the DCL Main Branch. Interviews with library fiction users, an interview with the Adult Services Librarian, and circulation statistics were the measures used to calculate the impact the genre separation had on its library fiction users. The data from the library fiction user interviews was gathered over a one-week period in May 1999 - June 1999. The interview with the Adult Services Librarian occurred in June 1999. The circulation statistics were obtained from the Collection Development Librarian (at the Main Branch) in May 1999.

There are many variations to the definition of a browser. For the purposes of this study, a browser will be

defined as a library fiction user that visually scans the fiction collection for materials, takes the material from the shelf, and checks the material out. Browser satisfaction will be determined by how simple it is for library fiction users to browse the fiction area. This was accomplished by simply asking library fiction users in the interview process.

### **Subjects for Study**

Anyone who has a DCL card had an opportunity to be included in the study. The population was restricted only to library users utilizing the fiction collection of the DCL Main Branch. To have access to a DCL card, library users must reside in Durham County, North Carolina. Male and female library users over the age of eighteen were invited to be participants in this study.

### **User Interviews**

Interviews with library users of the fiction collection at the DCL Main Branch were utilized to assess the impact the genre separation of the fiction collection had. An interview approach was used to make the library fiction user feel at ease and to obtain observations about the library fiction user's feelings about the genre separation.

In designing the interview questions, various survey formats designed to assess the impact of genre separation were studied (S. Baker, 1988; Jennings and Sear, 1986; Spiller, 1980). From these examples, questions were formulated for the interview. The Adult Services Librarian and a group of student peers critiqued the survey before its use.

Participants in the study were chosen randomly as they left the fiction collection. The interviews were voluntary and anonymous. Library fiction users gave oral consent before beginning the interview process. A copy of the oral consent statement is included as Appendix A. Additionally, a written statement explaining the study and contact information was given to each participant (Appendix B). After obtaining oral consent, the library fiction user was then requested to answer a demographic questionnaire (Appendix C). The demographic questionnaire was used to obtain data about the population that reads fiction at the DCL Main Branch.

After completing the demographic questionnaire, library fiction users were asked the questions on the user interview instrument (Appendix D). Question (1)

- (1) Have you ever used the library before the separation of the fiction collection? Is it an improvement? If you are new to the library, is this system of organization better than your previous library?

was used to obtain responses of how library fiction users felt about the genre separation of the fiction collection.

Questions (2), (3), and (4)

(2) Generally speaking, when you enter the fiction room, do you have at least one specific title in mind that you want to find? If yes, do you normally find it on the shelf?

(3) Generally speaking, when you enter the fiction room, do you have at least one specific author that you look for when choosing a book?

(4) In general, when looking for a specific book and unable to find that book, do you browse for other selections?

were designed to perceive how library fiction users look for fiction and if they browse. Questions (5) and (7)

(5) What methods do you use to find books?

(7) When browsing for a book to read, what makes you ultimately choose that book?

- Author
- Blurb
- Catchy title
- Genre (types of book, i.e. romance, western, fantasy, etc.)
- Interesting book cover
- It's on the new fiction shelf
- Library displays
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

also were used to determine what methods library fiction users employ when selecting fiction. Question (6)

(6) If you like to browse for fiction reading materials, what type of books do you read?

- adventure
- fantasy
- general fiction
- horror
- mystery
- romance
- science fiction
- short stories
- western

other \_\_\_\_\_

was designed to determine what areas of the collection are used the most. Question (8)

(8) In the areas that you like to read, are you generally satisfied with the books in that genre at the Durham County Public Library? Ex. Are all the books in the horror section to your liking?

was used to ascertain if the population is satisfied with the collection. Question (9)

(9) How often do you visit this library?

was used to gauge how often library fiction users visit the library. An opportunity to provide additional comments were included to give library fiction users the opportunity to express other opinions not asked during the interview process.

#### **Interview with Adult Services Librarian**

In addition to data obtained from library fiction users, an interview was conducted with the Adult Services Librarian to obtain her observations on how library fiction users view the genre separation of the fiction collection. Questions included topics such as preliminary research conducted before the genre separation project, expected outcomes of the project, and determination of the categories used. The input of the Adult Services Librarian can also add more insight to library fiction users' feelings of the classification scheme considering users

usually offer opinions when asked. A copy of the Adult Resources Librarian questionnaire is included as Appendix E.

### **Circulation Statistics**

Circulation statistics were generated from the DCL's automated library information catalog. In similar studies circulation has been shown to increase with the separation of fiction collections into subject or genre categories (S. Baker, 1988; Cannell and McCluskey, 1996). Circulation statistics of the DCL Main Branch were gathered to ascertain whether the separation of the fiction collection into subject or genre categories increases circulation of the fiction collection was also true in this case.

### HYPOTHESES

Three hypotheses were formulated for the purposes of this study.

- 1) A majority of library fiction users browse the fiction collection and employ informal methods of selection.

- 2) A majority of the library fiction users feel the separation of the fiction collection is an improvement on the previous author alphabetical fiction classification scheme.
- 3) Circulation statistics will increase following the separation of the fiction collection into subject or genre categories.

#### FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Each library fiction user that exited the fiction area was asked to participate in the study. The study was conducted during the following dates and times:

Monday, May 24	1:00 p.m. - 5:30 p.m.
Tuesday, May 25	9:00 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.
Wednesday, May 26	1:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.
Thursday, May 27	9:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.
Friday, June 1	5:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.

Of the sixty-four library fiction users approached to participate, 46 agreed to participate. Reasons for not participating included no time, children waiting in the children's area, and didn't use the fiction area.

Of the 46 participants, 34 (73.9%) were females and 12 (26.1%) were males. A majority of the participants were employed (71.7% employed and 28.3% not employed).

As shown in Table 1, 39 (84.8%) of the library users of the fiction collection responded that they do browse when selecting fiction material. This supports the earlier research findings that a majority of library fiction users select fiction by browsing (S. Baker, 1988, 1987; Bob, 1982; Jennings and Sear, 1986; Morse, 1970). This finding supports Hypothesis (1), that a majority of library fiction users browse the fiction collection when selecting materials.

**Table 1**  
**Number and Percentage of Library Fiction Users that Browse the Fiction Collection**

	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Browse	39	84.8%
Do not browse	6	13.0%
Did not answer	1	2.2%

Table 2 reports the methods that library fiction users employ when selecting materials. A majority of library fiction users select on an author basis (47.8%) and by browsing (41.3%). Other selection methods include advice from colleagues or the librarian (23.8%), using the online catalog (37.0%), displays (15.2%), genre category (13.0%), and reviews (2.2%). These findings support research by Spiller (1980) that most library fiction users either

browse the shelves or look for works of a particular author. These findings also support Hypothesis (1) that library users employ informal methods of selection.

**Table 2**  
**Methods of Selection by Library Fiction Users\***

	NUMBER (N=46)	PERCENTAGE
Advice	11	23.8%
Author	22	47.8%
Browse	19	41.3%
Catalog	17	37.0%
Displays	7	15.2%
Genre	6	13.0%
Reviews	1	2.2%
Other	6	13.0%

\* Patrons often use several methods of selection. Therefore, total numbers and percentages are greater than would be indicated by N, and percentages (rounded to the nearest tenth) sum to more than 100.

Table 3 shows the informal methods of selection library fiction users employ when browsing. Again, an author approach (65.2%) is the method library fiction users employ most when browsing the collection. This finding supports earlier research (Baker, 1986; Borden 1909; Rathbone 1902; Spiller 1980) that states library fiction users employ various informal methods when choosing fiction. The findings also show that 19.6% of library fiction users select fiction by genre category. This finding indicates some persistence on the part of library

fiction users who selected fiction in this manner before the separation of the fiction collection. It also shows that the DCL Main Branch needed to separate fiction according to subject or genre categories in order to assist library fiction users who clearly want to select by genre, which indirectly supports Hypothesis (1).

**Table 3**  
**Methods of Selection by Library Fiction**  
**Users when Browsing\***

	<b>NUMBER (N=46)</b>	<b>PERCENTAGE</b>
Author	30	65.2%
Blurb	20	43.5%
Catchy title	12	26.1%
Genre	9	19.6%
Book cover	15	32.6%
New Fiction Display	9	19.6%
Displays	7	15.2%
Other	5	10.9%

\* Patrons often use several methods of selection. Therefore, total numbers and percentages are greater than would be indicated by N, and percentages (rounded to the nearest tenth) sum to more than 100.

Given that a majority of library fiction users utilize browsing as a method of selecting fiction and employ various informal methods of selection when browsing, it appears that it is beneficial that the DCL Main Branch used several types of labeling systems (i.e. marking spines with

appropriate genre category labels, genre category notation in online catalog, and distinct shelving) when implementing the separation of the fiction collection. Further, given the fact that library fiction users are prone to feelings of information overload when faced with large fiction collections (Baker 1986), it is helpful that the DCL Main Branch separated the fiction collection to avoid these feelings. The separation of the fiction collection into separate genre categories will help library fiction users to narrow their selection choices and consequently expedite their selection process.

Of the library fiction users interviewed, 41 (89.1%) had visited and utilized the library before the implementation of the separation of the fiction collection into subject or genre categories. Of these, 32 library fiction users (69.9%) felt the separation of the fiction collection was an improvement on the previous alphabetical fiction classification scheme. Six library fiction users (13.0%) did not like the new classification and eight (17.4%) had no feelings on the separation. There were five (10.9%) library fiction users who had not used the library before the separation of the fiction collection. Four of the five (80.0%) felt the new system of organization was

better than what they had experienced in their previous library.

Based on previous studies that a majority of library users feel the separation of the fiction collection into subject or genre categories is favorable (Baker and Shepherd, 1987; Briggs, 1973; Rutzen, 1973; Sawbridge and Favret, 1982), the findings from this research support the previous findings. They also support Hypothesis (2) that a majority of the library fiction users feel the separation of the fiction collection is an improvement on the previous alphabetical fiction classification scheme.

Hypothesis (2) is further supported by comments received from library fiction users during the interview process regarding the separation of the fiction collection into separate subject or genre categories. In general, most of the comments were favorable. Library fiction users stated that the separation of the fiction collection into subject or genre categories made it easier to find the "types" of materials for which they were looking. One library fiction user stated, "I love it. It helps me find new authors I would not normally have found." Another library fiction user stated, "I have been in several different public libraries and it is always easier to find the types of books when they are separated out."

The Adult Resources Librarian had also reported favorable comments received from library fiction users. Although one library fiction user commented to her that she did not like the new system, several weeks later that person approached the Adult Resources Librarian again and exclaimed she loved the new system. She stated now she could practice "focused browsing." If she wants mysteries, she can browse the mystery area. If she is interested in science fiction, she can go to that area.

Although most of the comments received in the user interviews were favorable, there are library fiction users who are not happy about the separation of the fiction collection. One library fiction user commented that she enjoyed "hunting" through the shelves for interesting books. She thinks the new system makes it too easy to find the types of books she likes to read. Other library fiction users think the new system is too confusing. Complaints to the Adult Services Librarian include the fact that some of the subject or genre categories do not house enough material for adequate browsing. Overall, the findings and comments support Hypothesis (2) that a majority of the library fiction users feel the separation of the fiction collection is an improvement on the previous alphabetical fiction classification scheme.

**Table 4**  
**Genre Fiction Circulation Statistics at the**  
**DCL Main Branch**

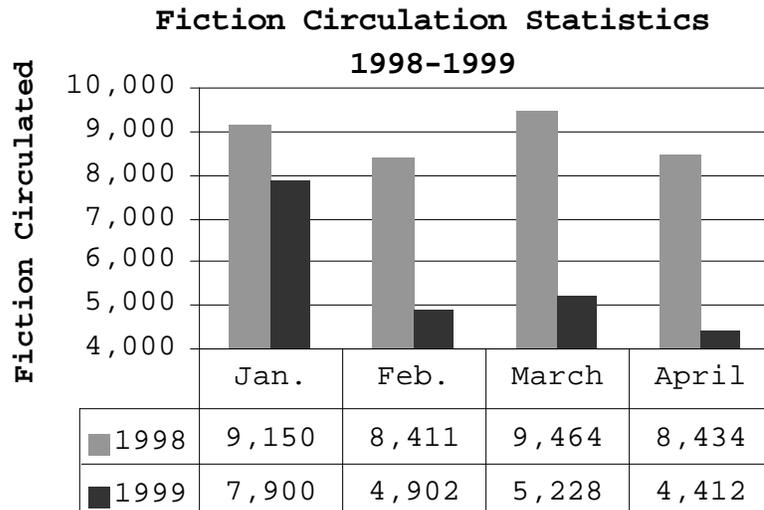
	<b>JANUARY 1999</b>	<b>FEBRUARY 1999</b>	<b>MARCH 1999</b>	<b>APRIL 1999</b>
Adventure Fiction	0	142	164	174
Fantasy Fiction	1	52	151	225
General Fiction	7,278	1,771	1,127	568
Horror Fiction	0	117	153	127
Mystery Fiction	548	1,698	2,127	2,082
Romance Fiction	0	603	831	677
Science Fiction	70	429	573	479
Western Fiction	3	90	102	80
<b>TOTAL FICTION</b>	<b>7,900</b>	<b>4,902</b>	<b>5,228</b>	<b>4,412</b>
<b>Monthly change in Circulation of Fiction</b>		<b>-37.9%</b>	<b>6.7%</b>	<b>-15.6%</b>

Table 4 shows the circulation statistics of genre fiction at the DCL Main Branch beginning the month of January 1999 (the month the new fiction classification scheme was implemented) and ending the month of April 1999. According to these findings, it appears that the popularity of genre fiction is growing. For example, circulation of mysteries was 548 in January 1999. The subsequent months

(February, March, and April 1999) it fluctuated to 1,698, 2,127, and 2,082, respectively. The statistics show that library fiction users are reading more genre fiction than that of general fiction. Compare these statistics with the fact that a majority of the library fiction users browse when selecting fiction. Consequently, separating the fiction collection into subject or genre categories is a favorable classification scheme because it seems that more library fiction users are reading genre classified fiction.

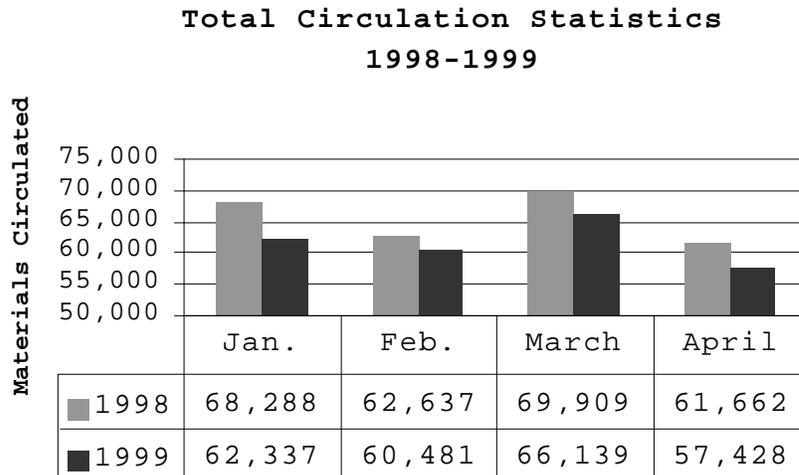
As demonstrated in Figure 1 below, it appears that fiction circulation has decreased since the separation of the fiction collection in January 1999. The largest percentage decrease (-47.7%) in fiction circulation occurred between April 1998 and April 1999.

**Figure 1**



However, these statistics do not convey the entire picture. Figure 2 shows that the total circulation at the DCL Main Branch actually decreased from 1998 to 1999.

**Figure 2**



The decrease in total circulation could be due to a number of external factors, which also can effect fiction circulation. These findings do not support the previous research results that circulation will increase due to the separation of the fiction collection (E.A. Baker, 1899; S. Baker, 1988, 1987; Borden, 1909; Goldhor, 1981; Shelton, 1982). Therefore, Hypothesis (3) that circulation statistics will increase due to the separation of the fiction into subject or genre categories cannot be supported by the findings of this study.

Due to the newness of the separation of the fiction collection, it may be beneficial to evaluate the

circulation statistics again at a later time. After library fiction users become accustomed to the new classification system and the library staff gets the shelving and the notation in the computer in congruence, the circulation statistics may increase.

The findings of this research indicate that a majority of library fiction users browse the fiction collection and employ informal methods of selection when browsing; and a majority of the library fiction users feel the separation of the fiction collection is an improvement on the previous alphabetical fiction classification scheme. However, at this time, overall circulation statistics are not increasing due to the separation of the fiction collection into separate subject or genre categories.

#### FURTHER RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study was limited to a randomly selected group of library fiction users within the DCL Main Branch. Additional studies using a larger number of participants may give a more detailed illustration of how public libraries should classify fiction.

Many studies (S. Baker, 1987, 1988; Goldhor, 1981; Willard and Teece, 1983) have shown that separating the fiction collection into subject or genre categories

increases browsing and circulation. There are several other questions that need to be addressed in the literature. One question to be answered, how do librarians know which subject or genre categories will effectively serve their community of users? For example, would a romance section be more utilized by library fiction users or would a thriller section be in more demand? Also, does grouping a novel in one subject or genre category decrease the possibility that it will be read by a library fiction user that normally does not read that subject or genre? How can different materials in different genres attract the attention of library fiction users? These are logical questions that should be addressed.

In addition, although there is some cohesion in subject or genre categories used in public libraries, there is no cohesion in classifying the same material from one library to the next. What characteristics distinguish a mystery novel from a thriller novel? For example, a Mary Higgins Clark novel is considered to be in the mystery genre in one library and in general fiction in another library. Standards for the classification of fiction into subject or genre categories would be useful in maintaining a cohesive classification system throughout public libraries.

Finally, subject or genre fiction categories can be used to aid librarians in the collection development process. By separating the fiction collection into subject or genre categories, librarians can observe where some genre categories are lacking materials and also where some collections need to be weeded. By observing closely how library fiction users choose subject or genre fiction, librarians can distinguish where collections need to be supplemented or lessened to ensure the collection meets the needs of the community. These observations can also help librarians to plan facilities and the classification schemes more effectively to better serve the needs of the individual public library user.

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## APPENDIX A.

### Oral Statement Requesting Participation and Consent

I am a master's degree candidate at the School of Information and Library Science at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The topic of my master's paper is an assessment of the impact that the genre separation of the fiction collection has had on patrons who browse the fiction collection at the Durham County Public Library. For this assessment, I am asking library patrons (approximately 50) to assist me by voluntarily answering the a few questions.

I am very interested in hearing what your feelings are about the separation of the fiction collection. Your willingness to share your opinions will be of value not only to my research, but may provide the library with suggestions to enhance services to patrons. Your participation is completing voluntary; there is no penalty for not participating. Your responses to the questions will be taken as indication of your consent to participate. **All information gathered from this interview will be kept in strictest confidence.** The data will be presented in summary form only in my master's paper, with no identifying information linked to responses.

APPENDIX B.

Written Consent Given to Library Fiction User



THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA  
AT  
CHAPEL HILL

School of Information and Library Science  
Phone# (919) 962-8366  
Fax# (919) 962-8071

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill  
CB# 3360, 100 Manning Hall  
Chapel Hill, N.C. 27599-3360

May 24, 1999

Dear Patron:

I am a master's degree candidate at the School of Information and Library Science (SILS) at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The topic of my master's paper is an assessment of the impact that the genre separation of the fiction collection has had on patrons who browse the fiction collection. By collecting data on how patrons browse for fiction I hope to be able to determine whether the genre separation of the fiction collection increases patron satisfaction, and if patrons are able to locate more books that interest them.

For questions regarding this interview or the confidentiality thereof, please do not hesitate to contact me at (919) 233-4660 or by e-mail at richa@ils.unc.edu. You may also address concerns to my research project advisor, Dr. Jerry D. Saye, at 200 Manning Hall, Campus Box #3360, UNC Chapel Hill, 27599-3360; telephone (919) 962-8073; e-mail address: saye@ils.unc.edu. As well, your questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject may be answered by:

David A. Eckerman, Chair  
Academic Affairs - Institutional Review Board  
CB#4100, 201 Bynum Hall  
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill  
Chapel Hill, NC 27599-4100  
(919) 962-7761 email: aa-irb@unc.edu

I appreciate your input. Please contact me regarding any concerns, or if you have further questions.

Thank you,

Amy Richard

APPENDIX C.

Demographic Questionnaire

1. Age:

2. Sex:

Female

Male

3. Are you employed?

Yes

No

If yes, what is your occupation or in what industry do you work?\_\_\_\_\_

4. Highest education level completed:

Less than High School

High school or GED

2-year degree or associate degree

4-year college or university

Master's degree

Ph.D.

APPENDIX D.

Library Fiction User Interview Questionnaire (Page 1 of 2)

1. Have you used the library before the separation of the fiction collection? Is it an improvement? If you are new to the library, is this system of organization better than your previous library?
  
2. Generally speaking, when you enter the fiction room, do you have at least one specific title in mind that you want to find? If yes, do you normally find it on the shelf?
  
3. Generally speaking, when you enter the fiction room, do you have at least one specific author that you look for when choosing a book?
  
4. In general, when looking for a specific book and unable to find that book, do you browse for other selections?
  
5. What methods do you use to find books? (Suggestions: browsing, reviews, advice from friends or the librarian only read certain authors, etc.)
  
6. If you like to browse for fiction reading materials, what type of books do you read?
  - adventure
  - fantasy
  - general fiction
  - horror
  - mystery
  - romance
  - science fiction
  - short stories
  - western
  - other \_\_\_\_\_

**Library Fiction User Interview Questionnaire (Page 2 of 2)**

7. When browsing for a book to read, what makes you ultimately choose that book?

- Author
- Blurb
- Catchy title
- Genre (types of book, i.e. romance, western, fantasy, etc.)
- Interesting book cover
- It's on the new fiction shelf
- Library displays
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

8. In the areas that you like to read, are you generally satisfied with the books in that genre at the Durham County Public Library? Ex. Are all the books in the horror section to your liking?

9. How often do you visit this library?

Additional Comments:

APPENDIX. E.

**Adult Resources Librarian Interview Questionnaire**

1. What kind of preliminary research did you conduct before beginning the genre separation project?
2. What were the expected outcomes from the project?
3. Did you administer a patron survey accessing interest before the decision to begin the project was made?
4. How did you decide there was a need for the project?
5. How did you determine what genre categories to use and what to include in each?
6. In your opinion, has patron browsing increased?
7. Do patrons seem to be satisfied with their fiction choices more or less?
8. What comments (positive or negative) have you received from patrons regarding the separation?
9. Has circulation increased? In what areas? Why do you think circulation has increased or not increased?

Additional comments you would like to make: