Learning From Leisure Reading

A Study of Adult Public Library Patrons

Using a combination of surveys and interviews, this research project explores the relationship between educational and recreational outcomes of leisure reading, the importance of learning to the leisure reading experience, the role of learning in leisure reading, and the educational outcomes reported by leisure readers. Interview transcripts and survey data were used to create a model of four categories of educational outcomes from leisure reading: (1) people and relationships; (2) countries, cultures, and history; (3) life enrichment; and (4) different perspectives. The article concludes with recommendations for integrating these results into practice and suggestions for further research.

Jessica E. Moyer

Jessica E. Moyer *is Reference and Instruction Librarian, Milne Library, State University of New York College at Oneonta.* *A summary of the research was presented at the 2005 ALA Annual Conference in Chicago at the Library Research Roundtable's 4 Star Research Forum on June 26, 2005. This research was also submitted as the written report for a Certificate in Advanced Studies Project, in partial fulfillment of the degree of Certificate of Advanced Studies, Graduate School of Library and Information Science, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, December 6, 2004. Submitted for review July 21, 2005 and accepted for publication February 9, 2006.*

Reference & User Services Quarterly, vol. 46, no. 4, pp. 66–79
© 2007 American Library Association. All rights reserved.
Permission granted to reproduce for nonprofit, educational use.

In 2000, Catherine Sheldrick Ross published, "Finding without Seeking: What Readers Say about the Role of Pleasure Reading as a Source of Information."[1] This was one of several articles that resulted from her multiyear study of readers.[2] Over the course of several years, Ross and her students interviewed 181 readers about leisure reading. "Finding without Seeking" focuses on one facet of her interviews. Ross and her students asked subjects to tell them about the one book that had the greatest meaning for them. As part of the larger discussion of their great book, nearly all of the subjects reported some educational outcomes of fiction reading, the most common being awakenings, new perspectives, and the expansion of possibilities. The purpose of this study is to look further at what, in terms of education, readers get from leisure reading materials, by asking the readers themselves about educational outcomes during leisure reading experiences. For the sake of clarity and inclusivity, in this article the term leisure reading will be used to refer to all types of recreational or pleasure reading, including fiction and nonfiction.

Based on Ross's research and anecdotal evidence about educational outcomes from leisure reading, this project proposes to investigate the relationship between educational and recreational outcomes of leisure reading, using a survey instrument and follow-up interviews. The hypotheses are that there will be a relationship between educational and recreational outcomes for leisure readers and that educational outcomes will be an important aspect of the leisure reading experience. It is also thought that there will be more than one type of educational outcome and that the different outcomes will have varying levels of importance for individual readers.

One of the ideas investigated in this project was the concept of a single book or reading experi-

ence serving multiple purposes. The specific area of interest was books that are traditionally marketed as leisure reading materials, on the theory that while a book may serve the primary purpose of leisure reading material, it may also serve a secondary purpose as an educational tool. And for some people, this secondary role may be of great importance. This is important for librarians to understand because in order to be able to suggest leisure reading materials, they need to understand the potential multiple purposes that a leisure book may serve. Like many aspects of reading, these secondary purposes will vary among readers because readers are individuals and interact with the text in their own unique ways. It is hoped that this research will provide a broad understanding of the educational purpose served by leisure reading materials, specifically regarding the different types of educational outcomes, and in this way help librarians to better understand and serve the readers who form one of the most important user groups of libraries.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Fiction Readers and Readers' Advisory Services

In 1996, Yu and O'Brien published a literature review, "Domain of Adult Fiction Librarianship" in *Advances in Librarianship*.[3] Their thorough and lengthy article covered all the major areas of fiction librarianship, including a definition of fiction librarianship, fiction as a type of library material, fiction acquisition, fiction processing, fiction representation and retrieval, fiction promotion, readers' advisory (RA) services (reader development), collection management, and most importantly for this article, a section on understanding fiction readers. Their review covered research published before 1996 in North America, Australia, and Europe. In 2005, a new review of the literature by the author was published in *Reference & User Services Quarterly,* and a pre-publication copy was used in the writing of this literature review.[4] The review examined articles, books, theses, and reports published from 1995 to June 2003 in the areas of cataloging and classification of fiction books, browsing and selection of fiction by readers, user studies of readers, and adult RA services.

In Yu and O'Brien's review, most of the studies cited were done in Europe or Australia, where there are long traditions of book and reading research. Since 1995, more research has been done in North America, but the author's review, for which international research comprised a substantial aspect, found that this was still a thriving area in Europe and Australia. In the last few years, Shearer, Ross, Chelton, and Saricks have been some of the people important to the development of fiction studies in North America. Outside of the many journal articles listed in the author's review, two books that are important to highlight are *Guiding the Reader to the Next Book* and the *Readers' Advisor's Companion*.[5] Both collections are excellent resources and should be perused by any librarian or library science student who has an interest in learning more about fiction readers. As noted earlier, Ross's recent research on readers is also summed up in the *Readers' Advisor's Companion*.[6]

A recent publication that is not included in either of the prior literature reviews but is worth mentioning is *Reading and the Reference Librarian* by Dilevko and Gottlieb.[7] While most of the book studies academic librarians, the results are still very relevant to RA services. One of the tenets of RA is that to be a good advisor one must be well read in a variety of genres of popular fiction, as this is the most successful way to suggest titles to patrons. Dilevko and Gottlieb conclude that those who consider themselves the best librarians, regardless whether they are public or academic, are well read. Most librarians who read regularly and from a variety of sources not only feel that they are more successful in their jobs, but feel that without reading, they would not be able to do their jobs well. Interestingly, the type of reading material did not matter; librarians who read popular fiction responded in much the same way as librarians who read other types of materials, such as newspapers, popular culture magazines, or Web pages. If it is so important that librarians read, then it is even more important that they understand the role that leisure reading plays in their lives and the lives of their patrons.

One of the most important results of the literature reviews by Yu, O'Brien, and the author is their conclusion that outside of Ross's research, there is very little theory, or theoretically based studies, about leisure readers, or studies that work directly with the readers themselves; without this research it is difficult to gain a complete understanding of leisure readers. There are two reasons that librarians need to better understand leisure readers. First, leisure readers are an important subset of the population, and as such it would behoove librarians to have a better understanding of them and their information needs. Secondly, leisure readers make up a large portion of the public library clientele. Fiction circulation in the participating libraries made up more than 50 percent of adult print circulation and up to 20 percent of all adult

circulation. Audio-visual materials, which include books on tape, made up as much as 53 percent of adult circulation.[8] In order for librarians to best serve these readers they need to understand them. This is of special concern to libraries and librarians who provide RA services. Without a more complete understanding of how readers find new books, how they decide what to read, and most importantly, what they get out of the reading experience, it will be difficult to serve these important and numerous patrons as well as patrons who ask for more traditional reference assistance.

May, Olesh, and Miltenburg recently completed one of the first studies of RA services by having students ask the same question at several libraries—a traditional method of studying reference services. The most disturbing result of this already saddening study is that the RA transactions were rarely treated with the respect and professionalism that are seen as mandatory for other reference transactions.[9]

Incidental Information Acquisition

There are a limited number of theories related to education and leisure reading, and most of those that relate to this study actually come from studies of information-seeking behavior, especially studies of everyday life information. The most applicable concept for this research is incidental information acquisition, which is a subset of uses and gratification.[10] Incidental information acquisition is not a commonly used concept and there are few studies that utilize it. Two of the most recent studies that do are Ross's previously mentioned article, "Finding without Seeking," and a 1998 article by Williamson, which uses the concept to explain the information behavior of the elderly and expand on this idea of information seeking.[11] Both articles are included in the 2002 review of information-seeking models in Case's book, *Looking for Information*.[12]

Because incidental information acquisition is a relatively new concept and not as well studied as some, there is no single definitive definition. Instead, researchers who use it define it in their own ways. Williamson defines incidental information acquisition as follows: "[it] is seen as synonymous with 'accidental information discovery,' suggesting that people find information unexpectedly as they engage in other activities. Some of this information they did not know they needed until they heard or read it."[13] Ross defines it as a non-purposive activity and says, "We know, in fact, that in the course of every day living people constantly encounter and use textual information without ever posing a formal request to an information system."[14] Case includes incidental information acquisition as part of the larger information-seeking idea of uses and gratification, a theory that has been used by mass media researchers.[15] He defines it as picking up information that may become useful later in life, during an activity that is not exclusively for information seeking, and most often the activity (reading) has an ulterior motive that has nothing to do with information seeking. Case also raises the concern of knowing when the information seeking goes from conscious to unconscious, or from incidental to purposive, an issue also raised by Williamson.[16]

In this study, incidental information acquisition is defined as information that is gathered from leisure reading material that at some point becomes useful to the reader and results in some type of learning experience (educational outcome). The gathering of information is not done purposefully nor do the readers generally have an immediate need for the information; instead they see it as something that may become useful to them at some later point in life. The concerns raised by Case and Williamson about when the information seeking moves from accidental to purposeful were addressed by the study design, as readers were only asked about leisure reading experiences. In this way, they talked about an activity with a specific purpose (leisure reading) the primary goal of which was not purposeful information seeking. This study continues to explore the relationships between leisure reading and information seeking, which Case sees as inextricably linked.[17]

Outcome Measures

In addition to the concept of incidental information acquisition, the author also chose to study educational experiences of leisure reading using the concept of outcome measures. Outcome measures are a way of measuring what users get out of a service or experience. In terms of libraries, this can mean measuring what users get out of a particular library service or collection, such as a user's satisfaction with and use of the online catalog after being taught how to use it. Outcome measures are fairly new to the field of library and information science (LIS). In October 2004, a search of the Library Literature and Information database found that twenty-two of twenty-four articles on outcome measures were published in the last ten years, and of the twenty-two, eighteen were published since 2000, a sign of the increasing importance of outcome measures to library science. One of the most important published works in this area is *Perspec-*

tives in Outcome Based Evaluation for Libraries and Museums, from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS).[18] This valuable guide has an introduction that outlines the concept of outcome measures and gives a brief history of the uses of outcome measures in museums and libraries. The second chapter of the report, "Documenting the Difference: Demonstrating the Value of Libraries through Outcomes Measurement," is devoted to the use of outcome measures in libraries.[19] Finally, this guide includes an excellent bibliography and reference list, with resources from within LIS and from other fields. Many of the listed resources are available online, making them easy to access for anyone who is interested in learning more about the use of outcome measures.

Outcome measures have been used to some extent in public libraries, but are used more often in academic libraries, often to study student outcomes of library services or, increasingly, as part of the accreditation process.[20] Public libraries are not accredited and the most well-known ranking system for public libraries, the Hennen rankings, are primarily based on output measures, such as circulation per capita.[21] However, as is demonstrated in this study, outcome measures can provide valuable information about library services from the users' perspective. Knowing what users get out of a library service, such as a home delivery service for elderly patrons, or story time for children, can be very valuable when library services need to be justified to the administration or to the tax-paying public. The results can also be used to better understand library patrons and their expectations and experiences of library services, so that services can be improved to better meet the needs of library users.

METHOD

This research project consisted of two parts, a short survey and follow-up interviews with a select group of subjects.[22] The survey consisted of fourteen items that were evenly split between recreational and educational items, and three additional items related to gender, type of reader, and preferred genre of reading material, as well as an open-ended comments item. Surveys were distributed at two medium-sized public libraries, each with a diverse patron base, serving towns of approximately 37,000 and 65,000 people respectively, as well as the local university community. Both are located in the Midwest, more than one hundred miles from any major city. Surveys, along with recruiting posters and consent letters, were placed at the circulation and reference desks, with envelopes for completed surveys kept by staff behind the desks. Patrons were encouraged to fill out and return surveys at the service desks. Sixty-two surveys were completed and returned over a ten-day period.

The survey items were developed by the author. Ideas for some of the items were drawn from Ross's study, "Finding without Seeking," using the five categories created from her interview data. After substantial revision, the items were initially validated in an informal pilot test. A draft of the survey was distributed to a group of LIS students who were also leisure readers, and they filled out the survey in the presence of the researcher. Comments and feedback were encouraged and oral and written feedback on many of the items was received. This feedback was then used for a final revision of both the survey items and design. This final version of the survey was then distributed to the public libraries as described previously.

After surveys were completed and collected from the libraries, survey results and items were validated using a statistical technique known as factor analysis. Factor analysis is a data reduction technique that can also be used for validating survey instruments. As part of the validation, factor analysis can be used to determine how many factors are present in an instrument.[23] In this case it was used to determine whether or not the data had just the two factors of educational and recreational (reading), and eliminated the possibility of a third, unknown factor. Factor analysis also can be used to determine how well each item "loads" onto each factor. In this case it was used to determine whether the items that were intended to be part of the educational or recreational factor were actually a part of the intended factor. Within factor analysis there are two methods for interpreting the results, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). CFA was used because "CFA is typically a more useful way of testing whether a given test's patterns of association with other variables correspond to what is expected. In CFA hypotheses are investigated by imposing restraints on certain factors so as to define more precisely the expected nature of the association between variables."[24] In this study it was more beneficial to have a better sense of the exact relationship between the variables of recreation and education based on the hypothesis of a definite relationship between the two.

The last item on the survey asked subjects if they were willing to participate further in the research project. More than fifteen respondents volunteered to do so. Subjects initially were selected by their ability to be contacted. E-mails

were sent to all who left legible e-mail addresses, asking if they still wished to participate. Several left e-mail addresses that were illegible or were no longer working, and many never replied to the initial e-mail. Eight responded by e-mail, and interviews were scheduled with those who were able to participate within the time frame. Some of the respondents were unable to participate during this time period, and thus could not schedule meeting times. Six subjects agreed to be interviewed, but only four completed the interview process. Subjects who did not leave an e-mail address were contacted by phone, and three subjects were successfully contacted. All three agreed to be interviewed and completed the interview process.

Altogether seven subjects completed the interview process. Interviews were conducted at the public libraries, places that were both familiar and comfortable for the participants and author. Interviews took approximately thirty minutes and focused on the responses to the survey questions, further exploration of the educational and recreational outcomes, and the subjects' individual reading experiences. All interviews were taped and transcribed. Transcripts were coded for educational and recreational factors, as well as for genres and other reading themes, such as whether the interviewee came from a family of readers, and whether they had been reading since childhood.

SURVEY RESULTS

More than two hundred surveys were available at the reference and circulation desks of the two participating libraries for ten days in April of 2004. At the end of the collection period, sixty-two surveys had been completed and returned. Table 1 includes the text of items one through fourteen from the survey and a breakdown of the response data by item.[25]

Factor Analysis of Items 1–14

The author and a consultant worked together to code the data into a computer database, which in turn permitted analysis to be performed by means of a computer program. To confirm the supposition that these items measured a general factor, CFA was performed on items one through fourteen of the survey instrument (for a listing of all survey items and responses, see table 1) by means of the CONFA computer program.[26] Subsequent CFAs were conducted to determine if a better fit might be achieved with a two-factor model. In both cases optimal model fit was achieved by dropping items with low factor loadings. Model fit was calculated for both the single- and two-factor analyses using Tanaka's goodness of fit index (GFI) as calculated by the CONFA program. Reliability of the factors in each of the models was assessed by means of McDonald's omega.[27]

Confirmatory factor analysis of items 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, and 14 yields a single factor model with a good fit (GFI .97) and high reliability (McDonald's omega = .91). Confirmatory factor analysis of the same nine items according to a two-factor model also yields a good fit (GFI .97). Reliability of factor 1, consisting of items 2, 4, 8, 10, 12, and 14, is good (McDonald's omega = .89). Factor two, consisting of items 3, 7, and 11, also has high reliability (McDonald's omega = .94). Conceptually, the two-factor model makes sense. Items 2, 4, 8, 10, 12, and 14 can be understood to be asking respondents about their perceptions of educational outcomes from leisure reading, while items 3, 7, and 11 can be thought of as asking respondents about recreational outcomes from leisure reading.

The substantial correlation between the two factors ($r = .51$) is a plausible value for the relationship between the two factors and lends additional support to the validity of the two-factor model. This result suggests that respondents perceive a relationship between educational and recreational outcomes of leisure reading. This was interpreted to mean that readers value both educational and recreational aspects of leisure reading. However, the correlation is not perfect; the leisure reading experience is about more than just education. This supports the hypothesis that while there is a relationship between education and recreation, readers are not choosing to read solely for the purpose of learning while reading, but that learning is often an unexpected benefit of leisure, albeit one that can be very important to the reader.

First steps toward developing an instrument to measure educational and recreational outcomes of leisure reading by adult public library patrons have been moderately successful. Its goodness of fit for the single- and two-factor models and its reliability measures are reasonable for a nine-item measure that is still under development. Clearly it would be logical to improve the instrument by writing additional items, a task that is now made easier given the knowledge gained from these initial analyses.

Results from Individual Items

Results from the individual survey items were also calculated.[28] One of the most interesting results is the high percentage (87 percent) of respondents

who agreed with the statement, "fiction reading serves as an escape." Because of this high number, it can also be said that even the people who see fiction as an escape also feel that they learn from fiction reading, based on the responses to item 2, with 81 percent agreeing that they learned a lot by reading fiction.

In regards to specific types of learning, 77 percent of respondents felt that they had a better understanding of other countries and cultures. This was validated in the interviews where learning about another time or place was the most commonly mentioned educational outcome. In "Finding without Seeking," Ross's results emphasized learning about other people and self-growth through reading. Interestingly, in the survey responses, only 50 percent of respondents felt that reading better prepared them to understand and solve problems, although 71 percent felt that reading helped them better understand their world. This was also a theme of the interviews (see the section on interview results for a further discussion of this type of educational outcome). This difference can most likely be attributed to the sample size and the fact that Ross's readers were selected by interviewers and were not necessarily public library patrons, as was the case for all the respondents in this survey. If this survey were to be repeated it would be important to look further at these specific types of learning, with more items addressing how leisure reading helps readers better understand others and gain new insights and perspectives, as well as how readers feel they grow and change through fiction reading, as these areas were emphasized by Ross's respondents and were also important to the subjects of this study.

Table 1. Educational and Recreational Outcomes (n = 62, * n = 60)

Items	% SA/A	% Neutral	% D/SD
1. Fiction reading serves as an escape	87	6	7
2. I learn a lot by reading fiction	81	10	10
3. Reading fiction is fun	98	2	0
4. Fiction reading helps me understand my world	71	24	5
5. I mainly read fiction to pass time	50	18	31
6. Reading fiction can be tedious	13	16	71
7. Fiction reading is a pleasant hobby	95	5	0
8. After reading fiction I feel more prepared to understand and solve problems	50	39	11
9. Fiction reading is purely for entertainment	29	23	49
10. Reading fiction has little educational value	5	8	87
11. Reading fiction is an enjoyable part of my life*	96	3	0
12. After reading fiction I feel I have a better understanding of other countries and cultures	77	23	0
13. Nothing I read in fiction relates to real life	0	8	92
14. I often find myself relating something I have read in a fiction book to something I hear or see in the news	67	23	10

Note: Abbreviations used in reporting the survey results are as follows: SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, N = Neutral, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree.

Genres

Among the readers surveyed, the most popular genres were literary, historical fiction, mystery, and spy/thriller/adventure, all ranked as well liked by more than 60 percent of respondents (see table 2).[29] Religious and inspirational fiction was the least popular, ranking as well liked by less than 12 percent and disliked by more than 60 percent of respondents. Romance was a close second, with 59 percent disliking romance, although 23 percent of respondents gave romance a positive ranking. Due to the small sample size and the limitation of surveying only two libraries, it is likely that these results say more about the likes and dislikes of two specific communities. In this case, both communities have higher-than-average education levels due to the presence of a large local university, with both libraries serving members of the university community. Anecdotal evidence also suggests mysteries and thrillers as the preferred genre of academics, and mysteries are one of the most popular collections in the participating libraries. Literary fiction scored remarkably high (67 percent), well above more common popular fiction genres such as romance, fantasy, and science fiction, and this is also likely due to the university community or the small sample size. The popularity of literary fiction also may be due to the self-report nature of the survey with respondents feeling like they should report that they liked literary fiction.

Within the interviews, historical fiction was

Table 2. Genre Preferences (n varies as noted)

Genre	n =	% Well Liked	% Neutral	% Disliked
Romance	53	23	19	59
Religious/Inspirational	51	12	27	61
Literary	51	67	24	10
Science Fiction	52	52	19	29
Fantasy	52	40	27	33
Historical	53	60	26	13
Mystery	52	65	21	14
Spy/Thriller/Adventure	50	66	18	16

most commonly mentioned, closely followed by mysteries. This correlates well with the survey data, as mysteries were also very popular with survey respondents (see table 2). The high number of responses for historical fiction likely is related to the fact that the most common educational outcome mentioned by interview subjects was learning about another time or place, both of which are common parts of historical fiction. Historical fiction is also often thought of as part of other genres, as mysteries, thrillers, inspirational, and romances can be set historically. Therefore, while patrons may not have given historical a very high ranking as a genre of its own, based on the titles mentioned in the interviews, it can be deduced that historical fiction is fairly popular with patrons, though most prefer it mixed in with other genres such as romance or inspirational. A current trend in popular fiction is books that cross genres, or integrate more than one genre in a single work. A good example is the popular Outlander series by Diana Gabaldon, which integrates romance, historical fiction, and the fantasy element of time travel.

Gender

Twenty-seven percent of survey respondents were male and 73 percent were female. This is not a surprising breakdown, with evidence suggesting that women are more likely to read fiction and more likely to pursue leisure reading as a hobby.[30] The fewer number of male respondents was also reflected in the interviews, where only one interview was successfully completed with a male subject. When compared with genres, these interviews produce interesting results. Romance and religious fiction are often thought of as women's stories, while science fiction, fantasy, and spy/thrillers as more likely to be read by men. Mysteries, historical fiction, and literary fiction generally are considered gender neutral, though none of these groupings are mutually exclusive or scientifically proven. Based on the results of the female survey respondents, it is interesting that romance and religious fiction were not very popular. But perhaps that can be explained by the high proportion that picked the gender-neutral historical fiction and mystery stories.

Frequency

Readers were also asked to identify themselves by type of reader: (1) heavy reader, reading more than three books a week; (2) frequent reader, reading one to three books a week; (3) moderate reader, reading two to four books a month; and (4) occasional reader, reading less than two books a month.[31] This was one of the most obviously successful parts of the survey instrument, with a good distribution of types of readers: 28 percent considered themselves heavy readers, 33 percent frequent readers, 27 percent as moderate readers, and 12 percent as occasional readers. Since this survey was conducted at the public library, with the recruitment materials asking for readers to participate, and most of the surveys were completed at the reference desk, the range of readers is satisfying and is helpful in supporting the rest of the data. It shows that the results come from all types of readers, whereas Ross's results come only from self-identified "heavy readers."[32]

INTERVIEW RESULTS

Several themes emerged from the interviews. One of the most common was subjects reporting that they had read since childhood, had come from a family of readers, had always read, or couldn't remember a time when they were not readers. Only one respondent did not report reading fiction since childhood. She reported that she had always considered herself a reader, but for most of her adult life she read mostly nonfiction, believing fiction to have little value, educational or otherwise. However, that all changed when she began working in a public library. Influenced by patrons and coworkers, she began reading fiction and in the six years since has become a dedicated reader and advocate of fiction reading. Having a leisure reading background and identifying themselves as readers appeared to be very important to the subjects, as none were asked about childhood reading experiences and yet everyone discussed it in their

responses.[33] This gives even more support to the idea that for adults to be leisure readers, they must start reading at a young age. A full 100 percent of the interview sample stated that reading was an important part of their life since childhood; many also said that libraries played an important role in their lives, both as children and as adults. So in order to get a lot of adult leisure reading patrons, it is necessary to start with the children, once again showing the essential importance of public library children's services.

When asked if they saw a connection between leisure reading and learning, all respondents replied with an enthusiastic "yes!" All felt that leisure reading played an important educational role in their lives and thought that it could also be an important educational tool for other people. This question was asked at the end of the interview, after subjects had talked about their responses to the survey questions and identified some examples of learning from their own reading.

Another theme was that learning while reading fiction was much easier and much more fun than more traditional types of learning. All participants had some college education, with most having a bachelor's degree. One woman said, "It's an easy way to learn a lot. You can learn a lot while enjoying yourself. I couldn't read a textbook to save myself, even while I was in school. But if I am really interested in a subject I can get through any fiction book." Other subjects also emphasized the enjoyment aspect of learning through fiction reading. In response to the question: what makes fiction reading fun for you? One respondent states:

> I like learning, it's an enjoyable way to learn. When I read a book that takes place in another country or another time, I learn about that country, I learn about that time, and yet there is a really good story that goes with it so it's not like I'm just reading some dry nonfiction-information kind of thing. . . . It's just such a fun way to learn without having to dig into a book that's just dry facts.

Lack of TV watching was also important. Five of the seven respondents emphasized their lack of TV watching, with one saying "TV is boring, you just can't get engaged with TV in the same way that you can with a book. . . . It's pretty simplistic and unsatisfying." Later the same subject goes on to say: "We actually have our TV in the basement, it's just too much bother to . . . go down there and watch TV. . . and when we do it's usually movies anyway." The only type of TV watching mentioned by any of the subjects was educational programming, which was mentioned by one subject who talked about how educational programming sometimes leads her into new areas of reading. This same subject later stated: "I don't watch [much] television, I prefer books to television." So for even those who do watch TV, it's done in a very limited way, and for some it's done for learning, not leisure. One hypothesis that could be formulated from these results is that people who read, and are dedicated to reading as a leisure activity, are not big TV watchers and may actively dislike watching television programs. It could also be said that people who do watch a lot of TV are less likely to pursue reading as a regular leisure activity.

Regarding the specific types of things subjects learned through fiction (educational outcomes), responses were divided into eleven types of responses: people and relationships; other countries, cultures, history; enriches life, livelier mind, engages and sparks imagination; faith and religion; personal problems and therapy; news and current events; different perspectives, challenges assumptions, makes you think in a different way; makes you want to learn more, leads to other reading (sometimes nonfiction); incidental information acquisition; vocabulary; becoming a better reader or writer; and just generally increasing chances of success in life.

The most often-discussed outcome was learning about other times, places, or cultures, receiving seventy-seven total mentions by all seven interviewees. This was the only category to receive a mention by everyone and had twice the number of mentions as the next closest outcome. The next most common outcomes were learning about other people and relationships, and learning about and dealing with personal problems, with thirty-three and twenty-eight mentions, respectively. This corresponds with Ross's study where she found that readers felt that they learned a lot about themselves and others from their reading.[34]

None of the other categories received more than twenty-five mentions. Learning about other countries, cultures, and times was the only category mentioned by all subjects, which makes sense, given it is also the most common. Four of the other categories—people and relationships; personal problems; news; and perspectives and challenges—were all mentioned by six of the seven interview subjects. While subjects were asked about news, people and relationships, and personal problems, no questions directly asked about new perspectives and challenges from reading.

It is always interesting when a majority of respondents volunteer information about a subject that is not asked about by the interviewer. In this

case, subjects talked frequently about how reading helped them learn about other perspectives, challenged their own ideas and assumptions, and made them think in a different way. Not surprisingly, this was sometimes related to responses to category 2 (other cultures, places, times) but not always. Interestingly, subjects used a variety of books to illustrate this concept of changing or challenging perspectives. Titles mentioned include Tony Hillerman's mystery novels, a variety of historical romance novels, including ones by Stephanie Laurens, a series of Christian novels about a family of orphans and their lives and careers, *Hawaii* by James Michener, *Shogun* by James Clavell, *Memoirs of a Geisha* by Arthur Golden, and a series of contemporary novels set in Upper Michigan. Seemingly any book that is different from the reader's daily life, whether it be another world in a science fiction or fantasy novel, or another time and place in a historical fiction novel, another part of the United States in a contemporary novel, or even just about people who have lived lives different from their own, causes this phenomenon. As long as the characters and settings were different from those in their daily lives, subjects felt that they learned about new perspectives and ideas, and their own ideas and perspectives were challenged, which many reported as leading to personal growth and development.

This also echoed Ross's study; her first category of responses is "Awakening/new perspectives/enlargement of possibilities."[35] For Ross's subjects this was the most commonly occurring result, and was cited by more than one-third of all her respondents. The other result from Ross' study that was very important to her readers was learning about themselves and developing an identity from reading. This was not often mentioned by the subjects in this study. One of the most likely reasons for it is that in this study the author talked to readers about any fiction reading experience, while Ross focused her interviews on talking with people about the "great book." It is likely that if readers had been asked to talk about a book that had a big impact on them, these results would have included similar responses, but because of the focus on the leisure reading experience as a whole, this was not an emphasized part of the responses. It also may be that the readers did not see this aspect as one that was particularly educational. The other important difference is that in this study all types of readers were surveyed and interviewed, from readers who read less than two books a month to those that read more than three books a week. Ross only studied heavy readers, which may also account for some of the differences in the results.

CONCLUSIONS

Types of Educational Outcomes

Based on the results of the factor analysis of items one through fourteen of the survey and the eleven response categories drawn from the interview data, four educational outcome categories have been created for purposes of analysis of the results. These four categories will be most useful in applying the results of this research and in future versions of the survey as additional items can be created based on the four categories.

- **People and relationships—**This category was important to many of the respondents. It includes learning more about yourself and others; learning how to understand, empathize, and interact with other people; gaining insight into your and others' relationships; and generally helping with personal problems. It also includes learning more about your own faith/religion as well as that of other people. People who were concerned with this type of outcome generally responded positively to items 2, 4, and 8. (See appendix for survey items.) These readers also tended to like contemporary fiction and some also enjoyed Christian fiction, because it helped them understand others' struggles with their faith, and because of the emphasis on families in many of the titles. This was one category that did not relate to any specific genres, though readers of contemporary fiction often mentioned this area. The results showed that readers could learn about themselves and others from any type of reading experience.
- **Other countries, cultures, and time periods—**This category included learning about other countries, other cultures (either in the United States or another country), and learning about other time periods (historical works set in any part of the world). It also included relating what had been read to news stories. One example is a woman who had read the Flashman books, talked about how she thought about them when she heard stories about Afghanistan (book 1 of the series is mostly set in Afghanistan) and how it helped her understand what was happening in Afghanistan today. This was also a popular outcome, possibly because it was one that respondents could easily think of when asked for examples. Historical fiction was the genre most associated with this area, although many other genres, especially romance, can also be set in historical times. Titles mentioned were

the previously mentioned Flashman series by George McDonald Fraser, for learning about Victorian England and the various parts of the British Empire; Tony Hillerman's mysteries, for learning about the Four Corners area in the modern day United States; *The No. 1 Ladies Detective Agency* by Alexander McCall Smith, for learning about Africa; and any of the historical epics by James Michener, for learning about the history and people of different parts of the world. This category was related to survey items 12 and 14. (See appendix for survey items.)

- **Enriches life—**This category encompasses the more abstract aspects of the reading experience and was largely created from the interview results. These include reading that leads to having a livelier mind, increases "literary IQ," sparks the imagination, makes you want to learn more about something you have read, leads to other reading, and just increases learning in general. This category is almost entirely from the interview portion, as respondents talked in general about the value of reading for them. Many talked about reading a fiction book that then led them to read nonfiction books in a similar subject. One woman, after reading the Laura Ingalls Wilder series, went on to read biographies and journals of other pioneer women. Others talked about how they felt that reading just made them smarter, better people. A common example was increasing vocabulary and increasing familiarity with certain words, simply by reading them over and over in different books. They felt that reading was essential for personal growth and development, and that, without reading, their minds would stagnate. Another subject felt that reading was necessary to her development as a writer. She felt that without reading regularly (and what she read did not matter a great deal), she could never really become a good writer; she had to know what other people were writing in order to improve her own writing. Overall, reading, even reading books that could be categorized as "fluff" or "escapist," has some educational value and fills readers' needs for lifelong learning and education. Readers who were concerned with this category also responded positively to survey item 2. (See appendix for survey items.)
- **Different perspectives—**This was a frequently mentioned category that crossed through all respondents and all genres. It includes learning about different perspectives, whether it be to better understand people of a different race, class, or culture within the United States, or getting a different perspective on a political problem or world event by reading about people who were involved in it. Also mentioned among responses in this category was having assumptions challenged, being moved to think in a different way, or think about something that respondents had not thought about in the past. This category is closely related to both people and other countries and cultures. Many of the examples given from those categories also crossed over into this area, but it is a separate category because it was one that was repeatedly emphasized by all respondents. This was also a category used by Ross in "Finding without Seeking," one that seems to be of universal importance to readers. This was a category in which it was not always easy for subjects to identify a specific example, but one that they came back to again and again. For example, one reader said that reading *The No. 1 Ladies Detective Agency* made her think differently about modern Africa and the people who live there. Respondents who were concerned about this area responded positively to items 2, 4, 8, and 12. (See appendix for survey items.)

Implications for Library Services and Areas for Future Research

As has been demonstrated, readers value educational outcomes from a leisure reading experience, even though the educational outcome is not likely to be the primary reason for choosing a particular book. However it was important enough to the respondents in this study to have a fairly large influence on their reading experience. In terms of RA services these results should have an impact on the way librarians interact with readers.

While educational outcomes are one of the many factors that influence leisure reading, these outcomes were important enough to the respondents to warrant consideration by readers' advisors. With educational outcomes most often serving a secondary role in the leisure reading experience, readers may not be able to tell staff about the importance of educational outcomes for their reading, but it is still a factor that needs to be taken into account. One way in which this could be integrated into RA work would be to use the survey instrument or even some of the items on it to get readers to start talking about the importance of educational outcomes and the specific types of educational outcomes that matter to them. For example, one interviewee said that she never liked to read contemporary fiction because she did not like reading about other people's problems; she worked at United Way and it was too much

like her daily life. However, she did really like to read books about Africa and books that were set in Africa, because it is a part of the world that she was interested in and liked to learn more about. This could be revealed by asking the reader about item 12 or item 14. Another subject liked to read books that were about people that had survived abuse or illness because these were experiences that she and friends of hers had also had. She liked to learn more about these experiences so she could better relate to and understand herself, her friends, and her family. This information could be gathered by asking readers about items 4 or 8.[36] As has been said many times before, the more that librarians can talk with patrons about what they like, the better they can suggest reading materials. Both the survey items and the four categories of educational outcomes should be helpful for readers' advisors as they attempt to understand the role that educational outcomes play in each reader's leisure reading experience.

While the suggestions above would work best for one-on-one RA transactions, the importance of educational outcomes also could be taken into account for other types of RA situations. Staff conducting book talks or writing reviews could highlight some of the educational outcomes in specific books. New read-alike lists could be created based on different outcomes. A list about other countries and cultures could range from some of the more traditional historical fiction, to modern works such as those by Amy Tan or Alexander McCall Smith, or romances set in exotic locations. Most importantly, librarians need to remember that the more they can talk to their readers and learn about them, the better they can suggest titles. Hopefully this research on educational outcomes will open up a new avenue for discussion between readers and advisors.

As with any research project, this one generated many possible areas for future research. Areas that would be especially important to conduct follow-up research in would be the relationship between leisure reading and the consumption of other popular media. All of the interview subjects emphasized their distaste for most TV programs. A few watched educational programs (the History Channel and A&E were both mentioned), and a few listened to National Public Radio. Newspaper reading was not done regularly by all respondents; it would be interesting to study the relationship between leisure book reading and other types of reading, especially as the reading of Internet sites such as Salon.com or any of the many blogs, increases in popularity.

The other interesting result that came out of the interview process (which deserves further study) is the connection between reading and visiting the library as a child and being a leisure reader as an adult. It would be especially interesting to look at leisure readers who did not identify themselves as library users, such as romance readers who only get their books from grocery stores or by mail order. It would be wonderful to see this research done as a collaboration of youth services librarians, young adult librarians, and adult librarians to look at library use and leisure reading over time. One interesting aspect of this particular type of research would be to look at the way leisure reading is valued socially at different stages in subjects' lives. Is leisure reading as highly valued and promoted for adults as for children? When and why does it change? How does that influence an adult's decisions to read as a leisure time activity?

Finally, more study is needed on the categories of educational outcomes that were developed from this research. Since this sample was by necessity small and geographically limited, it would be worthwhile to repeat the survey and interview process with a wider variety of libraries and patrons, possibly even studying readers who do not frequent libraries, although these readers could be difficult to identify. With the creation and addition of some survey items, the survey could be repeated easily in a number of libraries to see if the educational outcome categories identified by the subjects were also those that mattered to readers in other libraries. With these results it would be easier to generalize results to all leisure readers, and increase our knowledge and understanding of leisure readers and adult public library patrons.

Acknowledgments: The author would like to acknowledgement the assistance of Mary Wilkes Towner, Linda Smith, and Terry Weech for valuable comments and feedback, as well as guidance in the development of this project. The author also would like to thank Christopher Moyer for his assistance with the statistical analyses.

References and Notes

1. Catherine Sheldrick Ross, "Finding without Seeking: What Readers Say about the Role of Pleasure Reading as a Source of Information," *Australasian Public Libraries and Information Services* 13, no. 2 (June 2000): 72–80.
2. An excellent summation of her research can be found in *The Readers' Advisor's Companion*: Catherine Sheldrick Ross, "What We Know from Readers about the Experience of Reading," in *The Readers' Advisor's Companion,* ed. Kenneth Shearer and Robert Bur-

gin, (Englewood, Colo.: Libraries Unlimited, 2001), 77–96.

3. Lianghzu Yu and Anne O'Brien, "Domain of Adult Fiction Librarianship," in *Advances in Librarianship,* vol. 20, ed. I. Godden (San Diego: Academic, 1996), 151–90.
4. Jessica E. Moyer, "Adult Fiction Reading: A Literature Review of Readers' Advisory Services, Adult Fiction Librarianship, and Fiction Readers," *Reference & User Services Quarterly* 44, no. 2 (Spring 2005): 38–47.
5. Kenneth Shearer, ed., *Guiding the Reader to the Next Book* (New York: Neal-Schuman, 1996); Kenneth D. Shearer and Robert Burgin, eds., *The Readers' Advisor's Companion* (Englewood, Colo.: Libraries Unlimited, 2001).
6. Shearer and Burgin, *The Readers' Advisor's Companion*, 77–96.
7. Juris Dilevko and Lisa Gottlieb, *Reading and the Reference Librarian: The Importance to Library Service of Staff Reading Habits* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2004).
8. Mary Wilkes Towner, e-mail to author, Nov. 11, 2004; Kristina Daily, e-mail to author, Oct. 28, 2004; Nov. 1, 2004.
9. Anne K. May, Elizabeth Olesh, and Anne Miltenburg, "A Look at Readers' Advisory Services," *Library Journal* 125, no. 15 (Sept. 15, 2000): 40–43.
10. Donald O. Case, *Looking for Information: A Survey of Research on Information Seeking, Needs, and Behavior* (San Diego: Academic, 2002), 143–46.
11. Kirsty Williamson, "Discovered by Chance: The Role of Incidental Information Acquisition in an Ecological Model of Information Use," *Library and Information Science Research* 20, no. 1 (1998): 23–40.
12. Case references Williamson on pages 84, 146, 153, 258, 269, 273, 278, and 333, and Ross on pages 105–6, 153, 327.
13. Williamson, "Discovered by Chance," 24.
14. Ross, "Finding without Seeking," 72.
15. Case, *Looking for Information*, 143–44.
16. Ibid., 84–88; Case on Williamson, 272–73.
17. Case, *Looking for Information*, 152.
18. Stephen D. Weil and Peggy D. Rudd, *Perspectives on Outcome Based Evaluation for Libraries and Museums* (Washington, D.C.: IMLS). www.imls.gov/pubs/pdf/pubobe.pdf (accessed Oct. 28, 2004).
19. Ibid., 16–23.
20. For outcomes in academic libraries see: Anna H. Perrault, Vicki L. Gregory, and James O. Carey, "The Integration of Student Learning Outcomes with Teaching Effectiveness," *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science* 43, no. 4 (Fall 2002): 270–82; Ethelene Whitmire, "Academic Library Performance Measures and Undergraduates' Library Use and Educational Outcomes," *Library and Information Science Research* 24, no. 2 (2002): 107–28; See also vol. 28, issues 1/2 (2002) of the *Journal of Academic Librarianship,* which focuses on outcome measures. The Oct./Dec. 2003, no. 230/231, issue of *ARL* also focuses on outcome measures. *Library Trends* has published an outcomes issue (Winter 2003), which includes one of the better articles addressing outcomes use in public libraries: Glen E. Holt and Donald Elliot, "Measuring Outcomes: Applying Cost-Benefit-Analysis to Middle-sized and Smaller Public Libraries," *Library Trends* 51, no. 3 (Winter 2003): 424–40.
21. Thomas J. Hennen Jr., "Hennen's American Public Library Ratings." www.haplr-index.com (accessed Oct. 28, 2004).
22. See appendix for the survey.
23. Stephen D. Brown and Robert W. Lent, eds, *Handbook of Counseling Psychology,* 3d ed. (New York: Wiley, 2000), 161–65.
24. Ibid., 165.
25. All data are reported as whole numbers and due to rounding, not all tables will add up to 100 percent.
26. Roderick P. McDonald, *Test Theory: A Unified Treatment* (Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1999).
27. Ibid., 89–90.
28. See appendix for a complete listing of the survey items or table 1 for a listing of survey items and results from the factor analysis.
29. See table 2 for survey results by genre. Values of 1 and 2 were coded as well liked, 3 as neutral, and 4 and 5 as disliked, to correspond to the survey instrument, with 1 = I love it, 2 = I like it, 3 = It's okay, 4 = I'd rather not read it and 5 = I hate it.
30. Mostly anecdotal, though Ross cites several studies about genders of readers, "Finding without Seeking," 72–73. While this type of national demographic study is common in Europe, it is rarely done in the United States as seen in Ross's citations, which have the most recent United States survey from 1983.
31. Categories were developed by author.
32. Ross, "Finding without Seeking," 73.
33. Several of the subjects were asked: "Tell me a little bit about yourself as a reader; what it means to you, what role reading plays in your life, when you read, how often?" This was used as an introductory question in six of the seven interviews.
34. Ross, "Finding without Seeking," 76–79.
35. Ibid., 77.
36. For text of each item see table 1 or appendix.

APPENDIX
FICTION READERS SURVEY

Please rank items 1 to 14 from 1 to 5 by circling the appropriate number

1: Strongly Agree; 2: Agree; 3: Neutral; 4: Disagree; 5: Strongly Disagree

	SA	A	N	D	SD
Fiction reading serves as an escape	1	2	3	4	5
I learn a lot by reading fiction	1	2	3	4	5
Reading fiction is fun	1	2	3	4	5
Fiction reading helps me understand my world	1	2	3	4	5
I mainly read fiction to pass time	1	2	3	4	5
Reading fiction can be tedious	1	2	3	4	5
Fiction reading is a pleasant hobby	1	2	3	4	5
After reading fiction I feel more prepared to understand and solve problems	1	2	3	4	5
Fiction reading is purely for entertainment	1	2	3	4	5
Reading fiction has little educational value	1	2	3	4	5
Reading fiction is an enjoyable part of my life	1	2	3	4	5
After reading fiction I feel I have a better understanding of other countries and cultures	1	2	3	4	5
Nothing I read in fiction relates to real life	1	2	3	4	5
I often find myself relating something I have read in a fiction book to something I hear in the news	1	2	3	4	5

I am: ☐ Male ☐ Female

I would describe myself as: (This can include any type of reading.)

- ☐ A heavy reader (more than 3 books a week)
- ☐ A frequent reader (1–3 books a week)
- ☐ A moderate reader (2–4 books a month)
- ☐ An occasional reader (less than 2 books a month)

Rank each genre (fiction category) from 1–5
(1: I love it; 2: I like it; 3: It's okay; 4: I'd rather not read it; 5: I hate it)

Romance	1	2	3	4	5
Religious/Inspirational	1	2	3	4	5
Literary	1	2	3	4	5
Science Fiction	1	2	3	4	5
Fantasy	1	2	3	4	5
Historical	1	2	3	4	5
Mystery	1	2	3	4	5
Spy/Thriller/Adventure	1	2	3	4	5

18. Comments

If you are interested in participating further in this research project, which will include short interviews about your reading habits and interests, please fill in your contact information below and we will be getting in touch with you shortly.

Name: _____

Phone number (home): _____

Phone number (work): _____

E-mail: _____

I prefer to be contacted at: ☐ work ☐ home ☐ by e-mail

Thank you for your participation. If you have questions or comments, please refer to the contact information in the letter that accompanies this survey and feel free to contact us.

INDEX TO ADVERTISERS