Fiction Access Points across Computer-Mediated Book Information Sources:

A Comparison of Online Bookstores, Reader Advisory Databases, and Public Library Catalogs

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Abstract

One of a librarian's more difficult jobs may be helping patrons in an elusive search for a "good book." A variety of online sources are now available to help readers and librarians in their search, but the descriptive capabilities of the resources vary widely. Library and information science (LIS) literature has suggested many schemes and access points for fiction classification. This study compared the records for identical books in a variety of computer-mediated book information sources (CMBIS) in order to find out which resources utilized the access points identified in LIS literature. Results from this study suggest that online bookstores may be effective tools for librarians helping patrons find "good" books, due to their increased use of access points. However, reader advisory databases, which contain reviews and subject headings, are occasionally more effective than online bookstores for identifying books published prior to the 1990s.

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1. Introduction

Sometimes finding a good book can be hard. It would be easier if, when fiction readers seek that "good book," they were looking for any good book. However, they are not. They are looking for a book that meets their own personal "goodness" criteria, and the difficulty in finding that book comes in when the readers' "goodness" criteria are different from those of other people. The challenge of helping readers find books that they will enjoy has been a topic in library literature at least since 1933, when Frank Haigh's extensive fiction classification scheme was proposed and tested (as cited in Sapp, 1986). More recent research seeks to identify decision-making factors involved when readers choose books (Ross, 2001; Ross & Chelton, 2001). Both approaches share the goal of classifying or somehow determining what about certain books make them "good" for certain readers.

The tools for accessing information about fiction have expanded considerably in the past decade. Classification schemes have been integrated into online public access catalogs, and reader advisory databases are now accessible online. Meanwhile, with the development of Web commerce, online vendors such as Amazon.com began selling books. To facilitate sales, they have devised their own methods to provide readers with information about fiction books.

There are multiple sources of online information about fiction books available to any reader, and these sources are frequently accessible at any hour of the day or night via that reader's personal

computer. Previous research on classification and reader advisory suggests the type of information that ought to be included in these information sources if they are to be effective in providing information about books to readers.

The goal of this project was to compare the use of fiction access points over a variety of computer-mediated book information sources (CMBIS). Six examples of three types of CMBIS were analyzed: two online bookstores, two reader advisory databases, and two library catalogs. This analysis sought to determine what kinds of access points were provided by each source and source type, how many access points were provided, and whether those access points are available for fiction books across a broad time period. With a variety of resources to use for book selection, librarians' challenge is to determine which is most effective in helping patrons find fiction that meets their "goodness" criteria.

Research on fiction selection is most frequently approached from the perspective of a user in close physical proximity to books. The authors could find no empirical research focusing on the usability of online bookstores or reader advisory databases for fiction seeking. In in the post-Web era, though, readers are not restricted to selecting only the books to which they have immediate physical access. The practical significance of this project, therefore, lies in its ability to increase librarians' awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of using CMBIS for fiction seeking. This project contributes to the body of knowledge on fiction classification, as well as applying that research to the currently available electronically-mediated tools for book searching that are currently available.

1.2 Problem Statement

Computer-mediated book information sources (CMBIS) are widely available to anyone who has a computer and Internet access. Three types of CMBIS are analyzed here: online bookstores, the sites of which are freely accessible on the web; library OPACs, also freely accessible; and reader advisory databases, available to those patrons whose libraries make these databases available on their Web sites. Previous research suggests that fiction access points, herein defined as information about books and their contents, assist readers in determining whether a particular book meets the reader's "goodness" criteria. Thus, depending on the type and quality of information provided, each CMBIS is more or less useful to the book-seeking reader. A CMBIS that uses these fiction access points would be effective in helping users find the types of books they want to read. A source that provides more information and covers more of the factors that influence readers would be more useful than a source that provides less information.

Further, a source that offers a consistent level of information across multiple books would be more useful than a source which provides widely varying levels of information. An online bookstore has as its primary goal the sales of currently available books; provision of book information is a tool employed toward that end. However, libraries pride themselves on making author backfiles available, so the reader can find a book by an author long after it is out of print. Consistency of coverage may vary between different types of CMBIS.

2. Literature Review

Numerous fiction access points have been devised over numerous fiction classification and access schemes. Genre has traditionally been used in organizing the physical collection of

materials in libraries (Harrell, 1996, p. 149). Typical genre categories used in American public libraries include mystery and detective stories, science fiction/ fantasy, westerns, and romance (Harrell, 1996, p. 151). Genre classification is based on the idea that books in the same genre will present similar types of stories. Fiction indexers additionally look at the internal contents of the work. Characters, including their professions and relationships to each other, setting, time, plot, and course of action have been included in several fiction classification schemes (American Library Association, 2000; Beghtol, 1994; Chulick, 2000; Pejtersen 1983; Saarti, 1999). Ross (1991) says that readers depend on several avenues of information about a book: looking at its cover, reading the publisher's "blurb" on the back cover or dust jacket flap for a brief plot overview, reading a sample of the text to determine content, and using book recommendations from trusted sources. Saricks (2005) suggests that readers want a book with the same "feel" as a previously-enjoyed book, "feel" being composed of four elements: characterization, or the way the characters are described and portrayed; frame, or the setting, time, and atmosphere inherent in the story; story line, or a general idea of the action of the story; and pacing, or the speed at which the story progresses.

Fiction access points proposed in LIS literature have been developed from two different perspectives: categorization for the convenience of selection, which is a more reader-oriented system; and description of intellectual content, a system oriented toward scholarship of fiction or readers who seek specific topics in their fiction reading (Saarti, 1992, p. 22). However, there is some concern that content description is inappropriate for works of fiction, due to their affective nature. "The apparent impossibility of conceptually classifying fiction has led librarians to establish more objective criteria for [fiction retrieval], such as the author's name, nationality, or

period of activity. By doing this, librarians do not so much *classify* fiction as *organize* it" (Sapp, 1986, p. 488).

In general, classification schemes which attempt to describe the contents of the fiction book incorporate similar content. Saarti (1999, p. 90) notes that "events, actors, spaces, and times … are mentioned in almost all of the previous studies as the main categories of fiction indexing." The American Library Association's (2000) *Guidelines for Subject Access to Individual Works of Fiction, Drama, Etc.* (*GSAFD*) and Beghtol's (1994) Experimental Fiction Access System are two examples of content-based fiction classification schemes. Other classification schemes look outside the literature to develop criteria that reflect the relationship between fiction books and their readers. Beghtol (1995) speculates on using "literary warrant and consensus" as theoretical bases for creating a fiction index, suggesting that fiction scholarship might illuminate valuable fiction access points.

Classification schemes oriented toward the reader are more focused on the affective nature of fiction (Saarti, 1992). These schemes look to the way a work of fiction leaves the reader feeling. Pejtersen's Analysis and Mediation of Publications (AMP) system was developed from 300 conversations about books between Danish readers and librarians, which suggested that readers sought fiction using more than one dimension. While they might want a book with a particular subject or a particular setting, they also wanted a book with a particular emotional intention (Pejtersen & Austin, 1983, p. 234). Saricks devises her elements of appeal based exclusively on reader perceptions of the "feel" of a book (Saricks, 2005, p. 40).

Tests of classification schemes provide information about the validity of some fiction access points. User book retrieval tests were conducted with a trial database containing 434 books indexed in the AMP system, which yielded satisfaction rates of better than 90 percent (Pejtersen & Austin, 1983, p. 234). Another way of determining the impact of access points is to look at changes in circulation patterns based upon fiction access points. Saarti (1992, p. 23-24) noted that arranging books by genre and affect increased circulation of those books. Conducting a further interview of 50 patrons, he found that the majority of users said the new arrangement was an improvement over the old system. Ross (2001, p. 17) cites interviews with 194 "heavy readers" to support book selection based on the influence of reader's mood and desired reading experience. Saricks (2005, p. 40) refers to her "years of working with fiction readers" in support of her appeal characteristics. Despite these few examples, however, empirical validation of fiction access points is rarely undertaken.

3. Procedures

A content analysis method was used to assess bibliographic records from CMBIS against a list of criteria for identifying and selecting fiction reading materials. This analysis looks exclusively at information provided in a record for a particular book. The CMBIS search process is not evaluated in this article.

3.1 Selection of Sources and Books

The six CMBIS sources used in this project included two online bookstores (Amazon.com and Barnesandnoble.com), two reader advisory databases (*NoveList* and *What Do I Read Next?*), and two online public access catalogs for public libraries (OPAC 1 and OPAC 2). In addition to

being available to searchers through a computer-based interface, each source provided information beyond a basic bibliographic description for fiction books.

Popular fiction books were identified from bestseller and award lists, and 648 records from 108 books were analyzed. Books were chosen to represent a variety of fiction genres, including literary fiction, thrillers, horror, romance, mystery, fantasy, and multicultural fiction. Publication dates ranged from 1970 to 2005. Twenty-two books were published in the 1970s, 28 in the 1980s, 27 in the 1990s, and 31 in the 2000s.

Online bookstores were included in this project because they are a part of the fiction landscape. Both authors are aware of librarians who said that for fiction, they browsed online bookstores to find specific titles before looking those books up in their library's online catalog. The online bookstores were chosen on the basis of name recognition; both are well-known for selling books, and both have been featured in LIS literature as potential competitors to the library. Borders.com was excluded because it uses the Amazon.com search interface.

Reader advisory databases were created with the specific intent of increasing access to works of fiction, suggesting that their attention to reader-oriented search techniques and data elements would be particularly strong. The two reader advisory databases were likewise chosen based on name recognition. Both have been cited in recent reader advisory guidebooks (Saricks, 2001; Saricks, 2005; Shearer & Burgin, 2001). *Fiction Catalog* was not included due to its limited information provision, and at the time the project was begun, Greenwood Publishing Group's *Reader's Advisor Online* was still in development.

The two library catalogs were chosen because they used different automation systems, and had fundamentally different approaches to cataloging fiction. OPAC 1 is provided by SIRSI Corporation and though the library using OPAC 1 does not follow the cataloging principles established by the *GSAFD*, it includes some book reviews and excerpts provided by Syndetic Solutions, Inc. OPAC 2 is provided by Innovative Interfaces, Inc. (III). OPAC 2 does use *GSAFD* cataloging principles. Toward the end of the data collection period, OPAC 2 also added content from Syndetic Solutions for some books.

3.2 Selection of Fiction Access Points

A review of literature on the subject of fiction-seeking in libraries identified multiple articles on the effects of categorization on fiction retrieval, suggested strategies to improve fiction retrieval, or discussed the nature of fiction selection among readers. From 21 books and articles analyzed, 140 factors affecting fiction selection were isolated. Many of these factors overlapped; for instance, almost every system identified "author" or "creator" as an important element for fiction selection. The initial list of 140 was narrowed to 45 by reducing the overlapping elements.

From there, the list was given to a master's-level collection development class for analysis. The reader group analyzed the elements for clarity of definition (whether the categories were easily understood), exclusivity (whether they did not overlap), and validity (whether they were related to the concept of fiction retrieval). While the categories cannot claim to be exhaustive, as reasons for selecting one book over another are unique to each person, the readers did not add any new categories to the list. As a result of the feedback provided, the list of criteria was further

narrowed to 35. Final categories are listed in Appendix A. The first seven criteria were not used, as author, title, publisher, date, ISBN, and edition were all included in our sources. All items in our sample were English-language books, which eliminated the need to include language as an access point.

During coding, it became apparent that there were two different approaches to fiction access points, which we defined as objective and subjective. Objective fiction access points are those which required no interpretation. In this category, we include those access points which are either present or not (such as the image of the book cover, summary blurb about the book, reader reviews, etc.), or those which are factually determined (page length, character names, whether the book has won an award). Genre is included as an objective fiction access point, as many books are published which directly claim a particular genre as their own. Subjective fiction access points require the classifier to make some interpretive judgments. Subjective access points include the emotional experience produced in the reader by the book, whether or not the book includes explicit content such as sex or violence, whether the book shows signs of literary influence, and the pacing of the book.

3.3 Comparison of Records

For each book title identified, records were retrieved from all six CMBIS sources. Since all sources were available online, records for each source took the form of web pages and each record could conceivably change over the course of the research project. When a record was found, the page itself and any supplementary pages were downloaded and saved to a local file, to assure access to the static record available on a particular date.

To reduce potential bias, two judges (the authors) coded the data. The first author had originally developed the list of fiction-seeking criteria based on a literature review. The first author had extensive experience with fiction retrieval as a librarian and reader, and minimal nonfiction cataloging experience. The second author applied the categories without prior exposure to the literature about fiction seeking. However, she had worked extensively with library catalog design, and is an avid user of online bookstores and library catalogs. To establish intercoder reliability, records for eleven books were coded by both researchers, and the codes imported into SPSS v.11.0. Scores were calculated using Cohen's Kappa. Scores ranged from a low of 0.154 to a high of 1.0. Agreement was more pronounced on objective fiction access points, those that were either present or absent, than on subjective access points where information had to be inferred from elements in the record. In all cases save four, Kappa scores were significant, indicating interrater agreement, at the .05 level. The four areas where agreement was not achieved were emotional content, inclusion of known fictional character, characters' relationships, and readability level. The researchers discussed and renegotiated the categories until significant levels of agreement were reached for all categories.

After establishing agreement, records from all CMBIS sources were downloaded for each title chosen. Each researcher individually coded records for half of the titles, seeking to identify the appearance of fiction access points in each record. For instance, if a book's record at Amazon.com contained an image of the book's cover, while OPAC 2 did not, the "book cover" category was selected for Amazon, and left blank for OPAC 2. After all data was coded, the results were imported into a database for comparisons between CMBIS sources and their use of

fiction access points. Percentage comparisons were made between all six sources, between the

three source types, and between the time period of publication. Another comparison was made

between the presence of objective and subjective fiction access points.

4. Results

Results from this project suggested that certain fiction access points are in greater usage than

others. Online bookstores tend to use more fiction access points than reader advisory databases

and library catalogs. For instance, 1,970 fiction access points were employed by online

bookstores, 1,005 by Amazon.com and 965 by Barnes & Noble. The two reader advisory

databases used a combined total of 1,381 access points, and the two library OPACs only 1,104.

Regardless of source, newer books tend to get better treatment overall. Table 1 shows the

percentage of access point coverage of books by decade. More access points were used for

recently-published books than for older books. Averaging the use of access points across all

sources reveals a 38 percent use of access points for books published in the 1970s, a 38 percent

use for books published during the 1980s, a 52 percent use of access points for books published

in the 1990s, and a 54 percent use for books published in the 2000s.

[Insert Table 1 about here.]

For 16 out of 26 categories, books published in the 2000s had the highest percent use of access

points. Records were more likely to include an image of the book cover, page length, plot

development, and subjects. Records were also more likely to include subjective considerations as

the emotional experience of the book. However, access points which were dependent on the passage of time, such as literary influence, book awards, readability level, and identification of characters, setting, and read-alikes, were more commonly found in records for books from the 1990s.

Table 2 illustrates access point usage by decade and CMBIS. Four out of six CMBIS had greatest access point usage for books published in the 2000s. The two exceptions were GSAFD-based OPAC 2 and *What Do I Read Next?*, both of which used more access points for books published in the 1990s. In the two library catalogs, records for books published in the 1970s and 1980s made comparatively little use of access points. This usage increased in subsequent decades. Reader advisory databases, by contrast, have relatively consistent coverage of older and newer books. Online bookstores use the most access points across all decades.

[Insert Table 2 about here.]

4.1 Specific Access Points

Of the various criteria that have been discussed in LIS literature as being influential in readers' selection of fiction books, many have been incorporated into CMBIS. Some fiction access points enjoy broad penetration through all sources, some points have less consistent coverage through different types of sources, and some points are seldom employed in any source, as indicated in Table 3.

[Insert Table 3 about here.]

Several access points are used commonly and consistently across various retrieval sources. With the exception of *What Do I Read Next?*, all retrieval sources make images of the book cover available; these sources likewise include the page length of the book. A summary or text blurb is generally provided in all sources except OPAC 2. Genre, setting, and subjects are frequently provided by all six sources.

Some access points were infrequently provided but consistent across sources. Information about specific characters, their occupations, and their relationships with other characters was relatively consistent across all six sources, although this information is provided in only 40 to 75 percent of all records for each source examined. Likewise, information about the time period covered was consistently provided in 50 to 80 percent of records across all sources except OPAC 1. Between 15 and 30 percent of records from all sources discussed factual information to be learned from the books. Between 10 and 25 percent of records provided information on whether the book described real historical events within its fictional narrative.

Some access points were used inconsistently across CMBIS. While the two online bookstores frequently provided samples of the text, the OPACs and reader advisory databases were less likely to do so. Likewise, information about the book's typographical style was available only through Amazon.com, because Amazon includes scanned images of a book's pages. Professional book reviews were provided by all sources except *What Do I Read Next?*, but neither the library catalogs nor reader advisory databases provided reader reviews.[1]

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[1] The authors have been informed that Innovative Interfaces, Inc. is developing a reader review feature for future releases.

Information about the emotional experience and pacing of the books was frequently available in sources other than OPAC 2 and *What Do I Read Next?* And while few sources provided much information about the explicit content (sex, violence, or language) of the novels, OPAC 2 and *What Do I Read Next?* provided the least amount of information on this topic. Much of this type of information is gleaned from narratives about the book, and particularly from professional or reader reviews.

The book's intended audience (e.g., women, men, and young adults) was identified by about 25 to 30 percent of records in the reader advisory databases; this information was identified by 20 to 30 percent of records in online bookstores and less than 20 percent of records in library catalogs. Readability information was commonly found at one online bookstore (Amazon) and one reader advisory database (*NoveList*). Though this information was less commonly found in the other sources, the content provided by Syndetic solutions did include readability estimates for selected books in OPACs 1 and 2.

Approximately 45 percent of the records from reader advisory databases indicated award-winning books; one online bookstore (B&N) approached this percentage, but Amazon and the two online catalogs did not. Read-alike suggestions were very frequently provided by the online bookstores, in the form of purchase suggestions. *NoveList* provided read-alike suggestions in 60 percent of its records and *What Do I Read Next?* in 59 percent. However, read-alike recommendations were almost never available in library catalogs.

Some fiction access points are infrequently used in any CMBIS, despite having been identified

as making a difference in book selection. It was uncommon for records from any source to

indicate whether a work had been subject to scholarly analysis. Less than one-third of records

indicated the literary influences on the book or its author. Literary influence was more likely to

be acknowledged by the online bookstores and *NoveList*, and primarily in narrative about the text

such as reviews.

Overall, online bookstores were more likely to use fiction access points than were reader

advisory databases, and reader advisory databases were more likely to use fiction access points

than library catalogs were. There were some exceptions to this trend, in which reader advisory

databases outperformed online bookstores. The setting and time period during which the book

takes place was more commonly included in reader advisory databases than in online bookstores.

There was also slightly more use of characters' occupations and relationships in reader advisory

databases. These fields are specifically included in *GSAFD* classification, which may account for

their increased presence in reader advisory databases. The intended audience for the book was

also more frequently included in reader advisory databases than in online bookstores. This may

be due to online bookstores' unwillingness to identify a book as inappropriate for a potential

customer. The third difference was related to indications that a book had won an award. Again,

this was more common in reader advisory databases than in online bookstores.

4.2 Inferred Fiction Access Points

Table 4 enumerates the percentage of records in which fiction access points could only be

inferred from data about the book. In the majority of cases, these inferences were made on the

basis of text blurbs, reader reviews, or professional reviews included in the record. This text provides an avenue for the fiction-seeker to gain a holistic insight into the book's contents. In other cases, access points such as Plot Development could be inferred from subject headings like "Coming-of-Age Stories."

[Insert Table 4 about here.]

Neither coder included access points such as book cover image, sample of the text, or sample of typographical image; these items were either present or absent in a record. Despite this, the argument can be made that a reader's experience with types of covers or knowledge of certain font conventions would help that reader infer whether the book would be an appropriate choice.

In many cases where a book's emotional impact was identified, it was inferred from a textual blurb or review. In these cases, the supplemental text described the book in emotional terms (e.g. "this heartwrenching novel"). The identification of pacing was similar. Books were described as "fast-paced" or "breakneck." Plot development was inferred from text that described stories as "coming of age," "family drama," or "a thriller." Generally, however, information on these access points was not provided systematically. Information on frame, which incorporates time and setting as well as atmosphere, was more consistently available. Information on setting and time period were frequently incorporated into text blurbs.

Information on explicit content (sex, language, and violence) was not provided except through reader or professional reviews, and even then, it was more commonly inferred from reader

reviews than from professional reviews. As a result, information about explicit content was much less common on library catalogs and reader advisory databases than it was in online bookstores.

The influence of *GSAFD* can be seen in these results. Both OPAC 2 and *What Do I Read Next?* used a *GSAFD*-based approach to describing fiction books. While in most cases they did not include text blurbs with their records, such items as fictional characters' names, occupations, and relationships were included in the subject headings provided for the work. As a result, fewer inferences were made about these books. *GSAFD* subject headings provide targeted information about particular topics, without providing much room for multiple interpretations.

5. Discussion

While no CMBIS used all fiction access points for all records, each one used at least some access points. Genre classification is used across all sources. The separation of books into genres has a long history in libraries, and publishers have been deliberately sorting their books into genres to direct specific books to particular audiences. Genre is well-established as an access point. Book covers help readers recognize the genre of a book, as well as giving a brief visual image of the plot line or lead characters. As such, cover images are provided in all sources except *What Do I Read Next?* A verbal description of the book is provided in almost all sources as well, either in the form of a publisher's "blurb" or a review of the work. Most of the points that Ross (1991) identifies as ways that heavy readers find their next books are provided for in almost all sources. The one method that readers use which is not duplicated consistently is providing a sample of the text. Neither libraries nor reader advisory databases made use of this access point to the degree that online bookstores did.

Access points that attempt to provide intellectual access to the objective facts of the novel, the "events, actors, space, and time" (Saarti, 1999, 90), are covered intermittently. For this project, "events" were considered to have been expressed in the categories of plot development, real events in fictional context, and subjects or topics covered in the book. The latter of these categories was extremely well-covered by all sources, and plot development was covered reasonably well in almost all sources, though these were sometimes in the form of interpretation of the subjects/topics in library catalog records. The presence of real events in fictional contexts, though seldom included as an access point, was covered consistently across sources. The actors within the novel, the characters and their traits, are covered across all sources. Space, the settings of these novels, is also fairly well-covered. However, the time of the book's action is less consistently used than the location of that action. A contemporary setting can frequently be inferred from text about the book, but with the exception of *What Do I Read Next?*, bold declarations of time period are rarely made.

Access points based on literary warrant, such as Scholarly Analysis or Literary Influences, are used only rarely. When they are used, they are generally used in online bookstores and occasionally also in *NoveList*. The lack of coverage in reader advisory databases and library catalogs suggests that these institutions do not view their roles as providing scholarly access to fiction for researchers. The very light coverage in online bookstores likewise suggests that while some books are placed within a broader context of other books, most books are viewed as creating their own individual worlds.

Despite reasonable inclusion of objective access points, access points which take into account the "feel" of a book were seldom utilized. Where they were utilized, they were frequently inferred from text about the book. The emotional experience produced by the book was better covered by the reviews included in the online bookstores and *NoveList* than by the subject headings included in online catalogs. The pacing of the book and details about the characterization were also frequently inferred from the text. Sources were better about indicating, for instance, that a book featured a woman detective than they were about indicating that the characters were described in considerable detail and that their relationships with each other took up the main emphasis of the book. In summary, the more objective an access point, the more likely it was to be used. Subjective access points are primarily discovered in text about the book.

Despite factors being used in all sources, they are certainly not used consistently across all sources. Online bookstores used more fiction access points than reader advisory databases, and reader advisory databases used more than library catalogs. While some access points, such as the presentation of an image of the book cover, were used relatively consistently across all retrieval methods, there was considerable variance in coverage of other access points. The inclusion of text about the book, particularly in the form of reviews, permits the inference of access points. However, inclusion of text is not consistent across book information sources. Given an assumption that retrieval methods which provide more access points are better for helping readers find "good" books, it can be concluded that library catalogs are inferior to online bookstores. This is supported by anecdotal evidence from library practice of consulting online bookstores before looking at the catalog. The limitations of the MARC record overshadow the profession's attempts to make library catalogs more fiction-friendly.

Furthermore, the use of increased access points is more common for newer sources; fewer access points are available for old sources. Though access points are available across all sources for older books, more recent books are better covered by online bookstores and library catalogs. Reader advisory databases seem to offer only slightly fewer access points to older as to newer books. As more recent books are published, sources are easily able to add objective access points such as images of the book cover and genre classifications. Access points that require analysis or the passage of time, such as read-alikes and award winner status, are better handled by reader advisory databases. Reader advisory databases are ideally positioned to include information such as this, as the product their creators are selling is information about books, and not the books themselves. Despite the creation of numerous schemes to increase access to fiction through library catalogs, the historical emphasis on nonfiction classification has dominated library catalog development.

The actual fiction-seeking practices of readers using CMBIS should be examined to determine how those readers make book selection decisions in the absence of the physical book. Further, the promotional practices used by online bookstores should be studied to see whether these practices can ethically and practically be emulated by libraries.

6. Conclusion

Online bookstores use more fiction access points more consistently than either reader advisory databases or library catalogs. They are widely regarded by librarians as being effective book search tools, and if effectiveness is measured by information provided, they are. As search tools,

however, online bookstores are not flawless. With a surfeit of information on a particular book, online bookstores unwittingly provide their users with considerable "noise." The strength of allowing readers to state their own opinions becomes a weakness when those opinions are lost among other reader comments, advertisements, and disclaimers. Reader advisory databases often provide supplemental information not addressed in the online bookstores, and for known item searches, library catalogs can be relatively efficient. In the current situation, the three book information source types are complementary.

However, this is not to say that fiction-seeking in the library milieu cannot be improved. The sheer number of schemes devised for organizing and making fiction accessible suggest that the process of providing access to fiction is difficult at best. Using indexing schemes such as *GSAFD* means that the cataloging of the fiction collection mimics very closely that of the non-fiction collection. Information points are emphasized rather than "feelings" or emotions elicited by the books. Using more subjective criteria means that each book must be read and analyzed before being added to the collection. A broader application of a scheme such as *GSAFD* would have the advantage of providing greater consistency of fiction information provision across catalogs. Nonetheless, using only one scheme for providing fiction access points means that some information is being left out of the record. Including text blurbs from which a book's more subjective access points must be inferred does provide that avenue for retrieval, but makes that retrieval a more complex process than searching on a particular term or phrase. The profession may wish to visit the issue of fiction classification in order to determine its goal. If the goal is to get books into the hands of readers, *GSAFD*-type classification may not be as effective as other types of classification. If the goal of reader advisory databases is to help readers find the books

they want to read, they may wish to put more of an emphasis on quantifying those subjective

access points.

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Appendix A. List of Fiction Access Points

Item #	Description
1	Author is listed on record.
2	Title is listed on record
3	Publisher is listed on record.
4	Date of publication is listed on record.
5	Language of work is listed on record.
6	Edition of work is listed on record.
7	ISBN of work is listed on record.
8	Image of book cover is listed on record
9	Text from "cover blurb" or summary is listed on record
10	Record includes a sample of the text.
11	Page length or "thickness" is listed on record.
12	Text image included in record or typography or style data included.
13	Recommendations (from readers) are listed on record.
14	Recommendations or text of reviews are listed on record.
15	Some indication of the intended reader's experience of the book is listed on record (i.e. entertainment, escape).
16	Some indication of the mood evoked in the reader by the book or the "appropriate" mood for reading the book is listed on record.
17	Some indication of the emotional content of the book is listed on the record (i.e. "a three-hankie read" or a "joyful, uplifting book.")
18	Some indication of the explicit (sex, violence, language) content of the book is listed on the record.
19	Some indication of the factual information that can be extracted from the book is listed on the record (i.e. information about other cultures, historical setting, and so forth).
20	The record indicates that the book includes a known fictional character (i.e. Sherlock Holmes, Hercule Poirot).
21	The record indicates that the book's characters are pursuing a specific occupation (i.e. librarians, doctors).
22	The record indicates that the book's characters are involved in relationships with each other (i.e. mother-daughter).
23	The record indicates the setting of the plot (either a real or imaginary place).
24	The record indicates the temporal setting of the plot (either a real or imagined time).
25	The record gives an indication of how the plot will develop (i.e. boy-meets-girl, coming of age).
26	The record indicates that the book contains real events in fictional content (i.e. Battle of Waterloo or the signing of the Magna Carta).
27	The record gives some indication of the pacing of the book (i.e. "action-packed, mile-a-minute, full of character development, leisurely").
28	The record gives an indication of the subjects, topics, themes, or motifs included.
29	The record gives an indication of the readability level of the book (i.e. whether it has complex words, readability scales, etc.)
30	The record addresses the intended audience of the book (i.e. "women's fiction," "men's

	adventure," YA, etc.)
31	The record indicates the literary form of the fictional work (i.e. drama, essays, short stories).
32	The record indicates the genre of the fictional work (i.e. mystery, romance, science fiction, etc.)
33	The record indicates the literary influences on the writer or on the work itself (i.e. "author was influenced by Eudora Welty," or "reminiscent of Carrie").
34	The record indicates that the work has been subject to scholarly analysis (NYT Review of Books).
35	The record indicates that the work has won a literary award (i.e. Booker Prize).

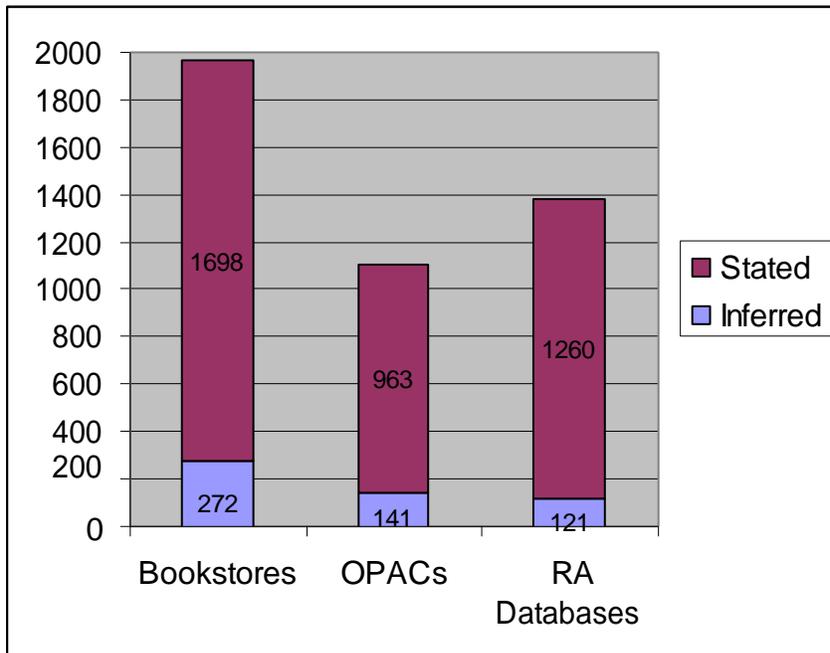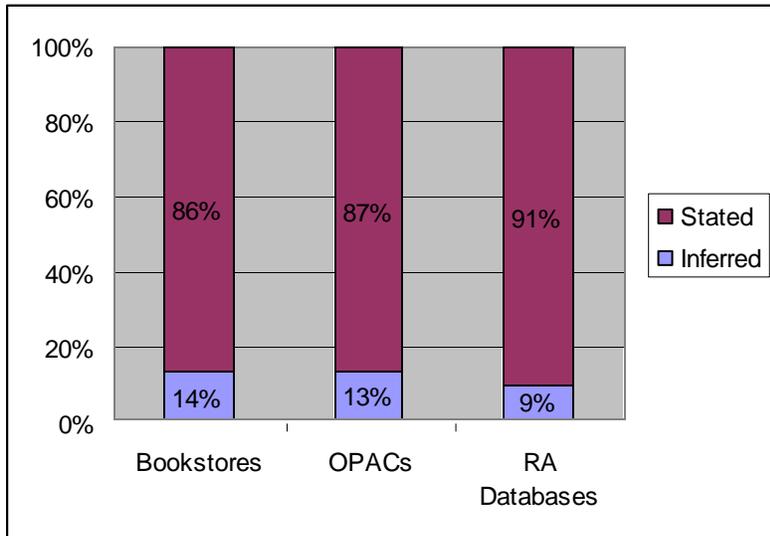Figure 1. Inferred versus Stated Access Points by Source Type

Table 1. Percentage of Fiction Access Point Usage by Publication Date Across All Sources

	1970	1980	1990	2000
Book Cover	59%	57%	75%	83%
Summary/Blurb	76%	72%	85%	78%
Sample of Text	23%	29%	43%	44%
Page Length	75%	71%	81%	83%
Typographical Data	15%	14%	15%	12%
Reader Reviews	31%	30%	33%	33%
Professional Reviews	39%	38%	64%	67%
Emotional Experience	36%	44%	63%	73%
Explicit Content	14%	23%	25%	29%
Factual Information	20%	16%	19%	42%
Specific Characters	58%	56%	72%	59%
Characters' Occupations	69%	56%	78%	68%
Characters' Relationships	39%	46%	61%	70%
Setting	71%	69%	94%	93%
Time	52%	54%	67%	65%
Plot Development	39%	48%	63%	69%
Real Events	12%	11%	20%	31%
Pacing	17%	20%	42%	44%
Subjects	78%	78%	94%	95%
Readability	19%	21%	34%	30%
Intended Audience	8%	16%	22%	41%
Genre	55%	49%	69%	76%
Literary Influences	5%	10%	22%	16%
Scholarly Analysis	4%	6%	9%	17%
Awards/Recognition	22%	26%	36%	37%
Read-Alikes	52%	51%	56%	49%

Table 2. Percentage of Total Access Point Usage by Source and Decade

	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s
Amazon.com	61%	56%	67%	70%
Barnes & Noble	49%	49%	66%	68%
OPAC1	17%	25%	47%	53%
OPAC2	22%	22%	38%	36%
NoveList	47%	48%	58%	62%
What Do I Read Next?	33%	30%	36%	34%

Table 3. Percentage of Fiction Access Point Usage by Source

	Amazon	Barnes & Noble	OPAC 1	OPAC 2	NoveList	What Do I Read Next?
Book Cover	97%	98%	67%	73%	81%	0%
Summary/Blurb	91%	97%	78%	27%	92%	83%
Sample of Text	83%	58%	35%	11%	24%	0%
Page Length	95%	95%	89%	86%	95%	6%
Typographical Data	81%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Reader Reviews	96%	94%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Professional Reviews	85%	76%	53%	12%	91%	0%
Emotional Experience	78%	79%	49%	31%	65%	31%
Explicit Content	33%	31%	19%	9%	38%	9%
Factual Information	31%	29%	27%	15%	32%	17%
Specific Characters	67%	60%	43%	55%	70%	73%
Characters' Occupations	72%	72%	53%	57%	81%	70%
Characters' Relationships	58%	59%	50%	42%	69%	51%
Setting	86%	85%	69%	80%	92%	83%
Time	61%	58%	36%	56%	66%	82%
Plot Development	67%	62%	57%	19%	81%	49%
Real Events	20%	19%	19%	12%	24%	20%
Pacing	55%	52%	27%	6%	45%	6%
Subjects	95%	93%	75%	81%	95%	83%
Readability	71%	19%	25%	1%	32%	9%
Intended Audience	21%	28%	16%	9%	36%	27%
Genre	69%	76%	44%	73%	60%	56%
Literary Influences	21%	20%	9%	2%	26%	3%
Scholarly Analysis	14%	17%	5%	5%	11%	6%
Awards/Recognition	17%	44%	12%	23%	44%	45%
Read-Alikes	91%	98%	0%	0%	60%	59%

Table 4. Percentage, Access Points Inferred from Text or Bibliographic Information

	Amazon	B&N	OPAC1	OPAC2	NL	WDIRN
Emotional Experience	25%	26%	19%	21%	14%	19%
Explicit Content	24%	16%	16%	7%	18%	7%
Factual Information	20%	12%	11%	2%	13%	6%
Specific Characters	21%	18%	11%	2%	11%	0%
Characters' Occupations	20%	18%	7%	2%	5%	0%
Characters' Relationships	23%	12%	11%	7%	13%	6%
Setting	16%	19%	4%	0%	2%	0%
Time	18%	16%	18%	5%	11%	2%
Plot Development	16%	18%	19%	0%	11%	6%
Real Events	7%	5%	5%	4%	5%	2%
Pacing	23%	19%	14%	4%	20%	4%
Subjects	13%	11%	9%	4%	2%	2%
Readability	7%	7%	11%	0%	7%	2%
Intended Audience	11%	7%	11%	9%	9%	6%
Genre	11%	9%	4%	2%	2%	2%
Literary Influences	5%	7%	4%	0%	5%	2%
Awards/Recognition	2%	2%	5%	5%	0%	2%