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Advisor: Mary Grace Flaherty

Research was conducted examining a link between education and training on readers' advisory and confidence levels when conducting the service. A survey was sent to all public libraries in North Carolina. The respondents were asked about their education, training received on the job and their level of confidence when conducting readers' advisory. The results from the survey showed that most library staff did not receive initial or ongoing training. Despite the lack of training, the respondents reported high levels of confidence, comfort and success when performing readers' advisory.

Headings:

Public libraries -- North Carolina

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TRAINING AND PRACTICE OF READERS' ADVISORY BY PUBLIC LIBRARY
STAFF IN NORTH CAROLINA

by
Amanda L. Gramley

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Mary Grace Flaherty

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Introduction

Joyce Saricks defines readers' advisory (RA) as a "patron-centered library service for adult leisure readers. A successful readers' advisory service is one in which knowledgeable, nonjudgmental staff help fiction and nonfiction readers with their leisure-reading needs" (Saricks, 2005, 1). Active RA is a more direct interaction between the patron and librarian. The process begins with an interview so that the staff member can learn more the reading tastes of the patron. The librarian may use a variety of tools to make a reading recommendation. Passive or indirect RA is often seen in libraries in the form of book displays, shelf-talkers, or bookmarks that contain new books to try. Readers' advisory is most often seen in public libraries because it is a community place that encourages reading for pleasure and information.

A quality RA service is important for libraries to have. As Barry Trott explains, "Readers' advisory services offer libraries an opportunity to continue to remain relevant to their users" (Trott, 2001, 60). As more people turn to the Internet to meet their information needs, libraries may seem less needed. Service to fiction readers is a way for libraries to excel. Fiction is still the most highly circulated material at public libraries (Trott, 2001). A 2013 Pew research study found that Americans have a positive view of the library and its services. Ninety-five percent of Americans over the age of sixteen agree with the statement "public libraries are important because they promote literacy and

a love of reading” (Pew Research Center, 2013). RA can help keep that number high by helping Americans find enjoyable reading material. As Smith explains, this is a niche area where libraries can excel by offering stellar RA services (Smith, 2000).

Another strong defender of RA services gives more arguments on the importance of RA in public libraries. Saricks (2005) cites a 2003 Harris poll that found that reading is the favorite leisure-activity for Americans. Libraries need to meet the needs of these leisure readers. The library does not have to be a self-service entity and they should provide patrons with trained and knowledgeable staff that can help any information need. Saricks’ second argument in favor of having RA is that patrons visiting the library can be overwhelmed by the number of choices. There are often thousands of fiction books arranged alphabetically by author and thousands of non-fiction books arranged in a system that is not easy to understand. Browsing can be time-consuming for a patron and personalized recommendations can make for a more positive library experience. Librarians can provide the link between the library’s collection and the patron (Saricks, 2005).

The literature on RA shows that the process is not always smooth. There are times when a staff member is unsure of how to conduct RA or does not know how to properly utilize available resources. The patron can leave this interaction discouraged. These unsuccessful transactions may be the result of a lack of education and training for staff members. Library school programs do not always offer education on RA and many public libraries do not offer training for their staff. This can cause RA to suffer and patrons may not receive a potentially valuable library service.

To find out how training affects North Carolina public librarians' levels of confidence in conducting readers' advisory, a survey was designed and sent to public libraries through email. The results of this research effort are reported below.

Literature Review

There is not a precise date for the origin of readers' advisory services, but it can be agreed that it is not a new service. Bill Crowley (2005) divides the history of the service into four eras. The period of 1876-1920 is labeled as the time of "inventing" readers' advisory. Librarians of the time believed in their educational role in shaping public reading tastes. They would build a collection and advise readers on what they considered appropriate books. The second division of history is "Privileging Nonfiction RA" and lasted from 1920-1940 and saw the creation of RA positions in many public libraries. The third period in RA history is from 1940 to 1984 and is termed by Crowley as "RA 'Lost' in Adult Services: The turn to information. During this time RA took a back seat to other functions. Readers' advisory was revived in the 1980s with a renewed librarian interested in promoting reading (Crowley, 2005).

The final division in RA history begins with 1984, the founding of the Adult Reading Round Table (Crowley, 2005). This group was founded in Illinois and consists of over two hundred members (Saricks, 2005). Originally, the RA revival prioritized fiction. Crowley sees this as reversing the neglect of mystery and romance over biography and history. It would be wrong to say that there is still a preference of fiction over nonfiction. Readers' advisors should be equally prepared to make fiction and non-fiction recommendations (Crowley, 2005).

Though RA can be simply explained as recommending a good book to a patron, it is not a simple process. As mentioned before, readers' advisory queries should be met with an interview between staff and patron. The librarian asks about recent books that

have been enjoyed in order to find out what factors of a book appeal to the reader the most. The staff member uses this knowledge to make a reading recommendation.

Kenneth Shearer makes a point of differentiating the readers' advisory interview from the reference interview. The success of the RA interview is that the patron finds material that is enjoyable and stimulating. A successful reference transaction is when a question is correctly answered. RA is a more subjective undertaking, while reference transactions are objective (Shearer, 1996). The RA interview can be different from other library transactions and the success depends on the staff member's ability to fully understand a patron's reading taste.

There are many tools that staff members may employ to aid with requests. As Saricks (2001) points out, they can take many forms such as, print, electronic and human. Some of the more common electronic sources include: NoveList, What Do I Read Next, Amazon.com, Fiction_L (a large readers' advisory mailing list) and others. Many libraries own print journals, *Genereflecting*, or reading lists they may have created themselves (Saricks, 2001). There is great value in using other staff and other readers as a reference source. As Saricks says, "Hearsay is a valid source of information in the readers' advisory interview....Readers' advisory is a collaborative activity, with readers and librarians sharing their knowledge of and pleasure in books and reading" (2001, 167). Although staff members may be well-read, there can still be genres or authors they are not familiar with. Tools can help when confronted with a request a staff member can not address or can even serve as a memory jogger when a mind goes blank. It should be remembered that tools can only help when there has been a thorough interview and the

librarian fully understands what the reader is looking for out of their next book (Saricks, 2001).

One way in which RA has been researched is through case studies. They have shown first-hand that many library staffers are not prepared when confronted with a RA request. Kenneth Shearer's groundbreaking 1996 study involved students visiting selected North Carolina libraries. The students entered the library and asked for a book similar to Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*. In 50 percent of the cases, the students received no assistance in finding a book. In 30 percent of the cases, students were simply given titles of specific books. Twenty percent of the cases saw that librarians actually made an effort of discovering what the students liked about *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The students completed a questionnaire after visiting a library. These revealed that students rated the experiences where staff attempted to find more about what they liked about the book the highest. The students said that they would go back to these staff even when the librarian was unsuccessful in finding another title to recommend (Shearer, 1996). This research shows that the correct answer does not matter as much as the readers' ability to share with the library their reading tastes and receive a well thought out response from staff.

Another unobtrusive study conducted a few years later by May had findings that corroborated Shearer's results. A group of public librarians examined how staff in libraries in Nassau County (outside of New York City) reacted when confronted with RA requests. They visited 54 libraries and waited in the fiction stacks to be approached by a staff member. In all but one instance, the researchers had to initiate contact with the query, "Can you help me find a good book?" They reported that many staff seemed

irritated or uncomfortable with the request. Overall, they found the RA interview was perfunctory and lacking depth. They also found that only 25 librarians (46 percent) utilized professional tools to assist in the query. Most librarians relied heavily on their personal reading (May, Olesh, Miltenberg, & Lackner 2000).

In another study, master students at Queens College, NY went undercover at their local libraries and asked for recommendations from librarians. The students encountered similar results as May's study. Many of the public librarians did not know how to conduct a readers' advisory interview, such as asking the students about a previous liked book's appeal factors. Once again, few librarians turned to professional tools, and if they did, they only consulted the OPAC (Chelton 2003). It would be wrong to assume that all library staff has difficulties in conducting RA. The case studies do illustrate the importance of having properly trained staff to meet the needs of visitors to the library.

These studies did not mention whether or not the undercover students were approaching professional or paraprofessional staff, possibly because it is difficult to tell the difference. A study of RA practices in public libraries by Robert Burgin uncovered that it does not matter who patrons approach, the service provided will be similar. A survey was sent to librarians in 1992-1993 that gathered data on the librarian's education, reading habits, sources that are consulted during RA, and the frequency of RA transactions. Nearly two-thirds of respondents had post-college education and over half had ten or more years of experience in public libraries (Burgin, 1996).

One of Burgin's findings was that those respondents with a M.L.S degree reported receiving significantly fewer readers' advisory questions than did those without the degree. Burgin attributed this discrepancy to the fact that librarians without the M.L.S.

tended to be on the desk more and had more interactions with patrons. He surmised that many readers' advisory transactions take place at the circulation desk, which is usually staffed by paraprofessionals (Burgin, 1996). Burgin also found that respondents with the M.L.S. degree were more likely to consult sources during RA interviews. The results are not surprising because it should be expected that instruction on the use of such sources would be part of a library school curriculum (Burgin, 1996, 81). These findings emphasize how important on the job training can be, considering how many staff members who receive RA questions do not have a M.L.S. degree.

Though many librarians may have had the chance to learn about RA tools in school, there are likely many that did not have this opportunity. In 1999, Shearer and Burin sent out a survey to deans and directors of American Library Association-accredited programs. After receiving few responses, a follow up survey was sent to a faculty member whom the researchers determined to care about the subject. The survey asked respondents if readers' advisory and other related topics (tools, promotion, and programming) were covered in required or elective courses. The results revealed that 36 percent of respondents offered general RA information in required courses and 79 percent offered general RA in electives. Not all schools responded, so the percentages could be even lower. In an article published in 2000, Dana Watson corroborated Shearer and Burgin's results. She discovered that of the fifty-six schools who have programs that are accredited by the American Library Association, only fourteen offer courses in readers' advisory services.

A study reported in 2008 shows some improvement in readers' advisory education in masters' programs; Van Fleet conducted a survey of all accredited MLIS

programs. She found that approximately half (28) of the programs offer courses that teach students about readers' advisory, a significant jump from Watson's 2000 study. She found that most of those courses are taught by adjunct faculty. She stated that this could be a sign that the schools do not take the subject area seriously enough to be given to a full-time faculty member. In order to improve education in this area, the field of readers' advisory needs to make the demand for more attention known to professional associations and the library schools (Van Fleet 2008).

There are various reasons given for the lack of attention paid to teaching readers' advisory. Part of it has to do with the history of public libraries. Until recently, public libraries considered the most important aspect of the institution to be providing patrons with useful information that would make them more informed and intelligent citizens. By focusing on that role, libraries minimized the need to supply popular reading. Wiegand reports seeing this emphasis on information reflected in library programs. He claims that they are more invested in theory and less on the act of reading. He laments that graduates will be leaving school with little knowledge about what people read and why they do it (Wiegand, 2001). Due to many library schools focus on academic and special librarianship, RA can be neglected. Watson sees this as a major problem and that employers are increasingly seeking people with skills in RA (Watson, 2000, 144).

On the job RA training is important and that training should be ongoing. All library staff can be trained and prepared on RA services. There are limitations in developing a successful readers' advisory training program, such as space, and funds. These problems can be compounded in small libraries where there may be a small staff.

There are some simple ways to help prepare staff for RA. Stover (2005) recommends incorporating training into staff in-service days and staff meetings. Dedicating time to this activity will show staff that the library values this service. Stover also endorses making it a habit for staff to start talking about books they are reading among each other. This will help staff members become used to the practice of describing books and help identify in-house experts on different genres (Stover, 2005). Welch, reference librarian at Herrick Memorial Library in Ohio, seconds Stover's idea of being aware of colleagues reading tastes and recommends a series of websites for staff to monitor for current awareness on popular books and authors (Welch, 2013). Saricks provides a series of book lists that librarians can consult to become familiar with the different genres. She also includes several exercises that staff can do to increase RA knowledge (Saricks 2005). The point these authors make is that training does not have to be expensive or time-consuming to make a positive impact.

Public libraries in North Carolina have resources available to them, such as NoveList and others that can be easily accessed online or through print. Staff members do not have to have read all the books in the library to make good recommendations to patrons. As readers' advisory experts have reported, training can be accomplished with small changes to the library routine. The question is if training and education is actually happening in North Carolina libraries. Also, there has been no clear answer on how this knowledge of RA can affect librarians' performance. This study will examine these questions.

Methodology

This study was designed to answer how training and education in readers' advisory affect the confidence level of public librarians in North Carolina.

An online survey was used to evaluate the training librarians have received on readers' advisory and if that training makes them more confidence levels. The State Library of North Carolina has a publicly available directory of all libraries in the state. The directory lists every library system and its branches. The name of the branch head and director is published along with their email address. Not all entries had an email address included. The directory was published in 2012 and not all information is current.

A total of 369 emails were sent out; 35 emails were bounced back due to out dated addresses. Thus, a total of 334 email invitations were successfully sent. The email invitation contained a brief explanation of the study, explained that the survey will take no more than ten minutes for respondents to complete. The email also asked for a staff member who conducted readers' advisory for the library to complete the survey. An anonymous survey link was included at the bottom of the email and contained a notice that the survey would be active for three weeks. A short reminder email was sent to all original recipients ten days later. The reminder email stated what was being studied, thanked those who had already responded to the survey, and asked for others to respond by a specified date. The initial email and the remainder email can be found in Appendix A and B. The study was determined to be exempt by The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Institutional Review Board.

The survey was created using Qualtrics and consisted of three main parts. The first section was questions about the library and the services offered. The respondents were asked how many employees the library has, both full-time and part-time. The survey then asked if they conducted readers' advisory, both active and passive services. It is possible that some staff members answering the survey might not be aware of the term RA. Active readers' advisory was explained as providing direct reading recommendation to patrons. For passive RA, they were asked about what specific services were offered, such as book displays and shelf talkers.

The next part of the survey asked for information about the respondent's background, including education level. For those with a M.L.S. degree, they were asked if RA was covered in any of the classes in their program. The survey also asked if their program offered a class in RA and if they took it. The logic feature in Qualtrics was used to skip over questions about readers' advisory being covered in masters' programs if the respondent did not have a M.L.S. degree.

Another area of the survey covered on the job training that staff members received. An initial question was if their job description included providing RA services to patrons. They were also asked if they received initial training when they started the job and if ongoing training on RA was offered at their library. Finally, the respondents were specifically asked if they received instruction on how to conduct an interview and how to use RA tools.

The last part of the survey covered the librarian's level of confidence in offering readers' advisory service. Questions addressed the comfort and confidence level librarians experienced when confronted with an RA transaction, if they used tools when

conducting RA and what tools they turned to most frequently. They were also asked to rate how successful they believed they were when conducting RA.

To encourage additional feedback, there was a space for respondents to leave comments. While this type of data was not quantified, it served to provide more context to the answers received.

Results

Of the 334 emails invitations successfully sent out with the survey link, 132 people started the survey and 120 finished, for a response rate of 36 percent.

The first survey question asked respondents for background information, specifically the size of libraries. These numbers include both full-time and part-time employees. Approximately 46 percent of the respondents reported having ten or less employees in their library. Twenty percent of the respondents had between eleven and twenty employees in their library. Only ten percent of the respondents worked in a library with more than fifty staff members.

Another question that gathered background data was if their job description included providing RA. Table 1 showed that 75% of respondents do have RA as part of their job description.

Table 1: Does your job description include providing readers' advisory services?

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Yes		88	75%
2	No		29	25%
	Total		117	100%

Respondents were also asked if their libraries participated in active RA. Ninety-four percent said yes, five percent said no, and the remaining one percent was not sure. All of the libraries reported using passive RA and the most popular method was book displays at 97 percent. Other popular methods can be found in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Passive services (you may choose more than one)

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Book displays	118	97%
2	Shelf talkers	44	36%
3	Reading lists	109	89%
4	Other	33	27%
5	No services are offered	0	0%

The staff members were also asked to report their level of education. The majority of people answering the survey had a master's degree. The specific percentages are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: What is your highest completed level of education?

#	Answer	Response	%
1	High school or GED	5	4%
2	Associate's Degree	11	9%
3	Bachelor's Degree	17	14%
4	Graduate Degree	90	73%
	Total	123	100%

Of those with a graduate degree, 93 percent possessed a master's in library science. Overall, 87 percent of the respondents had at least a bachelor's degree.

The next set of questions was only directed at those who reported having a master's degree. These questions concerned whether they had the opportunity to learn about readers' advisory during their graduate education. The results to the questions are shown in Tables 4-6. Results showed that 73 percent of respondents reported that RA was

covered in any of their classes during their master's program. However, only 27 percent reported having a class specifically on RA being offered by their program. Of those who reported having a RA class offered, 74 percent took such a class.

Table 4: Was readers' advisory covered in any of your classes during your master's program?

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Yes		58	73%
2	No		17	21%
3	Not sure		5	6%
	Total		80	100%

Table 5: Did your master's program offer a class on readers' advisory?

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Yes		23	27%
2	No		45	54%
3	Not sure		16	19%
	Total		84	100%

Table 6: Did you take a readers' advisory class in your masters' program?

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Yes		17	74%
2	No		5	22%
3	Not sure		1	4%
	Total		23	100%

The training that staff members have received on readers' advisory was also explored. The survey asked about initial training and ongoing RA training. Those results are shown in Tables 7 and 8. The tables both show that most did not receive initial or ongoing training.

Table 7: When starting your current job, did you receive any information or training on how to conduct readers' advisory?

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Yes		42	36%
2	No		75	64%
	Total		117	100%

Table 8: Does your library offer ongoing training on readers' advisory?

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Yes		44	38%
2	No		72	62%
	Total		116	100%

The next part of the survey gauged respondents' knowledge of RA, specifically of tools and how to conduct interviews. Table 9 shows that the majority (74%) of respondents have received instruction on how to conduct a RA interview. As show in Table 10, 89 percent of respondents have received some instruction on RA tools. Table 11 shows the most popular tools library staff use when making reading recommendations. Personal knowledge was the highest at 98 percent. There were 43 responses under "Other." Many of the responses were repeats, and the answers included: patron reviews, online reviews, and some print sources. Over two-thirds of the "Other" comments were of an online resource, including reviews and reading lists. Very few of the respondents reported consulting print books and print lists.

Table 9: Have you received instruction on how to conduct a readers' advisory interview?

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Yes		86	74%
2	No		31	26%
	Total		117	100%

Table 10: Have you received instruction on how to use readers' advisory tools, such as NoveList?

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Yes	103	89%
2	No	13	11%
	Total	116	100%

Table 11: What tools do you use to make reading suggestions? (You may choose more than one)

#	Answer	Response	%
1	OPAC	73	62%
2	NoveList	105	90%
3	GoodReads	73	62%
4	Amazon	83	71%
5	Personal knowledge	115	98%
6	Other staff	100	85%
7	Other	43	37%

The last part of the survey concerned staff member's levels of confidence, comfort and success in conducting RA. As Tables 12-14 show, staff members view themselves positively in these areas.

Table 12: Please rate your confidence level in being able to conduct readers' advisory. (1 being least confident and 5 being most confident)

#	Answer	Response	%
1	1	3	3%
2	2	4	3%
3	3	23	20%
4	4	51	44%
5	5	36	31%
	Total	117	100%

Table 13: Do you feel comfortable when patrons approach you with requests about book recommendations?

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Very	64	55%
2	Somewhat	43	37%
3	Neutral	7	6%
4	Not very	3	3%
5	Not at all	0	0%
	Total	117	100%

Table 14: How successful do you feel when giving recommendations to library patrons?

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Very	50	43%
2	Somewhat	48	41%
3	Average	17	15%
4	Not very	2	2%
5	Not at all	0	0%
	Total	117	100%

The last question on the survey was open ended and invited respondents to relate personal stories or thoughts on the practice of readers' advisory. Fifty-four people provided their views or experiences of RA. Some of the common themes that were present in the comments included staff training, tools that are used, the RA interview process, and success stories. Many of these comments related positive experiences, but a few told of the more negative aspects. The Discussion section will look at the comments further.

Discussion

The results of the survey were not completely surprising considering the literature on the subject. The previous research done on RA reported a general lack of library staff education and training in this area. However, it was thought that the lack of training would lead to lower confidence levels among staff. This was not shown to be the case and possible explanations will be examined.

The respondents to the survey were well educated with 73 percent possessing a graduate degree. Of these, most had a M.L.S. (93 percent of those with a graduate degree). Due to many having a master's degree, there were many responses on the state of RA education in library school programs. Seventy-three percent confirmed that RA was covered in their classes. There is no way to know how many classes it was covered in or how in-depth the subject was discussed. When asked if a RA class was offered in their program, 54 percent said no (19 percent were not sure). If a class was offered, about 74 percent did take this class. The studies by Shearer and Burgin (2001), Watson (2000) and Van Fleet (2008) found that anywhere between one-fourth and one-half of library school programs offered a class on RA. This is in-line with the 27 percent from this study who reported their library school offered a RA class. The survey did not ask where the respondents attended library school, but there could be several repeats in the study. The 73 percent who stated RA had been covered in their classes is an encouraging sign.

The results of the survey showed that training (both initial and ongoing) was not offered at the majority of public libraries in North Carolina. The respondents were asked about both initial and ongoing training. The literature has shown that staff training is an

integral part to a successful RA program. The lack of staff training shown in the survey could mean that RA services are not as successful as they could be.

According to the free-response section, some libraries had robust staff training programs. Having available training seems to be caused by the influence of the staff and the library management. The following quote exemplifies this:

Being able to provide good RA in a public library requires buy-in from local management. In my library we purposely over-staff the Readers' Services desk so that staff members have the flexibility to provide more in-depth RA services to members. Just having one extra person (most of the time) means you can talk to people instead of saying, "Next!" Unfortunately, RA is no longer a priority for system management, which means it is extremely important that our local management still values it. Without their support we'd be limited to passive RA. Reading lists are a great RA tool for non-RA folks. We have lots of reading lists, from If You Like Nicholas Sparks to African American Detectives to Inspirational Romance. We keep the lists accessible so when members say they love Philippa Gregory, even our non-RA folks can help readers find alternatives.

Other respondents reported staff being required to read fiction and being in charge of a specific genre. Some reported requiring staff to attend webinars or pair up with a more experience staffer when they are newly hired. The libraries without training did not specify why this was so. It could be for reasons identified in the literature review, such as lack of time and money.

Despite the fact that many respondents did not receive formal training on readers' advisory, most reported having knowledge on RA tools and how to conduct a RA interview. It is not clear where or when they received training on this. NoveList is freely available through NC Live to all public libraries, so they could have learned about NoveList in conjunction with general NC Live training. Staff members might have also learned about tools and interview success through trial and error. It is not known how long the respondents have been working in libraries and conducting RA. It is possible

that many of them have been working at libraries for many years and have figured out the most effective way to conduct RA and what tools are best to use.

The most frequent tool (at 98 percent) staff members used when making recommendations was their personal knowledge of books. The next most popular method was NoveList (90 percent) and closely followed by using other staff (85 percent). The results are not unexpected considering the results of the case studies. In the comments section of the survey, the importance of using tools was mentioned by a few. There were also comments that made it seem like using tools was not an option.

I think to be good at RA you need to have good recall, and I don't. I'm one of those people who struggles to remember what I read last month, totally forgets that I read a book, or remembers that I read it but can't remember enough about it to describe it to someone else beyond a cursory description. Also, I read more literary fiction, and most people that ask for RA are looking for popular fiction --- vampires, Nicholas Sparks, YA fiction, etc. so I don't have many personal recommendations. I think you can learn enough about how to conduct RA to get by, but those that are really good at it just have a natural gift for it.

This particular staff member did not mention the option of using other tools besides a personal recommendation. S/he thought s/he was a failure at RA because of a bad memory and not reading the more popular books. S/he was operating under the misconception that only those that are well-read in multiple genres can be good at RA. There were several other comments that also mentioned that it was important to read a lot of different books in order to give good recommendations. It is unclear if these particular people are familiar with professional tools.

Despite the fact that staff members received little training, they were confident of their ability in conducting readers' advisory. Over half (55 percent) reported being "very" comfortable when they are approached by a RA question. Nobody reported being "not at

all” comfortable and only three admitted to being “not very” comfortable when approached. The confidence levels reported were also high. On a scale of one to five (with five being most confident) on confidence level on conducting RA, 75 percent rated themselves either a four or a five. The librarians also saw themselves as being successful at making great recommendations for their patrons.

There are several possibilities as to why the confidence level is so high, even though training levels are low. As mentioned before, the survey did not cover how long the respondents have been working in libraries or how long they have been conducting readers’ advisory. It is possible that many of the respondents are experienced librarians and have had time to become comfortable and confident with RA. Also, the person responding to the survey is only one person at that individual library. According to the education background of respondents, they were librarians possessing a master’s degree. Other staff members on the circulation desk might also be conducting RA and might lack some of the confidence that others expressed. Another reason is that the data is self-reported and the staff members may be over estimating their abilities. Although they were informed that the survey responses were anonymous, they still might not be willing to be completely forthcoming.

Additionally, it is difficult to measure success at readers’ advisory. In many cases, the librarians may not know if their suggestions were successful. Follow up with patrons is possible, but can be difficult. This is one of the negative aspects to RA, a respondent commented, “It’s hard to know when you’ve done well, as patrons rarely come back to tell you if the book you recommended worked for them.” The only way to determine the

success would be to interview patrons who have received suggestions or to conduct an unobtrusive study similar to Shearer's in the early 1990s.

The study did not show an obvious link between training and the level of confidence of staff members. However, the free response section showed that the staff from libraries with training programs were proud of the resources they offered and believed that they helped.

Study Limitations

The limitations of the research are a result of the methodology. The data is self-reported and there will be no way to know if respondents truthfully. Library staff might be hesitant to acknowledge that they do not feel confident about performing about performing part of their job. The respondents almost might not be accurately judging their rate of success in RA. As mentioned, follow up with patrons is difficult. Finally, only about a third of the public libraries emailed completed the survey. Information about how the majority of public library staff in North Carolina conducts RA was not collected.

Conclusion

A readers' advisory survey on North Carolina public libraries was conducted during February and March of 2014. Approximately 120 librarians responded to this survey from across the state. They answered questions about their libraries, education, training received on the job, and about their abilities to conduct RA in their libraries. Almost half of the respondents included comments about their experiences in this area.

The results from the survey showed that less than half had exposure to RA in their library school's program. Also, only a quarter of the respondents had received either initial or ongoing training in their libraries on readers' advisory services. Surprisingly, the comfort and confidence levels of RA librarians were very high. Also, most believed that they were successful when giving recommendations to patrons.

The research was illuminating; however, more study on the area could be useful. The survey provided an initial look into the education and training of staff members that are offering RA. A more in depth study in this area is needed. Research in RA could also be conducted in other states to see how North Carolina compares.

One of the problems with survey is that all the data is self-reported. There is no way to tell how accurate some of the responses were, especially those that concerned successful RA transactions and confident levels. In order to receive less subjective answers, an unobtrusive study could be helpful. Interviews with staff members could be another method that will yield more insight than a survey on how training is conducted and perhaps encourage more details on librarians' confidence levels.

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Appendix A: Cover Letter

Dear Library Director or Branch Head,

I am a graduate student at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Library and Information Science and currently conducting research for my Master's paper on readers' advisory services in North Carolina public libraries.

I would appreciate it if you could forward this email to the staff member (over age 18) who is primarily responsible for readers' advisory services in your library.

I am interested in learning about the training, if any, library staff members receive on how to conduct reader's advisory. In order to learn more about this area, I have created a short survey. Your responses will be anonymous and the question will not ask for any personal information that would identify you as respondent. The survey is completely voluntary and should take about ten minutes to complete.

If you have any questions, please contact me at gramley@live.unc.edu or my advisor, Mary Grace Flaherty, at mgflaher@email.unc.edu.

Thank you, I appreciate your help.

Sincerely,

Amanda Gramley
MSLS Candidate

Link to survey: https://unc.azl.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_3CPGShKAaJPRwdn

Appendix B: Reminder Email

Hello,

I'm Amanda Gramley and I am a student at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in the School of Library of Information Science. I am conducting research for my masters' paper on readers' advisory services in public libraries. About a week and a half ago, I sent out a survey link. I would like to remind you that the survey is open until March 7th. I would appreciate responses about your experiences with readers' advisory.

Link to survey: https://unc.azl.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_3CPGShKAaJPRwdn

If you have already responded to the survey, thanks! I appreciate you taking the time to help out with my research.

Thank-you for your time,

Amanda Gramley

MSLS Candidate

Appendix C: Survey

Approximately how many employees does your library have? (Your best guess)

Full-time _____

Part-time _____

Does your library offer readers' advisory services?

Active (providing direct reading recommendation to patrons)

Yes No Not sure

Passive (circle any that your library uses)

Book displays

Shelf talkers

Reading lists

Other

If other, please describe below.

What is your highest completed level of education?

High School or GED Associate's Degree Bachelor's Degree Graduate Degree

If you have a graduate degree, is it a master's degree in library science?

Yes No (If no, please skip to training).

Did your master's program offer a class on readers' advisory?

Yes No Not sure

If yes, did you take a readers' advisory class in your masters' program?

Yes No Not sure

Was readers' advisory covered in any of your classes during your masters' program?

Yes No Not sure

Does your job description include providing readers' advisory services?

Yes No

When starting your current job, did you receive any information or training on how to conduct readers' advisory?

Yes No

If you have received any training, please answer the following questions.

Have you received instruction on how to conduct a readers' advisory interview?

Yes No

Have you received instruction on how to use readers' advisory tools, such as NoveList?

Yes No

Does your library offer ongoing training on readers' advisory?

Yes No Don't know

Do you feel comfortable when patrons approach you with requests about book recommendations? (Please circle one)

Very Somewhat Neutral Not very Not at all

Please rate your confidence level in being able to conduct readers' advisory. (1 being least confident and 5 being most confident)

1 2 3 4 5

What tools do you use to make reading suggestions? (You may circle more than one)

OPAC NoveList GoodReads Amazon Personal Knowledge

Other Staff Other

If you use more than one tool, which do you turn to most frequently?

How successful do you feel when giving recommendations to library patrons?

Very Somewhat Average Not very Not at all

I would appreciate any personal stories or general comments about your experience with Readers' Advisory. Please use the space below.

Thank you for your time!