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Genre fiction readers: a quantitative exploration of provided construct ratings

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Structured Abstract

Purpose – The repertory grid technique was adapted to investigate fiction readers’ attitudes and beliefs, with a specific focus on minority ethnic fiction.

Design/methodology/approach – The study required participants (n=36) to rate on a 7-point Likert scale a series of 16 provided constructs, using 10 main elements, namely the reader of ten fiction genres. Statistical tests investigated participant agreement across construct ratings, where on average fiction readers are rated on a construct continuum, and the extent to which public library work experience affected participants’ perceptions.

Findings – Findings were revealed regarding the perceived characteristics of the readers of ten fiction genres, including minority ethnic fiction. The readers of Asian and Black British fiction were similarly rated, but certain exceptions were also noted which had not been reported in previous research. Although intraclass correlations indicated that ratings were consistent for the more established fiction genres, there was little agreement regarding minority fiction.

Research limitations/implications – The research was potentially limited by the ethnic homogeneity of the sample population and the gender imbalance of same, and (in some cases) a lack of knowledge of minority fiction genres. It was felt that the repertory grid was an effective technique via which to build a rich profile of the fiction reader.

Practical implications – This research could inform the development of fiction collections, and its detailed examination of fiction reader profiles could be adapted in three specific ways, as described in the paper.

Originality/value – Little previous research has been conducted to differentiate between readers of different fiction genres, and less still for those of minority ethnic fiction genres.

Keywords

Repertory grid; personal construct theory; provided constructs; construct rating; minority ethnic genre fiction; genre fiction reader; Black British fiction; Asian fiction.

Introduction

This paper presents findings of a study which is part of doctoral research into the reading and promotion of minority ethnic fiction in public libraries. Previous papers by the author based on this doctoral work have presented a study of reader response to minority ethnic fiction (Birdi, 2010; Birdi & Syed, 2011), and a further study investigating fiction reader characteristics using personal construct theory (Birdi, 2011). The last of these papers examined tables of personal constructs elicited by 15 respondents and their frequencies, and also facilitated the understanding of these constructs its main limitations were that it was difficult to compare participant ratings given that so many different constructs were elicited (n=128 before grouping), that there was a relatively small number of repeated constructs, and that the sample size was too small for meaningful statistical analysis (n=15). However, it was concluded that the repertory grid technique is an effective means of generating and exploring a series of constructs relating to the characteristics of fiction genres and their readers.

The present study was therefore designed and conducted, which required a further group of participants to complete a repertory grid containing grouped constructs from the analysis of the previous research. The present research progresses from a qualitative investigation of the idiosyncracies of individual participant response (as in Birdi, 2011) to a quantitative testing of similarities and differences of constructs across a larger sample.

The aim of this research was to adapt the repertory grid approach in order to investigate in greater depth a group of readers' beliefs, attitudes and intentions to read certain fiction genres. Whereas the previous study (Birdi, 2011) had been primarily descriptive and qualitative in nature, this one is more analytical and quantitative, with the following specific objectives:

- To investigate the extent to which there is participant agreement across construct ratings for genre fiction readers
- To evaluate where on average genre fiction readers are rated on a construct continuum
- To investigate the extent to which participants' previous public library experience affects their perceptions of the readers of genre fiction.

Minority ethnic fiction: terminology and genres

Three terms are frequently employed in this paper, and are defined as follows:

- ‘Minority ethnic English language fiction’ describes any work of fiction produced by a member of a minority ethnic community, who chooses to write in the English language
- ‘Black British fiction’ is defined as fiction written by an author of African-Caribbean or African heritage, living and publishing work in Britain
- ‘Asian fiction in English’ is defined as fiction written in the English language by an author of Indian subcontinent heritage, living and publishing work in in Britain.

The design of this study required the deliberate separation of so-called ‘minority ethnic fiction genres’ from other fiction genres in order to compare their readers to those of other genres. Five decades since the main waves of immigration to the UK from countries in (for example) the West Indies and Indian subcontinent, it is still relatively common for a number of the key stakeholders in the supply chain from author to reader – publishers, booksellers, library suppliers and public libraries – to use the terms listed above and related terms in promoting the relevant titles to the reading public.

The primary intention of grouping ‘Black British fiction’ and ‘Asian fiction in English’ - as distinct from any other fiction genre - was to facilitate their examination, using terms with which the research participants would hopefully be familiar, or would at least be able to understand. The author shares the view of Goebel and Schabio (2013) that fiction genres ‘do not exist a priori, but in the texts themselves and in the interpreters’ heads’ (p.1). It could be argued that any of the books perceived by the participants in the study could be classified in a number of different ways. Another notable point regarding the grouping is that all genres are strongly felt to have a limited life-span (Fowler, 2002; Goebel and Schabio, *ibid.*), corresponding to what Goebel and Schabio (*ibid.*) describe as ‘long-term dispositions in societies, reflecting on social structures, communal vs. individualised concepts of interaction, ontological beliefs, forms of self-fashioning, and...on shortcomings and tensions within a given society.’ (p.1). This societal influence is of particular relevance to a body of literature which originated from the direct descendants of colonial rule.

Theoretical framework

Originally presented by George Kelly in 1955 in his ground-breaking work 'The psychology of personal constructs' and then developed in the context of clinical psychology, the significance of this approach is today widely acknowledged (Tyler, 1981; Fransella, 2005). Underpinning the new 'personal construct theory' (Fransella, 2005, p.67) was the idea that 'a person's processes are psychologically channelized by the ways in which he anticipates events' (Kelly, as cited in Fransella, 2005, p.67). In his work Kelly describes this constructivist approach, by which there is no such thing as objective reality.

The principle underpinning this study, therefore, is that our perceived meaning, or interpretation, of these experiences is the influential aspect, and not the event itself. As Banister et al (1994, p.73) suggest, 'Kelly's focus is on the individual as the maker of meaning'. And to summarise the principle from a researcher's perspective, Burr and Butt (1992, p.3) state that the clue to understanding an individual 'lies in understanding their particular construction of the world'.

Exploring this constructivist approach in a little more detail, we can look to what is now described as 'constructive alternativism', which acknowledges that there are different ways of seeing, of interpreting the same event, and that others are likely to interpret, or construe those events differently from ourselves. The researcher can therefore explore individuals' construct systems and judge them according to their usefulness in explaining the situation, and not in terms of an absolute truth which, Kelly would argue, does not exist in any case.

The repertory grid technique

Initially described as the 'role construct repertory test', the repertory grid is the most well-known aspect of Kelly's personal construct theory. This is a method based on three interlinked processes, conducted in the order as stated:

1. The definition of a set of elements
2. The eliciting of a set of constructs to differentiate between those elements
3. The relating of the elements to the constructs (Fransella, 2005, pp. 68-70).

Repertory grids are generally administered using either dyads (pairs of elements) or triads (groups of three elements), and by asking the participant to describe either a perceived difference between, or the perceived opposite of, combinations of elements. It was Kelly's belief that all constructs are bipolar, in other words that an individual never affirms something without simultaneously denying something else. There are obvious similarities to be drawn between Kelly's work and another notable study of the period, Osgood et al's 1957 study of semantic differentiation. Here, the authors' technique is to present the respondent with a series of semantic scales, consisting of pairs of polar adjectives, such as 'happy – sad', 'hard – soft', 'fast – slow'. The respondent would then note his or her response to the adjectives in relation to a particular construct on a positive to negative continuum. In doing so, as Johnson (2012) describes, the respondents 'differentiate their meaning of the concept in intensity and in direction (in a 'semantic space')'. Certainly, the repertory grid and semantic differentiation are both based on this notion of bipolarity which, as Fransella et al state, 'makes the notion of a construct quite different from the notion of a concept... It is in the contrast that the usefulness of the construct subsists' (2004, pp.7-8). However, although the two approaches are strongly related, there is a fundamental difference between them: on the one hand, as Osgood et al (1957) describe semantic differentiation, 'the larger or more representative the sample, the better defined is the space as a whole' (p.25), whereas the results of a repertory grid interview have been described as a 'map of the construct system of the individual' (Fransella et al, 2004, p.4).

The design of this study has taken advantage of both the idiographic nature of repertory grid data and, in using an identical series of bipolar constructs elicited for participants to rate, the more nomothetic nature of semantic differentiation.

Use of the repertory grid in previous research

There is a large body of research into the use and value of the repertory grid technique and the wider application of personal construct theory, and aspects of this work can be reviewed in order to inform and justify the present study.

As stated above, the origin of the repertory grid is in the field of clinical psychology, and it is therefore unsurprising that much of its previous use has been within this field. The grid is felt to be particularly useful in enabling the psychologist, or psychotherapist, to understand how a

patient views aspects of the world in which he or she lives, or how he or she regards his or her own behaviour in comparison to that of others (Hewstone et al, 1981; Parker, 1981). .

This use of the grid to explore our perceptions of others – in comparison to our perception of ourselves – is of particular relevance to the present study, which is investigating how participants perceive other readers, and how they view themselves as readers. Also of direct relevance is Fransella's finding (in Bannister, 1977) that evidence from her own repertory grid work revealed that many people will dissociate themselves from a stereotype presented to them. As many of the constructs elicited for the present study are based on stereotypical perceptions, it is of interest to investigate whether this finding can also be applied to the readers of different genres of fiction.

The repertory grid in Information Science research

The main application of personal construct theory in Information Science has been in information retrieval research. McKnight used the repertory grid technique and personal construct theory in an investigation of six researchers' perceptions of texts, and the ways in which they construed those texts (Dillon & McKnight, 1993), and as a means of 'externalising an individual's view of information space' (McKnight, 2000, p. 730). This second study used eleven possible information sources as the elements, asking the participant to elicit constructs based on a series of ten triads, and then to rate each construct using a 1-5 scale. Although just one participant was involved in this initial experiment, McKnight reports that the repertory grid is an effective means of obtaining 'an individual's view of the various information sources that make up his information space' (McKnight, 2000, p.732).

Zhang & Chignell (2001) conducted a US/Canadian study that investigated the effects of user characteristics on users' own models of information retrieval systems. The repertory grid was felt to be relevant to research into mental models as it 'identifies individual constructions of experience as the source of a person's behaviour' (p.447), and enabled an investigation of the ways in which different types of users had different mental models, an issue which the authors felt had not been addressed in previous studies. In the UK, Crudge & Johnson (2004, 2007) evaluated the use of the repertory grid technique in eliciting a user's mental model of search engines, and concluded that it is an appropriate technique for 'user-centred determination of evaluative constructs' (p.794). Furthermore, due to the users' own

formulation of constructs, the method was felt to be an effective means of reducing 'unacceptable levels of bias' (2004, p.802).

Methodology

The previous study consisted of a complete repertory grid interview with construct elicitation and rating (n=15) (Birdi, 2011). In order to increase the overall validity of the data collected and to enable more helpful statistical analyses, the present study combines the previous data with data collected from an additional 21 participants, who rated the most frequently cited and/or relevant constructs from the previous study. Unless stated otherwise, the analyses for this study are therefore based on a sample group of n=36. As was the case for the previous study, a purposive sampling method was also used here. In order to maintain consistency and increase the validity of the overall process, the intention was to reach a population similar to that of the previous phase.

Sample population

The sample population consisted of all students on the MA Librarianship programme in the Information School (formerly the Department of Information Studies) at Sheffield University in the academic year 2007-8, both full-time (n=29) and part-time (n=13), and all full-time students on the same programme in the following academic year 2008-9 (n=26). The invitation email emphasised that participation was entirely voluntary, and that no link would be made between participation and their progress on the course(s). In addition, all MPhil/PhD public librarianship students in the Department of Information Studies in the academic year 2008-9 (n=3), all members of the editorial board for the Public Library Journal (n=6), and a group of academic or research staff within the Social Sciences faculty (n=5) - all groups consisting of qualified librarians - were asked to complete the grid. The minimum intended overall sample size for this study was 20 participants, and a total of 36 responses were collected, comprising 15 Masters students (2007-8), 9 Masters students (2008-9), 3 MPhil/PhD students, 4 members of the Public Library Journal editorial board, and 5 academic or research staff. Of the 36 participants, 10 (27.8%) were male, and 26 (72.2%) were female.

The population was fairly homogenous in terms of ethnicity (32 White British, 1 British Asian, 2 Japanese, 1 Chinese participant). 11.1% of the population were non-white, which

although a small proportion is nonetheless larger than the finding of the CILIP Equalities Audit (Batty, 2009) that just 2% of the LIS workforce was from a BME background, compared to (at that time) 8% of the population as a whole.

The research context: collecting additional participant data

A number of additional participant data were collected during the study, in order to further understand the context in which responses were made. All additional questions were carefully considered, discussed with pilot study participants, and only included where they were considered to add to the overall data analysis. Data relating to participants' gender, ethnicity, age (within a range), and public library work experience were collected as the grids were completed, and data regarding which of the ten fiction genres used in the repertory grid they regularly read were collected afterwards, via email.

The selection of elements and constructs

Eleven elements were used for this and the previous study (Birdi, 2011), namely the reader of ten fiction genres (see below) plus 'myself as reader'. Using an identical list in this way increased the generalisability of the data collected.

- Reader of Science Fiction/ Fantasy fiction
- Reader of LGBT fiction
- Reader of War/Spy fiction
- Reader of Romance fiction
- Reader of Lad Lit fiction
- Reader of Crime fiction
- Reader of Chick Lit fiction
- Reader of Asian fiction (in English)
- Reader of Literary fiction
- Reader of Black British fiction.

The 21 new participants of the present study (i.e. those who had not participated in the previous study) were given a repertory grid containing 16 provided constructs, with no opportunity to elicit further constructs. These had been selected using the original list of 128 elicited constructs, which were then grouped according to frequency of response, and then

according to subject area, using five themes, as presented in Table 1 (below). As the focus of the research was on minority ethnic fiction, any construct relating to ethnicity or culture – either of the reader or of the plot – was included. Constructs were deliberately selected from each of the five high-order themes identified by thematic analysis in the previous study, in order to build on a large proportion of the original dataset, and to increase the likelihood of generalisability across the sample population.

Table 1. Emergent and polar constructs selected for the study, according to theme

| Theme | Emergent construct | Polar construct |
|--|--|---|
| Perceived demographic profile of the reader | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reader is more likely to be male • Reader is more likely to be younger • Reader is likely to be a member of a minority group | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reader is more likely to be female • Reader is more likely to be older • Reader is likely to be a member of a majority group |
| Perceived approach to reading | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reader is not likely to be an avid reader • Reader is not looking for a mainstream read | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reader is likely to be an avid reader • Reader is looking for a mainstream read |
| Preferred nature of plot | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reader is looking for an easy read • Reader is more interested in reality • Reader is looking for a light read • Reader is not looking to identify with the plot/characters • Reader is not looking for a predictable plot • Reader is not looking for a happy ending | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reader is looking for a challenging read • Reader is more interested in escapism • Reader is looking for a serious read • Reader is looking to identify with the plot/characters • Reader is looking for a predictable plot • Reader is looking for a happy ending |
| Subject interests | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reader is not interested in ethnicity as subject matter • Reader is not interested in others & their relationships (when selecting a book) • Reader is not interested in societal issues (when selecting a book) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reader is interested in ethnicity as subject matter • Reader is interested in others & their relationships (when selecting a book) • Reader is interested in societal issues (when selecting a book) |
| Preferred genres | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reader is interested in one fiction genre only • Reader is not interested in romantic novels | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reader is interested in multiple genres • Reader is interested in romantic novels |

The findings of the study

Before presenting the findings of the empirical research it is helpful to explain why only the findings of non-parametric tests are reported here.

The Likert scale is used to measure attitudes and opinions, generally where a response is given to a question or statement by selecting one of a number of options, typically (although not exclusively) via scales with five or seven response categories. There is some dispute regarding the nature of the data originating from Likert scales, and whether they should be analysed using parametric or non-parametric statistical tests. Cohen et al (2000), for example, propose that it is not legitimate to interpret the difference between 'strongly disagree' and 'disagree' as equivalent to that between all other consecutive categories on a Likert scale. Pett (1997) and Hansen (2003) agree that the data from a Likert scale should always be treated as ordinal, in other words that the different response categories have a rank order, but that the intervals between each of the categories should not be presumed to be equal. Knapp (1990), however, proposes that sample size and distribution are more important than the level of measurement when making a decision as to the appropriateness of parametric statistics. Jamieson (2004) cites Medical Education journal authors Santana and Perez (2003) and Hren et al (2004) who each used parametric analyses with Likert scale data, and certainly Blaikie (2003) agrees that it has become common practice to assume that Likert scale categories constitute interval-level measurement, and are therefore frequently analysed with parametric tests.

Pallant (2004) helpfully suggests that where the researcher is uncertain that the assumptions for the required statistical technique(s) can be met, three options are available, as paraphrased below:

1. To use the parametric technique anyway, providing justification from other researchers to support the decision;
2. To manipulate the data so that the assumptions are met – e.g. transforming variables – again with justification;
3. Using a non-parametric technique, as these tend to be less sensitive in detecting significance (pp.98-9).

Although the distribution of the Likert scale-based data is spread more widely than had been the case with the binary data of the previous study (Birdi, 2011), it was felt that assumptions

could not confidently be made regarding a normal distribution. It was therefore decided to adopt the more cautious approach, i.e. the third of Pallant's options. However, it is interesting to note that the parametric equivalent of each of the statistical tests contained within this study was also conducted with the data from the study and showed very little difference, with all significant findings remaining as such. This arguably increases the robustness of the findings of this research.

The means of grouped constructs

The data can be analysed using a measure of central tendency, in this case the mean, in order to inform us where the respondent focuses his or her 'range of convenience' between the two poles of the construct (Fransella et al, 2004, p.83). As the elements for the study are located on constructs by ratings between 1 and 7, the midpoint would be 4. Having calculated the means, we can therefore consider the extent to which ratings are asymmetrical, or 'lopsided', in the sense that one pole is used substantially more than another.

Table 2 shows the individual and overall mean scores (with standard deviation in brackets) for each of sixteen grouped constructs, where constructs were elicited by 23 or more participants. Although there were additional constructs elicited by multiple participants, it was not considered appropriate to combine ratings for all grouped constructs, as the original intended meanings were not always the same.

The rating of genre fiction readers on a construct continuum

In order to evaluate where on average genre fiction readers were rated by participants on a construct continuum, a series of Wilcoxon signed ranks tests was conducted. Using these tests it was possible to determine whether or not the mean ratings for a particular genre varied significantly from the midpoint of 4 on the scale 1-7. This statistical test is a more effective means of investigating this issue than a simple observation of mean ratings, as previously conducted, and enabled the specific analysis of the readers of each of the fiction genres. The findings are shown in Table 2 below:

Table 2. Wilcoxon signed rank tests to show the degree to which genre fiction readers differed significantly from the midpoint for 16 grouped constructs

| Construct | n= | Reader of Asian fiction in English | Reader of Black British fiction | Reader of LGBT fiction | Reader of Sci-Fi /Fantasy fict. | Reader of Romance fiction | Reader of Lad Lit fiction | Reader of Crime fiction | Reader of Chick Lit fiction | Reader of Literary fiction | Reader of War/Spy fiction | Myself as a reader | Mean (SD) |
|---|----|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|-------------|
| Perceived profile of the reader | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Gender (1=male) | 33 | 4.18 | 4.21* | 4.18 | 2.33*** | 6.61*** | 2.30*** | 4.06 | 6.27*** | 4.30* | 2.09*** | N/A | 4.05 (0.32) |
| Age (1=younger) | 28 | 3.82 | 3.79* | 3.36* | 3.07*** | 4.75** | 2.82** | 4.50* | 0.96*** | 4.50** | 5.00*** | N/A | 3.86 (0.52) |
| Minority (1=minority) | 27 | 2.52*** | 2.67*** | 2.63*** | 4.48* | 5.00*** | 4.74** | 4.96*** | 4.96*** | 4.78** | 4.93*** | (n=22) 5.23* | 4.24 (0.45) |
| Perceived approach to reading | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Avid reader (1=not avid) | 34 | 4.13 | 4.25 | 3.75 | 5.00** | 5.29*** | 2.75*** | 4.92** | 3.79 | 5.33** | 4.46* | (n=23) 5.91*** | 4.50 (0.49) |
| Looking for mainstream read (1=not looking) | 23 | 2.78*** | 2.52*** | 2.48*** | 3.09* | 5.91*** | 5.04** | 5.70*** | 5.87*** | 4.09 | 4.83* | 3.90 | 4.18 (0.45) |
| Perceived nature of the plot | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Looking for an easy read (1=looking) | 28 | 4.50* | 4.64* | 4.18 | 3.64 | 2.21*** | 2.32*** | 3.46* | 2.14*** | 5.75*** | 3.64 | 4.68** | 3.74 (0.43) |
| Interest in escapism (1=not interested) | 28 | 3.25** | 3.07** | 3.46 | 5.82*** | 5.71*** | 4.25 | 4.46* | 5.32** | 3.86 | 4.79** | 4.29 | 4.39 (0.61) |
| Looking for a light read (1=looking) | 25 | 4.56* | 4.64** | 3.96 | 3.40* | 1.92*** | 2.40*** | 3.84 | 1.76*** | 6.04*** | 4.44 | 4.36 | 3.76 (0.42) |

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|----|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|--------|--------|---------|---------|---------|----------------|-------------|
| Looking to identify with plot /characters (1=not looking) | 25 | 4.76* | 5.08** | 5.44*** | 2.88** | 4.84* | 5.04** | 3.04** | 5.60*** | 3.80 | 3.44* | 4.29 | 4.38 (0.54) |
| Looking for predictability (1=not looking) | 23 | 3.39** | 3.30** | 3.65 | 3.43 | 6.35*** | 4.74** | 3.96 | 5.70*** | 2.83*** | 4.57 | 2.91** | 4.08 (0.54) |
| Looking for a happy ending (1=not looking) | 24 | 3.75 | 3.42** | 3.79 | 3.17** | 6.63*** | 4.88* | 3.88 | 6.29*** | 3.08** | 3.46* | 3.46 | 4.16 (0.63) |
| Subject interests | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Interest in ethnicity (1=not interested) | 26 | 5.65*** | 5.88*** | 3.65 | 2.85** | 3.00** | 2.81** | 3.08** | 2.77** | 3.58 | 3.46 | (n=25) 4.16 | 3.72 (0.73) |
| Interest in other people (1=not interested) | 24 | 4.79** | 4.92** | 5.33*** | 2.71*** | 5.92*** | 3.96 | 3.63 | 5.75*** | 4.46 | 3.29** | 4.70* | 4.50 (0.76) |
| Interest in societal issues (1=not interested) | 23 | 5.35*** | 5.35*** | 5.26*** | 2.96** | 3.00** | 3.09** | 4.26 | 3.35* | 4.89** | 4.00 | 4.83** | 4.21 (0.59) |
| Preferred genres | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Interest in multiple genres (1=not interested) | 26 | 4.69* | 4.73* | 4.42 | 2.38*** | 2.81** | 3.58 | 3.38* | 3.31* | 5.12** | 3.31* | 5.23** | 3.91 (0.79) |
| Interest in romantic novels(1=not interested) | 27 | 4.04 | 3.93 | 4.96** | 2.00*** | 6.70*** | 3.30* | 3.04** | 5.96*** | 4.11 | 2.56*** | 4.00 | 4.05 (0.43) |
| <p>* p<.05 ** p<.01 *** p<.001</p> <p>red = value below the midpoint 4 green = value above the midpoint 4</p> <p>Note – the statistical tests included in the table are based on median rather than mean values (using a Wilcoxon signed rank test), but the mean values are included for accuracy, and to give a fuller account of the data.</p> | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

Perceived demographic profile of the reader

Specifically in the field of fiction reading, previous research has suggested that gender is frequently used to differentiate between reading groups. Tepper (2000, pp.255-256) reports, for example, that reading is ‘a pastime that is closely linked to gender...men and women have different preferences for the types of books they read’, and that there remains today ‘a large gender gap in reading...the gap is striking when we examine fiction reading’. In a brief review of research into fiction reading Yu and O’Brien (1999) observed, ‘Surveys on reading habits have unanimously shown that women are still greater fiction readers than men. Women are also found to have different reading tastes from those of men.’ (p.36). As the findings show, participants felt that the readers of Romance fiction (mean = 6.61, $p < .001$) and Chick Lit (mean = 6.27, $p < .001$) were far more likely to be female than male. Conversely, the readers of Lad Lit (mean = 2.30, $p < .001$), War/Spy fiction (mean = 2.09, $p < .001$) and Science-fiction/Fantasy fiction (mean = 2.33, $p < .001$), were more likely to be male than female. Participants had less strong feelings regarding the Crime fiction reader, and the readers of LGBT fiction and Asian fiction in English, where no significant result was found. For the reader of Black British fiction, it was felt that he or she was significantly more likely to be female, but only by $p < .05$ (mean = 4.21). These findings generally correspond to previous research in the field (Kraaykamp & Kijkstra, 1999; Tepper, 2000).

For the grouped construct ‘age’ the readers of Romance fiction, Crime fiction, Literary fiction and War/Spy fiction were perceived as more likely to be older, whereas the opposite is true for readers of Black British and LGBT fiction, Science fiction and fantasy fiction, Lad Lit and Chick Lit. Respondents showed no significant preference for the reader of Asian fiction to be older or younger (mean=3.82, ns). This finding is supported by Hicks and Hunt (2008), whose research with BME readers revealed that when asked if they had recently bought or borrowed a book by a BME author, there was little difference in the responses of the three recorded age groups within the exclusively BME panel: 17% of the ‘Under 35’ group, 25% of the ‘35-55’ group, and 23% of the ‘Over 55’ group gave a positive response (p.25).

As might have been expected, the readers of the three genres which could be described as ‘minority fiction’ were each rated as far more likely to be members of a minority group than not, each $p < .001$ (Asian fiction mean = 2.52, Black British fiction mean = 2.67, LGBT fiction mean = 2.63).

Perceived approach to reading

The readers of Lad Lit fiction were felt to be the least 'avid' readers (mean = 2.75, $p < .001$), and the readers of Romance fiction were regarded as the most 'avid' (mean = 5.29, $p < .001$). There was no clear opinion regarding the readers of the three minority fiction genres, who were considered equally likely to be 'avid' as not (Asian fiction mean = 4.13, ns; Black British fiction mean = 4.25, ns; LGBT fiction, 3.75, ns).

Readers of the three minority fiction genres were considered highly likely not to be looking for a mainstream read, each $p < .001$ (Asian fiction mean = 2.78, Black British fiction mean = 2.52, LGBT fiction mean = 2.48), with the reverse being the case for readers of Romance fiction (mean = 5.91, $p < .001$), Crime fiction (mean = 5.70, $p < .001$), Chick Lit (mean = 5.87, $p < .001$) and, to a lesser extent, Lad Lit (mean = 5.04, $p < .01$) and War/Spy fiction (mean = 4.83, $p < .05$). Interestingly, Pearl (2002, p.xviii) comments on the 'recent trend' in mainstream fiction of 'the appreciation for literature exploring other cultures and countries, including the immigrant experience', a grouping into which both Asian fiction in English and Black British fiction could reasonably be incorporated.

Perceived nature of the plot

Carey (1992) suggests that many genre fiction categories are still perceived to be mass-produced, often simple texts for a mass audience, and in her study of reading group readers Twomey (2003, p.19) found that 'genre, theme or subject area were sometimes perceived as indicators of a text's likely aesthetic or intellectual qualities', and further that the specific genres Romance fiction and Chick Lit fiction were 'widely and strongly derided' for being particularly 'basic'. Indeed, the readers of Chick Lit, Romance fiction and Lad Lit were felt to be significantly more likely to be looking for an 'easy read' than for something more challenging (means = 2.14, 2.21, 2.32, respectively, $p < .001$ for each), whereas the readers of Literary fiction were felt to be equally highly likely to be looking for something more challenging when selecting a book to read (mean = 5.75, $p < .001$). The readers of Asian fiction in English and Black British fiction were also felt to be more likely to look for a challenging read than an 'easy' one (means = 4.50 and 4.64 respectively, $p < .05$). In their study of public library book reading, Toyne and Usherwood (2001) found that when describing the contribution that fiction reading made to their lives, most respondents included the word 'escapism' in their initial comments which, they argue, 'demonstrates that escapism

is the most conscious perception that people have of what they derive from the act of reading' (p.26).

The readers of the three minority fiction genres and Literary fiction were perceived as significantly more interested in reality than escapism in the plots of novels they read (means = 3.25, 3.07 respectively, $p < .01$ for each), whereas those of Science fiction/fantasy fiction, Romance fiction (means = 5.82, 5.71 respectively, $p < .001$) and Chick Lit (mean = 5.32, $p < .01$) were felt to be significantly more interested in escapist plots.

A broader range of opinions was expressed across the genres regarding whether or not the readers were looking for a 'light' or 'serious' read (mean ratings from 1.76 for Chick Lit to 6.04 for Literary fiction). Despite this, the readers of both Asian fiction in English and Black British fiction were felt to be significantly more likely to be looking for a serious novel (means = 4.56, $p < .05$, and 4.64, $p < .01$ respectively). Writing about the categorisation of fiction in public libraries, Spiller (1980) repeatedly uses the term 'light fiction' as opposed to a 'serious novel', stating that publishers of light fiction very often issue their books in an identifiable genre package' (p.240). Presenting the results to a survey of public library staff regarding their provision of fiction, Spiller reports a categorisation of 'light fiction' by one library service as 'mysteries [crime fiction], science fiction, romances and westerns' (p.251). He also cites one respondent who stated that this area of stock is bought 'by the yard' (p.250), supporting its perceived status as lower than the so-called 'serious' titles.

In a study of young people's reading and the factors contributing to their 'liking' of a story, Jose and Brewer (1984) found that 'reader identification increases with greater perceived similarity between character and reader', and that the 'overall liking of story increases with greater identification' [among other factors] (p.911). Whereas the readers of Crime fiction (mean=3.04, $p < .01$), Science fiction/fantasy fiction (mean=2.88, $p < .01$) and Romance fiction (mean=4.84, $p < .05$) were not felt to be likely to identify with the plot or characters in the novels they chose, this was not the case for the readers of the three minority fiction genres Asian fiction, Black British fiction or LGBT fiction (means = 4.76, $p < .05$, 5.08, $p < .01$, and 5.44, $p < .001$ respectively), or for Chick Lit (mean = 5.60, $p < .001$).

The readers of Black British and Asian fiction (mean = 3.39 and mean = 3.30 respectively, both $p < .01$), plus those of Literary fiction (mean = 2.83, $p < .001$), were not felt to be looking

for a predictable plot, whereas the readers of the three 'romantic' genres (Romance fiction, Chick Lit and Lad Lit) were strongly felt to be looking for predictability (means = 6.35, 5.70, $p < .001$ for Romance fiction and Chick Lit respectively; mean = 4.74, $p < .01$ for Lad Lit). This finding is supported by Parameswaran (1999), who aligns romance novels with vernacular Indian films, describing both as 'formulaic, mass-produced entertainment' (p.97).

The same three genres were also perceived as looking for a happy ending in their books (means= 6.63, 6.29, $p < .001$ for Romance fiction and Chick Lit respectively; mean = 4.88, $p < .05$ for Lad Lit), whereas the readers of Black British and Literary fiction, Science fiction/fantasy and War/Spy, were not regarded as having this particular priority (means = 3.42, 3.08, 3.17, $p < .01$ for Black British fiction, Literary fiction and Science fiction/fantasy respectively; mean = 3.46, $p < .05$ for War/Spy). This corresponds with the view of US readers' advisory writer Saricks (2001) that the readers of all kinds of romance novels (including male romance, i.e. 'Lad Lit') 'expect a happy ending' (p.28), and of Dubino (1993) who refers to the development of the romance fiction genre with its focus on 'love and a happy ending' (p.104).

Subject interests

As would be expected, the readers of Asian fiction in English and Black British fiction were felt to be highly likely to have an interest in ethnicity in the books they read (means=5.65 and 5.88 respectively, $p < .001$). Interestingly, given that the readers of Literary fiction were given similar ratings for many constructs, findings were non-significant for the readers of this genre (mean=3.58, ns). Related to this finding, in a study of the value and impact of public library book reading, Toyne and Usherwood (2001, p.44) found that respondents believed that reading 'increased their understanding of people from other backgrounds or cultures'. Similarly, Syed (2008) studied readers from the British Indian community, who referred to the potential of fiction to arouse their interest in cultures other than their own, making comments such as '[I read to learn] about the world I live in', and 'When I was younger, I liked fiction related to different cultures' (p.33).

A limited interest in other people and their lifestyles was felt to be held by the readers of Science fiction/fantasy and War/Spy fiction (means = 2.71, $p < .001$ and 3.29, $p < .01$ respectively), whereas the readers of Romance fiction and Chick Lit were regarded as significantly likely to be interested in finding out about others (means=5.92 and 5.75

respectively, $p < .001$). The readers of the three minority genres Asian fiction, Black British fiction and LGBT fiction would also be significantly more likely than not to share this interest (means=4.79 and 4.92, $p < .01$, and mean = 5.33, $p < .001$ respectively).

The three minority genre fiction readers were felt to be the most likely of all genres to have an interest in societal issues (means = 5.35 for Asian fiction in English and Black British fiction, 5.26 for LGBT fiction, all $p < .001$), with the readers of Literary fiction also more likely than not to have such an interest (mean = 4.89, $p < .01$). No particular conclusions can be drawn from such minor findings, but it is worth reflecting that as Black British fiction and Asian fiction in English have emerged from the work of post-colonial authors either living in Britain or in previously British colonies, their work often contains a recognised focus on cultural identity and – in the case of those resident in Britain – that which Sesay (2005, p.16) has described as an ‘alienness’ or ‘otherness’ perceived in their position within British society.

Preferred genres

The reader of Literary fiction was regarded as the most likely to be interested in reading other genres (mean = 5.12, $p < .01$), and the readers of Asian fiction and Black British fiction were also felt to be likely to have such an interest (means=4.69 and 4.73 respectively, $p < .05$). No other readers were regarded as particularly sharing this interest.

Regarding the readers’ potential interest in novels with romantic plots, the readers of LGBT fiction, Romance fiction and Chick Lit were each felt to have this interest (means=4.96, $p < .01$, 6.70 and 5.96, $p < .001$ respectively). It is interesting that LGBT fiction and Romance fiction were grouped together under this theme: as Distelberg (2010) suggests, there is more to the LGBT fiction genre than ‘romance’, rather a need to focus on ‘gay life and reality’ (p.406). The findings for the readers of Asian fiction in English and Black British fiction were not significant (means = 4.04 and 3.93 respectively, ns).

Participant agreement across construct ratings

The means of construct ratings for fiction variables are useful in telling us whether, on average, there tends to be participant agreement across the constructs. Although this is useful in itself, mean scores can conceal great variation in rating, whereas a second test – the intraclass correlation (ICC) - can be conducted to overcome this. A descriptive statistic, the

ICC is a measure of the reliability of ratings, so can be used to take into account any such variation in ratings, and instead gives a more precise measurement of agreement (i.e. the extent to which participants rated each construct similarly).

Table 3 below presents the findings of this test, conducted for each of the ten fiction variables.

Table 3. Intraclass correlations across all participants for each fiction variable

| Variable | icc (2) (average measure) | p |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|----------|
| Asian fiction in English | .163 | .156 |
| Black British fiction | .193 | .088 |
| LGBT fiction | .135 | .209 |
| Science fiction/fantasy | .297 | .027* |
| Romance fiction | .17 | .024* |
| Lad Lit | .55 | .000*** |
| Crime | .496 | .001** |
| Chick Lit | .124 | .122 |
| Literary fiction | .094 | .276 |
| War/spy fiction | .404 | .005** |
| n=21 | | |
| * p<.05 | | |
| ** p<.01 | | |
| *** p<.001 | | |

The correlations indicate that there was significant agreement across five of the ten fiction genres, with the greatest agreement for the ratings of Lad Lit fiction (icc=.55). Interestingly, four of the five genres (Science fiction/fantasy, Romance fiction, Crime fiction, War/spy fiction) could be described as the more ‘established’ genres, almost inevitably present within a public library fiction collection.

Given the agreement in ratings for Lad Lit fiction, it is perhaps surprising that the ratings for the comparable Chick Lit genre were not more similar. One possible explanation for this could be that the majority of respondents (n=26, n=10 male) were female and therefore from the target group for this genre, so perhaps had more varied views regarding its readers,

whereas their views of the male-marketed Lad Lit fiction could be more stereotypical (and more consistent).

The remaining four non-significant variables were Literary fiction and the three minority fiction genres Asian fiction in English, Black British fiction and LGBT fiction. Given the frequent description by interview participants of Literary fiction as sharing similar characteristics to minority genre fiction, this particular similarity is not altogether surprising. Looking specifically at the three minority fiction genres, we can see that there is less agreement across the participants, particularly regarding LGBT fiction ($p=.209$), although ratings for the readers of Black British fiction are slightly more similar ($p=.088$). A lower inter-rater reliability indicates a greater diversity of opinion among participants regarding the profile of the reader of minority fiction. Although the range of opinion may be greater than for other fiction genres, the analyses will just discuss those constructs where the overall average across the raters is still significantly different from the midpoint for each of the three genres (e.g. Black British Fiction readers were less likely to be looking for a mainstream read (mean = 2.52, $p<.001$ i.e. 87% of raters scored 3 or less for this construct).

Investigating correlations between the constructs

So far this study has been considering differences within the constructs; however a decision was also made to investigate any notable relationships between the constructs themselves. Non-parametric correlations were therefore conducted using Spearman's rank correlation coefficient; of 120 correlations nine were found to be significant, i.e. 7.5%, a slightly higher proportion than could reasonably be expected to occur by chance (Bryman, 2012, p.349). Interestingly, five of the nine significant correlations relate to gender, and furthermore one-third of the 15 gender correlations ($n=5$) were significant, as shown in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Spearman’s rank correlations to show the five significant correlations between the ‘gender’ grouped construct and all other grouped constructs.

| Grouped constructs | Spearman’s rho with gender |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| Looking for an easy read (1=looking) | .45* |
| Looking for a light read (1=looking) | .45* |
| Interested in ethnicity (1=not interested) | .48* |
| Interested in multiple genres (1=not interested) | .53** |
| Interested in romantic novels (1=not interested) | .59** |
| * p<.05 ** p<.01 | |

As the table illustrates, the two strongest findings relate to female readers’ perceived interest in multiple genres, and in reading romantic novels. The second of these findings is unsurprising, and clearly supported by the findings of the literature (Goldman, 1993; Yu & O’Brien, 1999), and by the findings of the previous study undertaken by the author (Birdi, 2011), where participants strongly felt that Romance fiction was more likely to be read by female than male readers. Other significant correlations are perhaps less predictable, suggesting that female readers would be more interested in reading multiple genres and in reading about ethnicity than their male counterparts. It is also implied that female readers would be less likely to be looking for either an easy (non-challenging) or a light (not serious) novel than male readers.

The remaining four significant correlations suggest the following:

- That the readers who are more likely to look for a predictable plot are also more likely to be looking to identify with the plot/characters in a book ($r = .209, p < .05$)
- That the readers who are more likely to be interested in romantic plots are also more likely to be looking to identify with the plot/characters in a book ($r = .437, p < .05$).
- That the readers who are more likely to be looking for an ‘easy read’ are also more likely to choose their books from multiple genres ($r = .516, p < .05$)

- That the readers who are interested in other people are also more likely to be interested in societal issues ($r = .563$, $p < .01$).

Investigating the impact of public library experience on responses

This study has been designed in order to usefully explore the differences in ratings for the readers of each of the three minority fiction genres Asian fiction in English, Black British fiction and LGBT fiction, between those participants with previous public library work experience and those without.

Whereas all participants had previous work experience in an academic, special and/or public library for at least one year, those without any public library experience at all would be less likely to have worked in the selection and/or promotion of minority genre fiction and would not necessarily have a greater understanding of the field than any member of the general public. The potential value of conducting this correlation is in informing the investigation of the attitudes of public library staff towards minority genre fiction.

17 participants had no experience at all, and 19 had between a few months and more than 10 years of experience. For the purposes of analysis the population was divided into two groups, those who had never worked in a public library ($n=17$) and those who had some experience of this type of work ($n=19$).

Independent sample Mann-Whitney U tests, ‘used to test for differences between two independent groups on a continuous measure’ (Pallant. 2004, p.260), were conducted in order to see if ratings varied between the two groups described above. Given the focus of the thesis, the tests focused on the three minority fiction genres ‘Asian fiction in English’, ‘Black British fiction’ and ‘LGBT fiction’.

Following the analysis for each of the three genres across the sixteen constructs, just one significant example was found, namely the reader of Asian fiction in English and the construct ‘looking for a light read’. Here, the reader is perceived by those participants with previous public library experience to be less likely to be looking for a light read than by those without such experience ($z=-2.202$, $p < .05$).

However, it should be noted that the above example is just one of 48 analyses conducted to investigate these two groups, so the significance could be entirely due to chance: it is important to be cautious about drawing conclusions based on this finding alone. Based on the findings, it would appear that those with public library work experience have similar perceptions of the readers of different genres.

Investigating the impact of age on response

A second series of Mann-Whitney U tests was conducted in order to investigate the impact of participant age on responses made in the construct rating process. Although the majority of participants were aged between 20-29 years, the range of ages included in the sample was far wider, ranging between 20-29 and 60-69 years. It was therefore decided to recode the participants into two groups, namely those below and above the age of 30 years (n=22 and n=14 respectively), in order to divide the population a little more evenly and to facilitate the analysis. It was not possible to have a more even distribution, as the majority (61%) of participants belonged to a single age band, i.e. 20-29 years. Table 5 below shows which of the findings were significant.

Table 5. Significant differences in ratings between younger and older respondents

| Variables | Mann-Whitney U test z | Sig. (2-tailed) | Means: participants <30 years n=14 | Means: participants ≥30 years n=22 |
|--|------------------------------|------------------------|--|---|
| Age/Black British fiction reader | -2.38 | .017* | 4.12 | 3.27 |
| Easy read/Black British fiction reader | 2.25 | .024* | 4.2 | 5.15 |
| Escapism/Asian fiction in English reader | -2.17 | .030* | 3.73 | 2.69 |
| Ethnicity interest/LGBT reader | 2.23 | .026* | 3.07 | 4.33 |
| p < .05 | | | | |

As the table illustrates, participants aged below 30 years were more likely than those aged 30 years or above to think that the reader of Black British fiction would be older ($z=-2.38$), whereas they were less likely to think that the same reader would be looking for a challenging read ($z=2.25$).

The younger group of participants were more likely than the older group to regard the Asian fiction in English reader as having a greater interest in reality than escapism in the fiction he or she reads ($z=-2.17$).

Finally, the older group of participants were more likely than the younger group to perceive the LGBT fiction reader as having an interest in ethnicity in the fiction he or she selects ($z=2.23$).

Again, it should be noted that the four examples above are the only significant relationships to be found in 48 analyses, and for this reason should be regarded with caution. Given the findings above, it appears that neither age nor experience affect the ratings of constructs, but further research could group participants into more discrete experience and age categories, to provide a stronger basis for investigating their role.

Investigating the impact of ethnicity on response

A third and final series of Mann-Whitney U tests was conducted in order to investigate the impact of participant ethnicity on the construct rating process. Although just four participants were not white, given the focus of this thesis on minority ethnic fiction it was felt to be of value again to recode the participants into two groups, those who were white and those who were from minority ethnic groups ($n=32$ and $n=4$ respectively). Table 6 below shows which of the findings were significant.

Table 6. Significant differences in ratings between white respondents and respondents from minority ethnic groups

| Variables | Mann-Whitney U test z | Sig. (2-tailed) | Means: white participants n=32 | Means: minority ethnic participants n=4 |
|--|------------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|
| Minority/Black British fiction reader | -2.44 | .015* | 2.87 | 1.50 |
| Predictable/Black British fiction reader | -2.10 | .036* | 3.45 | 2.33 |
| Romantic interest/Black British fiction reader | -2.20 | .028* | 4.96 | 5.00 |

* $z < .05$

The table indicates that participants from minority ethnic groups were more likely than white participants to perceive the Black British fiction reader as being from a minority ethnic group ($z=-2.44$). They were also slightly more likely than white participants to regard this reader as someone who was not looking for a predictable plot ($z=-2.10$). Finally, the participants from minority ethnic groups were very slightly more likely than the white participants to see the Black British fiction reader as having an interest in romantic plots ($z=-2.20$).

The contribution of the research

In using a larger population than the previous study (Birdi, 2011), the present research has facilitated the statistical analysis of the ratings by 36 participants of sixteen provided constructs, and in doing so has provided further findings relating to the perceived characteristics of the readers of fiction genres, including minority ethnic fiction.

Investigating the means of grouped constructs within the five previously assigned categories, or higher-order codes, as in the previous study it was found that the readers of Asian fiction in English and Black British fiction were similarly rated, both in terms of their personal profile and their reading interests and preferences. Certain exceptions were noted, however, for example regarding their perceived interest in identifying with the plot and/or characters of reading material selected, in that the Asian fiction in English reader was felt to be less concerned by this when selecting books.

Analysing the rating of genre fiction readers on a construct continuum also revealed similar patterns across all three minority fiction genres (including LGBT fiction) for five of the 16 grouped constructs, with just one significant difference between the three genres, namely the extent to which the reader in question was perceived to be an avid reader.

Significant correlations were revealed between female readers and five other grouped constructs, suggesting that women are perceived as more likely than men to look for challenging and serious fiction, thereby contradicting a perceived stereotypical view of women as readers of so-called lighter fiction genres, such as Romance (Yu & O'Brien, 1999). However, the gender imbalance within the sample population may need to be considered when extrapolating from these data.

Further statistical tests investigated the impact of public library experience and participant age and ethnicity on response, and found in each case that there was only minimal difference between the two groups. However, one valuable finding is that both the quantitative data from the present study and the qualitative data from the previous study (Birdi, 2011) appear to indicate that the minority fiction genres were generally regarded as more ‘challenging’ than certain other genres (with the exception of Literary fiction), and that their readers would be more interested in realism than escapism. Dividing the sample population by ethnicity, it was found that white participants regarded the two readers as equally unlikely to be looking for a predictable plot or characters.

Despite these findings, intraclass correlations indicated that while ratings were consistent for the more established fiction genres, in fact there was relatively little agreement among participants regarding each of the three minority fiction genres, although slightly more for the reader of Black British fiction than for the reader of either Asian fiction in English or LGBT fiction. There would appear to be two possible explanations for this lack of generalisability for each of the minority fiction genres, namely:

1. That it is very difficult to ‘define’ the reader of minority genre fiction, as he/she could have any of a wide range of characteristics
2. That participants are simply unfamiliar with the genres, and therefore have no stereotypical view of the reader(s) in question.

Both arguments are entirely feasible, although given the significant levels of agreement across participants regarding the more ‘established’, traditional genres (Crime fiction, Romance fiction, Science fiction/fantasy, War/spy fiction) which would be given a clear section within any public library collection, there appears to be considerable evidence to support the second argument in particular. It is easier to stereotype the readers of more established genres, as they are well-known to us, frequently read by the general public and some participants could clearly imagine a ‘typical’ reader of those genres without difficulty.

In the case of the three minority fiction genres, however, public libraries would by no means inevitably have a separate section for each one, and their popularity with the reading public is arguably less. This was illustrated to some extent in the findings of a further study by the author (Birdi, 2010; Birdi & Syed, 2011), where a sample population of 1,047 library users

contained just 29 (2.8%) readers of Asian fiction in English, 36 (3.4%) readers of Black British fiction and 10 (1%) readers of LGBT fiction.

In terms of the practical contribution of this research, at a general level the findings could be used to inform the development of the fiction section within the overall library or bookshop collection: whereas previous research has not tended to consider the readers of individual fiction genres, this study has enabled a detailed examination of perceptions of the reader profiles of ten fiction genres, and of the extent to which these overlap.

More specifically, the statistical findings relating to fiction reader profiles and attitudes which have been presented in this research could be adapted for professional use, for example to help library and booktrade staff to understand the perceived characteristics and motivations of different fiction genre readers, in selecting and promoting such materials. Further work is being undertaken by the author to triangulate the findings of this and previous studies based on the same doctoral research (Birdi, 2010; Birdi & Syed, 2011; Birdi, 2011) in order to develop a practical tool both to support the promotion of specific fiction genres, and to provide a stimulus for the readers themselves in selecting their fiction.

Research limitations

As with all research, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of any study, and the notable limitation of this exercise has been the ethnic homogeneity of the sample population. Given the focus of the thesis on minority ethnic genre fiction, this limitation has potentially reduced the scope and impact of the findings.

A second, perhaps less striking, limitation is the gender imbalance in the population sample. A research recommendation would therefore be to conduct the study again with a larger population, with greater diversity in ethnicity and gender.

Thirdly, the majority of research participants were either student librarians or professional librarians (all with experience of working in a library), a deliberate strategy to maintain a relative homogeneity in terms of professional knowledge and experience. This consistency of participant profile was felt to be an advantage to the quality of the research data, in that participants were able to draw from a wider experience of interaction with readers of different fiction genres than would necessarily have been possible with respondents who were simply

members of the general public. Interestingly, five of the fifteen participants also reported that their lack of knowledge of minority fiction genres Black British fiction, Asian fiction and LGBT fiction had made it difficult to give a response regarding their perceived readers. In future research it could be of interest to have a wider cross-section of professions represented in the sample population, to investigate if the perceptions and level of knowledge of those from non-library professions - or even those in related professions such as bookselling or publishing - differ from those of library staff.

Concluding remarks

In conclusion, the use of the repertory grid with a group of librarianship students and professionals facilitated the development of a detailed series of perceived reader characteristics. However, it was clear from this and the previous study (Birdi, 2011) that some participants found it difficult to describe and rate the readers of the minority ethnic fiction genres in particular, so it would be of interest to conduct the same study with a group of the readers of Black British fiction, and Asian fiction in English, to see how the two datasets compare. Furthermore, given that the perceived profiles of the readers of the two genres were not identical, it would also be useful to extend the research to the readers of other minority ethnic fiction titles in the English language, such as the growing collection of books by Polish authors who have moved to the UK in recent years.

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