

Assessment of Personal Finance Collections

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## Introduction

Little is known about the quality or quantity of personal finance collections in public libraries. In this study, we sought to evaluate personal finance collections of libraries that participated in the [ALA Public Library Personal Finance Survey](#). There are many approaches to evaluating a subject collection. We chose to assess the quality of personal finance titles held by public libraries as compared to an exemplar list of 10 personal finance titles suitable for public libraries. The exemplar list was compiled based upon the recommendations of subject experts, book reviews, holdings in WorldCat<sup>i</sup>, and a publication date of 2010 forward. The exemplar list serves as a model of highly recommended books suitable for public libraries that can be used as a comparison to existing collections. The exemplars are included in Table 1 below:

*Table 1: List of Personal Finance Exemplar Titles*

<i>Personal Finance for Dummies</i> , 2015, Eric Tyson
<i>Why Smart People Make Big Money Mistakes and How to Correct Them</i> , 2010, Gary Belsky and Thomas Gilovich
<i>Common Sense on Mutual Funds: Fully Updated 10th Anniversary Edition</i> , 2010, John C. Bogle and David F. Swensen
<i>The Index Card: Why Personal Finance Doesn't Have to Be Complicated</i> , 2016, Harold Pollack and Helaine Olen
<i>Irrational Exuberance</i> , 3rd edition, 2015, Robert J. Shiller
<i>The Complete Guide to Personal Finance for Teenagers and College Students</i> , revised 2nd edition, 2015, Tamsen Butler
<i>One Cent, Two Cents, Old Cent, New Cent: All About Money</i> , 2011, Bonnie Worth and Dr. Seuss
<i>Thinking, Fast and Slow</i> , 2011, Daniel Kahneman
<i>Misbehaving: The Making of Behavioral Economics</i> , 2015, Richard Thaler
<i>A Random Walk Down Wall Street: The Time-Tested Strategy for Successful Investing</i> , 11th edition, 2015, Burton Malkiel

## Methodology

The exemplar list was compared to personal finance collections in two purposive samples (n40, n100) of public libraries. The purposive samples were selected from the [ALA 2016 Public Library Personal Finance Survey](#) participants, allowing a closer look at the participating libraries based on geographic locale codes<sup>ii</sup> and population served. For both samples, we searched for the exemplar titles in the holdings of the libraries via WorldCat, or the individual library catalog, if not available through WorldCat.

## Results

### Exemplar Holdings by Locale Code

We selected 10 exemplar titles to search in the catalogs of sampled libraries (n=40) for a possible total of 400 occurrences, excluding duplicate titles held by a library (Table 1). First, we looked at totals across all libraries. The count of exemplar titles held totaled 143 or 35.8% of the possible 400. The average number of exemplar titles per library was 3.6 out of the total of 10 titles. The 40 libraries were grouped by 10 into the locale codes of rural, town, suburban and urban. Each exemplar title was held by at least 4 libraries (10%) out of the sampled 40 libraries. The title held by most sampled libraries was *Thinking, Fast and Slow* with a count of 33 libraries out of the possible 40 libraries. This title represented 23.1% of the total 143 occurrences of all titles. Two titles tied for the least number of occurrences: *Personal Finance for Dummies* and *Why Smart People Make Big Money Mistakes and How to Correct Them*. Both were held by 4 libraries, each title held representing 2.8% of the total occurrences of all titles.

Next, we looked at the distribution of the 143 titles in rural, town, urban and suburban libraries. Figure 1 shows that most occurrences of the exemplar titles were in urban and suburban libraries (both 34%). Town libraries and rural libraries accounted for 20% and 12% of titles held, respectively.

*Figure 1: Distribution of Exemplar Titles in Libraries by Locale Code*

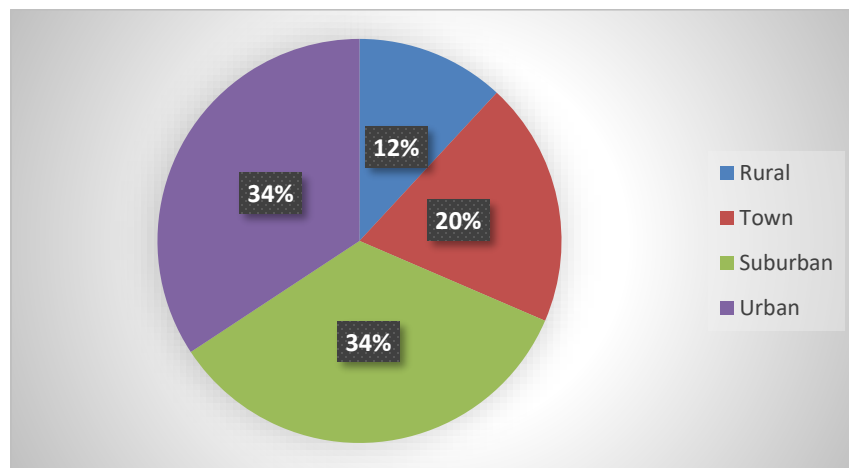


Table 2 lists the number of exemplar titles in libraries by locale code. The title, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* was held by the most libraries (33). *Personal Finance for Dummies* and *Why Smart People Make Big Money Mistakes and How to Correct Them* were held in the fewest libraries (4). No rural libraries held the title for teens, *The Complete Guide to Personal Finance for Teenagers and College Students* (revised 2nd edition). The title was held in one town library, three urban libraries and three suburban libraries. Similarly, the title for children, *One Cent, Two Cents, Old Cent, New Cent: All About Money* appeared in no rural libraries, in 2 town libraries, in 4 suburban libraries, and in 3 urban libraries.

Table 2: Exemplar Titles Held in Libraries by Locale Code

Personal Finance Exemplar Titles	Libraries by Locale Code				
	Rural	Town	Suburban	Urban	Total
<i>Thinking, Fast and Slow</i>	6	8	9	10	33
<i>A Random Walk Down Wall Street: The Time-Tested Strategy for Successful Investing</i>	4	4	6	7	21
<i>The Index Card: Why Personal Finance Doesn't Have to Be Complicated</i>	2	5	5	7	19
<i>Common Sense on Mutual Funds: Fully Updated 10th Anniversary Edition</i>	1	4	7	6	18
<i>Misbehaving: The Making of Behavioral Economics</i>	2	0	8	7	17
<i>Irrational Exuberance</i>	1	1	4	5	11
<i>One Cent, Two Cents, Old Cent, New Cent: All About Money</i>	0	2	4	3	9
<i>The Complete Guide to Personal Finance for Teenagers and College Students</i>	0	1	3	3	7
<i>Personal Finance for Dummies</i>	0	2	1	1	4
<i>Why Smart People Make Big Money Mistakes and How to Correct Them</i>	1	1	2	0	4
<b>Total</b>	17	28	49	49	77

### Exemplar Holdings by Population Served

Locale codes do not necessarily represent the density of population served by the library. For example, a large geographic area may have a low or high density of population. To group the libraries by service population, we condensed the 13 categories as designated by the National Center for Education Statistics into 5 categories to better suit the sample size.<sup>iii</sup> We grouped the second sample of libraries (n=100) into 5 categories of population served. This view provided a way to compare the personal finance exemplar holdings of libraries by service population.

Comparing the exemplar titles to the holdings of the sample libraries resulted in a total of 344 instances across all sizes of public libraries. The number and percentage of each exemplar title's occurrence as part of the total number of occurrences is listed in Table 3.

The title, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, had the highest number of occurrences at 111 or 32.3% of the total (344) instances. *The Index Card: Why Personal Finance Doesn't Have to Be Complicated* was second with 55 occurrences or 16% of the total. The two least held titles were *Why Smart People Make Big Money Mistakes and How to Correct Them*, 8 occurrences or 2.3% of the total and *Personal Finance for Dummies* with 4 occurrences or 1.2 % of the total.

The item selected for teens, *The Complete Guide to Personal Finance for Teenagers and College Students* was found in 3.2% of the collections. The item selected for children, *One Cent, Two Cents, Old Cent, New Cent: All About Money*, was found in only 5.2% of the collections.

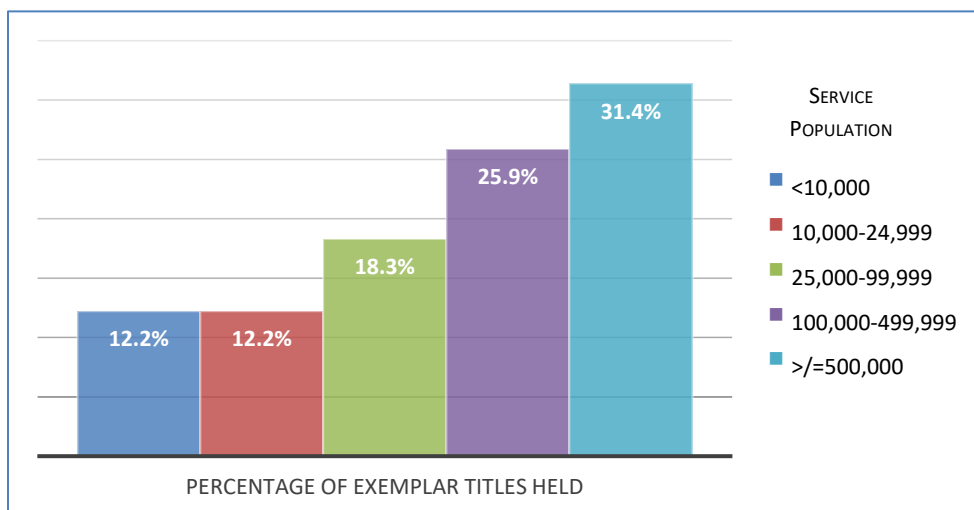
Table 3: Occurrences of Exemplar Titles in Sampled Libraries

Exemplar Titles	Number of Occurrences	Percent of Total
<i>Thinking, Fast and Slow</i>	111	32.3
<i>The Index Card: Why Personal Finance Doesn't Have to Be Complicated</i>	55	16
<i>A Random Walk Down Wall Street: The Time-Tested Strategy for Successful Investing</i>	43	12.5
<i>Misbehaving: The Making of Behavioral Economics</i>	38	11
<i>Common Sense on Mutual Funds: Fully Updated 10th Anniversary Edition</i>	35	10.2
<i>Irrational Exuberance</i>	21	6.1
<i>One Cent, Two Cents, Old Cent, New Cent: All About Money</i>	18	5.2
<i>The Complete Guide to Personal Finance for Teenagers and College Students</i>	11	3.2
<i>Why Smart People Make Big Money Mistakes and How to Correct Them</i>	8	2.3
<i>Personal Finance for Dummies</i>	4	1.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>344</b>	<b>100</b>

### Percentage of Exemplar Holdings by Service Population

The percentage of the total exemplar items held in libraries, as grouped by service population, is shown in Figure 2 below. Some results of the exemplar assessment could be considered predictable. Libraries with service populations of 500,000 and over had the most personal finance materials from the exemplar list at 31.4%. Libraries with service populations of 100,000-499,999 held 25.9% of the total number of exemplars. Libraries serving 25,999-99,999 people held 18.3% of the total count of exemplars. Libraries with service populations of 10,000-24,999 and those with under 10,000 both held 12.2% of the total count of titles. While smaller libraries will offer fewer materials and programs than larger libraries, often the size of a subject collection may depend on community needs, as well as patron demand. Hopefully, this study will raise awareness of the need for personal finance collection development in public libraries of all sizes.

Figure 2: Percent of Total (344) Exemplar Titles Held in Libraries by Service Population



## Discussion

The two approaches to measuring the exemplar list against library holdings revealed similar results. *Thinking, Fast and Slow* led in the highest number of occurrences for both samples. *A Random Walk Down Wall Street: The Time-Tested Strategy for Successful Investing* was 2<sup>nd</sup> in results by locale code and 3<sup>rd</sup> in results by service population. The reverse is true for *The Index Card: Why Personal Finance Doesn't Have to Be Complicated*, which listed 2<sup>nd</sup> in results by service population and 3<sup>rd</sup> by locale code. Similarly, *Common Sense on Mutual Funds: Fully Updated 10th Anniversary Edition* was 4<sup>th</sup> by locale code and 5<sup>th</sup> by service population. *Misbehaving: The Making of Behavioral Economics* was 5<sup>th</sup> by locale code and 4<sup>th</sup> by service population. *Irrational Exuberance* tied at 6<sup>th</sup> in both lists. The two titles for youth were near the bottom of both lists. *One Cent, Two Cents, Old Cent, New Cent: All About Money* is listed 7<sup>th</sup> and *The Complete Guide to Personal Finance for Teenagers and College Students* is listed at 8<sup>th</sup> in both locale code results and service population results. The last two titles, *Personal Finance for Dummies* and *Why Smart People Make Big Money Mistakes and How to Correct Them* reversed places at 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> by locale code and 10<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> by service population.

*Table 2: Comparison of Results by Locale Code and Service Population*

<b>Results by Locale Code</b>	<b>Results by Service Population</b>
<i>Thinking, Fast and Thinking Slow</i>	<i>Thinking, Fast and Thinking Slow</i>
<i>A Random Walk Down Wall Street: The Time-Tested Strategy for Successful Investing</i>	<i>The Index Card: Why Personal Finance Doesn't Have to Be Complicated</i>
<i>The Index Card: Why Personal Finance Doesn't Have to Be Complicated</i>	<i>A Random Walk Down Wall Street: The Time-Tested Strategy for Successful Investing</i>
<i>Common Sense on Mutual Funds: Fully Updated 10th Anniversary Edition</i>	<i>Misbehaving: The Making of Behavioral Economics</i>
<i>Misbehaving: The Making of Behavioral Economics</i>	<i>Common Sense on Mutual Funds: Fully Updated 10th Anniversary Edition</i>
<i>Irrational Exuberance</i>	<i>Irrational Exuberance</i>
<i>One Cent, Two Cents, Old Cent, New Cent: All About Money</i>	<i>One Cent, Two Cents, Old Cent, New Cent: All About Money</i>
<i>The Complete Guide to Personal Finance for Teenagers and College Students</i>	<i>The Complete Guide to Personal Finance for Teenagers and College Students</i>
<i>Personal Finance for Dummies</i>	<i>Why Smart People Make Big Money Mistakes and How to Correct Them</i>
<i>Why Smart People Make Big Money Mistakes and How to Correct Them</i>	<i>Personal Finance for Dummies</i>

The similarity of the lists is interesting given that two samples and approaches were used to gather the data. One reason the same book may be found in many libraries is that librarians often use standard selection guides, so may see reviews of the same books.<sup>iv</sup> Book vendors create similar selection profiles for librarians, resulting in similar lists of books to choose from. These methods work well for most collection development purposes.

When a deficit of titles in a certain subject area is noticed, librarians use other sources such as small presses that specialize in a subject area, networking with other librarians and attending conference exhibits, which provide the opportunity to talk to many publishers. The low occurrences of personal finance titles for teens and children, *One Cent, Two Cents, Old Cent, New Cent: All About Money* and *The Complete Guide to Personal Finance for Teenagers and College Students* is one such area. It could be that there is a need for more teen and children's personal finance resources. It could also be that the need for personal finance collection development aimed at youth is not currently on the public librarian's radar. The topic of personal finance collections and programs for teens and children in public libraries is recommended for further research.



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<sup>i</sup> OCLC WorldCat is an international database of library holdings. WorldCat is found at [www.worldcat.org](http://www.worldcat.org).

<sup>ii</sup> Geographic locale codes are used by IMLS to sort libraries into rural, town, suburban and urban areas. See the following document for more information:  
[www.imls.gov/sites/default/files/fy2015\\_pls\\_data\\_file\\_documentation.pdf](http://www.imls.gov/sites/default/files/fy2015_pls_data_file_documentation.pdf).

<sup>iii</sup> National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved from [nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d06/tables/dt06\\_420.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d06/tables/dt06_420.asp).

<sup>iv</sup> Several example selection guides are listed at the [Library and Information Science Resources for Palmer Students: Sources of Reviews and Readers' Advisory Tools to Build Collections](#).