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Relations between Librarians and Romance Readers: A Missouri Survey*

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Abstract

Romance novels have traditionally been derided in academic literature and while recent LIS literature has been supportive of romance, previous articles indicated considerable disdain for the genre. Criticism raised in the literature suggests that romance readers are less educated than other women and that romance novels portray women as passive recipients of men's actions. Do public librarians subscribe to these attitudes? In order to find out, we surveyed public librarians in the State of Missouri to gauge their attitudes and beliefs about romance novels and romance readers.

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Introduction

The romance novel is a form of literature geared toward women that presents a love story with a central female character and a focus on that character's emotional state. Feminist scholarship and library-related literature from the 1980s and 1990s suggests a bias against romance novels on the part of librarians. The literature, summarized in Background below, suggests that the reasons for these attitudes include the marketing of romance novels as commodities rather than literature, the presence of sexuality in the novels, and concern on the part of feminists that romance novels send a message to women that the key to women's happiness is being dominated by a man.

To counter this negative perception, some LIS authors and practitioners have worked to foster positive views of the genre. Many female and some male librarians admit to reading romance novels. Some librarians proudly admit to writing those same novels. Scholars such as Mary K.

Chelton and sociologist Janice Radway articulate the appeal of romance fiction to its readers, and others view romance as a staple of genre literature no different than mysteries or science fiction. While romance novels and their readers have been addressed in the research literature, the attitudes of working public library staff toward romance fiction and its readers have not been given similar attention. This paper presents the results of a research study on library staff attitudes toward romance fiction and its readers. We surveyed Missouri library directors, a body composed of both MLS librarians and individuals who perform all functions of librarians though they do not hold the accredited degree, as is particularly common in rural areas of the state. The study was exploratory in nature, because the bulk of library literature on romance is comprised of anecdotes and assumptions. There is very little research on the actual attitudes and practices of library staff toward romance. Based on answers to the survey questions and written respondent comments, we explored the answers to the questions below.

1. Are romance novels a significant element of the collection, as indicated by collection development funding and cataloging practices?
2. How do public librarians and library staff perceive romance readers?
3. Do public librarians and library staff feel that romance reading is detrimental to women?

Background

A review of academic and library literature regarding romance novels reveals two camps: opposition and support. Academics and librarians stand on both sides of this debate, but time seems to have softened opposition to romance. The early academic response to romance novels was generally scornful. Academic articles from the 1960s through the 1980s focused on the negative elements of romance, making a clear distinction between romance and “high” culture.¹

Authors provided multiple reasons why the romance novel was inappropriate or inadequate reading material. Principally, romance novels were deemed to be less worthy of the reader's time than other works of fiction.² In addition, romance was deemed pornographic for its inclusion of sex between hero and heroine, and the focus on the heroine's sexual satisfaction.³

Feminist critics expressed other concerns. They maintained that romance novels "perpetuated patriarchal structures" which were ultimately detrimental to women's happiness.⁴ The novels portrayed women being economically and socially rewarded for their appearance and passivity, and indoctrinated women to believe that their lives revolved around men.⁵ According to the critics, women who read romance novels were not able to organize and protest the social conditions that encouraged their use of romance as escape or pain killer. Rather, women became reconciled to insensitive or abusive male behavior through the narrative structures of romance.⁶

Recent work on romance, inspired by Janice Radway's groundbreaking work in the late 1970s, has taken a different perspective. Romance has been re-established as popular literature and women readers as deriving particular satisfactions from the novel's portrayal, or remaking, of the world. A point noted by Radway and acknowledged by her successors is that reading romance provides an "escape" from the strains of family life and a means of recharging and recovering.⁷ Romance novels portray a world in which feminine values such as community-building and expression of emotion are valued, where heroes are able to use emotional language, and where heroes nurture the heroine.⁸ The romance novel becomes a source of affection and nurturance for those women who cannot find it elsewhere.⁹ It also allows women to explore their sexuality and demand orgasmic parity with men in their sexual relationships.¹⁰

Romance novels themselves have undergone significant change throughout the 1990s and 2000s. The incorporation of feminist mindsets, women working outside the home and women making substantial achievements has been noted in some analyses.¹¹ Romance novels are lauded for portraying strong female characters who are willing to pursue their goals.¹² They show women who engage in meaningful, personalized work.¹³ Romance, in fact, acts as a “site of resistance” where women challenge both patriarchal oppression and academic feminism.¹⁴

Early articles in library literature on romance fiction and its readers substantially align with that in academic literature. Librarians deplored romance fiction and but tolerated its inclusion in the collection. In 1980, public librarian Rudolph Bold recommended stocking romance novels, even while denigrating the genre’s literary quality.¹⁵ According to Bold, librarians ought to realize that their own superior literary standards might be “unattainable” for the members of the community. Roger Sutton’s “Librarians & the Paperback Romance: Try to Do the Right Thing” in 1985 refers to teen paperback romances specifically as having the “trappings of mush” – “hyperbole ... throbbing [and] heat.”¹⁶ Sutton described the genre in terms of poor writing, minimal characterization, and bare-bones plots. Sutton’s language suggested that librarians are forced to accept these kinds of books only because of reader demand. The days of “uplifting” collections, he wrote, are gone. As late as 1995, Shelley Mosley, John Charles, and Julie Havar suggested that librarians had treated the censorship of romance novels as a “social obligation.”¹⁷

Disdained for its supposed deleterious effects on its readers, romance fiction is also scorned in research collections. Allison Scott refers to romance research collections as “a valuable,

endangered species of research material, and a class of book that constitutes a major portion of the contemporary bibliographic marketplace in North America.”¹⁸ There are collections that support research in science fiction, detective fiction, westerns and other genres. Romance, as a contemporary literary form, is ignored.

Nonetheless, support for the romance genre has gained strength. In 1984, two Illinois public librarians discussed patron and staff support for their library’s romance collection. *Publishers Weekly* forcibly brought romance novels to librarians’ attention in 1989 and 1991 with articles discussing the romance genre and its appeal.¹⁹ Mary K. Chelton explored romance’s audience appeal in 1991. In a 1992 editorial, Francine Fialkoff cited format and item cost as reasons why *Library Journal* did not regularly review romance novels.²⁰ However, two years after Fialkoff’s editorial, *LJ* initiated a regular romance review column. Librarian-authored romance reader advisory tools such as Kristin Ramsdell’s *Happily Ever After* (1987), *Romance Fiction: A Guide to the Genre* (1999), and Ann Bouricius’ *Romance Reader Advisory* (2000) suggest a increased tolerance for romance among some members of the profession.

The stigma attached to romance novels in libraries and the academic literature seem to be at odds with publication statistics that suggest that romance novels enjoy phenomenal sales and that romance publishing is a booming industry. Romance fiction generated \$1.41 billion in sales in 2003, accounting for 49% of all popular paperback fiction sold in North America.²¹

While sales of romance fiction suggests a substantial reader base and demand for the genre, the Romance Writers of America report that only 14% of romance readers obtain romance novels by

checking them out from the library.²² This figure does not take into account those readers who may use multiple sources to acquire reading material. However, it does raise an interesting question. Do women avoid checking romance fiction out of libraries because of the stigma attached to being a romance fiction reader? Former librarian Jayne Ann Krentz's introduces her work *Dangerous Men, Adventurous Women* with a powerful statement about the negative public aspects of being a romance fiction reader: "Few people realize how much courage it takes for a woman to open a romance novel on an airplane. She knows what everyone around her will think about both her and her choice of reading material."²³

Academic and library literature portrays romance novels as simultaneously patriarchal, pornographic, empowering, escapist, stigmatizing, liberating and scorned. However, the authors of this academic and library literature do not speak for the entire library profession. No prior research has investigated the feelings of work-a-day librarians toward romance novels and whether those feelings might extend to the patrons who choose to read them or the development of a romance collection.

Method

To determine their views, Missouri public library directors were surveyed about their beliefs and practices with regard to romance novels and romance readers. A purposive sample of public libraries was chosen from the *2003 Directory of Missouri Libraries* to ensure representation from urban, suburban, and rural libraries.²⁴ The sample included primary library facilities (central or main libraries) and branch outlets, though it did not include bookmobiles nor deposit collections. Surveys were sent to 126 public library service outlets, and survey responses were returned by

77, for a 61% response rate. Respondents had the option to be removed from future mailings by returning an empty envelope, an option chosen by three respondents. The total number of envelopes received was 80.

The survey instrument (Appendix A) included questions which explored respondents' attitudes toward romance novels and romance novel readers. Attitude-oriented questions were developed based on beliefs articulated in academic and LIS literature, and respondents were asked to respond on a Likert-type scale whether they strongly agreed, agreed, had no opinion, disagreed, or strongly disagreed. For instance, a survey statement based on research suggesting that women learn attitudes and behaviors from romance narrative was constructed as, "Romance readers learn attitudes and behaviors from romance novels." Respondents chose a level of agreement with the statement per the scale above. Other survey questions asked about library practices with regard to the collection development and cataloging of romance novels, including the percentage of the budget devoted to romance purchases and whether romance novels were fully cataloged. No attempt was made to collect romance circulation data. Practitioners indicated that it would be difficult to disaggregate romance circulation data from general fiction circulation data. However, we did look at respondents' perceptions of romance circulation. In addition to these questions, respondents were asked whether they read romance novels themselves. General demographic questions included sex, age, and education level.

Survey response variables were generally categorical or ordinal, with the exception of questions asking for romance collection size. Basic descriptive results are presented for the answers to closed-ended questions. The survey also included a few open-ended questions such as "If you

were speaking to a patron at your library, how would you describe the romance genre?” and “Please describe the kinds of comments that are made about romance-reading patrons.”

Additional space was provided for any comments or concerns that respondents might wish to express. A qualitative analysis of these responses was conducted using nVivo software.

Results

General demographic information is provided in Table 1. Of the 77 surveys received, 26 (34%) were from rural libraries, 19 (25%) from suburban, 31 (40%) urban; one (1%) respondent did not indicate region. The majority of library staff respondents were female. Despite the use of age range categories as opposed to asking for a specific age, age information was provided by only 68 (88%) respondents. The largest number of respondents fell in the 50 to 59 year age range, with the second largest number in the 40 to 49 year age range. Respondents were less reticent with their education information. All 77 answered this question. Of those, 74 (96%) had some post-secondary education, and 37 (48%) had either a Master’s or Educational Specialist degree.

Insert Table 1 about here.

Collecting and Cataloging Romance: When asked how many paperback and hardback romance novels were in their collection, 53 respondents (69%) provided responses. The mean paperback collection was 2,819; the mean hardback collection was 2,995. Paperback collection sizes ranged from 50 to 35,000. Hardcover collection size varied between 7 and 25,000. Collection sizes varied considerably between rural, urban, and suburban libraries. The average collection size for suburban libraries was 1,697 romance novels; for rural libraries, 3,099 romance novels; and for urban libraries, 13,022 novels. Even after eliminating three libraries with extraordinarily large

collections from analysis, reducing the mean urban library collection to 3,462 romance novels, urban libraries stocked more romance novels than do their rural and suburban counterparts. This may be attributed to urban libraries' roles as regional repositories. As seen in Table 2, respondents generally reported that romance novels were popular, high-circulating items, regardless of whether their service area was rural, urban, or suburban. Approximately 85% of urban library respondents agreed or strongly agreed compared to 65% of rural and 63% of suburban respondents. If collection size is a function of demand, that and respondents' indications of romance circulation popularity suggest that romance readers may be making their presence felt in urban areas more so than in rural or suburban areas.

Insert Table 2 about here.

Two avenues of romance acquisitions have been addressed in LIS literature: purchasing and donations. Most Missouri respondents (56, or 73%) indicated they use both methods. Another 15 (19%) obtain romance novels only through purchasing, while 6 (8%) depend solely on donations. These donations-only libraries include two suburban libraries (11% of all suburban library respondents) and four rural libraries (13% of all rural respondents). One suburban library respondent stated that the library neither purchased nor received donated romance novels. Urban library respondents were more likely to develop romance collections by purchasing only; 35% of all urban libraries did so, compared to 17% of all suburban and 3% of all rural respondents.

Insert Table 3 about here.

Only 57 (74%) of the total respondents answered the question regarding what percentage of the library's collection development funds was allocated to purchase hardcover and paperback

romance novels. Eleven (19%) respondents indicated that no funds were allocated for the romance collection; in contrast, 30 (53%) indicated that more than 2% of the collection development budget targeted the library's romance novel section. The remaining 16 (28%) of respondents' libraries allocated up to 2% of the collection development budget for romance acquisitions. Despite the apparent popularity of the romance genre in urban libraries, nine (40%) of urban library respondents indicated that no funding was allocated to purchase romance novels, while only four (20%) of rural libraries did not allocate funds for the purchase of romance novels.

Given the unit cost difference between a paperback novel and a hardcover book, low levels of funding for romance fiction is understandable. A combination of tight budgetary times, a steady supply of donated romance titles, and the low status of romance fiction and its readers, create a climate that make it easy to understand the attraction of developing a romance collection exclusively from donations. However, a collection developed solely from donated books is problematic for romance readers. Donations may not include all of the titles in a series – a must for those readers who use series numbers to track their reading. Author representation is limited to those authors read by the individuals who donate the romance novels, as is the degree of sensuality. Donated titles are not necessarily recently published romance fiction. The titles may be duplicates of books already in a library's collection, or simply out-of-date. Popular fiction readers, for example, are able to rely on public libraries for access to the most recent titles. Romance readers, however, may not have the same luxury. To some extent, these circumstances may explain why the Romance Writers of America report that only 14% of the romance fiction read is checked out from libraries and why so many romance readers purchase their books.

Since the majority of romance novels are paperback format, they are often thought of as ephemeral. Paperback romance novels have a shorter shelf-life than hardcover titles and some libraries have wrestled with the issue of whether that shorter shelf life outweighs the expense of cataloging. Participant responses suggest that this question has largely been answered in favor of cataloging romance fiction; 68 (93%) indicated that their libraries cataloged romance fiction. This cataloging rate was consistent among urban, suburban, and rural libraries. Some libraries deal with ephemeral items with minimal cataloging – basic bibliographic description without assigning subject headings. The data suggests that minimal cataloging was not the case for romance fiction. Of the 68 libraries that catalog romance novels, 62 provide full cataloging.

Reader Advisory Practices: A critical aspect of public libraries' provision of fiction is advisory services for the readers of that fiction. Previous research in readers' advisory suggests that most librarians rely upon their own reading experiences to recommend books, despite the existence of many reader advisory tools to facilitate the process.²⁵ The high percentage of romance book sales clearly indicates that romance fiction has a wide audience. A romance reader might well expect that employees at the public library would be able to recommend romance novels and identify read-alike authors and titles. She might also expect to be able to discuss the elements of appeal of romance novels with the staff at the public library. Is this the case?

While public libraries seem to go out of the way to provide catalog access to romance novels, public library directors and staff may be less oriented toward interpersonal communication with romance readers. When asked whether they read romance novels, 21 (28%) of respondents said

they never did and another 23 (30%) did so rarely. Despite the otherwise strong support indicated for romance fiction in urban libraries, urban library respondents were slightly more likely to answer that they “never” or “rarely” read romance; 62% of urban respondents did so, compared to 42% of suburban and 61% of rural respondents. When respondents were asked whether they read romance for work-related or personal reasons, of the 52 (68%) who answered, 31 indicated doing so for personal reasons, leading to the conclusion that most are not reading romance with the intent of discovering appealing titles to share with romance reading patrons.

Insert Table 4 about here.

These indications that library directors and staff may not be reading romance as part of their readers’ advisory work is supported by the respondents’ statements when asked if they discuss romance with others. Previous research suggests that women develop the romance reading habit primarily from female family members and friends who recommend romance novels and create a romance-reading community.²⁶ Regardless, 72% of Missouri respondents said they never or rarely discussed romance novels with family or friends. They were somewhat more likely to discuss romance novels with colleagues: 65% do so “never” or “rarely,” while 35% do so “sometimes” or “often.” This difference is not statistically significant, but it does suggest that Missouri library directors and staff are more comfortable talking about romance as it relates to the provision of reading materials, rather than discussing their own personal reactions to novels. Emotional content is one of the critical elements of a romance novel’s appeal.²⁷ Library staff may well be uncomfortable talking with patrons about passion or arousal, the emotions romance elicits, which would be a considerable barrier to romance reader advisory services.

Insert Table 5 about here.

Attitudes toward Romance and Romance Readers: To determine attitudes toward romance novels and romance readers, we asked respondents to indicate their agreement or disagreement with six statements stemming from academic studies of romance. Respondents chose responses on a five-choice Likert-type scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” The “no opinion” option was frequently selected which may suggest that Missouri library directors and staff preferred not to give an opinion, do not spend time pondering traditional romance stereotypes or may have felt that a single-answer choice was inappropriate for the question. One respondent wrote: “I think romance novels ARE pornography for SOME women, so I could not honestly disagree or agree.” emphasizing the fact that readers are different and that they read for different purposes.

While some of our respondents understand and acknowledge that readers read for different purposes, the formulaic nature of the romance genre has historically led some to believe that all romances are the same, and to infer that romance readers are incapable of dealing with non-formulaic materials. For instance, Linda K. Christian-Smith’s study of teen romance readers found that teachers viewed these books as second-class literature and the readers as less capable than other students.²⁸ Some romance readers internalize the stereotype and feel shameful about their reading choices. “Romance readers are expected to be simple-minded.”²⁹ However, Missouri participants were mixed in their responses to the statement, “Romance readers are less educated than women who read other kinds of fiction.” While 25% of respondents agreed with this statement, a larger proportion, 44%, disagreed. “No opinion” was selected by 31%, providing an option for those who either did not speculate on the education levels of their patrons

or who preferred not to indicate their view. On the whole, directors and staff in urban libraries seemed to have the most positive view of romance readers' education: 65% of urban library respondents disagreed with the above statement, compared with 42% of respondents in suburban libraries and 29% in rural libraries.

Two statements investigated the idea that readers learn behaviors from romance novels. Some academics have suggested that romance novels teach women appropriate gender behaviors and how to interpret their partners' behaviors.³⁰ Other research indicates that women are more likely to practice safe sex if they see it modeled in a romance narrative.³¹ The majority of respondents, 59%, accepted the idea that "Romance readers learn attitudes and behaviors from romance novels." Another statement related to learning from romance novels was "Romance novels are instructional manuals on how to 'catch a man.'" Agreement (30%) and disagreement (27%) were relatively evenly distributed, with 42% having no opinion on this question. It is possible that some respondents who were not romance readers felt unable to comment on this statement.

Romance novels written prior to the 1990s tend to portray women as passive recipients of male love, while more recent novels have portrayed their heroines as active and empowered.³² Two statements dealt with the portrayal of women in romance novels. The first statement, "Romance novels suggest that a woman's happiness is bound up in the traditional roles of wife and mother," was generally dismissed by Missouri respondents, 65% of whom disagreed with this statement. Only 11% agreed with this statement, and 28% had no opinion. However, there was not overwhelming support for the corollary view that "Romance novels show women as strong, active characters who forge their own destinies." Most respondents (47%) said they had no

opinion on this statement, but 41% agreed that romance novels did portray women this way and 12% disagreed.

The inclusion of sexual tension and sexual encounters in many romance novels has led some academics to suggest that romance plays a role in women's sexual lives, either as a surrogate for a satisfactory relationship with a significant other or as a tool for women to explore their own sexuality and sexual responses.³³ Some authors go further and portray romance novels as pornography for women, in that romance novels serve the same role for women that traditional pornographic materials do for men.³⁴ This opinion is not widely shared among Missouri respondents, 67% of whom disagreed with the statement "Romance novels are pornography for women." Only 5% of respondents agreed with the statement, while 27% indicated having no opinion. Some of this strong disagreement may come from the negative associations of the word "pornography" as exploitative and demeaning, or from the conceptual association of pornography with women in a province usually negatively associated with men.

Additional Comments: Based on their survey responses, Missouri library directors and staff appear less judgmental toward the literary merit of romance novels and more concerned about patron satisfaction. In addition to statistical data, respondents were given the opportunity to offer general comments. Two categories emerged from analysis of the open-ended responses that suggest an essential conflict between personal attitudes and professional ideology. Some respondents seem to regard romance as low culture, with such statements as "I wish they'd grow up to read real literature," and "Staff have labeled the romance paperbacks with a red dot for shelving purposes. They would joke about the Red Dot District." However, other respondents

seem to have been trained by the profession to avoid being viewed as making judgments about patrons based on their reading choices. “We try very hard not to judge by reading preference,” commented one respondent while another simply stated, “It isn’t allowed”.

Whether or not it is allowed, library directors and staff do make judgments about women patrons based on their reading interests. Some Missouri respondents indicated their opinions by commenting that romance readers are “wasting time on romances” and others noted that withering comments are “made about the books such as calling them bodice rippers.” Michael H. Harris, in “No Love Lost: Library Women vs. Women Who Use Libraries” argues that this is a long-standing issue in librarianship:

...one fundamental missing link in our understanding of Western library service...lies in a deep reading of the ways in which librarianship, a feminized but male-dominated profession, has come to the unflinching conclusion that it can distinguish between high and low culture; between those books that are “priceless” and those that are “trash,” between good and bad – books and readers.³⁵

Respondents’ comments seem to suggest that Harris is correct in his assumptions that women library staff judge books written by women for women readers as less worthy and low culture – a waste of women’s time “like TV soap operas.” “Patrons request them and consider them literature,” wrote one respondent, clearly implying that librarians do not.

Other comments on survey forms indicate a lack of knowledge and understanding of readers and their reading, of how individuals use print for their own purposes, and how readers interact with texts. Library professionals and paraprofessional staff seem not to have been sufficiently

instructed in readers' advisory and reader motivations. Respondents described romance fiction as "guilty pleasure," "brain candy," "light fiction for female readers," and "escapist books mostly for women." One respondent noted that romance fiction is "treat[ed] as any other reading interest with no value placed on it particularly." Yet the terms Missouri respondents used to describe romance fiction are value laden and convey meanings about both the romance genre and its readers who "want a simple easy to follow plot without too many characters – just a relaxing read, soon to be forgotten and certainly not about real life."

Discussion

The views and practices of Missouri public library directors and staff provide some indication of the level of romance novel acceptance in public libraries. Given the genre's popularity and perceptions of strong circulation, romance fiction seems to have earned a place as a staple in Missouri public library collections. Most libraries include some romance, and some libraries have very large collections indeed. Romance novels are generally included in the catalog, receive full cataloging, and command a percentage of the purchasing budget. Though a substantial percentage of romance fiction is donated, most libraries purchase at least some romance titles. Some of this investment is in the form of hardcover and trade paperback romance novels with cover artwork that, to an extent, disguises the genre and protects its readers. While hardcover or trade paperback books may be less stigmatizing than the traditional clinch-cover paperback romances, they offer romance readers a limited selection of authors. Romance authors who achieve this status may be marketing to a different audience than the traditional notion of the romance reader.

Purchasing and cataloging indicators suggest that Missouri library directors and staff are comfortable with the idea of romance novels in the library. However, they may not be comfortable discussing their own responses to romance fiction. While 55 respondents (71%) had read a romance novel at some point, only 21 respondents (27%) said they read romance for work-related reasons, which would presumably include discussing novels with patrons. Only 26 respondents (34%) discussed romance novels with their colleagues “sometimes” or “often.” This suggests that library directors and staff may not be able to help romance-reading patrons seeking reader advisory assistance.

The general trend in academic and LIS literature about romance novels and romance readers has been to become somewhat more accepting of the genre as more is understood about the relationship of women readers to romance texts. A trend noted in recent romance novels is the movement from the heroine as passive victim to the heroine as active agent, and the incorporation of elements of feminist viewpoints. While there are no previous studies of public librarians’ attitudes to which the present study might be compared, looking at the results of this research in the context of the academic and library literature suggests that attitudes may be changing. While some librarians are wary of romance novels, romance is no longer a whipping boy genre to be scorned with impunity.

The results and limitations of this study suggest possibilities for further research on romance readers and their texts, and the attitudes of librarians who interact with romance readers as library patrons. Since this research focused on the romance genre, we did not ask the opinions of Missouri library staff about other genres and their readers. Do they hold similar kinds of attitudes

toward readers of fantasy, science fiction, westerns, mysteries and other genres? This study was carried out in a Midwestern state. If the study were to be replicated in another state or broadened geographic region, would the results be significantly different? What role does geographic location play in the responses of library staff? And while our population of MLS versus non-degreed librarians was too small to meaningfully analyze, it might be interesting to know if the process of library school education has an effect on professionals' willingness to discuss romance novels. How is romance handled in library education generally and reader advisory courses specifically? How is romance fiction addressed as a genre in collection development courses and classes on reader advisory services? Are library school faculty inadvertently influencing students toward a lack of respect for the genre?

Does the age of the romance readers or library staff make a difference in attitudes? The feminist movement, culminating with Congressional approval of the Equal Rights Amendment in 1972, changed the way women looked at the world and the world looked at women. What is the role, if any, of generational difference? Do specific subcategories of romance fiction appeal to specific age groups of women? Have women romance readers "grown" with the genre, moving from the early Harlequin series to the more sexually explicit series published in the late 1990s and that continue along the same path in the present day? In her research on women romance readers, Janice Radway used qualitative methods of data collection and analysis to investigate how women felt about their reading. Interviews, observations and focus groups would enable librarians to explain their interactions with romance readers and romance fiction in their own words.

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Table 1. General demographic information

Library Location Type	Number of Respondents (n=77)
Urban	31
Suburban	19
Rural	26
No Response	1
Age Range	
30-39	13
40-49	21
50-59	32
60-69	1
Other	1
No Response	9
Sex	
Male	5
Female	72
Education	
High School	3
Some College	16
College Graduate	14
Some Graduate Education	7

Table 2. Librarians' opinions about the statement "Romance novels are very popular, high-circulating ite

Library Type	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree	TOTAL
Urban	3	0	1	11	11	26
Suburban	1	3	3	11	3	19
Rural	1	4	6	17	3	31
No Response					1	
TOTAL	5	7	10	39	16	77

ms at my library," broken down by library type.

Table 3. How libraries acquire romance novels, broken down by library type.

Library Type	Purchase	Donations	Both	None	TOTAL
Urban	9	0	17	0	26
Suburban	3	2	12	1	18
Rural	1	4	26	0	31
No Response			1		1
TOTAL	13	6	56	1	76

Table 4. Librarians reading romance novels.

Library Type	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	TOTAL
Urban	9	7	5	5	26
Suburban	4	4	7	3	18
Rural	8	11	10	2	31
No Response		1			1
TOTAL	21	23	22	10	76

Table 5. Do you discuss romance novels with...?

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	TOTAL
Friends/Family	27	27	18	2	74
Colleagues	18	29	22	4	73

Table 6. Attitude Questions

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree	TOTAL
Romance readers are less educated than women who read other kinds of fiction.	1	32	23	13	5	74
Romance readers learn attitudes and behaviors from romance novels.	3	10	19	36	9	77
Romance novels suggest that a woman's happiness is bound up in the traditional roles of wife and mother.	12	34	21	8	0	75
Romance novels show women as strong, active characters who forge their own destinies.						
Romance novels are pornography for women.	17	32	20	4	0	73
	0	9	35	28	2	74
Romance novels are instructional manuals on how to "catch a man."	0	23	32	21	1	77