

Some Love Lost: Access to *Romance* Fiction in Edmonton Regional Public Libraries

Nicole Loroff
February 5, 2015



Outline

- Problem
- Research questions
- Literature review
- Methodology
- Findings & implications
- Limitations

Research Problem

- Romance readers are routinely marginalized in public libraries
- Romance novels are treated as a lesser form of literature, which impacts their accessibility
- Catalogued on a basic level or not at all
- Haphazardly shelved
- Creates a negative experience for the patron
- Little actual research to back these claims up

Research Questions

1. Where are romance novels physically located in the public library?
2. How are romance novels organized, shelved, and displayed?
3. What are the practices of public libraries in classifying and cataloguing romance fiction?
4. Are romance novels being catalogued by each library system? Is the MARC record basic or exhaustive?
5. What subject-headings (LCSH)/metadata are being used?

Literature Review

- The romance reader is a uneducated, overweight housewife who indulges in “those paperback romantic nirvanas that sell themselves in supermarkets and bus terminals” as a means to cope with the hardships of everyday life (p.1136)
- Public libraries are obligated to stock romance novels, but should steer romance readers to more suitable literature
- Foundational works in romance fiction scholarship are also highly critical of the genre and its readership

Literature Review cont'd

- Librarians' attitudes are changing, but conflict remains between personal attitudes and professional ideology
- “Whether or not it is allowed, library directors and staff do make judgments about female patrons based on their reading interests” (p.61)
- Study also identified that minimal cataloguing was not the case; 62 out of 68 public libraries “fully” catalogued romance fiction...
- ...but did not actually look at the catalogue records

Methodology

- Experimental, empirical mix-method case study using unstructured observation for data collection; two sets of data
- Visited 3 public libraries from separate library systems in the Edmonton region
- Library 1- chose “home” branch
- No previous knowledge of the selected libraries’ layouts or practices
- Recorded in-person observations using a combination of voice recording, field notes

Methodology cont'd

- Accessed the online catalogue for the 3 libraries
- Sample: 2012, 2013, and 2014 Romance Writers of America RITA Award winners (31 books total)
- Looked at the MARC record for each book, assessed what subject-headings were applied in the 650 fields
- Recorded my observations in an Excel spreadsheet

Themes

1. Organization
2. Visibility
3. Promotion
4. Background or inherent knowledge of the genre

Organization

Table 1. Overview of observed organizational practices

	Alphabetized based on author's last name	Separated hard/softcovers and paperbacks	Separated hard/softcovers into genres	Separated Romance paperbacks into sub-genre
Library 1	Yes	Yes	Yes (All fiction books)	Yes (Historical Romance)
Library 2	Yes	Yes	Yes (Mystery)	No
Library 3	Yes	Yes	Yes (Mystery & Science fiction)	No

Visibility

- All 3 Libraries -
 - Could not see the “Romance” section from any of the entrances
 - Directory signs did not list specific genres
 - Shelving signs were obscured
 - Genre labels or stickers were used inconsistently, especially for hard/softcover books in the “General Fiction” or “Adult Fiction” sections

Promotion

- All 3 Libraries -
 - Did not devote a display exclusively to romance fiction
 - Some romance novels were included on displays, such as “Staff Picks,” but were not labeled
 - Library 2 placed signs of the shelf encouraging patrons to use Overdrive
- Library 2 & 3 -
 - Offered Readers Advisory (RA) pamphlets for popular romance
 - Listed 10 - 12 assorted titles, provided a synopsis, and gave directions to their locations

Background Knowledge

- All 3 libraries - mixing of romance novels in other genre sections
- Library 2 -“Popular” paperback section – saw multiple romance books in this section with no genre sticker applied
- Relied on knowledge of popular romance (authors, titles, publishers) to identify books on the shelves
- Relates to the ambiguous nature of romance fiction?

Implications for Physical Accessibility

- Romance fiction treated similarly to other literary genres
- Separation into genre and sub-genre suggests that these books (i.e. Historical Romance) may be more popular or in greater demand
- Choose to stock or collect romance paperbacks over hard/softcover
- Visibility issues do not appear intentional
- Lack of consistent labeling makes it difficult to spot romance novels, especially for patrons new to the genre
- Contributes to items being misshelved, misplaced, or “lost”

Catalogue Records

Table 2. Assessment of the bibliographic records for sample books available in the libraries' online catalogues

	Sample books in the catalogue	# of books with subject-headings	Total (%)	Average # of subject-headings applied	Listed book medium(s) with subject-headings	MARC field(s) used
Library 1	25	6	24%	2	Paperback Ebook	650
Library 2	23	22	95.6%	3.68	Paperback Ebook	650 651 655
Library 3	20	16	80%	3.38	Paperback Ebook	650 651

Findings

- Most used subject-heading was “Romance fiction,” but only Library 2 applied it in their records in the 655 (genre/form) field
- Most used subject-headings across the three catalogues was “Man-woman relationships” and “Love stories”
- Subject-headings were largely specialized
- Library 1 added the general note “a romance novel” in the 500 field
- All 3 libraries - subject-headings changed depending on medium

Implications for Online Accessibility

- Cataloguing romance novels to a minimal standard; exhaustively varied
- Supports the idea that the majority of public libraries are cataloguing romance novels
- Library 2 using “Romance fiction” to help facilitate accessibility
- Library 1 has limited accessibility compared to Library 2 & 3. However, efforts are being made to make the books more accessible through the general note “a romance novel”
- “Man-women relationships” and “Love stories” problematic

Limitations

- Localized
- Library 1 has multiple branches – organization, visibility, promotion may differ
- Relying on background or inherent knowledge could be interpreted as bias
- Bigger sample?
- Other factors that facilitate accessibility?

References

- Adkins, D., Esser, L., & Velasquez, D. (2006). Relations Between Librarians and Romance Readers: A Missouri Survey. *Public Libraries*, 45(4), p.54-64. Retrieved from <http://eds.a.ebscohost.com/login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/eds/command/detail?vid=6&sid=123a8a77-975a-442a-89df-61767fa756a9%40sessionmgr4003&hid=4205&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWRzLWxpdmUmc2NvcGU9c2l0ZQ%3d%3d#d b=lls&AN=502986107>
- Bold, R. (1980). Trash in the Library. *Library Journal*, 105(10), p.1136-1138. Retrieved from <http://eds.b.ebscohost.com/login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=390cb9cc-ba56-4772-8698-ddcfff61e178%40sessionmgr112&vid=12&hid=102>
- Charles, J. & Linz, C. (2005). Romancing Your Readers: How Public Libraries Can Become More Romance-Reader Friendly. *Public Libraries*, 44(1), 43-48. <http://login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lls&AN=502941333&site=eds-live&scope=site>
- Mosely, S., Charles, J., & Havir, J. (1995). The librarian as effete snob: why romance? *Wilson Library Bulletin*, 69(9), 1-3. Retrieved from <http://eds.a.ebscohost.com/login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=777cf891-540c-4264-8f55-168eaf49af24%40sessionmgr4003&vid=42&hid=4202>
- [Picture of book with pages shaped into a heart]. Retrieved February 1, 2015. <https://plus.google.com/112858590627572911588/posts?pid=5884615155185285442&oid=112858590627572911588>
- Saricks, J. G. (2009). *The Readers' Advisory Guide to Genre Fiction* (2nd ed.). Chicago: American Library Association.
- Veros, V. (2012). The Romance Reader and the Public Library. *Australian Library Journal*, 61(1), p.298-306. Retrieved from <http://eds.b.ebscohost.com/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=a15ae5df-a76c-4f4c-8dd3-718f419cf18a%40sessionmgr114&vid=20&hid=109>