

I DON'T READ IT FOR THE SEX: ROMANCE
READERS AND IDENTITY MANAGEMENT

By

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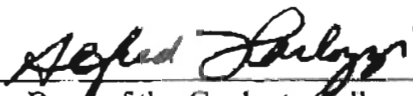
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This study focuses on the Romance fiction genre. Though it is one of the most popular types of fiction genres it still is not taken as seriously as other genres. I am interested in why this genre of fiction and its readers have been the target of much criticism while other genres of fiction, such as horror or westerns, receive little criticism. In this study romance readers were able to speak out on this issue and express their concerns on how society perceives them. Non-romance readers were also able to state their opinions about romance novels and readers. There are many issues that will be addressed in this study. First, I discuss how the content of romance novels and the women who read them are characterized. Romance novels are often described as “women’s pornography,” while romance readers are labeled as “non-intellectual” and sexually promiscuous. These labels reflect the fundamental contradiction of the dominant culture that encourages men’s sexuality and autonomy while restricting women’s sexual freedom and agency (Vance 1984). I argue that romance novels and their readers are ridiculed because they are perceived as a threat to the patriarchal structure of society. Romance novels celebrates women’s own experiences of sexual pleasure and gratification, ignoring the “patriarchal structure in which women act (Vance 1984:1)” Romance novels challenge the boundaries of proper women’s sexual behavior and portrays women’s sexuality as something to be celebrated rather than restricted.

In this thesis I argue that women will choose to read romance novels because:

1. they are searching for a woman-centered story
2. they view reading as a leisure activity

Romance writer Candace Camp believes that:

“much of the criticism leveled at romance literature has a sexist origin because romance literature is primarily written by and for women, which to many puts it in a lesser category of literature” (Fallon, 1984:197).

The fiction genres dominated by men such as horror (Stephen King) or military (Tom Clancy) do not receive the same criticisms that the romance genre receives. Many romance authors (Hart 1999, and Krentz 1992) believe the romance fiction genre is singled out because it is a female dominated industry. According to Hart (1999:98) “What makes the genre unique is that romances are written by women, for women, and to women. Those dynamics create a unique-and personal-author and reader relationship different from that in any other writing field.” This is also the main reason as to why the industry is so heavily criticized. Successful romance author Jayne Ann Krentz (1992) notes that the editing of romance novels has always been viewed as an “entry-level” position in the publishing industry. This type of disrespect from the larger literary and publishing worlds led to the formation of the Romance Writers of America. The writers were not taken seriously; their work was considered “trash” or “beach books.” Is this perception still alive in our society? The results from this research will answer, yes.

This industry, which is dominated by women, receives the harshest criticisms from women. Much of the research from feminist scholars has labeled the romance novel as a socialization tool that encourages traditional women’s roles of marriage and family. Feminist research (Snitow 1979, Mussell 1981, 1984, Modleski 1982, and Radway 1984) argues that by allowing the reader to “escape” from reality for short periods of time, the novels are enabling women to remain in “traditional” or submissive roles within a patriarchal society. This has romance authors (Krentz 1992, Phillips 1992, and Hart

1999) and readers in an uproar because they too claim to be feminists and many of the romance novels, especially contemporaries, are written from a feminist perspective which tell the stories of strong career women that find love on “their terms.”

Through this research, I have found that information is lacking regarding the readers of romance novels. There have been studies regarding readers (Hajda 1967, Mann 1974, and Owen 1990) yet these have focused more on the demographics of romance readers. However this research has been useful in understanding “who” the women are that read romance novels, but not “why” they read them or “how” they read them.

Romance readers have more than just demographics to offer a researcher. Why do women read romance novels? How do women read romance novels, at home or in public places? Public places will be defined as anywhere outside the home in which readers have the possibility of coming into contact with other people. And why is this genre of fiction and its readers the target of critics?

In Chapter 2 the literature review will be separated into two sections. In the first section of the literature review, there will be a discussion of the history of the romance novel. Then there is a section listing romance industry statistics, information concerning publishers of romance novels and the two different ways that a novel is published, either as a single-title romance or a series romance. Next is a section describing the professional organization of romance writers the Romance Writers Association (RWA) and the local Oklahoma Chapter (OKRWA).

In the second section of the literature review, there is first an analysis of feminist research, which has focused on the romance novel as a pacification or socialization tool.

The next section contains research that has focused on a new direction in romance novel research, more focus on the readers. Then a section is included that discusses information from romance authors, which is designed to defend their books and readers in response to romance novel critics. The last section in the literature review is a description of stigma and how groups have utilized identity management tactics.

In chapter 3, the methodology is explained. Qualitative methods have been employed for this study, specifically in-depth interviews with 18 individuals. There were nine women that read romance novels interviewed as well as nine women that did not read romance novels.

In chapter 4, the findings are presented of What, When, How, Where and Why women read romance novels and the stigma they face and how the management tactics they employ to maintain their identity of an intellectual woman. Information is also presented concerning the images of identity that the non-romance readers have concerning the romance novel and the women that read romance novels.

In chapter 5, in the conclusions section conclusions are drawn and there is a discussion of possibilities for future research. These possibilities include: a closer examination of the RWA as a gendered organization, the reasons for the increase in popularity of the romance novel during the 1980's, and why there has been an increase in women writing romance novels (why has the number of romance writers increased, do readers eventually write?).

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

SECTION I

This section of the literature review contains a brief history of the romance novel and its sub-genres, designed to show how the romance fiction genre came about and how it has transformed over the decades into today's "modern romance novel" which the Romance Writers of America define as

"a story with a central love theme and an emotionally satisfying ending"
(www.rwanational.org 5/21/02).

The idea of an emotionally satisfying ending revolves around the man and woman overcoming a conflict, which then allows them to be together as a committed couple. Next there is a discussion of the romance novel industry which includes information relating to the two different ways a novel can be published, either as a series/category novel or single-title novel. Then there is a section that describes the Romance Writers of America (RWA) and the Oklahoma Outlaws, the Oklahoma chapter of the RWA. This information is included to describe the professional organization of romance writers.

The History of the Romance Novel

European romance novels date to the twelfth century when stories of courtly and illicit love became popular with Chretien de Troyes credited as being the "father of the medieval romance" (Guiley 1983:54). He served in the French court at the time of Louis VII when he was married to Eleanor of Aquitaine. Queen Eleanor and her daughter, Marie de Champagne, wanted stories of courtly love that described heroic knights who

loved their ladies above anything else even dying to defend their honor. Themes of courtly love dominated romances until the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. During this time, romances changed to stories using the woman as the main character focusing on her emotions and sexuality. In 1761 *Pamela: Virtue Rewarded* by Samuel Richardson was published is considered one of the first romance novels. This book was so successful that many other writers copied the format making this genre popular. Books written by the Bronte sisters are viewed as role models for today's modern romance. The character of Heathcliff from *Wuthering Heights* still serves as a role model for the hero characterized as dark, brooding, and somewhat dangerous but exciting. Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* (1874) provided a strong, independent heroine, who demonstrates her self-sacrificing love by marrying the hero, even though he is blind. Jane Austen's novels *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma* also serve as role models for modern day romance novels (Guiley, 1973).

American romance novels use one of three archetypal characters: the domestic, the working girl and the happy novel. These character types became popular during the mid-nineteenth century due to the emergence of women as "cultural, social, and economic forces" (Pazis 1998:28). The "domestic" novel helped women to deal with problems revolving around their homes and husbands whereas the "working girl" novel emerged in response to the increasing numbers of women that were entering the workforce during the industrial revolution, working in such places as sweat shops, offices and factories. In the early twentieth century the "happy" novel appeared which was similar to the "working girl" novels but focused on a woman that relied on secular resources - such as her own self confidence - rather than religious values. This shift

from the domination of religious values to secular values provided room for the romance novel to portray women as independent but also as sexual beings in their own right.

By 1908, a British publisher, Mills & Boone, was publishing four different lines of romance novels: exotic, society, city, and country. The exotic and society novels dealt with the English upper class whereas the city and country novels encompassed the English middle class. By the 1920's the different categories had merged. Authors were writing anything the imagination could produce (Dixon 1999).

Dixon (1999:17) notes that during the 1930's the term "escapism" defined as:

"the tendency to, or practice of, seeking distraction from what normally has to be endured"

was applied for the first time to romance novels and readers. Until this time, books were read for pleasure, not for escape. During the 1920's and 1930's, the heroines became much more self-sufficient characters. World War II also played a role in shaping the romance novel. In the 1940's, the majority of romance novels incorporated the War into the story and these novels required a greater sense of respectability and morality from the heroine and hero.

In reaction to this in the 1950's romance novels went back to the basic "fairy-tale" theme of romance where a heroine meets a "Prince Charming" hero. There was also a boom in romance novels featuring Doctors and Nurses and the medical field as a backdrop during this decade. Throughout the 1950's and 1960's the heroines were very sensitive women while the heroes were the "alpha-males." The "alpha-male" character can be described as very macho, confident, aggressive, arrogant, as well as tall and muscular man.

In the 1960's the romance fiction genre was in a decline due to many social issues including civil rights, the Vietnam War, and feminism. The Women's Liberation Movement thought that romance novels "promoted promiscuity, permissiveness and doubt"(Pazis 1998:31). (In section II of the literature review there is a feminist critique of the romance novel.) It was partly in response to all the turmoil of the 1960's that the romance novel boomed again in the 1970's. During this time Harlequin and Mills and Boon merged and experienced widespread growth. Many publishers began to publish romance novels that had not done so before. Romances had been popular up to this time yet in 1972, *The Flame and the Flower*, by Kathleen E. Woodiwiss was published through Avon and ignited a romance publishing frenzy that has not slowed down. This novel and others published through Avon contributed to the romance category becoming the number one seller in the fiction industry.

As the romance genre continued to gain popularity during the 1980's the number of readers and authors increased. With the increase in authors the Romance Writers of America (RWA) was formed, which will be discussed in the next section. Throughout this period, Harlequin dominated the romance industry with 80 percent of the world market in the mid 1980's. During this time, Harlequin bought out their rival, Silhouette, and currently publishes under both names. There was also a movement during this time to make the "alpha-male" nicer which created a problem of how to build the necessary tension between a hero and heroine. In a romance novel there has to be an obstacle that the characters must overcome in order to ultimately be together in the end. If the obstacle did not lie within the "arrogant alpha-male" then a problem had to be placed somewhere else. Therefore other issues that women might have to deal with in life were explored:

alcoholism, single motherhood, depression, widowhood, infertility, incest, and spousal abuse.

Historical romance novels have always been the most popular genre within the romance fiction industry yet other categories were created so that readers had just about any choices imaginable. Since the early 1990's the romance fiction genre has tried to keep up with its large and growing audience by publishing a wide variety of novels. A romance novel can encompass any story within any setting as long as the hero and heroine are happily together in the end. In order to do this the romance genre is divided into sub-genres. See Table 1.

Table 1. Romance Sub-Genres

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| Contemporary romance | Romances set after the World Wars. |
| Historical romance | Romances set before the World Wars. |
| Inspirational romance | Romances containing spiritual themes. |
| Paranormal romances | Romances containing "other-worldly" elements such as magic, mystic characters or fantasy and science fiction elements. |
| Regency romance | Romances set in England in the early 1800's. |
| Romantic suspense | Romances containing mystery and intrigue. |
| Time-travel romance | (Included in our Paranormal sub-genre) romances set in two different time periods, with characters "time-traveling" between both. |

Source: www.rwanational.org/sub_genres.stm 3/15/03

Romance Novel Industry Statistics

Romance fiction is very popular and is published all over the world. The following statistics were compiled by the Romance Writers of America (RWA).

- *Romance fiction accounted for \$1.52 billion dollars in sales in 2001.
- *Romance fiction accounted for 55% of all paperback fiction sold in the United States in 2001.
- *Of all popular fiction sold (this includes hardcovers and trade-sized paperbacks, not just paperbacks):
 - 35.8% was Romance fiction
 - 26.6% was Mystery/Detective/Suspense
 - 17% was General Fiction
 - 6.6% was Science Fiction/Fantasy
 - 14.4% included Religious, Occult, Westerns, Male Adventure, General

History, Adult and Movie tie-ins.

*37% of romances readers read only Single-title romances

*45% read Single-title and Series romances

*18% read only Series romances

(www.rwanational.org/statistics.stm 3/15/03)

Series/Category Romance Novels

There are two publishing formats for romance novels. They can either be published as a Series or Category romance novel or a Single-title novel.

A Series Romance is a shorter paperback romance novel that is released as part of a numbered series and typically published by Harlequin/Silhouette, the largest publisher of series romance. A number indicating the place each book lands in the series appears on the cover of each series book. Series romances are released in numbered order, and shelved monthly like a periodical-with the previous month's titles being replaced by the next month's titles every several weeks.

(www.rwanational.org/statistics.stm 3/15/03)

See Table 2. for a description of the various series/categories of romances. The Series/Category novels are published through Harlequin, Silhouette, and Mills & Boon. These publishers accept "unagented" manuscripts, which means that an author can send their manuscript directly to the publisher. An "agented" manuscript requires that an established literary agent must send the manuscript. Therefore in order to send an "agented" manuscript an author must first find an established literary agent.

Table 2. Descriptions of the various Series/Category Novels

| Series/Category Lines All of which are published through the parent company of Torstar | Books Published per Year | Description |
|---|--------------------------------|---|
| Harlequin Series Unagented: | | |
| American Romance Words per book: 70-75,000 | 48 | Celebrates the pursuit of love in the backyards, big cities and wide-open spaces of America. Wide range of emotional and sensual content. Confident and caring heroine, tough but tender hero |

| | | |
|---|----|--|
| Blaze Words per book: 70-75,000 | 48 | New series that evolved out of the Temptation line. Sensuous, highly romantic, innovative, plots that are sexy in premise and execution. Very contemporary feel young and single, heroes and heroines in their early 20's and up. Emphasis on the physical relationship, fully described love scenes along with a high level of fantasy and playfulness. Commitment at the end. |
| Duets Words per book: 50-55,000 | 12 | Combination of romance and comedy, these novels depend on the comedy building from the relationship between the hero and heroine. High degree of sexual tension is a must, love scenes are not required. |
| Historicals Words per book: 95-105,000 | | Set prior to 1900. Primarily set in North America, England or France between 1100 and 1900. Not looking for the American Civil War, gothics, or family sagas or comedy of manners typified by a straight Regency. Primary element is romance. Story should focus on the heroine and how her love for one man changes her life forever. Must include romantic tension. |
| Intrigue Words per book: 70-75,000 | 48 | Taut, edge-of-the-seat, contemporary romantic suspense tales of intrigue and desire. Kidnappings, stalkings and women in jeopardy, coupled with best-selling romantic themes are examples. All loose ends are tied up neatly. |
| Presents Words per book: 50-55,000 | 72 | Grounded in reality, these stories offer compelling modern fantasies. Independent heroines must have conflict with breathtakingly attractive, larger-than-life hero. The romance may include explicit lovemaking. Harlequin Presents captures the drama and intensity of a powerful, sensual love affair. |
| Romance Words per book: 50-50,000 | 48 | Set against a variety of international settings. Strong, charismatic hero is essential; but, most importantly, reader must be able to identify intimately with a believable, engaging heroine. Contemporary and relevant to today's women. Whilst sexual description won't be explicit, there should be an edge of sensual tension. |
| Superromance Words per book: 85,000 | 72 | A contemporary, involving read with a mainstream tone in its situations and characters, using romance as the major theme. To achieve this, emphasis should be placed on individual writing styles and unique and topical ideas. Criteria are flexible. Aside from length the determining factor for publication is quality. Break free of stereotypes, cliches, and worn plot devices. |
| Temptation Words per book: 60,000 | 48 | Sexy, sassy and seductive! This is Harlequin's boldest, most sensuous series, focusing on men and women living-and-loving-today! Almost anything goes in Temptation: the stories may be humorous, topical, adventurous or glitzy, but at heart they are pure romantic fantasy. High level of sexual tension along with strong conflicts and then throw in a good dash of "what if..." The results should sizzle! |
| Blanca | | Harlequin's Spanish line. No other information available. |
| Deseo | | Harlequin's Spanish line. No other information available. |

| | | |
|---|----------------------|--|
| Mills & Boon Medical Romance Words per book: 50-55,000 | | Present-day romances in a medical setting. There should be a good balance between the romance, the medicine and the underlying story. At least one of the main characters should be a medical professional, and developing the romance is easier if the hero and heroine work together. Medical detail should be accurate but preferably without using technical language. An exploration of patients and their illnesses is permitted, but not in such numbers as to overwhelm the growing love story. Settings can be anywhere in the world. |
| Mills & Boon Historical Romance Words per book: 75-85,000 | | Covers a wide range of British and European historical periods from 1066 to approximately 1920. The romance should take priority, with all the emotional impact of a growing love, and should be developed over a relatively short span of time, the historical detail should be accurate, without sounding like a textbook, and should help to create a true sense of the chosen setting so that the reader becomes immersed in that time. |
| Tango | | Same guidelines as the Romance series, but looking for groundbreaking stories with a highly contemporary, possibly innovative style. These books are fresh and flirty and, whilst still offering an upbeat romance with a happy ending, they dare to be different. |
| Silhouette Series Unagented: | | |
| Bombshell *new line Words per book: 80-90,000 | *looking for authors | Looking for female action adventure stories in which it is the strong, savvy heroine who always saves the day. Fast-paced and action-packed, each Silhouette Bombshell book features a heroine who finds herself in precarious and often high-stakes situations. It is the heroine's ability to get herself and others out of the situation that drives the plot and ultimately provides the thrilling and often unpredictable reading experience. Each book will also contain an exciting romance subplot and in the end, the heroine always gets her man—both good and bad. Heroines: think Sidney Bristow in <i>Alias</i> ; Lara Croft in <i>Tomb Raider</i> ; Geena Davis's character in <i>The Long Kiss Goodnight</i> ; Jinx in <i>Die Another Day</i> . |
| Desire Words per book: 55-60,000 | 72 | Sensual, believable and compelling, these books are written for today's woman. Innocent or experienced, the heroine is someone we identify with, the hero is irresistible. The conflict should be an emotional one, springing naturally from the unique characters you've chosen. The focus is on the developing relationship, set in a believable plot. Sensuality is key, but lovemaking is never taken lightly. |
| Intimate Moments Words per book: 80,000 | 72 | Believable characters swept into a world of larger-than-life romance are the hallmark of Silhouette Intimate Moments books. These books offer you the freedom to combine the universally appealing elements of a category romance with the flash and excitement of mainstream fiction. Adventure, suspense, melodrama, glamour—let your imagination be your guide. |
| Romance | 72 | Require talented authors able to portray modern |

| | | |
|--|----|--|
| Words per book: 53-58,000 | | relationships in the context of romantic love. Although the hero and heroine don't actually make love unless married, sexual tension is vitally important. Our ultimate goal is to give readers vibrant love stories with heightened emotional impact-books that touch readers' hearts and celebrate their values, including the traditional ideals of love, marriage and family. |
| Special Edition Words per book: 75-80,000 | 72 | Sophisticated, substantial and packed with emotion, Special Edition demands writers eager to probe characters deeply, to explore issues that heighten the drama of living and loving, to create compelling romantic plots. Whether the sensuality is sizzling or subtle, whether the plot is wildly innovative or satisfyingly traditional, the novel's emotional vividness, its depth and dimension, should clearly label it a very special contemporary romance. Subplots must further or parallel the developing romantic relationship in a meaningful way. |

Source: www.eharlequin.com/cms/learntowrite/ 3/16/03

Single-title Romance Novels

A Single-title romance is a longer romance not released as part of a series. It is packaged and shelved like any mass-market paperback or hardback fiction book.

(www.rwanational.org/statistics.stm 3/15/03)

Single-title romance novels are usually published through one of the 13 publishing houses that are listed in table 3. There are other publishers of romance novels but due to the limitations of this research only the publishers of 10 or more novels per year have been listed. The single-title novels are marketed through author recognition rather than genre or series/category recognition. For example Harlequin will market a book as the latest in the "Superromance" series, whereas Avon will market a book as the "latest from Johanna Lindsay."

Manuscript submission also varies according to the different publishers of single-title romances. Some publishers accept "unagented" manuscripts while others require and "agented" manuscripts see table 3 for publishing information. Publishers also have

specific guidelines as to how a manuscript will be considered. Avon requests that only a two page query be emailed to avonromance@harpercollins.com with a response rate of 1-2 weeks whereas Simon & Schuster requires that three chapters and a short synopsis be mailed to their office with a response rate of 8-12 months (www.harpercollins.com/vhc/features/romance/guidelines.asp 3/16/03, <http://simonsays.com/subs/txtobj.cfm?araid=173&pagename=manuscript> 3/16/03).

Table 3. Single-Title Publishers¹

| Publishers | Number of Books published in 2001 |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| Avalon | 33 |
| Avon/HarperCollins | 100 |
| Bertlesmann (Ballantine, Bantam, Dell, Delacorte, Doubleday, Fawcett, Ivy, Waterbrook) -Agented: 100,000 words per book -Sub-Genres: Historical and Contemporary | 107 |
| BET | 60 |
| Bethany | 21 |
| Dorchester (Love Spell/Leisure) -Unagented: 90-100,000 words per book -Sub-Genres: Historical, Futuristic, Time Travel, Paranormal | 111 |
| Kensington (Kensington, Pinnacle, Bouquet, Precious Gems, Zebra) -Agented: 100,000 words per book -Sub-Genres: Alternative(paranormal), Brava Lrotic, Contemporary, Historical, Regency, Romantic Suspense, Time-Travel | 204 |
| Pearson (Berkley, NAL, Dutton, Jove, Onyx, Putnam, Signet, Topaz, Viking) | 138 |
| Pocket | 56 |
| Questar Multnomah | 13 |
| St. Martin's | 54 |
| Torstar (Harlequin, Mills & Boon, MIRA, Silhouette, Steeple Hill) ² -MIRA: Agented, re-releases of all sub-genres: | 1,067 |

| | |
|---|----|
| -Steeple Hill: Unagented, Inspirational | |
| Warner | 25 |

Source: www.rwanational.org/statistics.stm 3/15/03

1. Not all publishers list sub-genre and manuscript information.

2. MIRA and Steeple Hill are Single-title novels

Harlequin, Mills & Boon and Silhouette are Series/Category novels

Romance Writers of America

In the 1980's romance writers were ignored at writing conferences and taken advantage of by large New York publishing houses. Authors published by Harlequin were required to write under a pseudonym, in return the name was the property of Harlequin therefore if the author decided not to write another book, Harlequin could have other writers publish under the name. Authors were also taken advantage of through book royalties and payments (www.rwanational.org 5/21/02).

Authors fought back by forming the Romance Writers of America (RWA). Through the formation of the RWA, romance writers have their own conferences that focus on their needs and concerns and have united their resources against publishers of romance fiction to gain more author rights. There is also now a system of networks and support groups across the nation (and world) through both the national and local chapters of the RWA.

The Romance Writers of America, RWA, is the largest non-profit association of romance writers in the world, they consider themselves "The Voice of Romance" (www.rwanational.org/aboutus.stm 5/21/02). The national headquarters is located in Houston, Texas where the organization was founded in 1980 by 37 charter members. Today the RWA has over 8,400 global members, 1,600 of them being published. To become a member a fee of \$65 must be paid to the RWA. Published members are eligible to join the RWA's, Published Authors' Network or PAN. The PAN members

have been responsible for the majority of change that has taken place within the writing industry for the benefit of romance authors. Published members have their own group within the RWA because there is a distinction between a writer that has been published from a person who is just starting to write. Published or not, the members are kept up to date through the RWA's professional journal, *The Romance Writers' Report*, which is published on a monthly basis. This journal includes valuable information such as the latest romance industry news and publishing information.

In addition, the RWA sponsors two awards, the RITA (named after RWA's first president, Rita Clay Estrada) and the Golden Heart. The RITA is the highest honor that can be awarded to a published romance novel. The Golden Heart award is the highest honor awarded to unpublished works or manuscripts.

The RWA defines itself through the following ideologies, purposes, and values:

-Ideologies: Romance writers are professional creative artists. Romance writers are part of diverse and healthy literacy communities that contribute to constructive action in culture, society, and individual lives. United, romance writers are a powerful community.

-Purpose: To advance the professional interests of career-focused romance writers through networking and advocacy. (From our proposed Bylaws)

-Values: RWA belongs to its members. RWA fosters an environment of creative and professional growth. RWA thrives through the free exchange of ideas, knowledge, and diverse experience. Romance writers have the right to reasonable remuneration and preservation of authorial and intellectual property rights. Literacy is individually and culturally vital. Storytelling is fundamental to human experience: romance fiction explores issues of universal and eternal human interest."

(www.rwanational.org/ideology.stm 5/21/02).

The material from the RWA and OKRWA is designed to give background information regarding one facet of the romance novel industry. However, it is important

to note that with increased professionalization of an organization there is a greater inequality created by members. This study is limited to the readers of romance novels however a study of the professionalization of the RWA would provide an excellent opportunity for future research.

Oklahoma Outlaws

The Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, chapter of the Romance Writers of America, OK-RWA, is called the "Oklahoma Outlaws". Their motto is "The Most Wanted Romance Authors Anywhere" (www.okrwa.com/about 5/21/02). The OK-RWA also follows the national main objectives: to promote excellence in Romance fiction, to support and encourage unpublished members and to promote the work of published members. This chapter lists 63 members, 21 of them having been published. Many of the members have won or been finalists for the RITA, Golden Heart and National Readers' Choice Awards. The Oklahoma Outlaws publish a monthly newsletter, the OK CORRAL and sponsor the National Readers' Choice Award and Finally a Bride contest. The Oklahoma Outlaws meet every third Saturday of the month at the Bank of America building in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. To become an OK-RWA member you must first be a member of the RWA, in good standing, and then pay a membership fee of \$25.

Within this section the literature review, the history of the romance novel was discussed to show how the modern day romance novel came about. Due to the vast array of modern day romance novels available, information regarding the romance novel industry was included to describe the various sub-genres of romance fiction as well as the two different ways that a romance novel can be published either as a series/category or

single-title. Finally information was examined regarding the RWA and Oklahoma Outlaws to provide insight into the writers of romance novels.

SECTION II

This section of the literature review begins with an overview of the early research focusing on romance novels. Next a feminist critique of the romance novel is included, which has labeled the romance novel as a pacification and socialization tool. Secondly, there will be an analysis of research that has taken the romance novel in a new direction, one that focuses on the romance novel as positive for women. Next, will be an analysis of research that has focused on the romance novel reader. Then a section is included in which romance writers defend their work in response to past feminist critiques. The romance writers are defending the content of romance novels as stories of women's empowerment and arguing that their readers are intelligent women. Finally, there is a discussion of stigma from Erving Goffman, and how stigmatized groups utilize identity management tactics.

Early Research

Fallon's (1984) book "Words of Love: A Complete Guide To Romance Fiction" is a wonderful guide to romance fiction and authors prior to 1982. While Fallon's book is more of a reference guide, she hopes that her book can act as a starting point

"for feminist scholars who wish to study romance fiction as both a popular literary genre and as a vital indicator of women's view of themselves in a changing social context" (Fallon 1984:53).

Through an analysis of the research, it will be shown that the recent findings regarding romance novel content have changed somewhat because the novels have

reflected the changing views regarding women's roles in society. Research from Radway (1984), Mussell (1981,1984), Modleski (1982), and Snitow (1979), finds romance novels to be guides that emphasized traditional women's roles of marriage and family. Whereas recent work by Krentz (1992) and Arnold (1999) has revealed that the novels have changed to include a more career orientated heroine. Recent research (Owen 1990, Pettigrew-Brackett 2000) has also focused on reader information.

Relationships between characters were the focus in Weston and Ruggiero's (1978) study, which found that in "Gothic" novels (a novel revolving around suspense and the heroine fearing that the hero may cause her bodily harm) the heroine was described as a woman that did not follow traditional gender roles. However, the women in supporting characters were described as following traditional female gender roles. The heroes of the stories treated the heroines better than the supporting women, as would be expected in a romance novel. However the heroes of the stories were always described as following very traditional male gender roles. Therefore the authors infer that this promotes the idea that non-traditional women can still hope for very traditional men. The authors note that women should be independent and do what they want and not worry that:

"your chances for a happy marriage and a family will not be ruined. In fact, they may even be enhanced, since many men will choose you over more traditional females" (1978:654).

The authors see this as a step towards women's liberation. They found overall that the "Gothics" were a mix of traditional and modern values. Even though the authors mention women's independence they are largely suggesting that women should focus on the issue of marriage and family and eventually choose both.

Studies also include content analysis of "Courtship Talk." Alberts (1986) conducted conversation analysis over 10 Harlequin romances by utilizing Knapp's four stages of relational development and found that all books utilized the same techniques (meta-talk, face-threatening acts, and mitigation). These novels were studied to better understand romantic conversations in relationships and were chosen for three reasons, because they examined a couple meeting and the development of a romance, the novels contain mostly conversations between the male and female, and lastly because they are widely read. Alberts believed that literature acts as a sort of guide for the reader (a socialization tool) as to how they may encounter relationships.

Romance Novels as Pacification and Socialization Tools

The early feminist work regarding romance novels, from the late 1970's through the late 1980's, involves the novel's content. The majority of this work involved the Harlequin serial/category romance novels because they were the best sellers and thus had the larger audience (Snitow 1979, Modleski 1982). The work is sociologically significant because it focuses on the romance novel as a socialization tool that reinforces a woman's role within a patriarchal society. First, the assumption is made that all romance novels (or the majority of them) only focus on a woman finding a husband and then having children. Second, the argument is made that by reading romance novels, women are encouraged to be satisfied in life only through marriage and raising children. That they should not educate themselves beyond what is necessary to conduct traditional women's work such as teaching, childcare, or nursing. Therefore reading romance novels encourage a cycle of victimization where women are pacified into accepting the traditional roles of wife and mother (Radway 1984, Mussell 1981, 1984, Modleski 1982, and Snitow 1979).

Radway (1984) in her groundbreaking research "Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature" borrows from a psychological feminist theory approach by Nancy Chodorow (1978). This theory argues that women are seeking a nurturing relationship with a man, such as a parent to a child, yet this relationship never happens in the real world. However in the "ideal romance" the man acts as a perfect nurturer to the woman. Radway (1984) also argues that the romance novel is a tool for socialization into traditional gender roles under a patriarchal society because the books focus on monogamous, heterosexual relationships, relationships that are highly respected in traditional American society. Radway contends that her subjects were interested in the ideal romances of the best-seller romance novels from the late 1970's to early 1980's not because of a lack of a "love life" (a traditional heterosexual relationship) but to retaliate against the dissatisfaction of their lives and "love lives" within a patriarchal society. Radway (1984:15) believes that readers "retaliate" by "reinventing their relationships with men" and by internalizing the perfect relationship that the book provides. Therefore dissatisfied housewives become satisfied after reading a romance novel. Thus Radway does not believe that power is the focus of a romance novel, because, instead of empowering themselves, women are pacifying themselves.

Snitow (1979) and Modleski (1982) agree that romance novels are "pacification/socialization tools" and argue that women are struggling with a "divided self" in which one part of the woman is fine with the patriarchal status quo and then there is one that wants to break free. Modleski (1982:33) labeled the Harlequin romances as "the hysterical text" because readers "desired the subversion of the heroine's attempts at self-assertion." They believe that women read romance novels to escape from reality.

Since the readers are escaping and not acting to change their situation, they are pacifying the self that wants to break free. Thus the novels pacify women to accept the patriarchal society that they are living in. At the same time it could be argued that everyone reading fiction is trying to escape, men and women alike. Woodruff (1985:32) describes a Harlequin escape as the following: "In short, a Harlequin heroine is better than a hallucinogenic heroin."

Mussell (1984) also believes the romance novel is a tool for socialization, one that reinforces the patriarchal society and allows women to be satisfied with their lives within it. Mussell argues that romance novels reduce women to having only one meaningful experience or adventure in their life, the story of how they met their husband. Mussell (1981) also acknowledges the need for more research into why women choose to read romances as a leisure activity.

A New Direction in Research: The Romance Novel Comes of Age.

In the late 1980's researchers noticed a change regarding the content of the novel. Thurston (1987) found that heroines were now assumed to be strong and independent and Kolaczyk (1987) argued that the hero's are more caring and interested in the heroines for more than just sex. Hubbard (1985) points out that relationships differ in books depending on which decade they take place in.

Rabine (1985) argues that earlier research regarding the romance novel is simply outdated. This is in part due to the changes that Harlequin novels underwent to create stories that revolved around working women and workplace issues. Researchers can no longer label the romance novel as a tool for socializing the woman into a passive role.

The romance novel may continue to be viewed as a socialization tool, but it is now one that would focus on creating a career oriented woman who just happens to find love on her own terms. Rabine believes that women read romances because they relate to issues that a working woman has and that these novels help women to cope with their jobs not their relationships with men. In the novels the heroines usually have a very interesting occupation, they are CEO's or models, they are not secretaries or waitresses, therefore readers have a large amount of power and responsibility while they read the novels. The readers are able to live vicariously through the novels. More information regarding power will be discussed under the Romance Authors section.

Romance Readers Information

In the midst of all the research, those who were interested in reader demographics were finding that the readers of romance novels were "normal" people. Jan Hajda (1967) found that women who read romance novels were normal, happy people who were well adjusted and were socially integrated. They were not women using novels for a substitute to real life. John G. Cawelti (1976) argues that romance novels, which follow a specific formula, are popular because readers can interpret them in many ways, not because the reader "pool" is alike.

Peter H. Mann (1974) surveyed British readers and argues that romance novels should be taken seriously because they satisfy a need. Mann concludes that the critical stereotypes of romance novels and readers as non-intellectuals are inappropriate because they are based on false suppositions about the readers. Mann found that readers were intelligent women who had active lives. They were not "substituting" a life through the

books. Owen's (1990) demographic research has found that romance readers come from every possible educational background they do not fall into just one category.

Thompson, Koski, & Holyfield (1997) contend that previous studies have focused too much on labeling romance readers as women who are oppressed under a patriarchal society and that as they read they simply consume a product designed to pacify them. The authors accuse researchers such as Radway (1984) as falling into the trap of listening to readers yet supplying their own answers. Thompson, Koski, & Holyfield (1997) believe this is a real problem for romance novel research. There has been much research (Modleski 1982, Radway 1984, Rabine 1985, Cantor 1989) that has focused on applying a feminist framework, which undermines what the romance novels are about, in effect labeling the romance novel as a negative influence on women and labeling the women as simple minded (non-intellectual) consumers. When in fact this is not the case.

Owen (1997) also accuses Radway (1984) of forcing her own framework on the romance readers. Owen (1997) questions Radway's (1984) reader assumptions by arguing that women are actively reading and analyzing romance novels. They are not simply consuming material to escape from a patriarchal society. They read and interpret the novels in complex ways due to the core elements that are found in romances. The readers are able to project their own ideas into the stories due to the core elements. Although readers from Radway's study reported that they read the novels to gain information (historical as well as other information) this was not a major focus of her book. Owens (1997:536) states that romance novels are complicated because they seem to "offer nothing for a feminist reading, yet millions of women read them."

Pettigrew-Brackett (2000) was the first to specifically study romance readers as a stigmatized group. Pettigrew-Brackett found that romance readers were utilizing facework strategies that they believed were necessary to combat stigma, however, only romance novel readers were interviewed. Therefore the stigma that they reported might be self-imposed because she did not interview any non-readers to check their opinions of romance novels or the women who read them. Yet this study did provide new insights into the way in which researchers could examine romance readers.

Information from Romance Novelists

This section contains information from romance novel authors that is intended to explain and justify what they write. They defend the romance novel, their readers and argue that criticism from feminists is unwarranted because the majority of writers have feminist views and write from feminist perspectives.

The romance fiction industry went through a transition period in the late 1980's due to the increase in popularity of romance novels and in response to feminist critics. The reasons for the romance novel boom is not addressed in this thesis yet would be a good area for future research. The publishers of romance novels hired new editors to revamp the growing industry. These editors were intelligent, feminist women who were recent college graduates. The editing of romance novels has always been viewed as an "entry-level" position according to Krentz (1992). The new wave of editors had four main concerns regarding the romance novel: the alpha male, aggressive seductions, virginity and the core stories of the romance novel. Romance writers embraced and shunned the changes that the new editors requested. The romance novel industry is large

enough that there is an audience for anything that is written. In any case, romance writers are always defending their work and their readers. They defend the content of their novels as being stories of intelligent, strong women. They also defend their readers as being intelligent women who can tell the difference between fiction and real life and who have real lives.

Defending Book Content

What is necessary for a good romance novel? The “alpha male” is a key component for a romance novel. The reason why a novel is considered a romance is due to the plot of the story revolving around the relationship between the hero and heroine. Therefore some type of conflict needs to present itself and be resolved between the two. That is why authors are dependent on the duality of the hero character. That is the lead male has to be both the villain and hero for the heroine. There has to be some element from the hero (and sometimes the heroine) that keeps the couple apart. The out of control, arrogant; aggressive, egotistical “alpha-male” character provides a romance writer with a man that everyone thinks is bad but in the end is really a good guy. How can you create conflict between the hero and heroine with a man that only has the good side? How can you create conflict with a super sensitive, perfect man? The “alpha-male” characters can also have these good qualities, yet since he also possesses qualities that are seen as dangerous, you know with certainty that this man has a “core of steel” inside of him and if something ever happened that would necessitate his help, then he could be useful. Also since the hero plays both good guy/bad guy, the heroine can always be good. The alpha male is also useful in creating a fantasy: he is not bald, he has

a job, and his ex-wife is not harassing you for alimony that he owes her. The only problem that the “alpha-male” has will be solved through the love that the hero and heroine have for each other.

Aggressive seduction scenes were also under attack, although not every writer used them. Krentz (1992) argues that other genres actively use aggressive seductions such as mysteries and action-adventure novels. The only difference is that it is usually an aggressive female that is seducing the aloof male character. Therefore there is a double standard between the use of aggressive seductions, they are more acceptable when the woman is the seductress rather than the man the seducer.

Virginity of the heroine was an issue because critics believed it was unfair to always have an experienced hero with an inexperienced heroine. Yet Krentz (1992) argues that virginity is used as a metaphor for female power and that the heroine is portrayed as a smart woman who has waited to chose the right man. When heroines are portrayed as virginal, the heroes are even more transformed by the heroine because he knows how important her virginity is to her and what it means to have it. An argument is that “men represent to women one of the greatest sources of risk they will ever encounter in their lives, virginity is symbolic of the high stakes involved” (Krentz 1992:112). Therefore virginity is the symbol of a woman giving or sharing herself with another person. Consequently, she has no idea of how the man will treat her in the future.

The last attack was on the core stories themselves. Although all genres have core plots, romance is once again singled out. Romance novels use coded stories and themes that are recognizable to the writer/reader and are used to extract a certain emotion. Many critics do not understand this and dismiss the book. Barlow & Krentz (1992) point out

that many critics make fun of the romance novel by reading descriptive passages aloud, yet it is this descriptive type of writing that allows the romance novel to be successful. Experienced readers “have certain keyed-in responses to certain words and phrases” (Barlow & Krentz 1992:21). Romance novels are a celebration of life. This is why there is always a happy ending and why many novels include the birth of a child. The birth of a child in a romance novel is a celebration of life; its inclusion is not designed to coerce women into bearing children instead of having a career. Maggie Osborne (1999:158) states that “rejection of the genre as a whole generally comes from people who make a virtue of never having read a romance novel.” Osborne enjoys writing and reading romances because there are great writers in this genre who tell excellent stories. The media at large focuses on the negative aspects of relationships while she is committed to reminding people that marriages can last. Mary Jo Putney (1999:165) notes that with the many changes in the romance genre, the line is blurring between romantic fiction and women’s fiction. Now the only difference is that:

“the romance focuses on the relationship, while women’s fiction depicts a woman’s journey through life, with romance only one part.”

Intelligent Women and Empowerment Stories

Romance novels are based upon fantasy. Both the writers and readers know this. Readers of romance are no more likely than readers of other genres (mystery, horror) to “use their reading as a substitute for action in the real world” (Krentz 1992:5). Susan Elizabeth Phillips (1992:58) argues that “the Romance Novelist has an implicit contract with the reader who buys her book to portray life exactly as it is not.” Phillips expects a romance novel to be a fantasy; she doesn’t want to read about a woman with the same

problems that she faces. The books are supposed to be fun to read and Phillips (1992:54) believes other writers and readers know that "fiction is fiction and real life is real life."

Phillips (1992) is a career woman with children and feminist views and claims that there is no conflict between the reading/writing of romance novels and having feminist views. Phillips view is that the hero is "tamed" by the heroine in a romance novel and that the heroine is able to rise to any challenge that is posed to her. According to Phillips (1992:55-56):

"I can only shake my head in bewilderment when I hear the romance novel criticized for depicting women as being submissive to dominating men."

This is because those who are involved in the romance novel industry believe that the novels are about female empowerment. The heroine always wins and forces the hero to acknowledge her power as a woman. Romance novels also "invert the power structure of a patriarchal society" (Phillips 1992:56) through the use of the heroine power over the hero. The women are the true "heroes" of the book not the men. Dara Joy (1999) believes that modern romances reflect the changing attitudes and values that women have. The heroine and hero are equals in the books, and the heroine always triumphs while making her own rules.

Alison Hart argues that it is because of her feminist beliefs she has been able to write over fifty romance novels. She believes that feminists attack these books because they are misunderstood. These books are not about women as victims, they are books that describe and support the challenges that women face. They are "women's quest books" (Hart 1999:97). They are books that describe some type of conflict/fear that the woman must conquer. The hero in the past may have saved the heroine but today the

hero makes sure that the heroine defeats her fear on her own. Tami Hoag (1999:109) agrees and states that when she writes:

“the heroine may in fact be a victim of foul play during the course of the plot, she does not embrace a victim mentality.”

Critics of the romance genre are basing their criticisms on outdated stereotypes and Hoag argues that many critics of romance novels have never read one. Hoag's intention is to write about women who can be admired and respected.

Cameron (1992) believes that power is the core of the romance novel, not sex. Cameron argues that part of the appeal of romance novels for writers and readers is that many in society disapprove of them. Cameron points out that women have overcome many obstacles in society and they don't want to be told what they should or shouldn't read. Women can make their own choices and shouldn't have to defend themselves, yet many readers of romance novels feel compelled to explain why they read this material that so many find offensive.

Arnold (1999) is concerned with why the romance novel is ridiculed, specifically by feminists and men. Arnold (1999:15) describes her early years as a writer and her fears about writing romances:

“Books read only by women would never be reviewed, never win awards, never be taken as seriously as books read by men.”

She now has the attitude that it doesn't matter if men approve of her work. Arnold states that she writes from a feminist perspective and argues that the romance novel genre celebrates women because they are the characters that are “doing” things, not the hero. Arnold creates heroines that are rarely idle; they work, raise children and rely on themselves to make things happen. Arnold notes that many feminist novels from the

1960's and 1970's focused on women overcoming terrible relationships to become liberated women. In her novels the heroines are already liberated.

Arnold (1992) cites a study from the Wellesley Colleges' Stone Center for Developmental Studies and Services that found that men and women reach maturity through different means. Men through separation and autonomy whereas women mature through relationships. Arnold's (1992:138) novels are celebrating women's worth through :

“how much they contribute to the well-being of others; how successfully they navigate the complex world of relationships; how solid a grounding they provide for the generations that will inherit the planet- and how wholesome a planet those generations will inherit.”

Arnold knows this is in contrast with the way many others gauge success in a male-dominated society. Yet her characters are not overly concerned with climbing the corporate ladder or being the best warrior in battle. In any case Arnold (1992:138) states,

“To belittle romance fiction is to belittle women. To read romance fiction is to confront the strength of women, the variety of their experience, and the validity of their aspirations and accomplishments. To appreciate the kind of romance fiction I write is to admit that women can do, and that given the opportunity, they can change the world for the better.”

Romance novelist Patricia Gaffney (1999) describes her experiences of reading romance novels on the subway as embarrassing. Gaffney would hide the covers of the books from other people because of the passionate embrace that usually distinguishes romance novels from other types of literature. She credits much of the shame and embarrassment to the images on the covers of the books. She notes that the romance industry is changing because her most recent book was published with the picture of a wolf, instead of two people embracing. Gaffney credits this as one of the first steps to

having a mainstream “book” instead of just a “romance novel”. She argues that the line between mainstream straight fiction and romance fiction has narrowed due to the material published lately. Since the mid-1980’s the majority of heroines could be feminists; the novels are stories of independent women. Gaffney is adamant that she will leave the feminist debate to the scholars; she is not interested in that debate. Instead she is interested in the societal factors that make people ashamed to write and read romance novels. Gaffney concludes that since America is a Puritan country, it ridicules anything that deals with the issue of sex.

Stigma

— Many people have defined stigma. Goffman (1963:3) defines stigma as “an attribute that is deeply discrediting”. From Crocker et al (1998:505):

“stigmatized individuals possess (or are believed to possess) some attribute, or characteristic, that conveys a social identity that is devalued in a particular social context.”

Link and Phelan (2001:367) discuss four components when conceptualizing stigma.

“stigma exists when the following interrelated components converge. In the first component, people distinguish and label human differences. In the second, dominant cultural beliefs link labeled persons to undesirable characteristics-to negative stereotypes. In the third, labeled persons are placed in distinct categories so as to accomplish some degree of separation of “us” from “them.” In the fourth, labeled persons experience status loss and discrimination that lead to unequal outcomes.”

The different conceptualizations are due to the wide application of stigma to many groups such as occupations, physical attributes, and leisure activities including: gun collectors(Olmsted, 1988), soap opera viewers (Greenberg and Woods, 1999) and violent

video games (Scott, 1995, Vanhorn, 1999). This research focuses on stigma and how it is related to the leisure activity of reading romance novels.

The conceptualization of stigma from Link and Phelan (2001) applies well when discussing the readers of romance novels. When people see women reading romance novels, they distinguish a difference between themselves and the romance readers. Then they link the romance reader to undesirable characteristics or negative stereotypes such as being a non-intellectual or someone who just wants to read about sex. Next, non-romance readers separate themselves from readers of romance. The non-readers view themselves as different from women that read romance novels; they are the “intellectuals.” Finally, romance readers that are set apart from the non-readers experience status loss or discrimination through the harassment of their leisure activity or reading material from non-readers.

Romance readers and novelists have had many concerns with status loss and discrimination. Romance readers have experienced status loss and discrimination due to the various ways that society has labeled them as non-intellectuals and anti-women’s liberation. As stated in the literature review, the RWA was created to combat the status loss and discrimination that romance writers faced. Examples of the problems that romance writers encountered was a lack of respect from non-romance writers (in general and at writing conferences) and the way that the publishing industry limited authors rights and payments regarding published works.

The social psychological processes, which operate in regards to stigmatization, are important to romance reader research. This is partly due to previous research (Petigrew-Brackett, 2000) in which the question was raised: Do readers just have the

stigma internalized for no reason or are readers justified in their stigma consciousness, their anticipation of being stigmatized (Pinel, 1999). Is this expectation valid? This study is designed to answer this question by including non-romance reader subjects.

Discredited and Discreditable

Goffman (1963) describes two categories of stigmatization: discredited and discreditable. Discredited individuals have a stigma that is easily recognizable such as a physical disability whereas the discreditable have a stigma that is not known to others such as reading romance novels. Discreditable persons can become discredited once their stigma is made public. Many romance readers keep their leisure activity of romance novel reading a secret and are therefore in the discreditable category while others are publicly open about their reading material and are in the discredited category. Romance readers within both categories, discreditable and discredited, actively engage in identity management tactics or facework.

Facework- Identity Management

A person's face is what they present to others when interacting (Goffman, 1967). What face does a romance readers present to the public? This question is answered through the romance readers' use of facework or identity management tactics. These are tactics that are employed to avoid or lessen threats to a persons face (Goffman, 1967).

There are two categories of tactics or strategies that can be employed: preventative and corrective. Preventative strategies are employed to avoid situations whereas corrective strategies are designed to lessen or correct a negative perception

(Goffman, 1963). Research from Pettigrew-Brackett (2000) began an examination into the facework of romance readers but left many questions to be answered.

Within this section of the literature review early research focusing on the romance novel was discussed as well as a feminist critique of romance novels and how they are viewed as tools of pacification and socialization into traditional gender roles of wife and mother for women. Also, research was analyzed that viewed romance novels as positive for women and showed a new direction or focus for research, the readers of romance novels instead of the novels themselves. Then information was examined from authors of romance novels in which they defend their work and their audience. They argued that the romance novel is a story of women's empowerment and that intelligent women read these stories. Lastly, the concept of stigma from Erving Goffman was discussed including the preventative and corrective identity management tactics or facework strategies that stigmatized groups utilize.

The research questions that are addressed in this study include:

1. Do non-romance readers stigmatize romance novels and romance novel readers?
2. Do romance readers feel stigmatized?
3. If so, what identity management tactics do they employ?

The concepts discussed within this chapter will be employed to analyze the data from subjects that will be listed in chapter IV. In chapter III., the methodology of this research study is discussed.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Research Objective

This research project was designed to gain a better understanding of the experiences that women have relating to their activity of reading romance novels. These experiences are analyzed through a feminist critique as well as stigma and identity management tactics or facework strategies both preventative and corrective. This thesis is an attempt to expand the literature concerning the use of identity management tactics or facework strategies by analyzing the ways in which women have engaged in behaviors to hide their leisure activity of reading romance novels. Within this chapter, the following will be examined: qualitative methods, sample selection, semistructured interviews, and ethical issues.

Qualitative Methods

The human-as-instrument is inclined toward methods that are extensions of normal human activities: looking, listening, speaking, reading, and the like. We believe that the human will tend, therefore, toward interviewing, observing, mining available documents and records, taking account of nonverbal cues, and interpreting inadvertent unobtrusive measures.

Lincoln & Guba (1985: 199)

Through the use of qualitative methods I was able to get the most important information from the readers and non-readers of romance novels. A strength of qualitative methods is that it is very flexible and adaptable therefore allow I was able to be flexible and

adaptable with the research subjects and the information that they reported (Denzin 1970).

Qualitative methods also allow for a high degree of internal validity in which I am able to provide a very detailed account from the subjects however, external validity and reliability may be limited. This is due to the limitation that this may not be generalizable to all romance readers and non-romance readers. Other researchers may possibly come across different data or interpret the data somewhat different than I did (Lincoln and Guba 1985, Singleton and Straits 1999).

Sample Selection

Many subjects responded after soliciting two classes at Oklahoma State University (see Appendix B). Yet only one subject actually participated. During the interviewing period there were scheduling difficulties in which subjects solicited through the classroom kept canceling. Three subjects responded to solicitation flyers (see Appendix A) that were posted at used bookstores. The rest of the subjects were found using the "snowball" method in which every subject that I interviewed suggested at least one person that would like to participate in the study. Subjects that were solicited through the posted flyer (see Appendix A) and suggested by other subjects (snowball method) always kept their scheduled interview.

Near the end of the interviewing process, there were nine non-reader subjects and nine reader subjects. Therefore the actual sample size was 18 instead of the projected 20. However this did not hamper my study in any way because during this period I had reached the point of redundancy in which I was interviewing subjects and not learning any new information. Therefore I stopped with 18 subjects.

Semistructured Interviews

I conducted a semistructured, in-depth interview, using open-ended questions. The semistructured interview allowed me to meet my specific objectives while at the same time having a degree of freedom. The questions were open ended so that the subjects could answer freely and therefore give the best information available regarding why and how women read romance novels (Singleton and Straits 1999).

The interviews took place in 022 Classroom Building on the Oklahoma State University campus and also at locations of convenience for the subjects. The subjects were first given a copy of the Written Consent Form (See Appendix C), which I went over with them and after they signed it, the interview began. These interviews were audio taped and notes were taken as well. IRB approval was granted (see Appendix F) for the taping of the interviews because there were no ethical concerns. The audiotapes were transcribed verbatim to ensure accurate data. The interviews ranged in length from twenty minutes to 1 hour. The romance reader subjects tended to have longer interviews than the non-reader subjects did.

Ethical considerations

This research project did not pose any ethical concerns for the subjects involved. The information that the subjects shared was not of a sensitive nature. The subjects were also told that their participation would be kept confidential. They were required to sign a written consent form (see Appendix C) after reading it. They were then given a copy to keep, reminding them of their rights as a participant and also whom they could contact if

they had questions or wanted their information withdrawn from the study. The interview would then take place using the appropriate script (see Appendices D and E). The written consent form and the audiotapes were kept in a locked box. The audiotapes were assigned numbers as to not have the subjects names associated with them. I was the only person to have access to the locked box.

Within this chapter, the qualitative methods employed for this research was discussed. Semistructured interviews were conducted using open-ended questions, with 18 subjects, in order to gain information concerning the stigmatization of romance readers. Information was also gathered regarding the preventative and corrective identity management tactics or facework strategies women utilize that engage in the leisure activity of reading romance novels.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

This section discusses the data obtained from the 18 interviews. First, I discuss information collected from the non-readers and what they think of romance novels and the women that read them. This information is used to examine the stereotypes that non-readers had about romance novels and the women that read them. Next, I present information on the: who, what, why, how, when, and where women engage in the leisure activity of reading romance novels. This is done to better understand who reads romance novels, what types or sub-genres of romance they read, and why they choose to read romance novels. The information relating to when, where and how women read romance novels will examine the ways in which romance readers utilize preventative and corrective identity management techniques or facework strategies.

Non-Reader Information

Out of the nine non-romance readers four reported that they read as a leisure activity. Their reading material included non-fiction, fiction (horror, mystery, suspense) and magazines. These subjects reported the majority of their reading was done just before bed and they usually read 30 minutes to 1-½ hours. The other five non-romance reader subjects viewed reading as a work activity, not a leisure activity. They read only work or school related materials; they do not read for fun, they read to simply gain information. As stated earlier, six of the romance reader subjects also read for work yet all nine subjects report that reading is also a leisure activity for them, an activity, which allows them to relax and escape.

What Non-Readers think of Romance Novels.

What do people think about romance novels? One non-reader subject admitted that she had read a few of her relatives' books one time when she was "desperate" for something to read. She believes that romance novels are:

"Sappy Harlequin romances, Bodice Ripping historical fiction. (That) explore the spicier aspect of life, this is my idea and some women that read them have told me this. Don't understand why women read them. Same three plot lines over and over. All fiction is formulaic and I don't understand that either. Don't understand why anyone reads formula fiction (sci-fi, western). . Follow basic plot and then fashion a story around it, from what I understand about the market. You need to show older women and younger men. (The subject then describes the new movie "Tadpole" where an older woman and later all of her friends have sexual relations with a young guy). This may seem a little unrealistic, an older woman and younger man but it is possible, I know from past experience. This would be a new way to target an audience."

Thus this subject views the romance novel as a very simple story that revolves around sex. Other non-romance reader subjects responded in similar fashion when asked what they think of romance novels:

"Lusty sex."

"The covers are pretty steamy, shirt off shoulders, seductive positions, shows women as submissive (in the poses)."

"I think of Danielle Steele and "rusky" men rescuing a helpless maid. Men rescuing women with big boobs. Patriarchal society, traditional stories, and values."

Two subjects reported that the romance novel is a very emotional and dramatic book.

One subject reported that romance novels were:

"Dramatic, cheesy, overdone, emotional, fantasy, passion (which is not a bad thing). Other genres can also have these qualities, other genres also include romance."

Another describes the covers of romance novels that she has seen:

“The covers they are sick, way too, I mean, cheesy, very dramatic, overly dramatic. Men with rippling muscles, and women with big boobs and long hair”

Another subject responded that the romance novel covers were funny:

“They make me laugh, hunky guy and swooning lady. But my book covers (scary books) show someone screaming. Romance novel covers make me laugh because they are kind of cute and so unreal. You know Fabio, The guy that does the butter commercials? I wouldn’t want him jumping out of my butter. They aren’t positive or negative, just funny”

Other subjects reported romance novels as being negative or useless:

“Useless, fictitious, I only have time for work,”

“Suspense novels have more meat to them, romance novels I think are dingy. I read one once, got 2 chapters into it and felt like it was written by a high school girl. Why? Because that’s how high school girls talk. Oh he’s just so cute.”

“Romance novels aren’t my thing so I probably wouldn’t read one. I’m a romantic person but those books don’t capture my attention.”

“From what I hear (from relatives that read them) there is still a big section of unplanned pregnancy’s in the novels where they (the hero and heroine) don’t see each other for a while and then eventually get married. This is silly, and unrealistic, it sends a bad message, says its okay to be irresponsible and okay to not use birth control. Not to worry about disease or pregnancy with a stranger. In the novel it is okay because in the end the couple is together and how often does this happen in real life, it is unrealistic. Look at who they are targeting with these books, I think the lowest socioeconomic groups and these are the people who tend to be in this situation. They are targeting an audience that’s hoping for a happy ending but will probably never have one in their own lives.”

What Non-Readers think about the Women that read Romance Novels.

Now we know what the non-romance reader’s think about the romance novels, what do they think about the women that read them?

One non-reader subject reported:

"I think that women that read romance novels, that's their hobby. They might think "I'm going to read what I want and I don't care what anyone else thinks about it: you man, you perfect size zero, you husband." People that don't read are the ones you have to think about as dumb or illiterates. Submissive women don't have hobbies."

Another reports:

"I wouldn't think anything about women reading them."

Yet the majority of non-reader subjects believed that something lacking in women that read romance novels. They are usually lacking intelligence or sex.

One non-reader stated:

"Even though some of my family members read them (mother, daughter, sister), I think it's a waste of time and a depletion of their intellectual resources. I read to enrich the mind, for pleasure, also to inform myself. I wonder why they are choosing to read that when I don't see the point myself. I think that young women read them because they have romantic ideals about how men are, and that older women don't have that spice connection with their husbands and they are trying to recreate it. Single women are looking for an ideal man that doesn't exist. Ideal qualities only exist in GAY MEN. Women that read romance novels are looking for a romantic aspect of life, which they idealize, and in reality men don't have these qualities. A man that doesn't exist, some women are lonely and desperate and long married women try to use them to spice up their life. Newer books are more sexually explicit, these women would rather read a romance novel than something specifically considered pornography."

Another believes that women read romance novels because of their interest in sex:

"That's just their interest, reading about lusty sex, read to escape into another world just like any other fiction. Unless it's a math book then it is to escape."

Another stated:

"Women may read to crave romance or don't have it."

Therefore non-readers are associating sex with the reader. The romance reader is labeled with a sexual stigma such as: lacking a sex life, needing to spice up their sex life, or being a sex addict. The list has many possibilities.

Other non-readers reported that women read romance novels because they have nothing better to do:

“If you go through life fantasizing about Mr. Right coming along then you won’t experience anything while reading in a rocking chair.”

“Sure some women need it. Because they just aren’t fulfilled with their life. Maybe they are just bored or something and looking for romance or fantasy. Just something I don’t find appealing, reading about someone else’s romance and you know it only happens like one in a million times, how many times are you going to be swept off your feet.”

“My daughter reads (romance novels), I think she has nothing to do, she needs to get a job, has to have books or she “wigs out.” So the women who read don’t have very much to do, probably read because they have nothing to do. Never really thought about it, I read for facts, maybe they are trying to find facts about romance. I guess they read because they have nothing to do, but when you hear them discussing them I know they are getting something out of them because they discuss plot and logic, I just don’t know why they don’t go to logic books to get the same thing. People relate differently. I learned math from playing cards and dominoes where other people learned it from textbooks. Romance readers are intelligent and smart; they must be getting something out of it. I don’t relate to stories, I relate to logic. I don’t have the time (to read one), wouldn’t understand it, and wouldn’t have a logical plot. I know this is a stereotype, but I have never read one. Romance novels don’t seem the appropriate title, because when I hear women discussing them I know they get something out of it more than romance.”

This subject only views reading as a work activity. This subject will only read something if it will add to her knowledge for work. When I asked if she ever read while camping, a leisure activity she enjoyed, she replied, “math theorems.” Therefore she is very concerned with what women are “getting out of the books.” When in reality many of the women are probably just getting an escape which this subject can’t understand since she

does not view reading as a leisure activity something that can be done just for pleasure. This subject also takes the only person she knows that reads romances, her unemployed daughter, and makes the assumption that all women who read romance novels don't have enough to do. This subject also realizes that she is describing stereotypes but she has not read one herself to think otherwise.

Another non-reader explained she was sure that she must know people that read romance novels but she's not for sure because she's never asked anyone. The subject describes whom she "guesses" may read romance novels instead:

"My younger sister may read them because she is more imaginative and not quite as responsible (as my other sister). Just seems to fall that way, people that read romance novels, that I've noticed, seems that if they admit to it, they have a tendency of being in their own little world sometimes. Always looking for romance, the dream beau."

When asked if the subject knew of any co-workers that may read romance novels she responded with a look of shock:

"Most researchers don't read romance novels."

I asked, "How do you know that, have you asked them?"

The subject responded:

"Well no, but probably the only person that would read one would be our secretary. Because she's so wishy-washy, she is kind of like "I love you," I think she's the type, I'm really not sure she can read."

Again the idea of emotions comes into focus. The novels themselves are described as being emotional and dramatic, and now the women that read them are emotional. The women are also viewed very negatively as wishy-washy and less responsible than women that might read something else. But the most informative insight is that women who read romance novels are seen as non-intellectuals. This subject works on a university campus

and views romance reading as something only the lowest status person in her department might do. She then made the comment regarding women that read romance novels:

“This is why there might be so much depression among women. They read those novels and then look at their homes, that they are renting, they don’t have the perfect furniture, they don’t go dancing once a week, out to dinner every night. And they are like how come I can’t do this why doesn’t my husband bring me flowers.”

One non-reader subject reported:

“I can’t generalize (about women that read romance novels) some women that read aren’t helpless housewives, so I can’t generalize.”

Therefore this subject has internalized the stereotype that the majority of women that read romance novels are “helpless housewives” although she realizes that there are also exceptions.

The subjects then described what they thought of when they noticed women reading romance novels.

One responded:

“When I see women reading them in public: I just think they could do that at home. Because it’s something I wouldn’t choose to read in public. I like national geographic.”

While another reports:

“I see women reading them in airports, at camping grounds, just notice it, I assume they are romance novels because the covers are pretty, they have a sky or rose, I’ve never noticed a couple on the cover, only a lady on the front.”

One subject describes their rationale for whether they will think the romance reading is negative or positive:

“I thought it was fine for one person because she had no social life. She read all the time. If the reader looks like myself then I don’t make a negative judgement. If ugly maybe they read to makeup a life. But I don’t really think about it. Maybe others make negative judgements but I

don't. I guess you could compare it to guy's porn. Just because most guys are embarrassed to buy porn or have it lying around the house. But romance novels aren't porn they are much more, a novel and escape/fantasy. Did see a TV movie that characterized romance readers as single women with a cat on a rainy day, big cup of coffee in a cushy chair. Another TV movie showed women hiding the romance novel between other reading material because they can't put it down (reading at work). Readers may be compulsive readers or addicted to the story."

Two subjects reported that they have never noticed anyone reading romance novels:

"I never pay attention to what other women are reading."

"This is going to sound bad, but maybe I'm just not a very observant person because I never pay attention to what other people are reading."

Confronting the Romance Reader.

There is now a greater understanding of what people think of romance novels and the women that read them. However, Is there a real threat to romance readers that others will actually make a comment to them? I asked the non-reader subjects and found that only two had actually made comments and they only made them to people that they knew. One answered:

"I have made comments to people I know: Why are you reading that garbage again, why don't you read something worth reading. So, I will harass people I know. Strangers, I might just giggle to myself."

The other that made comments:

"I tell people I know, they are wasting their brain cells."

Who Reads Romance Novels?

There were nine romance reader subjects. They ranged in age, from nineteen to mid fifties. Five were single, one engaged and three married; the married subjects also had children. Seven of the subjects worked full-time, one worked part-time and was a full-time student, and one was a homemaker. Regarding education: one reader attended beauty school, and the other eight had at least some college experience. Out of the eight, five had earned degrees: (2) associates, (1) bachelor's degree, (1) master's degree, and (1) Ph.D.

What they read and why they read it.

The subjects that read romance novels do so in two different ways. Out of nine interviews, only one person reported that she read for more than 2 hours a day, everyday. The other eight readers were split evenly into two categories. Half responded they read for short amounts of time (30 minutes to 1-½ hours) everyday, the others read for longer amounts of time (2 hours or more) but not on a daily basis.

The majority of readers obtained their books through trading with friends or family members. They also bought them (inexpensively) from garage sales, used bookstores, and thrift shops. Only one reported that she buys the new, full price books from places such as Waldenbooks, Sam's Club and Wal-Mart. Two reported that they might occasionally buy a new, full price book. One reported checking them out from the city library.

Six of the nine readers reported that in addition to romance novels, they also read non-fiction and other genres of fiction such as horror, murder-mystery and suspense. Six

of the nine readers also read for school or work related purposes on a regular basis. Thus reading is also a work activity, not just for leisure.

Single-title Novels preferred over Series/category Novels.

Eight of the romance reader subjects reported that they had read at least one Harlequin/Silhouette. All nine subjects reported that they enjoyed the single-titled romances better than the Harlequin/Silhouettes. This is because the Harlequin/Silhouettes are too short to tell a very good story. The couple meets, falls in love and the story ends. The readers had many complaints about these books.

“I read longer novels, shorter (Harlequin/Silhouettes) if that is all to read. Harlequins are not based in reality, not, that any of the others are either but, Harlequins are like 80 pages long. No time to portray a story. It s the journey that is fun for me.”

Two of the subjects reported that they currently read Harlequin/Silhouettes in addition to the longer single-title novels.

One reported:

“I will read one if I am in the mood for something extremely easy and quick to read because I can read the entire book in one evening, sometimes I'm in the mood to finish a book, I don't want to have to stop and finish it another day.”

The other subject that read Harlequin/Silhouettes reported:

“The stories are simple but I get them from my mom and so I will read them if I don't have anything else.”

Therefore the subjects read Harlequin/Silhouettes for an easy, quick, escape. Not much time or effort needs to be exerted by the reader while reading the short Harlequin/Silhouettes.

Another subject responded:

“Romance is what I read because I don’t have it in real life and they are easy, I don’t have to think about them, I don’t have to break out a dictionary to find out what they are saying.”

Subjects reported that the Single-title romance novels offer more than just a romance story. They involve complex plots with great character development. Four of the romance reader subjects reported that they enjoy the murder-mystery romance sub-genre. Therefore in addition to a story involving “romance” there is a complete murder-mystery sub-plot that must be solved.

One subject reported:

“I don’t read it for the sex, I read it for the mystery that has to be solved.”

The romance reader subjects are able to tell the difference between a poorly written novel and a well written one. Eight of the nine subjects reported that they enjoyed the historical romances. They can tell the difference between an author that has researched the period the book is taking place in versus an author that hasn’t based on how much historical information is included in the book or in how detailed the clothing is described. Readers reported that they enjoyed the historical romances because they learned more about the time in history that was described in the books.

One subject reported:

“I learn a lot about history from the historical romances. Use real people and dates...and romance novels describe the day to day living routines of people in the past. They do this by describing what people wear and that homes may have a “garderobe” a bathroom rather than just focusing on political leaders and wars like history books tend to do. You really can get something out of the books.”

Therefore readers may prefer the longer, more complex single-title novels because they provide a longer, more fulfilled escape.

Reading a Woman-Centered story.

Another reason why women read romance novels is that they are looking for a story that is centered on a woman. The romance novel genre allows women an outlet where the lead character is a woman.

One subject reported reading them for this reason:

“To relax or unwind before bed. To enjoy a story or a fantasy and these stories focus on a woman as the lead character.”

Another subject describes how romance novels have evolved to focus on issues that are important to women:

“I believe the stories are always feminist stories. One reason is that with the newer books, the man is the secondary story. Also they support sexual freedom, especially with the new harlequin “Blaze” line where women are just out to have sex with a bunch of different guys. Kind of like the guys that go to bars and pick up women for one night stands. Authors are turning the aggressive seductions around where many women are now over the men. Authors have also been phasing out rape and virginity. And the stories are about sexual freedom and being a strong woman. The novels that I get from my aunt are contemporary novels that involve a divorced woman in her 40-50’s with grown children. I am not that old an enjoy reading about younger women but they are stories of strong women and prove that life isn’t over at 50, instead you are free from the duties of a family, you have an empty nest.”

Several subjects describe how books vary depending on the author yet they always write from the heroines’ point of view:

“The stories are both feminist perspectives and traditional (values). Just depends on the author. One (author) has a science background and the heroine is very strong, doesn’t need marriage, then you have the authors with the “woes me please take care of me.” I think we have to write from a feminist perspective because we are women. It would take a conscious

effort not to write a romance novel from a females point of view because we are females.”

“The stories have traditional roles. Men do things for them (women) that are loving and supportive, women are hard working and have a strong character about them so that’s somewhat different than having a character that is not able to work hard. Women can be secure and independent alone in some parts of the books. That’s what I like about her (Danielle Steel) books, she has them where they’re strong without anyone but then they do end up with a guy. It’s a love story I guess you have to. She does however make the women seem more complete and they’re more happy once they’re with that individual. When they are on their own they are not necessarily happy about it. They are strong enough but they could be with somebody to make themselves happier, so that whole traditional idea of being with somebody is definitely pushed.”

“I believe that we need to celebrate our womanly emotions, passion, love and I find empowerment when women are able to express themselves and when authors are expressing themselves that is empowering. I don’t believe the gender feminists are correct when they feel that womanly emotions need to be suppressed. A book is a way of expression, that is just her way of expression if she is writing about a woman taking care of her family, now if a man wrote a book that all women need to stay at home barefoot and pregnant, that is another story.”

“I think romance novel’s are actually just what a woman wishes a guy would do. A woman using her imagination to describe what she wishes would happen. Every woman deep down inside her wants the guy on shining armor to come in on a white horse. Her way of saying this would be nice; there is a longing in each woman that gets expressed in the book. I wish my boyfriend would do certain things for me, even though I know that I can do things for myself. I like it when he opens doors for me and gets my chair, even though we both know that I can do it for myself, its just an act of chivalry. I want to be asked what I want even if I don’t care, never told what to do. For example, I want him to ask me what I want to do Friday night, and then I can tell him, I don’t care you choose something. I would be angry if he ever just told me; oh we are going out to eat here tonight and then to see this movie. I know that this may sound terrible or like I’m a mean person, but that is what I want. I don’t want to be told what to do, but I also don’t want to always choose.”

Therefore the subjects enjoy romance novels because they are women-centered novels, providing a lead character that they can identify with. The heroine of the novels may have concerns or issues that are similar to readers even though they are set in fantasy. It

is also through the fantasy that readers can enjoy their “knight in shining armor” since they know this is not going to happen in real life.

Where they won't read.

Now I will discuss how the romance reader subjects manage their reading activity in society. Several subjects (5) reported having a problem with their reading material outside of their homes while others (4) did not have any problem with it.

Out of the nine-romance reader subjects five reported that they try to keep their reading private. There was only one correlation among the subjects, their place of employment. Four of them work on a university campus. The consensus was that if it were known that they read romance novels, they would be seen as less of an intellectual and thus experience status loss. Since they work in a university setting, it is very important for them to be viewed as an intellectual. They distance themselves from anything that might put into question their intellectual ability; therefore they primarily engage in preventative identity management strategies. They hide their romance novel reading because they fear that co-workers will view this reading material as something that only an “uneducated” person would be reading. Through the use of preventative identity management strategies the romance readers are keeping their reading material secret, thus staying in the discreditable category, they believe that if co-workers know of their romance reading they will be discredited.

One responded:

“I don't let anyone know at work unless other people are discussing them in a positive way and ask me about it. If people ask me if I read them, I will tell them yes, but it never comes up. I don't read during breaks at work so people at work don't know.”

Another subject described her experiences with preventative strategies (hiding her book, not reading much at work) as well as the treatment she received as one of the discredited at work:

“People at work knew, but I wouldn’t leave the book in plain sight, it stayed in my purse, and I read at home. I didn’t read at work because I knew that I would get the harassment of reading this “airhead” book. I took some kidding about it anyway because it was always obvious to others that we (a group of women at work shared books) were passing a book around. Other books I read I will leave on my desk or read on break but not with romance novels. If someone spotted it I got comments. Like I had a brick loose or something. There had to be a lack of intelligence or something to read that kind of book or I was harassed that I was reading it for the sex, which was a big laugh since there wasn’t any real sex in it, maybe foreplay, its not the equivalent of a playboy. But that was the biggest comment “oh you’re reading it for the sex”. Yeah right 20 pages of foreplay and 2 paragraphs of sex. I don’t know any man like that. You might get the 2 paragraphs of sex but not the 20 pages of foreplay. And then afterwards you just move on. It didn’t matter if they knew me well or not, they would always make some kind of comment about had to be something wrong about me to be reading these books but then I was harassing the girl that started the reading group. I started teasing her about it (reading romance novels) so she would read off a paragraph and then we would make up new lines or euphemisms.... Anyway, that’s how I got started reading romance novels, by harassing someone else about them.”

Even though there was a group of women reading romance novels at work, the subject felt it was necessary to engage in preventative strategies such as hiding the book in her purse and not reading it during her breaks for fear of what the non-reader co-workers would think of her. She knew what the non-reader co-workers would think of her and say to her because she had been a part of that group herself. This subject is interesting because she had the most actual threats to face from strangers and co-workers, yet she never engaged them in corrective strategies, she merely took the comments and walked away, she only engaged in preventative strategies by trying to keep her reading private.

Another subject engages in preventative strategies by not offering the information to anyone that she reads romance novels. She feels this information would result in definite status loss:

“The fact that I have a Ph.D. (in _____, and concentrate in _____) also makes me embarrassed in the department and like with other co-workers. I don't want people to know per se, even though I mean I'm not afraid to let them know, but at the same time, I'm not going to offer up the information. I think that others are thinking “Why is she reading romance novels when she should be reading and writing in academic journals?” Which they are correct. If someone from the department came into the bookstore while I were in the romance section, I wouldn't sneak to another section but I would make up an excuse as to why I was there.”

Therefore the subject is willing to engage in both preventative and corrective strategies if the need arises. The fourth subject strictly adheres to preventative strategies by not telling anyone at work and therefore does not face any risk of becoming a discredited person.

The fifth subject does not engage in preventative or corrective strategies in the workplace. She owns a salon and frequently discusses books with customers. When asked what she enjoys reading she will say “historical romances.” A salon and a university campus are two very different places and have different atmospheres. The salon provides a woman-centered atmosphere, which is mirrored in the woman-centered romance novel. Instead the subjects' concern is with reading romance novels in public places, which will be discussed in the next section.

Where and How they read.

All nine readers reported that the majority of reading was done in the home. This is the most common preventative strategy to being stigmatized. By reading at home,

subjects are able to avoid any criticisms from society. Nobody at work knows that you enjoy romance novels if you do the majority of your reading in private. All of the readers reported that they read in bed to relax. They also read in the living room and the bathroom.

One subject reported:

“I read them on trips, camping, at home. (never in public) Never thought about hiding a book cover. Always read in a location where that wouldn't come up. But if someone asked what I was reading I would show them.”

By reading at home or in “locations where that wouldn't come up” this subject is engaging in preventative strategies by avoiding outside opinions. The home and family environment is a safe one for this subject to openly read in and this environment is recreated during camping trips.

Another subject describes how her husband is fine with her romance reading:

“When I am down or down with my spouse, going back and reading one (romance novel) that interests me makes me feel happy. My husband comments that I must be reading a good one if I stay up until I am reading.”

However one subject does not have the same environment in which to read at home. She employs preventative strategies in the home:

“My fiancé thinks that romance reading is the equivalent of guys porn (which he is not supposed to look at) So I hide romance reading from him.”

When the subject discusses romance novels with her fiancé she engages in corrective strategies by describing how the novels are more than just sex.

Readers utilize preventative strategies when reading in public by choosing to read romances that do not have people on the cover, which are called “generic covers” such as one subject describes:

“Embrace (Bodice Rippers, where a man and woman are holding each other) covers turn me off. I may read one if it were real interesting, but I would be too embarrassed to read one in public. I would read a Danielle Steele in public.”

Another reported using preventative strategies on an airplane:

“I do not carry a large purse, I cannot carry a book with me anywhere. When I travel by plane, yes I will take a book, and I do get embarrassed. I will specifically read a book that does not have an embrace on the cover.”

She explains why she feels the need to read a “generic cover” novel:

“A lot of people think of romance novels as smut, and you know just not worth reading and in some respects in some of the novels I have read I would have to agree but not totally, some are good.”

The subject that is comfortable discussing romance novels in her salon employs preventative strategies when reading in other public places she responds:

“Yes, actually I have hidden my book I have a “Vera Bradley”, it’s like a cover that I usually put on my books.”

This subject is the most active “public” reader, she is one of two subjects that report carrying a romance novel in their purse on a regular basis and reading it whenever they get a chance during the day. By employing the preventative strategy of hiding her book through the use of a book cover she feels free to read in any location where she is “waiting around” she does not have to worry about becoming discredited.

There were four romance reader subjects that reported that they didn’t care what other people thought about them or their reading material. They did not care about preventative identity management tactics. Instead when I asked them what they thought

society in general thought about romance novels and if they have had negative encounters with others due to their romance novels, they seemed irritated and through their responses, they seemed to be engaging in corrective strategies with me.

For example, one responded:

“I am not embarrassed to read (romance novels), at least I read. I read them in the doctor’s office instead of the junky magazines.”

Therefore she is engaging in a corrective strategy by arguing that she is not stupid, she is not illiterate, and she is better than the people that don’t read and those who choose to read the “junky magazines.”

Another subject responded with a corrective strategy, she rapidly listed many qualities that she possessed:

✓ “I’m very outspoken and open with my opinion, very opinionated, very proud of the fact that I am a girl or woman, and I can back myself up. I am a political science major and I debate all the time, so people wouldn’t come up to me if they saw me reading a romance novel and make comments. In class (HS) I may feel awkward if the cover was real dramatic but I wouldn’t hide it. My dad would maybe say “what’s that” but he would do that with any book. I am very girly, I enjoy being a woman. I’ve always wanted girly things in my life, get dressed up for the prom, I’m a very passionate person.”

Another subject utilized the corrective strategy by quickly pointing out to me that

“society has stereotypes about everyone and comes from the uneducated masses.”

“If asked I will tell people that I read (romance novels), not ashamed about it. Society probably has stereotypes about women that read romance novels but that’s because society has stereotypes about everyone and comes from the uneducated masses. Reading is just an escape from reality, regardless of genre; you are just getting away. When I read in airports it doesn’t matter about the cover. Never hide them. (I) Have actually had women come up and say; “oh I’ve read that it’s wonderful.” No negative comments. It’s the way I hold my head. I have a confident posture. I read them because I like them, I don’t care what others think.”

Another subject reported that she is not hesitant about reading at work:

"I don't hide the books at work but, get comments when I read at work from a male co-worker but he usually harasses me (kids around) about everything. I'm not embarrassed about reading I will suggest books to women that are looking through the book aisles at work."

Romance Reader Concerns.

Most of the reader subjects reported that they were able to separate a fantasy from reality and therefore avoid any negative aspects of romance novels. However they were afraid that other readers might have a problem with this especially if they were "excessive readers" meaning that you just couldn't put a book down. Out of this study I would not include any of my nine romance reader subjects as "excessive readers." As stated earlier, only one reader read for more than 2 hours everyday and that was in the evening, she did not read all day long. The readers voiced the following concerns that are in turn preventive strategies in which they separate themselves from other romance readers.

One reported:

"I think that reading romance novels can lead to unrealistic expectations, in life and with your mate and yourself. Part of the reason why I think like this is because I read all of those self-help books and acknowledge certain things and then I read this different literature. And I can distinguish between the two a little bit more than most readers. You may think that you can live happily ever after. It can be disappointing when you close the book and realize that your life isn't ending with you inheriting 10 million dollars. But its also a nice outlet for enjoyment, and hope that you don't get so involved that it ruins your life or anything because you feel miserable but, I think there is a little bit of disappointment when you finish reading it."

Another stated:

"It's not too healthy to read syrupy novels constantly. You're setting yourself up for disappointment."

Another reports how she feels romance novels have impacted her relationships with men:

“My boyfriend doesn’t like it when I read, I get this like idea that my relationship needs to just be passion filled, white horse, and dozen roses. And that isn’t what happens. It has almost like put a veil over my face on what a real relationship is so we’ve had to adjust to what a relationship is and I’ve had to explain to him what romance is. He hasn’t even seen a girl movie really. My valentines’ gift to him is to watch “Sweet Home Alabama.” Almost created a problem, setting unreal expectations for my relationship. You may disregard a completely good guy because he doesn’t act like the hero’s. And then you realize that no real guy acts like that. Guys are different than girls. Guys don’t think like that.”

One reader was concerned with young girls reading romance novels even though she reported reading them when she was young and that they had no negative impact on her life:

“I don’t think it is appropriate for young girls to read romance novels, well / they can read the “nice” ones but that’s it. Nice means no sex... I think that girls may expect for relationships to be like the novels and that they might try to find a guy that is like a character from a novel. They may try to experiment with what they read in the books. They are setting unreal expectations for themselves. I think that there are a lot of romance novels out there that are not appropriate for young girls like Beatrice Small (an author who writes very racy romance novels).”

In this chapter the findings of the research was listed. The non-romance reader findings were first discussed and this included what they reported concerning romance novels and the women that read romance novels, and whether they would actually confront someone that reads romance novels. Then the findings from the romance reader subjects were discussed. The findings focus on who reads romance novels, what kinds of novels they prefer (single-titles) and why they read romances (for a woman-centered story). The findings also discuss where women will read romance novels and their rational for doing so. Last there is a section in which the concerns that romance readers have for other readers are discussed.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS

In this section I discuss the conclusions of the research as well as the limitations of the research and avenues for possible future research. First, all of the nine romance readers viewed reading as a leisure activity as well as a work activity but only four of the nine non-romance reader subjects viewed reading as a leisure activity. To the other five non-romance reader subjects, reading is work, it is designed to gain information, not to simply provide a pleasurable escape. Therefore there were two issues that the non-readers had with the readers, first that a woman chooses to read to relax (leisure activity), not just for work and second that they choose the romance genre of fiction to read. So for one of these two reasons, romance reading doesn't appeal to the non-reader subjects and is therefore viewed as a useless activity.

The focus of the findings was that five of the romance readers reported having problems with worrying that other people would stigmatize them for reading romance novels. Four of the five readers worked in a university setting and were all viewed as very intellectual workers. They feared that if others knew they read romance novels then they would be seen as a non-intellectual. Therefore they engaged in preventative identity management tactics.

From the findings of the non-romance readers these reader subjects were justified in their stigma worry. The non-readers do stigmatize romance readers as non-intellectuals. This is highlighted by the comments made from the non-reader in which the subject reports that the only person in her department that she thinks would read a romance novel is the secretary but then again she is not even sure that the secretary can

read. This non-reader subject works in a university setting and views romance reading as something only the lowest status person in her department might do. Therefore the romance readers are justified in the identity management tactics they employ in keeping their activity a secret in order to remain an “intellectual” in their co-workers eyes.

The non-readers stigmatize the romance novel as non-intellectual reading material because they believe them to be highly emotional and dramatic. In turn, the women that read romance novels are stigmatized as highly emotional, dramatic and non-intellectual.

In addition to stigmatizing romance readers as non-intellectuals, the non-readers affix a sexual stigma to romance readers. This sexual stigma is very versatile because for some non-readers they believed that romance readers were lacking a sex life, others believed that romance readers were possibly “over sexed” people. One non-reader subject related women and the hiding of their romance novels to men hiding pornography.

Thus the romance reader subjects employ preventative identity management tactics not only to prevent the possibility of being stigmatized as a non-intellectual but also to prevent others from labeling them with a sexual stigma. As described earlier, there are many sub-genres of romance novels and they contain different levels of sensuality or sexuality. In American society sensuality and sexuality are usually seen as taboo. Even though many other genres of fiction may include sensuality or sexuality just as the romance genre incorporates comedy, suspense and science fiction, it is usually viewed as a book about sex.

Romance readers are not engaging in identity management strategies due to a self-imposed stigma, there is a real threat to romance readers face. They are validated in the

use of preventative strategies that are employed such as hiding their activity to avoid others from labeling and stigmatizing them. However, information from the non-romance readers leads to the conclusion that romance readers do not really need to fear that a complete stranger would make a “rude” comment to them about their reading material. Romance readers are more likely to hear criticisms from people that they know.

During this research information was also gathered that combats stereotypes of the romance reader. Stereotypes centering on women being uneducated or reading romance novels to help with their unhappiness (to pacify themselves). All nine romance reader subjects were educated and all worked or went to school except for one who was a stay at home mother. They reported enjoying romance novels because the books were stories written by women for women. Women enjoy a woman-centered story. This is very important for the readers and they argue that the majority of heroines are strong women. The women are not just getting married and having children. The women in these stories vary depending on the authors. With the wide variety of novels available today, the subjects note that they can read about heroines that are experiencing every imaginable adventure. Or they can find a book that revolves around less exotic material but nevertheless is very entertaining and the heroines are always very strong.

The romance reader subjects also reported that they enjoyed the single-title historical and murder-mystery/suspense romance novels the most. The romance reader subjects reported problems with reading contemporary romances. The readers are not able to fully escape into a fantasy because they are reminded of their own lives. It is easier to accept the fantasy when it is occurring in a foreign land or in a different time period. Readers know that “fairy tales” don’t come true in real life, that situations don’t

always work out perfectly and thus lies the problem for many when reading contemporary novels. How can they read a contemporary book that ends up neat and nice when this is far from reality? Readers had the belief that if the story was historical, maybe it could have happened and therefore they can enjoy the story more.

This point is significant because it shows that readers are able to separate the fantasy from real life, and disproves the argument some researchers (Radway 1984, Mussell 1981, 1984, Modleski 1982, and Snitow 1979) make that romance novels are “pacifying” or “deluding” its readers. Several non-reader subjects reported they thought women that read romance novels might not be able to tell the difference between their fantasy books and real life. From this information it is clear that romance readers are able to separate fantasy from real life. The subjects do it to the level that for many, it is not satisfying to read a contemporary novel because they are so aware that in the “real world” things will never work out in a neat little package. In a historical or science fiction romance anything is possible and provides for a satisfying escape or leisure activity. Thus the romance reader subjects are not being pacified or socialized by the romance novels. They are not using these books as an escape in order to effectively deal with their lives; they are reading these books as a leisure activity in order to relax before bed. They are reading these books for the same reasons that anyone reads a story of fiction.

During the course of the nine romance reader interviews a common theme was occurring. They were engaging me in identity management tactics to try and separate themselves from other romance readers. They did so by arguing many different points. First, they commented that even though they can distinguish between reality and fantasy,

others may have a problem in doing so, especially the readers that “constantly” read romance novels. This was a common sentiment from the readers that would read for short amounts of time on a regular basis. They were directing these sentiments towards the readers that enjoy reading an entire book in one or two days.

Secondly, readers commented that young girls should only be allowed to read the “nicer” romance novels, which do not contain any explicit sexual scenes. This was the view from the majority of readers, four of which had started reading at a young age of 13-14. Two out of the four were not restricted in their reading and did not feel that their reading material had harmed them in any way whereas the two that were restricted by their parents were worried that the books could possibly corrupt a young girl.

Third, as stated before, the romance readers enjoyed the single-title romances more so than the category romances. The majority of readers wouldn’t be caught dead reading a Harlequin because they felt that it was a “simple” story. Therefore the readers had, among themselves, a hierarchy of what was considered “acceptable” romance novels. Therefore romance reading is most acceptable when the reader is at least a late teen, that can distinguish between fantasy and reality and can choose a single-title over a Harlequin.

The readers and non-romance readers agreed upon one comment. Society shouldn’t be so worried about women reading romance novels. Instead society should be concerned with those people who don’t read at all. Non-readers argued that at least the romance readers were reading something whereas the readers defend their books as well as praised them.

During the course of this study I have come across a possible limitation regarding the romance reader subjects. One purpose of the research was to find out if readers kept their activity a secret. I believe that there are many subjects that would have important information to share but they do not want to let others know that they read romance novels.

Another avenue for future research regarding romance readers would include a study only involving "compulsive" romance readers. This would include readers that read either a complete novel a day or every other day. This would provide interesting information as to whom is included in the demographics of the "compulsive" romance reader group as well as insights as to how or why they devote so much time to reading. Information gained could include the subjects' lifestyle. Is the subject disabled or isolated in some capacity so that reading is their primary activity? Is the subject just a fast reader? Do the subjects' read a little at a time throughout the day, or is the reading done in large blocks of time?

Another possibility is an analysis of the RWA and its chapters as a professional organization and what the ramifications have been for this organization and its members due to its female dominated status. Furthermore an examination would be useful as to how the organization differentiates between its extremely successful published author members such as Bertrice Small as opposed to an unknown, unpublished member.

There are also research opportunities as to why romance novels became so popular during the 1980's. Romance novels have been published in some shape for hundreds of years. What factors led to the industry's explosion in the 1980's? Why did so many women want to write and read them?

Another avenue for research regarding perceptions of romance readers could include an analysis of how men regard romance novels and the women that read them. During my interviews I received this suggestion many times.

In conclusion, romance readers are engaging in a leisure activity that most people enjoy, which is reading. However, society is able to stigmatize this group of readers as “non-intellectuals”, “over sexed” or “under sexed” women due to their choice of reading the romance fiction genre. There are many romance readers and authors who are battling against the stigma and stereotypes surrounding the romance fiction genre. Based on the results of this research, many romance readers engage in identity management tactics to avoid stigmatization by hiding their reading material. Romance readers also combat stigmatization and stereotypes by arguing that they “get” something out of the novels, they don’t just read it for the “sex.”

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APPENDICIES

Appendix A

Solicitation Flyer

To be posted at the Book Nook, the Used Book Stop, Hastings, Albertson's and Wal-Mart

DO YOU READ ROMANCE NOVELS?

DO YOU WANT TO DISCUSS ROMANCE NOVELS?

My name is Mary Daniels and I am currently working on a Masters Thesis in Sociology at Oklahoma State University. My study is designed to focus on the perceptions that women have regarding the romance novel. I am going to do this by interviewing women that read romance novels as well as non-readers.

I need volunteers for my study. I need to interview women that read romance novels and women that do not read romance novels. The interview would last from 15-45 minutes. It just depends on how long you want to talk.

Your participation would be **CONFIDENTIAL**. Your name would not be used in any way.

Please call (405) 744-9557 to set up an interview time.

If you would like to participate or have any questions/concerns please call:
Mary Daniels at (405) 744-9557

For questions:

Jean Van Delinder, Ph.D. at (405) 744-4613

Rights to research subjects: Sharon Bacher, IRB Executive Secretary, Oklahoma State University, 415 Whitehurst, Stillwater, OK 74078. Phone: (405) 744-5700.

Appendix B

Classroom Solicitation Script

Oklahoma State University

My name is Mary Daniels and I am working on a Masters Thesis in Sociology at Oklahoma State University. I am conducting a study on women's perceptions and romance novels. This study is being conducted through Oklahoma State University.

I am looking for women to participate in my study. If you volunteer you will be asked to participate in an interview. I need to interview women who read romance novels and also women that do not read romance novels. The interview will be audiotaped and will last from 15-45 minutes. The time frame depends on how much you want or have to say. The interviews will take place in the Classroom Building and all participants will remain confidential.

Questions or Concerns, please contact:

Mary Daniels at (405) 744-9557

For questions:

Jean Van Delinder, Ph.D. at (405) 744-4613

Rights to research subjects: Sharon Bacher, IRB Executive Secretary, Oklahoma State University, 415 Whitehurst, Stillwater, OK 74078. Phone: (405) 744-5700.

Appendix C

Written Informed Consent Form

A. AUTHORIZATION

I, _____, hereby authorize or direct Mary Daniels, to perform the following procedure.

B. DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH AND ASSOCIATED RISKS/BENEFITS

This research project is entitled: Gaining Insights into Women's Perceptions: An Examination of Romance Novel Readers. Mary Daniels, through Oklahoma State University is conducting the research as partial requirement to complete a Masters degree in Sociology at Oklahoma State University.

The purpose of this research is to gain information concerning women's perceptions of stereotypes/stigmas, gender socialization, gender inequalities, and empowerment. This will expand the field of knowledge relating to women's issues.

The interview will last from 15-45 minutes. The time frame depends on how much information you want to give or how long you want to talk. During the interview I will ask you questions and you can answer them; the interview will be audio taped. If you choose not to answer certain questions that is fine or if at any time you wish to terminate the interview that is fine and your wishes will be respected.

There are no risks involved in participating in this research. Possible benefits of this research include a better understanding of women's perceptions in American society.

Your participation in this research project will remain confidential. The written informed consent form with your signature and your audiotape will be kept in a locked box; your audiotape will have a number on it, not your name. I will be the only person with access to this locked box. At the end of the research I will destroy the written informed consent form and audiotape.

For any questions or concerns please contact:

Mary Daniels at (405) 744-9557

Jean Van Delinder, Ph.D. at (405) 744-4613

Rights to research subjects: Sharon Bacher, IRB Executive Secretary, Oklahoma State University, 415 Whitehurst, Stillwater, OK 74078. Phone: (405) 744-5700.

C. VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

I understand that participation is voluntary and that I will not be penalized if I choose not to participate. I also understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and end my participation in this project at any time without penalty after I notify Mary Daniels, during the interview or by calling (405) 744-9557.

D. CONSENT DOCUMENTATION FOR WRITTEN INFORMED CONSENT

I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy has been given to me.

Date: _____ Time: _____ (a.m.,p.m.)

Name (typed) Signature

Signature of person authorized to sign for subject, if required

I certify that I have personally explained all elements of this form to the subject or his/her representative before requesting the subject or his/her representative to sign it.

Signed: _____
Mary Daniels, Project director

Appendix D

In-Depth Interview Script for Romance Readers

What are your reading habits like?

Where do you get your books?

Is reading your main leisure activity, what else do you like to do in your free time?

How did you get interested in romance novels?

When did you first begin reading romance novels?

What kind of romance novels do you like? Do you have a favorite romance genre (historical or contemporary)?

Do you discuss these books with family or friends?

Do you know any men that read romance novels?

Do you think the feminist movement has helped or hurt the perception of women in romance novels?

Appendix E

In-Depth Interview Script for Non-Readers

What are your reading habits?

What do you enjoy reading?

What else do you like to do?

What comes to mind when you hear the words romance novels?

What do you think about the women who read romance novels?

Why do you think women read romance novels?

If given one, would you read a romance novel?

APPENDIX F

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Protocol Expires: 1/26/2004

Date: Monday, January 27, 2003

IRB Application No AS0349

Proposal Title: GAINING INSIGHTS INTO WOMEN'S PERCEPTIONS: AN EXAMINATION OF ROMANCE NOVEL READERS

Principal Investigator(s):

Mary Daniels
17-2 N. University
Stillwater, OK 74078

Jean Van Delinder
006 CLB
Stillwater, OK 74078

Reviewed and
Processed as: Exempt

Approval Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved *

Dear PI :

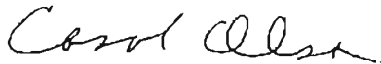
Your IRB application referenced above has been approved for one calendar year. Please make note of the expiration date indicated above. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period of one calendar year. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of this research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved projects are subject to monitoring by the IRB. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact Sharon Bacher, the Executive Secretary to the IRB, in 415 Whitehurst (phone: 405-744-5700, sbacher@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,



Carol Olson, Chair
Institutional Review Board

*NOTE: Change IRB room number to 415 and correct consent form... paragraph 2 to be a full sentence.

VITA



Mary H. Daniels

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Science

Thesis: I DON'T READ IT FOR THE SEX: ROMANCE READERS AND
IDENTITY MANAGEMENT.

Major Field: Sociology

Biographical:

Education: Graduated from Wagoner High School, Wagoner, Oklahoma, in May 1994; received Bachelor of Science degree in Sociology from Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in December 1998. Completed the requirements for the Master of Science degree in Sociology at Oklahoma State University, in December 2003.

Experience:

Graduate teaching assistant within the Department of Sociology at Oklahoma State University from 2001-2003. Employed July 2003, as an Academic Counselor at Oklahoma State University for the College of Arts & Sciences, Student Academic Services.

Professional Memberships:

Alpha Kappa Delta: the Sociology honor society, the Sociology Graduate Student Association, and the National Association of Academic Advisors.