

The Future of Historical Research in Popular Romance Studies

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As a researcher, I often find myself in a situation where I can reflect on two of the fields I work in at once. These fields oftentimes share commonalities, though they are distinct disciplines. For example, in my work I have researched circumcision debates in popular and niche magazines, often erotic and pornographic in nature. To my surprise, *Hustler* carried a series of articles about the politics of circumcision (Allan, “The First Rip Off: Anti-Circumcision Activism in Men’s Magazines,” 2018). This led me to explore the debates in other magazines, including gay men’s magazines (Allan, “The Lost Inches: Circumcision Debates in Gay Men’s Magazines,” 2019) and popular science magazines (Allan, “Circumcision Debates in *Sexology Magazine* (1934-1975),” 2021). Recently, I have begun attending to discussions of vasectomy, and have studied a very narrow area of inquiry, the sociopornographic magazine, which acts as a marriage manual (Allan, “The Easy Way Out’: Vasectomies in Sociopornographic Magazines,” 2022). The material studied ranges from the 1930s to the first decade of the 2000s. What all of these articles have in common is limited access to the primary material. Very few libraries, archives, repositories collect this material. In some cases, the material is entirely lost to the dustbin of history.

Outside of this work, I have also maintained a long interest in popular romance fiction, and thus, an overlap presents itself. What might this mean, in the future, for the study of the popular romance novels that are currently in our scholarly work? How does a field like popular romance studies ensure that future scholars have access to the primary material we currently use?

My questions are, in a sense, rhetorical for I have few answers, but as I think about the future of scholarship, what happens if those primary texts we study are inaccessible to a future researcher? How should the field of popular romance studies begin the process of archiving the primary materials that are studied and talked about? What of those texts that are not currently being studied but may well one day be of interest to a scholar? Again, I ask these questions rhetorically, but also sincerely, for in my own research I have realized that

so much “pulp” or “grey” material has simply disappeared. I can find references to works, but I cannot find the actual work. As such, I must take the word of the scholar who mentions the work, or the journalist who comments on it. Undoubtedly, many materials may well exist in private collections, but are they accessible if they cannot be found? When we think about the future of popular romance studies, I do hope we are also thinking about how we archive materials in the present, not just in our private collections, but also in the institutional repositories.