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The selective tradition, the role of romance fiction donations, and public library practices in New South Wales, Australia

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Introduction. This study uses Williams's notion of the selective tradition and the development of recorded culture to explore collection development practices, with a specific focus on librarians' attitudes towards donations. It explores how a group of public libraries marginalise romance fiction which is acknowledged as a significant aspect of popular culture.

Method. Collection development policies from public libraries across New South Wales, Australia, were compared with statements from professional bodies such as ALIA and IFLA, and legislation. Semi-structured interviews were held with librarians to identify the ways materials are selected and acquired and then integrated into the collection.

Analysis. Responses and data were analysed using a priori coding developed from the statements of professional bodies as well as thematic analysis.

Results. The practices used to select and acquire romance fiction differ significantly from those used with general fiction. In particular, since most romance fiction titles appear to be acquired through donation, they cannot be considered to be included in the selective tradition.

Conclusions. There is a misalignment between the interests of the community whose enthusiasm for romance fiction make it a huge part of the publishing market and the practices of public librarians in including these books in library collections.

Introduction

Romance fiction is an important aspect of popular and everyday reading culture. According to the identical definition provided by the Romance Writers of Australia ([2018](#)) and the Romance Writers of America ([2018](#)), romance fiction is defined as a narrative which has two elements: the romance relationship is the central narrative, and there is an emotionally satisfying and optimistic ending; it is *'a central love story and optimistic, satisfying ending'*. Romance fiction produces considerable economic capital. Fletcher et al. ([2018](#)), in their research into Australian publishing in the 21st century, note that *'the number of romance titles published per year has increased from less than two hundred titles per year in 2000–01 to just under nine hundred in 2015–16'* (p. 1001).

Kristin Ramsdell, librarian author of the *Encyclopedia of Romance Fiction*, reports that the romance genre is an over \$1 billion industry, accounting for 29% of all fiction sold across the world in 2015 according to Nielsen Bookscan ([2018](#), p. xix). However, its acceptance as part of literary cultural capital continues to remain low, *'the least visible in public literary culture'* (Fletcher et al., [2018](#), p. 218), because it is not selected to appear in sources that help to create cultural capital, such as library collections and book reviews. To the extent that romance fiction books *are* found in public libraries, they are very likely to have been donated by members of the community (Adkins et al., [2008](#), p. 60; Flesch [2004](#), p. 59; Ramsdell [2012](#), p. 37), a practice that may result in cost-savings, but which does not lead to a sound strategy for collection development. Further to this, romance fiction collections in public libraries are often not catalogued correctly or given any meaningful metadata resulting in the titles not being visible on library catalogues, nor being added to Libraries Australia, the National Library of Australia's library holdings database (Veros, [2015](#)). Despite its significant position in the publishing industry, romance fiction is not similarly reflected in the reporting of the highest borrowed fiction,

a place held by crime fiction (Australian Library and Information Association & Civica, [2018](#)), which is the smallest genre in terms of published output (Fletcher et al., [2018](#), p. 218).

This study explores the practices in public libraries in New South Wales which lead to the position of romance fiction as being the least visible in public literary culture. It uses Williams's ([1965](#)) notion of the selective tradition to frame the impact of the practices of selection, acquisition and cataloguing of romance fiction.

Selective tradition

Public libraries' systems for selecting material are systems that, in principle, should reflect their communities' reading interests; that is, the books they are reading are representations of everyday, popular culture. Everyday culture is the lived experience and engagement of people in their society. Raymond Williams ([1965](#)) positions everyday culture as the practices of the majority of people in a community rather than culture as reflected by museums, galleries and literary institutions. The practices of these communities engaging with popular products are a reflection of their everyday values and interests, and of their full participation in the lived culture of a particular time and place (Williams, [1965](#), p. 66). Williams argues that the tradition of selection is a '*continual selection and re-selection of ancestors*' (p. 69) and describes culture as consisting of three levels. The first is the aforementioned *lived culture* of a community; second, the *recorded culture, of every kind, from art to the most everyday facts*; and third, the *culture of the selective tradition*. The culture of the selective tradition connects the culture of everyday to the culture from the repository of recorded documents (texts), and identifies those aspects of the lived tradition which are deemed significant to merit inclusion in the reflection of the culture of that time. He indicates there will be criticism that some of what is selected is of little or no value, but that institutions involved in the selective tradition must resist this criticism, because otherwise they will misrepresent everyday culture, although he does acknowledge that these assessments of value are difficult to make.

This notion of selection is fundamental to the everyday practices of librarians in public libraries. In developing collections, they engage with the products of publishing, with their own data on borrowing, and with the characteristics of the community. They also make choices about how to create a record of the resources they have selected for the collection through cataloguing practices. These practices reflect Williams' *culture of the selective tradition*. He acknowledges that there may be significant aspects of *living culture* that are not included in the selections made in creating the record of a community.

Collection development and its societal context

Collection development policies are tools that guide libraries in the acquisition of materials and resources to meet the needs of their community. Collection development policies have served differing purposes over the past centuries, from short statements of selection philosophies (Gardner, [1981](#)) to ‘blueprints for the operations of a library as a whole’ (Johnson, [2018](#), p. 29). In the Australian context, documented collection development policies constitute ‘good collection management’ (Kennedy, [2006](#), p. 11), although they tend to be material-centred rather than user-centred (Kelly, [2014](#), p. 59). Through the process of articulating collection development policies, public libraries validate particular books and their authors, and in the process, reflect everyday culture and *the culture of the selective tradition* (Williams, [1965](#), pp. 66–67).

Collection development policies also reflect the ideologies and core values of professional bodies and international organisations such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) and the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA), as well as international conventions, and national and state legislation. Bourdieu and Nice ([1977](#), p. 53) refer to these as ‘*structuring structures*’: the organisations, the legislature and policy and governance that shapes and forms the way an institution functions. Higher level organisations, in their role as *structuring structures*, inform and provide the guiding principles for local level libraries to reinterpret and to build into their own organisational goals, which in turn provide the framework of guiding principles for the community-facing local public library. This research project focuses on the state of New South Wales whose public libraries provisions are bound to the Library Act of NSW 1939. The Library Council of New South Wales is one of these organisations as it is the governing body of the State Library of New South Wales with ‘*specific responsibilities to monitor the operation of public libraries*’ in New South Wales. *Living Learning Libraries* are the standards and guidelines formulated by the Library Council to assist councils in their delivery of services to their communities ([2019](#), p. 3). The Library Council’s framing of key practices influences public library policies and operations in New South Wales. Using Bourdieu and Nice’s notion of *structuring structures* as a frame for analysing collection development policies can reveal how the principles of collection development are understood by librarians and how they may impact on the inclusion of romance fiction within the selective tradition implemented by public libraries.

Methods

Public libraries in this study are identified as the library services that are provided by local government areas of New South Wales and are recipients of funding both from their parent council area and state funding as outlined by the Library Act of New South Wales. The Websites of local government areas in New South Wales were used to identify publicly available collection development policies and statements. Of 112 local councils, an analysis was made of the documents that guide collection development for twenty-six public library services (that is, just over a quarter of the council areas in the state once adjustments are made for councils that have an agreement in place for the delivery of joint services). Specific collection development documents existed for twenty-one library services. Document names varied with the words plan, policy, strategy, statement and guidelines all used seemingly interchangeably. A further five library services had a collection development section within their broader library strategy plan documents. These documents range in form and style from procedural and specific operational documents to brief, generalised policy statements. Several services make philosophical, aspirational and inspirational (see Gardner, [1981](#)) claims for their service delivery expectations as well as presenting goals and objectives for their member communities.

Libraries are not identified in the paper. To maintain the de-identification of each library and their local government organisations, documents are referred to generally as collection development policies from here on. Further to this, grammatical and representational changes have also been made, such as the removal of dot points and numerical ordering systems, so as to further de-identify the information that is presented. The text of each document has not been altered.

The collection development policies were analysed using *a priori* coding developed from the documents identified as being part of the structuring structures. This approach provided a way of elucidating the practices of public librarians, their relationship to the creation of cultural capital from popular culture and the place of romance fiction in the collections of public libraries.

Eleven librarians from seven library systems across New South Wales were interviewed. The librarians represented metropolitan coastal, regional and rural libraries as well as joint library services networks and single council library services and the librarians' identities have been made anonymous by representing them as a number and not referring to their specific staff position. The purposive sample identified libraries all of which had donated romance fiction collections that were identified through their catalogue records. All the interviewees were female librarians, whose roles involved collection development as well as programmes and readers' advisory. They were chosen to participate in the study by the management of their library. The number of

interviewees was a reflection of each library's organisational structure as well as their size, with smaller library systems having only one person in a collection development role and larger systems having several staff members working in a collections section of their library. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in the library with each interview lasting an hour. The transcripts of the interviews were analysed using the same *a priori* coding frame as the collection development policies. Thematic analysis was also used on the interview transcripts.

Results

Introduction to results

The practices of collection development in relation to the selective tradition are reported here, firstly within the context of general public library practices, and then with a particular focus upon the practices that relate to the collection of romance fiction. The twenty-six public library collection development policies analysed in this study reflect the ideologies of professional bodies and international organisations and these were named in many of the collection development policies, as was expected. The statements that are referred to include the [ALIA Free Access to Information](#) statement (65%), [ALIA Core Values](#) (19%), the [ALIA Statement on public library services](#) (38%) and the [IFLA/UNESCO Library Manifesto](#) (19%). The collection development policies refer to governing state library bodies (the State Library of New South Wales and the Library Council of New South Wales, 54%), as well as each library's local government body. The State Library of New South Wales's Living Learning Libraries guidelines was referred to by 23% of the policies. The naming of the national and international bodies in their collection development policies show that these organisations' values underpin at least some local libraries' practices.

Key principles that emerge through the analysis of the collection development policies include the right to information, the right to read, and the library as a place for the community to access information, literacy, education, culture, imagination and creativity (ALIA, [2018d](#); IFLA, [2018b](#); Niegaard, [1994](#)) with various related documents including the libraries' responsibility towards authors and creators, especially in the context of copyright (ALIA, [2018a](#); IFLA, [2018a](#)). These key principles also appear in ALIA's ([2018c](#)) statement on professional conduct such as their point on '*recognising and respecting the intellectual property of others*'. However, this responsibility is not mentioned in the State Library's *Living Learning Libraries* guidelines which acts as a model for the libraries investigated in this paper, with its content being paraphrased in

all the public library collection policies despite not being mentioned by all the libraries.

Collection development policies also refer to, and are shaped by, the legislation which governs their organisation, including the Library Act of New South Wales (54%) and its associated Library Regulations (35%), and federal acts: the Copyright Act (23%), the Classification Act (35%), the Local Government Act (15%), the State Records Act 1998 (8%) and a variety of other Acts, each mentioned once. In this consideration of the structuring structures which shape the collection development policies, one piece of legislation is conspicuous by its absence and that is the Public Lending Right Act. This Act recognizes the rights of authors to be recompensed for potential loss of earnings from books held in library collections. IFLA ([2016](#)) has a clear position on the public lending right stating:

1. PLR [public lending right] may be a copyright that grants to the owner of a protected work the right to authorise or prohibit its public lending, through licensing and the payment of royalties to authors through collecting societies; or
2. a “remuneration right,” or right of the author to receive compensation for public lending of his or her work.

However ALIA does not have a similar statement though they state in their History of the Association that they *‘contributed to the Office for the Arts review of the Public Lending Right and the Educational Lending Right’* in 2012 (ALIA, [2019](#)).

Collection development policies from the twenty-six libraries fall into two categories. Broad statements of principle were found:

This policy guides the development, management of and access to [Y] Libraries’ collections ensuring that they meet the information, education, recreation and cultural needs of the community. (Library Y)

as were detailed strategic and/or operational guidelines:

The Collection Development [plan] ... will be used as a tool for responding to client needs and demands, a public document which indicates to the community the nature and depth of the Library's holdings, a guide for library staff in the selection of materials. (Library B)

Collection development policies set the framework for the types of resources that a public library may select for its collection. This framework acts as the guiding principle within which the selective tradition needs to manifest. The practices of selection and acquisition are the mechanisms through which titles are added to the library collection, with selection being the practice of choosing resources for the collection, and acquisition being the practice of gathering these resources. These practices may overlap, as in the case of the 35% of collection development policies which explicitly state the use of library vendors, and 54% indicating the use of standing orders. In these cases, the supplier is responsible for making the selection and for providing the books. Finally, twenty-three of the collection development policies (88% of the sample) indicated that their library service accepted donations. The following sections present findings on the practices of selection and then on the practices of acquisition.

Practices for selecting fiction

Collection development policies from 92% of the library services described using a variety of selection tools that come from the aligned field of literature and reviews. Policies from 81% of services indicated they take purchase requests for resources for the collection from their community.

I take requests from customers into consideration ... generally I aim for something that will have more than that one person interested in it.(Librarian 6)

Other selection criteria included popularity (69%), bestsellers (65%), award winners (54%), classics (46%), and the publisher's reputation (35%). Genre fiction was specifically mentioned in nine (35%) of the collection development policies where it was related to popular fiction and leisure reading. Genre fiction included '*westerns, romances, science-fiction, family sagas and fantasy, including emerging and high demand but short-lived sub genres*' (Library J). Genre fiction was also referred to as '*ephemeral fiction*' (Library G). Westerns was the only genre given its own subsection in a collection development policy (Library R). Two libraries indicated that books within specific genres will be identified with stickers (Library A and Q).

The influence of accepted but undocumented practices within a library were also apparent as criteria for selection:

A lot of library staff have been working in the library for a long time, we've developed informal ways of doing that [selection].
(Librarian 7.1)

Literary reviews lend cultural legitimacy to books resulting in heightened engagement with the books by cultural and education institutions. Using different reviewing agencies to facilitate the selection of material is a way to filter the many publications that are available, contributing to the shaping of the libraries' selective tradition. The choice of review sources is made by both the professional staff from their familiarity with the literary field, and borrower requests for purchase. Of the review sources that the interviewees identified, *The Sydney Morning Herald* (a daily newspaper published in New South Wales) was mentioned by 23% of the interviewees and *Goodreading Magazine* by 19%. Other review sources mentioned by the interviewees included *The Australian*, *The Age*, *Bookseller and Publisher*, *Library Journal*, *Magpies*, *The Women's Weekly* and *The Australian Book Review*.

Vendors are commonly contracted by a library to select materials on their behalf based on a trust relationship established with the library and they often act as a conduit between the library and the publisher:

In fact, it's [selection of resources] done with our suppliers. They do our selecting for us based on the criteria we have given them.
(Librarian 1.1)

We deal with bookseller vendors rather than the publishers.
(Librarian 7.1)

However, two librarians noted that using a library supplier can also negatively affect the development of the collection since a vendor may overstep their role as an intermediary between library and publisher:

We haven't found that outsourced model works perfectly for us so we are going to claw back a little bit of the selection but leave the processing with the supplier. (Librarian 1.2)

Practices for selecting romance fiction

The selection processes for romance fiction reported by these librarians differ from those for other materials selected for the library. One of the interviewees acknowledges that romance fiction is not likely to be found in reviews in sources such as *The Sydney Morning Herald* and that they need to search elsewhere:

Well, we tend to just use the Herald. Well, obviously, we are not going to pick up much in the way of romantic fiction. With

romantic fiction, we are probably not using the reviews as much as some of the other sources. (Librarian 3.3)

Several interviewees cited *Goodreading Magazine* as a source to find 'medium to lighter fiction' reviews. However, an analysis of *Goodreading Magazine* to validate this claim showed that in a one year period (September 2017 to August 2018), there were only three romance fiction books reviewed with a further three that were on the periphery of the genre.

There is an awareness that romance fiction awards exist, however they either do not resonate with the selector's personal reading tastes:

Yeah, I suppose we do crime fiction [award winners] because that is what I am interested in, but the others we don't really filter through unless they make it more mainstream. But that's just me. I think if we did some research, like if we were looking for a romance one or crime one or something particular we would look at the awards. (Librarian 7.2)

or are perceived as a niche interest beyond the awareness of most librarians:

[Staff member X is] aware of all the literary awards and the short lists. Crime authors and then the, is it the Australian Romance – , you know the [sentence left hanging]. (Librarian 2)

Every librarian indicated that the selection practices used for romance fiction differed from those used for general fiction. The criteria included measures of volume and aesthetics:

[We purchase] By the metre.
[We select by] The cover! The cover! (Librarian 2)

To be honest, it is actually what the book looks like...you have got your Fabios [a well-known romance fiction cover model from the 1980s and 1990s] and that kind of thing. (Librarian 1.1)

We tend to just select them by their category. So the red or orange [branding for the publishers' imprint series]. So if we think we need more of a particular sort we'll just buy some ... a selection of that. We don't do it title by title. (Librarian 3.3)

Practices for acquiring fiction including romance fiction

A library's acquisitions are either budgeted and purchased materials or materials that have been donated. Budgeted fiction is acquired through vendors and library suppliers, individual purchase by librarians, and standing orders. Most often, library suppliers respond to the parent council's call for tenders and as such must adhere to government reporting and transparency requirements.

For the libraries that have their own selection process, the vendors and library suppliers often do the actual procuring, cataloguing and processing, delivering fiction as *shelf ready* (i.e., ready to be borrowed). The library staff verify that the resources match their orders and that the catalogue record is reliable, with Librarian 3.2 saying that her job requires '*checking for errors and enhancement of the catalogue.*'

Public libraries acknowledge that individual purchases need also to be made independent of their vendor agreements. These can be either through bookseller visits or visits to bookshops, through purchase suggestions from community members and staff, and as specific purchased from individuals whose work is of local interest such as in the case of local authors (Libraries H, L, M, O, R, and U).

Standing orders are a process whereby the library identifies authors whose creative outputs are automatically requested for purchase, bypassing the necessity for selection. A standing order is an acknowledgement of an author's cultural capital and literary legitimacy because their books will be selected regardless of literary merit. Predominantly, it is '*established authors*' (Library G) who are placed on standing order lists, which is an affirmation of the selective tradition. It is generally the vendor who provides the initial standing order options from which librarians choose:

That tends to be the one vendor and it's also they have their own suggested list and we'll cherry pick from that to create our own.
(Librarian 7.1)

However, cultural capital is gained through economic capital and community engagement. Popularity of sales and loans is an indicator of the need to either add or delete an author from a standing order list:

We might go from getting two copies by that author to just one. So, it's just a matter of monitoring. (Librarian 3.3)

The interviewees indicated that romance fiction was available from their vendors and that they often select this genre due to its popularity. However,

when asked if they also selected Mills & Boon (a well-known romance fiction publisher), a different picture emerged:

No, we never buy Mills & Boon. We do happily get quite a bit donated so we don't have to spend as much money on it if we didn't get those donations. (Librarian 3.3)

In regards to that sort of series [Mills & Boon] we don't actively buy it but because we find we get lots of donations. (Librarian 5)

Budget allocation towards romance fiction is not seen as necessary nor is it prioritised as the donations from the public seem to suffice as a point of entry into the library.

Donations as an acquisition practice

Donations are a significant source of materials for library collections. According to the *Public Library Statistics for 2016-2017* (State Library of New South Wales, [2018](#)), donations made up close to 15% of New South Wales public libraries' acquisitions. With 1,387,643 titles acquired in the 2016-2017 financial year, the reported 92,955 donated resources make up this substantial amount of 15% of materials acquired by public libraries. The analysis of the collection development policies showed that the inclusion of a donation statement was the most frequently occurring element and present in twenty-three of the twenty-six library policies, of which only one stipulated that it does not accept any donations. Library M's donation statement is representative of what is found in the policies:

The Library is pleased to accept gifts and donations, but reserves the right to decline or redistribute them as appropriate if they do not meet the selection criteria.

Donated materials do not always become part of a library's collection:

We accept donations but use very few. They usually end up in our book sale. ... We have a policy for donations in terms of currency and physical condition. They have to fit in with our collection development policy. So, a lot of them don't get through the door. (Librarian 3.3)

Donated materials that have been accepted for the library collection may still not be treated the same as purchased items, with practices related to cataloguing and shelving implying that donations have a lesser value:

If it doesn't fit our selection policy for a new resource then it won't get put on the system and then we shall have them shelved in a separate area and they are often just barcoded as an uncatalogued item. So, people could still borrow them but they are not part of our collection. (Librarian 1.2)

In at least one library, romance fiction donations are shelved below a sign and marked with a label that says

These books have been kindly donated. There is no need to scan.
Please return next time you are in the library. (Library U).

Often, rather than providing a complete catalogue record for each resource donated, a single catalogue entry is applied to many donated books. These records are a sub-par catalogue record because key identifiers, such as author name, are absent. Of the twenty-six libraries whose policies were analysed, 65% used this type of sub-par catalogue record for their romance fiction collections with titles including *Adult Paperback Donation* (Library A), *Romance Pb [paperback]* (Library S), *Light Fiction Romance* (Library O), and *Donation Paperback* (Library P). This practice was in place for six of the seven libraries where the interviews with librarians took place. The seventh library had shifted to full catalogue records in the previous year with the librarian recalling the former practice of using sub-par catalogue records as one that she did not like. In one library, despite the romance fiction titles being part of the library's purchase plan, there were sub-par catalogue records for these items indicating that the library instructed the vendor to supply the books without a catalogue record.

One of the librarians explained how uncatalogued items are shelved within the library:

So those ones aren't actually catalogued ... all we do is stamp them with an ownership stamp and do the sticker and they're just from people's donations and they just go on ... that carousel, it's just a browsing collection. (Librarian 5)

Another intimated that key performance indicators such as circulation statistics were not captured as a consequence of this practice:

We have always circulated donations but they weren't barcoded so we actually have no idea how many were being circulated.
(Librarian 1.2)

In at least one library, donated resources are separated according to their content. The popular, high turnover romance fiction collection is given a single catalogue record with the title *Romance* and this record has over 800 barcodes (i.e., 800 unique borrowable items) attached. Conversely, in the same library, popular fiction is given a complete and unique catalogue record including a Libraries Australia holding record thus making the items searchable through the national database. The relevance here is that the donated high-turnover fiction is given linked data thus making the resources searchable from the National Database, yet the romance donations are not given any even searchable metadata let alone providing linked data:

We do have another donated collection that we call quick picks that we have been running for a few years. And that is basically high turnover fiction - not always fiction...they are primarily donated but they also have a Libraries Australia record that we bring in. (Librarian 7.1)

Donations play a significant role in the collections of some libraries. However, most librarians in this study reinforce the view that donations are considered lesser items than those that are purchased.

It's donated material. They're not worth – which is a value judgement – they are not worth the effort to original type catalogue [entries]. (Librarian 7.1)

Perceptions of donations

Librarians had insights into why they believe community members donate their books to libraries. Some members are seen as wanting to share their reading:

When they bring along a fiction book they have enjoyed you can see the sparkle in their eyes. You know, they want to share it with someone else. (Librarian 2)

Others are perceived as wanting to contribute to the community:

I don't know if it is because they think the library is a better place for that book to have a future life as opposed to the op shop [charity shop]. (Librarian 6)

Some librarians assumed that the books donated are not particularly important to the donor:

To me, I think that people donate books if they don't have a special place in their heart. You know they don't think they are going to read them again. (Librarian 5)

Others thought donors considered them unwanted, rubbish to be disposed of:

I'd say three-quarters just want to get rid of them. They are cluttering up the place, they don't want them anymore. (Librarian 3.3)

The treatment of donations demonstrates that even when romance fiction is accepted into a collection as a donation, it may not be fully integrated into the collection or treated as having the same value as the fiction acquired through the process of the selective tradition.

Discussion

Collection development policies and the selective tradition

Collection development policies form an ideological framework within which library professionals work. The ideology in the documents reflects a popular culture or everyday culture through the emphasis on meeting the needs of the community and becomes a lens through which librarians view popular culture which they then express through creation of the book collections. That is, conceptually, a collection development policy can be seen as guidelines for the building of the selective tradition.

The wider study confirms Flesch's ([2004](#)) assertion that romance fiction collections are built through donations, and extends Ramsdell's ([2012](#), p. 37) discussion that relying primarily upon donations creates a second rate collection. This paper's analysis of the interviews and the collection development policies focused on the attitudes of librarians towards library donations thus building upon Adkins et al.'s ([2008](#)) survey results on the attitudes of librarians towards romance fiction.

Collection development policies can be considered to be statements of best practice, which is evident due to the mirroring of the Library Council of New South Wales ([2019](#)) *Living Learning Libraries* in the policies. The international (IFLA) and national (ALIA) library bodies' value statements, although recognised, do not always get carried down into the frameworks guiding libraries at the local level. An example of this, relevant to the consideration of the selective tradition, is the importance of respecting and recognising the

intellectual rights of authors. Even though the values are recognised and believed to be implemented, it is only when the practices used for general fiction are compared to the practices used for romance fiction that inconsistencies emerge. It would even appear that in some instances, the librarians are unaware of the guiding principles that underpin the practices of selection, privileging instead their personal values and preferences.

The collection development policies, and the documents on which they are based, position the public library as an organisation upholding the selective tradition. The policies guide the practices of librarians who have the responsibility for the selection of books into the collection which can be seen as gatekeeping. The findings show that these practices marginalise the selection of romance fiction. Reviews and awards in principle support the selective tradition but they are not evident in the selection of romance fiction. Library suppliers may be seen as facilitators of acquisitions to public libraries, with plans developed through community consultation.

Everyday culture and the role of donations

The public library has an important role to play in the cultural life of its community. Library collections are an expression of the everyday culture of their community, and the collection development policy therefore becomes a cultural symbol that frames, reflects and represents the community's everyday interests. Firstly, the policy demonstrates the reading culture that the library aims to build; secondly, it reflects the publications and products librarians anticipate and expect to meet the needs of their reading community. The library collection provides the community with a representation of everyday reading culture, and through the collection they make their judgements on what constitutes their reading culture.

All of the librarians interviewed in this study acknowledge that their libraries accept romance fiction donations to build their collections. However, these books are to some extent prevented from being fully included in the fiction collection from the differences in acquisitions processes and cataloguing records. As the findings have shown, donations of romance fiction books are not treated as having the same value in the collection as purchased fiction, and quite often are not treated the same as other types of donated books.

Note that an accepted donation has successfully met the selection criteria required for inclusion into the collection. However, meeting selection criteria does not necessarily mean that the item will then be considered to have the same merit as purchased and library-sourced materials, though this varies across the library systems studied. As the results show, a popular bestseller donation is

given a full metadata as well as its National Libraries of Australia database link, while a popular romance title is not given any meaningful metadata. An unintended consequence of this practice is that the creative outputs of some authors are not valued in the way that the IFLA statement, which has guided the development of most collection development policies included in the study, would indicate.

In considering this approach to managing institutionalised popular or everyday culture of the kind that Williams refers to, it is important to reflect on how the donations come into a library collection. Unlike purchased materials, which may have been selected based on reviews or come from the plan drawn up by a bookseller or vendor as part of a commercial transaction, these publications come from members of the community, the very people who create everyday culture. The reflections of librarians on why people donate books to the public library show the disconnect between the principles of a community-based approach to the selective tradition and the dismissiveness of a particular genre of popular culture. On the one hand, librarians acknowledge that people see the library's role in supporting popular culture and consider books more relevant to this role than to the aims of the charity shop; they recognise that people who are passionate about reading want to share their experience. On the other hand, librarians see most donations as being of no value to the collection, and clearly consider one romance title to be no different from any other, as evidenced through an institutionally endorsed, sub-par catalogue record for large numbers of unique titles. This practice shows that romance fiction may contribute to organisational key performance indicators such as meeting acquisition targets or raising the library's circulation statistics however through the lack of valuing these books, they are not afforded the cultural symbol of being held in a library collection. However, it fails to recognise the author, and the library's responsibilities under Public Lending Right, and it does not inform the selective tradition where popular authors and titles become evident through the trends observed in the loans statistics. Though not creating or purchasing a bibliographic record is stated as an economic decision based on limited funds, this is not evident with the treatment of other donations and other collections.

The library practices that marginalise

The statements of collection development policies (the *structuring structures*), which are in place to guide selection, often become diluted in the process of shifting from a statement of philosophy to becoming a working tool. For an author's work to become a part of the selective tradition, it needs to be included in the selection process and be valued at the point of acquisition. Collection development policies may be developed by libraries with staff members and the

broader community library users in mind (Johnson, [2018](#), p. 29), however it is imperative that valuing the creative output of authors is integrated into the library's policies and processes as well. Otherwise, authors whose publications are treated differently to the other fiction in library collections do not become part of the selective tradition despite being part of everyday reading.

The collection development policy and the selective tradition that it frames for a local library should also be a reflection of the library's community identity. Through their provision of romance fiction donations, the community is shaping their collection expectations for selection and provision of everyday reading options. The general fiction collection is selected based on a range of writing and publishing criteria, but in contrast, romance fiction is chosen according to its aesthetic appeal, anachronistic cover models and colour branding, reflecting a lack of understanding of the genre's position within the field of publishing and in the notion of popular culture accepted by a significant proportion of the local community.

Conclusion

Williams's notion of everyday culture and the selective tradition intimates that a public library acknowledges the value of everyday culture and the need to reflect their communities' reading interests through its collection development policies. The policies are statements of ideology, principles and values. However, through an interrogation of selection and acquisition practices, we see that in the case of romance fiction at least, the values expressed in the collection development policies are not implemented in a consistent manner. The evidence indicates that the practices for implementing collection development policies tend to present literary fiction as everyday reading whilst excluding romance fiction. This happens in spite of the fact that the collection development policies themselves do reflect the importance of building a collection relevant to popular culture or everyday culture, as is seen in the emphasis on meeting the needs of the library's community.

These processes of selection of materials into a library collection are, as Williams indicates, part of the process through which an understanding of popular culture is created. Libraries have an important role to play in normalising popular culture in a society. Community members who donate books seem to recognise this: they have an expectation that librarians will treat these books better than they can themselves, giving them a recognised place in a collection, which is also a record of what people in the community read.

This study concludes that, at least with respect to romance fiction, the collections of public libraries are not reflections of popular culture as presented by Williams's notions of the selective tradition. Romance fiction might not be incorporated into the practices of the selective tradition, but nonetheless it continues to find ways to be included at the margins, largely through the actions of its readers as contributors of donations to their public library. Implications of everyday practices of librarians and the role of donations in contributing to other aspects of library collections such as local studies, other genre fiction such as crime fiction collections, or non-fiction collections are topics for further study. Another important aspect for further study is librarians' understanding of the role of popular culture in their community.

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Note: A link from the title is to an open access document. A link from the DOI is to the publisher's page for the document.

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