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ABSTRACT

This study employed content analysis of the periodical literature of librarianship to address the current gap in knowledge about academic librarians' attitudes toward recreational reading between 1945 and 1975. The study's results suggest that during this time period, many influential members of the academic library community supported recreational reading for undergraduates and believed it was part of an academic library's mission to encourage it. It appears that interest in and support for recreational reading was at its height between 1951 and 1960.

Several recent articles in the library literature have inferred that recreational reading was historically viewed as outside of the academic library's purview. By introducing evidence to refute this commonly held belief, this research may help re-shape the discourse surrounding recreational reading in academic libraries. In addition, this new information may assist practicing academic librarians in making better-informed decisions about recreational reading collections and services in their own libraries.

Headings:

Academic librarians – United States – Attitudes

Academic libraries – United States – History – 20th century

College students – Books and reading – United States

Content analysis (Communication)

AMERICAN ACADEMIC LIBRARIANS'
ATTITUDES TOWARD RECREATIONAL READING:

A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THE PERIODICAL LITERATURE, 1945-1975

by
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BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

In June 2004 the National Endowment for the Arts' Research Division published a report called "Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America." The report, summarizing data from interviews with more than 17,000 American adults about their reading habits, indicates that the percentage of Americans reading books of any kind has steadily decreased since 1982. Perhaps of greatest concern is the dramatic decline in reading reported by those aged 18 to 24. "Unless some effective solution is found," the report suggests, "literary culture, and literacy in general, will continue to worsen. Indeed, at the current rate of loss, literary reading as a leisure activity will virtually disappear in half a century" (xiii).

The trend of declining literacy among 18-to-24 year-old Americans is an issue of great concern for leaders in higher education and librarianship. In the March 2006 issue of American Libraries, American Library Association president Michael Gorman suggests that one of the most powerful ways to address the decline in literacy is to encourage recreational reading. "Arresting the slide in literacy depends in great part on engaging the very young in reading for pleasure and continuing that engagement throughout the education process," including at the college or university level (5). Gorman argues that "academic libraries have to take up the cause of literacy with vigor" by promoting reading to students through outreach programs and activities such as book discussion groups (5).

A growing body of research suggests that many advantages – both academic and personal – derive from recreational reading. For example, literacy research has shown that there is a positive relationship between a student’s grade-point average and the amount of time spent in recreational reading.¹ Other researchers have described the “beneficial physical and mental changes,” such as stress relief and self-validation, which may occur during the act of leisure reading (Van Fleet 68). In addition, the promotion of recreational reading can be a way for academic libraries to support university missions “that focus on personal growth, cultural awareness, and constructive leisure” (Van Fleet 80).

Yet for many academic librarians, the decision to provide recreational reading collections and services for undergraduates is far from straightforward. Many academic libraries have experienced major budget cuts and are under pressure from university administrators to focus on outcomes and “tangible returns” in their service strategies (Zauha, Options for Fiction Provision 46). These circumstances may make it difficult for librarians to justify expenditure on recreational reading collections and services.

In addition, librarians must overcome the idea perpetuated by the library literature that support for recreational reading is not a traditional part of an academic library’s purview. Indeed, several articles in the library literature present this idea as an indisputable historical fact. Wiener, for example, writes that supporting recreational reading was “historically” regarded as “an altogether superfluous function of the academic library” (64). Odess-Harnish asserts that popular reading materials have “historically” been viewed as “unfit for academic/research libraries” (57). Hsieh and Runner state that “historically,” providing access to leisure reading materials “was

¹ See for example Gallik (1999).

outside the scope of the academic library mission” (200). Academic librarians who want to promote recreational reading may view these historical interpretations as obstacles, believing that the history of the profession stands against them and their efforts.

Unfortunately, the perception that academic libraries have not historically supported recreational reading services persists in the library literature despite a lack of supporting evidence. None of the three studies mentioned above provide citations to support their assertions, suggesting that these historical interpretations have become accepted as fact among researchers. It seems evident that practicing academic librarians and other leaders in higher education may be making decisions about recreational reading collections under the influence of an historical fallacy.

Clearly, additional research is required to determine if the perception that academic libraries have historically not collected or provided services for recreational reading is based in reality. This research will provide practicing academic librarians with a clearer and more accurate picture of historical recreational reading attitudes and practices in academic libraries. Ultimately, this more accurate historical picture will assist academic librarians in making better-informed decisions about recreational reading services in their own libraries.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study was designed to address the current gap in knowledge concerning American academic librarians' attitudes toward recreational reading during the twentieth century. Specifically, the study attempted to answer the following research questions:

- How many articles addressing the topic of academic libraries and recreational reading were published in the library literature between 1945 and 1975?²
- How did the academic library community perceive the recreational reading needs of undergraduate students between 1945 and 1975?
- How did the academic library community perceive the academic library's role in meeting these needs?
- How did these perceptions (of undergraduates' recreational reading needs and the academic library's role in meeting them) change between 1945 and 1975?

² See Methodology section for an explanation of the significance of these dates.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Early Research on Recreational Reading Services

The earliest studies to address recreational reading services in academic libraries began to appear in the late 1920s. For the most part, these studies took the form of anecdotal descriptions of recreational reading services known to the authors.³ When empirical research was published on this topic, it usually focused on analyzing circulation statistics as part of a case study at a single academic institution.⁴

Articles of this nature are useful in gauging the academic library community's attitudes toward recreational reading prior to 1945. However, they have not been incorporated into the literature review because of their narrow scope and limited generalizability. Instead, the literature review focuses on the position papers, literature reviews, and empirical research that provide a broadly comprehensive overview of the topic of recreational reading. The majority of these articles have been published since the mid-1970s. Articles published between 1945 and 1975 were purposely excluded from the literature review because these pieces will be discussed in the content analysis section of this paper.

Frameworks for Discussion

The published research is helpful in providing historical and contemporary frameworks for approaching the study of recreational reading collections and services in academic libraries. Generally, this research suggests that interest in and support for

³ See for example Cowley (1936) and Lyle (1941).

⁴ Carnovsky and Johnson (1936) and Hoole (1938) are examples of this type of empirical study.

recreational reading in academic libraries has steadily declined since the 1930s and 1940s.

In a 1997 paper, Virginia Vesper writes, “With some notable exceptions, the Browsing Room [for recreational reading] has been tolerated, but not usually encouraged in academic libraries” (2). She notes that while recreational reading services were seen as “an important element of the academic library in the 1930s,” most contemporary libraries deem these services “non-essential,” especially amidst budget cuts and pressures to meet curricular needs (2). Vesper suggests that the few academic libraries willing to provide recreational reading collections have consistently had to “rationalize” their existence since the 1940s.

Similarly, Jim Dwyer’s article (2001) is built on the premise that “encouragement of independent reading and the culture of the book have declined in academic libraries” (61). “While the role of independent and pleasure reading was once an ‘article of faith’ in university libraries, today there are few contemporary or browsing collections, few ‘noncurricular’ purchases are made, and the reader’s advisory service seems to take place primarily in the staff lounge” (62). Dwyer suggests that this situation derives from an increasingly strong focus in academic libraries on curricular materials for students, along with evolving faculty expectations about the materials to which students should have access.

Connie Van Fleet (2003) emphasizes the lack of services associated with academic library recreational reading collections, even when they do exist. Like Dwyer, she maintains that academic libraries have become increasingly focused on meeting the curricular needs of students, often at the expense of supporting their “cultural and

personal growth” (69). “Recreational reading is seldom encouraged and [the academic library’s] role (and the university’s) in developing lifelong learners is not developed” (69). Van Fleet suggests that academic libraries must find creative ways to link recreational reading with the stated objectives of the institution in which they operate.

On the basis of these and other studies, one might conclude that most contemporary academic librarians take a negative view of recreational reading collections, and that the existence of such collections is steadily declining. However, an examination of a group of important empirical studies on the same topic leads us, in some ways, to a completely different conclusion.

Empirical Studies

Although to date no published study has explicitly addressed the attitudes of academic librarians toward recreational reading services in their libraries, it is often possible to glean this information from empirical studies focusing on other aspects of recreational reading. For example, several empirical studies have appeared in which academic librarians were surveyed about the recreational reading services they provide. A careful reading of these studies and their qualitative data often yields a general overview of the librarians’ attitudes. When examined in chronological order, these empirical studies also provide insight into the evolution of academic librarians’ attitudes toward recreational reading during the twentieth century.

In 1976 Susan Marks published an empirical study of recreational reading collections in academic libraries. Marks’ research serves primarily as an exploratory study on the topic, since it was published in the professional journal American Libraries,

which is not peer reviewed. Marks gathered data from 24 of the country's largest university libraries, which showed that 12 of the libraries maintained recreational or browsing collections. Of the remaining 12, several libraries had eliminated their browsing collections due to financial difficulties or because the collections no longer seemed relevant.

Marks notes that many of the study participants seemed to take a negative view of providing recreational reading collections, especially in a climate when university administrators were "reluctant to maintain or create services that they consider superfluous and expensive" (95). Marks emphasizes her own conviction that recreational reading collections are of enormous value in academic libraries, concluding that "browsing rooms should not be jeopardized, but encouraged" (95).

Perhaps the seminal empirical survey of recreational reading services in academic libraries is Paul B. Wiener's 1982 study. Wiener surveyed 83 academic libraries to find out if they provided recreational reading services to their campus communities. The results showed that over 60% of the surveyed libraries provided some kind of recreational reading service, and that the libraries employed a great variety of methods and strategies in providing these services. Wiener uses the statistical data from the survey to demonstrate that recreational reading services can exist even in libraries with tight budgets and limited resources. He concludes that recreational reading collections should be treated as a necessary part of academic library service.

In 1994, Linda A. Morrisett published the results of another large survey of academic libraries. She collected data from 85 libraries in the Southeast about the existence and nature of recreational reading collections at their institutions. Although

only 45% of the surveyed libraries reported having a leisure reading collection, Morrissett concludes from the enthusiastic nature of many of the responses that there is “a significant interest and investment in leisure reading collections among academic libraries in the Southeast” (124).

The study published by Katherine Kerns and Debbie O’Brien (2001) supports Morrissett’s conclusions about Southeastern libraries. Kerns and O’Brien collected data from 30 libraries in Tennessee and found that 70% had recreational reading collections. Interestingly, 100% of the two-year colleges in the survey had recreational reading collections, while only 50% of the four-year colleges did. Based on these results, the researchers suggest that “the community college sees the need to provide popular fiction and other leisure reading in the library,” while four-year colleges often perceive that recreational reading is beyond their scope, since their purpose is “strictly research” (9).

Cynthia Hsieh and Rhonelle Runner (2005) explored the treatment of leisure reading materials and textbooks in contemporary academic library collections. Their method was twofold: they surveyed 99 academic libraries about their current policies regarding these materials; and they analyzed the collection development policies of 30 academic libraries to find references to textbooks and leisure reading collections. Their data revealed that many more of the academic libraries had a “no textbook purchase” policy than a “no leisure reading purchase” policy. The researchers suggest that academic libraries are increasingly making more of an effort to address students’ recreational reading needs, and that they are utilizing diverse strategies to provide access to recreational reading materials.

Use of Lease Plans in Academic Libraries

The first vendor lease plans appeared in the mid-twentieth century, enabling academic libraries to provide recreational reading titles on a temporary, “no commitment” basis. Since then, many researchers have focused on the use of lease plans by academic libraries.

The first such study was Ruth Carol Cushman’s 1976 survey of 14 academic libraries using lease plans. Cushman’s study was motivated by the difficulty of providing recreational reading materials in the midst of economic hardship in academic libraries during the 1970s. At the outset of her research, she strongly believed that lease plans were a viable means of providing recreational reading materials at low cost. Thus, her study focused on academic libraries that were already using lease plans.

Cushman’s data demonstrate that patrons at the libraries using lease plans were extremely satisfied with the provision of recreational reading materials, even if the librarians often experienced administrative problems with the plans. She interprets the survey data as supportive of her original belief that lease plans are an effective, low-cost method of providing access to recreational reading materials. Although Cushman’s study is weakened by a small sample size, it is ultimately of great value as the first of its kind to explore lease plans. Her study serves as a “baseline” for subsequent research on recreational reading in academic libraries.

Cushman’s study was the basis for follow-up research performed by Janelle M. Zauha in 1998. Zauha conducted a telephone survey of the same 14 academic libraries Cushman had studied, to find out “how lease plans fare in academic libraries over time” (Options for Fiction Provision 51). Zauha discovered that 7 of the libraries had actually

cancelled their lease plans in the years since 1976, primarily for economic reasons and lack of staff interest. Zauha's data suggests that academic libraries may have experienced a change in their attitudes toward recreational reading services between 1976 and 1998. She concludes that "the special nature of these collections, their visibility and divergent content, require that extra steps be taken to ensure their protection if a library wishes to continue them" (Options for Fiction Provision 52).

In 2002 Kerri Odess-Harnish published a third important study on the use of lease plans by academic libraries. Her study was larger than either Cushman's or Zauha's, incorporating data from 22 academic libraries using the Brodart company's McNaughton plan to provide access to recreational reading materials.

Since the majority of Odess-Harnish's data focuses on participants' opinions about using the McNaughton plan, it is of limited value for generalization. The most important aspect of Odess-Harnish's study is the way it captures librarians' philosophical attitudes toward the provision of recreational reading services, although this was not the stated purpose of the study. Based on a qualitative analysis of her survey data, Odess-Harnish suggests that "popular literature has a long way to go before [it] is purchased and preserved alongside titles considered to be of high enough caliber to be collected in academia" (67).

Historical Contexts

Any study of historical attitudes toward recreational reading in academic libraries would be incomplete without a discussion of two important texts in the professional library literature. Guy Lyle's classic handbook The Administration of the College

Library was first published in 1944 and reprinted in several revised editions. In each edition of his book, Lyle addresses the topic of recreational reading in a separate chapter, and it is clear that he strongly supported the academic library's role in encouraging recreational reading.

In the first edition of his book (1944), Lyle suggests that the importance of encouraging recreational reading derives from evidence that "the reading habit, if it is to be acquired at all, must be formed before the student graduates from college" (247). Furthermore, he believed that "the logical place to initiate and to center all efforts for stimulating reading beyond classroom requirements is the college library" (229).

In subsequent editions of his book, Lyle seems to become progressively discouraged about the academic library's efforts to support recreational reading. However, even in the 4th edition (1974), he remains an unequivocal supporter of recreational reading and suggests that encouraging it should continue to be a primary function of the academic library: "The college library should stimulate and encourage general reading because the formal processes of college are not the whole of college and reading for its own sake is an essential attribute of culture" (124).

In an attempt to provide a balanced view of the issue, Lyle acknowledged that not everyone agreed with his stance on recreational reading. In the first edition of Administration (1944), for example, he observes that some educators and librarians resented initiatives like browsing rooms because they considered recreational reading to be "a useful but secondary function of the institution" (230).

Lyle was not shy about attributing a great deal of the blame to his colleague Harvie Branscomb, who published Teaching with Books in 1940 and as a reprinted

(unaltered) edition in 1964. In this “terse little volume,” Lyle contends in the 1961 edition of his book, Branscomb “leveled a shooting iron at the extra-curricular reading efforts of college librarians and, as a consequence, won many of them away from the browsing room” and similar efforts (165).

For his part, Branscomb was unequivocal about his doubt that recreational reading should be part of an academic library’s responsibility: “The college asks undergraduates to give four years of their time to prosecuting the studies which it recommends as a preparation for adult living. If these studies are taken seriously there will be little time for outside reading” (187). In addition, Branscomb maintains that “the college library needs to take its own task more seriously, not to attempt the role of the public library” (188). Lyle’s and Branscomb’s works are particularly important because they represent opposite ends of the spectrum in the debate about recreational reading in academic libraries in the mid-twentieth century.

Implications for Research

Based on the literature reviewed for this study, it becomes clear that an important distinction must be made between academic librarians’ attitudes toward recreational reading collections and services and their actual provision in academic libraries. As stated previously, there are no published studies specifically addressing the attitudes of academic librarians toward recreational reading services. Researchers of this topic should keep in mind that it is possible for an academic library to have a successful and well-established recreational reading program even if the librarians on staff believe that it is a waste of time and effort. Therefore, research seeking to determine librarians’

attitudes in a historical context must derive from primary sources and materials in addition to empirical studies of the type discussed here, to avoid misinterpretation of the evidence.

Researchers should also be aware of the clear distinction between junior or community colleges, small colleges, and large universities regarding the provision of recreational reading materials. This distinction was an important finding in Cushman's research, and is also evident in Kerns' and O'Brien's study. Cushman's data showed that junior and community colleges and small liberal arts colleges were more likely to subscribe to lease plans. Similarly, Kerns and O'Brien's study showed that two-year college libraries were more likely to provide recreational reading materials than four-year colleges. Other studies (Hsieh and Runner for example) have demonstrated the opposite phenomenon.

Whatever conclusions they point to, these studies are important because they demonstrate that a distinction must be made between academic libraries of different types and sizes when comparing their treatment of recreational reading collections. Evidence of attitudes toward recreational reading at a small liberal arts college may not necessarily generalize to those at a large research university.

METHODOLOGY

Use of Content Analysis

In seeking to evaluate librarians' historical attitudes toward recreational reading in academic libraries, the researcher determined that a content analysis of the periodical literature would be the most appropriate research method. This method was chosen for several reasons. First, as stated previously, the purpose of the study was to evaluate the accuracy of the perception that academic libraries have not historically supported recreational reading. Babbie states that in designing research, "it's always worthwhile to check out widely held assumptions," and that content analysis can provide "specific details" to help support or refute such assumptions (323).

In addition, content analysis provides a way to objectively describe and analyze a body of written communication: in this case, the periodical literature of librarianship. The periodical literature of any field is a significant touchstone for gauging contemporary attitudes and beliefs. Blazek and Parrish suggest that periodical literature "is most fluid and responsive to the issues which drive a field of study, and in librarianship as in other professions, [it] has achieved primacy in reporting both research and current critical opinion" (50). Therefore, the researcher believed that the periodical literature of the field of librarianship would yield important information about historical attitudes toward recreational reading.

Finally, researchers have used content analysis to conduct thematic analyses and historical studies of the library literature.⁵ This study was designed to explore both thematic and historical trends in the literature, and the researcher was able to draw upon existing research methodology and models to apply content analysis to these tasks.

⁵ See for example Allard, Mack, and Feltner-Reichert (2005), and Blazek and Parrish (1992).

Parameters for the Study

Given that the researcher believed the periodical literature of librarianship would yield important information about the academic library community's attitudes toward recreational reading, it would no doubt have been useful to conduct a content analysis of the literature from all ten decades of the twentieth century. However, since the study was conducted within certain limitations of time and resources, the researcher elected to examine only the library literature published between 1945 and 1975. These beginning and ending dates are significant for several reasons.

Historians have established that "the outline of the modern university" first emerged during the 1920s (Atkins 21). At about the same time, the "modern" academic library was taking shape. Thus, it is likely that attitudes on recreational reading from 1920 and later are most relevant to the decision-making of academic librarians practicing today.

However, library researchers have already established that the 1920s and 1930s were an era in which "academic libraries vigorously promoted [the] recreational reading interests of students" (Zauha, Recreational Reading 57).⁶ According to Lyle (1935), the first recreational reading room was established at Smith College during the 1920s. By 1942, when A. Beatrice Young conducted a national survey of recreational reading rooms in academic libraries, 29 other institutions offered similar services.

This growth can be explained – at least in part – because academic librarians in the 1920s and 1930s believed that part of their professional mission was to encourage reading among students, foster appropriate reading habits, and set the foundation for a

⁶ This assessment was also corroborated by the researcher's own analysis of the literature from the 1920s and 1930s.

“lifetime reading habit.”⁷ During this era, librarians used recreational reading rooms as a positive public relations tool, strategically positioning these collections to “popularize” the academic library with students (Lyle, College Library Publicity 51). Indeed, in 1936 Carnovsky and Johnson claimed that academic librarians would be doing much more to fulfill “the obligation to foster reading independent of course requirements” if they had proper institutional funding (7).

Whatever the reasons behind it, researchers have established that many academic librarians supported recreational reading collections and services from the 1920s through the early 1940s. In 1944, Congress passed the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act or “G.I. Bill” as it was commonly known. Although the full extent of its effects would not be realized for years to come, the G.I. Bill sparked an “unintended revolution in higher education,” not least because it transformed Americans’ “ideas about who should go to college” (Bonner 46-7). In the wake of the G.I. Bill, pursuing a college education was no longer the sole privilege of the upper classes, as educational and funding opportunities opened up to women, minorities, and the middle classes in addition to returning servicemen.

In light of the dramatic changes that occurred in American higher education after 1945, the researcher believed that it would be most valuable to current practice to trace the changes in academic librarians’ attitudes toward recreational reading from that year forward. Therefore, a beginning date of 1945 was selected for content analysis in this study.

⁷ See for example Lyle (1941), Wriston (1935), and the chapter “The Encouragement of Extra-Curricular Reading” in Lyle (1961).

As stated in the literature review, the majority of the empirical studies on the topic of recreational reading in academic libraries have been published since the mid-1970s. The earliest piece of empirical research was Cushman's 1976 article published in The Journal of Academic Librarianship. After Cushman's article appeared, many other researchers and librarians began conducting empirical studies and writing analytical opinion pieces on this topic. As with the decades of the 1920s and 1930s, attitudes toward recreational reading from 1975 to the present have been reasonably well established in the library literature. Therefore, this study employed the year 1975 as an end date for content analysis.

Sampling Frame and Study Population

The sampling frame for this study was all the articles published in the periodical literature of librarianship between 1945 and 1975 that addressed the topic of academic libraries and recreational reading. To determine the parameters of the sampling frame, the researcher utilized several indexing tools. First, the researcher performed literature searches in the Reader's Guide Retrospective and Jstor databases, using the subject terms "recreational reading," "browsing room*" and "dormitory librar*" (with the stars representing truncation). Second, the researcher examined the H.W. Wilson Library Literature print indexes for each year incorporated in the study. Specifically, the researcher searched for relevant articles under the following subject headings:

- Browsing rooms
- College and University Libraries
- College and University Libraries – Aims and Objectives
- College and University Libraries – Book Collections

- College and University Libraries – Book Selection
- College and University Libraries – Services to Undergraduates
- Dormitory Libraries
- Reader Guidance
- Reading
- Reading – Educational Aspects
- Reading – Special Groups – College Students.

The sampling frame was strictly limited to articles in the library periodical literature; articles from non-library publications (e.g. The Journal of Higher Education) were excluded, as were unpublished Master's and Ph.D. theses written by library school students.

Approximately 75 article citations were identified using the search strategies outlined above. Next, the researcher evaluated each article for relevance to the study, eliminating those that did not actually address the research topic. Approximately half of the original articles were eliminated during this step. The remaining number of articles (35) was deemed to be large enough to provide sufficient evidence for the purposes of this research. Therefore the entire population of articles was included in the content analysis portion of the study.

Coding

To ensure that content analysis would yield the best possible data for the study, the researcher determined that articles should be coded based on both their manifest and latent content. In the quest to analyze and evaluate historical attitudes toward recreational reading, the researcher believed it was important to capture the subtler – and possibly tacit – content of each article, which might be overlooked in a manifest content

analysis. Specifically, the researcher decided to code each article based on the following variables:

1. Journal title
2. Geographical coverage of journal (whether the coverage was national, regional, or state)
3. Publication date of article
4. Affiliation of first author (e.g. university or other organization)
5. Type of article (research, description, position paper, other)
6. Treatment of the topic (major theme, moderate discussion, peripheral discussion)
7. Nature of coverage of the following topics (evaluated on a four-item scale):
 - Recreational reading needs of undergraduate students
 - The academic library's role in meeting those needs.

Before beginning the content analysis portion of the study, the researcher conducted a pilot coding exercise to assess the suitability of the coding instrument. Based on the pilot exercise, in which five randomly selected articles were coded, the researcher made one minor alteration⁸ to the coding instrument before creating a final version (see Appendix A).

When the content analysis was completed for all 35 articles, the researcher asked two colleagues to participate in an inter-coder reliability exercise to gauge overall reliability.⁹ These colleagues were given oral instructions for completing the coding exercise; a copy of the abstract and research questions, a copy of the coding instrument, an accompanying Reference Sheet (see Appendix B), and a list of definitions relevant to the study (see Appendix C). Using the coding instrument, the additional coders

⁸ In the original version, the second "treatment of topic" category was *minor discussion*. After the pilot coding exercise, this wording was changed to *moderate discussion*.

⁹ Thanks to Jean Ferguson and Alexander Idnurm for assisting the researcher with this coding exercise.

separately evaluated the same group of four randomly selected articles. These coding results were then compared with the researcher's own coding and assessment of the same group of articles.

In evaluating the results of the inter-coder reliability exercise, the researcher was particularly interested in the standardization of the more subjective questions, including the type of article, treatment of the topic, and nature of coverage. The results showed that inter-coder agreement was near 100% on the questions concerning the type of article and treatment of the topic.

Although inter-coder agreement was more variable on the questions concerning nature of coverage, the coders' answers were never more than one "step" apart in the four-item scale provided by the coding instrument. For example, Coder 1 may have coded an article as implying that undergraduates' recreational reading needs were "of major significance," while Coders 2 and 3 coded the article as implying that these needs were "important." It is likely that these subtle variations emerged because the "nature of coverage" questions required the coders to make subjective evaluations of an article's content, as well as the categories provided in the coding instrument (e.g. choosing between "important" and "somewhat important").

In the final analysis, the coders' answers demonstrated complete agreement along fundamental ideological lines (e.g. choosing "important" or a similar category versus "not important" to classify an article). The overall agreement between the three coders highlights the fundamental validity and reliability of the coding instrument and the study data.

Discussion of Limitations

Inherent in any empirical study are certain experimental limitations that must inform the discussion of results. In designing this study, the researcher took several steps to maximize the reliability and validity of the experimental population, including the utilization of several different indexing tools to determine the sampling frame, and searching for articles under a variety of subject headings.

However, it is possible that the articles included in this study failed to incorporate important opinions and trends concerning recreational reading. For example, the indexing tools used to determine the sampling frame may have overlooked important articles, which would in turn have been overlooked by the researcher. Further, since articles in the study population were identified in the indexing tools based on their titles and subject headings, the researcher may have misconstrued the significance of a particular article and thus overlooked important information. Finally, the researcher's decision to limit the content analysis to articles published in the library literature may have contributed to a biased or otherwise inaccurate sample. However, as stated previously, it is believed that the periodical literature of a profession is a significant touchstone for current attitudes and opinions, and studying it as a measure of historical attitudes toward recreational reading is likely to be a valid method.

FINDINGS

A total of 35 articles were identified and coded using the methods described above. See Appendix D for the bibliography of articles included in the study.

Publication dates of articles

The date of publication for the articles included in the study ranged from 1946 to 1973. Seven articles were published between 1945 and 1950; ten between 1951 and 1955; ten between 1956 and 1960; two between 1961 and 1965; five between 1966 and 1970; and one between 1971 and 1975. The greatest number of articles (20, or 57% of the total) was published between 1951 and 1960 (see Table 1).

Table 1. Total number of articles published, 1945-1975

Date range	1945-50	1951-55	1956-60	1961-65	1966-70	1971-75	TOTAL
No. of articles	7	10	10	2	5	1	35
% of total*	20%	28.5%	28.5%	6%	14%	3%	100%

*Note: rounded to the nearest 0.5%.

Library publications and geographic coverage

A total of 12 library publications were represented among the 35 articles. College & Research Libraries and Library Journal published nine articles each; Wilson Library Bulletin published six; Catholic Library World and Harvard Library Bulletin each published two; and one article was published in each of the following publications: Alabama Librarian; The Bookmark; Idaho Librarian; RQ; Tennessee Librarian; Virginia Librarian; and Wisconsin Library Bulletin. Twenty-seven articles or 77% came from

journals with national coverage; eight articles were from journals with state coverage (see Table 2).

Table 2. Library publications represented

Date range	1945-50	1951-55	1956-60	1961-65	1966-70	1971-75	TOTAL (%*)
College & Res. Lib.	1	4	1	1	2	-	9 (25.7)
Library Journal	-	3	5	1	-	-	9 (25.7)
Wilson Lib. Bulletin	2	1	2	-	1	-	6 (17.2)
Catholic Lib. World	2	-	-	-	-	-	2 (5.7)
Harvard Lib. Bull.	2	-	-	-	-	-	2 (5.7)
Other**	-	2	2	-	2	1	7 (20)
TOTAL	7	10	10	2	5	1	35 (100)

*Note: rounded to the nearest 0.1%.

**Other publications include Alabama Librarian; The Bookmark; Idaho Librarian; RQ; Tennessee Librarian; Virginia Librarian; and Wisconsin Library Bulletin.

Author affiliation

Twenty-six of the first authors, or 74% of the total, were librarians affiliated with academic libraries. One author represented a public library; one represented a state library; and one was affiliated with the American Library Association. Two authors were non-librarians affiliated with universities. The professional affiliation of four of the first authors could not be determined.

Type of article

Of the 35 articles, 13 or 37% were descriptive in nature. Seven were classified as position papers, and another seven were classified as research articles. Eight of the articles could not be classified using the provided categories and were coded as "other."

In most cases, articles coded as “other” were either news briefs or combined the characteristics of two or more of the listed article types (see Table 3.)

Table 3. Type of article by publication date

Date range	1945-50	1951-55	1956-60	1961-65	1966-70	1971-75	TOTAL (%*)
Descriptive	3	4	4	1	1	-	13 (37)
Position paper	2	1	3	-	1	-	7 (20)
Research	1	4	-	-	1	1	7 (20)
Other	1	1	3	1	2	-	8 (23)
TOTAL	7	10	10	2	5	1	35 (100)

*Note: rounded to the nearest 0.5%.

Treatment of the topic

The topic of recreational reading was a major theme in 19 or 54% of the articles. Thirteen of the articles included moderate coverage of the topic, while 3 articles contained only peripheral discussion (see Table 4).

Table 4. Treatment of the topic by publication date

Date range	1945-50	1951-55	1956-60	1961-65	1966-70	1971-75	TOTAL (%*)
Major theme	4	6	6	2	1	-	19 (54.3)
Moderate coverage	2	3	3	-	4	1	13 (37.1)
Peripheral discussion	1	1	1	-	-	-	3 (8.6)
TOTAL	7	10	10	2	5	1	35 (100)

*Note: rounded to the nearest 0.1%.

Nature of coverage: recreational reading needs of undergraduates

Sixteen or 46% of the articles implied that the recreational reading needs of undergraduates were “important,” while 10 of the articles implied that they were “of major significance.” Thus, 26 or 74% of the articles implied that the recreational reading needs of undergraduates was either “important” or “of major significance.” In nine of the articles, recreational reading needs were represented as “somewhat important.” None of the articles implied that the recreational reading needs of undergraduates were “not important.” One hundred percent of the articles viewed recreational reading needs as at least “somewhat important.” Eight or 80% of the articles implying that recreational reading needs were “of major significance” were published between 1951 and 1960 (see Table 5).

Table 5. Nature of coverage: recreational reading needs of undergraduates

Date range	1945-50	1951-55	1956-60	1961-65	1966-70	1971-75	TOTAL (%*)
Of major significance	1	2	6	-	1	-	10 (28.6)
Important	4	4	3	2	2	1	16 (45.7)
Somewhat important	2	4	1	-	2	-	9 (25.7)
Not important	-	-	-	-	-	-	0 (0)
TOTAL	7	10	10	2	5	1	35 (100)

*Note: rounded to the nearest 0.1%.

Nature of coverage: academic library’s role in recreational reading

Fourteen or 40% of the articles implied that supporting recreational reading needs was an “important part” of an academic library’s mission. Twelve of the articles implied that this was a “major part” of an academic library’s mission. Thus, 26 or 74% of the articles implied that support for recreational reading was either an “important” or “major”

part of an academic library's mission. Eight articles suggested that support for recreational reading was a "somewhat important" part of the mission, while one article implied that this was "not part" of the academic library's mission. Thirty-four or 97% of the articles implied that support for recreational reading was at least a "somewhat important" part of an academic library's mission. Nine or 75% of the 12 articles implying that support for recreational reading was a "major part" of an academic library's mission were published between 1951 and 1960 (see Table 6).

Table 6. Nature of coverage: academic library's role in supporting recreational reading

Date range	1945-50	1951-55	1956-60	1961-65	1966-70	1971-75	TOTAL (%*)
Major part of mission	1	3	6	-	2	-	12 (34)
Important part of mission	4	4	3	2	-	1	14 (40)
Somewhat important part of mission	1	3	1	-	3	-	8 (23)
Not part of mission	1	-	-	-	-	-	1 (3)
TOTAL	7	10	10	2	5	1	35 (100)

*Note: rounded to the nearest 0.5%.

Research Questions Addressed

This study was designed to address the current gap in knowledge about academic librarians' attitudes toward recreational reading services between 1945 and 1975. As stated previously, several articles in the recent library literature imply that academic libraries have not historically supported or collected materials for recreational reading. This study's research questions were designed to address this commonly held perception.

The first research question asked how many articles addressing the topic of academic libraries and recreational reading were published in the library literature between 1945 and 1975. The study indicates that the total number of articles is 35.

The second research question explored how the academic library community perceived the recreational reading needs of undergraduate students between 1945 and 1975. The study indicates that nearly three-quarters (74%) of the articles published on the topic of recreational reading during this time period implied that these needs were “important” or “of major significance.” One hundred percent of the articles implied that undergraduates’ recreational reading needs were at least “somewhat important.”

The third research question explored how the academic library community perceived the academic library’s role in meeting the recreational reading needs of undergraduates. Nearly three-quarters (74%) of the articles in the study implied that supporting recreational reading was an “important” or “major” part of an academic library’s mission. Ninety-seven percent of the articles in the study implied that supporting recreational reading was at least “somewhat important” a part of an academic library’s mission.

The study’s final research question explored how perceptions of undergraduates’ recreational reading needs and the academic library’s role in meeting them changed between 1945 and 1975. It is clear from the data in this study that the decade between 1951 and 1960 generated the most interest in recreational reading (gauged by the number of articles published on the topic), the most support for recreational reading, and the strongest belief that it was part of an academic library’s mission. Exactly why this occurred would be a worthwhile question to pursue in further research.

Qualitative Analysis of Articles in the Study

In addition to quantitative analysis, an evaluation of the qualitative data gathered from the articles in this study is an illuminating way to assess historical perceptions of recreational reading in academic libraries.

Precisely fifty years before ALA President Michael Gorman wrote about the “decline in literacy” discussed in the introduction to this paper, another ALA officer evoked the same topic in a speech before the Alabama Library Association. “It is universally recognized that the reading interests and habits of our American public are poor,” lamented Arthur T. Hamlin in April 1956. Fortunately, he continued, “The young person can be won over to the satisfaction of reading at many stages of growth and development” (7). Like Gorman, Hamlin believed that the academic library had a primary role to play in this process:

The college faces a real problem in leading . . . non-readers into the life with books, but it can accomplish much. If the college fails, all hope is lost. The graduate who does not read books as a regular habit for interest, enjoyment and general profit will, with rare exceptions, never become a book reader. We must get them at this point or we will never get them. (8)

Hamlin’s belief that a student’s college years represented the last opportunity to develop good reading habits parallels Guy Lyle’s stance in The Administration of the College Library, and is a common theme among the articles evaluated in this study.

“One of the important aims of a college education should be to make lifetime readers of our students,” Elizabeth O. Stone declared in 1961.

If college students have not been stimulated to read to satisfy intellectual curiosity, or if they have no intellectual curiosity, but have read only that which was assigned, it is quite unlikely that much reading will be done during the remainder of their lives. (355)

In her article, Stone proposes many strategies to encourage student reading in academic libraries, including browsing rooms, residence hall libraries, rental collections, book exhibits and clubs, and publicity in the college newspaper. Ultimately, she concludes, “Whatever methods [are] used...if you succeed in endowing your students with lifetime reading habits so that reading becomes attractive to them you have done much to aid in the progress of education and in the development of an informed citizenry” (362).

In an article for the Virginia Librarian six years later, Anthony R. Dees suggests that “It behooves the college library to undertake a responsibility in developing an interest in books and reading that will be lasting. By the time a student graduates from college his reading habits have been established...If the reading habit is to be formed at all, it must be formed during the college years” (11-12). Echoing Dees, Harvard librarian Philip J. McNiff believed that one of the academic library’s primary functions was “the establishment of reading habits which will follow the students into their post college years” (270). Toward this end, McNiff reported that the professional staff at his library “concentrates its efforts on the encouragement of general and recreational reading” (270).

Many authors of articles in the study profess the belief that recreational reading was one of the best ways to instill “lifetime reading habits” in students. In an article for Catholic Library World in 1949, Mary Elvira proclaimed that “educators are of the opinion today that fundamentally, students should do some free reading in the course of their college career. For such reading has a more lasting and beneficial effect on the individual at the time and for the future” (303).

Similarly, Dixon Wecter suggested in the Harvard Library Bulletin that “general reading...which I take to mean reading for pleasure, by personal initiative and under the

spur of intellectual curiosity” is “the most reliable specific against that torpor ready to assert itself when scholastic compulsions cease. Such reading is the only habit that stands much chance of survival into maturity...” (7, 12). In somewhat inflated prose, Wecter proceeded to describe the powerful effect of “general” or recreational reading: “As parvenus of power we must earnestly find our bearings in time, which is history, and also in the non-temporal record of the race, which is literature, the arts, philosophy, ethics, and religion. In its broadest sense this is the mission of general reading in a university. It is man in search of himself” (13).

In addition to position papers like these, the library literature provides many examples of libraries developing special programs to encourage recreational reading – and thus, the reading “habit” – among students. In May 1961, Library Journal reported on an initiative at the University of Cincinnati in which more than two thousand paperback books were given away free to students in the Engineering College. According to the article, one of the program’s primary objectives was “to inspire the student engineer to read great literature voluntarily in a nonacademic environment, thus cultivating in him a life-long habit of reading books...” (A Program of Guided Reading 1840).

In a 1955 article describing a new program to promote recreational reading in his library, Robert D. Harvey suggested that the majority of a student’s college reading was likely to discourage long-term reading habits:

When the college students’ use of the library is limited to assigned readings from the reserve collection, plus a dash through the catalog, Readers’ Guide, and a few reference books to satisfy the requirements for a term paper, it is no wonder that any dormant interest in reading is quickly squelched. (711)

To counteract this effect, Harvey wrote, the college library must make an effort to promote books that will “excite a student enough to want more of the same”: i.e. books chosen for recreational reading (710).

Harvey notes that although the concept of promoting recreational reading might have been new for academic libraries, “the public library has long been conscious of its obligation to stimulate in its patrons a lasting interest in good reading” (710). Eli M. Oboler also referred to the value of “public library” services in an academic setting in a 1955 Idaho Librarian article, explaining that the browsing collection at Idaho State College was intended “to act as somewhat of a ‘public library’ [for] the busy college student and faculty member” (50). In yet another nod to the importance of public library services, Dean Cadle suggested that “it would be a valuable addition to American education if our college libraries had a staff of readers’ advisers whose sole duty was to teach classes in extracurricular reading” (219).

Many of the authors represented in the study who lacked recreational reading initiatives to promote enthusiastically expressed an interest in establishing one. Indeed, Inis I. Smith appears rather alarmed at the results of an informal 1956 study indicating that students at Penn College were not using the library for recreational reading. “After making this study, I decided that two steps might be taken to increase our library efficiency: first, stimulate interest in books on the part of the faculty; secondly, take steps to encourage recreational reading” (390).

Despite the general sense of enthusiasm for recreational reading among the articles in the study, some authors expressed a sense of futility concerning their efforts to encourage reading. In 1959 Arna Bontemps admitted that “the discovery that most

college students are not reading much material above their textbook and course requirements is not exactly new. Neither are the suggestions for remedying the situation” (10). However, she continued, “it is hard for me to conceive of librarians continuing to be indifferent to the basic problem [of a lack of extracurricular reading among students]” (10-11).

Ten years later, Edward B. Stanford maintained that “most librarians would doubtless like to feel that they personally, by providing conveniently accessible and enriched collections, could somehow stimulate students to read, on their own initiative, beyond the requirements of their course assignments” (202). However, he wrote, librarians also recognized that an increasing number of extracurricular activities competed with recreational reading for students’ time. Thus, in Stanford’s opinion, “there is not much, beyond providing attractive and conveniently located browsing collections and displays, that the library can do to affect student reading habits” (202).

Of course, not everyone agreed that it was the academic library’s role to promote recreational reading in the first place. “Should we not accept the fact, made clear by numerous reading studies, that only a relatively few undergraduates read beyond the course requirements?” asked Stanley E. Gwynn in 1953 (268).

Should we not acknowledge...that in adult life only a relatively few people read and utilize the knowledge gained from reading...? Should we not ask whether reading or not reading is associated with the basic temperament and personality and mental equipment of the person and is therefore a characteristic incapable of alteration by librarians or anyone else? (268)

Interestingly, while Gwynn rejected the idea that librarians should promote recreational reading indiscriminately to all students, he maintained that materials and services should be made available for students who *were* interested in recreational reading.

Several authors of articles included in the study promoted a subtle variation of the argument that academic libraries should support recreational reading. These authors rejected the idea that all recreational reading was created equal, and agreed to support recreational reading among college students only if it was the “right” reading. For example, in describing the success of recreational reading collections in dormitory libraries in a 1951 Library Journal article, Fern Allen explained: “Studies of student reading interests show that students read about the same books as any other *superior adult group*...Probably modern fiction of a *fairly superior type* is most popular” (921 emphasis added). Allen’s implication is that recreational reading might be justified only if it centered on literature of a “superior” type.

In a 1949 College & Research Libraries article, Lester Asheim capitalized on the idea that some reading was superior to others to press his argument that the academic library should wholly reject recreational reading. “If it is true that the library establishes habits of reading which the student carries with him throughout his life, then is there not the danger that the library actually teaches him to turn to the second rate and the mediocre rather than to the best [by encouraging recreational reading]?” (246). Asheim maintained that academic libraries existed to support the curricular needs of students, and that students seeking recreational reading should be directed to “that agency which will serve their needs better” (i.e. the public library). Further, in building library collections, Asheim argued that academic librarians must “rule out those titles which can be defended on no other grounds than that a popular and completely uncritical demand for them exists” (248).

Despite these views, the library literature surveyed for this study indicates that many members of the academic library community supported recreational reading in their own libraries. In the same year Asheim's article was published, Sister M. Ricarda of Catholic University conducted a study of the existence of browsing rooms at 82 college and university libraries. This study was actually designed as a follow-up to Young's 1942 survey of browsing rooms, since Ricarda incorporated updated information from each of the colleges and universities surveyed by Young.

Of the 82 schools she surveyed, Ricarda found that 47 had browsing rooms and an additional 10 wanted to establish one. These results led her to surmise that "in the past decade there has been a steadily growing interest in developing reading for pleasure among college students" (246). In her article, Ricarda presented the qualitative results of her survey, which indicated that most study participants believed the academic library played an important role in encouraging recreational reading:

There is a consensus of opinion that the browsing rooms not only have contributed to the development, in individual students, of a taste for reading and the profitable employment of leisure hours, but also have done much to broaden and intensify the cultural activity of the college. Nor should one neglect to note the associations between student and librarian which these informal contacts are building up. They may do more to attach the student to the institution and its ideals than many hours of formal classroom instruction. (246)

Clearly, the qualitative data gathered from the articles evaluated in this study indicates that many members of the academic library community strongly supported recreational reading by undergraduates, and believed that the academic library played an important role in promoting this reading. One common theme among the authors of the articles is the idea that students needed to develop good reading habits during college if they were ever going to do so. Likewise, many authors promoted recreational reading as one of the most effective ways for students to establish these "lifetime reading habits." In

the end, despite divergent views on the reasons behind and the methods of promoting recreational reading, a strong message of support for recreational reading emerges from the library literature surveyed for this study.

CONCLUSION

The qualitative and quantitative results of this study appear to refute the perception that academic librarians and academic libraries did not historically support recreational reading. Indeed, this study suggests that a majority of members of the academic library community supported recreational reading for undergraduates and believed it was part of an academic library's mission to encourage it.

These results are particularly significant when placed in context with what is already known about support for recreational reading in academic libraries between 1920 and 1940, and in the years after 1975. The information contributed by this study provides "the last piece of the puzzle" in determining attitudes toward recreational reading in the twentieth century. The picture that emerges is one in which the academic library community has supported recreational reading for undergraduates and provided collections and services to encourage recreational reading from 1920 to the present.

By painting a more accurate picture of the academic library community's attitudes toward recreational reading in the twentieth century, this study has contributed to the fields of library history, the history of American academia, and the body of literature informing academic library practice today. In providing evidence to refute the widely held belief that recreational reading has not historically been viewed as part of an academic library's responsibility, the insights provided by this research may help to reshape the discourse surrounding recreational reading in academic libraries. In particular, the researcher anticipates that the study will assist practicing academic librarians in making better-informed decisions about recreational reading collections and services in their own libraries.

Appendix A: Content Analysis Coding Instrument

Article #	1	2	3
Journal title			
Publication date of article			
Geographical coverage of journal			
Affiliation of first author			
Type of Article: 1 = Research 2 = Descriptive 3 = Position paper 4 = Other			
Treatment of the topic: 1= Major theme 2 = Moderate discussion 3 = Peripheral discussion			
Nature of coverage – Recreational reading needs of undergraduates (relative importance inferred by article) 1 = Of major significance 2 = Important 3 = Somewhat important 4 = Not Important			
Nature of coverage – Academic library's role (relative importance inferred by article) 1 = Major part of mission 2 = Important part of mission 3 = Somewhat important part of mission 4 = Not part of mission			

Appendix B: Reference Sheet for Content Analysis Coding Instrument

- **Geographic coverage of journal:** Indicate whether the coverage is national, regional, or state.
- **Affiliation of first author:** Indicate the institution or organization with which the first author is associated.
- **Type of article:** Indicate the type of article based on the following definitions.
 - *Research:* based on the results of an experimental study conducted by the author
 - *Descriptive:* based on the author's observations of trends, events, and/or practices in libraries
 - *Position paper:* based on the author's opinion of a particular issue, in which the author expresses a particular viewpoint and may recommend a particular course of action.
 - *Other:* used to classify articles that do not fit into the categories listed above.

Appendix C: Definition of Terms Relevant to the Study

- *Academic libraries*: libraries supporting the educational and research needs of user populations at colleges and universities, which may include research libraries, college libraries, and community college libraries.
- *Academic library community*: the community of librarians, educators, students, and others who are interested in and/or have a stake in the activities of academic libraries.
- *Undergraduate students*: students at a college or university undertaking coursework towards the completion of a bachelor's degree.
- *Recreational reading*: reading undertaken by choice and for leisure purposes rather than to fulfill school- or work-related requirements, interpreted as books and periodicals for the purposes of this study.
- *Recreational reading needs*: the library needs of users arising from their choice to engage in recreational reading (for example, the need for access to current popular fiction titles).
- *Recreational reading services*: services provided by libraries to support users' recreational reading needs (for example, provision of current popular fiction titles).

Appendix D: Bibliography of articles evaluated in the study

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