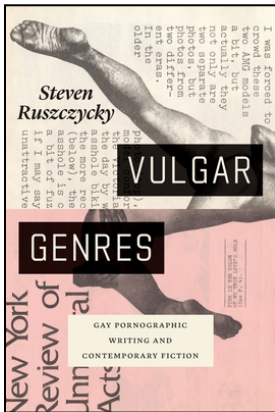


Steven Rusczycky. *Vulgar Genres*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2021. 207p. Paper, \$30 (ISBN: 978-0-226-78875-3).



Vulgar Genres is a fascinating book analyzing what author Steven Rusczycky calls writing “across the literary-pornographic divide.” His book consists of close readings of both commercial literary fiction by gay male authors depicting homosexual identity and encounters, and by authors and editors of what he calls “vulgar genres” that are more explicitly pornographic. Any library or archive worker interested in collection development of queer literature, LGBTQ special collections and archives, or queer studies more broadly, will read it with great interest.

The author convincingly argues that the literary gay fiction that blossomed after US obscenity laws were successively struck down between 1957 and 1966 had to contend with the concurrent proliferation of gay pornography, either by distancing itself from pornography’s crassness, or by freely incorporating explicit pornographic tropes and fantasies to serve their narrative ends. Moreover, fictional gay narratives could serve as texts that “consider the role that pornography itself has played in narratives of gay self-formation,” (23) by depicting the consumption of pornography as a part of their characters’ burgeoning sexuality. Situating these literary works in the context of a gay pornographic boom helps to enrich rather than cheapen our reading of them.

Grappling with pornography is not reduced to an individual artistic choice on the part of the authors featured. Rusczycky demonstrates a keen understanding of the commercial imperatives of the publishing industry and how they shaped both highbrow fiction and the “vulgar genres.” Beyond the book publishing industry, the author analyzes the role that special-interest magazines and newsletters played in creating a gay reading public (or rather “counterpublic” to use Rusczycky’s preferred term) that responded to the fiction at hand. This counterpublic allowed for a different and more receptive reading of gay literature than the mainstream literary public, which tended to reduce or pigeonhole gay authors into sociological witnesses of their subculture rather than view them as true artists.

Rusczycky focuses on gay cismale authors, and charts an evolution of literary writing beginning in the late sixties and into the beginning of the twenty-first century. Chapter one focuses on William Carney and the 1970s, when writing that depicted the BDSM community and dramatized master/sub relationships was prominent. In chapter 2, we read about the trope of the pornographic police officer in the writing of John Rechy and Samuel Steward. Chapter 3 discusses the AIDS era and sexual risk-taking through the work of Samuel Delany and Scott O’Hara. Chapter 4 describes the frank and somewhat shocking depictions of intergenerational sex in literature and textual pornography seen in the writings of Matthew Stadler and Boyd McDonald. The conclusion addresses the rise of internet pornography mediated through a gay coming-of-age narrative, demonstrated by the work of Dennis Cooper.

These chapters explore how each of these texts grappled with moral panics that complicated depictions of queer sex, leading to controversy even if obscenity laws were no longer as strict. These “panics” include the anti-pornography crusades of evangelical Christians and second-wave feminists, fear of sexual contact and queerness in general during the onset of the AIDS epidemic, the intensified mainstream media focus on child molesters in the eighties and nineties, which often conflated queerness with pedophilia, and the widespread fear parents

had of their children accessing pornography too early and too easily in the digital age. Though I have used the past tense to describe these moral panics, most are ongoing or even resurgent.

It is important to note that this book focuses on textual pornography and not the image (though there is some analysis of image and multimedia in Rusczycky's readings of zines and digital culture). Rusczycky calls on the field of porn studies to expand research beyond the image and into more text. In the digital age, texts that prove crucial to queer self-formation include not just commercially published literature or narrative pornography but everything "from story archives and self-published pornographic novels to promotional materials created by performers, the erotically elaborate profile text of apps and cruising websites, and the narrative captions appended to pornographic images on micro-blogging platforms." (138)

It is perhaps a pedantic habit of a librarian, but when I open a scholarly book I immediately flip to the acknowledgements section. What librarians, archivists, and other GLAM workers assisted with the research of the book? What collections proved crucial to the scholar's research questions? The author singled out some big-hitting sexuality collections at major academic institutions as well as the peerless Leather Archives and Museum in Chicago. Academic libraries are clearly crucial to this kind of research, and the research itself raises a number of questions for the information professional. To what extent should we collect these vulgar genres? What gaps will future researchers face based on what we deem unsuitable for our collections today? While public libraries face serious censorship threats in our current moral panic, academic libraries often meekly self-censor by opting only for "serious" literature and categorizing the queer erotic as "trivial." I was intrigued by an out-of-print novel Rusczycky briefly discussed in chapter one (*Leather Ad: M*, by Larry Townsend) that uses classified ads as a narrative device, but found few Worldcat holdings from North American libraries for either the 1972 original or the 1996 reprint. I saw an inexpensive used copy on an online used book website—a withdrawn library book.

Vulgar Genres concludes by analyzing Dennis Cooper's literary response to queer sexuality in the digital realm, noting future opportunities for research at the intersection of literature and the queer digital realm. Yet queer digital spaces are constantly under attack and disappearing. How can libraries preserve or collect evidence of this counterpublic that is primarily available digitally, or train researchers to personally archive digital ephemera so that it is accessible in the years to come?

It is wonderful to read an intelligent study that provokes such questions, and a reminder that literature continues to be one of the greatest spaces to understand and analyze the complicated and ever-changing process of queer self-formation. — *Walter Schlect, Washington University in St. Louis*

The Ultimate Privacy Field Guide: A Workbook of Best Practices. Erin Berman, Bonnie Tjerina, eds. Chicago, IL: ALA Editions, 2022. 96 pp. Paperback, \$29.99 (978-0-8389-3730-3) In an all-encompassing, digitally connected world, librarians are at the forefront of protecting patrons' digital privacy. This is evident in programs like the Library Freedom Project, a group that teaches librarians about privacy issues; the annual New York City Privacy Week, a joint program between the metropolitan area's public libraries that focuses on digital privacy and security; and recent privacy-oriented books such as law librarian Sarah Lamdan's *Data Cartels*. Privacy is a tenet of librarianship, as library users should have the ability to read and research without intrusive surveillance from the state and, in modern times, big tech.