

Updating the heroines

Couple writes realistic romances about professional women



By Kay Longcope
Globe Staff

Antonia James, 27, was determined to become a partner in her Chicago CPA firm. She had fought her way up and, "hungry as ever," could view the top through the clouds. So what if a promotion over her fiancé ruined nuptial plans? She shivered at her narrow escape from such chauvinism.

Sound like grist for a novelist's mill?

It is.

James is the main character in "Power Play," a novel about a contemporary career woman who also wants a fulfilling personal life. The book, published this summer by Avon Books of New York, was written by Andrea Edwards, a pseudonym for coauthors Anne and Ed Kolaczyk of Kildeer, Ill.

"Our heroines are all competent, professional women who, like all working women, walk a tightrope," said Ed Kolaczyk, 48, in a telephone interview. "They have to balance the requirements of demanding careers with their own needs as women."

Anne Kolaczyk, 34, a former teacher who turned to writing romance novels in 1976 because she was bored with her role as wife and mother, said, "We are portraying a very large segment of the population that has not had its problems and hopes explored in fiction. Too many women dealt with in books are either the villainous type or the typical romance heroine who is dependent upon a man. The stories we write reflect a more realistic view of how women see their lives."

The subliminal message, said her husband, a former IBM employee, is that "it's normal for women to want other things than just being wives and mothers. That's what I know from spending 23 years in the corporate world."

Books about women and work are not new, said Ann Whalen, a buyer for the Paperback Booksmith outlet in Brookline. As examples, she cites Louisa May Alcott's "Work," Virginia Woolf's "Night and Day," Margaret Drabble's "The Middle Ground," and three books by Gail Godwin: "A Mother and Two Daughters," "Odd Woman" and "Violet Clay."

What's new — "an '80s phenomenon" — is that novelists "are taking into consideration women's competition with men" in the workplace. Whalen said. "The other books are concerned with women making a home or having a career. Even Henry James' "The Bostonians" has that aspect to it."

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Anne and Ed Kolaczyk at home in Kildeer, Ill. AP PHOTO

(from Boston Globe)

Kolaczyk, Anne + Ed

They write about contemporary heroines

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Robert Rosenbaum, an assistant manager at Barnes & Noble in Downtown Crossing, said books about the professional career woman who also wants love are a new trend, but there aren't that many of them on bookstore shelves.

"We have 200 new fiction titles, and only two or three deal with that issue," he said. "They're easy to spot. Usually on the book-jacket there's a photo of a woman in a business suit looking very aggressive," he laughs, pointing to "The 12 Apostles," a new novel by William J. Coughlin published by Putnam. Coughlin's heroine is Dominica Drexler, whom the book-jacket describes as "a true heroine of the '80s." She is "beautiful and brilliant — a woman who embodies

all the drives and desires, conflicts and confusions, of talented women everywhere."

Drexler, said Rosenbaum, "wants to be a senior vice president and hold a position on the board of directors. She's competing, of course, with her lover. There's always some love interest."

"I can see this being an offshoot of the romance syndrome," said Gilda Bruckman of New Words, a feminist bookstore in Cambridge. "I can see two possibilities emerging: either a realistic portrayal of women in a variety of professions who want fulfilling personal lives, or feminist backlash works on women fighting their way to the top and realizing it's not what they wanted at all."

Anne Kolaczyk said the books she writes with her husband "reflect a realistic view of how women see their lives."

"Power Play" follows "Now Comes the Spring," published in May 1983. It is about a female newspaper photographer romantically linked to a reporter, neither of whom believe they can have children.

A third novel, "All Too Soon," will be published in January. "It's about a 38-year-old woman who has risen to a high corporate position and, all of a sudden, hears the biological clock," explained Ed Kolaczyk. "She has to decide whether to have a child on her own or not. Our fourth book will treat a professional woman who is a sin-

gle parent caring for a 10-year-old son while competing in a high-pressure computer company."

Coleen O'Shea, an Avon publicist, said in a telephone interview that "the Kolaczyks have good vision about mature women with educated backgrounds who are able and eager to make decisions about their lives in a corporate setting. This speaks to the heart of what women are doing day-to-day. The first book sold well and encouraged us to pursue additional books."

The Kolaczyks stressed that they're writing this particular kind of novel because most fiction does not deal with realistic concerns of women trying to balance personal and professional lives.

Anne Kolaczyk said she prefers writing these books to romances, which she and her husband also write for Avon. "In romances, the women put up with a great deal because they're dependent on men, emotionally and financially. I wouldn't put up with what they do. I like to show a more balanced picture of women. I think there's a market for this type of book because professional women can relate to them."

A native of Elmhurst, Ill., Anne Kolaczyk taught elementary school for several years before marrying in 1972. Four years later, "to get out of the house," she took a creative writing course. By that time, the couple had adopted three children, now 14, 10 and 8.

"I was basically bored," she

said. "I baked bread constantly because it takes time. I volunteered in school, church, but it wasn't challenging my mind. I tried crafts because I am good at sewing, but that returned nothing but frustration."

She first started writing short stories and, after selling one to the Chicago Sun-Times, decided to try her hand at romances. In no time, it seemed, she had written and published eight. "Then the market dried up, my agent quit and I was stranded."

In 1981, her husband, who was critical of the one-dimensional women portrayed in her romance novels, suggested that they try writing together about women attempting to balance personal and professional lives. A year ago, he quit his job of 23 years as a telecommunications specialist with IBM to write full time with his wife.

"We study women's affairs extensively," he said. "We have a bunch of files on professional women and how they're making it or not. We also keep an eye on popularized literature and how women are being portrayed. In too many cases, they are portrayed as spastics, doing jobs well but immobilized when the 'hero' appears and their bodies go into all kinds of vibrations."

"In our books, the heroine gets the hero — not because they need him, but because they want him. We think that's a more realistic portrayal of women today."

Kolaczyk, Anne + Ed

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(from Boston Globe)