

2011

Is She Real or is She Wonder Woman? Finding the Authentic Woman in Graphic Novels and Comic Strips

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IS SHE REAL OR IS SHE WONDER WOMAN? – FINDING THE AUTHENTIC
WOMAN IN GRAPHIC NOVELS AND COMIC BOOKS

A Graduate Research Paper

Submitted to the

Division of School Library Studies

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

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December 2011

This Research Paper by: Michael Welch

Titled: IS SHE REAL OR IS SHE WONDER WOMAN? – FINDING THE
AUTHENTIC WOMAN IN GRAPHIC NOVELS AND COMIC BOOKS

has been approved as meeting the research requirement for the
Degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to discover whether or not women are portrayed in an authentic manner in comic books and graphic novels. This study provides a brief history of comic books and graphic novels from the late 19th Century to early 21st Century. The study then reviews qualitative studies on the gender roles of women in graphic novels, women in prime time television, collection development and graphic novels, children's animated television, young adult's perceptions of televised women heroes, gender and racial stereotypes in newspaper comics, and "wonder women" or women in heroic roles in comic books and television. The most notable of the articles is one written by Calvert, Kondla, Ertel and Meissel (2001) which makes use of the gender schema theory, which this study uses as a starting point.

This study looked at thirteen graphic novels which were found using WorldCat and categorized into the final themes of, interpersonal relationships, who gives women power, real world problems, using the mind over the sword and finally artwork. The researcher found that the gender roles of women in graphic novels and comic books are in line with a twenty-first century way of thinking and that women in graphic novels are portrayed in an authentic manner.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“In every generation there is a chosen one.
One girl in all the world.
She alone will stand against the vampires,
the demons, and the forces of darkness.
She is the Slayer” (Whedon, 2003, p. 1).

For more than seventy-five years comic books and graphic novels have been a staple of American popular culture. Bridging the gap between the narrative and the visual, it is another aspect of storytelling. Too many words can overtake a panel and take away from the artwork, and too much art makes it a small coffee table book.

Justification

Graphic novels have become increasingly more mainstream and are an important addition to today’s culture. Stories that would not have found a home in another medium have found one inside a graphic novel. Like any other literary form the reader must look at the development of the characters and the relationship between characters and their overall surroundings. This study will explore whether graphic novels and comic books portray women in an authentic perspective.

History of Comic Books – The Beginnings

The examination of women’s portrayal in graphic novels begins with the history of the graphic novel predecessor, comic books. The following is a brief history of comics and the emergence of the graphic novel. Albert (2011), Sabin (1996) and Rhoades (2008) have all provided various histories of the origins of the comic book. Generally seen in newspapers, Albert (2011) states that, “The comic in its purest form has been seen in

early cultures, such as Egyptian wall art and prehistoric man cave paintings.” (History section, para. 3). All of these mediums are illustrated narratives of juxtaposed images. Although cave paintings and hieroglyphs have been around for thousands of years, the prime mover of their evolution into American comics was *Hogan's Alley* featuring *The Yellow Kid* by Richard Felton Outcault published between the years of 1895 and 1898. This strip, named for the main character, was a yellow night-shirted, bald youth named Mickey Dugan, was caught in a bidding war between William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer who each wanted fans of the strip to follow their publications, not their competitor's.

After *The Yellow Kid*, Winsor McCay published *Little Nemo in Slumberland* in 1905. A more sophisticated approach to the artwork influenced by Art Nouveau, gave the reader unique perspective, color and structure to the panel layout. Although the character himself was rather emotionally cold, the artwork is what made this series of stories shine. “Panels would often times be stretched for dramatic impact” (Sabin, 1996, p. 20).

George Harriman's creation of *Krazy Kat* in 1913, presented a recurring, yet simple plot. The title elaborated on the love-hate relationship between Krazy Kat and Ignatz the mouse. The relationship consisted of Krazy Kat being in love with Ignatz the mouse whose sole purpose was to inflict pain on Krazy Kat. Krazy misinterprets the pain inflicted by Ignatz as an act of love. A third character, Offissa Pupp also has feelings for Krazy and punishes Ignatz in some way (Sabin, 1996, p. 22). That plot, with variations along the way, continued for over thirty years.

Other comics that made their mark in history with characters who are recognized even today include *Dennis the Menace*, *Popeye*, *Blondie*, *Casper*, and a variety of

Disney's long standing characters such as *Mickey Mouse* and *Donald Duck*. These were a few of the characters who got their start because of Krazy Kat and his supporting cast. These classic characters treated readers for subsequent years. Parodies of these characters would make their way into a series of bootleg comics, which published their antics adding scenes of graphic sex. The anonymous publication of such comics made it difficult for any chance of legal action for their creators (Sabin, 1996).

History of Comic Books -- Super Heroes

Rhoades (2008) mentions that a history of comic books cannot be complete without mentioning the first super powered character Superman. Superman, who was created by Jerry Siegel and Joel Shuster, first saw print in the January 1933 issue of their fanzine entitled *Science Fiction*. The dawn of the comic book was upon us and the world of fiction and literature would never be the same (Rhoades, 2008, p. 17).

It would not be until a few years later that Superman graced the cover and the inside pages of *Action Comics* no. 1. A well-rounded supporting cast joined Superman. This cast included Lois Lane making her debut as a reporter for the Daily Star (later the Daily Planet) and Superman led the way for comic books to become part of American popular culture; more importantly though, this story gave the reader a first glimpse of Lois Lane.

Superman paved the way for other pop culture icons most notably, *Batman*, created by Bob Kane and *Wonder Woman*, created by Dr. William Moulton Marston. While Batman may have been another man in a costume, Wonder Woman became an example and representative of an entire gender. Wonder Woman's creator was not a

couple of kids or a young man who grew up in the depression, but a Harvard-trained psychologist who also held both a Ph.D. and a law degree.

With Wonder Woman, women found their way into the medium. It did not go well from there. After the introduction of Wonder Woman, one would have thought that the portrayal of woman as the “damsel in distress” would stop; they would become the heroine in the story and save the world from the wrongs of some evildoer. The portrayal of women in comics could not have gone in a more opposite direction.

History of Comic Books – Betty and Veronica

Various sources such as Sabin (1996) and more recently Krensky (2008) mention that after the golden age of comic books, female characters became exploited for the enjoyment of the then predominantly male audience. Following is a combined and brief history of women’s stereotypical portrayal in comic books and graphic novels. The emergence of *Archie Comics* introduced the characters of Betty and Veronica who are heralded as the original boy chasers, “Betty and Veronica were hardly role models for young girls, wasting as much time and energy as they did fighting over boys, at least they were bright, perky teenagers” (Robbins, 1999). In similar fashion, women were, and still are, exploited for the sake of the male reader. To better illustrate this, Figure 1 depicts the realistically drawn female figure. Figure 2 is what we are normally given in comic books and graphic novels (Meltzer & Turner, 2006).

Figure 1 – The realistically drawn woman

Very Quick Proportion Chart

WITH A COUPLE ANATOMICAL NOTES MISSKITY0000

EVEN CARTOONISTS NEED TO KNOW PROPER ANATOMY AND PROPORTIONS IN ORDER TO SKEW IT INTO CARTOONS BELIEVABLY.

HERE IS A QUICK PROPORTION CHART FOR THE FEMALE FORM WITH A FEW LITTLE POINTERS ON ANATOMY THROWN IN!

PECTORAL (BOOB) MUSCLE, CURVES OVER THE ARM, NOT THE OTHER WAY 'ROUND.

HIPS ARE NOT A SIMPLE CURVE, THERE IS A DENT WHERE THE PELVIS AND HIP CONNECT. THE TOP OF THE THIGH HAS A MUSCLE BLUMP.

THIGHS ARE LONGER THAN CALVES, THEY ARE NOT EVEN.

THE SLOPE OF THE KNEE AND SLOPE OF THE ANKLE ARE OPPOSITE. THE KNEE IS HIGHER ON THE INSIDE AND THE ANKLE IS HIGHER ON THE OUTSIDE.

CHART MADE BY MISSKITY0000 FOR THE ARTWORKSHOP. DO NOT REDISTRIBUTE. IF YOU WISH TO SHARE THIS CHART WITH OTHERS PLEASE FAV IT OR LINK IT BUT DO NOT SAVE AND GIVE THE IMAGE AWAY.

ENJOY MY UNDIES!

7 1/2 Heads Tall

A WELL PROPORTIONED LADY IS APPROX. 7 1/2 HEADS TALL. SO A GOOD START WHEN DRAWING A CHARACTER IS TO DRAW THE HEAD AND THEN MEASURE DOWN THE LENGTH SO YOU KNOW HOW TALL THEY ARE. THAT WAY YOU CAN MAKE SURE YOUR FEET DONT GET CUT OFF THE PAGE, OR YOU DONT TAPER YOUR CHARACTER TO A POINT (I SEE THAT TOO MUCH, IT DOESNT WORK).

HANDS GO DOWN TO MID-THIGH

ANKLE HAS 2 BONES, ONE IN AND ONE OUT.

Knee Slope

Ankle Slope

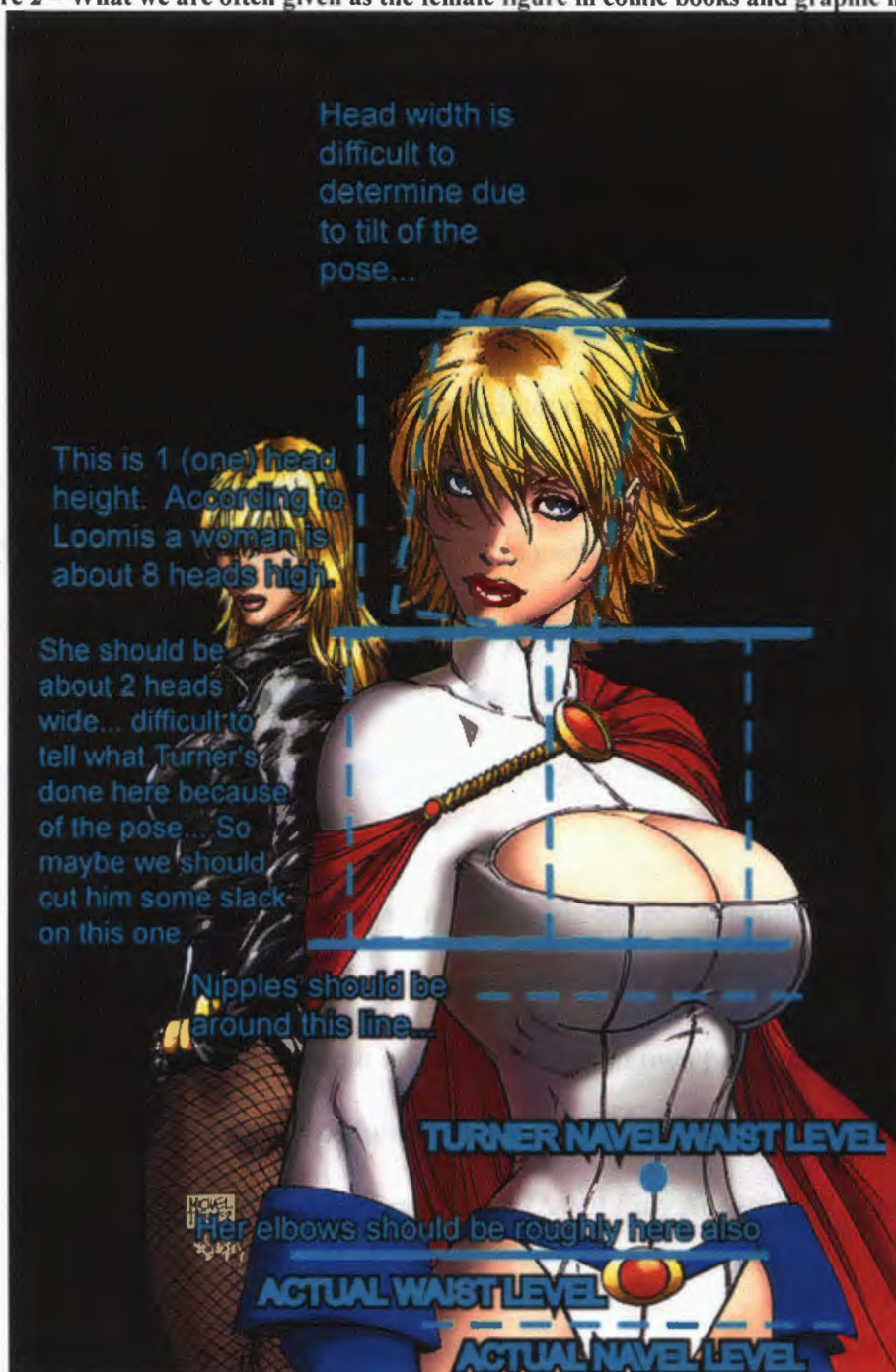
TOP OF PELVIS BONE

LITTLE DENT

MUSCLE BLUMP

(Artworkshop, 2007)

Figure 2 – What we are often given as the female figure in comic books and graphic novels.



(Meltzer & Turner, 2006)

After the emergence of Betty and Veronica, in 1941 came a vast insurgence of young adult comics. *Wilbur*, a clone of *Archie* and others followed; most notably of these was *Torchy*, published by Quality Comics from 1949-1950. The title character of *Torchy*

dressed in six-inch spikes and nylons with seams down the back and a clingy dress that exposed more than enough cleavage.

In 1944 Timely Comics (later to become Marvel Comics) began publishing *Miss America*, originally intended to be a comic book starring a teenaged superhero of the same name. By the second issue however, it had become a girls' periodical featuring things like fiction, fashion and beauty, articles about pop stars, and of course, comics. Phyllis Muchow and another woman who signed her name "Dottie" drew Miss America. This was not the only girls magazine, and it certainly would not be the last.

Polly Pigtails made its debut in 1946. This publication by *Parents Magazine* contained uplifting tales of real-life role models. Stories about Louisa May Alcott or Madame Chiang Kai-shek graced the pages. Journalism was one of the few professions open to women in the forties and comics pages during this time period were filled with female reporters.

After Polly was *Katy Keene*, who in 1949 made her debut. Unlike Polly, she had a good job as a movie star. This was the first interactive comic book. Girls could do puzzles and games and could even cut out and submit their own paper dolls and designs for Katy. By the height of Katy's popularity in the 1950's, she had more than half a dozen titles to her name such as *American Pin-up Queen Katy Keene*, *Katy Keene Magazine* and *Charm*.

Titles like *Girl Comics* and *Young Romance*, *Cinderella Love*, *Career Girl* and *Wartime Romances*, riddled the magazine racks. *Career Girl* and these other titles included stories of flight attendants, nurses and teachers finding Mr. Right. The

proverbial Prince Charming was who they fawned over and a career was never imperative as long as they got their man. (See Figure 3 below)

Figure 3 – Career Girl Romances



(Charlton Comics, 1973)

By the mid-seventies, the look and feel of comics for women had changed. The women's liberation movement was in full swing. It was now about Betty Friedman's book *The Feminine Mystique*. A career for a woman could come first, and women could order for themselves in a restaurant. Suddenly readers saw titles like *Wimmen's Comix*, *Babe*, and the outlandishly, if not offensively, titled *Tits and Clits*.

History of Comic Books -- The Emergence of the Graphic Novel

In 1978 Will Eisner published the first creator-owned graphic novel, *A Contract with God*. *God* was not just another comic book of thirty-two pages in length; it was a book length story with artwork. With the publication of *A Contract with God* a new way

of looking at the format emerged and led the way for other graphic novels to be published in the years to come.

In 1985, DC Comics released *Watchmen* by Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons. *Watchmen* is notable as being a comic book series collected into a graphic novel, spinning out of a new comics vehicle called the limited series, which were designed to only last a finite number of issues. This limited series concept would prove to be a major factor in today's collected series graphic novels. *Watchmen* gave us a multigenerational story about archetypal superheroes.

The women in the story were far from typical, however, as they were strong-willed individuals with cloudy pasts. They were characters important to the overall story in a world not far removed from our own. This story and others that followed have been making progress to portray women as more than objects of young men's affections.

After the release of *Watchmen*, the most notable graphic novel was Art Spiegelman's *Maus: A Survivor's Tale*. This was a biographical story of Spiegelman's parents in World War 2 during the Holocaust. *Maus* was the first graphic novel broadly accepted by the public. It received several nominations for literary awards, but most importantly in 1992, it received a special Pulitzer Prize.

God, Watchmen, and *Maus* created opportunities for others. The 1990s became the decade to write comic books and graphic novels. Anyone with a computer and photocopier could create a graphic novel and publish it. These publications were personal statements and perfection was secondary to making their point known. Creators such as Debbie Drechsler, Jessica Abel, and Mary Fleener are but a few of the authors who began producing graphic novels, all with poignant representations of female leading characters.

Other creators have come from various mediums and have adapted their creations to the comic book and graphic novel formats. An example of this is Joss Whedon's *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*. Besides the world he created for the television series from 1996-2003, he has adapted his creations providing additional insight and background to his characters using graphic novels. Whedon thereby gives the characters more life and provides the reader with information that they would not have otherwise.

Graphic Novel's Appeal to the Teen Reader

For many years, comic books seemed to be the near-exclusive domain of young male readers. However, graphic novels offer a greater selection than comic books to interest female readers. Moreover, just because information is given in a way other than sentences on a page does not make them any less worthy to be called a novel than the next book on the shelf.

Problem

Although a significant number of graphic novels feature men as central characters, women are increasing in appearance. However, unlike the beginnings of comic books, the portrayal of women in graphic novels differs. Women in the comic book medium can be CEO's of companies, police officers, government spies, as well as vampire slayers and zombie hunters, teachers, and computer networking specialists. Literature can be a reflection of society. However, it is unclear if women are being portrayed either in a realistic and authentic manner or as simply a male character trapped in a woman's body.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to examine what the gender roles of women are in graphic novels and whether or not women in graphic novels are portrayed authentically.

Research Questions

This study will pursue insights into the following questions:

1. Are women in graphic novels and comic books portrayed authentically?
2. What are the gendered roles of women/female characters in graphic novels and comic books.

Limitations

The young adult fiction in this study includes only collected comic books and graphic novels published between 1993 and 2011. The fiction read for this study included young adult fiction recommended for young adults.

Summary

As a genre, comic books and graphic novels have been gaining their place in library collection development. According to Staino (2010), "School and public libraries aren't cutting down on graphic novel purchases." Some librarians look at it as an easy justification in that graphic novels increase circulation. "They may make up a small percentage of a collection but they are always checked out. Graphic novel popularity among teenaged readers is at an all time high" (Staino, 2010, para. 2). Francisca Goldsmith wrote,

Graphic novel readers have learned to understand not only print, but can also decode facial and body expressions, the symbolic meanings of certain images and postures, metaphors and similes, and other social and literary

nuances teenagers are mastering as they move from childhood to maturity.

(St. Lifer, as cited in Staino, 2010, para. 7).

Because young adults are reading graphic novels more, this study will seek to identify whether or not women in graphic novels are portrayed in an authentic manner that provides roles to which today's young adult female reader can relate.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Research relevant to this study examined gender roles of women in graphic novels, comic books, magazines and television. Topics include gender and racial stereotypes in daily newspaper comics. Young adult perceptions of televised women in prime time television as well as children's animated television are explored. In addition to these topics, the researcher reviewed Wonder Woman and other superheroes. Other topics delved into include women's magazine fiction and gender roles of women in graphic novels and comic books. The developments of graphic novel collections as it pertains to stereotypes of women are also traversed in the study.

Gender Roles of Women in Graphic Novels and Comic Books

Robbins (2002) analyzed represented illustrations of women from the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s. Robbins' study focused on the early days of comics and found that most times, like any other art form, the strip revealed how the creator saw both themselves and the opposite sex. George McManus, introduced a new tradition to drawing men and women. He portrayed women as beautiful and men as comical. In his 1909 strip, *The Newlyweds*, Mrs. Newlywed is a doe-eyed attractive woman; her husband, however, is classically cartoony, with large oval eyes, a round nose and no chin. This stylization carried over into *Bringing up Father* in 1913. In this creation Jiggs, an ex-bricklayer, is round-nosed and funny-looking. Nora, the daughter in the strip, is drawn as beautiful with a figure which is often silhouetted through her clothing (Robbins, 2002).

Robbins (2002) pointed out that one exception to this stylization was Elzie Segar's Olive Oyl who remained as visually out of proportion as her popular boyfriend,

Popeye. However, this was outside the norm as others such as Chic Young's heroine of his strip *Blondie* was a stunner. Her husband, Dagwood, was drawn in the funny cartoon tradition. All the men in *Blondie* had old traditional looks to them, while all the young women were represented as beautiful clones of Blondie. The V. T. Hamilton creation *Alley Oop* debuted in 1933. In it, all the men, including the title character Alley, were cartoon versions of Neanderthal-like men. However, all the women were drawn with beautiful slender figures (Robbins, 2002). When cartoons began introducing female counterparts to established male characters, such as Minnie Mouse and Daisy Duck, instead of giving them breasts, other minor physical traits, such as eyelashes and foot wear, were augmented. Robbins asserted that this tradition of identifying female animals has continued.

Robbins (2002) also stated that by the late 1980s, both male and female superheroes had been given exaggerated physical features. Men grew progressively more muscular with thickened necks and smaller heads. Females developed longer legs, attained larger perfectly round breasts which were sometimes larger than their heads, and thinner waists. And to show off their assets, the artists would cloth their women in bottom baring thongs and as little on top as possible.

According to Robbins, twenty years after this trend began women are drawn with legs twice the normal length, smaller waists and breasts and rears which both thrust out. The women were illustrated as objects of sexual fantasies for adolescent males who have had no experience with the real thing (Robbins, 2002).

Women's Magazine Fiction

Socially constructed gender role expectations are the behaviors, attitudes, emotions, and personality traits deemed appropriate for each sex (Boudreau, et al., 1986). This social construction led Pierce (1997) to conduct a study to look at mass media in women's magazine fiction for gender-role messages and the contribution it makes to a media portrayal of gender roles. Previous studies by Bailey (1969) and Loughlin (1983) showed that while changes had been made, stereotypes still existed.

In her study of magazine fiction, Peirce (1997) chose for her analysis, all large-circulation (more than one million circulations) national women's magazines which published fiction during the 1990s. These publications represented a cross-section of the field with different audiences and editorial formulas. *Ladies' Home Journal*, *Good Housekeeping* and *Redbook* were chosen in the service and home category. These publications have a similar audience, middle-class, married women who attended or graduated from college, almost half of whom have children and/or are employed. "*Cosmopolitan*, in the fashion and beauty categories, is targeted to the unmarried 18-34-year-old who is employed" (Pierce, 1997). *Ms* magazine was also included in the sample though it has a smaller circulation of only 250,000. It is however, the only magazine which claims to be the voice of the feminist movement (Prijetel, 1995).

Peirce's goal was to select a random sample of 25 stories with female characters from each magazine between 1990 and 1995. Stories were chosen using random selection with replacement; first a year, then a month and then a story. If the main character was a male or the issue contained no stories a new issue was chosen as a replacement. The final sample consisted of 125 stories. As in Bailey and Loughlin's studies, Pierce considered

as variables, age, marital status, appearance, economic status, education, occupation, number of children, residence, housing, goal, problem and dependence (Peirce, 1997).

Peirce (1997) found that women in the magazine fiction were not necessarily the attractive, middle-class, married women in the 26-35 age group, who lived with one or two children, in a house, in the city that Bailey and Loughlin found. The problem shifted from a psychological one which Loughlin found, back to Bailey's original findings of a romantic one. Depending on the magazine, different problems existed in the fictional stories. In *Redbook* marital status would take top billing while in *Ladies Home Journal* and *Ms*, the goal is personal fulfillment. Romance is the goal as well as the problem in *Cosmopolitan* and *Good Housekeeping*.

Few of the characters in the fiction stories Pierce examined were anything but Caucasian Americans. Of the 125 main characters, 10 were from a different nationality and 7 were of a different race. Most of the main characters had stereotypically female jobs and in all the magazines selected for the study, males were assigned more different occupations. While not all occupations were named in the study, for women some of them include secretaries, housekeepers, nurses, receptionists and dental hygienists. Men were typically business owners, doctors, lawyers, dentists, college professors, and architects (Peirce, 1997).

The study concluded that women's magazine fiction was still as traditional as it had been in the past. She found that characteristics, roles, and occupations were still gender stereotyped. While women have been taught to think of themselves last and their families first, the problems associated with husbands, boyfriends, children or others must

be considered traditional rather than feminist. The goal and problem of the study had shifted back to romance and away from the psychological in most publications.

The Portrayal of Women in U.S. Prime Time Television

How television portrayed women and its effects on young viewers, led Elasmr, Hasegawa and Brain (1999) to conduct a content analysis which focused on two points. The first was to examine how women are portrayed on prime time television broadcast in the United States. The second was to explore the possible association between the trend of women's presence on prime time television and the trend in American's progressive acceptance of women as important individuals outside the home.

Elasmr, M. Hasegawa, K, and Brain, M., (1999) examined prime time television programming of six constructed weeks. Each constructed week consisted of selecting one hour of TV programming between 7 and 10 p.m. on each day of the week, one from Monday, one from Tuesday, one from Wednesday and so on from each month between the months of October 1992 and September 1993. Originally intended to last 12 weeks, the study was later reduced to 6 weeks by choosing one day from every other month of the year. The channel for a particular night was selected at random from the four television networks: ABC, NBC, CBS, and FOX. The sample included 42 hours of television programs representing 60 different shows.

Elasmr, et. al. (1999) concluded that there had been an increase in the percentage of women characters on prime time TV in comparison to the 1980s. The trend was consistent with that of American values concerning women in the workplace. For the entire program genres combined, Elasmr, et. al. (1999) found that 17.7% of major characters in US prime time television were female and 80.2% were classified as having

minor roles. Out of the female major roles, 69.2% were in a domestic comedy and 15.4% were in the genre of drama or crime.

Most females were shown in their twenties or thirties and only 1.7% of females were shown of college age; 20.5% were in their late twenties; 37.9% were in their thirties; and 10.6% were in their forties. Females of European descent included 85% compared to the low 8.9% of Americans of African origin and 3.1% of a Hispanic heritage. While 41% of the women were shown as not married, just over 46% of the women shown were of unclear marital status and 12.6% of women were currently married.

Overall Elasmal et. al. (1999) showed that though there had been an increase in women characters on prime time TV in the early 1990s, they were more likely playing minor roles. They were also less likely to be married, housewives, be caring for children and more likely to have dark hair. Based on their findings the woman on U.S. prime time TV in the early 1990s was young, single, independent, and free from family and work place pressures and obligations. The researchers concluded that the reliable construct for researching the trends of women's portrayal on television depended on the willingness of the researchers to adopt standardized coding schema.

Naked Ladies and Macho Men

Zellers' (2005) study examined graphic novels during a crucial point. At the time of the study, graphic novels were circulating widely but had not been subjected to collection development policies in most libraries. Focusing on the content of the graphic novels in the collection at School of Information and Library Sciences at the University of North Carolina, the researcher set out to illustrate the need for feminist-friendly

materials in graphic novel collections, and the to recommend appropriate changes to graphic novel collection development policies.

Content analyses of three elements were examined in the study, sex of the protagonists, the perpetrators of violence and the clothing of the female and male characters. The results of Zellers' study support his original hypothesis. More men than women were found to be protagonists; men were more often the perpetrators of violence. And lastly, women's clothing was more sexually suggestive than that of men.

In the eighteen books sampled from the collection of 178 graphic novels at the SILS collection only 6 out of the 54 protagonists were female. Out of the 805 acts of violence 89 were committed by women. And of the characters that were suggestively clothed, partially clad or in any way naked, out of the 403 characters total, 107 were males and 296 were females (Zellers, 2005, p. 22).

Children's Animated Television

Lambert (2004) used a content analysis methodology to assess the television series Bob the Builder. The television show was described as a multimodal text that relied upon the use of linguistic, visual, spatial, auditory and gestural cues in the transmission of a visual narrative. In trying to determine what how children interpreted the various layers of meaning while watching Bob the Builder, a coding framework was developed for analyzing content. "The theoretical research method could have wider application to similar multimodal texts" (Lambert, 2004, p. 1). Lambert used a content analysis methodology because it is the established method in the analysis of mass media. Inferences between a particular text and its social context can be made using this method.

A total of 12 episodes were used in the analysis, 6 from earlier shows and the other 6 from more modern episodes. The selected episodes consisted of approximately 10 minutes each. Every second episode was chosen from the total number of shows. Out of those episodes, every other show was viewed either in the first half or the second half.

The analysis revealed that there was a mismatch between the actual narrative and visual/spatial cues in the way the program represents to the child viewers the told of men and women through its main characters (Lambert, 2004, p. 5). In viewing the areas of unevenness between the characters of Bob and Wendy, Bob was found to have prominence in close of shots. Bob was often times portrayed as someone who needed help. Wendy dominated in her ability to explain things to others, being able to give solutions, initiating and staying focused and she both follows and supports Bob. She was often depicted in aerial camera views standing or working with others around her. Wendy was portrayed as possessing true leadership however, since the show was primarily focused on Bob, the visual prominence of Bob created a powerful effect (Lambert, 2004, p. 4).

Young Adult's Perceptions and Memories of a Televised Woman Hero

The purpose of the study by Calvert, Kondla, Ertel and Meisel (2001) was to examine how young adult males and females perceive and remember televised depictions of female action heroes using *Xena: Warrior Princess*. Focusing on viewer perceptions of Xena and her perceived portrayal as a role model, the study looked at how those portrayals were remembered by viewers.

Noting bipolar conceptualizations of masculine and feminine and citing Jung's male and female shadow i.e., masculinity without femininity is ruthless and femininity

without masculinity was ineffectual; the inclusion of the traditional masculine traits appeared to be important for the development of females. Women with more masculine personality traits were more likely to participate in nontraditional roles such as being a scientist of some type or an athlete (Spence & Helmrich, 1978).

One hundred and thirty-nine college students participated in the study by Calvert, et. al. There were 97 women and 42 men. Three episodes of *Xena: Warrior Princess* was selected based on the amount and kind of shadow imagery which was contained in the episode. A ruthless shadow, and integrated shadow and low shadow episode were each chosen. Before viewing a program participants completed a Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI), a self-descriptive measure of traditionally masculine and feminine personality characteristics. A few days after completing the BSRI, participants viewed one of the episodes and then answered a 4-point Linkert questionnaire to assess their perceptions of Xena and Gabrielle. The dimensions of likeability, role model, physical attractiveness, nurturance, and self-efficacy were used with the response options: not very much, a little bit, or a whole lot scored as 1-4 respectively.

Participants were also asked if they had ever viewed the episode they had just watched of episode of *Xena: Warrior Princess*, and if they were likely to view the program again. Then participants rated Xena and Gabrielle on the BSRI for their perceptions of the characters masculinity and femininity. Within one week of viewing participants wrote about the story that they had viewed. The participants also answered a final questionnaire which asked them to identify examples of archetypal images and other symbols that were presented in the program.

The study summarized that people with masculine personality styles were more likely to like Xena and to see her as a role model. Men perceived her as a role model the most when there was little of her shadow presented in the story. Women on the other hand preferred Xena as a role model when she was presented having an integrated shadow. Women also saw Xena as a role model when she was perceived to be in control of her life and they saw her as attractive, and a mother figure.

The results of the study suggest the importance of having women's heroic roles include the portrayal of traditionally valued feminine qualities. Gradual rather than major changes in gender portrayals seemed likely to be acceptable and memorable to viewers; this was in line with gender schema theory.

The most effective formula for presenting heroic female portrayals is one in which female characters embody traditionally valued feminine characteristics, such as physical attractiveness, nurturance, compassion, and using the mind over the sword (Calvert, et. al., 2000, p. 51).

The gender schema theory which Calvert, et. al. provided is used to define the authentic female character.

Gender and Racial Stereotypes in Daily Newspaper Comics

Glascok and Preston-Schreck (2005) assessed the content of gender and minority roles in daily newspaper comics. Using a content analysis of other media, television and advertising, they were expecting to find an increase in female major and minor characters. In addition to this they also were expecting and increase in the percentage of females in the workplace and lesser percentage of women in the home and as the primary caretaker.

Choosing from a month's worth of comics from four daily newspapers in an unnamed mid-west state, Glascock and Preston-Schreck excluded all redundant comics to arrive at 50 unique comic strips. Of these fifty strips, twenty-three of the top twenty-five comics circulating in the United States were chosen. In all 1077 characters were included in their sampling. They were 61% male, 28% female and 11% animals; male animals outnumbered females 6 to 1.

Though coded in the study, some factors were excluded from the final analysis. Overall males (61%) appeared more frequently than women (31%). There was no significant gender differences found for age. However, women were less likely to be identified with a job (62.4 to 47.8% for men). Women were also less likely to be a professional but more likely to hold a support position.

It was concluded that stereotypes of women and girls in newspaper comics over the last twenty years have remained standard in today's papers. For example, more men appeared than women and gender roles subsisted in respect to jobs and family life. However, females as major characters appeared to be gaining ground over previous studies up from 15% in Chavez's 1985 study to 40% in 2005 (Glascock and Preston-Schreck, 2005).

The Wonder Woman Precedent

O'Reilly (2003) sought to answer the question of whether female superheroes heroic trials were merited to a sanctioning institution while their male counterparts on trial effect the outcome on their own behalf. Using examples from Wonder Woman, Buffy the Vampire Slayer and the Charmed ones, the characters were created for girls and possibly for men.

Using various examples from comic books and television appearances (both the live action *Wonder Woman* series (1976-979) and the animated *Justice League* (2001-2006) Wonder Woman who gains her powers through a physical contest must still gain the approval from those in authority over her. Though she was the prototype for female superheroes, she was not given a clear depiction of women's empowerment. She had to partake in a series of physical challenges in order to become Wonder Woman. And when she broke a sacred law of her homeland, Themyscira, even after the protests of her friends, Superman and the Flash, she dutifully accepted the judgment.

O'Reilly then goes on to discuss the Charmed Ones. Piper, Phoebe, and Paige from the television show *Charmed* (1998-2006) were heroes with great magical powers used to protect the innocent with as minimal of magical evidence as possible. Though they cleaned up their own messes often enough, it wasn't until their deeds were caught on camera that they were forced to defend themselves and their actions. Though their heroic actions were not good enough to allow them to make their own decisions, they accepted the judgment passed onto them.

The Chosen One, Buffy was constantly being judged by both her peers and her Watcher, Giles. "Into each generation a Slayer is born..." Unfortunately for Buffy, with her slayer skills comes an entire council of Watchers approving and disapproving of the use of her powers. When Buffy has to save her mother after having her powers stripped away by the council, she does so and embraces her Slayer powers more fully. At the same time she grows weary of future engagements with the Council of Watchers.

I think your Watcher hasn't reminded you lately of the roles and statuses of the players in our little game. The Council fights evil, the Slayer is

the instrument by which we fight. The Council remain; the Slayers change. It has been that way since the beginning... – Buffy Summers, “Checkpoint” (O’Reilly, 2003, p. 277).

Even with all her powers and her Watcher, she realized she was still being used as pawn by those in authority over her. And she used her own uniqueness to put a squash on the Council’s decision.

There isn’t going to be a review... No interrogations. No questions you know I can’t answer. No hoops. No jumps... see, I’ve had a lot of people talking to me the last few days. Everyone just lining up to tell me how unimportant I am. And I’ve finally figured out why. Power. I have it. They don’t. This bothers them... You’re Watchers. Without a Slayer, you’re pretty much just watching Masterpiece Theatre... So he’s how it’s going to work. You’re going to tell me everything you know, and then you’re going to go away – Buffy Summers, “Checkpoint” (O’Reilly, 2003, p. 278).

Unlike Wonder Woman and the Charmed Ones, Buffy had a reversal of the power differential (O’Reilly, 2003, p. 281).

Summary

Through Wonder Woman, Wendy, Buffy and the Charmed Ones as well as a myriad of other creations in serial publications, television and comic books and graphic novels the definition of the authentic female character takes shape. Through the use of the gender schema theory in *Xena: Warrior Princess* the coding Calvert et. al. (2001) created lays the foundation for building a definition of what is an authentic female character,

specifically, examples where the use of the mind over the sword will be the initial characteristic.

O'Reilly (2005) gave a critical view of the prototypical female character in comic books and popular culture. O'Reilly found that when women may be bestowed superhuman abilities in graphic novels and other media, they are often limited in the use of their abilities by those in a position of power over them. On more than one occasion the female in question will be given great power but that power will be challenged by those in a position above her. The researcher also noted that those in power found ways to retain their power and continued on accepting the consequences.

Peirce (2002) found that social forces in mass media affected the ways in which women were traditionally viewed. The roles and occupations of main characters were found to be in line with traditional views of women in society. The researcher found that though the stories are written for a particular audience they in no way reflect what the reality was for their primary audience.

Zellers' (2005) analysis of female protagonists determined that librarians need to be more conscious in their selection of graphic novels. "Collecting assertively more pro-feminine books," Zeller's states, "Graphic novel collections will likely reflect undue numbers of male protagonists, violent males, and scantily-clad females" (2005). Young adult females will regularly pass up the opportunity to read a graphic novel so as to not be subjected to violence and boobs. The researcher also concludes that since the genre is gaining in popularity, young adult females are missing out on many opportunities given to them and are instead avoiding the genre.

Lambert and Clancy's (2004) content analysis of children's animated television programs, using *Bob The Builder* found that though both males and females were given an equal amount of screen time. The female character of Wendy was portrayed as possessing true leadership while Bob was a giver of instructions. Visual/spatial cues are found to be mismatched from the actual narrative presented to the viewer (Lambert & Clancy, 2004).

The findings of these researchers and others indicate a need to examine and define what the authentic woman is in graphic novels. With growing circulation as well as the ease of access across all reading levels, the need for defining gender roles and the portraying authentic women in graphic novels sets the purpose for this study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Graphic novels and comic books have become a growing part of public and school library collections. Young adult interest in them and the frequency with which they are checked out are both increasing every year. Utilizing previous research in gender and woman's role in literature and other mediums, notably Calvert's use of gender schema theory, this study will analyze what the gender roles of women are as well as whether women are portrayed authentically in graphic novels and comic books.

Qualitative content analysis is "any qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings" (Patton, 2002, p. 453). Qualitative content analysis is primarily inductive as it grounds the researchers' topics and themes, as well as the inferences drawn from them, in the data (Wildemuth, 2009, p. 309). In contrast, quantitative content analysis generates theory while requiring the use of random sampling to insure the "validity of statistical inference" (Wildemuth, 2009, p. 309). Wildemuth also continued by stating that a qualitative approach to research also "produces descriptions of typologies" and "the perspectives of the producers of the text can be better understood by the investigator as well as the readers of the study's results" (Wildemuth, p. 309).

Qualitative content analysis "involves a process to condense raw data into categories or themes based on valid inference and interpretation" (Wildemuth, p. 309, 2009).

According to Wildemuth (2009), conventional qualitative content analysis is an approach "in which coding categories are derived directly and inductively from the raw data and is

the approach used for grounded theory development” (Wildemuth, 2009, p.309). The data will be collected and sorted into categories. During this process a log will be maintained containing notes about each of the graphic novels.

Population

For this study, graphic novels and comic books with a predominant female protagonist were chosen from a variety of resources. The list of resources will appear in Appendix A. Graphic novels copyrighted later than 1993 were chosen. The researcher will read books in the sample looking for female protagonists who possess attributes in line with Calvert’s gender schema theory (Calvert, et al. 2000). These attributes were identified as, physical attractiveness, nurturance, compassion, and use of mind over the sword. A constant comparison was used to ensure all attributes are identified for all texts. The researcher used only print resources for this study. Although electronic resources are available for the format, those resources are typically digital representations of the print resource with no changes being made. A list of titles was compiled utilizing WorldCat. Search terms included, juvenile fiction, graphic novels, comic books, super heroines, women, teenagers, high schools, United States, heroes and cartoons and comics. After the initial search was conducted, books with a target audience of young adults were selected from the list if they were held by at least 100 OCLC member libraries and had a predominant female protagonist. Twenty five titles were found initially, and random sample thirteen titles were chosen from the original list. The final list of thirteen titles used for this study is listed in Appendix A.

Procedure

Once the titles were identified the researcher read each book and kept a log. Emerging from this analysis was a comprehensive assessment of the qualities that constitute an authentic feminine character portrayal in graphic novels and an assessment of the degree to which such authenticity is actualized in recent graphic novels suitable for the young adult audience.

Table 1

Preliminary Themes

Theme	Title of book theme came from
Girlfriends/boyfriends/relationships	Breaking Up, Potential, Hereville, Whiteout, Watchmen, Batgirl
Real world/life problems	Potential, Birds of Prey, Watchmen, Whiteout, 100 Bullets, Bargirl
Peer pressure	Potential, Birds of Prey, Batgirl, Breaking Up
Parents/siblings/family	Breaking Up, Blue Monday, Hereville
Alcohol/drugs	Potential, Breaking Up,
Secrets	Breaking Up, Potential, Birds of Prey, Batgirl
Fashion & Style	Breaking Up, Birds of Prey, Batgirl, Ultra
Sex	Potential, Breaking Up, Whiteout
Artwork—realistic, exaggerated, stylized	All titles
Diet/food	Breaking Up, Birds of Prey, Death, Blue Monday, Ultra
Music	Blue Monday
Crime and law enforcement	100 Bullets, Birds of Prey, Ultra, Whiteout
Use of real language	100 Bullets, Potential, Breaking Up,

	Ultra, Whiteout
Decision making	Death, Hereville
Women or men in positions of power	Batgirl, 100 Bullets, Whiteout, Watchmen, Birds of Prey, Death
Physical attributes	Whiteout, Breaking Up, 100 Bullets
School/education	Breaking Up, Potential, Batgirl, Hereville, 100 Bullets

As the list of preliminary themes was recorded and they were grouped together in like categories as seen in Table 2. The major themes were then resorted.

Table 2

Final Theme Categories

Final Theme	Preliminary Themes
Interpersonal Relationships	Parents/siblings/family
	Relationships/Girlfriends/Boyfriends
	Peer Pressure
Who gives women power?	Women/men in positions of power
	Took power for themselves
Real world problems	Alcohol/drugs
	Grades
	Sex
	Decision making
	Fashion and style
	Crime and law enforcement
Mind Over the Sword	Various examples
Art work	Realistic
	Stylized
	Exaggerated

After the larger themes were determined, book titles were separated into groups, as seen in Table 3. By taking the titles that match the preliminary themes and placing them into the correlating larger theme groups the researcher analyzed the themes of the final books.

Table 3

Book Titles in Each Theme Category

Interpersonal/experiences	Breaking Up, Hereville, Coraline, Watchmen, Blue Monday, Potential, Ultra: Seven Days, Coraline
Who gives women power?	Batgirl: Year One, 100 Bullets, Birds of Prey, Coraline
Real world problems	Inside Out, Potential, Ultra: Seven Days, Birds of Prey
Mind over the sword	Coraline, Death, The High Cost of Living, Watchmen, Whiteout, Breaking Up, Blue Monday, Hereville
Artwork	All titles

The researcher analyzed the themes of the thirteen books, based on the five major categories. The analyses of the tables were reported in chapter four.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The researcher conducted a content analysis by looking for themes that emerged in the titles read. The list of books chosen provided appears in Appendix A. The final themes identified were, mind over the sword, real world problems, interpersonal relationships, source of protagonist's power as well as the type of artwork used.

Findings

Each book was examined through a thematic lens to answer the research questions for this study:

1. Are women in graphic novels and comic books portrayed authentically?
2. What are the gendered roles of women/female characters in graphic novels and comic books.

For each of the themes, panels or groups of panels from the graphic novels will be given showing examples of those themes to indicate how the book addressed the complexity of the topic.



Interpersonal Relationships



Interpersonal relationships whether they are between the female protagonist and other peers, parents, or other family members are shown in all of the titles in this study. The examples chosen illustrate how graphic novels portray female interactions with other characters. Over-protective father figures, aloof mothers, friends who can seem like enemies, or parents who were never there are just some of the examples of the main female protagonist interacting with other persons in her life. No subject matter is too socially taboo. Rape, women's menstruation cycle, social standing, career expectations,


leadership potential, dating, porn, eating disorders, pre-marital sex, sexual orientation, social expectations and cultural expectations were all explored.

Table 4

Interpersonal Relationships

Theme	Book Title	Example	Complexity
Interpersonal Relationships	Breaking Up	 <p>(Friedman, 2007, p.124)</p>	In A. Friedman's <i>Breaking Up</i> Chloe has to hold back and clutch her hands behind her at times of confrontation with others. She trembles under pressure.
Interpersonal Relationships	Watchmen	 <p>(Moore Gibbons, 2005, chapter 9, p. 20)</p>	The relationship between a daughter and a father is explored in a flashback in the pages of <i>Watchmen</i> . Laurie has no idea that the Comedian, Edward Blake, is her father at this point in her life.

Theme	Book Title	Example	Complexity
Interpersonal Relationships	Batgirl: Year One	 <p>(Beatty, 1999, p. 11)</p>	<p><i>Batgirl: Year One</i> explores the relationship between a father and a daughter. Barbara Gordon and her father James argue about her post college career choices. While Barbara wants desperately to following in her father's footsteps, he will not allow that.</p>
Interpersonal Relationships	Ultra: Seven Days	 <p>(Luna & Luna, 2005, p. 40)</p>	<p>Three super powered heroines discuss a prophecy given to them the day before in the pages of <i>Ultra: Seven Days</i>. Despite all of her super powers, Pearl (Ultra) has to endure her friends badgering in regards to a fortune which was given to her stating that she will find her true love in seven days.</p>

Theme	Book Title	Example	Complexity
Interpersonal Relationships	Coraline	 <p>(Gaiman & Russel, 2008, p. 26)</p>	In <i>Coraline</i> , Coraline give her mother an unconventional answer to a simple question. Her mother does not acknowledge it and instead continues on.

In A. Friedman's *Breaking Up* Chloe had to choose between her boyfriend and her closest friends. Her choice to keep them separate eventually leads to a confrontation which results in a major break up on both sides of her life. Her friends cannot believe she lied to them and kept things hidden from them. Her boyfriend, Adam cannot believe he was an embarrassment to her. She doesn't talk to any of them for a week.

Watchmen's Laurie Juspezyk grew up thinking her father was her real father. She did not suspect that a sadistic, cruel and self-centered man named Edward Blake, The Comedian, could ever be her father. While Laurie was talking to her old boyfriend Dr. Manhattan above the surface of Mars, she comes to realize that when her mother, Sally Jupiter (Silk Spectre I), was raped by Edward Blake (The Comedian), Edward Blake, she was conceived. An act of pure violence leads to the romantic coupling of Laurie's mother and her biological father, Edward Blake.

"...Until your mother loves a man she has every reason to hate, and of that

union of the thousand million children competing for fertilization, it was you. Only you that emerged.” – Dr. Manhattan (Moore, Gibbons & Higgins, 2005, chapter 9, p. 27).

In *Batgirl: Year One*, Barbara Gordon, who wanted to follow in her father’s footsteps and become a police officer, is denied her chance from the beginning. Her father and other male persons in a position of power over her all see her as small and weak. Her father will not allow her to become a police officer while he is on the police force himself. She “doesn’t meet the minimum height requirements” (Beatty, 1999, p. 10). Her martial arts instructor thinks she is too scared and doesn’t want to learn to be any real threat. This is true until Barbara turns the tables on her instructor and pins him on the mat.

In *Ultra: Seven Days*, Ultra has to endure the badgering from her closest friends the day after a mysterious fortune teller reveals that in seven days she will find true love. During a simple lunch she gets pestered by her two closest friends. The conversation is about fate, fashion, what they ordered and who man is at the condiment bar is having a conversation with Ultra.


N. Gaiman’s *Coraline*, Coraline has the problem of moving into a new house in a new town and not knowing anyone. When she tries to elicit a reaction of any kind from her parents she gets no response. Eventually, Coraline gets drawn into the Other House with her Other Mother and Other Father both of whom are evil inside a shell of her real parents. Coraline wanted adventure, and that is what she received.



Who gives women power?


Women acquiring power in graphic novels and comic books happens in different ways, sometimes a character will find himself or herself in an unavoidable situation in which they have not choice but to act regardless of the consequences. Other times someone else may give them the power they need to achieve their goals. Whatever the case, women in graphic novels seize the opportunities presented to them, act accordingly and do not back down.

Table 5

Who gives women power?

Theme	Book Title	Example	Complexity
Who gives women power?	Batgirl: Year One	 <p>(Beatty, 1999, p. 94)</p>	When confronted by Batman and Robin, Barbara (Batgirl) is asked to justify why she is doing what she is doing. Her only response is that she has seen Gotham's future and that the city she loves needs all the help it can get.

Theme	Book Title	Example	Complexity
Who gives women power?	100 Bullets	 <p>(Azzarello, 2000, p. 14)</p>	After being released from prison, Dizzy is given a once in a lifetime opportunity by the mysterious Mr. Graves to do unto others as they did to her own family. This is something out of the norm as persons released from prison are not given a free pass.
Who gives women power?	Coraline	 <p>(Gaiman & Russell, 2008, p. 100)</p>	Realizing she is trapped in her other home with her other mother, Coraline decides to take matters into her own hands.

Theme	Book Title	Example	Complexity
Who gives women power?	Birds of Prey	 <p>(Dixon, 1999, p. 38)</p>	At a time in Dinah Lance's life, when she couldn't be much farther down, she is offered a way out and she graciously accepted it.

Barbara Gordon's example of putting on a Batman styled costume and fighting crime was the last thing she wanted to do. However, when both her father and Batman are unable to help she takes matters into her own hands and saves them both. Later though, Batman asks her why she is doing what she is doing. She responds, "Because I can" (Beatty, 1999, p.94).

After being released from jail, Dizzy is approached by the mysterious Mr. Graves. He offers her a once in a lifetime free pass in order to exact revenge on those who killed her family. She can walk away or accept his offer and discover the truth for herself. What she decides to do with her choice is up to her.

Coraline decides to take the fight to her Other Mother when she discovers that her real parents are being held captive by her Other Mother inside a mirror. Coraline asks her Other Mother if she wanted to play a game. When her Other Mother inquires what the prize is if Coraline loses, Coraline offers herself.

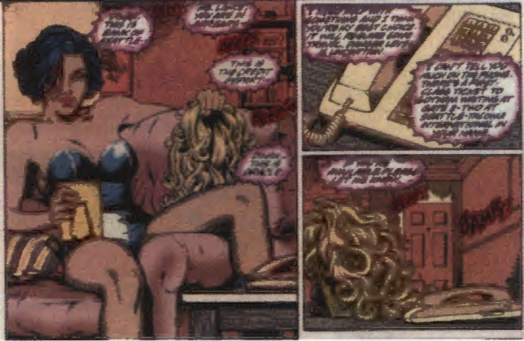
Dinah Lance (Black Canary) is offered the opportunity to be a field agent for Oracle (Barbara Gordon). When she accepts she gets full access to all of Oracle's knowledge databases and all of Oracle's technology. She also gets a costume upgrade which was long overdue since her previous costume harkened back to another era.


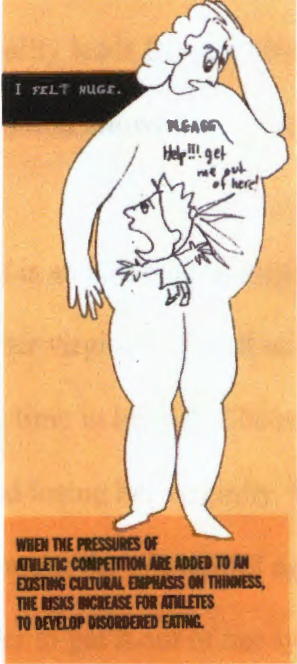
Real World Problems


The problems which women are presented as having in the pages of graphic novels all seem very real. The reader may have experienced something similar to one of the characters, or they may not have. The situations give the characters a sense of fealty and reality which can help you relate to them in some way. Whether it is a question of being in debt and screening calls, sexual activity and relationships with friends and family, diet and eating disorders, or the obscure, the problems women face in graphic novels are real.

Table 6

Real World Problems

Theme	Book Title	Example	Complexity
Real World Problems	Birds of Prey	 <p>(Dixon, 1999, p. 12)</p>	At a time in Dinah Lance's life, when she couldn't be much farther down, she is offered a way out. It was entirely her choice whether she would take Oracle up on her offer.

Theme	Book Title	Example	Complexity
Real World Problems	Potential	 <p>Schrag, 2000, p. 58)</p>	Ariel takes a page aside to break the fourth wall and address how she really felt at that point in her life.
Real World Problems	Inside Out	 <p>(Shivack, 2007, p. 8)</p>	In high school, pressures to conform to a particular body image are often times difficult, especially with a “Cultural emphasis on thinness,”(Shivack 2007, p.8).

Theme	Book Title	Example	Complexity
Real World Problems	Whiteout	 <p>(Rucka, 1999, p.48)</p>	Nothing is more real to Marshall Stetko than having to face the fact that she just had to have her index and middle finger amputated while on assignment at the South Pole.

Black Canary has the unfortunate problem of too many bills to pay and no income to pay them. One thing you would never think a costumed crime fighter would have is paying their bills, and this reality leads Black Canary to accept an offer to be a field agent for Oracle. Accepting the position allowed her to update her look and make a change in her life she needed.

A. Schrag's *Potential* is an autobiographical account of her junior year in high school. Her wanting to lose her virginity as well as her sexual orientation comes into conflict at the worst possible time in her life. She is trying to decide what she should do about sleeping with a boy and losing her virginity. She is already a lesbian. However, this one aspect of her life would make the uneventful age of 17 mean something. She needed to get it taken care of, in order to get it out of her system.

Inside Out is N. Shivack's autobiographical account of her struggles with an eating disorder. She lets the reader into her world and the world of other young women and men who deal with a similar problem everyday. Shivack's eating disorder took control of her life when she started swimming competitively in high school. Her inner monster took control of her life. When she moved out of her parents' house to live on her

own, she realized that she needed help. Her father helped her find a social worker who specialized in eating disorders, and through a series of ups and downs, she did get better.


In G. Rucka's *Whiteout*, U. S. Marshall Carrie Steko, while on assignment at the South Pole, is on a deadline to track down a killer after a body is found frozen in the ice. In her pursuit of a murderer, she finds herself facing the fact that she will lose her index and middle fingers on her right hand due to exposure to the cold. It is inevitable, and at the South Pole it is an outpatient procedure. She drinks herself to sleep regardless of the fact that the killer is still loose and her window to find him is shrinking.




The Mind Over the Sword


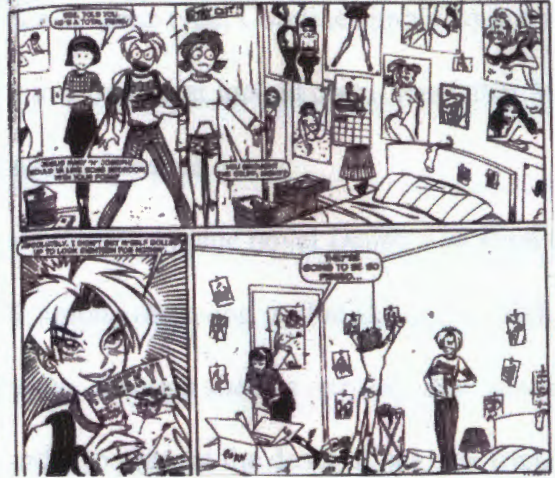
Using the mind over the sword is what sets women apart from men in graphic novels. Whether it is Coraline asking her Other Mother for a key, Death agreeing to help an old friend, a U. S. Marshall being knowledgeable in her job or enacting revenge for a prank, women in graphic novels are portrayed as being more than capable of using their minds before their fists. Examples of women using their mind over the sword are given in Table 7.


Table 7

The Mind Over the Sword

Theme	Book Title	Example	Complexity
The Mind Over the Sword	Coraline	 <p>(Gaiman, 2008, p. 118)</p>	While playing a game with her other mother, Coraline finds herself in a predicament which her other mother is all too happy to help with.

Theme	Book Title	Example	Complexity
The Mind Over the Sword	Death, The High Cost of Living	 <p>OKAY, I'LL LOOK FOR IT BUT THERE'S A CHANCE OF NOBODY I WANT TO GO AWAY... TONIGHT.</p> <p>ANY IDEA WHERE TO GET IT?</p> <p>MAYBE I PLANNED TO ASK YOU INSIDE A BASKET, NEED A HILL, BUT CAPTIVE, ON AN ISLAND SURROUNDED BY A LAND OF THE DAMNED BY A HUNDRED DREAMING EACH I ASKED AND MORE PAINFUL THAN THE LAST.</p> <p>(Gaiman, 1993, p. 41)</p>	<p>Didi(Death) only has one day a century to enjoy life. However she is coerced into helping an old friend who is holding a new friend's life in the balance.</p>
The Mind Over the Sword	Watchmen	 <p>THERE. OKAY. THAT'S IT.</p> <p>YOU CAN TAKE ME BACK TO EARTH TO FRY WITH DAD AND MY MOM AND ALL US OTHER WORTHLESS HUMANS. THE CONVERSATION'S OVER...</p> <p>...AND LISTEN, YOU WERE WRONG, SEE? YOU SAID IT ENDED WITH ME IN TEARS, AND LOOK AT ME! NOT A MOIST EYE IN SIGHT!</p> <p>YOU WERE WRONG ABOUT THAT. MAYBE ABOUT A LOT OF THINGS.</p> <p>(Moore & Gibbon, 2005, Chapter 9, p. 22)</p>	<p>Eventually giving into temptation, Laurie gives into her thoughts and begins to remember her past. All the thoughts and memories she has kept buried for most of her life come flooding back as she begins to realize who her real father is.</p>
The Mind Over the Sword	Whiteout	 <p>THE ANTI-CIA TREATY PROHIBITS USE OF--</p> <p>OH FOR HEAVENS--</p> <p>--CONTRIBUTOR FOR MILITARY MEASURES YOUR PRESENCE IS A VIOLATION--</p> <p>--DON'T YOU THINK I KNOWITCHAPTERS AND VERBS--</p> <p>--TREATY!</p> <p>(Rucka, 1999, p. 97)</p>	<p>Carrie Steko can not only handle herself in regards to firearms and hand to hand combat she is also knowledgeable about her job. Though there have been many scenes leading up to this one, Marshal Stetko begins looking at the big picture and who is doing what on her watch.</p>

Theme	Book Title	Example	Complexity
The Mind Over the Sword	Breaking Up	 <p>(Friedman, 2007, p. 92)</p>	Even though her best friend, Chloe, has been less than cordial to her, Mackenzie takes the non-confrontational approach. If she would have let Nicola walk in on her boyfriend and Chloe a fight would have ensued.
The Mind Over the Sword	Blue Monday	 <p>(Clugston-Major, 2003, p. 25)</p>	After Bleu and her friends find themselves on the receiving end of a restaurant prank they decide that some revenge is in order.

Theme	Book Title	Example	Complexity
The Mind Over the Sword	Hereville	 <p>(Deutsch, 2010, p. 45)</p>	After being assaulted by a mysterious pig the day before, Mirka lays a trap for her would be assailer.

The title character of N. Gaiman's (2008) graphic novel *Coraline* would like to escape the realm of her Other Mother. However, she cannot proceed without a key. Rather than trickery or violence of some type, Coraline simply comes out and asks her Other Mother if there is a key to a particular locked door. Her Other Mother is more than willing to cough up the key, which Coraline needs.

Death in Neil Gaiman's (1993) graphic novel *Death, The High Cost of Living* has one day every century to walk among the living so that she may experience the things she takes away from people every day. Though she has only one day, she decides to help Mad Hettie find her heart in order to prevent the death of her new friend Sexton. Her quest to find Mad Hettie's heart begins right after this and takes Death on a journey of fun, food, music, marbles, and haggling over the price of jewelry.

In *The Watchmen*, Laurie Juspechzyk (Silk Spectre II) has a conversation with Dr. Manhattan above the surface of the planet Mars. The conversation is a turning point in both their lives and is pivotal to the direction of the rest of the story. Through the conversation, Laurie learns that her biological father is Edward Blake (The Comedian) and Dr. Manhattan learns about miracles.

Early in Rucka's graphic novel *Whiteout*, U. S. Marshall Carrie Stetko was able to fend off a killer, but she lost two of her fingers in the process. Later in the story when

Carrie confronts a British spy and is trying to figure out who is responsible for the murders, she proves how capable she is at her job. Information such as treaties which pertain to Antarctica and what the British spy can and cannot do on the continent is available to her.

At a New Year's Eve party in A. Friedmann's *Breaking Up*, Chloe is able to avert a guaranteed brawl. Fast thinking on her feet helps Chloe divert Nicola's attention away from Mackenzie who is making out with Nicola's boyfriend. Though she has been concerned with Mackenzie's treatment of her all school year, she will not turn her back on her best friend.

In Clugston-Flores' *Blue Monday* after being on the receiving end of a practical joke Bleu and her friends exact their revenge. Bleu and her friends are able to talk their way into their friend's bedroom and proceed to switch out all of his posters of naked women with ones of male models. When the boys get home they are horrified by the results and a series of pranks in the "one-up" category ensues.

In Deutsch's graphic novel *Hereville: How Mirka Got Her Sword*, Mirka has to out think a mysterious pig before the pig gets the best of her. Earlier in the story, the pig put a curse on her family. Laying in wait, she is able to catch the pig and gets the pig to submit to her.

A few of the books explored were the first part to a series, *100 Bullets: First call, Last Shot, Whiteout, Potential, and Blue Monday* and the topics discussed can be explored further in later titles. Issues with artwork as mentioned in chapter 1 of this study were not analyzed due to the wide range of art styles presented in the sampling.

Artwork

The art work today, like that of the 1930s, 40s and 50s is dependent on the artist. G. Rucka states in the afterword of *Whiteout* that, “The comic is nothing without the art.” He continues to state, “We need an artist who can draw people and not caricatures. Who can make it all look, if not real, at least realistic. Most importantly, we need an artist who can draw women. Not Bad Girls, not Pin-Ups, not Top-Heavy Genetic Aberrations, but women” (Rucka, 1999, p. 116).

The art styles vary greatly from the realistic in the pages of *Whiteout*, *Watchmen*, and *Coraline*, to the stylized art work in *Blue Monday* and *Ultra: Seven Day*, to the cartoon looks of *Hereville*, *Batgirl: Year One* and *100 Bullets: First Shot, Last Call*, to the amateurish *Inside Out* and *Potential*. The portrayals of women on the page were no less clear and women were presented in an authentic manner with real world problems and real world interactions with other characters. With this in mind, those who decide to pick up a graphic novel would be reading about any number of topics and will be treated to any number of portrayals of women.

Gender Roles

The gender roles of the females in the sampling of graphic novels vary. The women presented are lesbian, students, daughters, mothers, law enforcement officials, vigilante crime fighters, explorers, friends, librarians, data retrieval experts, the living embodiment of Death, witches, spies, pranksters, daydreamers, girlfriends, superheroes, criminals, and someone with a debilitating mental disorder. Every one of the female characters is either very real or very not. However, as you read each book, they all seem real.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Problem

This study sought to discover how graphic novels portrayed women. The problems with past illustrations and storytelling in comic books and graphic novels as stated in Chapter 1 were addressed. The concerns with not depicting women in an authentic manner and what the gender roles of women were in graphic novels were explored.

This study explores thirteen titles, which had a predominantly female protagonist in the story. This study could be of use to any teacher librarian who is trying to include more graphic novels into their collection and include them in book discussions. The study provides examples of the complexity of the women and those who interact with them on pages which are fifty percent or more pictures and illustrations. This study could also be used when making considerations for titles to be purchased for a graphic novel collection in a school library.

Conclusions

The researcher found that graphic novels with a target audience of young adults portray women in an authentic manner. The various roles depicted on the pages and the reactions they are given are in line with a twenty-first century way of thinking about women's roles. A variety of issues from sex, boyfriends, and eating disorders etc. were all analyzed. In the graphic novels with a female as the main protagonist, the following issues were explored: (1) what are the interpersonal relationships female characters have; (2) who gives women power in the story; (3) what are the real world problems the main

female character has to cope with; (4) do women in graphic novels use their mind over the sword.

Depending on the graphic novel and the complexity of the issue looked at, some of the books in the study fall into multiple categories. Women are portrayed not as men in women's bodies. Instead, they are portrayed as women with feelings, problems, family concerns and nuances which make them stand out from the male characters in the same stories. They may be portrayed as confident while at the same time vulnerable. A variety of artwork styles and strong story telling is often times what is important.

Recommendations

This study focused on graphic novels with a young adult audience which had a female character in a leading role. The books chosen were published in the United States in the year 1993 or later. For further study, a researcher may chose to include publications from other countries. Another possibility to further research on this topic would be to look at who is writing and illustrating the graphic novels and what the differences are between male and female created characters. Another study could be to use the themes studied in this paper to look at portrayal of women or female characters in regular prose fiction.

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APPENDIX A**LIST OF GRAPHIC NOVELS**

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