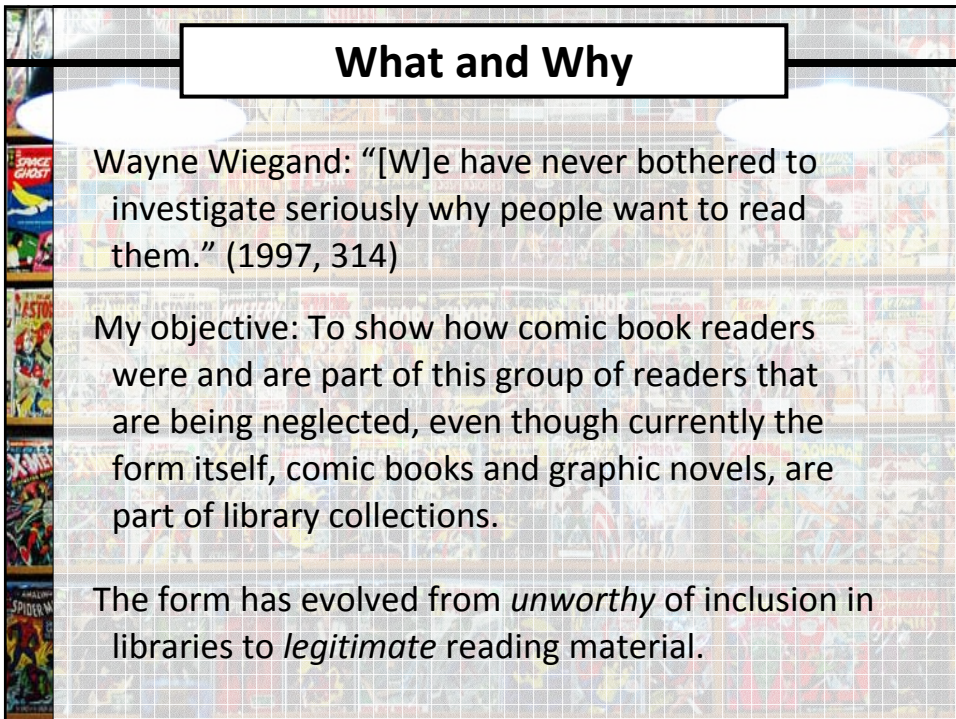


**Slighting certain kinds of readers:
searching for comic book and
graphic novel readers
in LIS literature**

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What and Why

Wayne Wiegand: “[W]e have never bothered to investigate seriously why people want to read them.” (1997, 314)

My objective: To show how comic book readers were and are part of this group of readers that are being neglected, even though currently the form itself, comic books and graphic novels, are part of library collections.

The form has evolved from *unworthy* of inclusion in libraries to *legitimate* reading material.

The pioneers

Nyberg (2002) notes three types of articles in the early debate about comics:

- Essays or opinion pieces
- Articles based on personal and anecdotal information
- Research attempts, especially in Education

Scott (1990) and Tilley (2007) agreed on the need to expand the discipline knowledge about comic book readership:

- Who reads comics books and why?
- Do your readers benefit intellectually, socially, or emotionally from reading comics?
- What do young readers like about comic books?
- What motivates a reader to select a comic book for voluntary reading instead of a different print format?

The explosion

Articles and books from the 1990s to the present day provide practical information about graphic novels: directed to a professional audience, these publications look at matters of language and aesthetics, selection, acquisition, cataloguing, and promotion.

In contrast, the exploration and analysis of comic book readers is a minor or inexistent topic.

	2000-2004	2005-2010
Monographs	3	8
Journal articles	73	+117

The examples

Lyga, A.W., & Lyga, B. 2004. *Graphic novels in your media center: A definitive guide*. Westport, Conn.: Libraries Unlimited.

Brenner, R. E. 2007. *Understanding manga and anime*. Westport, Conn.: Libraries Unlimited.

Serchay, D. S. 2008. *The librarian's guide to graphic novels for children and tweens*. New York: Neal-Schuman Publishers.

Snowball, C. 2005. Teenage Reluctant Readers and Graphic Novels. *Young Adult Library Services*, 3 (4), 43-45.

Snowball, C. 2007. Researching Graphic Novels and Their Teenage Readers. *LIBRES*, 17 (1), 1-20. Available at: <http://libres.curtin.edu.au/libres17n1/>

Snowball, C. 2008. *Graphic novels: enticing teenagers into the library*.

Retrieved March 2009 from

<http://alia.org.au/~csnow/research/index.html>

Snowball, C. 2008. Teenagers talking about reading and libraries. *Australian Academic and Research Libraries*, 39(2), 106-118.

The GN reader in library practice

Lyga & Lyga discussion of why graphic novels are useful and needed is inclusive of readers.

Visual literacy: readers who cannot visualize when reading and those who are dependent on visual clues to keep their interest.

Reluctant readers: readers who have difficulty with comprehension and others, mainly boys, who are simply less attracted to the materials generally offered for reading.



The GN reader in library practice

GN readers in the midst of Manga's fan culture.

Brenner notes three reasons for the appeal of manga to U.S. readers:

- Manga aesthetics and style
- Readers discover unfamiliar and challenging customs, ideas, and traditions
- Readers feel they own a "reading space" away from adults



The GN reader in library practice

Serchay's argument focuses on the educational benefits of graphic novels, especially for reluctant readers.

The idea of pleasure reading is mentioned tangentially.

Krashen's *The Power of Reading*:

- Comic books as light reading, thus their connection with reluctant readers
- Comic books can be a conduit to "real book" reading



The GN reader in library research

Snowball's research focus is "to investigate the inclusion of graphic novels in library collections and whether this format encourages teenagers to use libraries and read in their free time."

Graphic novel collections:

- Lack of consideration for the medium
- Lack of users interested in the medium
- In many cases, GN are not part of the collection development policy
- Censorship through non-selection



The GN reader in library research

Snowball's research challenges:

- The concept of nonreaders
- The inherent connection between teenagers and graphic novels

The representation of graphic novels as aids for reluctant readers affects the credibility of graphic novels as a valid and proper reading material:

- Interest of avid readers in graphic novels
- Librarians, graphic novels and literary merit

Comparing the past and the present

Steele (2005) summarizes the supporting arguments for comics in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s:

- Literacy tools for reluctant and poor readers
- Catalysts for traditional literature
- Healthy conduits for fantasy and escape from reality
- Enablers of social skills like sharing

Horner (2006) comments on the positive attitudes of contemporary librarians

- Graphic novels as aids for literacy
- Graphic novels as stepping stone to move onto better things
- Graphic novels as a bait to lure YA into the library

Conclusions

1. Libraries represent and collect the culture of a certain historical moment, thus the presence of GN in libraries recognize the value and importance of this element of contemporary culture and especially its many readers.

2. The exposed arguments help to perpetuate stereotypes about the quality, the use, and the readers of this literary and artistic medium of expression.

3. Comic books are a rich, diverse and multilayered reading material that offer works for almost any kind of reader: reluctant, visual, avid, or genre-focused.