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Final Reflection

Directed Reading LIS 5960

When I began this class, my aspirations were to learn a brief history of how the public opinion of comics has evolved, and about how the medium of comics could be used to record a person's oral history, in the form of a graphic memoir. I sought to read many examples of graphic memoirs, on a large variety of topics. Finally, I wanted to research information on how comics are being used in libraries, and how the subgenre of graphic memoirs could be used to help build community in the space of libraries.

In *Understanding Comics*, McCloud (1994) states that comic books were initially thought of as "crude, poorly-drawn, semi-literate, cheap, disposable kiddie fare," (pg. 3) and unworthy of consideration as a medium for information or literature. In this line of thought, at best, they were only for children, filled with, "...superheroes and funny animals..." (Chute, 2017, pg. 2), and at worst, were "an evasion of reading and almost its opposite," as well as a gateway to juvenile delinquency. (Wertham, 1954, pg. 140). While comics can be about superheroes or anthropomorphized animals, those are just two of an infinite number of genres that comics can be about. Additionally, although comics have previously not been accepted as a medium for literature, today many many comics are literature award winners, joining the ranks of Toni Morrison and Ernest Hemingway. Will Eisner (2008) states,

"The format of comics presents a montage of both word and image, and the reader is this required to exercise both visual and verbal interpretive skills. The regimens of art (e.g., perspective, symmetry, line) and the regimens of literature (e.g., grammar, plot, syntax) become superimposed on each other. The reading of a graphic novel is an act of both aesthetic perception and intellectual pursuit." (pg. 2)

Sometimes creating a graphic memoir can be therapeutic for the creator. This is the case for Tom Hart, who wrote *The Art of the Graphic Memoir*, as well as *Rosalie Lightning*. In his book, *The Art of the Graphic Memoir*, Tom Hart discusses how creating another of his work, *Rosalie Lightning*, allowed him to focus his attention on a creative outlet after the death of his daughter, and allowed him to honor his daughter's memory through graphic memoir.

The subject of graphic memoirs can be as diverse and multi-faceted as the imagination will allow. One often used subject of graphic memoirs is disease, as can be found in the books *The Hospital Suite* and *Monsters*. This phenomenon has born an emerging subgenre known as graphic medicine.

Graphic memoirs also could be coming of age stories, such as the case with *One Dirty Tree* and *Tomboy*. They can also be a moment of personal growth, such as Erin Nations' *Gumballs* and his transition from female to male, or a collection of personal memories tied together by a subject matter. This is the case for Lucy Knisley's *Relish*, which not only shares her memories and the food that unites them, but also serves as a recipe book so you can cook the same foods.

In *The Art of the Graphic Memoir*, Hart (2018) states, "Comics are inherently visual, like cinema or animation, but they are also intimate, making a one-to-one connection with the reader as do novels or poetry." (pg. 12). This sentiment of making one-on-one connections is at the heart of comics collections in libraries. "According to the website Graphic Policy's mining of Facebook data, half of all Americans who identify as 'comic fans' are females and roughly 40% of comics readers belong to some form of ethnic or racial minority." (Wood, 2018, pg. 25) While the comics community is diverse, many of the gatekeepers of the community are not.

“[They do not] always welcome new readers especially anyone who [doesn’t] conform to comic fandom’s perceived norms (white, male, nerdy) or who [doesn’t] already know their way around comics culture...As librarians, it’s a part of our job ...to make sure our patrons understand that comics are for everybody.” (Wood, 2018, pg. 27)

In addition to creating connections and fostering a sense of community through the use of comics, libraries play a large role in the commerce of the comics industry. “Libraries and similar institutions represent 10% of the comics market-not including manga purchases (Wood, 2018, pg. 26) Furthermore, libraries employ a wide array of programming to create connections among patrons, as well as to highlight their own comic collections. Some of these programs include Comic Jams and Staple Parties (Wood, 2018, pg. 141), where patrons can work with other patrons to create their own comics, visits and discussions with graphic novelists, either in person or through web-based communication (Goldsmith, 2005, pgs. 75-77), and of course, book talks and book clubs specifically designed for the discussion of graphic novels (Goldsmith, 2005, pgs. 79-81).

What I learned from doing the program proposal project was that there’s a lot to consider when planning for a program. Every inevitability has to be considered and each of those has to have a solution. I had previously thought of the connection and comics and libraries as mostly reading comics, such as in the form of a book club. Reading the two texts that I read about comics in libraries, *Graphic Novels Now* and *Comic Book Collections and Programming*, taught me that there are a variety of ways to include comics in library collections, as well as a variety of programs to help highlight those collections. Working on the programming opened my mind to a more personal approach to making comics using the medium of comics almost as a daily journal.

I initially proposed this subject for the directed reading class because of my interest in comics and because I've always been an avid comic reader. My perception of understanding comics was shattered because as much as I thought I knew, I learned so much more through the readings. In completing this class I feel well equipped and well informed to help to create or strengthen the comics collections and programming as whichever library I may be employed.

Works Cited

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