

AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE OPINIONS OF PUBLIC LIBRARY STAFF  
ON HOW AND WHERE A GRAPHIC, COMIC, AND CARTOON COLLECTION  
SHOULD BE SHELVED

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## Abstract

**Background:** In 2006, after a two year review, the Dewey Decimal Classification System [DDCS] decided that all graphic novels, cartoon strips, comic books, manga, fotonovelas, caricatures, and similar material should be stored under one classification code in the Dewey run – 741.5. Literature from before and after this date however, shows that librarians find it extremely difficult to decide where to shelve their graphic collections, and suggests that few if any choose to use the DDCS method.

**Aims:** The study aimed to test whether the DDCS method of classifying, and by extension shelving, graphic novels etc. was adequate by gathering the opinions of librarians across the UK on how and where they currently shelve their graphic novels etc. and what they would do if they were given complete freedom. The hypothesis was that librarians would prefer a method of shelving closer to fiction practice, such as alphabetical or genre-based, to the DDCS method.

**Methods:** The study used a form of triangulation, focusing mainly on an online questionnaire, but also using observational research and interviews. The questionnaire was distributed using snowball sampling and the data collected was analysed using simple data analysis including the creation of graphs. There were seventy respondents to the questionnaire. In addition to questions on shelving practice, respondents were also asked about their fears over content and complaints.

**Results:** Out of the seventy respondents, sixty-nine had graphic novels in their libraries and the one who did not worked in a reference only library. Of those sixty-nine, forty-one respondents shelved their graphic novels etc. in no order despite some of these having over one thousand five hundred titles. None of the respondents shelved their graphic novels etc. using the DDCS method. Much fewer librarians showed concern over violent content than anticipated, and the strongest concerns were over sexist and religious content.

**Conclusion:** This study supported the hypothesis that the majority of librarians would not shelve their graphic novels etc. by the DDCS code. It did not, however, find a preferred method. Instead the results of this study suggested that many librarians have given up trying to employ any system of shelving. There were some limitations with the results, the most noticeable of which is that the respondents did not constitute a representative sample. Several suggestions for further research are suggested based on the results of this research.

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## Chapter 1. Introduction

### **1.1. Background to the study – Dewey’s decision**

In February 2006 an article entitled ‘Comic-book conundrum: Cracked’ appeared on *The Dewey blog* (Joan, 2006). After an extensive two year review, staff at the Dewey Decimal Classification System [DDCS] had decided that the best method of classification for “comic books, graphic novels, fotonovelas, cartoons, caricatures, comic strips [and manga]” (Joan, 2006) was to include all of them under one heading – 741.5. This placed all of this diverse material firmly together and under the Dewey category of ‘700 – Arts & Recreation’. When considering a library, however, it should not take the reader long to see the potential difficulties with this decision. Even accepting that many libraries do not strictly shelve everything by any classification system, systems such as the DDCS are there primarily as tools of reference for the physical action of shelving material. On the same website, the DDCS published a list of examples, showing where certain popular titles would be kept (Beall, 2006). [For the interest of the reader, this list can be found as Appendix A.] It includes *Rupert Bear*, a young children’s classic, *Azumanga Daioh*, a cult manga series about a group of school-girls, and the *Nikopol Trilogy*, an adult graphic novel set in a futuristic urban state with a fascist government and a blood-spattered front cover. A librarian putting these three books on the same shelf would be likely to attract complaints from concerned parents and other members of the community.

The argument for putting these books together is, however, simple and compelling; for those library users who are fans of graphic [visual, not explicit] material,

is it not easier for them to browse in one place rather than wander about the library searching in different corners for odd titles that they might enjoy?

To look further into these issues, this study will attempt to gauge the opinions of public library staff, firstly as to where in the library graphic novels, cartoon strips, comic books, manga, and similar materials belong, i.e. on which shelf in which section, and secondly on how they should be shelved, whether by a simple alphabetic order, by chronological order within their series, or by their genre. It will use the opinions gathered to discuss the different ways of shelving graphic novels, cartoon strips, comic books, manga, and similar materials and make recommendations for best practice.

NB: To save including the phrase ‘graphic novels, cartoon strips, comic books, manga, and similar materials’ in sentences throughout this dissertation, the words ‘graphic novels etc.’ shall from here on refer to all of this material. Though not ideal, this will hopefully emphasise the fact that four very different formats are being discussed throughout this piece of research, and, although there are similarities between them, each should be considered a unique format in its own right. [More information on what these four formats are can be found in section 1.3. Definitions.]

## **1.2. Aims and Objectives**

Aim: to critically investigate whether all graphic novels, comic books, comic strips, manga, and similar materials [graphic novels etc.] should be shelved together, and whether they should be split by subject, type, genre, author or illustrator name, reading age or other method.

Objectives:

1. to investigate the difficulties of cataloguing graphic novels etc.,
2. to consider whether the decision by staff at the Dewey Decimal Classification System [from here-on 'DDCS'] to classify all such material under one classification code number is useful, necessary, or acceptable to the actual shelving of these materials,
3. to consider the strengths and weaknesses of alternative methods,
4. to gather the opinions of library staff on the shelving of these materials,
5. and to make recommendations for best practice.

Hypothesis:

The DDCS method of shelving graphic novels etc. is unhelpful to everyday library users. Other methods more closely related to shelving fiction would be more appropriate. Librarians will prefer to shelve graphic novels etc. by a fiction stock method such as alphabetical, than to shelve these titles in the Dewey run.

### **1.3. Definitions**

Graphic novels etc. should be considered not as a genre, but as a format (Fletcher-Spear, 2005). There are many genres within graphic novels, such as “memoir, crime fiction, coming of age stories, and action stories” (O’English, 2006), as there are many genres and subsets within manga such as Shonen, Shojo, and Kodomo, all of which have different target audiences (Imrie, 2009). It would be unnecessary to define all of these genres for this particular study, as none are specifically referred to in the

questionnaire, but, for the information of the reader, the following definitions of the four main types that shall be talked about in this dissertation, namely graphic novels, cartoon strips, comic books, and manga, have been provided and are useful to bear in mind for this piece of research.

### 1.3.1. Graphic novels

The simplest definition is that posed by Rudiger and Schliesman (2007) – they are “book length comics”. This can be deceptive, however, there are few seven hundred page graphic novels [there are one or two]. To expand the definition a little, graphic novels are titles similar in appearance, thickness, and length to books, as opposed to comics that are flexible like magazines, in which the story is told in visual format, predominately utilising speech bubbles as the method of narrative and dialogue [this use of speech bubbles is the same for all four types]. They can be ‘stand alone’ stories, or collections of short stories within a volume. Many are serials, the most popular consisting of dozens of individual books with stories that further the overall tale of the main character, much in the same way as a television serial or a series of novels about one set of characters. The longest running series, such as *Batman*, often kill off and add new characters to progress the ‘world’ of the novel and include ‘spin-off’ characters who appear in more than one series, such as the character of Catwoman who was introduced as a character in *Batman* and went on to have her own stories. More recently, graphic novel editions of many ‘proper’ novels are being published, such as works by Shakespeare, Dickens, and Tolkien, along with ancient myths and popular faerie stories.

### 1.3.2. Cartoon strips

Cartoon strips are the continuation of newspaper cartoons such as *Peanuts* and their Scottish equivalent *The Perishers*. Other examples include *Garfield*, *Andy Capp*, and *Nemi*. They tend to be black and white drawings, often published as landscape, rather than portrait, books with two or four cartoons, each comprising three or four frames, on each page. As opposed to graphic novels, where writers and artists come and go over the years, cartoon strips tend to be written and drawn by one or two individuals (cartoonists), who continue to create them for their whole career. One example of this is Reg Smythe, the author of *Andy Capp*. Like graphic novels, cartoon strips will tell different stories about the main characters, but, because most began their lives as newspaper strips where only one cartoon [three of four frames] was published per day, every cartoon tells its own joke. Cartoon strips are always funny, even if the joke is usually on the star. Cartoon strips are also usually set in the ‘real world’ and tell jokes about people and situations that the reader recognises such as Andy Capp’s long suffering wife, Flo, Charlie Brown’s run-ins with bullies, Wellington’s desperate attempts to give Boot the dog a bath, or Nemi’s relationships with friends and boyfriends. They do incorporate touches of fantasy though, such as the inner monologues of the animals. The most famous of these is Snoopy, the dog from *Peanuts*, the most elaborate perhaps are the crabs that appear in *The Perishers* and hold assemblies that are half religious gatherings and half committee meetings, with a little scientific development thrown in, as they attempt to establish the meaning of “the eyeballs in the sky” – which belong to the dog Boot, who watches them each summer with increasing incredulity. Although the word ‘strips’ suggest the format of progressing frames, some newspaper

cartoons are single frame jokes, which are also produced in book form as yearly annuals or special editions, such as collections of wartime newspaper cartoons.

### 1.3.3. Comic books

Comic books [or just ‘comics’] look like magazines; graphic novels look like books. Often comic books are created by the same writers and illustrators as graphic novels and feature the same characters. In fact, many graphic novels are actually the amalgamation of several previously published comic books with some additional full page cover art or new short stories. Andelson (1992) found that forty-two and a half percent of the graphic novels in Bowling Green State’s University’s Popular Culture Library had already “existed as an earlier, other format”. One good example of this is *Witchblade featuring Tomb Raider: Covenant* where the first four volumes [or comic books] of *Witchblade* are republished together along with both another short story featuring Sara Pezzini, the main character of *Witchblade*, and Lara Croft, the Tomb Raider, at the beginning of the book, and the first volume of *Cyblade/Shi: The Battle for Independents*, which also features the character of Sara Pezzini, at the back. Comic books are shorter and more flimsy than graphic novels and so more easily damaged. Although cheaper, many original comics are extremely valuable, especially when unread and therefore in ‘mint condition’, and there is a huge collectors’ market for them. The majority of the best known Marvel and DC graphic novels such as *Superman*, *Spider-Man*, and *Watchmen*, began their lives as comics.

#### 1.3.4. Manga

“Manga are not comics, at least not as most people know them in the West. The Japanese have liberated the medium’s language ... and expanded its potential to embrace long free-form narratives on almost every subject...” (Gravett, 2004). In the West, however, manga is the collective name given to many Japanese art forms and the Japanese equivalent of graphic novels. In terms of look, manga publications are the closest to ordinary paperbacks of all four formats [at least in the West, in Japan they come in many formats including A4 comic books]. Unlike graphic novels, which are printed on special paper, many manga series are printed on ordinary book paper and contain black and white drawings apart from the first few pages, which are sometimes in colour. Like all Japanese texts, most manga is published from right to left and back to front by Western standards, and therefore most have a message on what we would consider the front page saying ‘stop, don’t spoil the ending, turn to the back’. Like Western cartoon strips, manga series are often written by the same mangaka [author] from start to finish, and like graphic novels, most are of novel length.

NB: Just to restate, throughout this dissertation ‘graphic novels’ refers to only this one type, ‘graphic novels etc.’ refers to all four types.

## Chapter 2. Literature Review

### **2. 1. A brief history of graphic novels etc.**

Almost all of the academics who cite Eisner's *Contract with God and Other Tenement Stories* as the first real graphic novel, such as O'English et. al. (2006), write that this is debated; few of these articles, however, suggest any rivals. *Contract* was published in 1978 and this is a good indication of the time frame of this material, although of course illustrated texts in Britain go back to the eleventh century if not before in such forms as illuminated Christian texts. Comic books have been popular in the UK and America since the 1940's. Neill (2008) writes that an extremely wide range of genres were originally offered, but that by the 1960's and 70's, the superhero genre, monopolised chiefly by Marvel and DC, had become by far the most popular. By 1970, most other genres and many other publishers had died out altogether and the 'Big Two' counted for eighty percent of the market (Lavin 1998). Even in 1997, despite the entry of over a hundred independent comic book companies to the scene, Marvel and DC publications continued to account for over fifty percent of sales, with Image Comics taking about fourteen percent (Lavin, 1998). More recently, graphic novels and comic books have branched out into the wide range of genres that they began with. Since the success of 'serious' titles such as *Maus*, a World War II tale where the Nazis are depicted as cats and the Jews as mice, and *Persepolis*, a memoir about a girl's children in Iran, many publishers have also begun to offer graphic novel versions of established books such as Victorian classics, Shakespearean and other Early Modern plays, and The Bible. Comic books appear not just in Britain and America, but other Western countries

such as France which gave birth to both *Asterix* and *Tintin*. Many European countries are still producing comic books and graphic novels as can be seen by ‘Best of Europe’ displays in shops such as Forbidden Planet and Travelling Man. One of the newest graphic novel series to be created, *The 99*, comes from Kuwait and is intended by its creator, Dr. Naif Al-Mutawa, to portray a more tolerant and creative side of Islam to the rest of the world (Teshkeel Media Group, 2009; Al-Mutawa, 2009).

As discussed in the definitions section, cartoons began in newspapers as satirical light relief from the headlines. These can easily be seen in Victorian papers with cartoonists such as Punch, but can be traced as far as the Georgian age and beyond when cartoonists poked fun at the great figures of the day. One such cartoon depicts two of England’s most famous actors, both starring in rival productions of one of Shakespeare’s plays at different theatres in London, screaming at each other to prove that their declamation was superior. Others spoofed Prime Ministers like Disraeli. Cartoon strips, which had three or four frames in which the story progressed as opposed to just one frame and caption, became popular in tabloid papers such as *The Daily Mirror* from the 1970’s. These broke away from direct political and social satire and instead told the serialised stories of families or groups of friends such as Charlie Brown and his classmates in *Peanuts*.

The word ‘manga’, was first used in Japan in 1814 (Imrie, 2009), but the various Japanese comic formats now collectively known as manga have gained Western popularity over the past ten to fifteen years, beginning with cult children’s television programmes such as Pokémon and gradually expanding to a youth and adult audience. Manga is mass produced in Japan and appears in “telephone-directory-sized publications” (Imrie, 2009), but is published mainly in ‘tankobon’ [book] form in the

UK. Most manga titles have age banding on the covers, which serve as a guideline to purchasers and library users. Some of the most popular manga ‘subsets’ may be of concern to librarians, such as Yuri, which are stories about lesbians aimed at a male readership; others though, such as Kodomo, are aimed primarily at children. There are difficulties in translating the idea of genre into the Japanese medium, hence the use of the term subsets. Many of the subsets that readers in the West might think of as genres are really groups aimed at different audiences such as children, young girls, and adult males. There may be very different sorts of stories within these groups, which is why the term genre does not quite fit.

Over the past five to ten years, graphic novels and comic books have exploded in popularity due to the number of film versions released. Titles such as *X-men*, *Spider-Man*, *Batman* and *Watchmen* have included some of Britain and Hollywood’s A-list actors, such as the pairing of Patrick Stewart as Professor X and Sir Ian McKellen as Magneto in the *X-men* trilogy and Halle Berry who played both the character of Storm in the *X-men* films and the title character in *Catwoman*. The much publicised death of Heath Ledger, who won several posthumous awards for his portrayal of the Joker, shortly before the release of *The Dark Knight*, made that Batman tale one of the ‘must see’ films of 2009. Graphic novels from outside the superhero genre were also chosen by filmmakers, such as Neil Gaiman’s *Stardust*, starring Michelle Pfeiffer and Robert de Niro.

Manga also has a sister genre of films called Anime [animation]. Anime can be half an hour cartoons or big budget films, the most popular of which, such as Hayao Miyazaki’s *Spirited Away* can be Oscar winning creations. Major titles can become famous around the world and Miyazaki is considered one of the greatest living

animation directors (Jolin, 2009). Anime series based on manga titles can also become cult successes and most UK universities have an Anime Soc [society] within their Student's Union. Several libraries also have anime clubs partnered with their manga collections.

Although at least three of the four forms discussed here have had only a relatively short history in the UK, they have become very popular very quickly, especially with secondary school and university age students. Much therefore has been written on how graphic novels etc. might fit in to library environments, and what they could add to the library's collections.

## **2.2. Graphic novels in public libraries part one – the confusion**

The debate began by asking whether there was such a place at all for a medium perceived as violent, highly sexualised, and illiterate. Comic books in particular had a difficult and prejudiced history due to figures such as Dr. Frederick Wertham, who spent much of the 1940's and 50's trying to 'break' the comic book industry in America by advocating the banning and burning of many titles (Neill, 2008). As the realms of graphic novels etc. expanded, however, UK librarians began to see the merits in titles that had wide appeal to many of their problem groups such as young males and readers who had English as a second language. As early as 1974 Ballard and Kirby wrote, "Why comic books? Because kids are reading them. Do we need any other justification?" Thirty years later, Ireland (2004) repeated their sentiment, "Why build a graphic novel collection? Because kids love them!" Now almost all UK public library authorities appear to have some graphic novels etc. [see results section].

New questions have emerged, however. If libraries are going to have these titles, where in the library should they go? Are they for children or adults? Should they be offered to the most reluctant readers, or should they be kept out of reach of the most vulnerable users? Are they fiction or artwork? Are they better off with sci-fi or with poetry, plays, and jokes? Should they be on shelves at all – would boxes be easier? Library literature has been asking these questions for the last ten years, and many opinions have been offered. There have been several studies showing that no-one quite knows what to do with graphic novels etc. in libraries. Most have looked at what libraries currently do; there have been no major studies, however, asking librarians what methods they would prefer to use and why.

In research conducted earlier this year, Wright (2009), discovered that there is little consensus between the public libraries of different Canadian cities as to where graphic novels should be placed within their classifications. One title, *Persepolis*, a memoir written by a young Iranian girl about her childhood, was classified as Adult Fiction in Calgary, Young Adult Dewey in London, and Adult Dewey in Toronto, while Vancouver had copies in the Dewey runs of both its Young Adult and Adult collections. Of the six titles that Wright (2009) looked at, none were placed in the same category by all four libraries and four of the titles, *Maus*, *Persepolis*, *Watchmen*, and *Dark Knight*, were classified Adult in two of the library systems and Young Adult in the other two. Wright (2009) also found other discrepancies between the library systems and within the systems themselves; London classified eighty percent of its graphic novels as Young Adult, while Calgary put five sixths into the Adult collection.

Gorman (2003) found five different ways in which graphic novels were classified, including as non-fiction in the Dewey run, unclassified in a browsing section, and on a

completely separate shelf, away from fiction, non-fiction, Adult, Young Adult, or Children's. Heaney (2007) suggested another approach all together, to put a small collection in plastic crates on top of tables at easy height for 'flipping through'. Weiner (2008), despairing of finding any system that worked in his library, created his own and published a report on it in the Texas Library Journal.

Apart from the list provided by the DDC (Beall, 2006) are no systems of cataloguing graphic novels etc. that library professionals can follow. Even this one may make no sense to the users themselves. Two versions of *Dennis the Menace* are under two separate codes, 741.56973 and 741.59411, for example, as opposed to *The Amazing Spider-Man* and *Batman* which are under the same code, 741.5973 [please see appendix A for the full list]. Beall wrote as a brief introduction to the list:

“The sample title list is intended as a guide to help classifiers with the new distinction between 741.5 and 741.56 given in the February 2006 posting of New and Changed Entries.”

(Beall, 2006)

Clearly there has been some confusion to warrant the publication of this list. The list does not provide any explanations, however, only examples, which makes it difficult for librarians to use as a guide. Despite the lack of guidance offered to librarians on how to shelve their graphic novels etc. libraries are increasingly encouraged to have graphic novels etc. as part of their collections. The reason for this encouragement is clear to all those concerned; as Ballard and Kirby implied (1974), and as many others have stated,

graphic novels etc. bring new readers, and potentially therefore new members, to the library.

### **2.3. Graphic novels in public libraries part two – the mousetrap**

Many librarians and teachers claim graphic novels etc. are useful tools to encourage children and young adults to start reading. The implication of the word ‘start’ is that graphic novels etc. will one day be put aside in favour of other reading materials. This can be seen in various quotations about graphic novels etc. in the literature; Dickinson, for example, writes that “deep down, some of us want the reading of graphic novels to lead to ‘real books’” (2007). Hurst uses a less apologetic turn of phrase:

“Like many library professionals, it excites me to get people interested in reading, especially children and young adults, which is why I advocate the use of comic books and graphic novels in public libraries. Many readers are attracted to this genre, and it is a great way to... attract new ones to the joys of reading.”

(Hurst, 2004)

Lee (2004) adds the following:

“In public libraries they [graphic novels etc.] can be used as a focal point to encourage readers who may not use the library, to explore it more fully.”

It is unclear as to quite how this works as presumably these reluctant readers, young adults, young men, and ‘problem groups’, would need to enter the library and find the graphic novels etc. before they could be suitably encouraged by them.

Gravett (2005), however, takes issue with the idea of graphic novels etc. as the librarian’s great tool to unlock their problem groups, as such sentiments suggest that graphic novels are ultimately ‘less-than’, crutches that can be discarded once proper literacy is established, and not a distinct and equal form in their own right. The very statement that librarians use – that they get reluctant readers ‘into the library’ – make graphic novels etc. sound somewhat like cheese with the library doors as the trap slamming shut behind them. This only works however, if there are signs outside telling people that the library includes graphic novels etc. and it is harder to see it working if the graphic novels etc. are tucked in a forgotten corner of the library along with the other ‘less-than’ stock.

Some writers advocate putting graphic novels etc. in specific locations to be seen by the less able, less enthusiastic readers. One popular suggestion is near to computers so that users who want nothing to do with the library’s other books can flick through a comic while waiting for the internet to load. This part of the literature suggests that graphic novels etc. are titles that can be flicked through in a few seconds rather than books that can be savoured by their readers.

Despite the perception that graphic novels etc. are for reluctant readers, some research has in fact suggested that graphic novels are an upper-class pastime rather than something for less able members of the libraries community [if the assumption that reluctant readers often come from poorer families is accepted] (Neill, 2008). This could be due to their cost. Most new paperback books will cost six to eight pounds; new

graphic novels are closer to sixteen and large editions can be up to thirty-five pounds or more. These prices can also be a concern for libraries as a large intake of graphic novels can stretch a library's budget.

#### **2.4. Graphic novel etc. complications**

It would be foolish to try and tell librarians that most books, even most paperbacks, are the same size; compare for instance a Penguin edition to the Oxford edition of the same classic. If there is a broad church of height, however, graphic novels etc. certainly do not fit into it. Cartoon strips, as already stated, are often landscape books that stick out on shelves, some comic books are double the height and a twentieth of the thickness of an ordinary paperback, and graphic novels can be anywhere between a quarter to twice as thick as a hardback. For a library with standard shelving, manga titles can be the only ones that actually fit (Brenner, 2007).

“In my own public library's collection we have separated manga from the Western graphic novels simply because of size and space. Intermingling the manga with the much larger and thinner Western graphic novels led to messy shelves and tilted volumes...”

(Brenner, 2007)

Similarly in Barnsley Central Library, these differences in size and shape are probably the reason why Young Adult manga was integrated into the alphabetical teen fantasy

section, while *Asterix* sat on the spill over shelf for large size children's fiction, and the comic books were stuck alongside books about puberty [see results section].

In addition to size, one of the biggest concerns in the library literature has been about the fragility of these titles, especially in the case of comic books. Thin, tall, and relatively cheap to produce, comic books can quickly become damaged. Some libraries receive regular deliveries of newspapers, magazines, and comics, which are only available for users to read inside the library, as they are less likely to be torn while read than they are when pushed into a bag for the journey home. Graphic novels are more sturdy than comic books, but they tend to be bound very tightly, which means that pages can split along the spine and fall out if the book is opened forcibly. Unfortunately the artwork in graphic novels usually goes right to the spine, meaning that the most respectful of readers will still want to stretch them simply so that they can see the whole page.

Theft is another issue raised by much of the literature. Lavin (1998) actually suggests that defacing the front cover before putting a graphic novel on the shelf is a good way of ensuring that fans do not pinch the entire collection. Although minor thefts may be unavoidable, and even common in some areas, most libraries have the user information to chase up non-returned books, and defacing artwork is not a good look for the collection. Lavin also suggests that many libraries that lose graphic novels etc. to theft and damage, find that this loss is offset by donations of unwanted comics from library user's own collections (1998).

One further difficulty with graphic novels etc. is noted by Brenner in his book *Understanding Manga and Anime*. He points out that manga are hard to catalogue

because librarians and cataloguers attempt to treat them as single volumes when they are, in fact, series:

“Manga series should be catalogued on one serial bibliographic record, distinguished by volume numbers, rather than individually on separate monograph records... it’s important to encourage librarians and cataloguers to follow this method. This... prevents slight differences in individual cataloguing of volumes causing librarians and patrons to miss volumes while searching.”

Brenner (2007)

Brenner here is talking about cataloguing, as opposed to either classifying or shelving; cataloguing graphic novels etc. is a whole separate area for research. His point is still relevant, and adds a further idea to the shelving of graphic novels and comic books [which are also series]. If graphic novels, comic books, manga, and some cartoon strips are strictly serialised, should librarians be considering shelving chronologically, rather than alphabetically?

There are difficulties, therefore, in having graphic novels etc. in libraries. These range from the physical properties of the mediums, such as size and binding, to more social concerns about theft, and the technicalities of organising serialised titles. Cost is another issue, although this can be offset a little by supplier policies and library discounts. Despite these problems, graphic novels etc. are increasingly being bought for public libraries. The biggest question however remains; that is, whereabouts on the library’s shelves to put them.

This literature review has suggested that the literature simply does not know. There are examples of confusions and discrepancies, along with those of librarians giving up on published systems and creating their own. In this study, the opinions of those librarians who work with graphic novels etc. in their everyday lives will be gathered to see whether there are any solutions to this problem.

## Chapter 3. Methodology

### **3.1. Choosing a method and choosing subjects**

Qualitative research is better suited to the study of opinions than quantitative, which deals more with figures. Although qualitative research is perhaps more complicated to analyse than its counterpart, it allows the research to delve deeper into the reasons for people's responses. As the purpose of this study was to investigate the opinions of public library staff, it was decided that a qualitative approach would be taken to the research.

With quantitative research it is important to gain as many responses as possible, so that the figures and measurements can be based on a large group. This should make the sample less biased. With qualitative research, it is less vital to have a large number of responses, as the data gathered can be anecdotal in nature and therefore not comparable with other pieces of evidence. Some of the questions asked, however, such as those relating to demographics or those with only one response, would lend themselves to some quantitative analysis and tools, such as graphs [see below].

It was intended that the study would have as wide a UK distribution as possible; it was also desirable to be able to compare and contrast responses. The most useful method was therefore a questionnaire. This could be carefully structured to produce comparable data, but could also gather some in-depth information. It would be relatively inexpensive to create, and would be fairly quick to complete. It could also be widely sent in a variety of ways including face-to-face, by post, and, most usefully, over the internet.

It was decided very early in the research project that the questionnaire would be in online format. This was partly to make it easy for the respondent to complete and return in their own time, but mainly so that it could be distributed across the UK. Gray (2004) lists six advantages to using online questionnaires; these are: low cost, quick inflow of data from many people, people complete at a time and place that suits respondents, data analysis of closed questions is relatively simple, respondents anonymity can be assured, and lack of interviewer bias. Several websites offering online survey tools were looked at, but in the end the site chosen was surveymonkey.com. Although many others offered the same or similar options, this website was the most visually attractive and questions were felt to be instinctive for respondents to complete. It also allowed for many different types of questions including one answer, multiple answers, sliding scales, and text boxes. This was important as some of the questions being considered required significantly different types of responses.

This research was concerned not only with how libraries that had graphic novels etc. in their stock dealt with those titles, but with libraries that did not have this material. An online questionnaire also lent itself to this requirement as 'skip logic' could be added to branch the questionnaire into two sections, one for those with graphic novels etc. and one for those without, which meant that respondents only had to fill in questions relevant to them, ensuring that they did not get bored with non-applicable questions.

Although at first the possibility of also surveying library users was considered, it was decided that this research would question only library staff. This was due to the amount of time given to the project, and also the increased complication of reaching a good number of users over a wide area. It was also decided that this research would focus only on public library staff, rather than staff in any other sector. The main reason

for this was that one of the difficulties with graphic novels etc. is the perceived danger of allowing children access to inappropriate material. This is not so great an issue in other sectors as school libraries will only have age-appropriate stock, academic libraries will only normally be visited by over eightheens, and libraries in commercial and other sectors will also not cater to children nor have much of this material. It is only in public libraries that adult graphic novels could be easily found and read by very young children. Complaints in general may also be more common in public libraries than in an academic or commercial sector, as public libraries are seen as using public money to buy books, or in other words, ‘wasting my money on these excuses for books’.

It was decided that respondents would be contacted by the method of snowball sampling. This is that “the researcher makes initial contact with a small group of people who are relevant to the research topic and then uses these to establish contacts with others” (Bryman, 2001). The main disadvantage with snowball sampling is that “it is very unlikely that the sample will be representative of the population” (Bryman, 2001). Essentially as only those interested will respond to a questionnaire on any given subject, results from that questionnaire cannot be said to represent the population. Gray, however, suggests that this is not only a problem with snowball sampling, but that any online questionnaire is unlikely to provide a valid sample:

“With Web-based surveys... there is no control over who completes the survey form. This means that respondents will comprise a volunteer rather than a random sample, with corresponding threats to the validity of the data.”

(Gray, 2004)

Realistically, it would be extremely difficult to achieve statistical representation with such a small-scale study, no matter which sampling method was used, and there are reasons for using snowball sampling in this type of research. Bryman goes on to say that:

“There is a much better ‘fit’ between snowball sampling and the theoretical sampling strategy of qualitative research than with the statistical sampling approach of quantitative research.”

(Bryman, 2001)

Snowball sampling therefore has its disadvantages; but although it is by no means perfect from a statistical perspective, it is an efficient method of gaining a good number of qualitative responses, which was a priority of this research.

### **3. 2. Compiling the questionnaire**

The following section contains a discussion on the main questions posed and a brief explanation of the information that it was hoped would be gained by asking them. [For a full list of the questions asked, see Appendix D.]

#### **3. 2.1. Page 1 – Shelving graphic novels**

The respondents were first asked to provide their names and email addresses. These were taken so that requested information could be provided, such as a signed copy of the consent form [please see Ethics section for further information on this]. Although it was made clear that by returning the questionnaire ‘implied consent’ would be taken,

it was considered best practice to give respondents the choice of having a formal document.

### 3. 2.2. Page 2 – You and graphic novels etc.

After these ethical considerations had been addressed, the survey proper began. The first few questions asked the respondents' gender, age and staff level, e.g. front-line, managerial etc. Respondents were then asked whether or not they read and owned graphic novels etc.

These questions were designed to add some demographics to the results, and to see how much awareness of graphic novels etc. there was amongst the staff of public libraries. It was hoped that there would be a fairly wide spread amongst ages and gender, as this would lend an unbiased feel to the later questions on their opinions. If all the respondents had been female, 26-35 and said that they were concerned about sexualised women in graphic novels, for example, this may have been less interesting than if it had been males of all ages who were concerned about the same area. It was also hoped the answers would show whether there was a spread of those reading graphic novels and whether it was only the younger age groups that owned any.

The question on staff level was included as some of the literature read suggested that senior managers, who only look at the high issue figures for graphic novels etc., might have a very different opinion to enquiry desk staff, who spend days trying to locate a graphic novel, without any information on its spine, for a hold. The researcher also hoped to see whether one staff level had a particular fear of complaints.

The respondents were then offered a choice of paths for the questionnaire to take by asking whether they worked with graphic novels etc. At this point the questionnaire

split. Those who answered 'Yes' were directed to a different set of questions to those who said 'No'. This was done mainly so as not to irritate, and so lose, respondents by asking several questions to which their answer would have to be 'Not Applicable'. The questions for those who said they did have graphic novels concentrated on how their collection was shelved. The other set of questions asked why the library did not stock these titles. Both types of respondent were asked their personal concerns about the content of graphic novels etc.

### 3. 2.3. Page 3 – Yes to graphic novels etc.

Respondents who said that they did stock graphic novels etc. were first asked to estimate how many their library stocked. They were asked about provision for children and how these titles were currently shelved. Respondents were then asked what types of content, such as violent, they were concerned about when considering graphic novels etc. and whether they were also concerned about receiving complaints. They were asked whether their library had received complaints and what these were about. Finally, they were asked whether their library had seen an increase in interest in graphic novels etc. among their users over the past five years.

The first few of these questions were designed to find out more about current practice. This could then be compared to the answers to later questions to see whether this current state in any way reflected the ideals that librarians had.

### 3. 2.4. Page 4 – No to graphic novels etc.

Those respondents who had no graphic novels etc. in their libraries were asked the reason for this. They were asked whether further guidelines about choosing age-

appropriate or genre-specific stock would encourage them to buy these titles for their library. They were then set the same question on content concerns as the respondents with graphic novels etc. had answered. These questions were designed to see whether there were any particular fears that prevented graphic novels etc. from being stocked and to see whether further information would be welcome or unwanted.

### 3. 2.5. Page 5 – Your opinions

The fifth and final page of the questionnaire was entitled ‘Your Opinions’. The questions here were more personal and more general. They moved away from asking what the respondent’s individual library did, and instead asked what they personally would like to see done and what they thought might, or might not, work.

The first two questions asked were designed to see whether there could be a difference in what librarians wanted and what their users might look for. Respondents were asked to put themselves in the position of a user and library shelvee and asked which system they thought would be most useful for these people. The respondents were then asked their opinions on two of the more radical ways of shelving graphic novels etc., use of genres and complete integration with the fiction stock. Finally each respondent was asked, if they could do anything at all with graphic novels etc. what they would choose. This allowed respondents to consider a completely free situation and attempted to gather information on their real wishes for a graphic novel etc. collection. It was hoped that any contrast between the answer to this and the previous two questions would show the difficulties between ideals and practice, and any correlation would confirm certain methods as preferable.

One final text box allowed respondents to put any further comments that had been raised while completing the questionnaire. It is good practice to allow such a space as, although many respondents may ignore it, some useful last comments can be gathered.

### **3.3. Piloting the questionnaire**

Once a draft version of the questionnaire had been created online, this version was sent to three individuals, one an academic and the supervisor for the project, one a student, and one a person with no connection to the department in which the research was carried out. These three individuals were asked to fill out the questionnaire to see whether there were any simple mistakes in the phrasing of the questions or problems with the website. By doing this small pilot it was hoped that when the real respondents came to fill in the questionnaire they would not encounter any difficulties or confusion that would cause them to withdraw from the study.

The online tool worked well, and there were few problems with the set-up. One difficulty was that, due to the colour scheme chosen, if the respondent missed a question and were sent back to the same page with a symbol pointing out what they had missed, that symbol did not show up clearly. A change of colour was decided on to compensate for this. In terms of the questions there were no major difficulties; one or two were rephrased and one, which felt like repetition to the testers was removed. As only minor problems were noted with the pilot, all of which were simple to change, it was decided that a second pilot was not necessary.

### **3.4. Data analysis – analysis of the questionnaire**

As Gray (2004) suggests, one of the advantages of using online questionnaires is that data analysis of closed questions is relatively straightforward. Closed questions can be either questions where the response is either ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ [or possibly ‘Don’t know’] or questions to which only one response is required such as a question asking the respondent to choose what age bracket they fall in to. Such questions can be analysed quickly and their data converted into graphs. Almost all of the questions asked were at least partially closed. There was only one, the final ‘Any further comments’ question, which was completely open, and this was an optional question. All others were either closed, or partly closed in that they gave choices of response and then a text box to write any explanation or further comment. This meant that most of the questionnaire would be relatively easy to analyse, without using a complex coding method. It was considered extremely important to make use of any comments left by the respondents, however, and it was decided that although these could not constitute large amounts of comparable data, as a number of structured interviews might, they could be used as quotations to emphasise or contrast with points made by the analysis of the closed data.

### **3.5. Observation**

Patton (1980) suggests three main advantages of using observation. These are the addition of context, thereby allowing a “holistic perspective” to be taken, the ability for the researcher to be inductive and to use a “discovery-oriented approach”, and the ability for the researcher to notice behaviours that are routine to the participants and so may go

undetected by them and therefore not expressed in an interview. Fourth and fifth advantages are that the researcher may be able to observe something that would not be spoken about by participants, for instance something that they do not agree with, are ashamed of, or consider too sensitive to discuss, and that the researcher can “move beyond the selective perceptions of others”.

Patton suggests that adding observational research to methods such as questionnaires and interviews can broaden the perspective of the research. Berg also advocates using combined approaches, known as a ‘triangulation method’, writing that:

“Every method is a different line of sight directed toward the same point, observing social and symbolic reality. By combining several lines of sight, researchers obtain a better, more substantive picture of reality.”

(Berg, 2007)

It was decided therefore that, along with the questionnaire, visits to public libraries would be used to gather observational evidence, thus enriching the other findings and adding insights into what various methods of shelving graphic novels etc. look like in practice. Three large libraries and one branch library was visited, all of which had shown interest in the project. These were Barnsley Central Library, Sheffield Main Library and Broomhill Public Library [a branch of Sheffield], and Newcastle City Library. Notes were taken in these libraries about the position and shelving order of the graphic novels etc., which could be added to the discussion of the questionnaire results.

The three main areas to consider when using observational research are the degree of disclosure, degree of participation, and degree of structure (Patton, 1980).

Degree of disclosure is the extent to which people know they are being observed. Degree of participation relates to whether the researcher takes part in an activity or simply watches the activities of others. Degree of structure is to what extent the researcher goes to observe with a set of questions to answer, or whether they just make notes during the observation.

It was decided that the degree of disclosure in this research would be closed. As there would be no observation of people, just of the location of graphic novels etc. within a library building, there was no ethical requirement to approach library users. Members of staff from each library had either invited the research or given permission for their library to be part of the study. No further disclosure was deemed necessary. The degree of participation was not a major factor for this research as there was no experiment set up to participate in. The observational research was of a building; the researcher was therefore an onlooker rather than a participant.

It was decided that a certain degree of structure would be beneficial, so that comparison of the notes could be made. If something particularly interesting had been noted in the second library, but due to lack of structure there were no comparable notes for the first library, it would be difficult to analyse any data. A small set of questions were therefore created to guide the observation [these can be found as appendix E].

### **3.6. Interviews**

Originally it had been intended that some interviews would be conducted to further enrich the findings of the questionnaire and to gain some more detailed responses. The original intention was to interview three or four staff of different levels from a

particular library to create a small case study of librarians working with graphic novels etc. When the questionnaire was first distributed, however, a number of people made contact and asked to help with the research. It was decided, therefore, that some of these people might make suitable candidates for interview. Although this would make this part of the research much more improvised, qualitative research lends itself to such informal additions to the results. As Mason writes:

“Qualitative researching... engages us with things that matter, in ways that matter... using methodologies that celebrate richness, depth, nuance, content, multi-dimensionality, and complexity. Instead of editing these elements out in search of the general picture or the average, qualitative research factors them directly into its analyses and explanations.”

(Mason, 2002)

It was decided that two of these offers of input would be taken up. One with a Comics Scholar, who showed interest in the project from an academic standpoint, and one with a Community Development Librarian from one of the authorities that had supported this research from the beginning and was hopeful that the results would be useful to their work with graphic novels etc. An Information Sheet and Consent Form was used to satisfy the ethical requirements of interviewing [see ethics section] and public places were agreed upon for both meetings to ensure the comfort and safety of both the interviewer and interviewee. As there were only going to be two interviews conducted, it was decided that a formal structured interview would be inappropriate. The advantage of a structured interview is that replies can be compared, but with only two participants

there would not be enough data to do any significant comparisons. It was decided that the interviews would instead be non-structured and that, although the interviewer would have certain questions, they would allow the interviewee to guide some of the conversation.

### **3.7. Ethical considerations**

As this project was primarily concerned with gathering the thoughts and opinions of human beings, it was important to give ethics full consideration. The following section includes information on the creations of Information Sheets and Consent Forms to be used with questionnaire respondents and interview subjects, along with practice followed for confidentiality and anonymity.

#### 3.7.1. Informed consent and signatures

As the questionnaire was going to be administered online, it was obvious that it would be difficult to gain signatures. Many online questionnaires use the idea of ‘implied consent’. This is the theory that by filling in and returning a questionnaire the respondent is implying to the researcher that they may use the data given. Berg defines informed and implied consent thus:

“Informed consent means the knowing consent of individuals to participate as an exercise of their choice, free from any element of fraud, deceit, duress, or similar unfair inducement or manipulation. Sometimes in large-scale survey questionnaire studies, separate signed informed consent slips are eliminated and

replaced with implied consent. Implied consent is indicated by the subject taking the time to complete the lengthy questionnaire.”

(Berg, 2007)

Although implied consent is a reasonable method, the research was aware that this piece of research tackled sensitive issues such as the existence of violent, sexual, sexist and political imagery as themes within many graphic novels etc. It was hoped that this research would gather the opinions of library staff on these issues and so planned to have a question covering them. There would also be a question about the location of graphic novels etc. for children in libraries. Because of these sensitive issues, the researcher felt that it was important to give the respondents as much information as possible, and to clearly explain their rights to withdraw from, or question, the research.

Two Information Sheets and two Consent Forms were created [these can be found in the appendices B and C]. The first Information Sheet [A] would be distributed with the link to the questionnaire; the second [B] would be used in the interviews. Consent Form B was also used in interviews. Consent Form A was created originally to accompany the questionnaire. Later, when the questionnaire was created, it was decided that the boxes on this form could become questions on the first page of the questionnaire. This meant that each questionnaire was initialled; this is a simple way of gaining a signature online, as written signatures cannot be added without drawing equipment or scanners. The first page of the questionnaire therefore, made the ethics clear to the respondent by asking them to initial if they had read the Information Sheet and agreed to take part in the research.

### 3.7.2. Contacts

The two Information Sheets supplied all those interested in the research with the contact details of the lead researcher and project supervisor. This ensured that any questions that subjects might have had could be addressed.

The names and email addresses of respondents were taken with the express purpose of being able to contact those who asked for a copy of either the results or Consent Form A signed by the researcher. These were taken under the explicit understanding that they would be used for no other purpose and were destroyed after the research was completed.

### 3.7.3. Confidentiality and anonymity

“Confidentiality is an active attempt to remove from the research records any elements that might indicate the subject’s identities. In a literal sense, anonymity means that the subjects remain nameless.”

(Berg, 2007)

For ethical reasons, the respondents were assured that no personal data, such as their names, would be used in the research. Names and emails were gathered in order for the researcher to be able to send information to those who were interested [see above], but care was taken to ensure that they cannot be used in this research to identify any of the respondents or their opinions.

## Chapter 4. Results and Discussion

This section includes detailed descriptions of the results from the online questionnaire. Each question is addressed in turn; other data, gained by comparing questions, is also included here, as is data from observations and interviews, which are added to relevant sections of the discussion.

### **4.1. Interest in the research**

The first ‘question’ that each respondent was asked was whether they wished to receive a copy of either the Consent Form or the results of the research. Although this was done primarily to satisfy ethical requirements and to establish contact with any who were interested, the feedback was striking. Out of seventy respondents, fifty-four (over seventy-five percent) asked to see the results. This suggests that the topic of this piece of research is both relevant and interesting to those working in the public library sector. The Community Development Librarian that the researcher interviewed strongly agreed with this, stating that they hoped the results would be useful to their Library Authority.

### **4. 2. Demographics – gender, age, and level of staff**

The first few questions then asked the gender, age, and level of staff of each respondent, and then whether that respondent read and owned graphic novels. Out of seventy respondents, twenty-two were ‘Male’ and forty-eight ‘Female’ (Fig. 1). Most respondents, twenty-five, were between ‘26-35’ years old, with seventeen at ‘36-45’ and

nineteen '46-55', but all three of these age groups were well represented (Fig. 2). Only two respondents were over 56. There was a similarly good spread over the levels of staff (Fig. 3). Although not even, there were eighteen 'Frontline Staff', twenty-five 'Line Managers', and nine 'Senior Managers', with seventeen labelling themselves as 'Other'. Several of those were also in managerial positions, such as some who worked two job shares, one of which was in management, along with Team Librarians, Stock Librarians, and Youth Librarians. Only one was a 'Student Librarian/Librarianship Student'. This could be accounted for by the focus on public libraries as many student librarians may be working in their academic centres. Perhaps the most interesting point of these basic figures is the male to female ratio. Despite the general belief that graphic novels are mainly of interest to men, almost seventy percent of the respondents to this survey were female. Although this could well be influenced by the minority of men in librarianship jobs, which is still a predominately female profession, it is still an unusual result to have so many women interested in what to do with graphic novels etc., many of whom are readers of this format [see below].

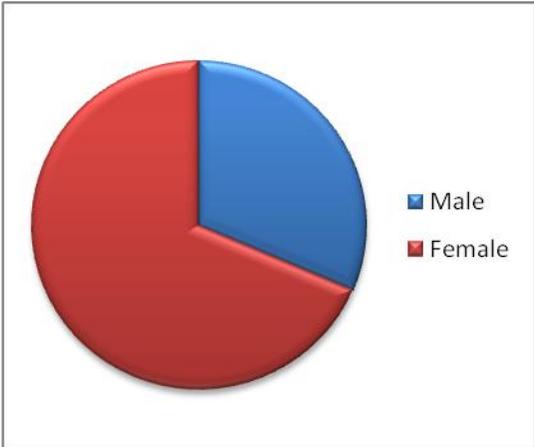


Fig. 1 – Gender

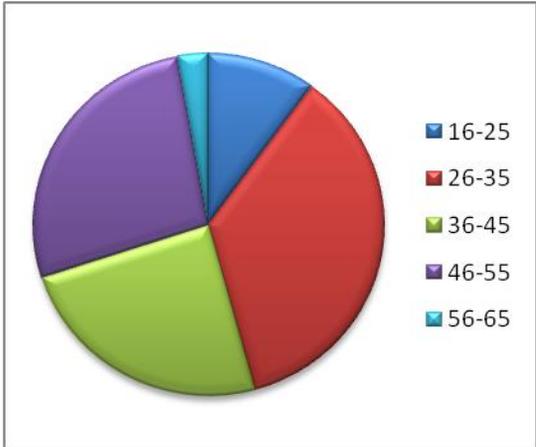


Fig. 2 – Age

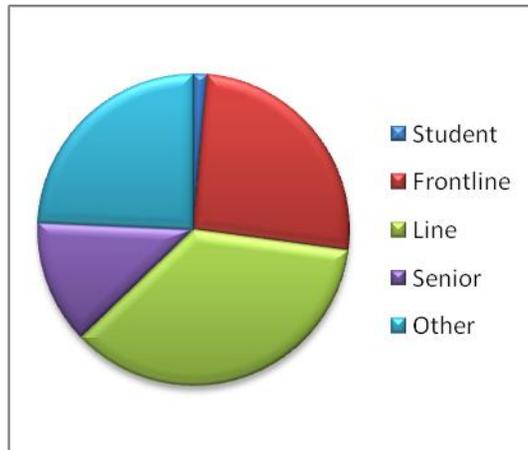


Fig. 3 – Staff Level

### 4. 3. Awareness of graphic novels etc.

The respondents were then asked whether they read graphic novels etc. themselves. Forty-one out of seventy said they did, with thirty-four (almost half) also owning their own collections. Of those who read graphic novels etc. nineteen were 'Male' and twenty-two 'Female'; the largest group of those reading graphic novels etc. was the '26-35' year olds with three '16-25', nine '36-45' and seven '46-55'. It is very possible that only those who were already fans of this material, or had a personal interest in it, decided to take part in the questionnaire, but these figures still show that there are librarians who read this material, and that it is not only a medium for teenage males. Of those who read graphic novels etc. twenty-five had read over twenty titles, and of those who owned some, eighteen respondents owned over twenty, both of which are over fifty percent of the first figure. The next highest figures for each group were for the '1-5' category, showing that most people had either a very strong interest or had 'dabbled' in this format.

#### **4.4. Graphic novels etc. in libraries**

Research done by the American Library Association in 2005 found that ninety-seven percent of respondents had graphic novels etc. in their stock (National Coalition Against Censorship, 2006). In this research, of the seventy respondents, sixty-nine had graphic novels in their libraries, totalling ninety-nine percent [rounding fractions up]. These results support the ALA's findings; the fact that the ALA research had approximately one hundred more respondents than this research accounts for the small difference in percentages. This shows the change in status of graphic novels etc. from the time when they were considered unworthy to be part of a library's collection at all. The respondents came from all over the UK, as can be seen by their work emails such as joe.bloggs@sheffield.gov.uk [real examples and further information cannot be provided for reasons of ethics and confidentiality] showing the spread of graphic novels etc. over a large number of UK Councils and Local Authorities. The emails also show, however, that several of the respondents came from the same Authorities, particularly in South Yorkshire due to the support this project received from organisations such as SINTO. This means that some of these responses may be duplicated. They are still striking however, and the latter, more personal, responses will be individual.

Respondents were then asked roughly how many titles they had in their libraries. As Fig. 4 shows, fifty-seven out of sixty-nine respondents [sixty-nine who said 'Yes' to having graphic novels etc. in their libraries] said that they had over fifty items on their library catalogues with thirty of those having hundreds of items. Some of these were council wide and included more than one branch library, but the figures suggest it is

likely that most public libraries in the UK have dozens of graphic novels etc. either immediately or easily available to their members.

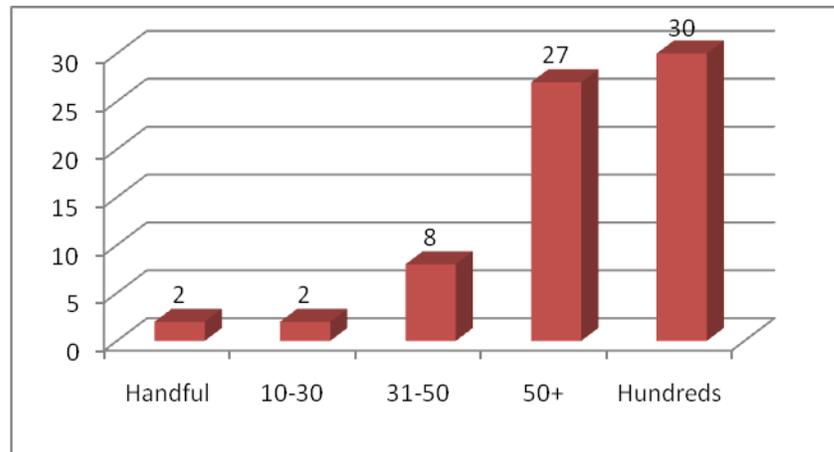


Fig. 4 – The number of graphic novels etc. in libraries

The next question asked whether the library had a separate section of graphic novels etc. for children and young people. Fifty six out of sixty-nine did so (Fig. 5).

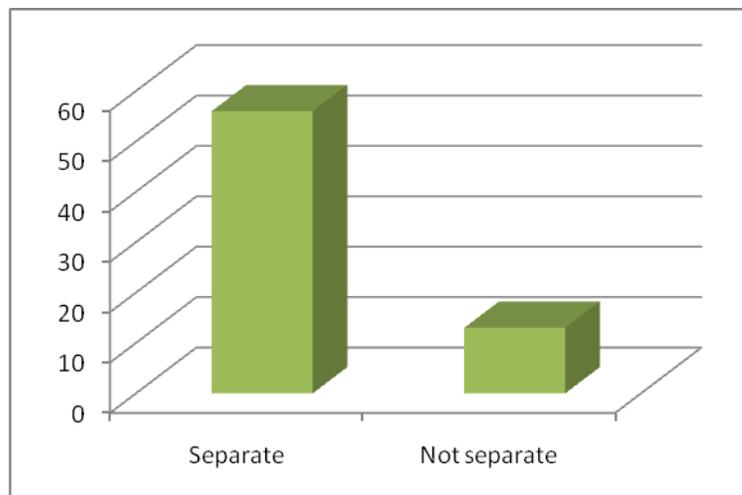


Fig. 5 – The number of libraries with a designated children's section

This shows that library professionals are aware of the need for certain boundaries when considering very young children and some adult titles; it also shows that they consider themselves capable of making judgements as to what is suitable. This is a little hard to elaborate on, however, without knowing what constitutes each of these children's graphic novels etc. sections. In an interview conducted with a Community Development Librarian, the researcher was told that the library had no graphic novels etc. in the children's room. Later, in the same interview, the researcher discovered that the children's room did include titles such as *Asterix* and *Tintin*, which most would consider to be either graphic novels or comic books. The fact that three quarters of librarians try to separate out suitable children's material, shows that librarians are willing to do at least some sorting of graphic novels etc.

#### **4.5. Shelving systems**

Question 16 asked how the respondent's library organised their graphic novels etc. at present. The respondents were given several options including by author or illustrator name, alphabetically by series, chronologically within a series, by publisher, genre. They were also able to select 'Other' and to write a different answer. These were perhaps the most interesting, and potentially worrying, results of the whole questionnaire. Out of sixty-nine respondents who had graphic novels in their libraries, forty-five chose the 'Other' option and forty-one of these wrote that they shelved their graphic novels etc. in no order at all.

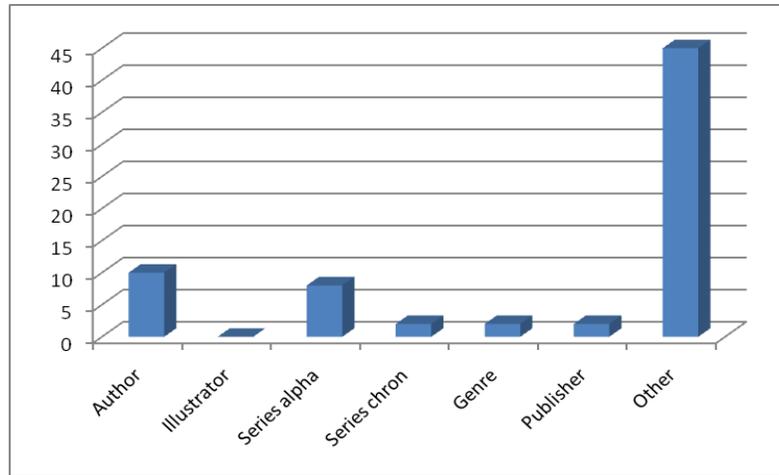


Fig. 6 – Current method of shelving

These responses were then cross-checked with the numbers of graphic novels etc. that each of these forty-one respondents said they had in their library. The following list of thirty-four responses to the question of how many graphic novels etc. the library stocked shows that the majority of those libraries that did not keep their graphic novels etc. in any order had hundreds of them:

10-30, 10-30, 31-50, 31-50, 31-50, 31-50, 31-50  
 50+, 50+, 50+, 50+, 50+, 50+, 50+, 50+, 50+, 50+, 50+, 50+, 50+, 50+, 50+, 50+, 50+  
 150, 200, 200, 200, 300, 500, 605, 700, 1500, 1700

Twenty-seven out of forty-one had more than fifty titles in their libraries with nine of these having over two hundred including one at fifteen hundred and one at seventeen hundred. Four other responses ticked the ‘Even more (hundreds)’ response box, but did not specify how many. Two, both with fifty plus, split their collections into manga and everything else, but had no order within those two sections, and one final response split their collection into the main publishers [probably Marvel and DC], but there was no order after that. That library had four hundred titles. Some of these figures may again be

across several branches, but the thought of having between fifty and five hundred books to search through to find one that you want, let alone one thousand seven hundred, is quite incredible, whether you are a member of staff searching for a hold, or a fan of an Image or Crossgen publication wadding through hundreds of Marvel editions. What this does seem to show, is that very few libraries know how to shelve graphic novels etc. At best they have not yet identified an effective system; at worst, they have given up trying to employ any system at all.

Out of the other responses, the most popular (with ten ‘votes’) was to shelve them alphabetically by author. This is perhaps the most obvious method for librarians who know nothing about graphic novels etc. It is the method that they use for their other fiction sections, and for the most part works extremely well. It may also work with manga and cartoon strips. With graphic novels, however, it is a nightmare.

The biggest complication for anyone seeking to enforce alphabetical author order on graphic novels and comic books is summed up by Gary Markham, who was given the task of cataloguing a corpus of hundreds of graphic novels etc. for research purposes in an academic library:

“But who is the correct author main entry or chief intellectual contributor in a comic or graphic novel?”

(Markham, 2009)

He uses the example of one graphic novel in which the following information was given: Whedon – story, Sanchez – pencils, Fridolfs – inks, Masden – colours, Parkhouse – letters. This was only for the first short story in a volume of three. The

second two stories have four contributors each, only two of which (Masden and Parkhouse for the third story) are the same. “Establishing Whedon as author main entry is almost entirely arbitrary”, concludes Markham (2009).

Another example is one of the most popular Image series, *Witchblade*. *Witchblade* began under the direction of David Wohl, Christina Z., Brian Haberlin (plot), and Michael Turner (pencils). By volume nine, Marc Silvestri had joined the team (as both plot and pencils), and Brian Haberlin had left it. *Witchblade: Distinctions* had various illustrators for each of the short stories and even some new plot creators. By *Witchblade: Witch Hunt*, Ron Marz took over from Wohl and Z. as the writer and Michael Choi as illustrator. The cover for this graphic novel, however was headed by Greg Land and his name is on the cover, along with four others. *Witchblade: Distinctions* has eight names on the spine, and the four *Witchblade Featuring Tomb Raider* books have no authors or illustrator names on the spine, but do have Michael Turner’s, or another cover art illustrator’s, signature on the front. When shelving by author name, therefore, where would these four graphic novels be placed? Some of the longest running and most famous graphic novels such as DC’s *Batman* and Marvel’s *Spider-Man* have been around for sixty years. They have had countless changes of authors and illustrators. Shelving graphic novels by author is therefore an extremely difficult option for a librarian to choose.

The next most popular way (eight votes) was to shelve graphic novels etc. in alphabetical order of their series title. This would seem to be the easiest solution all round. It would be quick for library staff to shelve this way, and easy for them to find a hold title, as it would for a *Batman* fan to find all of those titles that interest him.

Only two respondents each said that they shelved by chronological order of series, by genre or by publisher. Chronological order is difficult to maintain, especially when most graphic novels only indicate their volume in little letters somewhere in the first few pages. Many libraries keep paperback series in chronological order however, and it could be argued that libraries should do whatever makes it easier for the users, not the staff. Very few libraries seem to keep graphic novels etc. in genres. Again it is difficult to decide on the genres of many graphic novels, but simple audio-visual categories such as Action and Adventure, Comedy, and Classics could be used. Some of these are likely to become top heavy, but they may introduce already enthusiastic graphic novel readers to new and more obscure titles, and would at least give some basis to the library catalogue.

Shelving by publisher can solve one of the biggest problems of no-order shelving, that of the user who considers themselves to be a fan of graphic novels, but does not like Marvel and DC superheroes. Consider the library that had 1700 graphic novels etc. Say that a thousand of those are graphic novels. According to the 1997 figures (Lavin, 1998) two hundred and eighty will be Marvel, two hundred and forty will be DC, one hundred and forty will be Image. That leaves six hundred and sixty titles that could be anything else. Searching through six hundred and sixty titles for something by Neil Gaiman might not be fun, but it is better than searching through one thousand seven hundred. It would also better suit those fans of DC who do not read Marvel, and vice versa.

No respondents shelved their graphic novels etc. by illustrator. This seems appropriate for shelving as it would be a complex task to shelve in this way. In terms of the library catalogue, however [which would be a whole different topic of research] it may be useful to note illustrators in addition to authors, as some fans will know the

names of illustrators in the same way that fans of music may talk about backing musicians or producers, and not just the lead singers.

#### **4.6. Librarian's concerns**

The respondents were then asked, when selecting suitable graphic novels etc. for a library, how concerned they were about some of the more controversial content within some of the titles. Respondents were asked to consider five categories [the explanatory words shown here in brackets were given to respondents on the questionnaires as examples and clarifications], violent content (fights and murders), sexual content (sex scenes), sexist content (sexualised women), political content (fascist or anarchist characters), and religious content (for or against one religion e.g. anti-Semitic or creationist content). Respondents were asked to rate their level of concern within each category as either 'Not at all', 'Somewhat', 'Quite', or 'Extremely'.

The first graph (Fig. 7) shows levels of concern with violence. Most respondents defined themselves as 'Somewhat' concerned, followed closely by 'Not at all'. Only six out of sixty-nine were 'Extremely' concerned. This is surprising as the idea of comic books as violent is one of the most cited reasons not to have these titles in any type of library. There is a climate current amongst library professionals against any form of censorship and it is possible that this influence is being seen here. One respondent wrote

“I am not concerned as I believe we should stock everything even those titles we disagree with due to freedom of speech. Although all these categories are things we should be aware of I don't think they should dictate what we carry.”

This respondent clearly felt that it was up to the readers, or reader’s guardians, to check what they, or their wards, read, and the responsibility of the librarian to provide materials to their users and not to limit access to that material. This respondent ticked ‘Not at all’ for every category; a significant number of others did the same. Not all agreed with the statement, however, or had the luxury of agreeing. One wrote

“... a lot of children ask to take out GNs which are categorised as adult books, and it’s the responsibility of the librarian to decide whether or not the book is suitable. The concern here is that a quick flick through might not be a thorough enough check”

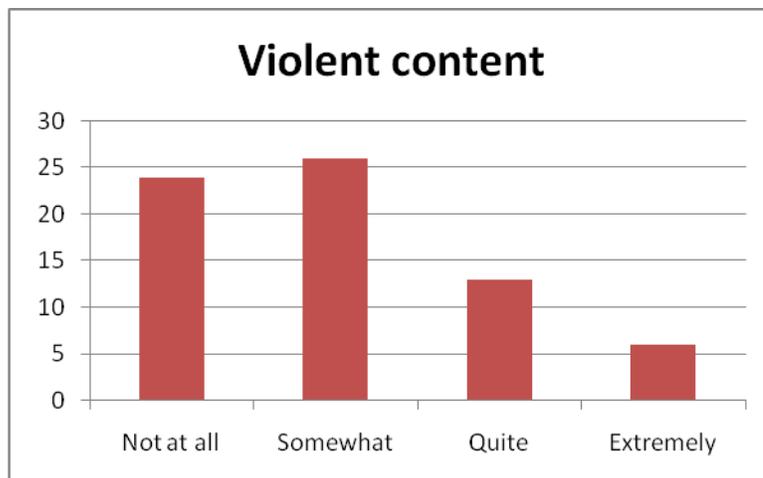


Fig. 7 – Concerns with violence

Almost twice as many librarians (eleven) said they were concerned about sexual content, as had been concerned about violence (Fig. 8). The Community Development Librarian interviewed by the researcher said that they were not surprised by this. They

felt that there are stronger feelings against sexual content in any format, such as films, nowadays than there are about fight scenes and other violence. The same number (eleven) of respondents said they were extremely concerned about sexist content in graphic novels etc. (Fig. 9).

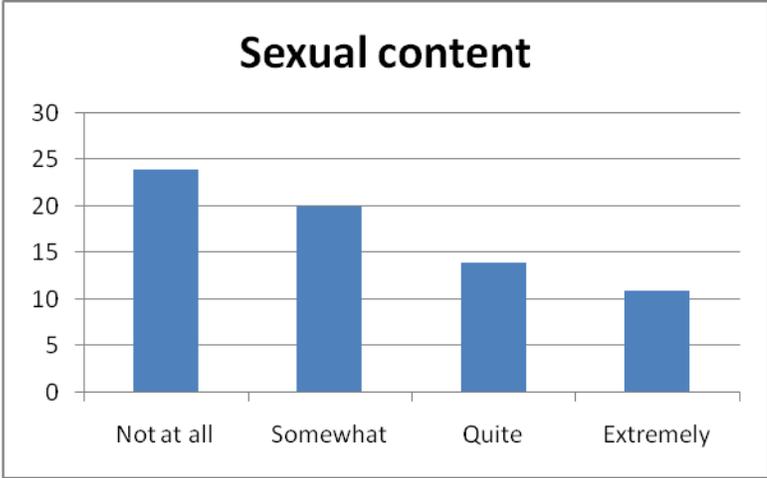


Fig. 8 – Concerns over sexual content

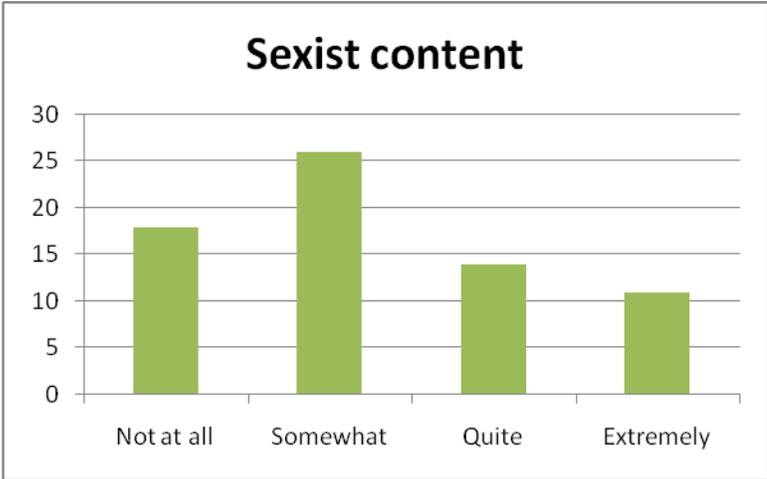


Fig. 9 – Concerns with sexism

The same number of respondents also stood for those ‘Quite’ concerned with sexual or sexist content; fourteen chose this option for both questions. The only difference between the two graphs is the number of respondents who defined as ‘Not at all’ and ‘Somewhat’. Overall, more people were concerned about sexist content than were concerned about either sexual or violent content. Twenty-four out of sixty-nine, or thirty-five percent, were ‘Not at all’ concerned about violence or sexual content as opposed to only eighteen, or twenty-six percent, for sexist content. This could perhaps be attributed to the political correctness guidelines imposed by many Councils, but is an interesting response.

Of all five categories, the one of least concern to the respondents was political content. Only four out of sixty-nine were extremely concerned with any political context (Fig. 10). More people were concerned with religious content, although some respondents questioned the researcher’s examples, one writing “I would be concerned about anti-Semitic. That is hardly the same as creationism.” Despite anti-Semitism’s long and well-documented history, however, any belief has the potential to offend and to be attacked. Although there may be more concern about issues that have been problematic in the past, there are others that have the potential to be of significance in the future.

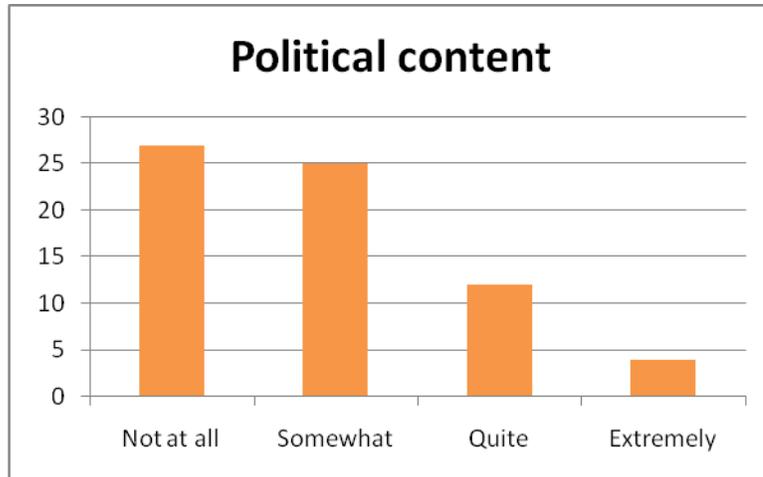


Fig. 10 – Political concerns

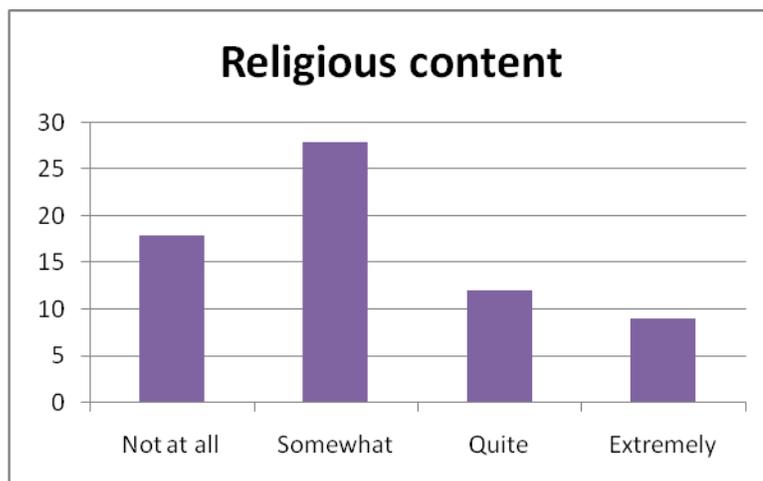


Fig. 11 – Concerns with content for or against a religion

The results of this questionnaire suggest that of the five categories it is sexual, sexist, and religious content that are of most concern to librarians. Despite the perception that the amount of violence in graphic novels etc. is one of the strongest reasons not to include them in library collections, there is surprisingly little concern about this issue. Two other concerns mentioned in respondent’s comments were homophobic content and references to drug use. Several respondents wished that the covers gave more indication

as to the level of adult content within graphic novels etc. and one wanted a key on the back, similar to ones found next to DVD certificates which would explicitly state what was included in the images.

There seems no obvious reason for this lenience towards violent content rather than say religious content. It was considered whether it was the use of the word 'anti-Semitic' in the examples that made so many people feel concerned about this topic. Other words used in examples such as 'sexualised' and 'fascist' would also be expected to provoke reactions, however, and it seems unlikely that the extent to which the figures differed was solely due to the use of a term that has recent significance due to a media fascination with the Holocaust. The figures beg the question, however, when claiming more concern with sexism than sex, is the librarian less concerned with the potential harm to their younger users than with the defence of the library's reputation and its vulnerability to complaints and legal challenges?

#### **4.7. Complaints**

Some research conducted in libraries has suggested that librarians are very concerned about getting complaints, but rarely do they actually receive any (Wright, 2007). Much has been written in the literature on graphic novels etc. about what to do should complaints arise (National Coalition Against Censorship, 2006; Dickenson, 2007; Rudiger, 2007). The following graph (Fig. 12), however, suggests that not too many librarians have concerns about getting complaints over the graphic novels etc. that they stock. Thirty-five respondents, approximately fifty percent, said they had no concerns about getting complaints, with a further twenty-six saying that they were only

'Somewhat' concerned. Only one respondent was 'Extremely' concerned about receiving complaints. Of those who said they were 'Quite' or 'Extremely' concerned about receiving complaints six were Line Managers' and two were 'Front-line Staff', three were '26-35', one was '36-45', three were '46-55', and one was '56-65'. This suggests that fear of complaint is personal and perhaps due to experience, rather than a fear held only by young front-line staff who do not wish to be in a difficult position or older managers who have political fears over their library receiving complaints. Of these eight people, only two had received 'A couple' of complaints and most had not received any. The one respondent who was 'Extremely' concerned about receiving complaints had not received any. This suggests that fear of complaints cannot necessarily be attributed to past experience.

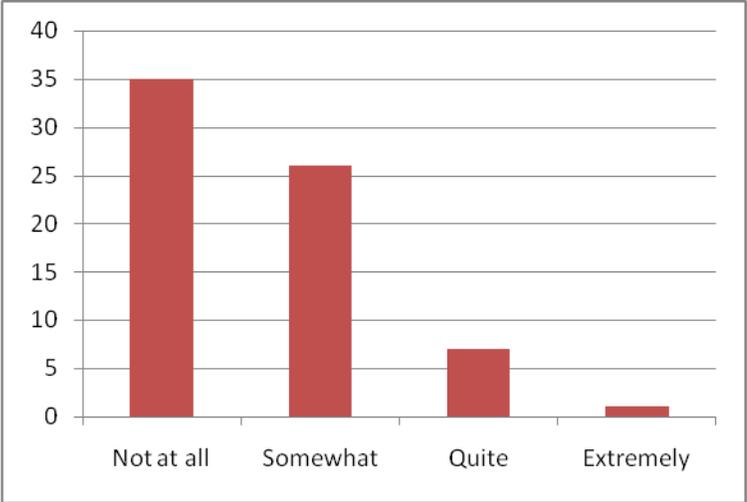


Fig. 12 – Concern about receiving complaints

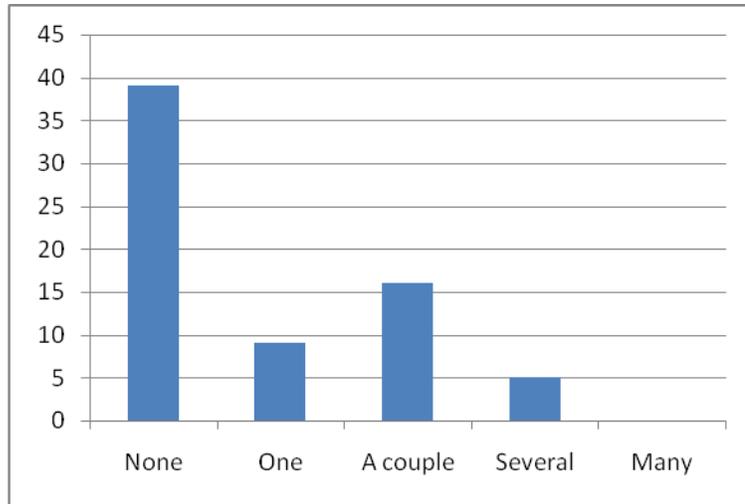


Fig. 13 – Number of complaints received

Over fifty percent of respondents had never received a complaint about their graphic novels etc. This could account for some of the librarians who had no concerns. Out of sixty-nine respondents, thirty had received complaints, either ‘One’, ‘A couple’, or ‘Several’. None of the respondents had received ‘Many’ complaints.

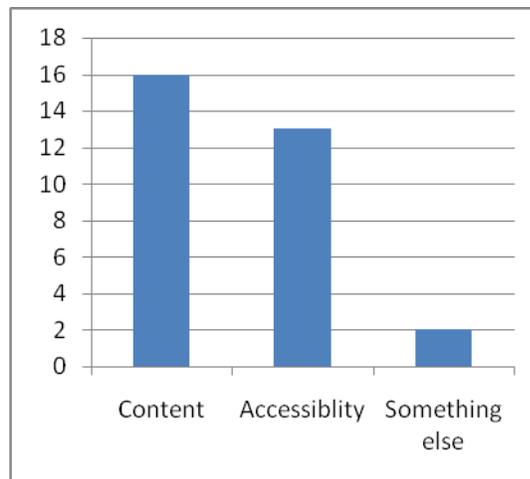


Fig. 14 – Reasons for complaints

Respondents were then asked whether these complaints were about the content of a particular title or whether they were more to do with the accessibility of unsuitable titles to children and vulnerable users.

As Fig. 14 shows, there was not much difference between the number of complaints over content, sixteen, and the number of complaints over accessibility, thirteen. Two complaints were classed as ‘Something else’. One of these was due to a “homemade abortion” scene, which had upset a young user. The researcher would class this as content, as it was something that had been read, rather than an abstract complaint about graphic novels etc. being accessible to children. Some other comments left, however, also suggested that respondents considered complaints to be a combination of both, for example an adult complaining that a child had read something [content] that should not have been within reach [accessibility].

The second complaint, however, was described by the respondent as ‘Not stocking what the customer wanted’. This is very similar to the results found by Wright who, when looking at complaints about information and fiction for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning teens, found one librarian whose one received complaint was about the user’s disappointment that this material wasn’t easy to find (2007). This response supports her findings and shows that although some libraries stocking graphic novels etc. may attract some complaints, they will also create demand.

#### **4.8. Increase in interest**

Respondents were asked whether they had seen any increase in interest over the past five years. Most respondents had seen an increase with only eight out of sixty-nine

opting for ‘No increase or interest’. Twenty-seven respondents had seen a ‘Strong’ increase in interest with seventeen each noticing ‘Slight’ or ‘Some’ increase (Fig. 15).

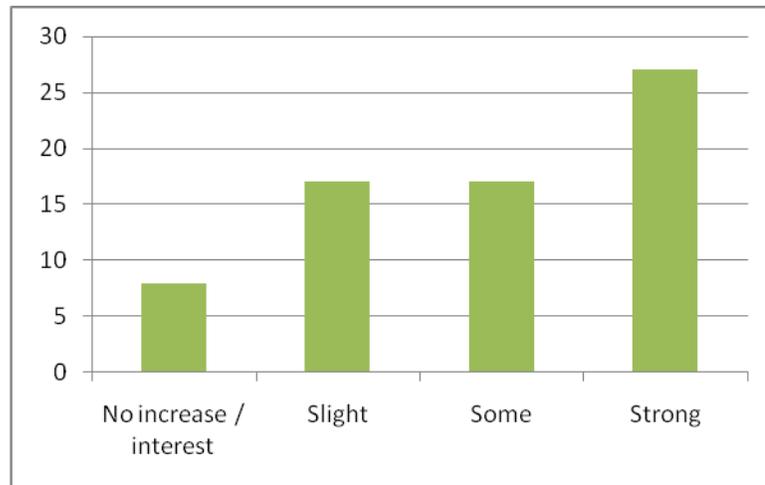


Fig. 15 – Increase in users’ interest

Several of the respondents stated that there had been a major rise in the issue figures for manga over the past five years, with others mentioning film versions of many graphic novels as a catalyst for issues of those titles. Several respondents commented that they had started offering events or clubs based around graphic novels etc. and that some younger members of staff had helped to market the material. Many respondents noticed increased interest from younger users, but one also remarked “I believe that we are seeing more adults take an interest in graphic novels than before”, suggesting that graphic novels etc. are for a much wider market than reluctant teens. One respondent claimed

“Libraries that maintain a strong GN collection have the most engaged teen patrons at every level, and have a reduced level of antisocial behaviour”

This is an interesting argument against fear of violence begetting violence amongst youths in mediums such as graphic novels etc. suggesting instead that providing teenagers with what they want makes them more receptive to the library and its staff. Another respondent was more sceptical about the appeal of graphic novels etc. though, writing “Supply seems to create demand”. This comment is more difficult to evaluate, however, as presumably any collection introduced to a library, such as music or a new genre of books, would create demand, whereas a library that did not stock these materials would not show their use. Whatever the reason, however, these results support other research finding that graphic novels etc. are becoming increasingly popular and are boosting library issue numbers.

#### **4.9. No graphic novels etc.**

Only one respondent said that they had no graphic novels etc. in their library. The reason that this respondent gave for not doing so was that they worked in a reference only library. They answered ‘Don’t know’ to questions asking if they would be more interested in graphic novels etc. if they were identifiable by genre or easily separable into children and adult titles. Due to the fact that there was only one respondent and their reason for not stocking graphic novels etc. was clear and logical, there is little that could be done with this data. This page also included the question about the level of concern over different types of content. As there was only one respondent, however, it would be impossible to keep that data completely anonymous; anyone who knew this individual had filled in the questionnaire could also know they were the person without graphic novels etc. in their library and could therefore identify

the responses as belonging to them. Because of this, it was decided not to include the individual data here. This respondent's data is by no means useless however; the next section of the questionnaire merged the two groups of librarians [those who stocked graphic novels etc. and those who didn't] so the following analysis includes responses from this individual.

#### **4.10. Librarians' opinions**

[To restate, as the questionnaire has again merged there are seventy respondents to the following questions].

The final page of the questionnaire was designed to ask respondents what they would like to see done in libraries, and what they thought would work. For the first two questions they were asked to put themselves in the roles of first a user, and second a librarian shelving graphic novels etc. They were asked whether they would find it easier, as those people, to find graphic novels etc. if they were shelved together or split into genres.

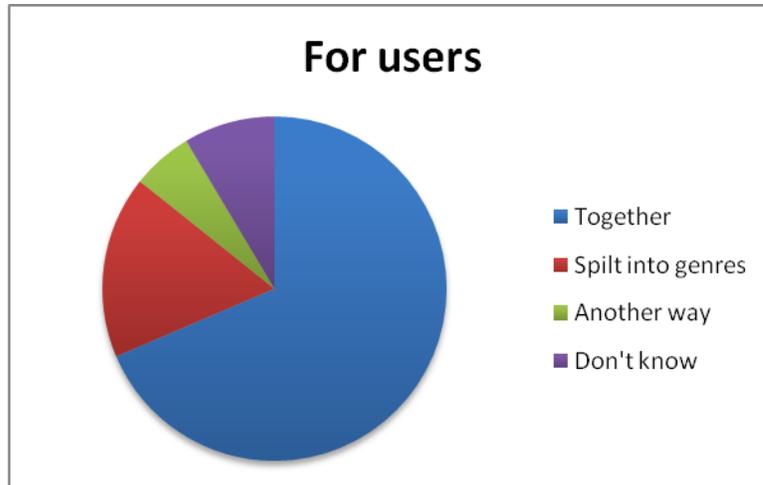


Fig. 16 – What users want

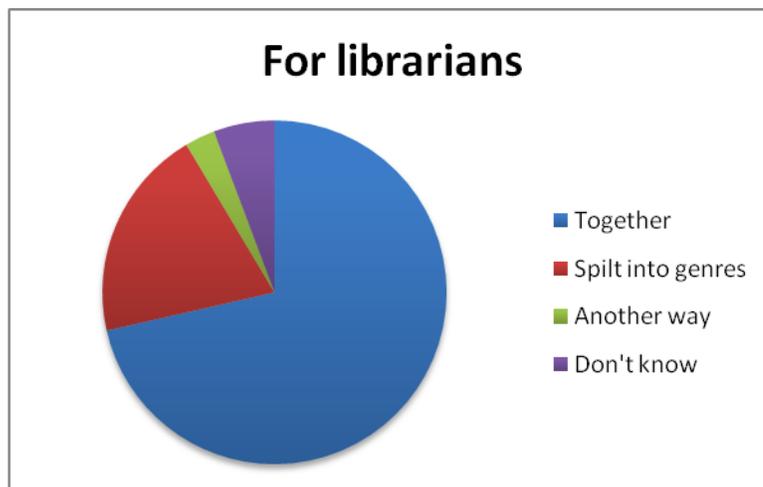


Fig. 17 – What librarians want

For both questions the respondents overwhelmingly stated that they would put them together with forty-eight, or sixty-eight percent, saying that users would prefer this, and fifty, or seventy-one percent, saying that librarians would prefer it.

The comments left on these questions however, show that although librarians want their graphic novels etc. to be together, many are unhappy with having them in no order. There were twenty-five comments on the first question and twenty on the second. Most of these said that they would like graphic novels etc. to be shelved by series. For

both questions, more respondents chose the ‘Don’t know option’, six for the first and four for the second, than chose ‘Done another way’, four and two respectively. Again this suggests that some librarians simply do not know what to do with their graphic novels etc.

Despite only twelve and fourteen respondents saying they would prefer genres in the last questions, forty-six, or two thirds, answered that genres could be useful (Fig. 22).

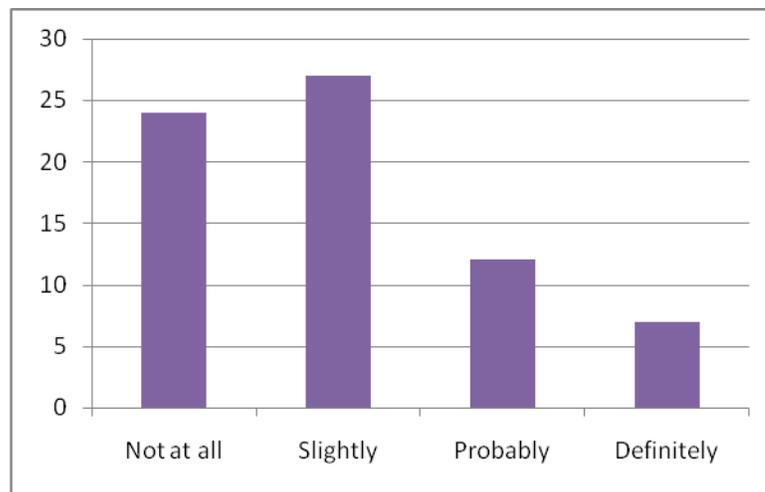


Fig. 18 – Usefulness of DVD genres

Respondents were asked to consider whether it could be useful to split the graphic novels etc. into genres, in a similar way to DVD’s. Comments showed concerns with this, however, one described the choice of genre as often “arbitrary”, especially when genres are chosen by those who have little knowledge about graphic novels etc. Others were concerned about users not bothering to browse genres that could include titles they would enjoy, while some thought that a superhero genre would swamp any others. Most said that for small collections, it would be unnecessary.

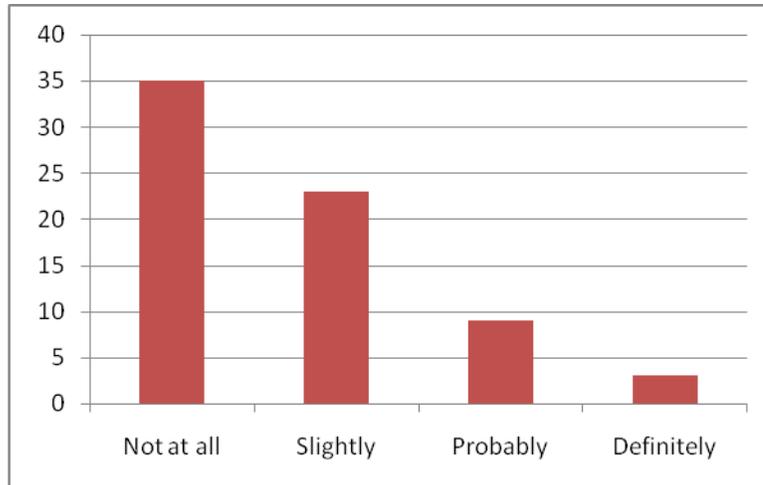


Fig 19 – Usefulness of integration

A similar feeling was shown for the next question. Respondents were asked to consider the notion of splitting graphic novels etc. altogether and putting them across the library amongst non-fiction and fiction, depending on the type of story, thus placing graphic versions of novels alongside the Oxford Editions, *X-men* with science fiction, and *Persepolis* with autobiography. Many respondents stated that “Manga readers want manga etc.!” Another said “very few people would borrow both types”. Some were more interested, however, and suggested that this could work for particular titles such as adaptations of classic novels. One suggested that this could form a special promotion; librarians could for example put two editions of *Jane Eyre* along with the graphic novel version and some film versions to show the diversity of stock. Another respondent simply wrote “unrealistically hopeful expectation”.

One respondent, however, wrote the following:

This is a really interesting idea but I certainly wouldn’t support complete integration – I think that would make them very difficult to find. It would I

suppose have a ‘political’ benefit in terms of bringing graphic novels into the mainstream and combating the idea that they are ‘not proper books’. Also I think it would be a very interesting reader development approach, but I would rather have a main collection elsewhere and then second copies (if budget allows) integrated with the fiction stock

Another said

This is something I would quite like to try – would attract new readers to graphic novels but may mean customers who only read graphic novels would be less happy – my perception is that they only tend to read graphic novels and non-fiction

It seems that there is interest in the potential provided by this idea. It has many practical considerations such as the size of difference between ‘normal’ fiction and cartoon strips or comic books. Perhaps the first of the above suggestions would be best, but as the respondent pointed out, it would very much be a case of budget-permitting, especially in smaller libraries.

#### **4.11. Complete control**

[All of the comments made by respondents for this question and the final ‘Any other comments’ question can be found in appendix F and G respectively.]

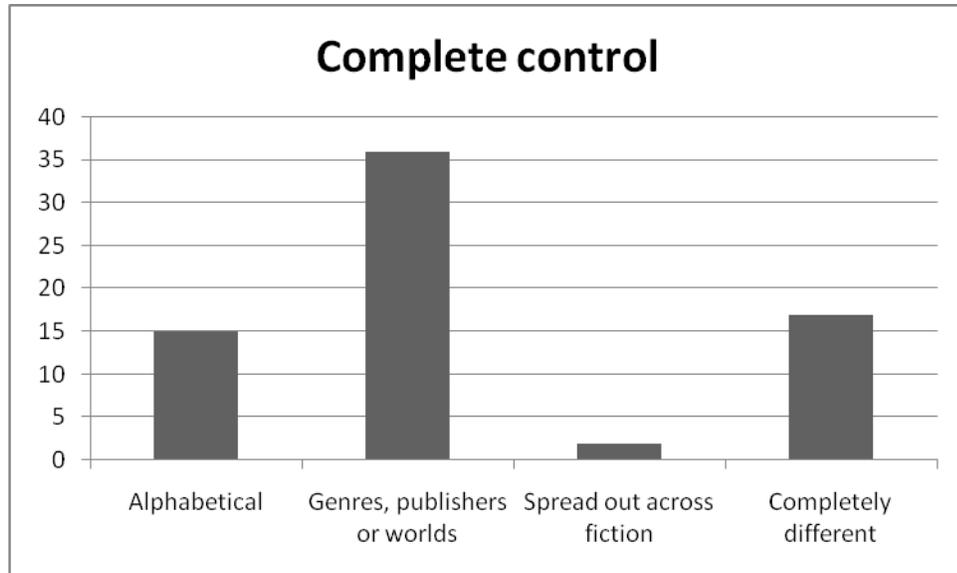


Fig. 20 – What would you do

Lastly each respondent was asked, “If you had complete control over how and where to shelve a graphic novel etc. collection, would you... 1) Put them all together in some form of alphabetical order, 2) Put them all together but split them into genres, publishers, or worlds, 3) Spread them out across the main fiction stock, 4) Do something completely different.

Thirty-six respondents, just over fifty percent, said that they would rather split a graphic novel etc. collection into genres, publishers, or world, than put them in an alphabetical order.

In comments, several respondents said they would prefer face-on stands, boxes, or dump bins to standard spine out shelving. Others stressed the importance of splitting age appropriate stock into separate areas. Some said that they liked random orders as it allowed readers to discover new things. Others simply said that they were not personally

worried about how graphic novels etc. were shelved, as long as they were prominent.

One said

“Just put them on the shelf and see how the readers use them.”

Or, as Brenner put it:

“In the end, manga readers will find manga wherever you shelve it...”

(Brenner, 2007)

He adds, however:

“...but making it visible and advertising it well can and will draw in a larger readership.”

(Brenner, 2007)

Dump bins seemed a popular solution and were mentioned throughout the questionnaire, as were carousels. Although these can seem easily accessible and visually attractive, they have the disadvantage of encouraging the ‘lob’ culture of no order shelving.

In an interview with a Community Development Librarian, the idea of a “lob culture” was discussed. This was the suggestion that carousels encourage librarians to ignore any order that they would impose on the same books if they went on a shelf. Librarians start out by trying to place an author’s titles together but after a couple of minutes of moving everything around the spinner to get some room in the compartment

they want, they give up and lob things on where a gap already exists. The Community Development Librarian also felt that there was a common misapprehension that carousels are easy to look through as, due to the fact that you can only look at one side at a time, it takes more effort to focus on the small area than it does to scan a whole shelf using peripheral vision.

One suggestion made for comic books was to use box files to hold several titles from the same series, such as *Batman*, so that users can read the generic label on the wider spine and then flip through the inside if that title is of interest. Although an easy solution to shelving, this is probably the least visually attractive option of those suggested.

The final question gave a space for respondents to leave any other comments that they wished to make [please note these can be found as appendix G]. Again, several expressed anxiety about identifying and separating age-appropriate material. Some respondents suggested using spine stickers to help with the problem of spines that show no information; several advocated face-out shelving. One respondent expressed disappointment that their library could not stock as many titles as they would like due to service level agreements that made it difficult for them to contact other specialist suppliers. Some respondents again stated their interest in the research, stating that they had found the questionnaire interesting and hoped the results would be of use.

One topic that was mentioned throughout comments on the questionnaire was the desire for training. One respondent wrote to this question:

“There does still seem to be a great mistrust and lack of understanding of graphic novels in libraries which leads to clumsy and innacurate filing and deprives

many potential readers of the opportunity to read them. It only takes a couple of complaints from irate parents to instill a knee jerk reaction in libraries and provoke extreme measures. Unfortunately I think we shall have to wait for libraries bibliographic departments to receive adequate training in graphic novels before these cataloguing problems can be rectified. In the meantime there is a lot of potentially high issuing stock being left underused on library shelves.”

Several respondents suggested that training of some description would be useful to help them identify material for children. Many of the respondents suggested at various points in the questionnaire that they found this difficult to do; one was particularly concerned that in flipping through a graphic novel a librarian might miss the one page that would make the title inappropriate, and that librarian would then be the target of complaints from angry parents. One respondent said that the “vast majority of library staff” did not have any understanding of the market for graphic novels etc. and other wrote that “It is hard to tell from the front covers sometimes what the book will be about and what topics will be covered.” One respondent described librarianship as a “risk-adverse” profession and said that made graphic novels etc. “daunting”.

It seems that there is a great deal of concern amongst librarians over how to deal with graphic novels etc. There is also a great deal of concern, however, over getting things right. The majority of respondents to this questionnaire wanted further help to ensure that their graphic novel etc. collections could be useable, safe, and exciting for their users.

#### **4.12. Observational research**

This section comprises a discussion of the notes taken from the observational research. [For a list of the questions and basic notes, please see appendix E.]

In a discussion with a Comics Scholar it was found that one major, and telling, problem with graphic novel etc. collections in public libraries is their “liminal” [comics scholar’s term] or marginal positioning in library buildings. Many large libraries place their graphic novel etc. collections behind columns or around corners; they certainly do not seem to belong in amongst the real books. Some could argue that putting graphic novels etc. on their own emphasises them and shows them off to the library users, but the placing of them next to doorways and staircases adds to the suggestion that these books do not quite belong in the library. A brand new library opened this summer in Newcastle city centre. It has its graphic novels on two small bookcases with their backs to the banisters of the main flight of stairs. Although this means that they catch the user’s eye as they make their way downstairs towards the exit, it also means that anyone attempting to browse the shelves is trodden on by those users who have just come up the stairs. In Barnsley Central Library the graphic novels etc. are positioned on the back wall behind the central staircase, meaning that users have to walk either under the stairs or through the partitioned audio-visual area to find them at all.

The only library visited that had their graphic novels etc. on prominent display was the main library at Sheffield. Here visitors walking through the doors were instantly faced with carousels of these titles. This would seem the ultimate realisation of graphic novels etc. bringing people into the library. There could be no seduction for young people however as unfortunately, since a complaint a few years ago, Sheffield library

policy has refused anyone under eighteen taking out any graphic novel etc. One observer was unconvinced that this choice of location was indeed a marketing ploy; they felt that the carousels had been placed near the doors simply because that was where the free space happened to be.

As graphic novels etc. do not obviously fit into any other section in the library they do often find themselves in the free space available. Barnsley Central Library put their handful of Young Adult graphic novels etc. on the shelf with the teenage advisory books on puberty and parental divorces, because that was where they would fit. Lee advises against putting all of a library's graphic novels etc. in one age group as this has the potential to alienate other readers who might be interested (2004). It can also emphasise the theory, even prejudice, that graphic novels etc. are 'less-than' and not worthy of a place in the main collection. Lee does suggest, however, that placing this material next to the computers so that "potential readers [can] look at the titles while waiting their turn" might be a good idea (2004). These two statements are a little contradictory when read together; Lee seems to suggest that graphic novels etc. should be worthy of being in the same room as the main collections but not of being on the same shelves.

One of the libraries visited had signs on their adult graphic novels etc. 'warning' potential readers, or the guardians of potential readers, that they contained adult content. Such signage would not look out of place on an 18 certificate DVD shelf, but it is probably down to personal taste whether or not a warning message on graphic novels etc. is useful to parents who may be ignorant of the dangers or a mild form of censorship. It is of course unlikely that such a sign would deter a child from flicking through titles that look like fun, but it may give parents an indication of their suitability. One of the

respondents to the questionnaire commented on their fears that some parents assumed all graphic novels etc. were comics meant for children and it was difficult to persuade them otherwise.

The observational research supported the Comic Scholar's view that graphic novels etc. found themselves marginalised in libraries by their location away from books and next to doors and stairs. Some of the respondents to the questionnaire, however, suggested potential benefits in placing graphic novels etc. in different locations; most noticeably the location advocated was near the computers, so that those users who would not go near the books but came in to use the internet would start reading graphic novels etc. Although this is a tactic that has enjoyed some success in libraries, in general terms it only serves to re-establish the perceptions that graphic novels etc. are for less able readers only, that reading them is easy because it's just looking at pictures, and that the reading of them will lead reluctant users from the computer to comics and eventually to the proper classics.

## Chapter 5. Conclusions

### **5.1. Summary of the results**

The following twelve bullet points list the conclusions reached by analysing the results of the online questionnaire.

1. Librarians of all ages and both genders read and own graphic novels etc.
2. Almost all UK Public Authorities now have some graphic novels etc. in their libraries, and most of these have between fifty and two thousand (council-wide)
3. Most libraries put children's material in a separate section, and are very concerned about doing so accurately
4. Not all titles that are graphic novels etc. are considered to be so, such as *Asterix*, and these can fall by the wayside when deciding how to shelve other titles
5. Most libraries do not shelve their graphic novels etc. in any order
6. Those that do, go for author order, which does not work easily with graphic novels themselves
7. Librarians are less concerned with violence than expected, and more concerned about sexist and religious content than any other
8. Despite the amount of literature written about how to deal with complaints, half of respondents said that they had no fear of receiving any, and over half had never had one
9. Most complaints received involved children, making it more important than ever to give librarians guidelines about selecting age-appropriate material

10. This research supports other findings that there has been a strong increase in interest in graphic novels etc. amongst library users over the past five years
11. Most librarians want their graphic novels etc. to be in the same area but split into some sort of easily accessible order
12. Librarians have some interest in genres and integration, but are concerned about the practicalities of undertaking such a huge cataloguing task and reorganisation of their libraries

## **5.2. Conclusions**

To return to the hypothesis in the introduction:

Hypothesis:

The DDCS method of shelving graphic novels etc. is unhelpful to everyday library users. Other methods more closely related to shelving fiction would be more appropriate. Librarians will prefer to shelve graphic novels etc. by a fiction stock method such as alphabetical, than to shelve these titles in the Dewey run.

The results of the questionnaire both support and refute the hypothesis in different ways. Although the results support the fact that librarians do not see the DDCS method of shelving graphic novels etc. as useful, librarians clearly do not agree on a more useful system; in fact most librarians appear to use no system at all.

Over all, the results show that librarians have a great deal of interest in graphic novels etc. and want a day-to-day system of shelving that works for both staff and users.

They also show that there is a lack of understanding from many librarians, a lack that many are aware of and wish to improve on, about exactly what comes under the headings of graphic novels etc. Most dramatically, the results show that most librarians have either given up on shelving, or never begun to shelve, their graphic novels in any order.

These five points show the most popular methods of shelving graphic novels etc.

- not to shelve in any order
- to shelve in alphabetical order of author name
- to split collections into the two / three main publishers [DC, Marvel, Image] and then to put everything else in a fourth section
- to shelve together, but split by genre or ‘worlds’
- to shelve in alphabetical order of series

Not to shelve graphic novels in any order certainly appears to be current practice. Forty-one out of seventy-nine respondents said that this was how they currently dealt with their collections. Although this “lob culture” may be the easiest method for librarians, however, it is hard to believe that it is easy for library users to find the title they are looking for. Even if it is the case that half of graphic novel etc. readers are happy to ‘flick through’ and discover new things, there will be other users who are unhappy with having to look across several hundred spines to find out whether the library stocks any titles from the series that they are interested in.

Shelving in alphabetical author order was the most popular option amongst those who chose an order. The problems of this have been discussed at length in the Results

and Discussion section and they should not be ignored. Some graphic novels have up to ten contributors and some collections of short stories have more. Furthermore, if the perception expressed by some librarians in comments to the questionnaire, that ‘those who read graphic novels etc. know more about them than the librarians do and therefore know how to look for them’, is correct, then what happens when a fan approaches the main desk and asks for anything by Michael Turner, Rene Goscinnny or Dave McKean, who as illustrators rather than authors, will not appear on any catalogue.

Splitting graphic novels into the main publishers is an interesting idea. It allows those with a basic knowledge of the medium to find titles more quickly, and separates unique stock well. It doesn’t however answer the ultimate ‘how to shelve’ question for those titles that end up in the ‘everything else’ section. Nor does it help those who don’t have a clue who published *Persepolis*. It also introduces the issue of how far to go in breaking up the collection. Should just Marvel and DC be separate, should Image be added, do five or six publishers deserve a section? It also doesn’t take into account smaller publishers owned by the big companies such as Top Cow, owned by Image, or Titan Books, which publishes DC titles in the UK. Titan Books publications may have the DC logo clearly on the front and spine, but not all Top Cow titles clearly belong to Image.

Choosing to split graphic novels etc. into genres or ‘worlds’ is a contentious issue amongst librarians. It is the method chosen for many home collections, but in a library it can be difficult to decide what goes where. Often this can be down to a matter of personal taste, meaning that it can be more successful in school libraries with one enthusiastic member of staff than in a public library with a dozen different opinions being voiced. Even if one member of staff is elected to make the decision, it can be

difficult for others to shelve their way, simply because certain decisions do not make sense to them. *'The knowledge gap'*

Shelving in alphabetical order of series is not one of the most popular methods according to the questionnaire. It is however one of the most natural. It is the simplest to maintain and the most obvious for library users in addition to library professionals to understand; what could be simpler than *Batman* going under 'B'? It seems astonishing that more libraries do not use this method. It is not a perfect system, especially to those who are trying to find chronological volumes or individual subtitles shelved under a collective heading, but it does give an immediate and accessible structure to the collection.

To make matters more complicated, none of the above methods work for all four formats. Manga lends itself to chronological shelving due to the large series numbers on their spines, cartoon strips and comic books are almost always shelved by size, as this is the best way to protect them from damage. Graphic novels themselves are the most complicated and contentious to shelve and the simplest methods do not seem to be the most popular. Perhaps this in itself adds to the theory that there is no existing system of shelving graphic novels etc. that is satisfactory for library professionals. Further research into this possibility would be extremely interesting as, if this is the case, then a system should be created following consultation with librarians and other specialists.

### **5.3. Limitations of this research**

The main limitation of this research was that the respondents were gathered by a snowball sampling method and were volunteers or a 'self-selecting sample'. Both of

these factors mean that this research is not representative of the population and therefore its results cannot be considered representative or statistically significant. This does not mean that the results of this research are not useful or worthy of discussion. It means simply that this was a preliminary study and that a wider piece of research, supporting these findings, would have to be performed in order to make these results statistically valid.

Another limitation of this research is that although a form of triangulation was used to enrich the results of the research, one method, the questionnaire, was focused on and used to a much greater extent than either of the other approaches. Interviews were only conducted with two people and observational research was only taken in four libraries. When compared with seventy responses to the questionnaire, there is clearly a heavy weighting towards this approach.

The most disappointing limitation of this research was that there was only one respondent who had no graphic novels in their library, making the data from them impossible to use. It was hoped that more people without graphic novels etc. would be reached, and the fact that they were not is probably due to the self-selecting sampling method.

Although these factors limit this piece of research, it has been an interesting introductory study, and its findings could lead to further research that might influence the creation of a system for shelving graphic novels etc. in libraries that satisfies library professionals and is useful for library users and graphic novel etc. fans.

#### **5.4. Suggestions for further research**

The following are suggestions for further research that could be undertaken to look further into these results and the issues that they have raised:

1. A larger scale, representative version of this study could be conducted to improve the validity of these results
2. Of those that did not shelve their graphic novels etc. in any order, it would be interesting to ask the reason for that; whether, for example, it was due to a belief that users enjoyed browsing, problems in understanding the order due to the difficulty in finding information on the front covers, or whether it is true that some librarians have just 'given up'.
3. This research was only able to approach the librarians to see how they would like graphic novels etc. to be shelved. It would be interesting to also ask various library users including fans of graphic novels etc. and members of the public concerned about them what they would prefer to see their libraries do.
4. This research only had one respondent who had no graphic novels etc. in their library, and this was due to the library stocking only reference books. It would be interesting to see whether there are more libraries that do not have graphic novels etc. and the reasons for this, or whether it is true that now almost all public libraries stock some of these titles.
5. This research found that there was little concern over violence amongst the librarians who responded to the question. Further research could be done to see

whether this is a real trend amongst librarians as the perception in the literature is that violence is of great concern.

6. One respondent said that most of their library's graphic novels etc. are placed in the adult section, but that they are bought with the money from the children's budget. Research could be done to see whether this is common practice and what confusions and difficulties can arise when this happens.

### **5.5. Coda: researcher's reflections**

In terms of where in the library to put graphic novels, the debate continues. Many currently advocate putting them next to the computers, cafés, or doors to entice those users who did not come into the library for the books. This, however, gives off the unfortunate perception that librarians are not quite behind graphic novels etc. and that they do not consider them even worthy of being in the vicinity of the Mills and Boon, let alone the Dickens. Neither is putting them at the heart of the library best practice if those who will be most attracted to them are not allowed to borrow them. Putting them next to the science fiction section, the literature declares, is a cliché. Putting them on the same shelves as everything else, however, is difficult due to their size.

The researcher would like to recommend that best practice is to separate graphic novels etc. into their four formats, and then to put them in alphabetical series order [due to its ease], not as part of the fiction or Dewey run, but not so far away from it as to be creeping out of doors. The evidence here, however, does not lend itself to such simplicity. Most librarians seem to put their graphic novels etc. in no order next to computers as if they are fit for nothing more than 'flipping through'. It seems a shame

that this is the conclusion of this research and the perception given by a literature that at face value seems to have never ending enthusiasm for the benefits of graphic novels etc. Perhaps there is not a perfect system that will work for every public library, as such systems will be defined by the size of the collection, the size of the building, and the time that the staff have to dedicate to shelving and cataloguing. Not having any system at all, however, should not be the answer to the question of shelving graphic novels etc. Ultimately it seems defeat or even laziness rather than a belief in the 'freedom of browsing' that would lead a library professional to not have any way of finding an item of his stock; and if 'freedom of browsing' is such an attractive idea, why it is not used for all fiction stock? Library systems are there for the purpose of helping the user to find what he is looking for; it is one of the main roles of the librarian to assist him. Currently this service is not offered for graphic novels etc.

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## Appendix A – Beall’s sample list

<http://www.oclc.org/dewey/discussion/papers/741SampleList.doc>

### **Sample Title/DDC List: 741.5 Comic books, graphic novels, fotonovelas, cartoons, caricatures, comic strips**

The sample title list is intended as a guide to help classifiers with the new distinction between 741.5 and 741.56 given in the February 2006 posting of New and Changed Entries. The list is not intended to be exhaustive, but we do welcome suggestions for additional titles. Users may respond to the Dewey blog, or send comments and suggestions to:

Julianne Beall  
Assistant Editor, DDC  
jbea@loc.gov

<b>Title</b>	<b>DDC</b>	<b>Writers &amp; Artists</b>
Alex	741.56942	Charles Peattie & Russell Taylor
The Amazing Spider-Man	741.5973	Stan Lee & Steve Ditko
Andy Capp	741.56942	Reg Smythe
Astérix	741.5944	Uderzo & Goscinny
Astro Boy	741.5952	Osamu Tezuka
Archie	741.5973	Bob Montana; Craig Boldman & Henry Scarpelli
Azumanga Daioh	741.56952	Azuma Kiyohiko
B.C.	741.56973	Johnny Hart
Baby Blues	741.56973	Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott
Ballard Street	741.56973	Jerry Van Amerongen
Batman	741.5973	Bob Kane & Bill Finger; Frank Miller
Beetle Bailey	741.56973	Mort & Greg Walker
Bizarro	741.56973	Dan Piraro
Blondie	741.56973	Chic Young; Dean Young & Denis Lebrun
Bloom County	741.56973	Berkeley Breathed
Bristow	741.56942	Frank Dickens
Broom Hilda	741.56973	Russell Myers
The Broons	741.569411	Dudley D. Watkins; Ken H. Harrison
Calvin and Hobbes	741.56973	Bill Watterson
Captain Marvel	741.5973	Bill Parker & C.C. Beck
Cathy	741.56973	Cathy Guisewite
Close to Home	741.56973	John McPherson
Contract with God and Other Tenement Stories	741.5973	Will Eisner

Dennis the Menace	741.56973	Hank Ketcham; Marcus Hamilton & Ron Ferdinand
Dennis the Menace	741.59411	David Law; David Sutherland; David Parkins
Dick Tracy	741.56973	Chester Gould; Dick Locher & Michael Kilian
Dilbert	741.56973	Scott Adams
Doonesbury	741.56973	Garry Trudeau
Drabble	741.56973	Kevin Fagan
The Family Circus	741.56973	Bil & Jeff Keane
Fantastic Four	741.5973	Stan Lee & Jack Kirby
The Far Side	741.56973	Gary Larson
Flash Gordon	741.56973	Alex Raymond; Jim Keefe
Flook	741.56942	Trog
For Better or For Worse	741.56971	Lynn Johnston
The Fosdyke Saga	741.56942	Bill Tidy
FoxTrot	741.56973	Bill Amend
Fred Basset	741.569411	Alex Graham
Funky Winkerbean	741.56973	Tom Batiuk
The Gambols	741.56942	Barry & Dobs Appleby
Garfield	741.56973	Jim Davis
Get Fuzzy	741.56973	Darby Conley
Ginger Meggs	741.56994	James Charles Bancks; Lloyd Piper; James Kemsley
Hägar the Horrible	741.56973	Chris Browne
Heathcliff	741.56973	George Gately
Herman	741.56973	Jim Unger
Hi and Lois	741.56973	Brian Walker, Greg Walker & Chance Browne
The Hulk	741.5973	Stan Lee & Jack Kirby
If ...	741.56942	Steve Bell
Jane	741.56942	Norman Pett; Don Freeman; Michael Hubbard
Jump Start	741.56973	Robb Armstrong
The Justice League of America	741.5973	
Krazy Kat	741.56973	George Herriman
Li'l Abner	741.56973	Al Capp
Little Orphan Annie	741.56973	Harold Gray
Luann	741.56973	Greg Evans
Mister Boffo	741.56973	Joe Martin
Modesty Blaise	741.56942	Peter O'Donnell
Mother Goose and Grimm	741.56973	Mike Peters
Mutts	741.56973	Patrick McDonnell
Nancy	741.56973	Ernie Bushmiller; Guy & Brad Gilchrist
Nikopol Trilogy	741.5944	Enki Bilal
Non Sequitur	741.56973	Wiley Miller
Opus	741.56973	Berkeley Breathed

Over the Hedge	741.56973	Michael Fry & T. Lewis
Peanuts	741.56973	Charles Schulz
Pearls Before Swine	741.56973	Stephan Pastis
The Perishers	741.56942	Dennis Collins & Maurice Dodd
Pogo	741.56973	Walt Kelly
Popeye!	741.56973	Elzie Segar's <i>Thimble Theatre</i> ; Hy Eisman
Prince Valiant	741.56973	Harold R. Foster; Mark Schultz & Gary Gianni
Rose Is Rose	741.56973	Pat Brady
Rupert Bear	741.56942	Mary Tourtel; Alfred Bestall
Sally Forth	741.56973	Greg Howard; Francesco Marciuliano; drawn by Craig Macintosh
Steve Canyon	741.56973	Milton Caniff
Strangers in Paradise	741.5973	Terry Moore
Superman	741.5973	Jerry Siegel & Joe Shuster
Tarzan	741.56973	Edgar Rice Burroughs
Terry and the Pirates	741.56973	Milton Caniff
Tintin	741.59493	Hergé
Wonder Woman	741.5973	
X-Men	741.5973	Len Wein & Dave Cockrum; Chris Claremont & Jim Lee
Ziggy	741.56973	Tom Wilson & Tom II
Zippy the Pinhead	741.56973	Bill Griffith
Zits	741.56973	Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman

## Appendix B – Information Sheets A and B

### **Information Sheet A – Questionnaire**

*You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please contact the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.*

#### What is the project called?

The research question is ‘Whereabouts in a library should a graphic, comic, and cartoon collection be shelved?’

#### Who is conducting this research?

The lead researcher is Emiliebeth Arwen Caddy, a postgraduate student in the Department of Information Studies at The University of Sheffield.

#### What is the project’s purpose?

To gather the opinions of public library staff on whether all graphic novels, comic books, comic strips, manga, and similar materials should be shelved in the same place in simple alphabetical order, or whether they should be ordered using genre, subject, type, author or illustrator name, reading age or other method.

Between 2004 and 2006, staff at the Dewey Decimal Classification System, which is a system that works out where books go on a library’s shelf, looked at how to code graphic, comic, and cartoon material. After two years they decided that it would all go together in one code and therefore on one shelf, bookcase, or area of the library. However, with the increasing popularity and diversity of publications in these formats, it may not be appropriate to shelve them in this way any more. This research seeks to discover whether different people including fans of graphic novels, librarians who shelve these books, and adults or parents who might be concerned about some of the material contained in graphic novels think it would be best to keep all of this material together, or whether they would like to see it split up into different sections.

The researcher is also aware of uncertainty over the contents of some graphic novels and similar material and their suitability to be shelved in a public library at all. This is particularly an issue when the library in question is used by children and young people. This is one of the reasons why the researcher is interested in the possibility of splitting such material into age-ranges or subject types. This project is especially interested in the views of library staff on these sensitive topics.

### Why have I been asked to take part?

You have been contacted because you work in a public library. This project is particularly interested in public libraries because of the diverse range of people who use them, including people of different ages, cultural backgrounds, and interests. It is also interested in different members of staff such as front-line/enquiry desk library staff, shelving staff, cataloguing and acquisition staff, and senior library managers.

### Do I have to take part?

It is entirely up to you whether you wish to take part in this project. You will be asked to give your consent to the researcher, so that she can use the data collected from you. You are also free to withdraw your consent at any time and for any reason, and you do not have to tell the researcher your reason. The researcher's contact details are given at the bottom of this Information Sheet so that you can contact her with any questions, or if you later decide to withdraw from the project.

### What will happen if I choose to take part?

You take part in this project by filling in the attached questionnaire. This will ask you some brief personal details including your current level (i.e. senior manager, front-line staff), your gender, and your age. It will then ask your opinion of graphic novels and the possible systems for shelving them in your public library.

After you have filled in the questionnaire, you don't have to do anything else. If you wish to receive further information about the research, or to see the results when the project is finished, you can put your contact details on the questionnaire and the researcher will contact you.

### What are the possible benefits and disadvantages of taking part, and what should I do if something goes wrong?

While there are no immediate benefits for those people consenting to fill in the questionnaire, it is hoped that this work will add to other research on graphic novels in public libraries and 'best-practice' (suggestions of what to do) will be taken from them. This means that in the future, some libraries may decide to change their layout to suit the sort of opinions voiced in this type of research.

Because of the awareness of a sensitive topics in this research (children's access to inappropriate content in graphic novels and similar material), the research is aware that some of the questions may cause offence or upset to some participants. The researcher has done all she can to minimise any offence, but if you have any concerns about this project, you should contact the researcher in the first instance, and then Ms. Sheila

Webber (s.webber@sheffield.ac.uk), a lecturer in the department where this research is being carried out and the supervisor for this project.

Will my taking part in this be confidential?

Absolutely. All data collected from you will only be seen by the researcher and her supervisor during analysis. All data will be stored by code, rather than by your name, and anything used in the final presentation of the research will be anonymous. You will not be identified or identifiable in any way. The Consent Form (page 1 of the survey), is a contract stating what can be done with the data collected from you. If you would like a copy of this, signed by the researcher, then you can indicate this on the Consent Form.

What will happen to the results of the project?

The results of this project will be printed as a masters thesis for The University of Sheffield and will be available online from the university where it can be read for the purpose of further research. If you would like to receive any information about the results, then there is a space in the survey for you to give your contact details to the researcher. Your contact details will not be used for any other purpose, and will be safely destroyed on completion of the project.

Who has ethically reviewed the project?

All research projects at The University of Sheffield are ethically approved by a board of academics. This research has been approved by The Department of Information Studies Ethics Review Procedure. This procedure is monitored by The University's Research Ethics Committee. Further details can be found on The University of Sheffield's website, [www.shef.ac.uk](http://www.shef.ac.uk)

For further information please contact:

**Lead Researcher**

Miss Emiliebeth Arwen Caddy

lip08eac@shef.ac.uk

**Project Supervisor**

Ms Sheila Webber

0114 222 2641

s.webber@sheffield.ac.uk

## **Information Sheet B – Interview**

*You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please contact the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.*

### **What is the project called?**

The research question is ‘Whereabouts in a library should a graphic, comic, and cartoon collection be shelved?’

### **Who is conducting this research?**

The lead researcher is Emiliebeth Arwen Caddy, a postgraduate student in the Department of Information Studies at The University of Sheffield.  
Contact details: 01226 289262, lip08eac@shef.ac.uk

### **What is the project’s purpose?**

To gather the opinions of public library staff on whether all graphic novels, comic books, comic strips, manga, and similar materials should be shelved in the same place in simple alphabetical order, or whether they should be ordered using genre, subject, type, author or illustrator name, reading age or other method.

Between 2004 and 2006, staff at the Dewey Decimal Classification System, which is a system that works out where books go on a library’s shelf, looked at how to code graphic, comic, and cartoon material. After two years they decided that it would all go together in one code and therefore on one shelf, bookcase, or area of the library. However, with the increasing popularity and diversity of publications in these formats, it may not be appropriate to shelve them in this way any more. This research seeks to discover whether different people including fans of graphic novels, librarians who shelve these books, and adults or parents who might be concerned about some of the material contained on graphic novels think it would be best to keep all of this material together, or whether they would like to see it split up into different sections.

The researcher is also aware of uncertainty over the contents of some graphic novels and similar material and their suitability to be shelved in a public library at all. This is particularly an issue when the library in question is used by children and young people. This is one of the reasons why the researcher is interested in the possibility of splitting such material into age-ranges or subject types. This project is especially interested in the views of library staff on these sensitive topics.

### **Why have I been asked to take part?**

You have been contacted because you work in a public library. This project is particularly interested in public libraries because of the diverse range of people who use them, including people of different ages, cultural backgrounds, and interests. It is also interested in different members of staff such as front-line/enquiry desk library staff, shelving staff, cataloguing and acquisition staff, and senior library managers.

### Do I have to take part?

It is entirely up to you whether you wish to take part in this project. You will be asked to give your consent to the researcher, so that she can use the data collected from you. You are also free to withdraw your consent at any time and for any reason, and you do not have to tell the researcher your reason. You will be given a copy of the consent form, and a copy of this sheet with the researchers contact details on so that you can contact her with any questions, or if you later decide to withdraw from the project.

### What will happen if I choose to take part?

If you agree to take part then the researcher will arrange an appropriate time to meet you. The interview will be informal and you will have the opportunity to talk about your experiences and opinions of working with graphic novels and similar material. There only needs to be one meeting and this should take no more than an hour.

The researcher is interested in the opinions of library staff in different roles and at different levels. She will therefore ask you to describe your role within the library organisation. All of your responses will be completely anonymised when the research is finally presented.

If you wish to receive further information about the research, or to see the results when the project is finished, you can put your contact details on the consent form and the researcher will contact you.

### What are the possible benefits and disadvantages of taking part, and what should I do if something goes wrong?

While there are no immediate benefits for those people consenting to fill in the questionnaire, it is hoped that this work will add to other research on graphic novels in public libraries and 'best-practice' (suggestions of what to do) will be taken from them. Taking part in this project may also stimulate your own thinking about this current issue in library and information science.

Because of the sensitive topics in this research (children's access to inappropriate content in graphic novels and similar material), the research is aware that some of the questions may cause offence or upset to some participants. The researcher has done all she can to minimise any offence, but if you have any concerns about this project, you should contact the researcher in the first instance, and then Ms. Sheila Webber

(s.webber@sheffield.ac.uk), a lecturer in the department where this research is being carried out and the supervisor for this project.

Will my taking part in this be confidential?

Absolutely. All data collected from you will only be seen by the researcher and her team during analysis. All data will be stored by code, rather than by your name, and anything used in the final presentation of the research will be anonymous. You will not be identified or identifiable in any way. The Consent Form, which both you and the researcher will sign, is a contract stating what can be done with the data collected from you.

What will happen to the results of the project?

The results of this project will be printed as a masters thesis for The University of Sheffield and will be available online from the university where it can be read for the purpose of further research. If you would like to receive any information about the results, then there is a space for you to give your contact details to the researcher on the Consent Form. Your contact details will not be used for any other purpose, and will be safely destroyed on completion of the project.

Who has ethically reviewed the project?

All research projects at The University of Sheffield are ethically approved by a board of academics. This research has been approved by The Department of Information Studies Ethics Review Procedure. This procedure is monitored by The University's Research Ethics Committee. Further details can be found on The University of Sheffield's website, [www.shef.ac.uk](http://www.shef.ac.uk)

For further information please contact:

**Lead Researcher**

Miss Emiliebeth Arwen Caddy

lip08eac@shef.ac.uk

**Project Supervisor**

Ms Sheila Webber

0114 222 2641

s.webber@sheffield.ac.uk

Appendix C – Consent Forms A and B

**Participation Consent Form A – Questionnaire**

Title of Research Project: Whereabouts in a library should a graphic, comic, and cartoon collection be shelved?

Lead Researcher: Miss Emiliebeth Arwen Caddy

Please initial

I confirm that I have read and understood the Information Sheet, dated 30 <sup>th</sup> April, 2009, explaining the above project, and I have been given the details of the lead researcher, who I can contact if I have any further questions.	
I understand that by returning a questionnaire, along with this form, to the research I am consenting to take part in this research and for the data collected from me to be used in this research.	
I understand that my participation is voluntary, and that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time by contacting the researcher, without giving any reason, and without there being any negative consequences.	
I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential, that my name will not be linked to any data, and that I will not be identified in the report or reports that results from the research.	
I give permission for the researcher to have access to my anonymised responses and I agree for the data collected from me to be used in any future research.	
I agree to take part in the above research project.	

Name of participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Date:

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

If you are interested in the results of the research, or would like a copy of this signed by the researcher, then please provide your contact details. These will not be used for any other purpose, and they will not be given to any third party. Please tick the box to indicate whether you would like to receive a copy of the Consent Form and/or information on the completion of the project.

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Tick for consent form:

Tick for final report:

Name of lead researcher: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Date:

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant Identification Code (*for the use of the researcher*): \_\_\_\_\_

## Participation Consent Form B – Interviews

Title of Research Project: Whereabouts in a library should a graphic, comic, and cartoon collection be shelved?

Lead Researcher: Miss Emiliebeth Arwen Caddy

Institution: The University of Sheffield

Please initial

I confirm that I have read and understood the Information Sheet, dated 30 <sup>th</sup> April, 2009, explaining the above project, and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.	
I understand that my participation is voluntary, and that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time, without giving any reason, and without there being any negative consequences. Further to this, I am free to decline to answer any question or questions that I do not wish to answer.	
I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential, that my name will not be linked to any data, and that I will not be identified in the report or reports that results from the research.	
I give permission for the researcher to have access to my anonymised responses and I agree for the data collected from me to be used in any future research.	
I have received a signed and dated copy of this form from the researcher, along with a copy of the Information Sheet and the contact details of the researcher.	
I agree to take part in the above research project.	

Participant Identification Code (*for the use of the researcher*): \_\_\_\_\_

Name of participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Date:

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of lead researcher: \_\_\_\_\_

Date:

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix D – The Questionnaire

Some of these questions were laid out differently online; screenshots have been provided, but most of the questions should be self explanatory.

### **Page 1 – Shelving graphic novels**

1. Have you read the information sheet... (initial i.e. 'EAC')
2. I agree to take part in the following research ('YES')
3. I would like a copy of the consent form. I would like to receive the results. (tick)
4. Your Name
5. Your Email address

The screenshot shows a questionnaire titled "Shelving graphic novels". It includes an introduction, consent statements, and input fields for initials, name, and email.

**Shelving graphic novels**  
**Shelving Graphic Novels**

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide it is important for you to read the Information Sheet carefully, and discuss it with others if you wish, before you continue.

Please contact the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

Please note, you must be working in the Public Library sector to take part in this survey.

**I confirm that I have read and understood the Information Sheet, dated 30th April, 2009, explaining the research questions.**

**I understand that by returning a questionnaire I am consenting to take part in this research and for the researcher to use my responses for the purposes of the research.**

**I understand that my participation is voluntary, and that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time.**

**I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential, that my name will not be linked to any of the responses.**

**I give permission for the researcher to have access to my anonymised responses and I agree for the researcher to use my responses for the purposes of the research.**

Please Initial

**I agree to take part in the following research.**  
 YES

**If you are interested in the results of the research, or would like a copy of this signed by the researcher, please tick the box to indicate whether you would like to receive a copy of the Consent Form and/or the results of the research.**

I would like a copy of the consent form

I would like to receive the results of this research when it is completed

**Your name**

**Your email**

**Page 2 – You and your graphic novels etc.**

6. Are you: male, female, transgender?
7. Are you: 16-25, 26-35, 36-45, 46-55, 56-65, 65 or over?
8. Are you: student librarian, front line staff, line management, senior management, other?
9. Do you read graphic novels etc. yourself?
10. If yes, how many have you read: 1-5, 6-10, 10-20, over 20?
11. Do you own any graphic novels etc.?
12. If yes, how many do you own: 1-5, 6-10, 10-20, over 20?
13. Do you have graphic novels etc. in your library?

**Page 4 – No to graphic novels etc.**

14. How many do you stock?
15. Do you have a separate section of graphic novels etc. for children located elsewhere in the library?
16. How is your collection shelved?
17. When selecting suitable graphic novels etc. for your library are you most concerned about: violent content (fighting and murders), sexual content (sex scenes), sexist content (sexualised women), political content (fascist or anarchist characters)?

18. How concerned are you about complaints?
19. How many formal complaints has your library ever received?
20. Were these complaints concerned with content or access?
21. Have you been aware of an increased interest among users?

When considering what might be a suitable graphic novel etc. for your library, how concerned are you about the following things?

	Not at all	Somewhat concerned	Quite concerned	Extremely concerned
Violent content (fights and murders)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sexual content (sex scenes)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sexist content (sexualised women)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Political content (facist or anarchist characters)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Religious context (for or against one religion ie. anti-semitic or creationist content)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Is there anything else you are concerned about (please specify)	<input type="text"/>			

**Page 4 – No to graphic novels etc.**

**Shelving graphic novels**

**No to graphic novels etc. collection**

**Why have you chosen not to stock this material? (please tick all that apply)**  
**(If aquisition/selection is not part of your duties, please select 'other' and indicate this)**

- No perceived market
- Don't have the space / size library
- Concern about content and complaints
- Concern specifically about access to children and vulnerable adults
- I don't know anything about them
- I've just never considered doing so
- Other

Other (please specify)

22. Why have you chosen not to stock this material?

23. Would you be more interested in graphic novels etc. if they were split up into genres or types (like DVD stock, for example)?
24. Would you be more interested in graphic novels etc. if you could separate material suitable for children from the main collection?
25. If in the future you were selecting appropriate graphic novels etc. for your library are you most concerned about: violent content (fighting and murders), sexual content (sex scenes), sexist content (sexualised women), political content (fascist or anarchist characters)?

## Page 5 – Your opinions

**Imagine you are a user who enjoys reading graphic novels etc. Would you prefer this material to be...**

Shelved together, so you could find them all quickly

Split into genres, for easier browsing of subjects

Done another way (please specify)

Don't know

Any comments or thoughts?

**Imagine you are a front line member of staff (maybe you are). Would you want graphic novels etc. to be...**

Together, so you could shelve them quickly

Split up, so that you could market them to different audiences

Done another way (please specify)

Don't know

Any thoughts or comments

26. Thinking as a user who enjoyed reading this material, if you went into a library would you want the graphic novels etc. to be together so you could find them, or split into genres or types for easier browsing?
27. Thinking as a front line member of staff, would you want graphic novels etc. to be together so you could shelve them quickly, or split up so that you could market them to different audiences?
28. How useful do you think it is to split a collection of graphic novels etc. into genres (like DVD's)?
29. How useful do you think it would be to completely integrate graphic novels etc. with the rest of the fiction / non-fiction stock, for example to have a graphic novel version of Jane Eyre with the other Bronte books or to have a comic book version of Indiana Jones in the adventure section?
30. If you had complete control over how to shelf your graphic novel etc. collection, would you put them all together or spread them out across the main fiction stock?
31. Do you have any other thoughts or comments you would like to make about classifying and shelving graphic novels etc.?

## Appendix E – Observational Research Questions and Notes

These are the questions used as a checklist for the observational research of four library buildings, along with brief typed-up notes.

1. Can you see the graphic novels etc. when you walk in the door?
2. Can you see any signs to them?
3. Are they in the same place / on the same shelf?
4. Are there any for children?
5. What order are they shelved in?
6. Are there any age signs, warning signs, notices about content?

### Barnsley Central Library

Graphic novels etc. cannot be seen from door. Although they are almost directly across from the main entrance they are hidden by the main staircase. Users have to walk through the audio-visual area or behind or under the stairs to find them. There are no signs to them inside or outside the library. There are some in the children's section downstairs; there is nothing to indicate this. There is no separate section in the children's library, they are on the teenage section next to the self-help books. Children's section does not have enough to have any order; all are *The Simpsons* comics. Upstairs they are not shelved in any order. There are more than fifty. There are no signs. Over 14's can take out those in adult section.

### Sheffield Main Library

Graphic novels etc. on carousels as you walk into library. Not in any order. None for children; no one under 18 can take out any graphic novels in any Sheffield library.

Although there are titles like *Asterix*!

### Broomhill Branch Library, Sheffield

Can't see graphic novels etc. when entering. They are on separate face-out shelving, and kept in no order. No signs (small branch library, everything together). None in teen section upstairs, *Asterix* etc. in children's section upstairs. Warning signs on adult collection saying they are for adults.

### Newcastle City Library

Graphic novels etc. upstairs on main fiction floor; there are signs to them. They are on two waist-height shelves with their backs to the stairs. There are some for children. Children's section is on same floor so children could look through adult collection easily. No warning signs. No order shelving.

## Appendix F. Complete Control Comments

[Please note that incorrect spelling has been left in these comments.]

1. Put them in a more prominent position by the main reception desk. Get teens to design posters to advertise them. Start a graphic novel reading group?
2. put them in series order, then move them nearer the computer area (incase we have reluctant readers that do use pcs)
3. We use author surname in alphabetical order, however we do have some exceptions, these are where one title has been written by many authors, (usually superheroes) in this case we go with the first letter of title. If someone specifically wants to read Batman they are more likely to look under B.
4. I would keep the collection together but use different colour spine labels to denote individual genre
5. keep them in a dump bin
6. Keep as they are, i.e. shelved together (some libraries have them in dumpbins) and not shelved alphabetically (this is extremely time-consuming to do and has no real advantage as shelf checks for specific books are rare)
7. Display them all front-on, in a unit specifically designed for this purpose.
8. I would use some form of alphabetical order for the bulk of the stock, with a nearby, continually fresh display / dumpbin.
9. Divide them into age groups then display them all face on where people have easy access to all in the collection.
10. Just put them on the shelf and see how the readers use them
11. shelve front facing in random order
12. Separate into manga & "western graphics" (readership of former is predominantly 15-30 mixed gender, latter is 25-45 mainly male), grouped by series. It is illogical to associate by artist or author as most work on a very wide areas over time
13. Maybe age-related - i.e. some suitable for children in children's section
14. See my previous comments!
15. Split them into age ranges: teen, young adult and adult. I do have control of this and this is what we do.
16. Quite like them being mixed up as it allows the discovery of new authors /artists

17. I would also try putting some in with genres ie Jane Eyre in with the classics
18. Put all the adult items together and all the teenage seperately to avoid content complaints. keep the teen in the teenage section. Keep them in no particular order.
19. All face-on display
20. Divide them by readership levels, I don't think it's appropriate to treat younger-end Manga or Batman, for example, together with Preacher etc.
21. Shelve altogher so that users immediately see all the Graphic novels we stock
22. I might split them into publishers but probably not. I do have complete control.
23. Put them togther with as much face on as possible
24. Sort the graphic novels into adult content and childrens contents and shelve them by author in the relevant sections of the library.

## Appendix G. Any Further Comments

[Please note that some words have been removed from the following statements and replaced with a line \_\_\_\_\_. This has been done to maintain anonymity and to ensure that individuals cannot be identified, and for no other reason. Incorrect spelling has been left in.]

1. We try to get a fair bit of face-out  
  
For a risk-averse profession they are daunting. Need to reach an audience who may not sue libraries or know they are there. Not sure how that could be addressed nationally?
2. Some staff still regard them as an alternative for less able readers and those with English as an additional language - rather than a sophisticated reading form, too.
3. We shelve Manga separately to graphic novels and also find it hard to maintain the shelving order of worlds, although that is the aim  
  
I would suggest moving them to more "used" area of the library that people walk past so they notice them or near computer area in libraries for reluctant readers. I have done that before at a previous library I worked in and it was successful! Also advertising with poster that borrower can request books for free (available in \_\_\_\_\_ Libraries, not sure about elsewhere) so people can order other bits of series not in our library.
4. Stuff with explicit content should be in collections marked for adults, the same as books. You wouldn't shelve "Last Exit to Brooklyn" in the children's library, the same applies to graphic novels.
5. We don't see enough graphic novels through our library supplier and because of our service level agreements it is extremely difficult to go off on book buys to more specialist shops
6. In our library, the graphic novel section is situated at the back of the library, obscured by a staircase and shelves. People are not able to see the collection as they enter the library. I believe many people do not actually know we have a collection and/or where it is. If the collection had a more prominent position in the library, people would be more aware of graphic novels and more would be borrowed.
7. Very useful to be able to distinguish between adult, young adult and children's graphic novels, on the library catalogue as well as visibly on the books.
8. Any tips, gratefully received!!
- 9.

10. The biggest problem with graphic novels is separating 'adult' graphic novels from teens and choosing which are which. Since those who would read 'adult' ones would also read Teens ones, how could you separate the two, yet if you put the two close together, you may have teens reading material not appropriate to them.
11. Would like some more clarity on suitability for younger readers
12. It would help to narrow them down into age categories, so that users know what type of content to expect in the books (e.g. sexual content, violence). It is hard to tell from the front covers sometimes what the book will be about and what topics will be covered.
13. Children do tend to see them as 'comics' and I think this is a common thing with parents too unless you point out that some content could be unsuitable. Staff need to be trained to ensure they can advise on this subject.
14. childrens and teenage should be shelved seperately due to some unsuitable content in some teenage/adult books. Teenage shelved randomly due to theories that teenagers prefer not to have 'rules'.
15. They definitely tend to get lost if you shelve them in the Dewey sequence. And there is still in practice a lack of consistency in at least some libraries as to \*where\* in the Dewey sequence you shelve them, so you end up with some in the 800s under what is presumably the main number for graphic novels, then some in the 700s under TV tie-ins, etc.
16. I am responsible for buying all of \_\_\_\_\_ libraries graphic novels. The key point in classifying and shelving these is an understanding of the market, something that the vast majority of library staff do not have as it is not the sort of thing they read. It is essential to avoid stereotypes (ie all for teenage boys) and not assume if you read one type of graphic you will read them all. The genres are as diverse as mainstream novels albeit those with a sci-fi/fantasy base do predominate.
17. How they are displayed is very important - they cry out to be face-on, but space to do this is limited, but the more the better.
18. Just that I'm going to ComicCon in San Diego this year - first time! - and am hoping to attend some library-related panels. I might come back with some brilliant ideas on this subject (from my reading of GN-LIB the Americans certainly do get quite exercised on the subject of shelving graphic novels!).
19. As mentioned before, most of the complaints come from younger children picking up graphic novels which contain sex and violence. They are popular characters which the children identify with, e.g. transformers, superman, Spider-Man, x-men, but the content is older. Even though we clearly mark them as teenage books and put them in the teenage section, we do not prevent younger children from borrowing them.
20. No
21. My own interest in graphic novels began in my teens back in the seventies when I was an ardent reader of imported American comics (I even remember Eclipse Comics publishing "Sabre" the first comic to bear the name "graphic novel"). I recently went to an afternoon screening of Watchmen, a graphic novel which completely bowled me over when i first read it in twelve installments 20 or so years ago and the cinema seemed to be full off middle aged blokes about my age (all of whom were I think

equally disappointed by it).

This background has made me a lot more receptive to graphic novels than a lot of librarians who still see them as a waste of money or passing fad.

There does still seem to be a great mistrust and lack of understanding of graphic novels in libraries which leads to clumsy and inaccurate filing and deprives many potential readers of the opportunity to read them. It only takes a couple of complaints from irate parents to instill a knee jerk reaction in libraries and provoke extreme measures. Therefore because some librarians are aware of violent content in a graphic novel like "Dark Night" all Batman graphic novels, including reprints from children's comics from the fifties, are categorised as "adult only". Marvel comics are currently re-printing a lot of their old material as "Marvel Essentials". This was originally published in the 60's and 70's and aimed at children, and I have seen children in the last two library authorities I worked in looking at them with interest, but once again they are absurdly classed as "adult". One of the problems of automated library systems (ahh yes, I am old enough to have worked with the Brown system for many years) is that frontline staff now lack the flexibility to allow common sense to prevail and are physically unable to issue such stock.

Unfortunately I think we shall have to wait for libraries bibliographic departments to receive adequate training in graphic novels before these cataloguing problems can be rectified. In the meantime there is a lot of potentially high issuing stock being left underused on library shelves.

22. Make sure graphic non-fiction (eg, manga versions of Shakespeare, recent 'graphic novel' biography of Darwin, &c) are treated appropriately - not all lumped into fiction.

23. We have had our collections since 2005. we have not had one complaint and have had many positive comments from the public. graphic novels often appeal to those libraries have traditionally found difficult to attract. They can encourage reluctant readers by introducing new stories about familiar characters and can be used in education to assist those who learn in a visual way.

24. The graphic collection has really taken off at \_\_\_\_\_ Libraries, however stock falls apart too easily and its important to keep it upto date.

25. Once we separated the 'kids' stock out from the rest of our graphic novels holdings (the Tintin, Asterix, Lucky Luke...) issues started to improve. Our graphic novels are now located on the edge of our adult fiction collection, library staff can intervene if children are attempting to borrow or read inappropriate material. Some of the material we carry is extremely challenging, but I believe this makes the collection, overall, more 'adult' and 'serious'. Readers seem to get the message that graphic novels are a format containing a wide diversity of genres rather than a genre that is essentially juvenile.

26. Classifying is more difficult, presently we class all as fiction whatever the genre. This is problematic if you want to shelve in genre.

27. Please read above.

28. Just to say happy to help in anyway and look forward to hearing the outcome of this research.

29. I would be tempted to put the first initial of the authors surname as the top of the spine so that they could be shelved in first letter order.

30. They are very difficult to keep in order for a few reasons. The graphics used on the

spines make it hard to decipher the series name from the volume name, particularly if you are unfamiliar with graphic novels and the different types.

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