Adolescent Females and the Graphic Novel: A Content Analysis

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Abstract

Numerous studies of adolescent reading preferences have found that fewer females than males are drawn to reading graphic novels. Why? Adolescent readers are diverse in gender and race/ethnicity as well as the disabilities they represent. Do main characters in graphic novels reflect that diversity? Has representation changed over time? Using a content analysis approach, this study examined the main characters in a set of recommended popular graphic novels for teens to determine the percentage of female protagonists and how that percentage has changed over a seven-year period. Additionally, the race/ethnicity and any disabilities of the female main characters were analyzed. The 70 recommended graphic novels and illustrated nonfiction for teens ages 12 to 18 used for the study were found on YALSA's "Top Ten Great Graphic Novels for Teens" lists from 2007 through 2013. Female main characters were found in 46% of the titles, with 24% of these titles having only female main characters while 22% had both female and male main characters; the female main characters represented three of five race categories identified by the U.S. Census Bureau and four of the fourteen disability classifications identified by IDEA.

Introduction

Enticing adolescents to read has been and remains today a core objective for librarians, educators, and parents. At any age, reading preferences reflect reading interests; therefore, it is essential for libraries and schools to provide a varied collection of books to meet a myriad of interests. The graphic novel is a format that covers a spectrum of genres, thereby making it potentially appealing to a broad audience.

Cited as early as 1964 in a newsletter published by the Comic Amateur Press Alliance, the term "graphic novel" lagged in the beginning as its validity was questioned; some considered it to be nothing more than a comic book.[1] Half a century later, the definition of graphic novel is still debatable, yet this format has managed to become an established book category that is widely accepted and found in libraries as well as in schools across the nation.[2] Beth Jane Toren notes

that "library and education literature indicates the visual narrative is as valid a form of literature as the textual narrative."[3] Now in the twenty-first century, graphic novels are being used to promote literacy with specific target audiences: boys,[4] second-language learners, and reluctant readers.[5]

Interestingly, Robin A. Moeller, a library media specialist, noticed that the majority of students in the high school library who read graphic novels were male, and after making attempts to persuade females to read graphic novels, she was told by females that they considered them "boy books."[6] In 2011 blogger Brett Schenker used Facebook to collect data on the ages and genders of comic book, graphic novel, and manga fans. He found that for the 17-and-under age group, male fans were more than double that of female fans: 118,920 males and 49,020 females.[7]

This noteworthy gap is puzzling in and of itself, yet even more so in light of multiple studies involving adolescents and reading. Marilyn A. Nippold, Jill K. Duthie, and Jennifer Larsen surveyed 100 sixth-graders and 100 ninth-graders, both groups comprised of 50 boys and 50 girls each, about their preferred leisure activities. For both groups, a higher percentage of girls selected reading as a preferred leisure activity.[8] Lee Shumow, Jennifer A. Schmidt, and Hayal Kacker surveyed sixth- and eighth-grade students and found that girls read more out of class than boys did.[9] Christina Clarke's 2010 survey of 17,089 students from 112 schools in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales found that 39% of girls read every day compared to 28% of boys.[10] The findings from these studies indicate that female adolescents are generally more avid readers than males, so why are they not reading graphic novels in the same numbers as males? What has led adolescent females to perceive graphic novels as "boy books" and to the significant disparity in graphic novel fans by gender?

Problem Statement

Numerous studies have been conducted to achieve insight into adolescent reading choices. Karen C. Beyard-Tyler and Howard J. Sullivan have found that reading preferences are influenced by the sex of the main character.[11] More recently, Rosemary Hopper reports that reasons for choosing books include prior knowledge of an author, the appearance of the book, family member and peer recommendations, teacher influence, media and film influences, and genre.[12] Arlene L. Barry's survey of eighth-grade students illustrates that some teens want a connection of some kind with a book's characters. Personality, interests, and race/ethnicity were noted as possible connections, but these same students stated that having a connection of any kind was paramount to the type of connection.[13]

Although there are multiple reasons why girls on the whole might be less likely to read graphic novels than boys, one possible reason might be the prevalence of female protagonists. For this reason, the examination of female characters' current and past prevalence was chosen as the focus of the study.

Purpose of the Study

This study examined how popular graphic novels for teens portray females and how that portrayal has changed over time.

Research Questions

     R1. What percentage of young adult graphic novels found on the YALSA "Top Ten Great Graphic Novels for Teens" has one or more female main characters? Has this percentage changed over time?

     R2. What races/ethnicities are represented by the female main characters? Has this representation changed over time?

     R3. What disabilities are represented by the female main characters? Has this representation changed over time?

Definitions

The following terms were central to the study, so for that reason the definition pertinent to the study has been stated and described.

     Content analysis: Close analysis of a work or body of communicated information to determine its meaning and account for the effect it has on its audience. Researchers classify, quantify, analyze, and evaluate the important words, concepts, symbols, and themes in a text (or set of texts) as a basis for inferences about the explicit and implicit messages it contains, the writer(s), the audience, and the culture and time period of which it is a part. In this context, "text" is defined broadly to include books, book chapters, essays, interviews and discussions, newspaper headlines, periodical articles, historical documents, speeches, conversations, advertising, theater, or informal conversation.[14]

     Graphic novel: Written and illustrated in comic book style, in which an extended narrative is presented as a continuous sequence of pictorial images printed in color or black-and-white and arranged panel to panel, with text given in captions and dialogue usually enclosed in balloons.[15]

     Manga: A Japanese term for comics and print cartoons. Outside Japan, manga refers to comics created in Japan, by Japanese artists, in Japanese language, and originally in a characteristic black-and-white style that originated in Japan in the late nineteenth century. Manga includes a wide range of literary genres.[16]

     Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA): A division of the American Library Association, this national association was founded in 1957 with the mission of expanding and strengthening library services for teens ages 12 to 18. In addition to honoring titles with its various awards, YALSA also prepares annual recommended book and media lists.[17]

Limitations of the Study

This study only included graphic novels found on YALSA's "Top Ten Great Graphic Novels for Teens" lists from 2007 through 2013. The findings are not generalizable to the full universe of graphic novels for teens, but they can help to shed light on some possible reasons why girls might tend to be less avid readers of the genre.

Importance of the Study

Librarians and educators spend considerable time searching for materials that not only meet standard evaluation criteria, but that also reflect the diversity of readers and their assorted interests. Material selection can be an arduous task, especially when initiating a new section within the collection. Toren has contended that "it may still take extra effort to find the titles inclusive of race and gender and written or drawn by diverse artists."[18] Hence, this study might be useful in making collection development decisions by providing information about how females are portrayed in popular graphic novels for teens as well as by contributing to the evidence-based research that currently exists on the topic.

Review of Literature

Adolescent Reading Preferences

The desire to understand adolescent reading preferences has been the focal point for numerous studies over the years. For example, Beyard-Tyler and Sullivan conducted a study using 576 subjects in seventh, ninth, and eleventh grades from suburban areas of a major southwestern city to investigate adolescent preferences for sex of character in contemporary realistic fiction.[19] Balancing the number of subjects by sex and grade level, students were given a booklet with four synopses: two positive, one with a female protagonist and one with a male protagonist; and two negative, one with a female protagonist and one with a male protagonist. The study found that both girls and boys showed a preference for protagonists of their own sex.[20] However, it was also found that as the age of the female subjects increased, the preference for same-sex characters declined while the preference of male subjects for same-sex characters increased with age.[21] Beyard-Tyler and Sullivan have noted that "sex-preference studies have implications for authors who write stories for adolescents and for those who select and recommend books for adolescents."[22]

More recently, Moeller conducted a study with fifteen high school students from a primarily white, middle-class, midwestern public high school. The purpose of the study was to investigate how gender was connected to high school students and graphic novel readership. After reading three graphic novels from the "Great Graphic Novels for Teens 2007" list published by YALSA, the eight females and seven males were interviewed individually and in focus groups.[23] Moeller found that interest in graphic novels depended upon whether the participants were able to identify with characters from the stories. There was evidence of this during the discussion of *X-23: Innocence Lost*, which has a petite female protagonist who exhibits both "fierce warrior" and "vulnerable teenager" traits.[24] Moeller reports:

> The girls expressed a shared sense of enjoyment and empowerment at this depiction, causing them to read this graphic novel from a dominant-hegemonic position. They began their conversation about this book by admitting that they thought they were going to like this book the least of the three read for this study, but they were surprised to find that they enjoyed reading about an intelligent and physically strong girl growing up in extreme conditions.[25]

Similarly, evidence that adolescent reading preferences are affected by the reader being able to identify with the characters surfaced in Vivian Howard's exploratory study of Canadian students in junior high.[26] The purpose of this study was to examine the role that pleasure reading played in the lives of adolescents between the ages of 12 and 15. The focus-group participants were both male and female; however, they were not equally represented, with 70% being girls and 30% being boys.[27] Eighty-five percent of the participants identified as active readers while 15% identified as reluctant readers. The study found that teens read for educational, social, and personal reasons.[28] One teen named Karen responded that pleasure reading was a source of reassurance:

> It's a book I just read a few days ago. It's called *The Earth, My Butt, and Other Big Round Things*. It was just really funny and the main character in the book was a bit like me, I thought. I could identify with her and with her problems and what she did to solve them.[29]

A study by Ase Kristine Tveit was conducted for the purpose of analyzing teenagers' reading habits and library use at schools in Oslo, Norway.[30] The participants, 120 girls and 92 boys from nine classes at four secondary schools, completed a survey consisting of ten questions about library use and reading habits.[31] When asked about leisure-time reading preferences, over twice as many boys as girls indicated that they preferred reading comics, 35 boys to 13 girls, and, according to Tveit, "comics were the only medium in question with mainly male readers."[32] Comparatively, Barry's recent survey of 148 eighth-graders about their reading preferences in terms of genre resulted in females ranking the "cartoons, comics, or graphic novels" genre number eight out of a list of twenty genre options, with males ranking "cartoons, comics, or graphic novels" as number one.[33]

In summary, the findings from these studies indicate that adolescent females do prefer reading materials with female protagonists up to a certain age and that the female protagonist exhibit relatable and appealing characteristics. Furthermore, adolescent female readers find reassurance in being able to relate to a character's problems. Recent surveys show that fewer adolescent females prefer to read graphic novels compared to adolescent males. What other factors may be causing this disparity in readership by gender? It might be that females have preconceived ideas about graphic novels or that they have not had the same exposure as their male counterparts, or perhaps they just do not like the format itself.

History of Female Portrayal in Comics and Graphic Novels

Anna Jorgensen and Arianna Lechan conducted a historical analysis of female representation in graphic novels, and their study illuminates extreme shifts in the depiction of females over the last seventy years. Beginning with the 1940s, numerous strong female superheroes like Black Cat, Lady Luck, and Wonder Woman emerged.[34] In fact, Wonder Woman's creators, psychologist William Moulton Marston and Max Gaines, were hoping to appeal to female readers; according to Jorgensen and Lechan, Marston recognized that females wanted to read about "strong women—women who were smart, physically strong, and capable, but still caring."[35] This decade also produced career comics, which represented females working outside the home in jobs left vacant by men going off to war. Next came the romance comics of the 1950s, emphasizing

marriage as the key to true happiness; these comics were popular with girls and women.[36] In fact, a 1950 graph from *Newsdealer* magazine showed that women ages 17 to 25 were actually reading more comic books than their male counterparts.[37] Even though the 1960s produced fewer comics for girls, the first all-female comic, *It Ain't Me, Babe*, emerged in the 1970s.[38] Subsequently, the comics of the 1980s reflected women who had both careers and family, and during this decade the romance comic attempted a comeback but failed, as comic book creators and publishers were not in tune with female experiences and current social issues.[39] In contrast, the comics of the 1990s depicted women as sex objects and victims of rape, violence, and murder.[40] Throughout the last decade, the number of female comic writers has increased as well as the number of women who are working in mainstream and independent publishing.[41] Graphic novels and comics that portray women as sex objects still exist, but Jorgensen and Lechan point out that "many wonderful graphic novels are being published with strong female protagonists, in a variety of genres, for a wide range of age-levels."[42]

Collection Development and Graphic Novels

Marilyn Irwin and Robin Moeller conducted a study of the portrayal of disabilities in graphic novels found on YALSA's "Great Graphic Novels for Teens 2008," and of the 60 graphic novels listed, a random sample of 30 was used for the study.[43] Using the definitions made available by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) of 2004, findings indicated that twelve of the graphic novels had at least one character with a disability and four had two characters with disabilities; nevertheless, Irwin and Moeller point out that "those portrayals most frequently fit a negative stereotypical image."[44] To further explore the portrayal of disabilities represented in graphic novels, Moeller and Irwin conducted a follow-up study using The "*New York Times* Graphic Books Best Seller List."[45] This study found that of the 29 books used in the sample, 18 books had at least one character with a disability, and one book had a character with two disabilities.[46] Furthermore, the majority of these characters were found to not be defined by their disability as the characters predominantly had been in the initial 2010 study. Be that as it may, both studies illustrated that the disabilities represented were more often portrayed as negative rather than positive and limited to mostly war injuries.[47] Moeller and Irwin contend, "The findings of this research suggest that authors, illustrators, and publishers of commercially popular graphic novels have not taken the opportunity to represent people with disabilities in a realistic manner."[48]

Trina Robbins, editor of the original all-female comic book *It Ain't Me, Babe*, once told Carla Sinclair, author of *Net Chick*, in an interview, "Girls read comics when there are comics for girls to read."[49] Ideally, a library's collection is designed to reflect a broad range of interests for both males and females. Whether fictional or nonfictional, characters should not be limited to one gender, race, ethnicity, or class; they should depict the current generation, including those with disabilities, in a way that is realistic and free from hurtful stereotypes. Furthermore, readers should be able to identify with the characters' problems. The findings from studies cited in this study suggest that girls prefer female protagonists with relatable characteristics as well as characteristics that provide reassurance and empowerment. Jorgensen and Lechan have established criteria to develop graphic novel collections with healthy representations of females and appeal for a wide-ranging audience.[50]

Content Analysis: A Flexible Research Method

Content analysis, according to Marilyn Domas White and Emily E. Marsh, "is a flexible research method that can be applied to many problems in information studies, either as a method by itself or in conjunction with other methods."[51] The content analysis method has been used in recent Library and Information Science (LIS) studies to examine and gather information about many topics, including the characters and setting of easy-to-read picture books,[52] disability and accessibility in scholarly LIS research,[53] and dialogue regarding controversial materials in LIS educational texts.[54]

Marilyn Brissett employed content analysis to study characters of color and the settings of the picture book collection held at Gladys A. Abraham Elementary School Library, which is located on the island of St. Thomas.[55] The purpose of the study was to determine if the picture books in the collection reflected the ethnicities of the school population.[56] Brissett found that the main characters and settings did not reflect the school population, which consisted of 3% white, 33% Hispanic, and 64% black students; 46% of the books had white main characters, 4% had Hispanic main characters, and 44% had black main characters, while 88% of the books were set in the United States.[57] Brissett asserts: "Instead of relying on traditional journals for book selection, that may or may not fairly represent minority cultures, librarians need to seek out journals that support and publicize authentic and accurate portrayals of minorities."[58]

Brissett's study and others demonstrate how content analysis can be used to gather data about various bodies of literature. The analyzed data can provide researchers with a deeper understanding of a particular body of literature as well as contribute to the growing body of LIS research, strengthening evidence-based librarianship. The procedures employed in content analysis allow for replication in future studies that expound on earlier studies or even for replication in studies of a different nature altogether.[59]

Methodology

Data Sources

The data sources for this study included the "Top Ten Great Graphic Novels for Teens," a list of recommended graphic novels and illustrated nonfiction for teens ages 12 to 18, prepared yearly by YALSA. The time frame of the study was limited to lists for 2007 through 2013 since 2007 was the first year this list was published and 2013 was the most recent list available at the time of the study. This time frame provided a total of 70 titles for analysis. The "Top Ten Great Graphic Novels for Teens" list was chosen for this study because it is generally recognized by librarians and educators as a reputable source of exemplary titles. Furthermore, the titles on the lists are voted on by committee members, which include a mix of public and school librarians with backgrounds and experience in the selection and use of graphic novels.[60] In order for a title to be selected for the recommended list, it must meet the following criteria: reflect an integration of images and words, exhibit a clarity of visual flow on the page, have images that are able to convey necessary meaning, exhibit an outstanding quality of the artwork's reproduction, and have a narrative that is enhanced by the artwork and dominated by a sequential art component.[61] According to YALSA:

Standard selection criteria consistent with the Library Bill of Rights shall apply. Librarianship focuses on individuals, in all their diversity, and that focus is a fundamental value of the Young Adult Library Services Association and its members. Diversity is, thus, honored in the Association and in the collections and services that libraries provide to teens.[62]

Procedure

Using content analysis, each graphic novel on the "Top Ten" lists for the years 2007 through 2013 was analyzed to collect data about the gender of the main character or characters. These data were used to determine what percentage of the graphic novels had one or more female main characters. In a similar manner to Brissett's study, the main character was identified as the character that was the main focus of the text and illustrations.[63] If the main character was female, then the race/ethnicity was determined as well as any disabilities. The race/ethnicity of the main character was determined by examining the character's physical traits, including skin color, hair texture and style, and facial features; types of food eaten, clothing style, location of story, and language were also used as cues to determine race/ethnicity.[64] Race/ethnicity categories included the five racial groups identified by the U.S. Census Bureau: American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, and White. As in Irwin and Moeller's study, disabilities were classified according to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) of 2004 terms: autism, deaf-blindness, deafness, developmental delay, emotional disturbance, hearing impairment, intellectual disability, orthopedic impairment, other health impairment, specific learning disability, speech or language impairment, traumatic brain injury, or visual impairment/blindness.[65] Text and illustration clues were used to identify disabilities.

A coding form (see Appendix A) was used as the data-collection instrument to record the title, author, illustrator, publication information, and gender of the main character or characters of each graphic novel. This coding form was also used to record the race/ethnicity and any disabilities of the female main characters. The data recorded on each coding form were tallied and recorded on a tally form for each list year (see Appendix B). The data on the tally forms were entered into Excel spreadsheets for analysis and presentation.

Results

The "Top Ten Great Graphic Novels for Teens" prepared annually by YALSA beginning in 2007 and ending in 2013 provided a total of 70 titles for this study. A print copy of each title was obtained through either a public library or bookstore. Each graphic novel on the list was examined to determine the gender of the main character or characters. If the main character or characters were female, then race/ethnicity and any disabilities were also identified. A coding form was used to record the data collected on each title, and the forms were sorted by list year. A tally form was used to total the data of each list year, and the data from the tally forms were entered into Excel spreadsheets for analysis and presentation.

> *R1. What percentage of young adult graphic novels found on the YALSA "Top Ten Great Graphic Novels for Teens" has one or more female main characters?*

As indicated in "Figure 1: Gender of Main Characters, 2007–2013," 46% of the graphic novels used for the study were found to have one or more female main characters. This total included titles with only female main characters (24%) as well as those with both female and male main characters (22%). It was found that 48% of the graphic novels examined had only male main characters, while 6% of the graphic novels had neither male nor female main characters and were labeled as "Other."
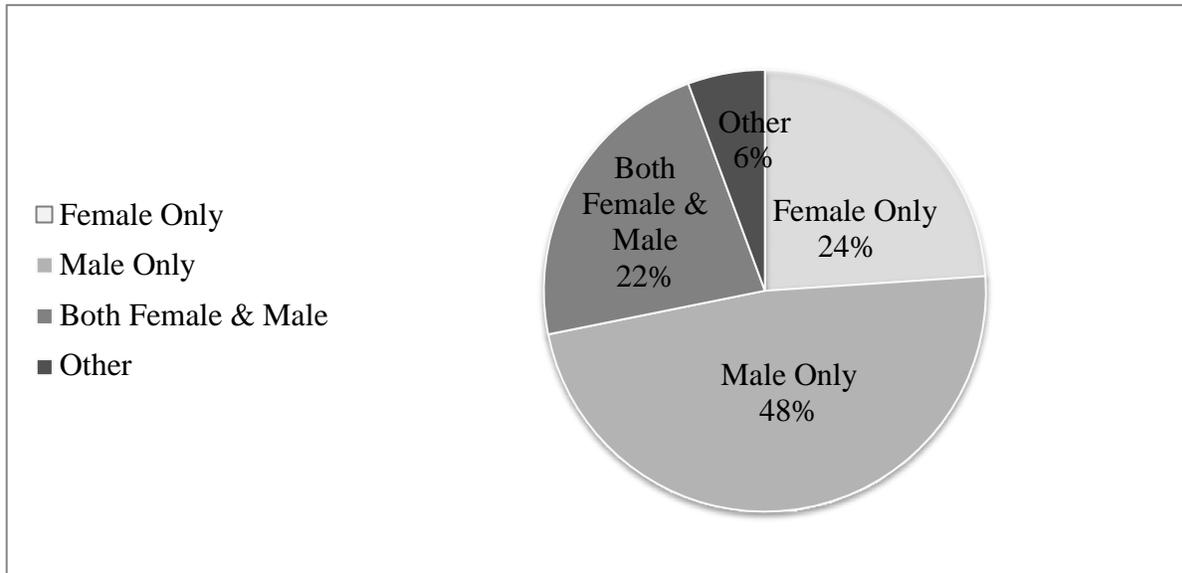

Figure 1: Gender of Main Characters, 2007–2013

R1. Has this percentage changed over time?

As indicated in "Table 1: Distribution of Main Characters by Gender, 2007–2013," this percentage has changed over time. The "Female Only" category increased from 10% in 2007 to 30% in 2013, which represents an increase of 200% between the years 2007 and 2013. The "Both Female and Male" category decreased from 40% in 2007 to 10% in 2013, which represents a decrease of 75% between the years 2007 and 2013. The total of both categories decreased from 50% in 2007 to 40% in 2013. However, the total percentage of graphic novels with female main characters increased to 60% in the list years for 2009, 2010, and 2012.

Table 1: Distribution of Main Characters by Gender

List Year	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Categories							
Female Only	10%	20%	30%	30%	20%	30%	30%
Both Female and Male	40%	10%	30%	30%	10%	30%	10%
Total	50%	30%	60%	60%	30%	60%	40%

R2. What races/ethnicities are represented by the female main characters?

As illustrated by "Figure 2: Race/Ethnicity of Main Characters, 2007–2013," the female main characters represented three of the five race categories identified by the U.S. Census Bureau: 45 (74%) were White, 10 (16%) were Asian, and 6 (10%) were Black. The two categories not represented by the female main characters were American Indian/Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander.
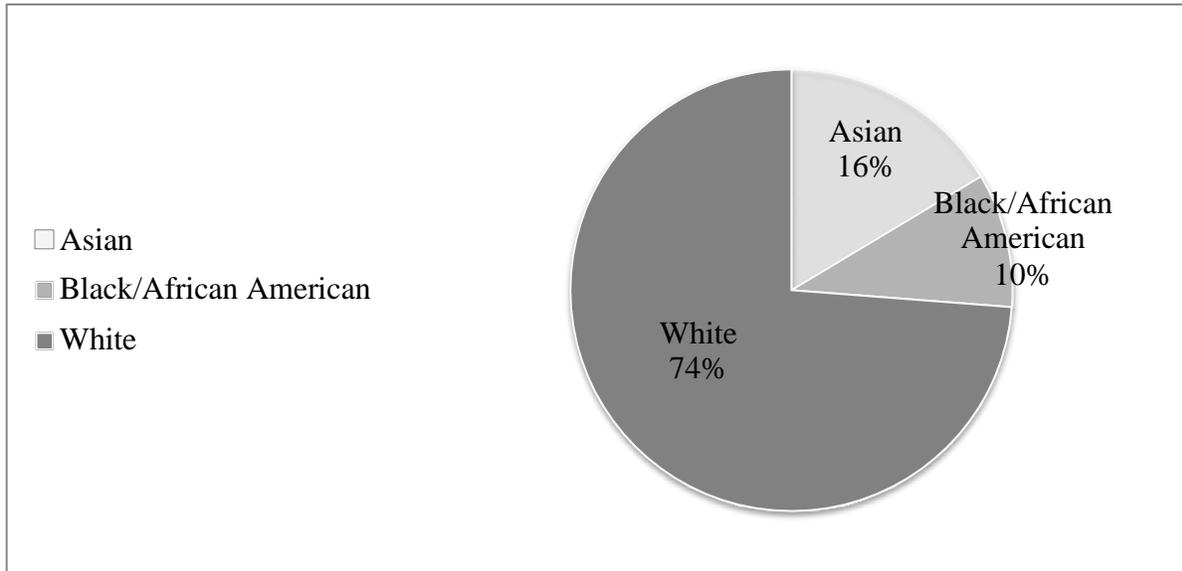

Figure 2: Race/Ethnicity of Female Main Characters, 2007–2013

R2. Has this representation changed over time?

As indicated by "Table 2: Distribution of Race/Ethnicity Representation of Female Main Characters, 2007–2013," the White category had the highest representation out of all five categories for the list years 2007, 2009, 2010, 2012, and 2013. In 2007 there were 19 White main characters, with fewer representations in subsequent years, yet there was at least one White representation for every year of the seven-year span. The White category was the only race/ethnicity with representation for every list year in the study. The Asian category had the second highest overall representation out of the five categories and the highest representation for the 2008 list year. The Asian category was represented in 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, and 2012. However, the Asian category had no representation in the list years of 2007 and 2013. The Black/African American category had the third highest overall representation as well as the highest representation for the list year 2011. The Black/African American category was represented at least once in 2007, 2010, and 2011, yet this category had no representation in the list years of 2008, 2009, 2012, and 2013. Both the American Indian/Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander categories had no representation throughout the seven-year period of time.

Table 2: Distribution of Race/Ethnicity Representation of Female Main Characters, 2007–2013

List Year	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	

Race Categories								Total
American Indian/Alaska Native								0
Asian		2	3	2	1	2		10
Black/African American	1			2	3			6
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander								0
White	19	1	7	3	1	4	10	45

R3. What disabilities are represented by the female main characters?

Of the fourteen classifications identified by IDEA, four were represented by the female main characters found on the "Top Ten" lists: visual impairment, deaf-blindness, emotional disturbance, and orthopedic impairment. There were ten different characters with one disability each represented between 2007 and 2013. As indicated by "Figure 3: Disabilities of Female Main Characters, 2007–2013," visual impairments made up 70% of the representation, while deaf-blindness, emotional disturbance, and orthopedic impairment were each represented once, making up the remaining 30%.
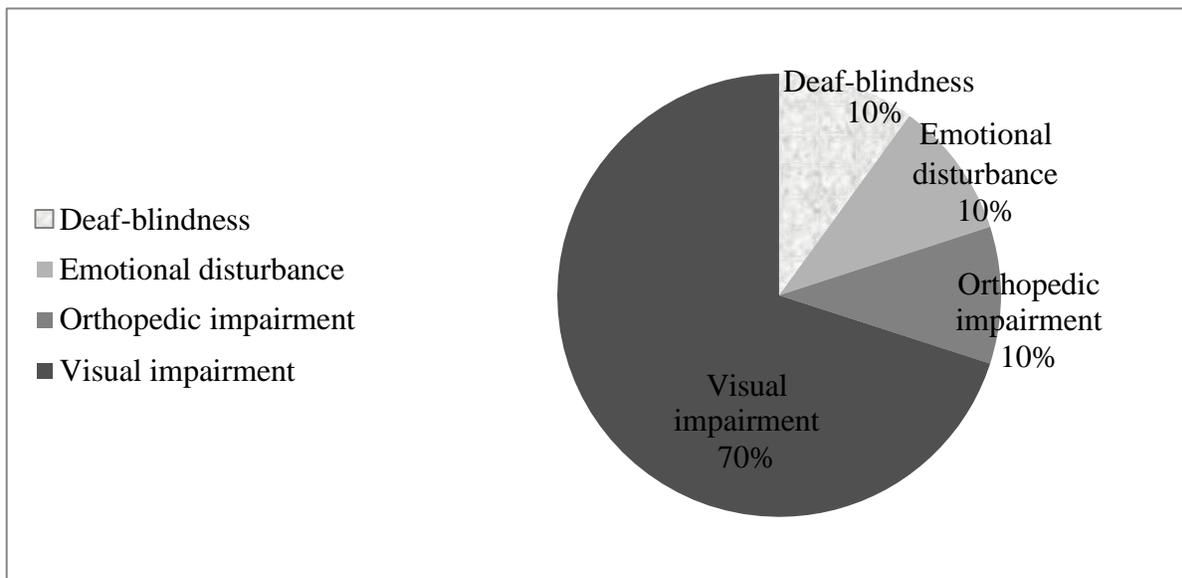

Figure 3: Disabilities of Female Main Characters, 2007–2013

R3. Has this representation changed over time?

As illustrated by "Table 3: Distribution of Disabilities of Female Main Characters, 2007–2013," the representation of disabilities has changed over time. The overall representation of disabilities was lowest in 2007 with no representations and highest in 2010 with three representations. List years 2009, 2011, and 2012 all had one representation while both 2008 and 2013 had two representations. Other than the year 2007, each list year for 2007 through 2013 had at least one representation of disability.

Table 3: Distribution of Disabilities of Female Main Characters, 2007–2013

List Year	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	
Categories								**Total**
Autism								0
Deaf-blindness							1	1
Deafness								0
Developmental delay								0
Emotional disturbance				1				1
Hearing impairment								0
Intellectual disability								0
Multiple disabilities								0
Orthopedic impairment			1					1
Other health impairment								0
Specific learning disability								0
Speech or language impairment								0
Traumatic brain injury								0
Visual impairment; blindness		2		2	1	1	1	7
Total	0	2	1	3	1	1	2	10

Discussion

Nearly half of the 70 titles examined in this study had one or more female main characters. However, only 24% of graphic novels on YALSA's "Top Ten" lists had female-only main characters while 48% had male-only main characters. The U.S. Census reported that females made up 50.9% of the population in 2000 and 50.8% of the population in 2010.[66] If roughly half of the population is female, then why are twice as many males represented as females in the data source used for the study? Consequently, this may be a carryover from when comic book writers catered to a predominantly male audience, or perhaps it may be a result of the proportion of the authors who were female and male and whether or not their gender might have influenced their use of female and male main characters.

An analysis of the seven-year period of time for female main character representation indicated a modest increase in female-only main character titles. The 2007 list year had only one title with a female-only main character while the 2013 list year had three titles with a female-only main character. Perhaps a more significant increase in the number of female main characters in the future might entice adolescent females to view graphic novels as an appealing reading option, especially important considering all this format has to offer. Graphic novels provide images, pictures, and color for readers who are visual learners. The sequential art along with the concise language used in graphic novels make them an alternative to lengthier books with no images, and the interplay of visuals and text has the ability to provide readers with a new reading experience altogether. Furthermore, adolescent females' perceptions, stereotypes, and identities may be challenged by the images found in graphic novels. With their multitude of art styles, graphic novels might inspire young female cartoonists to explore the world of animation.

The 2010 Census data collected for each category identified a population comprised of 72% White, 13% Black/African American, 5% Asian, 0.9% American Indian/Alaska Native, and 0.2% Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander.[67] The percentages represented by the titles used for this study were mostly reflective of those data with a makeup of 74% White, 10% Black/African American, 16% Asian, 0% American Indian/Alaska Native, and 0% Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander. The one discrepancy was the Asian category having a greater percentage of representation in the study compared to the Asian category percentage in the Census data. This may be due in part to the fact that the majority of the main characters whose race/ethnicity was identified as Asian were found in graphic novels that can also be classified as manga, which is created in Japan by Japanese artists;[68] there was at least one manga title on every "Top Ten" list year between 2007 and 2013, with some years having more than one manga title.

Table 4: Distribution of Manga Titles, 2007–2013

List Year	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Manga titles	1	3	4	3	1	2	1

Since 1997 federal agencies have been required by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to use a minimum of five racial/ethnic categories: White, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander.[69] Important to realize is that OMB approved the Census Bureau's inclusion of a sixth category titled "Some Other Race" on the Census 2000 and 2010 for respondents who could not identify with any of the other five categories.[70] The 2010 Census reported a 9.7% increase in the United States population between 2000 and 2010; this growth came primarily from those who indicated their race/ethnicity as something other than White alone as well as from those who indicated their ethnicity to be Hispanic or Latino.[71] Census data collected in the twenty-first century indicates that the racial landscape in the United States is in flux, and the addition of a sixth category reflects an increased recognition of the blurred boundaries of race and ethnicity.

In terms of disability, of the fourteen classifications identified by IDEA, only four were represented by the female main characters found on the "Top Ten" lists: visual impairment, deaf-blindness, emotional disturbance, and orthopedic impairment. Visual impairment made up 70% of the disabilities represented. The lack of representation of the other ten classifications was disappointing, especially the absence of autism representation. In 2010 the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported that 1 in 68 children was diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder, a significant increase in prevalence from 2000 when 1 in 150 children was diagnosed.[72] In totality, ten disabilities (16.39%) were represented by ten different female main characters over the seven-year span of time from 2007 through 2013. The 2010 Census reported that 18.7% of the population has a disability and 12.6% has a severe disability.[73] Thus, the disability representation in the titles used for this study closely reflected the percentage of the population with a disability in 2010 yet lacked a comprehensive reflection of the fourteen different disability classifications.

The findings from the studies reviewed in this study indicate that adolescent females do prefer reading materials with a female protagonist up to a certain age and in which the female protagonist exhibits relatable and appealing characteristics. Moreover, adolescent female readers find reassurance in being able to relate to a character's problems. Every ten years, the U.S. Census provides a snapshot of the national community, and there is evidence that it is changing in terms of race/ethnicity. Will the changing populace be reflected in the main characters of graphic novels selected for future YALSA "Top Ten Graphic Novels for Teens"? Will female adolescent readers be able to relate to these main characters in terms of race/ethnicity and disability? In order for any genre or format to appeal to an adolescent, it must accurately reflect the current demographic as well as continue to advance alongside the perpetual evolution of humanity. Even though the YALSA "Top Ten" list is not representative of the broader universe of graphic novels and thus insufficient in depicting the way graphic novels not found on its "Top Ten" lists reflect gender, race/ethnicity, and disability, this study does provide an analysis of YALSA's "Top Ten Great Graphic Novels for Teens" list, which is generally considered to be a reputable source for recommended titles.

Librarians, educators, and parents may rely on recommended reading lists when searching for adolescent reading materials, but they should also carefully evaluate each title's representation of gender, race/ethnicity, and disability. The fact that adolescent reading preference studies have reported that more males than females read graphic novels and comics may be a result of other causes. More surveys about graphic novels administered to adolescents representing different demographics and living in various regions of the country would also enhance the overall snapshot of teens and graphic novels. Additional research might focus on the main character's sexual orientation or ethnicity as well as stereotypes. A study using a more extensive list of graphic novel titles, such as YALSA's "Great Graphic Novels for Teens" complete lists for a given year, which can range from 40 to 70 titles, might provide more insight than the "Top Ten" lists. Alternative "top lists" that might be considered for future studies are lists created by reviewers, such as Kirkus, or those created by book publishers, such as Scholastic or Macmillan. Finally, a study examining the authors and illustrators of graphic novels found on the "top lists" in terms of gender, race/ethnicity, and disability would also contribute to the growing body of research on this established book category. After all, a diverse body of adolescent readers most certainly warrants a diverse collection of graphic novels on the bookshelf.

Appendix A: Coding Form

LIST YEAR _____

Title of the Book: _____

Author(s)/Illustrator(s): _____

_____

Name of Publisher: _____

Location of Publisher: _____   Year_____

Gender of Main Character: ____ Male ____ Female ____Other

Race of Female Main Character:
_____ American Indian/Alaska Native
_____ Asian
_____ Black/African American
_____ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
_____ White
_____ Undetermined

Disabilities of Female Main Character:
____ Autism
____ Deaf-blindness
____ Deafness
____ Developmental delay
____ Emotional disturbance
____ Hearing impairment
____ Intellectual disability
____ Multiple disabilities
____ Orthopedic impairment
____ Other health impairment
____ Specific learning disability
____ Speech or language impairment
____ Traumatic brain injury
____ Visual impairment, including blindness
____ None

Additional notes:

Appendix B: Tally Form

List Year _____

Gender:
_____ Total number of titles with female main characters

_____ Total number of female main characters

Race of Female Main Characters:
_____ American Indian/Alaska Native
_____ Asian
_____ Black/African American
_____ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
_____ White
_____ Undetermined

Disabilities of Female Main Characters:
_____ Autism
_____ Deaf-blindness
_____ Deafness
_____ Developmental delay
_____ Emotional disturbance
_____ Hearing impairment
_____ Intellectual disability
_____ Multiple disabilities
_____ Orthopedic impairment
_____ Other health impairment
_____ Specific learning disability
_____ Speech or language impairment
_____ Traumatic brain injury
_____ Visual impairment, including blindness

_____ Total number of disabilities represented

Appendix C: Data Sources

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