Graphic Novel Selection and the Application of Intellectual Freedom in New Zealand Secondary School Libraries

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There is a gap in our knowledge about the relationship between school library managers’ graphic novels selection and self-censorship practices. In this project, we surveyed New Zealand secondary school library managers. The survey results suggested school library managers inconsistently follow professional library standards in selection practice and that self-censorship was identifiable among 56% of the survey respondents. Many respondents also indicated that impartiality was an insignificant selection criterion. Results also indicated that school library managers were unclear as to whether intellectual freedom principles applied to people under the age of 18. We provide directions for further research and implications for practice, including our commitment to create a best-practice guide, based upon the research presented here, to assist school library managers in the development of graphic novel collections that not only meet educational standards of assisting literacy, but also align with professional library standards of intellectual freedom.

Introduction

Graphic novels can form a vital part of a school library’s literacy framework (Stivers, 2015) and are recognized as a popular component of young adult library services (Schneider, 2014). Some school library managers, however, still undervalue this medium within their collections (Gavigan, 2014). The reluctance to embrace graphic novels might be related to issues regarding the appropriateness of their content to a young adult audience. Researchers have also reported an inconsistent understanding of the concept of intellectual freedom and how it is applied to selection in school libraries (e.g., Best, 2010; Reichman, 1993). There is a knowledge gap on how library managers select graphic novels for secondary school libraries (Stivers, 2015). Given that the graphic novel genre continually developing, it is not surprising that many school librarians find it difficult to select graphic novels for their libraries. The graphic novel is increasingly popular with readers but “with the format’s increased presence in libraries and renewed popularity across age groups have come challenges” (Cornog & Raiteri, 2014, p. 60). In fact, despite considerable “professional advice advocating for the inclusion of graphic novels” in school libraries (Stivers, 2015), the literature shows vast inconsistencies in collection development practices.

Purpose

In this project, we investigated the predominant graphic novel selection criteria employed by New Zealand secondary school library managers viewed through the lens of intellectual freedom.
principles. The presence and extent of self-censorship by school librarians within this process was also determined. If researchers and educators knew more about school librarians’ opinions of graphic novels, including reasons why school librarians might avoid selecting this medium, then stakeholders could create better guidance through policy statements to assist school librarians in making more informed choices for adding graphic novels to their collections.

Research Questions

The main question and two sub-questions that this research aimed to address were:

RQ. What are the predominant selection criteria employed by school library managers when establishing and maintaining graphic novel collections in their libraries?
   a. To what extent are school library managers consistent/inconsistent with their selection criteria?
   b. To what extent is school librarians’ graphic novel selection in-line with LIANZA’s Statement on Intellectual Freedom?

Literature Review

The Graphic Novel Medium and Literacy

Although graphic novels emerged from, and are in some cases indistinguishable from, traditional comics, the genre exists in a semi-independent sphere distinguished by content, format, and the intent of the artists and authors. Graphic novels are differentiated from comics not only by format, they also encompass an increasingly diverse range of content. Graphic novels are superhero stories, “works of satire, non-fiction, memoirs, historical fiction” (English, Matthews, & Blakesley Lindsay, 2006) and more.

Graphic novels possess educational value as a literacy tool. New media theorists ascribe the term “multimodality” to the way “individuals make sense of text through different modes” (Moeller, 2016). Twenty first century learners must be able to obtain meaning from a combination of modes, or “multimodal ensembles” made up of “writing, signs, symbols, and music” (Moeller, 2016, p. 702); by combining image and text to form a narrative, graphic novels are effective multimodal texts for contemporary literacy instruction.

Pantaleo (2013) investigated how Grade 6 students derived meaning from visual elements in graphic novels and picture books. Pantaleo (2013) concluded that students “need to be visually literate” in order to negotiate “the omnipresent visual communications in our contemporary society” (p. 372). Moeller (2016) found that although “school teachers expressed an interest in and attributed value to the use of graphic novels in the classroom” (p. 709), a lack of access hindered such aspirations.

Graphic Novels in School, Public, & Academic Libraries

Stivers (2015) conducted a mixed-method interpretive study to examine school librarians’ attitudes and behaviors in relation to graphic novel selection; that study’s qualitative data indicated that although most school librarians celebrated graphic novels as a medium, they
usually refrained from actively promoting them to the school community. Stivers’ (2015) research validated highlighted the limited knowledge of the factors that “influence the decisions librarians make when they are collecting” graphic novels and calling for “school best practice information” (pp. 5,29).

Gavigan (2014) analyzed graphic novel circulation data and collection statistics in six middle school libraries and the quantitative data revealed that in relation to collection proportion, the circulation frequency of graphic novels was consistently higher than other genres. Despite this popularity, Gavigan (2014) noted that some school librarians were “reticent to add graphic novels to their library collections” (p. 97). Schneider’s (2014) investigation of North American public librarians’ approaches to graphic novel and video game collection management identified inconsistencies in graphic novel selection and stressed the difficulty of assessing age appropriateness. Graphic novels may also present complications in terms of other appropriateness aspects: Jorgensen and Lechan (2013) said “Girls are also interested in superheroes and action stories, and many more might choose this medium if there were more stories in which they could see themselves” (p. 267).

Graphic novels are a valuable component of school library collections, offering “a tangible representation of a contemporary culture that is increasingly visually oriented” (Wagner, 2010, p. 47). Casey and Pinkley (2013) claimed they offered an immense contribution as a “pedagogical tool” for “ethnic studies, humanities, sciences, arts, and business”, and that the selection and inclusion of graphic novels in school libraries “should be no different than the selection and inclusion of all other literature” (p. 8). Despite this, “no other single format causes more questions and even ‘raised eyebrows’ than does the graphic novel in school library collections” (Gann, 2013).

**Selection, Censorship, & Intellectual Freedom**

Selection is “the set standards used by librarians to decide whether an item should be added to the collection” (Lamb, 2015) and selection theory recommends librarians adopt specific rules that govern their selection practices. Haines (1950) proposed 14 fundamental principles that should govern book selection, Lamb (2015) clarified them to make them more relevant to current practice:

1. Community
2. Current Interest
3. Comprehensive
4. Local History
5. All Ages & Formats
6. Anticipate
7. Demand
8. Value
9. Impartiality
10. Professionals
11. Best
12. Circulation
13. Trends
14. Promptness. (Haines, 1950)

Gregory’s general rules for selection support Haines’ principles (2011, p. 61). Haines and Gregory both stress the importance of maintaining impartiality in selection and giving preference to items that anticipate and meet user demand; these prevail over librarian perceptions of quality. A feature of selection that applies specifically to graphic novels in school libraries is their use as a literacy tool for struggling readers and visual learners (Gavigan, 2014).
One of the few available graphic novel selection guides for librarians emanated from Lavin’s analysis of publishing industry statistics (1998), though his research dates from 1998 when there was little differentiation between graphic novels and comics (Lavin, p. 38). He concluded that librarians must pay attention to the intended age range of graphic novels, and that “titles from most mainstream publishers are acceptable for high school...audiences” as “virtually none of today’s mainstream comic books feature nudity or sex ‘on panel’” (1998, p. 41). Much has changed since his study, which emphasizes the need for new guidance on graphic novel selection.

Asheim (1953) claimed that the difference between selection and censorship is a distinction between positive and negative actions: the “positive selector asks what the reaction of a rational intelligent adult would be to the content of the work; the censor fears for the results on the weak, the warped, and the irrational.” Furthermore, a selector considers the value of a work of literature as a unified whole, but the censor takes isolated aspects out of context, giving rise to a situation where “four letters” can outweigh “five hundred pages” (Asheim, 1953). In order for a selector to remain consistent, it is advisable to follow professional standards of intellectual freedom. The results of this research show that many school librarians judge graphic novels based upon isolated aspects of the work; again highlighting the need for best-practice graphic novel selection standards. Asheim’s work is enduring because he places selection and censorship in terms of life or death respectively for library professionals. “If we are to gain the esteem we seek for our profession, we must be willing to accept the difficult obligations”, by demonstrating the virtues and trust that “remain true to the ideals for which our profession stands” (Asheim, 1953).

Best, Jenkinson, and Reichman were all indebted to Asheim, in particular his polarizing of selection and censorship in terms of positive and negative actions. Jenkinson (2002) suggests a decline in professional standards is responsible for self-censorship within Canadian school libraries. Censorship, claims Jenkinson, is invisible and infiltrates with ease through the selection process (2002, pp. 22-23). He recommends that schools must “be prepared to discuss and confront the concept of intellectual freedom as it pertains to building a school’s learning resources” (2002, p. 23).

Best’s study raised an interesting question: “is the concept of intellectual freedom applicable to children?” (2010, p. 19). This question was asked of New Zealand school library managers in this project. Reichman asserts that statements on intellectual freedom are intended to include children (1993, pp. 22-24). In his instructional manual for schools, Reichman addressed the harmful effect of “educational censorship” in North American schools (1993, pp. 3-4). He claims that professional standards of intellectual freedom are equally applicable to school libraries and “should be directly incorporated in every school library selection policy” (Reichman, 1993, pp. 22-23). His stance is predicated by the American Library Association’s Free access to libraries for minors: an interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights which states that “every restriction on access to, and use of, library resources, based solely on the chronological age, educational level, literacy skills, or legal emancipation of users violates” the Library Bill of Rights (2004). The document stresses that sole right and responsibility lies with “parents and guardians to guide their own children's use of the library and its resources and services” (American Library Association, 2004) and concludes that librarians and library governing bodies have a public and professional obligation to ensure that all members of the community they serve have free, equal,
and equitable access to the entire range of library resources regardless of content, approach, format, or amount of detail. This principle of library service applies equally to all users, minors as well as adults.

Lack of access to information can be harmful to minors. Librarians and library governing bodies have a public and professional obligation to ensure that all members of the community they serve have free, equal, and equitable access to the entire range of library resources regardless of content, approach, format, or amount of detail. This principle of library service applies equally to all users, minors as well as adults. Librarians and library governing bodies must uphold this principle in order to provide adequate and effective service to minors. (American Library Association, 2004)

Like Reichman, Gorman affirms that principles of intellectual freedom apply to children, however, those seeking to censor library materials sometimes use “the protection of children” to assert their agenda (2000, pp. 89,95). This research investigates these issues. Many of Gorman’s values pose great difficulties for the school librarian and highlight the need for industry standards in all areas.

The Library and Information Association of New Zealand Aotearoa [LIANZA] Statement on intellectual freedom is the most applicable professional standard relating to New Zealand libraries for this research. This statement is largely based upon the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions [IFLA] Statement on libraries and intellectual freedom that “supports, defends and promotes intellectual freedom as defined in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights” (2015). This research examined library manager perceptions of intellectual freedom to determine the extent to which graphic novel selection is consistent with LIANZA’s Statement on intellectual freedom.

**Self-Censorship Practices in Libraries**

In a library context, self-censorship is “a subtle or covert way of restricting free access to library materials and information by library workers because of conflict between personal censorship views and accepted professional library practice” (Nieuwoudt, 2012, p. 10). Although the practice goes against professional ethics, the literature reveals that self-censorship remains prevalent in libraries (Whelan, 2009a).

Though Fiske’s study dates from 1959, her study of the pressures that can lead to self-censorship remains relevant today. Fiske (1959) uncovered widespread self-censorship in California’s libraries; asserting that two-thirds of librarians sometimes self-censor material through selection, and 20% habitually self-censor (Latham, 2014). She also revealed that many librarians routinely practicing self-censorship simultaneously aligned themselves with professional standards of neutrality and intellectual freedom; a theme that continues to the present day (Latham, 2014). In relation to school libraries specifically, Fiske (1959) revealed that 29% of school librarians avoided purchasing material deemed controversial and school libraries garnered more complaints than municipal or county libraries. Questions relating to pressures leading to self-censorship were central to this research.

Like Fiske, Moody’s (2004) study of public libraries in Queensland (Australia) discovered that “anti-censorship attitudes are not always indicative of censorship behaviours” (p. 180). Her research design and methodology give a highly appropriate method utilized by this research. For
example, Moody (2004) suggested avoiding emotive terms such as ‘censorship’ in a questionnaire (2004). Furthermore, using hypothetical books to assess librarian selection criteria avoids preconceived perceptions, and limits the variables of interpretation.

Nieuwoudt (2012) investigated the knowledge and views of New Zealand public library workers in relation to LIANZA’s Statement on intellectual freedom, whether they self-censor, and relevant training requirements. Consistent with Fiske and Moody, Nieuwoudt (2012) found that “despite the commitment of libraries to intellectual freedom, some librarians still perceive certain forms of censorship to be necessary and ethically sound” (p. 47).

Over five years Taylor and McMenemy (2012) investigated book challenges in Scottish public libraries. Eight of the 29 public authorities in Scotland “received complaints made against books on the grounds of content or inappropriateness” (Taylor & McMenemy, 2012, pp. 159-163) with 15 complaints in total. Most of these complaints regarded sexually orientated material “aimed at children/young adults” (Taylor & McMenemy, 2012, p. 163). Taylor and McMenemy (2012) used the American Library Association complaint classification categories to explain the book challenges:

- Cultural (anti-ethnic/insensitivity/racism/sexism/inaccurate)
- Sexual (Homosexuality/nudity/sex education/sexually explicit/unsuited to age group)
- Values (Anti-family/offensive language/political viewpoint/religious viewpoint)
- Social issues (Abortion/drugs/occult/Satanism/suicide/violence) (2012, p. 161).

In this study, we used these categories to ask school library managers whether they would select, restrict, or not-select nine hypothetical graphic novels. The categories were used in some of the survey questions, and they also the source of the hypothetical titles used in the survey. A survey conducted for the School Library Journal (SLJ) in 2008 found that 70% of the library professionals who responded claimed that concern over possible parent reactions gave them pause when considering controversial titles, such as stories with homosexual themes (Whelan, 2009b). SLJ’s 2016 Controversial Books Survey found that more than 90% of elementary and middle school librarians said they have not purchased a book due to subject matter; this number drops to 73% for high school librarians. Sexual content and profanity/vulgar language were the most often cited offensive topics (School Library Journal, 2016). Other controversial topics that led to self-censorship in libraries were religion, politics and race. Sloan (2012) found that public libraries in the United States, especially those in the south, were avoiding purchasing books by atheists. Public attitudes to removing books from public libraries was changing over time as social and political views evolved, so anti-communist sentiment has declined but there was some support expressed for removing books by Muslim authors who expressed anti-American views. This highlights an interesting aspect of the debate, that in order to preserve democracy some people were willing to support restrictions on the free flow of information (Brett & Campbell, 2016). Mills (2015) used these categories in a survey of challenges made in New Zealand public libraries between 2010 and 2014. The specific reasons given by the complainants were stated for 13 of the 20 challenges recorded. Of the 13 challenges that have identified reasons, five could be classified as ‘sexual’, two as ‘cultural’, one as ‘values’, one as ‘social issues’, and one both ‘cultural’ and ‘social issues.’ This suggests the categories are sufficiently relevant and robust to be used in a survey of self-censorship in New Zealand school libraries.
Taylor and McMenemy (2012) claimed “the pressures the individual librarian faces cannot be underestimated: these can come from society, from the librarian’s employer, their professional obligations, and their own views and beliefs” (p. 157). Although these pressures are touched upon frequently in the reviewed literature, they have rarely been collated so succinctly and holistically. Most librarians celebrate intellectual freedom, but a multitude of pressures can undermine their values. Knox argued that statements on intellectual freedom, when added to scholarly research, provide librarians with symbolic capital that can give them the strength to resist self-censorship. She concludes with “If all workers in libraries are aware of the professional code of ethics, the history of institutional support, and the insights provided by research into intellectual freedom, there might be fewer instances of self-censorship among librarians and capitulation to louder voices within a library’s patron base” (Knox, 2014, p. 19). Perhaps better selection guidelines for graphic novels will assist school library managers in achieving the ideals of their profession whilst mitigating the pressures (real or perceived) that potentially influence the selection process.

Self-censorship can have a profound influence of the educational development of young adults. Nietzsche (2014) considered each individual as the controller of their own destiny; however, he deemed educators (and school librarians certainly sit within this category) as liberators to this destiny. There is no way to help any (young) soul attain this happiness, however, so long as it remains shackled with the chains of opinion and fear. And how hopeless and meaningless life can become without such a liberation! (Nietzsche, 2014)

If school library managers follow proposed selection guidelines to curate rich and diverse graphic novel collections for their communities, they will be assisting their students on the pathway to self-discovery.

**Research Design**

This research follows a descriptive survey research model (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). Quantitative data were collected with a structured survey questionnaire administered with the Qualtrics online survey tool. To ensure anonymous responses, we used the ‘Anonymize Results’ function.

The population was all New Zealand secondary school library managers registered on a database as National Library of New Zealand (NLNZ) School Loans Coordinators. An email message containing a direct link to the survey was distributed to all people on the database in New Zealand secondary schools. Staff of the NLNZ sent this in order to comply with privacy restrictions, and they sent a reminder email message two weeks later. The library manager is the most likely person to occupy the coordinator role within the school (National Library of New Zealand, 2015).

**Research Participants**

In New Zealand there are 107 Year 7-13 schools and 237 Year 9-13 schools (a Year 7 student is likely to be 11 or 12 years old), giving a potential total of 344 secondary schools for the research (Ministry of Education, 2016). Therefore 145 schools were not represented in the distribution list and did not receive the survey. This is unfortunate but there is simply no thorough list of those working in New Zealand’s school libraries, the School Loans Coordinators list being the most complete one available. There were 101 responses in total, 89 from library managers, 80 of whom worked at secondary schools (either Year 7-13 or Year 9-13). Therefore this survey achieved a 40%
response rate. Of the 80 eligible respondents, 31 (n=39%) worked with Years 7–13 and 49 (61%) work with Years 9-13; no respondents worked in schools that served only Years 7–8. Most of the 80 respondents (n=59 or 74%) worked in co-educational schools, while 10 (13%) respondents worked in male only schools and 11 (14%) worked in female only schools.

We also recorded participants’ deciles. New Zealand school deciles measure “the socio-economic position of a school’s student community relative to other schools throughout the country” (New Zealand. Ministry of Education, 2017). School deciles indicate the extent the school draws their students from low socio-economic communities. Policymakers use deciles to target funding, for state and state-integrated schools, to help them overcome any barriers to learning that students from lower socio-economic communities might face. The lower the school’s decile, the more funding it receives; for example, decile 1 schools are the 10% of schools with the highest proportion of students from low socio-economic communities, whereas decile 10 schools are the 10% of schools with the lowest proportion of these students. Table 1 illustrates survey participants’ decile distribution.

Table 1. Participants’ (N=80) Decile Distribution

| Decile | N(%) |
|--------|------|
| 1 or 1a | 3(4) |
| 2      | 7(9) |
| 3      | 10(13) |
| 4      | 8(10) |
| 5      | 11(14) |
| 6      | 9(11) |
| 7      | 4(5) |
| 8      | 7(9) |
| 9      | 10(13) |
| 10     | 8(10) |
| Private | 3(4%) |

As Table 1 indicates, while many participants represented decile 5 or below (n=39, or 49%), a slight majority of participants represented deciles 6-10 or were from private schools (n=41 or 51%).

Data Collection

Approval to conduct this research was granted by the Victoria University of Wellington’s School of Information Management Human Ethics Committee. The survey was active for three weeks from the date of the initial email message. Participants were incentivized with a chance to win a NZ$50 book voucher.

The survey, featured in the Appendix, utilized a combination of principles from Haines (2011) and Gavigan (2014) to create a holistic perspective of selection principles to limit variables and ensure consistent terminology. The survey featured 16 questions, divided amongst five sections, as illustrated in the Appendix:

1. Selection criteria in relation to graphic novels. After initial questions regarding the inclusion and selection of graphic novels within the school library, and experienced/perceived challenges, respondents were asked to rank their preferred selection criteria from a given list in order of importance.
2. **Selection principles.** Respondents were asked the extent to which they agree/disagree with three statements concerning selection in general.

3. **Intellectual freedom in libraries.** Respondents were asked four questions concerning intellectual freedom in libraries.

4. **Measuring selection approach.** Respondents were asked to confirm whether they would select/ restrict/not-select each of the nine hypothetical graphic novels presented.

5. **Decile and gender.** Respondents were asked to submit the schools’ year level; decile rating; and gender mix. These results are reported in the sample section of this paper.

## Results

After two initial questions that established respondents as being responsible for selecting graphic novels in their school library, respondents said if they had sustained an actual challenge to a book in their library and whether they had based graphic novel selection on the potential occurrence of such an event; to question. In response to the question “Has a challenge ever been made against a book in your school library?” 27 said Yes (34%). To the question that asked “Have you ever chosen to not-select a graphic novel based upon the potential occurrence of such a challenge,” of the 80 respondents, 56% (n=45) responded yes and 44% (n=35) reported no. Respondents were then asked what factors were most important to them when selecting graphic novels based upon Haines (1950), Gregory (2011), and Gavigan’s (2014) principles of selection. These are listed below in overall order of importance according to the mean participant rank, with the most important at number one and least important at number 15, as Table 2 illustrates.

### Table 2. Selection Factors for Graphic Novels from Most to Least Important

| Importance Rank | Selection Factor                                      | Mean  |
|-----------------|-------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| 1               | Anticipating the needs and wants of users             | 3.31  |
| 2               | Will support literacy or assist struggling readers    | 3.54  |
| 3               | Demand                                                | 5.18  |
| 4               | Current interest                                      | 5.79  |
| 5               | Reflects an area that requires coverage in collection | 5.99  |
| 6               | Reflects community interests                          | 7.51  |
| 7               | Appeals to all ages                                   | 7.96  |
| 8               | Quality                                               | 9.27  |
| 9               | Lasting value                                         | 9.32  |
| 10              | Reflects changing current thoughts and opinions -     | 9.35  |
| 11              | Best works on a particular topic                      | 9.46  |
| 12              | Circulation potential                                 | 9.64  |
| 13              | Relates specifically to the school/town/region        | 10.60 |
| 14              | Impartiality                                          | 10.69 |
| 15              | Promptness in supplying new releases                  | 12.38 |

As Table 2 indicated, participants prioritized users by anticipating user needs (M=3.31), supporting struggling readers (M=3.54), meeting user demand (5.18), and serving current interest (M=5.79). Participants were less concerned with seeking graphic novels that were the best works on a particular topic (M=9.46), had they perceived had circulation potential (9.64), related specifically to a local region (10.60), treated a topic impartially (M=10.69), and were new releases (M=12.38).

Participants (N=80) then responded to questions regarding intellectual freedom and libraries. The results are shown in Table 3.
Table 3. Participant Responses to Intellectual Freedom and Libraries Questions (N=80).

| Question                                                                 | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|-------|---------|----------|-------------------|
| Library collections should be an unbiased source of information that represents as many points of view as possible | 37(46)         | 35(44)| 6(8)    | 2(3)     | 0                 |
| Content should be covered in a manner appropriate to the library's anticipated users' needs | 38(48)         | 41(51)| 1(1)    | 0        | 0                 |
| No materials should be excluded from the collection because of the race, religion, gender, nation origin, sexual preference, or political view of the author, the materials, or the user | 23(29)         | 31(39)| 11(14)  | 14(18)   | 1(1)              |

As Table 3 shows, most participants strongly agreed or agreed that library collections should be unbiased (n=72 or 90%); content should match user needs (n=79 or 99%); and that materials should not be excluded based on external considerations like race, religion, gender, nation origin, sexual preference, or political view of the author, the materials, or the user (n=54 or 68%). It should be noted that 15 respondents (19%) either strongly disagreed or disagreed that external considerations should not be a basis for exclusion while 11(14%) of respondents reported a neutral feeling on the topic.

The next survey question was, “Are you familiar with the contents of the LIANZA Statement on Intellectual Freedom?” Of the 80 survey participants, 44(55%) responded yes, while 36(45%) responded no. The subsequent question was, “To what extent do you agree with the contents of the LIANZA Statement on Intellectual Freedom?” To this question, of the 79 respondents, 17(22%) noted that they strongly agreed and 43(54%) noted that they agreed, while 16(20%) were neutral and 3(4%) disagreed. No respondents strongly disagreed.

These questions were followed by question 11, which was, “Do you believe that libraries should adhere to the principles of Intellectual Freedom?” To this question, of the 80 respondents 64(80%) replied yes, 3(4%) replied no, and 13(16%) were not sure. When the 80 respondents were then asked if they believe that the principles of Intellectual Freedom apply to people under 18, 31(39%) said yes, 12 (15%) said no, but 37 (46%) said they were not sure.

Question 13 asked participants to decide whether they would select, restrict, or not-select nine hypothetical novels for their school library. The results are shown in Table 4.
Table 4. Participants’ Selection Actions Regarding a Hypothetical Graphic Novel (N=80)

| Hypothetical Graphic Novel                                                                 | Select | Select but Restrict | Not Select |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|---------------------|------------|
| A graphic novel set in the 1800s that portrayed Maori as inferior to British settlers.  | 39     | 5                   | 33         |
| A graphic novel that celebrated homosexuality.                                            | 45     | 17                  | 16         |
| A graphic novel that contained one panel in which cartoon characters engaged in sexual intercourse. | 8      | 19                  | 52         |
| A graphic novel featuring a character that consistently used swear words throughout.      | 22     | 29                  | 25         |
| A graphic novel where one of the characters was anti-Christianity.                       | 43     | 11                  | 23         |
| A graphic novel that celebrated a woman's right to have an abortion.                     | 37     | 29                  | 12         |
| A graphic novel in which the characters frequently take illegal drugs.                   | 13     | 31                  | 33         |
| A graphic novel containing frequent scenes of gruesome violence.                         | 9      | 32                  | 35         |
| A graphic novel in which one of the characters commits suicide.                          | 13     | 44                  | 20         |

As Table 4 shows, most respondents would select and not restrict hypothetical graphic novels that celebrated homosexuality (n=45); contained an anti-Christian character (n=43), portrayed Maori characters as inferior (n=39), and celebrated a woman’s right to abortion (n=37). The majority of school librarians would select, but restrict access to, a hypothetical graphic novel in which a character committed suicide (n=44); contained frequent scenes of gruesome violence (n=32); in which characters frequently took illegal drugs (n=31); celebrated a woman’s right to abortion (n=29); and contains characters who used profanity (n=29). Most respondents would not select a hypothetical graphic novel in which characters engaged in sexual intercourse (n=52); contained gruesome violence (n=35); Maori characters were portrayed as inferior (n=33); and in which characters took illegal drugs (n=33).

Discussion

One third of schools (34%) had faced a challenge regarding an item in their collection. Despite only one third of library managers having actual experience of a book challenge, over half have chosen to not-select a graphic novel for their collection based upon the possibility of such a challenge. This shows that many school library managers are concerned their selection could be questioned and/or challenged. These responses are also consistent with self-censorship practices and thus indicate that self-censorship is present in 56% of New Zealand secondary school libraries. As Asheim (1953) posited, self-censoring actions are incompatible with professional standards of intellectual freedom. Real or perceived pressures from an employer or wider school community should not influence the selection process. This is clearly supported in Section Four of LIANZA’s Statement on Intellectual Freedom (2002).

To what extent are school library managers consistent/inconsistent with their selection criteria?
It is also clear that impartiality, one of the fundamental principles of selection, is not an important factor in New Zealand secondary schools. Impartiality ranked second last in the list of 15 criteria from Haines (1950), Gregory (2011), and Gavigan’s (2014) principles of selection.

Responses to parts of the survey investigating the predominant selection criteria employed by school library managers when establishing and maintaining graphic novel collections in their libraries showed a heavy focus on user demand, current interest, and for supporting literacy or assisting struggling readers. This latter criteria related to Gavigan’s (2014) identification that “21st century learners construct their knowledge and meaning through a variety of visual images” and “providing non-traditional texts through visual literacy formats, such as graphic novels, can engage students’ interest in a subject” (p. 98). New Zealand school library managers obviously subscribe to the merits of graphic novels as a literary tool as this criterion was ranked second most important in the given list of 15. This result is encouraging as Stivers’ (2015) study concluded: “it was clear that the librarians with the strongest collections... collected graphic novels heavily because it was advantageous for their students; and... their students were interested in them” (p. 30). Stivers also aligned this practice with contemporary literacy theory, such as Krashen’s concept of ‘free voluntary reading’ (2011):

Research shows that engaged reading – not type of reading – is the substantial driver of reading success... these librarians are building school libraries aligned with literacy research, while demonstrating that graphic novels are a necessary and essential part of this literacy framework in school libraries. (2015, p. 30)

Our research data clearly indicated an alignment with literacy research and graphic novel selection criteria. However, our data do not present a similar alignment with professional library industry standards of intellectual freedom. Only 45% of respondents said they were familiar with LIANZA’s Statement on Intellectual Freedom. When asked if they if libraries should adhere to the principles of intellectual freedom, 80% said Yes, but significantly when asked if the same principles of intellectual freedom apply to people under 18, only 39% said yes, with 15% saying no and a large number (46%) simply saying they were unsure.

Respondents showed great inconsistencies of approach when it came to choosing whether they would select, restrict, or not-select the nine hypothetical graphic novels. Graphic novels that unashamedly celebrated homosexuality or were anti-Christian were the most likely to be selected with 58% and 55% respectively saying they would select these graphic novels. Sixty-seven percent, however, would not select a graphic novel with one panel depicting naked characters participating in sexual intercourse and 56% would select but restrict access to a graphic novel in which one of the characters committed suicide.

Only 10% of library managers would select a hypothetical graphic novel containing one panel depicting sexual intercourse for their libraries. This is certainly an instance where library managers are assessing the merits of a work based upon individual factors rather than the work as a whole. This relates to Asheim’s (1953) assertion that although librarians may feel obliged to select according to standards, those standards can be subjective, vague and imprecise. Asheim (1953) stressed that selectors must consider the effect that the complete literary work would have on a “rational” person and find reasons to keep a book rather than reject it. A censor, he argued, focuses on the negative aspects of the book; for instance, the single panel of naked cartoon
characters engaged in sexual intercourse, rather than the complete, potentially valuable whole of the work (Asheim, 1953).

Detractors could argue perhaps, that the hypothetical graphic novels in the survey presented the negative aspects of the work rather than the unified whole, and therefore ‘set-up’ the library managers to skew results. Conversely, a selector should consider that this is an isolated aspect of the hypothetical graphic novel, and choose to select, restrict, or not-select accordingly. There was no indication whether this was a work of literary genius, complete rubbish, or somewhere in between.

**To what extent is school librarians’ graphic novel selection in-line with LIANZA’s Statement on Intellectual Freedom?**

Like studies by Fiske (1959), Moody (2004), and Nieuwoudt (2012), the data reveal a disparity between self-censorship practices and the promotion of the philosophy embedded in statements made by professional bodies. Despite over half of the respondents admitting to self-censorship practices, over three quarters of respondents believe libraries should adhere to principles of intellectual freedom. Furthermore, over half of respondents were previously familiar with the LIANZA Statement on Intellectual Freedom and 76% agree or strongly agree with the contents of the document.

Unlike previous studies, our research investigated whether respondents believed that principles of intellectual freedom applied to people under the age of 18. Fifteen percent thought they did not and 46% were not sure. Gorman (2000) suggested that most disputes regarding intellectual freedom “are not between those who are for it and those who are against it. They are often between people who believe in different applications of intellectual freedom, while all professing to be for it” (p. 89). Unlike Asheim (1953), Gorman (2000) did not decry absolutions, but rather suggests that the competing tensions of censorship and intellectual freedom are best served by a pragmatic approach that benefits the community and ensures, foremost, the continuation of the library service. Our research suggests that consistent application of intellectual freedom principles in secondary school libraries is complicated by an uncertainty over whether such principles apply to school library users.

Whilst some of the results could be attributed to an apparent vagueness in LIANZA’s Statement on Intellectual Freedom, there are a substantial proportion of library managers who choose to ignore the expressed values of the document. In response to the statement “No materials should be excluded from the collection because of the race, religion, gender, nation origin, sexual preference, or political view of the author, the materials, or the user”, 19% of respondents either disagree or strongly disagree whilst 14% neither agreed nor disagreed. This clearly contravenes LIANZA’s Statement on Intellectual Freedom that stresses in Section Three that “no information resources should be excluded from libraries because of the opinions they express... nor on the grounds of the political, social, moral or other views of their author” (2002). Although only 4% of respondents disagree with the contents of LIANZA’s Statement on Intellectual Freedom, a further 15% seemingly disagreed with one of the key sections of the document. Clearly though, there is an inconsistency of approach to selection in school libraries and a seeming confusion about the concept of intellectual freedom.
Assumptions & Limitations

The survey instrument did not include an option for respondents to explain or justify their actions. Qualitative research may provide insight into motives of library managers. Although this research proclaims the importance of professional standards or best-practice guidelines, the existence of these documents does not guarantee that people working within the profession will follow them.

Conclusion

By analyzing the graphic novel selection criteria employed by New Zealand secondary school library managers and their perceptions of intellectual freedom, this research is able to determine that self-censorship exists in the graphic novel selection process in 56% of New Zealand secondary school libraries. There is also some contradictory behavior around selection and intellectual freedom principles, despite most library managers saying they accept LIANZA’s Statement on Intellectual Freedom, yet not affording intellectual freedom to people under 18.

The predominant focus of graphic novel selection is based upon user demand, current popularity, and their strength as a tool to enhance literacy. Despite the latter criteria aligning with educational/literacy standards, there is an apparent reluctance to adhere to library standards of intellectual freedom by most library managers. This indicates that school library managers are more responsive to professional educational standards (the sector they work in), rather than the standards of librarianship.

Results of this study will be useful in the preparation of best-practice guidelines to ensure this vital and valuable medium is an integral component of all school library collections. Recommendations from this project might help elevate the perception of graphic novels amongst school librarians so that New Zealand secondary schools can realize their worth as a literacy tool.

Recommendations and Further Research

LIANZA should update their Statement on intellectual freedom as such a fundamental document should leave no ambiguity to interpretation with regard to library services for children and young adults. Once this work is completed, LIANZA should promote the changes to the document to raise awareness. A best-practice graphic novel selection guide should be written based upon this research.

This research has raised several areas for further investigation within the library and information sector:

- Fifteen percent of respondents accepted LIANZA’s Statement on Intellectual Freedom, but disagreed with the survey question that was virtually identical to section three of the LIANZA document. Qualitative research might help explain this apparent contradiction.
- Qualitative research investigating the use of graphic novels in school libraries could determine whether the celebration of graphic novels as a tool to assist struggling readers and boost literacy has been at the negligence of the medium as an art form in its’ own right.
- Our research discovered that in the selection process, most school library managers adhered to education sector standards; but were less likely to follow the school library
sector standards. It would be worth investigating whether similar professional allegiances exist with public librarians and the local government sector they work in.

- Our research discovered that there is inconsistency concerning whether principles of intellectual freedom applied to people under the age of 18. Quantitative research could investigate at what age school library professionals believe that principles of intellectual freedom begin to apply.

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Appendix. Survey Questions

Q1. Do you have Graphic Novels in your school library?

Q2. Are you personally responsible for selecting Graphic Novels for your school library?

Q3. Has a challenge ever been made against a book in your school library?

Q4. Have you ever chosen to not-select a graphic novel based upon the potential occurrence of such a challenge?

Q5. When selecting graphic novels for your library, what factors are most important?
   - Reflects community interests
   - Current interest
   - Comprehensive
   - Local history
   - Specialist material
   - Quality over quantity
   - Anticipating the needs/wants of users
   - Appeals to all ages
   - Circulation
   - Lasting value
   - Demand
   - Impartiality
   - Current Trends
   - Promptness
   - Support literacy or assist struggling readers

To what extent do you agree/disagree with the following three statements?

Q6. Library collections should be an unbiased source of information that represents as many points of view as possible.

Q7. Content should be covered in a manner appropriate to the library’s anticipated users’ needs.

Q8. No materials should be excluded from the collection because of the race, religion, gender, nation origin, sexual preference, or political view of the author, the materials, or the user.

Q9. Are you familiar with the contents of the LIANZA Statement on Intellectual Freedom?

Q10. To what extent do you agree with the contents of the LIANZA Statement on Intellectual Freedom?

Q11. Do you believe that libraries should adhere to the principles of intellectual freedom?

Q12. Do you believe that the principles of intellectual freedom apply to people under the age of 18?
Q13. Please indicate whether you would select, restrict, or not-select a hypothetical graphic novel...

- set in the 1800s that portrayed Maori as inferior to British settlers.
- that celebrated homosexuality.
- that contained one panel in which naked cartoon characters engaged in sexual intercourse.
- featuring a character who consistently used swear words.
- in which one of the characters was anti-Christianity.
- that celebrated a woman's right to have an abortion.
- in which the characters frequently take illegal drugs.
- containing frequent and gruesome war scenes, with an overall anti-war stance.
- in which one of the characters commits suicide.

Q14. What is the year level of your school?

Q15. What is the gender of students?

Q16. What is the school decile?