

**'Manga readers in Auckland's *Graphic Novel Café*'**

**by**

**Kylie Maree Thomson**

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## ***Abstract***

Japanese graphic novels, known as ***manga***, are now filtering into library collections. However, librarians know very little about adults who read manga and their reasons for choosing this type of reading material. By learning more about such audiences and their reading habits, collection development librarians will be in a better position to build up their collections and target their services more precisely. This study was delimited by location to New Zealand's only café dedicated to English-language manga, the Graphic Novel Café. It adopted a qualitative approach, and purposive sampling was employed to select an array of readers, who were interviewed about their manga-reading experiences. The findings indicate considerable potential for manga to attract a variety of patrons. They include the fact that manga reading can be a social activity, and is often entwined with related interests such as anime. Some of the special considerations for incorporating manga into a library collection are type, artwork and serialisation. This study fills a gap in the scholarly literature on the New Zealand context, and also highlights areas for future research to expand upon.

**Keywords:** manga, graphic novels, collection development, reading choices

# **1 Introduction**

## **1.1 Problem Statement**

In recent years, there has been a new phenomenon in the Western publishing world: Japanese graphic novels, known as *manga*, are being translated into English, German, Italian, Spanish and many other languages. Manga now enjoy an immense popularity outside of their home country with, for example, the sales of manga in the US alone being estimated to have risen from “about a third of the \$75 million graphic-novel industry [in 2001] to claiming almost two-thirds of what is now a \$330 million movement [by 2006]” (Thompson & Okura, 2007, p.225). A cursory glance at the shelves devoted to manga in major bookstores attests to this popularity, and they are now filtering into library collections as well.

However, librarians know very little about adults who read manga and their reasons for choosing this type of reading material. By learning more about such audiences and their reading habits collection development librarians will be in a better position to build up their collections and target their services more precisely.

## 1.2 Literature Review

### 1.2.1 Introduction

Scholarly interest in manga has come from an extremely diverse array of disciplines, and this review will take a broad, interdisciplinary approach to the literature, as well as examining trade journals, newspapers, and the works specific to the Library and Information Management (LIM) field. As the literature treats manga as both a subset of graphic novels to which the same arguments apply, and as a distinctive art form in its own right for which there are special considerations, it is necessary to first provide an explanation of graphic novels as well as manga. This review will then examine a variety of reasons for manga reading offered by the literature, ranging from global cross-cultural perspectives to those works which deal with reading choices at an individual level. Finally, it will address the library context directly.

### 1.2.2 What Is Sequential Art?

Influential American comics artist Will Eisner coined the phrase '**sequential art**' in the 1970s in an attempt to legitimise and showcase the potential of the medium. It is an umbrella term for all stories told with a series of panels containing art and text that, when read in sequence, express narrative action (Eisner, 1996; Miller, 2005). The following are the three major manifestations:



- Comics: Art in which images and words work in tandem. Usually produced in either short strips in newspapers or in magazine form. Often seen as disposable or ephemeral, and as being aimed at children and adolescents.
- Graphic novel: Derived from comics but considerably more sophisticated, these contain sequential art in book form. It should be noted that the label 'graphic novel' can be applied to non-fiction as well.
- Manga<sup>1</sup>: Whereas in Japan the word manga can refer to any of a variety of weekly serials and compendiums, 'manga' as it has entered into the English language usually refers to the collected works of authors in the form of graphic novels, translated into English (or any other local language). A key feature of manga is its serialisation; series can run from anywhere between two and forty volumes.

Works such as Wright (2001) and Pustz (1999) provide important information about the history of comics in America, including the moral panics of the mid twentieth century and the strict censorship applied to comics thereafter<sup>2</sup>. This is the historical context within which the importation of manga must be considered, and it will have parallels in many Anglo-American cultures. McCloud (1993, 2006) has produced some fascinating work on artists' techniques and how they are

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<sup>1</sup> The term can be both singular and plural (as it is in the original Japanese), although 'mangas' is also acceptable for the plural in English.

<sup>2</sup> This has only been relaxed fairly recently, and publishers still do try to apply ratings for age-appropriateness, albeit in an inconsistent fashion (Thompson, 2007).

translated in the act of reading, with the readers' minds supplying the 'closure' between each frame and tying the panels together to create a seamless mental flow. Many other critics speak of a special accumulation of experience required to be able to interpret the visuals and the content of the texts themselves (Eisner, 1996; Horner, 2004; Pustz, 1999; Wright, 2001).

Eisner (1996), ever one for a memorable quote, states that "reading in the pure literary sense was mugged on its way to the twenty-first century" (p.5), and this ties in with a broader movement to re-envisage literacy as a continuum of skills (Ross, McKechnie, & Rothbauer, 2006; Schwartz, 2002; Schwartz & Rubinstein-Avila, 2006). With **visual literacy**<sup>3</sup>, literacy is not defined solely as text-based, such as is required in reading a standard novel, but involves decoding linguistic and paralinguistic features (in this case panel layout and pictures) in conjunction with each other, with meaning being conveyed simultaneously at several levels. This entails an active engagement with the text, and such an argument contrasts sharply with older beliefs about comics reading being purely passive (Poerschke, 2005). Arguments have coalesced around the utility of graphic novels in encouraging reluctant readers in particular, as well as for ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) students and native English speakers learning other languages (Miller, 2005). And multiple works have found that those who read graphic novels are likely to be keen readers of other forms of literature as

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<sup>3</sup> Also called media and multimodal literacy; the terms are used fairly interchangeably.

well; at the very least, a range of literacies and age groups can be expected (Boyd, 2005; Charbonneau, 2005; Poerschke, 2005).

### 1.2.3 Manga In Japan

Several studies have conducted in-depth looks at the development of manga (Gravett, 1997, 2004; Ito, 2005; Schodt, 1986). Schodt's landmark study was the first to introduce Western audiences to the history of manga, and the other major works cited here owe a great deal to his preliminary work. He offers an especially fine look at the entwining of Japanese art forms, such as their *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints, and Western influences such as cinema and comic strips. It is important to note that very few people make the claim that manga and its sister art-form *anime* (Japanese animation)<sup>4</sup> are purely Japanese, but rather that there are perpetual cross-cultural currents of influence (Cavallaro, 2006; Levi, 1996). As Paul Gravett says, the Japanese "have taken the fundamentals of American comics, the relationships between picture, frame and word and, by fusing them with their own traditional love for popular art that entertains, have 'Japanized' them into a storytelling vehicle with its own distinctive form" (Gravett, 2004, p.10). Using perspectives garnered from history (Ito, 2005), art and comics criticism (Avella, 2004; Schodt, 1996; Thompson, 2007), and sociology and anthropology

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<sup>4</sup> The two are closely inter-related, with manga often giving birth to animated shows and sometimes vice versa (see O'Hagan, 2007); thus works on anime have been consulted as well as those dealing solely with manga.

(Kinsella, 2000), these studies often tend towards the descriptive rather than the purely analytic (see Mescallado, 2000, for criticisms). Nevertheless, the works have utilised a wide variety of sources, such as the original manga, statistics from the publications industry, and interviews with the creators and other insiders, and they do succeed in building a rich picture of manga in Japan today. The industry is obviously huge there: publishing figures from 2002 show that manga constituted 38.1% of texts sold by volume, and 22.6% by value (Gravett, 2004, p.13; see also Natsume, 2002, 2003). There is very little of the stigma attached to reading comics in Japan that there is in many Western countries, and manga are written for and read across the spectrum of Japanese society. Of particular interest is the fact that manga publication is fairly gendered, with works being geared for either female or male audiences as well as specific age groups. The main categories are as follows:

- *shoujo*: those works aimed at an adolescent female audience, tending to deal with relationships and (frequently) romance on an exploratory level
- *shounen*: those works aimed at an adolescent male audience, focusing more on values-laden action
- *jousei*: those works aimed at an older female audience, with more adult themes and explicit sexuality

- *seinen*: those works aimed at a slightly older male audience than *shounen* manga, with more explicit sexual content and violence<sup>5</sup>

Manga employs very distinctive visual vocabularies to capture the essence of movement and to evoke mood: “a complex iconography that include[s] ... various methods of ornamentation, rhetoric of detail, and distinctive visual idioms” (Natsume, 2000, p.5) (see Appendix 5.2 Examples Of Manga Artwork). Content is also key to manga; they tend to contain broader themes and a wider variety of genres as well as greater story complexity than much of Western sequential art (Katsuno & Maret, 2004; Napier, 2005; Poerschke, 2005; Thompson, 2007). And with their reliance on ambiguity and context to convey meaning, they are inevitably infused with Japanese ideals as well as the details of Japanese daily life (Ito, 2005).

### 1.2.4 Manga Outside Japan

A look at trade journals shows that publishers outside Japan are now very much aware of the increasing bankability of manga (for example: Glazer, 2005; Kean, 2004; Reid, 2005; Stone, 2007; Thompson & Okura, 2007). Interestingly,

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<sup>5</sup> These are generalisations, and there are more distinctions than these in Japan, but Western publishers have tended to stick mainly with the two basic categories of *shoujo* and *shounen*. It is only recently that they have branched out into manga aimed solely at older audiences, and they are not yet quite certain how to label and market them (Arnstein, 2007; Dennys, 2006; Thompson, 2007). It should also be noted that Allen and Ingulsrud’s (2005) work on manga readership in Japan makes it quite clear that there can be considerable divergence in *intended* audience and who is *actually* reading the manga.

whereas initial choices for publication were selected because of their similarities to Western graphic art, four to five years ago the demand for 'unflopped' or 'authentic' manga (this means presented in the original Japanese way, to be read from right to left) took publishers by surprise, and now almost all manga are produced in this fashion (Gravett, 2004; Thompson, 2007). Several works trace the history of importation into the West (Natsume, 2002; Rifas, 2004), as well as some of the issues entailed, such as the collision of different value systems (Rimmer, 2004) and the complexities of translating manga into English (O'Hagan, 2007).

### **1.2.5 Why Do People Read Manga?**

The reasons why something intended for local (Japanese) consumption has received such a warm global reception are somewhat elusive. No-one has yet come up with a comprehensive theory, although various hypotheses have been offered. At their core, these seem to suggest that it is both the exoticism (Allison, 2006; Gravett, 2004; Kinsella, 2000; Thompson, 2007), *and* the universality of the themes and techniques of manga that constitute its appeal to many non-Japanese readers, and that it allows for a wide range of interpretations and appreciation (Cavallaro, 2006; Eisner, 1996; Levi, 1996; Lewis, 2000; Napier, 2005; Price, 2001; Wong, 2006). The very existence of a broad variety of manga written by and aimed at girls and women has been pointed out as another major factor (Dennys, 2006; Gustines, 2004; Rimmer, 2004). Unfortunately, there has

been no serious research into who is reading what in Western countries; the literature offers the barest anecdotal hints that suggest that females are likely to read both *shounen* and *shoujo* manga, whereas males are more likely to stick with just *shounen* (Bergin, 2005; Dennys, 2006). Some make the point that many countries have a long acceptance of comics art, particularly parts of Asia, where manga are enormously popular, but also in Western countries such as France, Italy and Germany (Charbonneau, 2005; Natsume, 2000; Price, 2001). Interestingly enough, it is a New Zealand scholar whose work contains the most salient reminder to bear the cultural background of readers in mind. Sunaoshi's (2006) research into the readers in Korean and Chinese comic and video rental shops in Auckland (reading manga in their own languages) shows that recent immigrants can use it as a way of establishing a measure of familiarity in a new location, and sometimes as a means to engender pan-Asian relationships on 'neutral ground'. Sunaoshi's work was an immensely important forerunner to this research project, and it was illuminating to compare the experiences of her participants with those of readers drawn from more varied backgrounds.

Many authors are aware that we are dealing with some form of cultural 'crossover'. Natsume (2000) roots the importation of manga in a world-wide context, pointing out that we are in "an era of synchronous global consumption of mass entertainment" (p.2). Other works also argue that the growing global popularity of Japanese modes of entertainment such as video games betokens a growing acceptance of Japanese pop culture (Allen & Sakamoto, 2006; Cross &

Smits, 2005; Gustines, 2004; Napier, 2005; Tobin, 2004). Misaka (2004) contends that there may be “no cultural difference when it comes to what kids like” (p.29) and Allison (2003, 2004, 2006) argues strongly for the ‘cultural cachet’ of Japaneseness; Mescallado (2000) gives perhaps a more nuanced reading when he claims that we can see in this “a process by which globalized pop culture is claimed, contested, defined, and perpetually redefined thereafter” (para. 19). Iwabuchi’s (2002, 2004) *mukokuseki* theory, whereby a lack of ‘cultural odour’ renders the origins of commodities increasingly insignificant in the face of local methods of consuming and interpreting, is a complex and important one; he also points out that most of the English language manga is produced and distributed by American companies and is hardly unfiltered (see also Martinez, 1998). However, for Western readers the very format of manga is an inescapable reminder that it is not of local origin, as are the cultural details. The work of Rimmer (2004) may offer a way to reconcile these multiple approaches, as he agrees with the branding of Japan as ‘cool’ but also points out the repackaging that occurs at the local level in Asia.

Various commentators, librarians among them, have also noted the keen manga subculture that exists, one with possibly more power than that of Western comics and graphic novels in terms of popularity (Gravett, 2006 ‘Thinking inside the box’, 2007 ‘Tap into fan power’; McCormick, 2006; Miller, 2005). The literature here provides some other tantalising hints about manga reading being a shared experience and thus a **social** activity, with readers who are engaged and



motivated (Allen & Ingulsrud, 2005; Bergin, 2005; Miller, 2005; Sunaoshi, 2006). Commentators such as Mescallado (2000) and Alvermann and Hagood (2000) situate this within the context of other fandoms, such as anime and science fiction, and it is also a common theme in works on American comics readers (McCloud, 1996; Pustz, 1999; Wright, 2001). Much of the literature on reading choices also attests to the importance of knowledge of the conventions of one's chosen genre and the degree to which the reading itself is woven into the participants' lives (Appleyard, 1991; Ross & Chelton, 2001; Ross, McKechnie & Rothbauer 2006; Sunaoshi, 2006). For example, according to Chandler (1997), the pleasure that devotees can derive from their chosen genre<sup>6</sup> may be due to empathy and escapism, or to the "sharing [of] our experience of a genre with others within an interpretive community which can be characterized by its familiarity with certain genres" ('Working within genres', para. 12). While the importance of having acquired this specialised knowledge is highlighted, the process of 'acclimatising' to one's chosen genre is seldom dealt with. Horner (2004) notes briefly the difficulties of establishing manga literacy, but there does not seem to be any material dealing with the experience of non-Japanese readers in learning to read manga, which is different again from learning to read Western graphic novels.

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<sup>6</sup> Note that 'genre' in Chandler's work is defined at the broadest conceptual level, and can therefore include manga as a category; when genre is referred to elsewhere in this review, it denotes the more usual forms of library categorisation such as fantasy, romance, etc.

On a more general level, Ross, McKechnie and Rothbauer (2006) stress the importance of librarians being familiar with models of reading in order to build robust collections and be able to recommend books to patrons. Several recent articles cover the latest thinking on the complex array of factors that can constitute appeal for readers and that enable them to select their reading material, such as knowledge of authors, genre, cover art, back of book summaries, other readers' opinions, length of story, setting, and 'feel' (Arnstead, 2005; Wyatt, 2006, 2007); Ross and Chelton (2001) make a strong argument that readers often make selections by eliminating undesirable traits. These are all worth bearing in mind when delving into manga readers' preferences, and the questions and criteria utilised by Boyd (2000) and Poerschke (2005), which attempted to determine reading choices, also had much methodological value for this study.

### **1.2.6 Graphic Novels In Libraries**

The bulk of the library literature dealing with graphic novels, which is primarily from the USA, tends to be comprised of more practitioner-generated material: best practice tips, recommended works, anecdotes, mailing lists, and in-house circulation figures (Bussert, 2005; Crawford, 2004; Foster, 2004; Gorman, 2002; Leckbee, 2005; Lyga, 2006; O'English, Matthews & Lindsay, 2006; Raiteri, 2006; St Lifer, 2002; Welch & Brown, 2005). This ground-swell response of librarians,

most from school and public libraries but with some notable contributions from academic librarians as well, attests to the great potential for graphic novels to attract patrons. The limitation of most of these works is that they do tend more towards description and advocacy, highlighting the need for more comprehensive studies. Works such as Gorman (2003), Horner (2004) and Miller (2005) are fine compendiums which may be positioned as the culmination of ten to fifteen years of librarians and others increasingly realising the worth of sequential art. Kudos must go to Miller in particular, for his very fine review of the literature; this confirms the impression of a 'critical mass' of attestations by librarians and educators. Boyd's (2000) Master of Library and Information Studies (MLIS) research project, which examined the place of graphic novels in New Zealand public libraries and their readership, also offers a thoughtful overview of the literature. Her findings match those of her overseas counterparts in many respects, and her contention that using graphic novels is a good way of "contemporising the library's collection and ensuring the continued appeal of the library to a visually literate generation" (p.107) is one echoed in other works (see also Horner, 2004).

### **1.2.7 Manga In Libraries**

Although there is nothing at all available on the New Zealand library situation, there are increasing numbers of articles showing that librarians overseas are

aware of the popularity of manga and are attempting to harness it. For instance, since 2005 up to 60% of public libraries in the United Kingdom have undertaken the 'Manga Mania' promotion with great success (Holman, 2006, p.S11). As with graphic novels, practical tips and recommendations dominate the literature (Gorman, 2008; Holman, 2006; Kan, 2003; compare these to the bookseller's perspective in Arnstein, 2007). Exner (2007) makes some interesting points about the issue of censorship in conservative areas, particularly important given the casual nudity and sexuality on display in many manga. She also notes that older manga readers are quite happy to read works aimed at young adult readers (see also Appleyard, 1991). The notion of the devoted fanbase and the wide base of appeal appears here as well (Charbonneau, 2005; Miller, 2005; Nylund, 2007), and these works hint at the large numbers of females accessing these collections (Bergin, 2005). All agree that librarians can engage with this particular audience, soliciting their advice and expertise and making them part of the collections development process. Miller (2005) notes that treating manga as a separate entity in a collection is often a useful distinction, as manga-seeking patrons will frequently gravitate solely towards manga regardless of its genre. Finally, a cursory glance at the '*Graphic Novels In Libraries*'<sup>7</sup> mailing list reveals that a high proportion of the posts are manga-related, and there is an excellent online guide to manga for librarians and parents written by a librarian, Gilles Poitras (2007).

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<sup>7</sup> <http://lists.topica.com/lists/gnlib-l/read>

### **1.2.8 Conclusion**

Manga's popularity has taken the world somewhat by surprise. While affirmations and practical pointers still predominate in the LIM field, proponents do now seem to be moving past apologia and into more academic considerations of graphic novels and manga. It is safe to say that reading graphic novels requires a greater sophistication than has previously been assumed, and one may expect a variety of readerships. Because of the manga phenomenon's relative newness, it also is necessary to go beyond the LIM field to find substantial work. There is plenty of material that helps to define the characteristics and background of manga, and it is undoubtedly true that the art form "can be taken as shorthand for the preoccupations of Japan and the Japanese, boiled down to a few stark lines on the page" (Lewis, 2000, p.11). At the same time, studies have attempted to address just why it is attracting so many readers outside of Japan. It is conceivable that future research may be able to get to grip with global cultural cross-currents and our increasingly multicultural societies. At the very least, manga reading can be seen as a multi-valenced phenomenon, and this research project will hopefully fill the gap in some small fashion by assessing readership in a very specific New Zealand context.

## 1.3 Purpose

The purpose of this project is to conduct preliminary research in New Zealand's one and only English-language manga café in order to examine the experiences of adult readers of manga, and to discover what factors influence their manga reading. Practitioners and publishers have identified manga as an important trend for libraries, and one that can potentially reach a much wider audience than the traditional white adolescent male readership of Western comics (for example, Dennys, 2006; Exner, 2007; Gustines, 2004; Nylund, 2007; Rimmer, 2004). Because there is nothing published on this subject in the New Zealand library context, this study fills a gap, and adds to the scholarly literature on the topic, making it possible for the profession to build up a richer, more textured picture. Through this study librarians may glean some valuable insights into what draws adult readers to manga and therefore into some of the issues to consider when building up a manga collection. This study is likely to be of particular interest to collection development librarians, especially those interested in attracting an older demographic than most libraries may be currently catering to with their manga collections. It highlights areas for future research to expand upon, and tests some of the observations and assumptions in the literature (see below 3.2.1 Learning To Read Manga; 3.3.1.4 Types; 3.4 The 'WHY' Of Manga Reading; 4.5 Implications For Further Research). The findings of this research may also provide insights into both the current attitudes to sequential art and the 'cultural crossover' that is indicated by the acceptance of such a medium.

## **1.4 Project Objectives**

This research project has the following objectives:

### **1.4.1 The ‘WHO’ Of Manga Reading**

To capture a snapshot of readers in terms of their manga reading backgrounds, and investigate what social factors are operating.

*This objective is addressed by Research Sub-Question 1*

### **1.4.2 The ‘HOW’ Of Manga Reading**

To determine how these readers access manga, and examine their reading habits.

*This objective is addressed by Research Sub-Question 2*

### **1.4.3 The ‘WHAT’ Of Manga Reading**

To discover what sorts of manga they read, and build up a picture of their selection criteria for manga and related art forms.

*This objective is addressed by Research Sub-Question 3*

#### **1.4.4 The ‘WHY’ Of Manga Reading**

To explore the readers’ reasons for reading manga.

*This objective is addressed by Research Sub-Question 4*

### **1.5 Research Questions**

The questions upon which this research project is based are as follows:

#### **1.5.1 Major Question**

What factors influence the manga reading of adults in Auckland today?

#### **1.5.2 Sub-questions**

1) What are the main characteristics of manga readers?

A) What social factors have shaped their experience of manga-reading?

2) How do these readers read manga?

A) How did they learn to read manga?

B) What are their reading patterns?

C) Where do they access their manga?

3) What criteria govern these readers’ selection of manga?

4) Why do they read manga?



## ***2 Project Design***

### **2.1 Methodology**

According to the naturalistic paradigm, a phenomenon can be understood by rooting it in a specific context, and focusing on those individuals for whom it is meaningful. The typical reason for choosing qualitative methods is that they place stress on the importance of participants' perceptions and viewpoints (Creswell, 2003; Gorman & Clayton, 2005), and this seemed particularly appropriate for a preliminary exploration of reading choices. The Graphic Novel Café (GNC) was settled upon as one of Auckland's primary hubs of manga-reading activity, with a readily-accessible population of readers, and expressions of interest were invited from its patrons. In order to derive the richest information possible, purposive sampling was employed on the pool of candidates, aimed at selecting a spread of different types of manga readers by age, ethnicity, and gender. Semi-structured interviews were used to delve into important aspects of the manga reading experience; the words of the interviewees were then grouped thematically and interwoven, and triangulated with the literature itself in the final analysis. *A more in-depth explanation of the process now follows.*

## 2.2 Implementation Scheme

The Graphic Novel Café was established in 2002 by proprietor Seong J Oh. Manga reading and rental cafés are common in Asian countries, and Auckland has several such cafes for readers of manga in Chinese and Korean, but this is New Zealand's only English-language manga café (for information about such cafés and their histories, see Sunaoshi, 2006; Thompson, 2007). Situated just above Auckland's central business district, and a short walk from the University of Auckland's main campus, the GNC is a well-known haven and gathering place for manga and anime fans, most of them adults. It consists of a public room with merchandise and rentable anime DVDs, with a small area for people to sit with drinks and snacks. There are three other (non-public) rooms used by the regular patrons: the manga library and reading room, the DVD-viewing room, and a room used for a variety of socialising purposes (such as mah-jong, gaming, model-making, and working on manga and anime-related art).

Upon securing permission from the proprietor, Participant Information Sheets (see Appendix 5.3 Information Sheet For Reader Interviews) were placed in the Café's reading room, and information about the study was also posted electronically via the Café's internet forum<sup>8</sup>. Respondents who were interested were encouraged to fill out the Participant Selection Form (see Appendix 5.4), and place it in a secure ballot-style box. Alternatively they were able to contact

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.graphicnovelcafe.co.nz/forum/index.php>

the researcher directly about participating in interviews, and the Participant Selection Form was filled out by the researcher on their behalf. As an incentive, those who put their names forward went into a draw to win one of three GNC gift vouchers worth \$10. The Participant Selection Form asked for demographic information (including first language) to gauge the spread of respondents. A casual glance at the readers clustering around manga shelves in major bookstores or in the GNC itself attests to manga's broad reader base. It was therefore important to get as wide a variety of participants as possible, so as to be able to explore a range of possibilities. Fifteen patrons of the GNC put their names forward, and the following ten were selected for interviews:

**Table 1: Interviewee Profiles**

*Unless otherwise noted, English is the first language of the participants.*

<b>Participant Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Years Speaking English</b>	<b>Occupation</b>
Selena	30	Female	Pakistani		Intranet developer
Rinelle	21	Female	Chinese/Maori		Student (animation)
Bob	40	Male	NZ Pakeha		Software developer
Kitty	42	Female	NZ Pakeha		Librarian
Shuji	24	Male	Japanese	6 years	Student (business)

Jim	29	Male	English (Caucasian)		Network technician
Allen	28	Male	Chinese (Hong Kong)	over 10 years	Student (computer science)
Jo	20	Female	Filipino		Student (chef)
Eric	37	Male	Malaysian- born Chinese		Banker
Ji Hoon	20	Male	Korean	7.5 years	Student (engineering)

Drawing threads from the literature, the interviews examined interviewees' manga reading experience in its entirety. The point was not necessarily to be generalisable but to obtain a rich picture of specific instances (although some measure of generalisability may have been achieved by building up thick layers of description). The interviews were semi-structured with open-ended questions, and the schedules were pilot tested on an experienced manga reader; her feedback was incorporated into the first set of questions used on the actual participants. There was a list of areas of concern having no specified order, enabling the interviewer to maintain flexibility to seize upon comments and follow trails of interest. The questions dealt with issues such as:

- Introduction to and learning to read manga
- Manga reading as a social experience

- The appeal of manga
- Strategies for selecting manga
- Knowledge of manga's special characteristics.
- Where manga fit into broader leisure activities
- Cultural background and attitude to 'comics' reading

Six interviews took place in the GNC's DVD viewing room, as a convenient and known central location that offered some privacy; the other four took place at the participants' homes, with the married couple electing to have a joint interview. All were held in the afternoon or evening, and had a friendly, eager energy, tinged slightly with nerves on the part of both parties. Consent forms were signed to protect both parties (see Appendix 5.5 Consent Form For Reader Interviews), and copies of the interview schedules were sent to the participants beforehand, so as not to surprise them. The questions evolved as the interviews progressed; perspectives garnered in early interviews were used to refine the interview schedules several times to build up richer questioning methods (see Appendix 5.6 Final Interview Schedules). The interviews ranged from 12 minutes to nearly 40 minutes, with the average time being about 18-20 minutes. Recording was done with an mp3 player, with a cassette tape dictaphone as backup (a necessary precaution, as occasionally the mp3 player malfunctioned or the sound quality was too low).

Transcription was done with a fair bent towards fidelity; most 'ums' and 'ahs' were omitted, as was the (frequent) laughter, but otherwise attempts were made to preserve the flow of natural speech. The quotes that appear in this research report have been trimmed and 'cleaned up' slightly for consistency and coherency, but otherwise all attempts have been made to keep the interviewees' words as their own. The completed transcripts, with areas of uncertainty highlighted, were sent to the participants for checking.<sup>9</sup> Once these had been returned, the data was coded manually for meaning. As with all qualitative research, this was an iterative process, characterised by a continual emergence and refining of categories.

I am an avid reader of manga and a patron of the GNC myself; it was this interest which guided me towards this topic and heightened my keenness to conduct research upon the topic. There are always dangers and rewards in being a fan researching fan culture, as Pustz (1999) has noted. For example, the fact that I read manga and consider myself an *otaku* (see 2.6 Further Definitions) probably smoothed my path to some degree, especially in securing the GNC proprietor's cooperation. It also enabled me to establish trust and gain access to my interviewees; as I was knowledgeable about the manga they were talking about, there was no need on their part to convince me of its worth. The importance of such "empathetic understanding" and "personal involvement and partiality" on the

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<sup>9</sup> A summary of the final report will be emailed to each participant. In addition, a printed copy will be placed in the Graphic Novel Café's reading room, and a summary of the findings may also be posted on the Café's internet forum.

part of the qualitative researcher is stressed by Gorman and Clayton (2005, p. 4). However, there is also a need to offset potential researcher subjectivity in such cases. Here, reliability was achieved by keeping the interviews as digital files and maintaining rigorous field notes, leaving an 'audit trail' so that others could follow the development of thinking. Validity was ensured by checking back with participants on the meaning of their comments, and by triangulating with the literature and other interviewees' comments.

## 2.3 Delimitations

The focus of the study has been narrowed to the patrons of the GNC, as this is New Zealand's only dedicated English-language manga café and therefore the only set population of readily accessible English-language manga readers. The definition of manga has not been restricted solely to those graphic novels which originate in Japan and therefore includes Korean *manwha*<sup>10</sup> or Original English Manga (OEM)<sup>11</sup>, as they possess considerable similarities to authentic Japanese manga and it was not known whether readers make distinctions between them.

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<sup>10</sup> Also known as *manhwa*. These are usually interfiled with manga, and are distinguishable mainly by the names of the authors and their left-to-right format (Thompson, 2007).

<sup>11</sup> Manga created by Western artists; also known as Original English Language (OEL) manga.

## **2.4 Limitations**

The major limitation of this approach is that, with relatively small numbers of participants, the results cannot pretend to be comprehensive, and may be impressionistic at best. It was also under a time limitation, and the exposure to and engagement with interviewees would be much more prolonged in an ideal situation. In addition to this the Café's clientele, most of whom are 'hard-core' readers with considerable knowledge and expertise, may differ somewhat from those at whom public libraries are aiming their current manga collections. But as it was qualitative research, the focus was after all on individual experience, and as the GNC reader population is ethnically mixed with significant numbers of female readers, it hopefully provides a rich and varied portrait of manga readership.

## **2.5 Ethical Considerations**

This project undertakes to meet the highest ethical standards, and obtained Human Ethics Committee approval for work involving human subjects. All attempts to preserve interviewee privacy have been made: informed consent was obtained from the participants, and they were accorded pseudonyms in the final write-up so that any quotes would not be attributable to them personally. Data was scrupulously recorded, and was kept in either a locked cabinet or a password-protected file, with access restricted to the investigator and the



project's supervisor, Dr Dan Dorner. The proprietor of the Graphic Novel Café also gave written permission for the research to take place there.

## 2.6 Further Definitions

- *otaku*: a term often used to refer to fans of manga (and anime, and other related pastimes).
- *shounen-ai* (literally 'boys-love'): homoerotic romance stories focused on gay male protagonists; written and read primarily by straight women. A very significant subgenre of manga.
- *yaoi*: similar to *shounen-ai* but in a more hardcore vein.
- *yuri*: homoerotic romance stories focused on lesbian protagonists.

## **3 Discussion**

The following discussion focuses upon answering each of the research questions by weaving together the words of the participants.

### **3.1 The ‘WHO’ Of Manga Reading**

*This section addresses Research Sub-Question 1: What are the main characteristics of manga readers?*

#### **3.1.1 Social Networks**

*Rinelle: From one of my internet friends; it was my very first manga and I was quite excited. I actually got it for Christmas. So yeah, I was like jumping around, screaming; I was quite happy.*

*This section answers Research Sub-Question 1A: What social factors have shaped their experience of manga-reading?*

All the participants were keen to tell the story of how they were introduced to manga, and what became clear in the course of the interviews was that manga

reading was both a social **and** a solitary activity. Everyone stated that they liked to read manga on their own (see 3.2.2 Reading Patterns), but beyond this, it was obvious that many interviewees were members of often small but intense networks, and were not therefore operating in complete isolation. As Rinelle explained, “very few of my friends actually have and collect mangas. But the ones that do I’m quite happy with because they’re as crazy as I am in collecting.”

And Selena spoke of the small and tightly-knit community of the not-too-distant past:

We used to have manga reading days, back when manga wasn’t easily available as it is now. We would bring all our manga together into one location, and spend the whole day reading. So it can be a social thing, and I enjoy it as a social thing... Some people struggle with reading manga in a group, because it’s a silent thing. You can’t really be social with it. But to me it was a nice feeling to be around people who are enjoying something similar to you, even though you’re not interacting directly with people, I still think you **are** interacting because you’re there for a common purpose.

Some identified themselves directly (and proudly) as *otaku* (see 2.6 Further Definitions), and possessed a broader sense of the *otaku* community. This sense of community was not limited to just in-person interactions; Jo was very

enthusiastic about the opportunities for online bonding and was actively engaged in a range of online activities. Several of the people who put their names forward for these interviews did so via the GNC internet forums, which see a reasonable amount of discussion among patrons on a whole range of matters manga and anime-related. And Bob also spoke of the work done by fellow fans in making things available on the internet, such as the scanlations communities<sup>12</sup>, saying “it’s kind of interesting to see how much effort the fans do go to to actually convey the various meanings.”

There is another important facet to this phenomenon. For example, manga reading for both Shuji and Ji Hoon was part of how they socialised with their countrymen living in New Zealand and maintained bonds here. As Shuji said, “mainly I come here nowadays to talk to friends... Because when I was studying as a language school student, I couldn’t find any native friends... While here it is easy to find native speakers.” There are some distinct correlations here with Sunaoshi’s work with recent Asian immigrants to Auckland. She contends that “Auckland is an internationally neutral place for readers from different backgrounds, where they can share their manga-reading experiences” (Sunaoshi, 2006, p.102). To some extent this is true at the GNC as well, where Japanese, Korean, Malaysian, Chinese and Filipino readers mingle in the

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<sup>12</sup> Scanlations are scans of original Japanese manga which have had the Japanese dialogue digitally erased and translations inserted into the speech bubbles. They are created by fans of manga for the benefit of other fans, typically adhere more closely to the source language and culture than many officially translated manga, and are strictly not for profit; as part their own ethical standpoint, many scanlation communities will not touch manga licensed by (Western) publishing companies.

reading room, but they also tend to stay in their distinct groupings when socialising, and read manga primarily in their own languages.

Intriguingly enough, beyond the commonality of shared interests and bonding with likeminded adults, manga reading could also be seen as a family affair. People from a variety of backgrounds had spread it to their family members or were part of a family where reading manga (and often watching anime) were seen as natural pastimes. So Shuji and Allen talked of receiving manga from parents and neighbours in their home countries; Shuji read *shoujo* as well as *seinen* manga because of his younger sister; Eric shared reading and watching time with his two sisters (whose tastes differed considerably from each other); Jo bonded with her brother-in-law, parents and sisters over manga, anime and videogames; and Kitty and Bob passed manga on to their nieces and nephews.

So what the interviews attested to is at least three kinds of networks among these manga readers: friendship and affiliation, ethnic bonding, and family, all of which can be seen as considerably interlinked. The reading itself was woven into the participants' lives; for many, it was part of the natural fabric of their social lives as well as personal. (See also 3.2.1 Learning To Read Manga for further pertinent material about readers' backgrounds.)

### 3.1.2 Perceptions About Manga And Manga Readers

*Kitty: I do get prejudice at work from the librarians... Some of them are very understanding but others think that they're just like kids' stuff... And they just haven't read them, basically. And then once you do get them to read something they're totally converted.*

*This section also answers Research Sub-Question 1A: What social factors have shaped their experience of manga-reading?*

The interviewees were also asked what attitudes they had encountered from people who were not part of their manga-reading networks. Among the long-time readers, several commented on the lack of easily-available manga in New Zealand until relatively recent times. The natural concomitant of this was a lack of knowledge about manga and anime as a whole in this country. Selena, who first encountered manga in an English boarding school in 1989, related an amusing anecdote from when she immigrated to New Zealand which illustrates this point nicely: "That was back in early 1994, and when I asked the video clerks, 'have you got any anime?' they said 'is that a type of sheep?'" This lack of knowledge betokened a number of misconceptions about manga, and the interviewees were quite clear that they believed that manga did not receive the credit it deserved. There was a slight defensiveness or cautiousness on some interviewees' parts when discussing the attitudes of those around them, which

ranged from amused to ambivalent to a grudging acceptance. For instance, Selena's workmates lightly ribbed her about reading her 'porn', while her family "at one point just thought it was a fad, a passing interest, but I think over 18 years they've found that's not the case. They tolerate it but they don't fully accept it." Others commented on parental attitudes as well; Jim laughed that "my parents see it as 'there's worse things I could be spending my money on'. And at least it's books. [But manga readers] do seem to get a stereotypical label." And occasionally nasty ethnic prejudices could surface, as Allen's unpleasant experience while browsing the manga section in a Borders store shows:

[A man] walked past me, and he said, 'Oh, this is what Ching-Ching comics are like'. And I won't say anything, but I was thinking 'you are so narrow-minded', and he didn't know what manga probably was... But this was one of the maybe quite typical ways how people see this stuff.

Several commented that such attitudes were due to ignorance of the sheer variety of manga available, and were caught up in the limited Western perception of cartoons and comics as being only for children. Jim said that "I just do feel that American, or more European culture, sees manga and comics as a whole for children, and so you don't get the plots that you do get with manga"; Bob tried to "express to people that manga is not a genre, it's a medium. And so you find all sorts of genres in there"; and Selena also evinced a zeal to correct such misapprehensions:

I think a lot of people don't give it enough credit. They seem to think it's for children, when it's very much not. Whenever I talk to people who have not been exposed to it before, they always make the assumption that manga is for children. And I always turn around and say, 'look, it's like a live action movie. It's like books. There is always something there for everyone.' Just because it's graphically produced, it doesn't mean that it isn't a serious form of reading.

And still others took it a step further, and made it their mission to convert friends and relatives. For example, Ji Hoon cheerfully mentioned that "many of my friends didn't read but I recommend them, and they begin to!"

While the literature did note that Asian countries have long acceptance of comics art, and the Asian interviewees themselves attested to the graphic arts-saturated atmosphere in which they had been raised (see also 3.2.1 Learning To Read Manga), it should not be thought of as a matter of simple East/West polarity, whereby the West expresses doubts about manga and its ilk and the East welcomes it with open arms. Like Jim, Allen mentioned his parents' grudging acceptance of his reading, and compared the Japanese comics favourably with the Chinese *manhua* (the home-grown comics of Hong Kong, his homeland), which he disparaged as "low caste". And Ji Hoon had thought manga childish for years, and then reappraised his attitudes in early adulthood.



## 3.2 The ‘HOW’ Of Manga Reading

*This section addresses Research Sub-Question 2: How do they read manga?*

### 3.2.1 Learning To Read Manga

*Bob: It was pretty smooth once you started... Actually, I did start reading the wrong way. Because the first one didn't have the classic 'You are looking at this the wrong way round' sort of thing.*

*This section answers Research Sub-Question 2A: How did they learn to read manga?*

While the literature tends to focus most pointedly on younger readers and issues of literacy, the whole debate about ‘reluctant readers’ is possibly not suitable and certainly not easy to judge with adult readers. Literacy here is defined as **manga literacy**, with its (near) simultaneous decoding of the artwork and stories. The work of Allen and Ingulsrud among Japanese readers makes it clear that the learning process of manga reading is a multi-valenced phenomenon: “since meaning is conveyed at different levels... a successful reader must process and interpret the meanings of these layers in order to build an understanding of the text. [This skill] is learned by themselves” (Allen & Ingulsrud, 2005, p.267). It should also be pointed out that the special visual vocabularies can often be quite

different between works aimed at male audiences and those aimed at females (see Appendix 5.2. Examples Of Manga Artwork). And for non-Japanese readers, there is also a host of cultural details, such as name suffixes, which might well be jarring but are often an important factor within the storylines presented. Yet experienced readers not only take them in their stride, they have absorbed their meanings and can critique translators' efforts and publishing companies' standards.

Note that all of the interviewees had been reading manga for at least four to five years and are now all very fluent; any memories of difficulties of establishing manga literacy may have faded somewhat with time. It might have been illuminating to catch some relative newcomers to manga, but this was not part of the selection criteria; perhaps further research could expand upon this. So when asked about their learning experience, the process of 'acclimatisation' was seldom mentioned in much detail. In fact, Jo, Ji Hoon, Shuji and Allen (all from Asia) had no real recollection of this process, as they all grew up completely surrounded by manga. It was notable that those raised in Asia had been reading it in one form or other since early childhood, and had also watched anime on television since they were children. Shuji stated that he had been reading manga since "maybe around two years or three years old... That's normal Japanese! Normal Japanese is like that. Because maybe every Japanese have their favourite type of comic! Including the grandpa or grandma." He also spoke of how completely natural it was for him to read manga, and how picking one up or

buying one was almost a reflex action for him. This was echoed in the stories of others who grew up with manga and anime permeating their culture. For instance, when speaking of this matter Jo said that “it’s a Philippines thing anyway. Because nearly all the Filipinos I know know [it].” This is borne out in Sunaoshi’s work: most of the Asian immigrants she interviewed started out when they were young “without thinking or noticing their origin... manga to them, are both ‘familiar’ and ‘foreign’” (Sunaoshi, 2006, p.98).

What could be gleaned from the interviewees who did not grow up from early childhood in a manga-saturated world was the variety of experiences they had prior to their manga reading, that in some way prepared them for it. Several came to manga via anime, which bears many similarities to manga; Eric declared that “manga is a more frame rate version of anime”, and it is obvious that the two art forms share many of the same visual idioms at least (see 3.3.2.2 Anime). Others had prior experience with comics and graphic novels from America, Britain and France such as *Watchmen* and *Asterix*, and Jim also mentioned modern webcomics. All of these had given them familiarity with some of the techniques of graphic storytelling; as Kitty said, “we already knew how to read comics by that stage.” And of course many of the longer-term readers had actually encountered flopped manga first, which probably also eased the learning process in some respects. As a result, few from this group reported more than a few ‘hiccups’, such as accidentally starting to read in the wrong direction when their attention slipped. Rinelle reminisced fondly that:

I think I had to follow the instructions the first time I was actually given a proper Japanese one. It took me a while because I kind of looked at what was supposed to be the cover and it was the back of it. [But] it didn't take too long to get used to it.

The manga themselves offer training opportunities of sorts as well; several interviewees mentioned the pages inside the back cover (which is the front cover for people used to reading left-to-right) which often offer helpful explanations on how to read the panels from right-to-left. And when asked if she thought there might be any stumbling blocks for people coming to manga for the first time, Selena commented thoughtfully that she “honestly [did not] think so, because it's quite self-explanatory as well. And a lot of the manga these days will also have a glossary of what the terms mean anyway. So if people are struggling, the option to understand is there.”

The literature also makes mention of manga's potential usefulness for people with English as a second language, with its contextual clues, pared-down language, and visual vocabulary that guides readers. According to Ji Hoon and Shuji, the potential is definitely there: Shuji specifically mentioned having access to a joint English and Japanese version of a manga, which allowed him to compare and contrast, and he had found it very useful for improving his own English reading skills. But he also warned that reading manga in English here in New Zealand made him feel as if he was studying all the time, and it was not

necessarily relaxing for him to do so. Ji Hoon, too, stated that he felt reading manga in English had a distancing effect and it had both more resonance for him in his own language and entailed less work on his part. In addition to this, Allen noted problems he had encountered when taking on an English series familiar to him in Chinese, as he had to adjust to even supposedly simple things such as the Romanisation of characters' names. As fun and relaxation were among the primary reasons cited for reading manga for all interviewees (see below 3.4.1 The Appeal Of Manga), it was actually **very** important to these readers that they were not reading (or not only reading) manga in English but in their own languages<sup>13</sup>.

### 3.2.2 Reading Patterns

*This section answers Research Sub-Question 2B: What are their reading patterns?*

Although all interviewed utilised the manga room at the GNC from time to time for their reading, the most frequently mentioned locations for manga-reading were on public transport and in the interviewees' own private spaces. An individual volume of manga is a quick read; Eric, who considered himself a slow reader, would "normally absorb one volume" in an hour's time, whereas Shuji could whip

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<sup>13</sup> Indeed, more participants read primarily in their own language than had been anticipated, given that the holdings of the Graphic Novel Café's manga reading room are in English.

through five an hour if reading them very quickly. Reading during lunchtimes and on buses and trains while travelling to and from work was therefore a recurring theme, and almost everyone read their manga at least some of the time in quick bite-sized chunks, often fitted in around time constraints. Bob said that he could squeeze in a “single book[], even just half a book at a time”, and Kitty mourned that “we never have enough time really!” The convenience of manga for occasions when time was of the essence was also mentioned frequently; Jim commented that “[with] manga I find it’s easier to pick up and put down than a proper novel, and that certainly when travelling did influence me quite heavily.”

However, others mentioned also liking to go on manga-reading ‘binges’, working their way through stacks of manga when the mood caught them. Ji Hoon’s favourite time to read manga was “at home, for like when it is raining. I don’t want to go outside, so I just stay in and read manga”, and Jo said that “usually if I buy lots of manga and I’ll be busy at work or at school, and I find it under my bed – then I’ll just like read the whole thing... Or maybe just a whole series.” Most spoke of liking to make their way through a series methodically (whether over a gradual period of time or in a great burst), though this was more important to some than others. The importance of re-reading came through clearly as well; Rinelle enthused that “I’ve read about all my manga collection probably about millions of times by now”, and Jim stated:

I'd say with most things like manga, the ability to re-read on a regular basis is quite good and you're always picking up extra themes in the drawing and the story which you might not have read before, and not being too heavy - for lack of a better word - encourages that.

### **3.2.3 Accessing Manga**

*This section answers Research Sub-Question 2C: Where do they access their manga?*

The interviewees also utilised a range of methods to access and 'sample' manga in order to decide whether it met their selection criteria or not (see 3.3.1 Selection Criteria). These included browsing shelves in bookstores, in the GNC or other (non-English) manga rental stores, and in libraries (see 3.2.4 Manga In Libraries); searching online retailers' websites; flipping through pages; reading the summaries on the back; and often reading the first volume itself. There were mentions of glancing through manga anthology magazines, which serialise chapters of manga before they are gathered into compendiums. Several spoke of having a to-read list, and how they would scan specifically for the next volume of series they were following or for a favoured author. Some looked for the new releases list in the GNC, and Jim stated happily that he did not need to keep

track of releases himself “because a very kind store owner does that for me”, while Kitty and Bob lamented the loss of the new release shelves at the GNC due to space considerations. And there was always allowance for serendipity, of course; sometimes a reader would pick up a book on pure whim. When people talked of methods of sampling manga, ‘non-legitimate’ sources such as scanlations also received several mentions. Sometimes these were accessed as a reaction to the price of manga (see 3.3.1.7 Cost), but they were also used as a tool to explore and be introduced to new or rare material. As to the appropriateness of using such source, Selena commented that “in terms of downloads online, I generally don’t like doing that. Because I’m a big believer in supporting the artist. But there are some manga that I’m positive will never get translated... that I will get online.”

### **3.2.4 Manga In Libraries**

*Selena: You [librarians] can make the automatic assumption that it will be teenagers who will be reading it, or young adolescent boys, but you will find that quite a lot of adults will read it, and they’ll often go for more intelligent topics out there, in terms of manga.*

*This section also answers Research Sub-Question 2C: Where do they access their manga?*



There was a real sense among interviewees who had checked with their local libraries that there was not much available. Kitty stated that “usually they don’t have much there”; Selena said that “I have looked; I have not found”; and Rinelle “would say there’s currently not enough. Because they need **more** of a collection”. Some noted specific problems, such as patchy holdings and collections that were lacking in substance and not well looked after. Allen commented that “that is the main problem I saw in the general public libraries. They will buy it and put it in the shelves, but from what I saw, it was quite disorganised”. And Jo was not impressed either:

[What they have is] so used up, so many people wanting to borrow it, but it’s just one copy of each... And then it’s like, ‘Oh, I wish they would have more stuff!’ ‘Cause that’s what the other people are asking about, where can they read it all.

Allen also recommended strongly that “if you’re going to buy a series, buy in the complete, and keep buying it.” This squares with Exner’s (2007) experience in her library: “incomplete stories frustrate manga readers just like readers of other series... A complete run on a single title is more likely to be popular than a spotty run of two or three related titles” (p.14).

Because of these perceived deficiencies in library holdings, it would seem that few use their library for more than supplementary purposes at present. But if a library can prove its worth, they might well come. For example, Rinelle found an older work at her local library that intrigued her, and “will currently be going to the

library more often to pick up books that spark [her] interest now". Librarians should try to reorient any preconceptions they hold about graphic storytelling in general and manga in particular, and should remember that the key thing should be "what value they [the readers] place on this activity" (Creel, 2007, p.46).

Manga is after all a fairly niche market in New Zealand, and locations where readers can sample manga are often limited. A library can therefore provide a 'free fix' of graphic artwork, offering manga to those who cannot afford their own. Ross and Chelton (2001) also aver that "libraries support ... risk-taking with new and unfamiliar authors, genres, or subject areas" (p.52). In the case of manga, libraries can allow readers to branch out and try lesser-known material, while at the same time giving access to the 'staples' (see also Holman, 2006; and see 4.4 Practical Implications).

When asked if they had any recommendations for incorporating manga into a library collection, the participants had several interesting things to say. Rinelle wanted "a few posters to be hung around the library – at least in the manga section. And an update of current popular mangas at the moment". Bob noted perspicaciously that currency is perhaps not as much of an issue for a library as for a bookstore, because the artwork does not date that much if the storytelling itself is sound. The notion of aiming for a wide appeal and not catering to just one type of taste came through many times; Eric recommended having "a broad selection for ages as well... Aim wide and aim across... I think a decent blend of shoujo series and shounen", and Ji Hoon thought libraries should "try to pull in so

many different types that many people can enjoy ... so many people like different types, not just only one.” Several participants advocated providing shorter, self-contained series that people can ‘test the waters’ with; as Eric said:

Start off with some shorter things because people want to get a feel for it. Rather than say “we’re going to start this and by the way, it’s twenty volumes”. When you walk into a library and you see this and you go, ‘alright, am I going to read this?’ I mean it may be really, really interesting but it’s not the first one you’re going to pick, is it? And I think a lot of manga writers, especially the famous ones, do have a lot of short things as well as the magnum opuses. So I mean it gives people a taste.

And there was one final, deeply-felt recommendation from Selena: “**Always** have several copies of volume one!”

### 3.3 The 'WHAT' Of Manga Reading

*This section addresses Research Sub-Question 3: What criteria govern their selection of manga?*

#### 3.3.1 Selection Criteria

*Jo: Usually I read the back, if I see the cover and sometimes I'll flick through, and if I like it I'll pick it up.*

*Jim: If I like the author and the artist, that's one way. Flicking through and seeing whether it's a story that interests me. Maybe a little on other people's recommendations, but not too heavily, just generally having a rifle through.*

*Selena: I will read reviews, I'll talk to friends who've read them before, I'll even have a quick squizz through at Borders or GNC, just to see what the manga's like. If it doesn't appeal, I won't follow through.*

With an attention to detail worthy of any bibliophile, the interviewees had encyclopaedic knowledge of and delight in the various editions available (coloured, re-releases, joint language ones – Kitty and Bob, being great fans of

*Ghost in the Shell*, possessed multiple versions), their translation merits, the number of volumes, the release schedules, and the major publishing companies, not to mention vigorous opinions on the overall quality of products. There was a strong sense that people had read widely before settling on their preferred areas, and all had built up a variety of methods with which to evaluate potential reading material. Note that with some of these methods, there was only a short time for the manga to make an impression on the reader, who would then make a judgement call as to whether they would go on with a series or not. Here follow some of the specific selection criteria the participants deploy once manga are in front of them; this section owes a great deal to the writings of Ross (1999), Ross and Chelton (2001), Ross, McKechnie, and Rothbauer (2006) and Wyatt (2006, 2007) about factors that can influence readers' choices.

### **3.3.1.1 Artwork And Authors**

(See also Appendix 5.2. Examples Of Manga Artwork)

In most of the literature dealing with reading choices, artwork will usually get a brief look-in, primarily in terms of the cover art. But the importance of the artwork to manga readers, both on the covers and inside the books, cannot be overstated. Over and over again, people talked of how major a factor it was in making their selections; Rinelle said that “artwork is actually one of the major things that I go by”, and Jo stated emphatically:

Since I've read so many mangas, I kind of know what style that the artist is. And I'm very picky and if I see something and I go 'Ohhh! That's too weird!', or it's too cutesy, and I'm like 'Ew, noooo'. So I'm very picky about it.

Selena was first exposed to manga in the form of Thai editions when at boarding school in England, and she "fell in love with the artwork. Couldn't understand a word of what was happening, but I could work out the story from just following the pictures." Her experience indicates just how much the artwork alone can convey a very great deal. And Allen, a budding artist and animator, spoke of the inspiration he drew from manga artwork and how he hoped to emulate it: "I want to do something that everybody will get the message... Without actually having to read those small subtitles or explanations, I want you to get what I am doing [just from the drawings themselves]."

A particularly keen interest in the intrinsic beauty of some of the artwork was exhibited at several levels. For example, Eric collected animation cells, and Selena had a truly impressive collection of manga artbooks, which are glossy and extensive compilations of colour artwork, book covers and sometimes black and white line art from particular series. Many of the interviewees could name individual artists, and could even recognise their works just by glimpsing the

cover art. Some mentioned following their works for years, and watching the evolution in their artwork with interest. Certainly everyone could recognise which audience any given manga was geared at just by looking at the artwork (see also 3.3.1.4 Types), and therefore whether it matched with their preferred types. And as mentioned below (see 3.4.2 The 'Japanese-ness' Of Manga), some expressed strong preferences for unadulterated artwork. Of course, everyone brings their own aesthetic sensibilities to the table when choosing a manga; as Jim said, "I find that I either can get on or can't get on with an art style, and that does influence me quite heavily." It would therefore be impossible to gear a collection around just one art style; the key thing to remember is that people like to be able to see the artwork, and can appreciate the artwork for its own sake.

As for authors, some interviewees were aware of individual writers, and followed their works, and others were keen to discuss their knowledge about the backgrounds of certain authors, as well as their perception of their personalities. Given that a goodly proportion of manga authors are the artists as well, the issue of authorship is not necessarily totally divorced from the artwork issues. As Selena explained:

A lot of the time I will pick up a manga based on the artist, if it's an artist that I have historically enjoyed I will definitely go there. Usually the artist will also be the story creator, so if I know that

they've written stories that I've enjoyed in the past I'll also go that way.

### **3.3.1.2 Story**

The importance of the story itself in conjunction with the artwork was also a recurring motif. Selena noted that “if an artist is brilliant but the story is crap, I might give them a go, I might not” and then proclaimed that for her, “story is king”. And for some, a good story could outweigh less attractive artwork. For instance, Rinelle declared:

Artwork is actually one of the major things that I go by. But also story-wise as well. One of my favourite mangas doesn't have a very attractable art style but the way that it's drawn – it's absolutely hilarious and just the story in it. That is practically the only manga I will accept just by the story.

People spoke eagerly of convoluted plots and complex series; Jim relished the ‘freshness’ of stories with “original plots, not rehashed, and a new idea when it came out at the time”. As noted below (see 3.3.1.3 Pacing and 3.3.1.11 Deselection), many spoke of annoyance with manga that begin to recycle plots and ideas, or dragged on forever (although Jo made an exception for gag manga, which she *expected* to recycle plots).



### 3.3.1.3 Pacing

Pacing, which Wyatt (2007) defines as “the way the reader moves through the story arc” (p.40), was seldom mentioned. Though this was a gap in the questioning, as it was seldom mentioned explicitly, it may also be due to the fact that manga is a swift read in any case, and the panels can fly by. Pacing was mostly mentioned in the context of a series ‘running out of steam’ (see also 3.3.1.11 Deselection), and so for manga, it may be a more pertinent criteria when considering the length of series as a whole rather than pacing in individual volumes. Eric laughingly spoke of a favourite series that he thought was probably past its best: “Those food ones, like *Yakitate*. When will it end, when will it end? How much bread can a man make? ... Things that go on forever, I cannot stand. Shorter series, with a definite ending, are probably my favourite.”

Another pacing consideration for manga must surely be related to its serialisation: volumes of popular manga are often released every two to three months, although it can be up to a year between volumes for some series, particularly if the English release has caught up to the serialisation in Japan. This means that readers can literally follow series for years and years. This also means that the length of any given series (that is still being released in Japan) will not always be known. Both Jo and Selena stated that they would not touch a series until it was complete, or at least until a substantial portion of it was out. Others were less concerned about being slowly drip-fed volumes over the course of months and years, but generally speaking, people were quite likely to research

the length of the series and its release schedule before incorporating it into their reading.

### **3.3.1.4 Types**

(See also Appendix 5.2. Examples Of Manga Artwork)

Note that type here is defined as the main categories of manga, aimed at particular genders and age groups (see 1.2.3 Manga In Japan). All interviewees had a very keen awareness of the terms *shounen* and *shoujo* at least and could recognise instantaneously by the artwork what gender any given manga was aimed at; Allen stated that “when I just look at the drawing I know they are for the girls”, and this was a fairly common observation. As experienced readers they therefore all possessed an effortless recognition of the major types, interpreting at a glance the visual clues. As might be expected, Shuji was aware of the most subtle distinctions; as noted above (1.2.3 Manga In Japan), *jousei* and *seinen* are newer to the West at least, and are seldom marketed or named as such. Some had very set opinions about what they would or would not touch. Ji Hoon stated categorically that “I am very hard to read and see the *shoujo*’s picture, and I don’t like the drawing style”, while others were very open; for Jim, “my personal opinion is if I like the story I’ll get it; if I like the artwork I’ll get it. Doesn’t really matter stereotypes or who it’s for.”

It was also obvious that there was indeed considerable divergence between the publishers' intended audience and who was reading. There is anecdotal evidence in the literature that females are likely to read both *shounen* and *shoujo* manga, whereas males are more likely to stay with just *shounen* (Bergin, 2005; Dennys, 2006). However here, in slight contrast to this, it was not simply a matter of women reading both, and men adhering solely to the material directed at male audiences. So some of the men mentioned *shoujo* romances, Selena spoke fondly of a gritty cyberpunk series aimed at male readers, and both of the younger women talked of loving *shounen* horror and action and expressed distaste for 'girly' material:

Interviewer: What [do you] draw the line at?

Rinelle: That would be the really really girly romance novels - **too** girly for me! I think I probably learn more maybe towards like a guy kind of sense where they pick up a manga. I like more of the action, the horror.

At the same time, it was these younger women who (without any awareness of apparent incongruity) mentioned a fondness for *shounen-ai*, *yaoi* and *yuri* (see 2.6 Further Definitions), subgenres that appear to attract mainly female readers and are primarily romance or erotica-oriented (Thompson, 2007). So it was interesting to note how much those not born to manga (especially the younger ones) had seemed to absorb the original publishers' gendered definitions, even when the story played against type or the reader's own tastes ranged beyond

pre-defined gender demarcations. It might cautiously be said that the older readers (those aged in their late 20s and onwards) were less fixated on these types and moved more fluidly between them, based on their other selection criteria. Further research might like to address the fascinating process of 'acclimatising' to reading *shoujo* and *jousei* versus reading *shounen* and *seinen*: that is, learning to read the often startlingly different artwork and storytelling techniques.

### **3.3.1.5 Reviews And Recommendations**

Some interviewees said they actively searched for reviews; Allen talked of bearing in mind a positive or interesting review he read in a magazine when considering new manga, and searching the internet for reviews "if I want to get a bit more information". And when a particular interest has been created, a review could be used as confirmation; according to Jim, he would have "almost made [his] mind up" if he consulted a review. Often this could be used to expand upon their usual tastes, and most agreed that given a compelling reason to look at something different, they might well try it. Many also used recommendations from others for this, and friends were the most commonly mentioned source. Rinelle stated that she relied on "mostly friends' recommendations because I find they're the best". Reading circles and manga store owners, at the GNC or elsewhere, were also mentioned, and so Ji Hoon "just view[s] from my friends or

in the manga shop owner ask me, 'oh this one looks really good to read'". These recommendations did not necessarily come just in person; Jo relied on friends in the online communities she was part of to garner recommendations for her favourite genres.

Of course, the impulse to branch out and try something different would only come with good reason and trust, and had to come from someone whose recommendation carried a lot of weight. As Selena said:

I have a lot of friends who are into manga – whether or not I trust their opinion is debatable. I will always listen to what they have to say about a manga, and over time I've got to know whose opinions will be more likely to match my own.

A few also mentioned being guided by what was generally popular rather than what critics or friends said. According to Rinelle, she selected according to "mostly what other people think is the best, whatever's popular at the moment", and Allen agreed that he would assume that there was something good about a manga if so many people liked it, and he would therefore at least give it a try.

### 3.3.1.6 Characters

Favourite character type was not a major factor for most respondents. Some, of course could give an answer. For instance, Kitty liked cute things and vampires, Bob liked girls with guns, and both Jo and Selena could reel off very precise lists. For example, Selena's list:

*Tokyo Babylon's* Seishirou. Dark, moody, scary, evil – characters like that **always** appeal! *Sailor Moon*-type characters, because it is the ultimate fangirl [thing] – you know, you want to be there to save the world. Even at 30 I still think like that! I like characters that have a bit of good and evil; I don't like perfect characters, I like imperfect characters. Which is why *Sailor Moon* does appeal to me, because she is so imperfect... Strong characters; I hate fluffy characters.

But some genuinely did not gravitate towards any particular types of characters. For Jim, “as long as the character fits within the whole story frame and what is trying to be portrayed, then it works for me”, and others concurred with this viewpoint. On the whole it seemed to be a tricky question for some respondents; perhaps the question should have been rephrased here, or more examples given to stimulate responses. It may even be that character types are so strongly associated with certain types or genres of manga that they become subsumed under those headings (see also 3.3.1.8 Genres).

### 3.3.1.7 Cost

When talking about how they selected manga, it should be pointed out that most people thought in terms of selecting for purchase as well as for just reading, so money was most definitely an issue. Given the very strong desire among most interviewed to possess the actual manga, whether in English or another language, they naturally talked about comparing prices and carefully husbanding resources. This was a particularly pressing issue for the student interviewees:

Interviewer: How often are you likely to buy ones that you particularly like?

Rinelle: Quite often. Whenever I have the money to actually go out and buy them. If I had more money I would probably have a library of my own books by now.

Shuji noted that the English versions were expensive, and so were imported Japanese versions; he normally waited until he went back to Japan and bought large quantities. For the older, presumably somewhat more financially settled readers, money was less of an issue, although they certainly were not being profligate. Kitty and Bob spoke of waiting until they obtained discount vouchers at Borders before buying manga, and Jo stated that “I’m pretty big in the ones I actually buy [are] the ones that I really liked and can read all the time”. Several other interviewees also noted that perceived re-readability was often a key to

buying. Given this overall care for cost-effectiveness, there was a real sense of winnowing choices for the highest quality purchases.

### **3.3.1.8 Genres**

When asked the question ‘Are there any particular genres you gravitate towards?’, some participants had very broad tastes. Jim answered “not really, no, a whole range of areas and interests”, and Kitty also said “not really. We’ve sort of learned not to, because quite often it’s a surprise when you find something that you think looks dreadful, and then you read it and it’s absolutely wonderful.” Others, however, spoke very clearly and definitively about what sort they preferred, and their responses hint at the broad variety of genres and subgenres of manga. Apart from the more standard fare of romance, fantasy, history, and so on, some of the more unusual ones included food, surgical dramas, board games, magical girls, and gothic fiction. Wyatt (2007) has some interesting things to say about genres in the 21st century: “once so neatly arrayed into defined areas, [genres] are now exploding into cross-genre creations and newly formed microgenres, merging and shifting like bubbles in a lava lamp, forcing readers and librarians into new genre landscapes” (p.41). Naturally this can make it harder for librarians to comfortably categorise things according to genre. And this is especially true for manga, which has a particular permeability of genres, often mixing together several comfortably in one work. For instance,



*Rurouni Kenshin* (Watsuki, 2001-2006) could be described as an historical-action-fantasy with elements of romance! Wyatt (2006, 2007) also did some very interesting work on readers choosing according to stories' settings, but this did not arise during the course of the interviews. It was not explicitly mentioned as a factor in the interview questions, but perhaps it may also be due to people mentally compartmentalising setting under genre.

#### **3.3.1.9 Mood**

Choosing according to mood seemed to be very much up to the individual; for some, choice was completely unrelated to mood. For those for whom it did matter, the manga they selected seemed to be chosen sometimes to break or alter a mood, and sometimes to complement the way they were feeling. Jo said that if she was "tired and I want to wake up [I'll] get the funny ones. Or feeling sad, read a drama one". As for Selena:

If I'm in an angry mood I won't be reading manga. That's for sure, because for me manga's a pleasurable experience, and when I'm angry, I don't do it. If I'm in a mooney sort of mood, I'll go for some of the comedies. If I'm feeling lethargic, I'll read an action. If I'm really feeling mushy – romance, all the way!

### **3.3.1.10 Language Choices**

There are two facets to choice of language here, and they are addressed elsewhere in this report. The first is the translation of manga and the issues surrounding it; this will be dealt with below (see 3.4.2 The ‘Japanese-ness’ Of Manga). The second is language in its strictest definition: as noted above, the respondents read their manga in a variety of languages, including English, Japanese, Korean, and Chinese (see 3.2.1 Learning to Read Manga).

### **3.3.1.11 Deselection**

Ross (1999) contends that selecting a book is often a matter of what a reader limits it to, and this has been borne out somewhat above, with some of the respondents staying within carefully-drawn boundaries. When asked what they would rule out from their selections, some could give specific examples of what they did not like. For instance, both Allen and Rinelle drew the line at sexually explicit manga, and Shuji steered away from grotesque horror manga, which he defined as “of like a lot of insects eating the humans”. There was a range of ambivalent attitudes expressed about such graphic and adult material, and it seems safe to say that gratuity was seldom appreciated if there was no strong story there to support it.

But the major issue for most was **deselecting** or discarding something. How long interviewees would stick with a series that had turned disappointing or gradually become less satisfying varied somewhat. Allen, for example, declared that he had never abandoned a series. Others expressed caution about undertaking such an action:

Bob: It's very rare. I suppose if there's kind of repetitiveness in some –

Kitty: Sometimes they just keep going and going and you think 'enough already!'

Bob: Yeah. And nothing new's come out of it.

Still others were keenly aware that their time for reading manga was short, and were therefore more willing to let go of a series; Eric was one of the interviewees who would give something up "at a certain point. If it's going nowhere or if it's full of filler". As most interviewees put considerable effort into selection in the first place, this reluctance is natural. Whereas novice readers (of any form of literature) may become easily frustrated and give up due to "their lack of experience and their inability to read the clues provided" (Ross, McKechnie & Rothbauer, 2006, p.201), these experienced manga readers had a great deal of faith in their own choices, and displayed considerable commitment overall to series they had picked. The deciding factor for many seemed to be whether the perceived worth of a series no longer weighed up favourably against their limited

time; the more precious their time, the less likely they were to stick with something that was no longer as satisfying.

### **3.3.2 Related Media**

*The following two sections also answer Research Sub-Question 3A, by considering whether the readers' selection criteria encompass related materials.*

#### **3.3.2.1 Manwha And Original English Manga (OEM)**

*Selena: There is a lot more manga out there, so trying to find anything that's manwha specifically - I don't look to go out there, 'right! I'm going to get manwha!' If it's a story that appeals to me I'll pick it up.*

Attitudes to and experience with *manwha* varied somewhat. A few said they were able to pick *manwha* out easily enough once it was in hand, because of perceived differences in artwork, though they noted it was hard to distinguish from manga when simply scanning the shelves. But certainly not everyone was convinced that they could pick it out easily, other than perhaps the left-to-right format and the Korean names:

Interviewer: Do you read the Korean *manwha*?

Jim: Korean, not really, or not that I'm aware of. That's not to say I haven't and am unaware of it.

For some, this difference did indeed mean a lack of interest; Jo said that "I like the Japanese one better. And I also look at the context because I'm really into Japanese culture, so I don't really relate to the Korean stuff." But possibly because of this overall perceived similarity to manga, there was a general willingness to apply manga criteria to *manwha*. So for Rinelle, "it wouldn't matter if it was done by Koreans or Japanese, so long as the same thing applied", and for Jim, "again it comes back to an art style I like, and storyline, and subject matter that is of interest". So it is possible that *manwha* could be interfiled among manga and treated in the same fashion, and be likely to receive the same amount of interest.

In contrast to this, there was a general lack of interest in Original English Manga, or even a lack of knowledge about what it was. Rinelle had "not yet been impressed by any of them. There is [something lacking in them]. I think it's because it is not Japanese. Or not as much as the actual Japanese mangas." And Jo declared outright that she did not "really like the American manga. 'Cause I like the ones that have their own artwork but [these] ones they've just copied off but not the context." In addition to this, Selena said that "I also realised that I've got so much to get through of Japanese manga and Korean *manwha* that I don't really want to get into something else", and several others

mentioned having 'full plates' with their manga reading. Note that within the borders Selena and others drew around their reading, there was sometimes room for *manwha* to reside, but probably not OEM. This does not necessarily argue against the incorporation of OEM into a library collection, and perhaps a less hardcore manga-reading audience would neither notice nor care, but it should be considered carefully, as one of the things the interviewees were attracted to in manga was its perceived genuineness (see below 3.4.2 The 'Japanese-ness' Of Manga).

### **3.3.2.2 Anime**

*Bob: You have to understand also that we quite heavily get into the anime as well.*

Wyatt (2006) has some very salient things to say about pop culture artefacts and the differing formats available. He advocates supplying "readers with material to expand upon the experience of a book. In combination with reading, they create a multilayered approach to the world, holding the reader enthralled" (p.42).

Some of the things he lists in this "multilayered approach" include movies, television programs, music, and websites to support reader's interests. Both O'Hagan (2007) and Allen and Sakamoto (2006) stress the interlinked nature of manga and anime, and what became apparent over the course of the interviews

was the degree to which anime shared the afore-mentioned 'sister relationship' with manga. To some extent the anime wave preceded the manga wave of importation into the West, and as noted elsewhere several of the participants came to manga via their interest in anime. The fluid nature of the borders between the two art forms was something that came through very strongly indeed in the interviews – to the point that people would casually refer to an anime when asked manga-specific questions, and were keen to discuss subtitling and dubbing alongside issues of cultural retention in manga itself. Several quotes from the interviewees illustrate this point. For Eric, manga functioned as “an adjunct to anime”, and Rinelle stated that “since I love anime, [manga is] a hard copy, one that I can take around anywhere”. Jo had a particularly interesting comment to make about the relationship between the two:

I got a Madman<sup>14</sup> [anime] box and it had a code which I really, really liked. Which is if you didn't read the manga, you were only seeing half the story... So [for me] it's always manga first before anime.

Some of the participants had a keen interest in and knowledge of how manga and anime adaptations differ, and enjoyed the opportunity to compare and contrast. Erica observed that “when you have an anime that you like and it is based on source material, something that's always interesting is to go and read the manga”. Kitty and Bob did however note that with the differing release

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<sup>14</sup> Madman is a major Australasian distributor of anime and manga.

schedules of manga and anime there was a danger of becoming confused over what was happening at which point in the two media, especially given the fact that anime based on manga can often overtake the original if it is still in serialisation, and may therefore have to branch off in alternative directions.

Because of the overlap between the two art forms, there are obvious opportunities for libraries to attract patrons with anime as well as manga. However, despite their often symbiotic relationship, librarians should be cautious about making assumptions that people will, as a matter of course, choose to consume a favourite manga in another format. Allen spoke of preferring to watch anime adaptations of action manga because he thought they captured motion better; he saw their strengths as different but complementary. Jim said that he would typically go with one form but not the other; he “consider[s] the two mutually exclusive, so I can watch or read [any given title], but I don’t do both”. And Eric warned that “to make the assumption that popularity in manga equals popularity in anime is also quite wrong. There are some horrible adaptations to anime and in fact *shoujo* manga tend to be the worst culprits in a lot of cases.” Nevertheless, despite these reservations, it still seems reasonable to assume that anime too might have considerable potential for helping librarians draw attention to their collections by appealing to these interlinked interests.



### 3.4 The 'WHY' Of Manga Reading

*This section answers Research Sub-Question 4: Why do they read manga?*

#### 3.4.1 The Appeal Of Manga

*Kitty: It's fun!*

*Bob: Actually if nothing else, I'd say that the topics and things tend to be a lot more fun-loving and enjoyment storylines and such. There's not a huge amount that's actually going to depress you or anything.*

*Kitty: Some of them do! But there's a lot of good fun stuff... It's very entertaining, really.*

*Bob: We're also Terry Pratchett fans, and that's very much in that fun-loving vein... So once you learn that, why should you make your life more miserable? It's good fun stuff, to read and enjoy.*

It would seem that the GNC patrons read manga for much the same reasons as Sunaoshi's interviewees, as it "creat[es] in them various feelings such as excitement, ease, fun and intellectual stimulation" (Sunaoshi, 2006, p.98). When asked about her reasons for reading manga, Selena replied crisply "relaxation and enjoyment", and this does seem to sum up many of the interviewee's feelings. This was echoed by Rinelle, who saw it as "something that you can just

sit back and relax and just totally get into it and just de-stress”; by Jo, who said “it’s just when I read it, I feel really happy”; and by Jim, who was “always switching off, because of the nature of my work and I am on call, and we do work some fairly phenomenal hours; it’s nice to be able to sit down with a book and switch off.”

Chandler’s (1997) genre theory stresses empathy and escapism as major factors among devotees of a particular genre, and numerous respondents mentioned emotional resonance and identification with characters as a draw for them. For example, when discussing one of her favourite series, *Fruits Basket*, Rinelle said:

It is a very deeply moving story, very emotional... You can see so many things in it that you can relate to. And I love those kinds of stories [where] you feel what the characters are feeling and you can just know what they’re thinking.

And this would certainly seem to have been borne out here; when listening to the interviewees’ responses to stories, it did indeed seem true that they were reading for the visceral thrill and the identification (the “ultimate fangirl” fantasy, as Selena termed it). Appleyard (1991) argues that children and adolescents read for the pure fun and immersion in the process, and also that devoted readers can continue this into adulthood. This notion came up repeatedly in the interviews, and Eric memorably dubbed this addictive quality as “*shoujo* crack cocaine”.

When talking of a series he was growing slightly tired of yet could not stop reading, he said: “Once you start you’re just like ‘ohh’. That’s why I’m never going to start the others [of its kind]”. Allen related missing his train station because he was so engrossed in his manga (therefore he found reading at home safer, “because when I’m reading it’s so concentrated”). And Ji Hoon spoke of being drawn into a story, and the complete believability of the story’s world:

[The artist] drew about basketball, it’s so well and so interesting - I didn’t like basketball, I didn’t know much about it but then I read, ‘oh, I know how to play maybe’... Maybe, it is if possible I play that.

On the other hand, O’English, Matthews and Lindsay (2006) argue that graphic novels (and by extension, manga) may constitute “a return to the humanities ideal that reading should both educate and delight” (p.180). And most of the participants spoke of the learning opportunities and intellectual stimulation afforded them by manga as well as the sheer pleasure and emotional identification. Ji Hoon stated that he thought that manga “sometimes they give us some knowledge about them. Because some manga comics is so reality”. And Eric mused that “your brain is slightly more engaged when you read manga because watching anime is actually quite passive. I find that with reading manga just because of the way it reads back to front, you actually get more engaged.”

Some read manga at times from their perspective as professionals rather than 'just' as readers (see Appleyard, 1991, for how people can adopt more than one stance as a reader). So Jo (a chef in training) gravitated to cooking manga; Kitty (a cataloguer) and Bob (her husband) enjoyed portrayals of librarians:

Bob: She's so very curious, and it's the obsessiveness ... I think it's very charming.

Kitty: And I can relate to having no room for your books!

Bob, with a background in IT and knowledge representation, also enjoyed grappling with 'user-interface issues' in cyberpunk manga. He theorised that "they're actually quite deep problems associated with a basic premise of: If you could connect your mind into an external network, what would you expose yourself to, what would you expose the network to, and that's actually quite intriguing." And Rinelle and Allen, as artists and animators, drew inspiration from manga, using it for reference purposes. In fact Allen was able to pick books from two perspectives, one as a person reading for pleasure, and one as an artist, leading him to try things he would not normally touch in order to expand his repertoire of artistic skills.

For some, manga could be a catalyst for expanding consciousness and grappling with some serious issues. For instance, Bob said that there were some manga that he "would classify as 'nasty' pieces of work. 'Cause they're reflections on

the more evil sides of society and I've initially sat down reading them and you just can't put them down after that point." And Selena spoke passionately about the complexity of some manga, such as Masamune Shirow's *Ghost In The Shell* series:

The storylines have definitely stood over time. They were written back in the early '80s, '90s, and the storylines are still applicable today, and what appealed to me back then was they were so mature in terms of what they were saying, the topics they were discussing that – a lot of the time manga can be quite childish, can be quite dumbed down... This stuff never was.

These mirror threads from the literature that stress the intricacy of manga's storylines (Katsuno & Maret, 2004; Napier, 2005), and all of the interviewees radiated confidence that manga would and did run the gamut of content and taste. Certainly something that is geared at such a variety of people and encompasses so many different genres may well have the potential to comfortably cross gender, ethnic and age barriers.

There was also a clear sense coming from many participants of choosing something to fit a busy lifestyle and, given the time constraints many were operating under, picking a **favourite** option (i.e. manga). Wright (2001) speaks of American comic books as a form of instant gratification. Manga too come in

short instalments that can be read relatively quickly, but one should take into account the dedication, concentration and focus displayed by these readers, some of whom have followed series for years<sup>15</sup>. The role of manga in the interviewees' lives was not necessarily indicated by the time spent on it (which could be short and intermittent for some) but rather by the attachment to this material and the mental energy focused on it. As Jo said, "it's part of my life, and I don't think I can give it up... [It's] not just a hobby."

### 3.4.2 The 'Japanese-ness' Of Manga

*Selena: The translations were a little bit off. I still can't come to grips with some of the manga that change Japanese names to American names. It just doesn't appeal... And for the purist in me, as far as some of my favourite stories were concerned, reading the English versions was like 'No! They did that wrong!'*

There was one other very important element of appeal for most of the interviewees: namely, the 'Japanese-ness' of manga. Iwabuchi (2002, 2004) argues that manga and anime are both universally appealing and not perceptibly 'Japanese', and it is true that a central conundrum of the art form is that the

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<sup>15</sup> This can also be true of readers of Western comics, of course; see Pustz (1999) for more on this.

characters seldom look Japanese. Levi (1996) argues that the average manga character possesses “a basic human face reduced to its minimum components” (p.14), and that “the simple features of its characters allow a wide variety of people to see themselves” (p.65), while Eisner (1996) champions the idea that the universality of gestures and expressions of comic art in general lends itself to international viability. And yet, the interviewees positively relished manga’s Japaneseness. Allison (2006) speaks of a ‘fetishised difference’ and we see something of that at play here in Rinelle’s words:

I actually like it if they lean more towards the Japanese tradition. Because it’s what I love, it’s what I’m into right now. I’d love to learn more about the Japanese culture and... I’d even love to learn how to speak Japanese.

At the same time, some interviewees argued for a universality of emotional response to manga:

Bob: I don’t know quite how the publishers do sort of stuff, but ... they’re recognising that there was an interest in Japan, that they were very popular in Japan, you’d think that they’d get that humanity is pretty much the same wherever. It would be popular in America and thereby in by inference even here in New Zealand

One should be cautious about subscribing fully to theories that stress the twin poles of universality and exoticism, especially when bearing in mind that for many of the Asian readers manga was not necessarily particularly exotic (obviously this was never going to be an issue for Shuji as a Japanese person!). On the other hand, some such as Allen and Jo had an obvious attachment to the source culture, and Eric (Malaysian-born Chinese) and Rinelle (Chinese/Maori) also had plenty to say on the matter. That most of the interviewees were 'purists' was obvious, and critical and engaged ones at that. They had often encyclopaedic knowledge of sources, and stressed the importance of respecting the original material and the culture from which it originated wherever possible.

There was considerable suspicion of 'Americanisation' in the translation and publication industry. For instance, Bob was not pleased that "Americans dumb it down, and they make cultural changes as well, quite often", and Kitty agreed with him, adding "we don't like it when they try to Americanise things." Selena also had some issues with how translations and cultural references were handled:

I mean initially also back then a lot of the translators weren't doing it properly. They didn't understand the Japanese colloquialisms, they didn't understand the cultural meanings of some of the things that were happening in the manga... So not only would they try to translate to a more American medium, when they tried to be literal, and it came off really wrong.



However, she also conceded that translators have been doing an increasingly better job as the industry in the West has matured and become more sensitive to what the readers are asking for (see O'Hagan, 2007, for an interesting discussion from the translator's perspective). Many expressed a preference for the retention of things such as name suffixes; and some had very thoughtful things to say about the appropriateness (or not) of keeping cultural references intact. For example, Eric mused that "if it's a very Japanese-oriented manga or very steeped in their culture then you do like to have the references kept... Sometimes when it's a more generic deal manga, like a science fiction one, it doesn't matter." While Bob stated that "I think [something] like the *Excel Saga*, because it was so contemporary with the political environment, did require quite a lot of extra explaining to get the full appreciation of what the author intended." Rinelle liked the translation notes in the back of many manga, and lamented their lack in some versions; Kitty also noted approvingly that such notes "did preserve a lot, and what they did translate is explained quite a bit."

Likewise, the editing of content and artwork could arouse some strong feelings:

Interviewer: Are there things you will not touch?

Jim: With a barge pole, anything that's been too Westernised or the artwork's been butchered... Personally speaking, artwork is a fairly important part, and if it's been censored or cut then I will tend to avoid it... When I say Westernised I mean a liberal editing stance

has been taken to bring it more into line with what they feel they could sell in a Western market, so it reflects the editing process.

And Jo also spoke distastefully of doctored artwork which smoothed over a character's naked body. Here the literature can supply an awareness of the broader context on such issues. For instance, Schwartz and Rubinstein-Avila (2006) state that US taboos such as casual nudity become "natural, playful and non-sexual in manga" (p.46), and Rimmer (2004) notes that there were (and to some extent, still are) barriers against the importation of manga due to cultural values systems that differ from those of Japan, particularly when manga touches upon sexual or religious matters.

As a final note, it was in the context of this perpetual awareness of alteration or loss from the original Japanese that the scanlations community was sometimes mentioned; some interviewees reported a greater interest in 'unofficial' sources for their manga when they felt the officially released versions had failed their standards in some respect.

## ***4 Conclusions***

### **4.1 General Comments**

This project has examined the manga-reading experience of the adult readers at the Graphic Novel Café, and built up a picture of the factors that influence their manga reading (see 4.3 Summary Of Findings). By examining the words of the interviewees in conjunction with the literature, it presents some considerations for librarians who are interested in building up their manga collections (see 4.4 Practical Implications), and identifies areas that future research could expand upon (see 4.5 Implications For Further Research).

### **4.2 Limitations**

As noted earlier (see 2.4 Limitations), the major limitation of this project was its limited sample size, which means the results are not generalisable and can only raise issues for consideration. Several points of interest also turned out to be beyond the scope of the study; these are identified as possibilities for future research below (see 4.5 Implications For Further Research).

### 4.3 Summary Of Findings

In investigating the factors that influence the manga reading of adults in Auckland today, this project has examined the 'who', the 'how', the 'what' and the 'why':

The interviewees' words have confirmed the hints in the literature that manga reading was a social activity to a considerable extent, undertaken with friends and people from similar ethnic backgrounds (see 1.2. 5 Why Do People Read Manga). In an extension of the literature, this study has found that for these readers, manga reading could be a family matter as well. Indeed, it was interwoven into many participants' social lives on several levels, and this finding matches with Chandler's (1997) theories of an interpretive community bound by shared interests and experiences. The knowledge and energy displayed by these readers might well be reflected at the local level and could be harnessed by librarians, as many in overseas libraries are doing (for example Bergin, 2005; Exner, 2007; Holman, 2006). The interviewees encountered a range of attitudes from the non-manga readers around them, which they felt stemmed mostly from ignorance of manga and a limited view of comics art in general.

The interviewees either grew up with manga from a very young age or came to it via a natural progression through related media that eased the process of learning to read manga for them. While they obviously had the accumulation of experience spoken of in the literature (see 1.2.2 What Is Sequential Art?), they

were seldom able to articulate the process of accumulation; in the future researchers might like to examine this process, and to make judgements about literacy (or perhaps 'literacies') (see 4.5 Implications For Further Research). While manga definitely had some of the potential noted in the literature for those with English as a second language (see 1.2.2 What Is Sequential Art?), for pleasure reading the participants in this research project preferred reading manga in their own languages, and this is an important point that should be remembered. Manga was read both to fill in short gaps of time in a pleasurable fashion, and to indulge in for longer bouts of time. Participants had a variety of means for accessing and sampling manga, and from their perspective, libraries' manga collections were under-performing.

Each reader did indeed have his or her own system of book selection, according to a variety of factors; some were manga-specific, such as artwork and type, while others fitted in very well with the categories generated by scholars such as Ross (1999) and Wyatt (2006, 2007), and would be applicable to most fiction. Even if manga publication is geared towards specific audiences, there was not *necessarily* a correlation between the gender of the readers and the manga they chose to read, as Allen and Ingulsrud (2005) also found. In contrast to the anecdotal evidence in the library literature, here both males and females were likely to read outside as well as inside the types geared towards them. However, this project's findings do accord with the hints in the literature that manga readers are part of a broader fandom of related interests (see 1.2.5 Why Do People Read

Manga?), as many of the interviewees incorporated things such as anime into their selections.

There were a range of reasons why this diverse group of interviewees read manga, including fun and relaxation, intellectual stimulation, and emotional identification, which are strikingly similar to those of the participants in Sunaoshi's (2006) research. And echoing other arguments in the literature (see 1.2.3 Manga In Japan), the GNC readers were convinced of the variety of manga available, and that it could potentially suit many tastes. On the other hand, most also possessed an attraction and attachment to the source culture that generated manga, and were comfortable navigating through the cultural references in manga; even those who were not members of that source culture had absorbed the various meanings embedded in the artwork and content. So one might cautiously say that the middle ground approach increasingly being adopted in the debate over universality and exoticism (see 1.2. 5 Why Do People Read Manga?) is borne out by this study too.

## 4.4 Practical Implications

Here follow some of the special considerations for incorporating manga into a library collection:

Given the importance of the artwork for manga readers (who really **can** judge these books by the covers), librarians should give thought to how they can display manga to best advantage in order to catch readers' attention. Type is another extremely important consideration, and librarians should familiarise themselves with the major categories of manga. A library might also have an advantage in offering a slightly different array of manga than other sources such as Borders. And judging from many of the series and artists mentioned by the participants, it seems that it is indeed true that older manga readers are quite happy to read material aimed at younger readers as well, as Exner (2007) also found.

There are numerous challenges posed by manga's serial nature, although the gaps in the release schedules of longer-running series might also offer opportunities for the library to catch people with similar series. It seems clear from the interviews that manga-reading can often exist somewhere along a spectrum of related interests, which could be fruitfully harnessed by the library – although librarians should be cautious about making any simple correlations between related materials in different formats. Finally, there could well be an

existing fan-base for manga that a library could draw in, and librarians could utilise these readers' knowledge and enthusiasm, soliciting their help in creating in-house resources for recommendations and reviews.

## 4.5 Implications For Further Research

On a final note, this project has identified several areas for further research:

- To examine the learning process of newcomers to manga, in order to discover more about how they learn to decode the different visual vocabularies and imbibe the meanings and tropes of the major types.<sup>16</sup>
- To discover where manga-reading is situated in regards to broader reading and leisure activities, and what range of literacies manga readers possess.
- To ascertain the best methods of promotion and arrangement for manga collections.
- To discover more about the relationships between manga and closely-related media such as anime or manwha, and judge which formats and versions will have the greatest appeal for library users.

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<sup>16</sup> This might be especially illuminating if *seinen* and *jousei* become more established categories outside of Japan, as their artwork is slightly different again from the more familiar territory of *shoujo* and *shounen* and the content is often emphatically different.



**Wordcount: 18714 (not including appendices)**

## 5 Appendices

### 5.1 Bibliography

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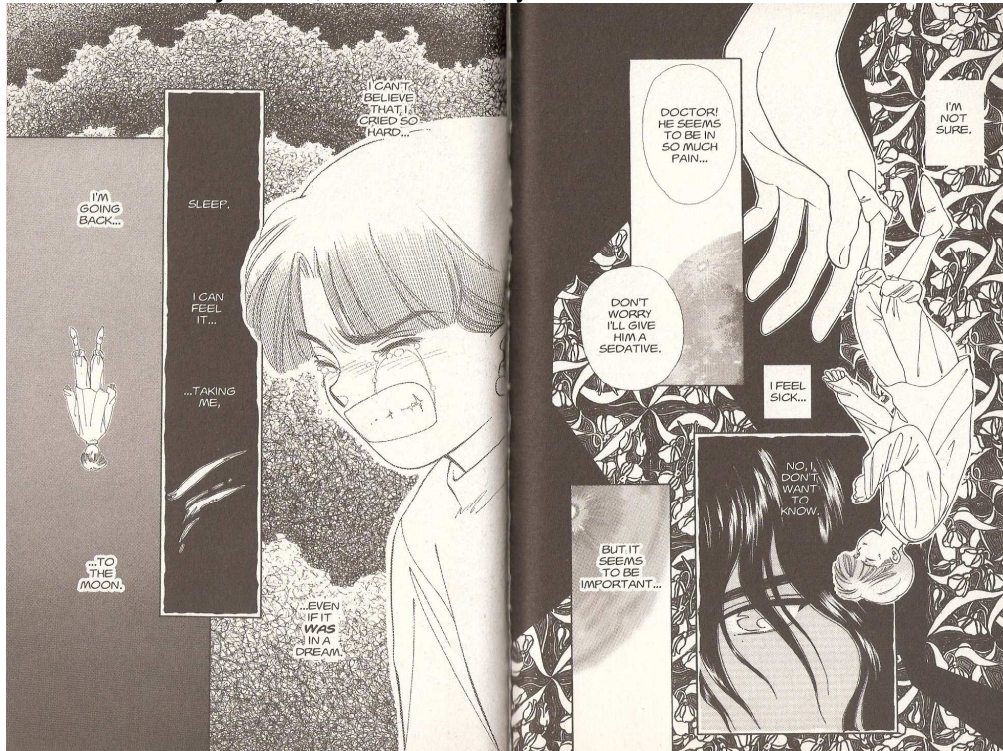
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## 5.2. Examples Of Manga Artwork

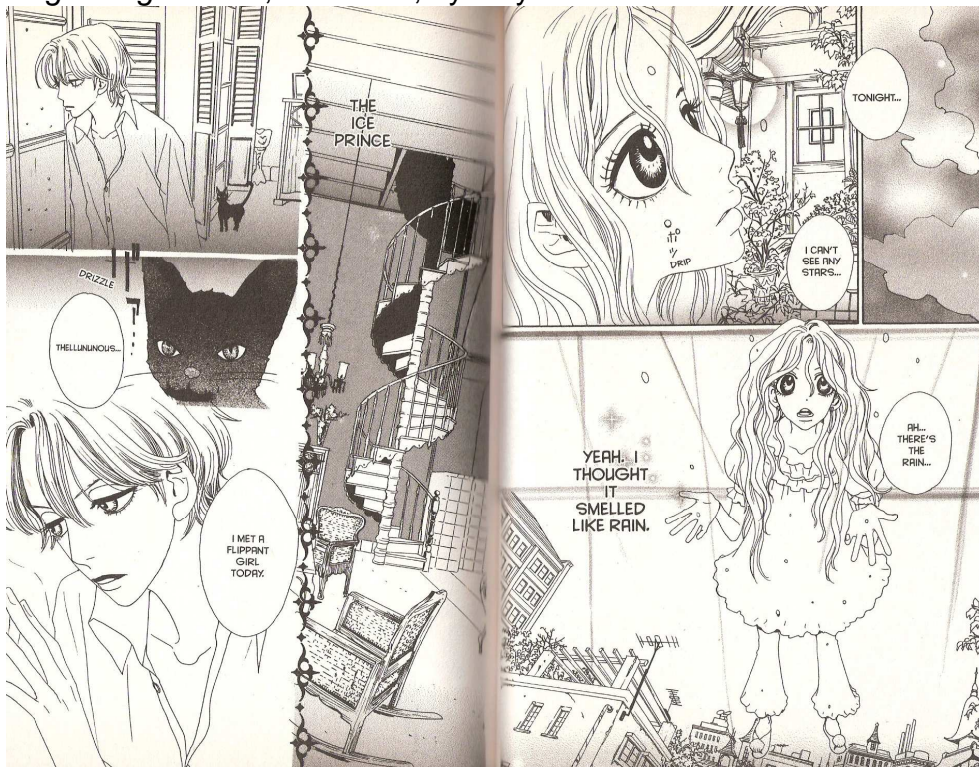
*Remember: most manga is read right-to-left*

### 5.2.1 Shoujo Manga

*Please Save My Earth, Volume 12, by Saki Hiwatari*



*Sugar Sugar Rune, Volume 1, by Moyoco Anno*





### Tokyo Babylon, Volume 4, by CLAMP



### 5.2.2 Shounen Manga

#### Death Note, Volume 4, story by Tsugumi Ohba and art by Takeshi Obata





...NOT EVER.

BUT INNOCENT PEOPLE WILL NOT FALL IN THIS ONE'S BATTLES...

YOU'RE TOO SOFT, AS USUAL... CAN YOU BEAT SHISHIO LIKE THIS?

WHO KNOWS?

EVEN WITHOUT PLANNING, IT CAME OUT THE WAY YOU WANTED IT TO.

BRING ON SHISHIO MAKOTO!!

NEVER FEAR, SAGARA SANOSUKE'S HERE!

THE MEN ON THIS SHIP ARE PROBABLY THE MOST LOYAL OF SHISHIO'S MEN.

THEY WON'T LEAVE WITHOUT SHISHIO.

IF WE FIGHT HERE, THEIR ESCAPE WILL BE DELAYED, AND SOME WILL DIE.

FRIEND OR FOE, IT'S BEST TO AVOID MAKING VICTIMS.

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YEAH, I SAW. SIT DOWN AND WATCH, OK?

WATCH OUT, LADY!

GAVE YOUR EXCLUSIVES FOR THE DEVIL!

WAIT, I—

I FIGURED OUT WHAT YOU WERE UP TO.

THP だ! だ! だ! THP

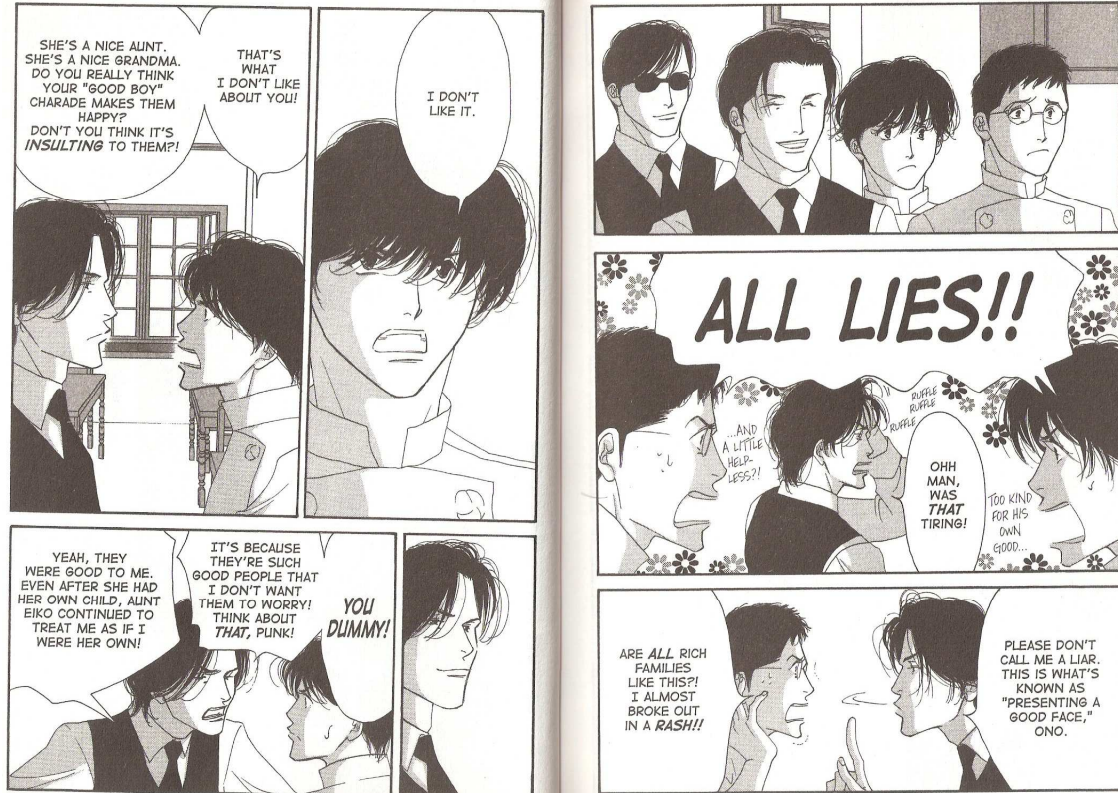
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AAAUH!

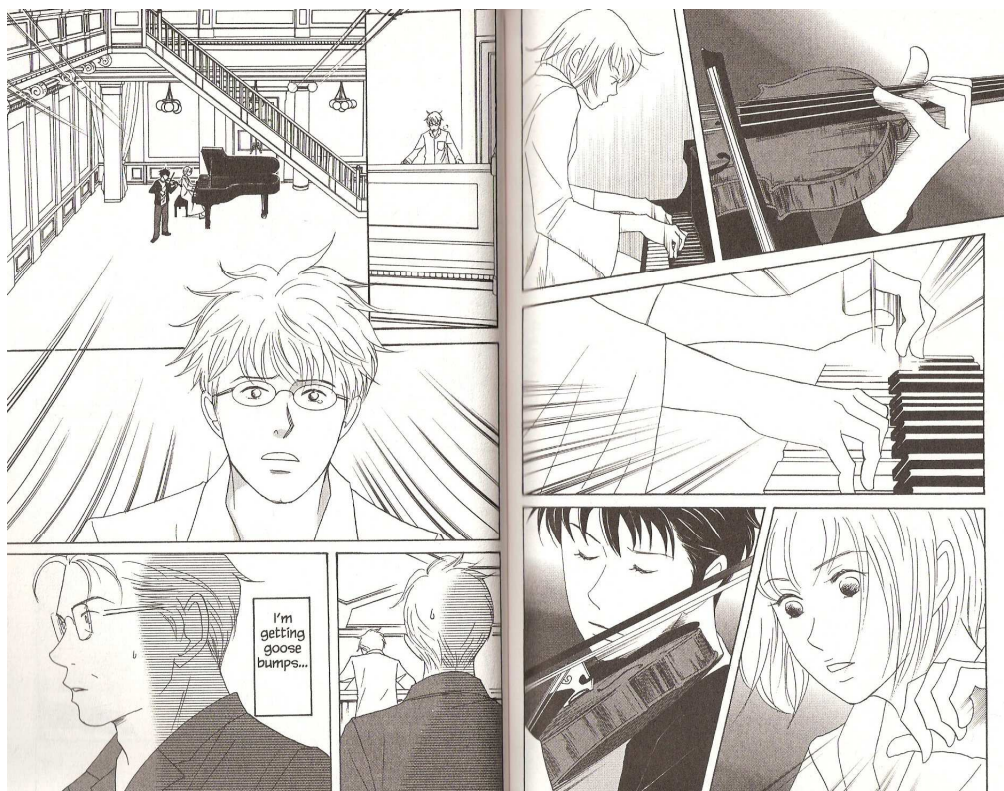


### 5.2.3 Jousei Manga

*Antique Bakery*, Volume 2, by Fumi Yoshinaga

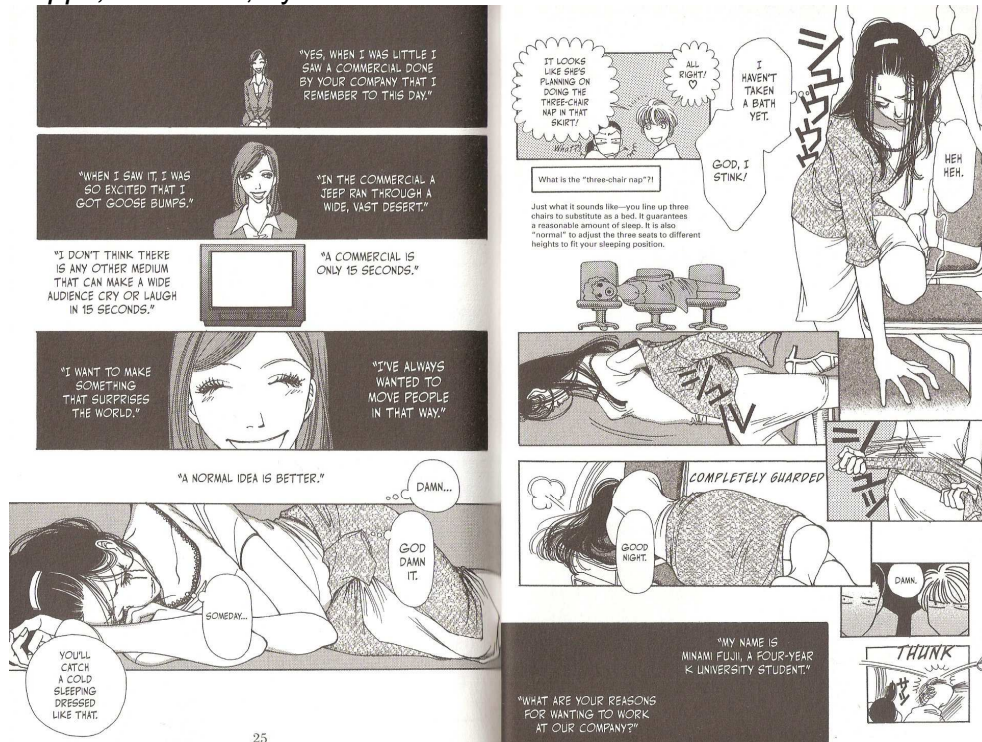


*Nodame Cantabile*, Volume 1, by Tomoko Ninomiya





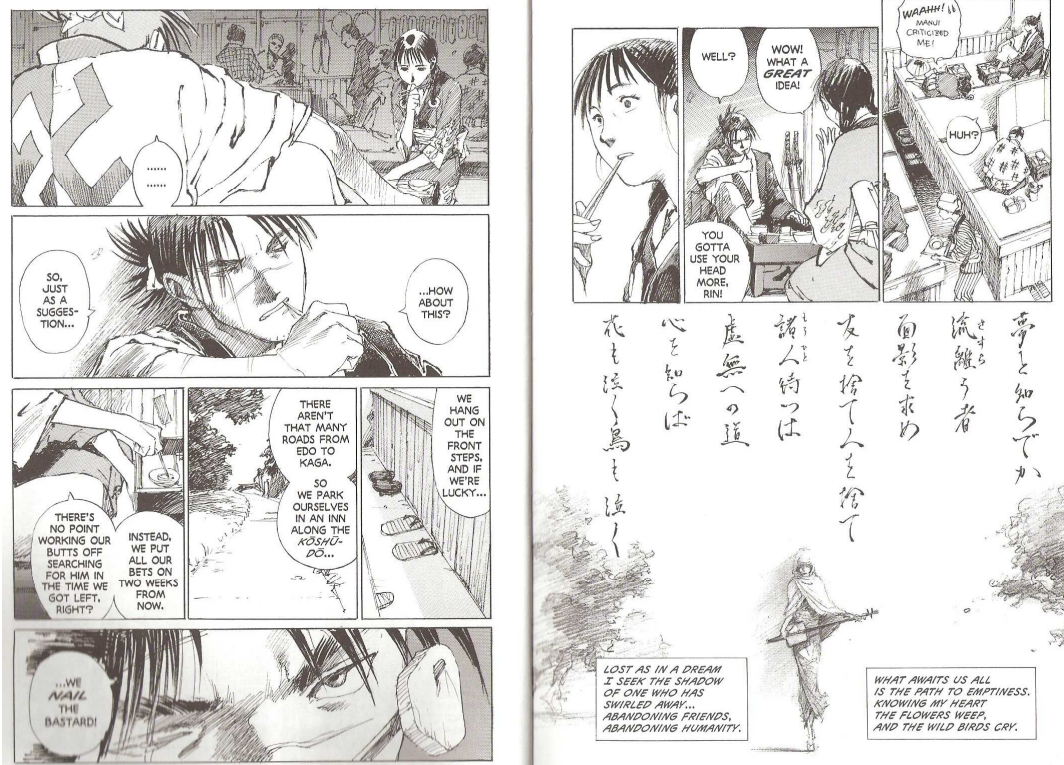
## Suppli, Volume 1, by Mari Okazaki



25

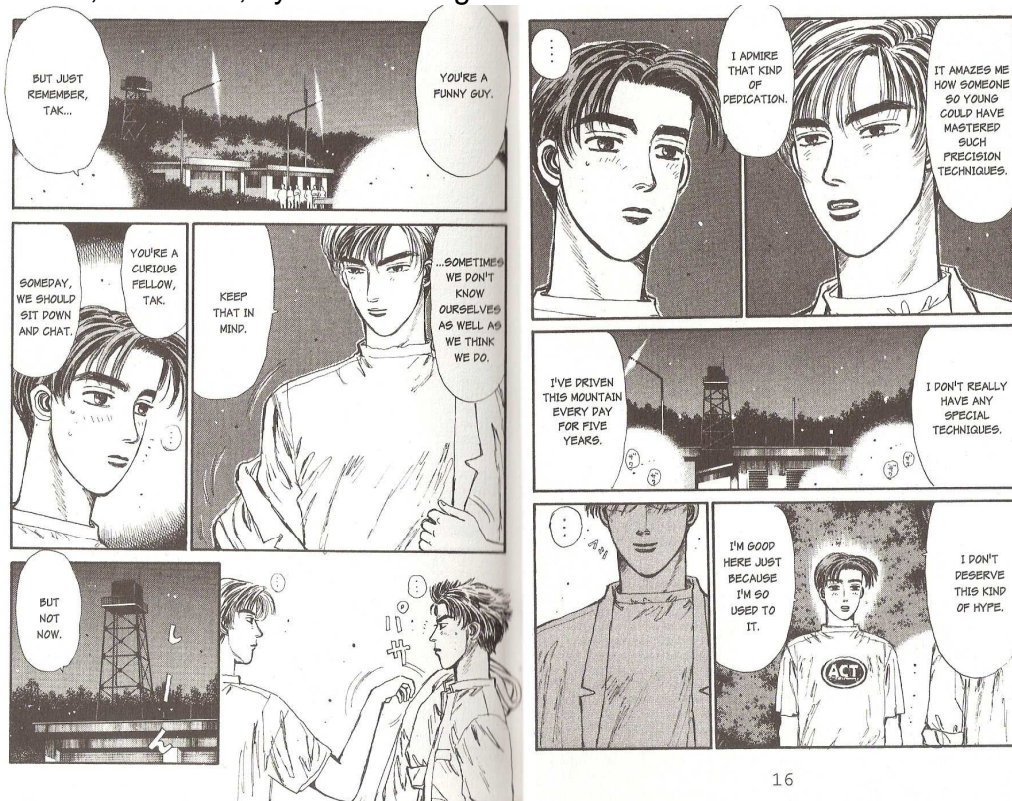
## 5.2.4 Seinen Manga

### Blade of the Immortal, Volume 3, by Hiroaki Samura (read left-to right)

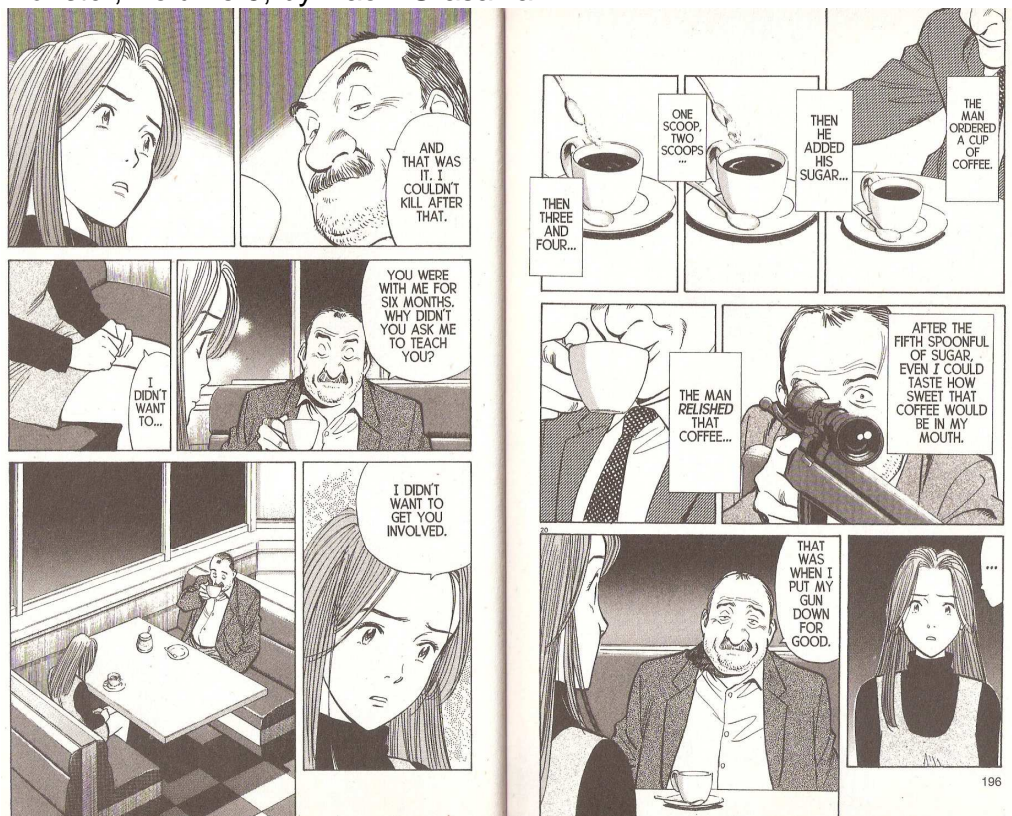




*Initial D*, Volume 5, by Shuichi Shigeno



*Monster*, Volume 5, by Naoki Urasawa



## 5.3 Information Sheet For Reader Interviews

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON

*Te Whare Wānanga o te Ūpoko o te Ika a Māui*



SCHOOL OF INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

### Participant Information Sheet

**Researcher:** Kylie Thomson: School of Information Management, Victoria University of Wellington

I am a Masters student in Library & Information Studies at Victoria University of Wellington. As part of this degree I am undertaking a research project on adult readers of manga and their reading preferences. By discovering more about them, librarians will be able to build richer collections and serve more people's needs. This research involves interviewing 8 to 10 readers directly, and the University requires that ethics approval be obtained for research involving human participants.

I am inviting the readers at the Graphic Novel Café to participate in this study. Selected participants will be asked to take part in interviews about their experiences with manga. It is envisaged that the interviews will take about thirty minutes each, and audio recordings will be made of them. They will be carried out at a place and time convenient to participants.

If you are willing to be considered as a participant please complete the attached Participant Selection Form which asks for responses to five demographic questions, and for your contact details. Please place the completed form in the secure box provided. Your responses to these questions will only be used to assist in the selection of participants. From this pool of respondents, 8 to 10 individuals representing a cross section of readers will be selected to be interviewed. All respondents who submit the Participant Selection Form will automatically go into a draw to win one of three Graphic Novel Café vouchers valued at \$10 each. Should any of these participants feel the need to withdraw from the project, they may do so at any time before the data collection is complete on the 20<sup>th</sup> of July 2008.

The interview information will form the basis of my research project and will be anonymised in the written report and any subsequent journal articles or conference presentations. Interview participants will be given pseudonyms, and it will not be possible for them to be identified personally. All material collected will be kept confidential, and participants have the right to access the audio recordings and check transcripts. No other person besides me and my supervisor, Dr Dan Dorner, will have access to the recordings and transcripts. They will be kept in a locked drawer or password-protected electronic file. The transcripts will be destroyed and the recordings erased two years after the end of the project, unless participants indicated they would like them returned to them. The report will be submitted for marking to the School of Information Management and deposited in the University Library and possibly in the University's institutional repository; a copy will also be given to the Graphic Novel Café. It is possible that one or more articles will be submitted for publication in scholarly journals or presented at conferences. A summary of the research results will also be emailed to each of the interviewees.

If you have any questions about the project, please phone me at work at [REDACTED] or email me at [REDACTED], or contact my supervisor, Dr Dan Dorner,

[REDACTED]

Kylie Thomson  
[Signed]

## 5.4 Participant Selection Form

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON

*Te Whare Wānanga o te Ūpoko o te Ika a Māui*



SCHOOL OF INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

### Participant Selection Form

Your Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Your Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Your Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

### Demographic questions

1. What is Your Age: \_\_\_\_\_
2. What is Your Ethnicity: \_\_\_\_\_
3. What is Your Gender: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Is English your first language? (*please circle*) YES / NO
5. If 'no', about how long have you been speaking English?  
\_\_\_\_\_ years \_\_\_\_\_ months

## 5.5 Consent Form For Reader Interviews

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON

*Te Whare Wānanga o te Ūpoko o te Ika a Māui*



SCHOOL OF INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

### **CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**

**Title of project:** Manga and Manga Readers in Auckland's *Graphic Novel Café*

I have been given and have understood an explanation of this research project. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have them answered to my satisfaction.

I understand that I may withdraw myself (or any information I have provided) from this project before data analysis commences on the 21<sup>st</sup> of July 2008 without having to give reasons or without penalty of any sort. I understand that if I withdraw from the project, any data I have provided will be returned to me or destroyed.

I understand that any information I provide will be kept confidential to the researcher and the supervisor, the published results will not use my name but will use a pseudonym instead, and that no opinions will be attributed to me in any way that will identify me.

I understand that the data I provide will be used for this research project, and that it is possible that one or more articles will be submitted for publication in scholarly journals or presented at conferences.

I would like to check the transcripts of my interview on their completion on the 20<sup>th</sup> of July 2008.

I understand that the audio recordings of interviews and their transcripts will be deleted two years after the end of the project unless I indicate that I would like them returned to me.

I would like the audio recordings of my interview returned to me two years after the conclusion of the project.

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

I agree to take part in this research

Name of participant (*please print clearly*)

Signed:

Date:



## 5.6 Final Interview Schedules

- Personal introduction
- How long have you been reading manga and what introduced you to it?
- How did you learn to read manga?
- How do you like to read manga? (*when, where, how many, with whom*)
- How do you choose what to read?

*Artwork, author, back of book summary, characters, cultural references (e.g. name suffixes), friends' recommendations, genres, mood/reading experience wanted, pacing, reviews, types (eg shoujo, shounen).*

- What will you **not** read? At what point will you give up a series that isn't working for you? Are there any choices that seem to break your own guidelines?
- Do you read manhwa or OEL manga? Other related things, like anime and merchandise?
- How/Where do you access manga?
- What manga do you buy?
- Could you tell me a bit about your favourite manga and why you like them?
- How many people do you know read them? *What do the people around you think of manga?*
- Where does manga fit in to your lifestyle?
- Could you tell me about your overall reasons for reading manga?
- What tips would you offer librarians?
- Questions for non-English speakers eg *do you read manga in English?*