

THE RELATIONSHIP OF COMIC BOOK READING
TO PERSONALITY ADJUSTMENT

by

TERESA ANDERSON GRIFFIN

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INTRODUCTION

Since comic books have become so easily adapted to all kinds of purposes and have become almost universally intelligible, studies have been made about their role in scholastic development, their word content and children's interest in reading them. Few investigators have studied the psychological effects upon personality adjustment from reading them. A number of surveys reveal mass buying by American children. Zorbaugh (19) states:

A recent survey by the Market Research Company of America on the reading of comic books throughout the country reveals that comic books have as large if not a larger public than have the comic pages of the newspapers, a public estimated at seventy million.

Zorbaugh further states: "Surveys by Gallop and others show the comics to be far and away America's favorite form of literature."

Statistics on comic book reading are startling and indicate that this powerful medium of communication might play an important part in personality adjustment.

Gruenberg (7) noted:

The comics deserve the serious consideration of statesmen and educators, politicians and publicists, psychologist and sociologist, for they reflect what millions are thinking about, what they want, what they fear, and how they feel about matters of social significance.

Having worked with children over a period of time, the writer had observed the growing appeal that comics made to children and was stimulated to do research on the problem of personality adjustment and comic book reading.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

For this study, a survey was made of the literature in the fields of children's reading and comic books. This review of the literature shows that there is some inconsistency and uncertainty in the findings. Some very reliable investigators have interested themselves in comic books. Berchtold (4) calls attention to the fact that comics appeared in the American Newspapers for the first time in 1894. The New York World installed its first color press during that year, ostensibly to print color fashion pages, and the editor, Morrill Goodard, persuaded the management to try a color comic to test the press. It was on the last Sunday in November, 1895 that a drawing depicting the antics of a slum urchin in a nightgown appeared. It was a hit; something that the American public had been wanting. The comics were launched. The first modern comic book according to Weller (15) appeared in 1911. It was a collection of Bud Fisher's "Mutt and Jeff" newspaper strip. The first week's sales reached 35,000 and netted the publishing house \$6,000.00 in addition to the

circulation. The first comic book in its present format as cited by Zorbaugh appeared as late as 1933. Smith (11) reported the retail sale of comics totaled \$30,000,000.00 in 1943. In 1949 Beauchamp (1) reported that 35 publishers distributed about 300 comic books with an approximate annual circulation of 720,000,000 copies.

Since building up a tremendous quantity of sales, Smith (11) called attention to the fact that periodical publishers have been working toward the improvement of the quality of their merchandise. The comics started as a toy and had no social responsibility. Sales reached far above the expectations of the publishers. They, too, were surprised.

Such a wide circulation of comic books naturally caused much to be written about them. Many of the writings are based on opinions and are not backed by studies. In this study, it is the research with which the writer is concerned. Most of the approaches have been made from the educational point of view. Psychologically, little has been done. One of the first studies was done by Thorndike (12) He studied the word content of several comic books. He found that a count of the total number of words in the text showed it to cluster around 10,000 words. He observed:

The child who reads a comic book once a month through the school year (and this represents a very moderate dosage) gets about as much wordage of reading as he gets from the new fourth or fifth grade reader.

He selected several 300 word samples from different comic books and evaluated them by means of the Lorge formula.¹

Of these, he said:

With one exception these selections fall at the fifth or sixth grade reading difficulty according to the formula. This is consistent with the group who read them, because the bulk of the readers fall within the ranges of 9-15 years. They represent material of difficulty appropriate to the average 11 or 12 year old and to the slow child of somewhat greater age.

Thorndike concluded that the contribution made to children's lives by reading comics whether it be exposure to an unrealistic world, a release from tensions and aggression which are built up and unexpressed in the world of reality, or just a means of wasting time is a vital question.

McCarthy and Smith (10) investigated the magnitude of the comic book problem in the private and public schools of Duluth, Minnesota in 1943. The questionnaire method was used and 8,608 children from Grade IV through Grade IX participated in the study. Out of 8,608 children only 935, which is less than 11 percent, did not read any comics. The 8,608 children had read 25,395 comic magazines during the week preceding the study. Other important findings were:

¹ Lorge, "Predicting Reading Difficulties of Selection For Children." Elementary English Review. XVI, 1939. 229-233.

1. The maximum number read by any boy in the public schools was 47 and by any girl 42.
2. In the private schools the maximum read by any boy was 46 and by any girl was 47.
3. The peak of comic book reading was reached in Grade VI in the public schools and Grade IV in private schools.
4. Children's choices gave "Batman" first place, "Superman" next, "Donald Duck" third place and "Tip Tip" fourth.

McCarthy and Smith also endeavored to determine the factors which make the appeal of the comic so marked. They wanted to question children who had not participated in the questionnaire, as they felt a direct question would not be answered adequately by them. In two schools, one in Chicago and one in Minneapolis, 350 children were asked to write, without signature, their answers to the question: "Why do you like comic magazines?" They found 121 children liked comics because of their humor; 90 named adventure; 52 thought that the pictures made for easier reading; 46 gave pastime as their reason; and 20 gave various other reasons. The fact that they "solved crime" provided satisfaction for 21. They concluded:

There can be little doubt regarding the mass effect of the ten or twelve million copies of the comics that are sold monthly to a like number of boys and girls and passed on to many more. Most of these children, let us hope, have made normal emotional adjustments, but others are maladjusted, to

some degree at least. Fears many times have been conditioned. Trends, hereditary perhaps, toward undue dominance and toward cruelty, negativism, etc., may have been developed. In children such as these, comics can only intensify beginning abnormal tendencies. Consequently it would seem good psychology to keep nervous unstable children away from comics or keep comics away from them.

Such conclusions as these made it seem highly desirable to repeat or make a similar study and test for facts which would either reject or uphold the foregoing conclusions. McCarthy and Smith, in no way, attempted to measure children's personality adjustment. Yet they concluded that comics are causes of maladjustment.

Witty (17) explored the extent and nature of reading the comics in Grades IV, V, and VI. He used the interview method by means of a questionnaire. It was administered to 2,500 pupils in Grades IV, V, and VI in eight schools in Evanston, Chicago and Milwaukee. He reported data obtained from 334 children in the Evanston schools only. The questionnaires were employed as a basis for an interview and additional data concerning reading habits, mental ability, educational achievement, nervous stability and recreation were secured. He found that reading comics was most popular of all pursuits. The average number read by boys and girls was 13 of which 3 were read regularly, 3 often and 7 occasionally. "Superman" and "Batman" attained first and second rank for both boys and girls in all grades. In the exact words of the author he said: "All these activities seem to satisfy the

middle grade child's desire and need for experiences that are adventurous and exciting."

A comparative work was also done by Witty (18). He studied the interests of children selected at random from 2,500 public school children on the same points as those covered by the preceding study. Subjects were children from the fourth, fifth, and sixth grades in eight schools in Chicago and vicinity. The interview method was used. Samples of 100 each were made at random by including data from every twentieth child in the first sample and proportionate numbers in other samples. In this study the average number of comic books read by boys and girls was slightly above 15. Boys read more frequently than girls. Of the 15 reported read, 4 were read regularly and $4\frac{1}{2}$ often. He reported that samples showed remarkable agreement and the method used seemed to provide a reliable picture of the entire group of 2,500 boys and girls. Witty had this to say in conclusion:

Strictures are often made concerning the dire effects of reading the comics. The data in this paper do not afford a basis for these diatribes. In one school two groups of children were studied intensely, those who read comics extensively and those who seldom read them. Reading patterns of the two groups disclosed little difference in amount or nature of reading.

Bender and Lourie (3) studied the effect of comic books on the ideology of children. They used the case study method. In the course of these studies, they found that the child projected his fantasy upon the characters and stories of the

comic books, or he incorporated the characters and solutions of real problems into his own inner-fantasy life. They believed that the chief conflict over comic books was in the adult mind. They maintained that:

The effect of the comic book in normal children is comparable to the therapeutic effect in the emotionally disturbed child. Well balanced children are not upset by even the more horrible scenes in the comics as long as the reason for the threat of torture is clear and the issues are well stated.

They also said that if a child reacts emotionally or with a behavior disorder to reading the comics, the trigger action can be traced further back to the basic traumatic factors within the child's background. They pointed out that "It is felt that even the more obviously emotionally unstable child should not be deprived of the possible benefits he will gain from reading comic books." They concluded that the comics, like the folklore of other times, serve as a means to stimulate the child's fantasy life and thereby help him solve the individual and sociological problems inherent in his living.

Bender (2), in another article, said, "The absorption of children in the comics is easily understood when we regard it as a part of their constructive experimentation with reality and its problems." She believed that the language of the comic had the same problems and meaning for the child as the pictorial content. It represented experimentation. The positive qualities of the comics were enumerated as follows:

(1) Great adaptability and fluidity in dealing with social and cultural problems, (2) Continuity through characters who deal with the individual's essential psychological involvement with these problems, (3) An experimental attitude and technique.

It was agreed by all investigators, whose studies have been reviewed, that the masses of children read and like comics but there was disagreement as to the effects of such reading. Thorndike found them to be more than just picture books with a little reading material when he studied their word content. Witty found that they satisfied the middle grade child's desire for adventure and activity. In his comparative study, he found nothing in scholastic work to distinguish the comic book readers from the non-readers. McCarthy and Smith found that the peak of comic book reading was reached in the sixth grade in the public school. This finding was consistent with Thorndike's conclusion that comics represent material of difficulty appropriate to the average 11 or 12 year old and to the slow child of somewhat greater age. A few have drawn conclusions which appear to be big leaps that clearly go beyond their data. Much is left to be investigated and studied before children's motivation in comics will be understood. From an educational point of view, very little has been done to make use of the comic book technique. Child psychologists, curriculum experts, and vocabulary specialists

have a rich field of materials in the comics from which to work and this field has yet been only slightly tapped.

These findings, particularly McCarthy and Smith's conclusions, were the point of departure for this study. Since there is a possibility that personality adjustment could be influenced by comic book reading and since there is lack of agreement among investigators, this study was designed to investigate that possibility. Specifically, the problem was first, to determine the relationship between comic book reading and personality adjustment in the school; secondly, to determine the relationship between comic book reading and general personality adjustment.

SUBJECTS, INSTRUMENTS AND PROCEDURES

The subjects for this study were the sixth grade children of Manhattan, Kansas who were enrolled in Woodrow Wilson, Eugene Field, Bluemont, and Roosevelt elementary schools who liked comics well enough to give three choices of favorite comic books on their questionnaire. The number meeting this requirement was 100. That included all children present on the day of testing.¹

¹ The number of children who were eliminated because they gave two or less choices of favorite comic books was 17. Those who did not like comics and did not read them numbered 5 and gave no choices.

The measuring instruments used in this study were:

1. Brown Personality Inventory For Children, which consists of 80 questions exploring how a child feels about himself, his parents, his school, etc. It provides five separate classifications for scoring results:

	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Adjustment</u>
Best	20	Excellent
Second	20	Good
Middle	20	Average
Fourth best	20	Below average
Lowest	20	Needs clinical attention

The Brown Personality Inventory For Children was selected because the time required for administering it coincided with regular classroom periods and it is one of the new personality measuring devices especially adapted to children.

2. The Henmon-Nelson Test Of Mental Ability.

3. The Stanford Achievement Reading Test, Form F for reading. The Henmon-Nelson Test Of Mental Ability and Stanford Achievement Test for reading were used because these tests scores were a part of the school records and were copied from such records.

4. The Cincinnati Rating For 555 Comic Books¹, which is the result of the combined efforts of the Committee on Evaluation of Comic Books, composed of representatives from organizations in Cincinnati working with and for youth. Approximately

¹ Parents Magazine - 555 Comic Magazines Rated, February 2, 1950, 25-38-39. p. 83-87.

50 trained reviewers evaluated the books by means of a profile chart which was the result of three months of study on the problem. The rating gives a classification in four different groups. They are:

- A. No objection
- B. Some objection
- C. Objectionable
- D. Very objectionable

This rating was selected because it was the only such instrument indicated in the literature reviewed.

5. The teachers' classification of children's school adjustment¹.

6. A personal questionnaire¹, giving information about favorite comics and the number read, characters liked and disliked, as well as other choices pertinent to this study. It required about 30 minutes to administer.

Teachers were asked to place the children, enrolled in their classes, into the five classifications of personality adjustment provided by the form. The children were given the personal questionnaire to secure information regarding comic books. Directions were read by the examiner. Information was recorded by children on blanks provided by the form. Children were told that in no way would the information secured affect their school records, that the information was knowledge that mattered only to the examiner and that their contributions would be kept in strict confidence. Children were urged to

¹Copies found in Appendix.

spell words as best they could without help. The next instrument used was the Brown Personality Inventory For Children. The examiner read the recommended directions given by the author in his manual.

These instruments were given to all grades in their own rooms in the same order. The questionnaire was given first, followed by the Brown Personality Inventory For Children. Children appeared to be cooperative and seemed to enjoy the experience.

A valid measure of comic book reading is very difficult to obtain. It seemed that there was no way to find the actual amount of time which children spend in reading comic books because of other factors in operation. "Time" seems to be a meaningless term to many children, while "numbers" are more meaningful. Therefore, the most practical score seemed to be the number of books read rather than time spent in reading. The average number of books read during the week was probably within the range of memory for most children. Such a score, however, is probably subject to the errors characteristic of children's reports.

The "quality" and "quantity-quality" comic book scores used as variables to compute coefficients of correlations were secured by assigning each child's three choices of favorite comic books a score of one, if it fell in the first classification (no objection) of the Cincinnati Rating; a score of two,

if it fell in the second classification (some objection); a score of three, if it fell in the third classification (objectionable); a score of four, if it fell in the fourth classification (very objectionable). Then the three scores were totaled and divided by three to find the average quality of each child's choice of comics. This quotient was called the "quality" score. The "quality" score was then multiplied by the number of comic books read per week. This product was called the "quantity-quality" comic book score.

The previously described procedure yielded the following data on 100 children:

1. Brown Personality Inventory scores
2. The Henmon-Nelson Test Of Mental Ability scores
(I.Q. and Mental Age)
3. Stanford Achievement Test scores on reading
4. Quantity comic book scores
5. Quality comic book scores
6. Quantity-quality comic book scores
7. Teachers' classification of children's school
adjustment

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

An analysis of children's reports obtained from questionnaires brought out choices of favorite comics, characters admired and disliked, some reasons for their choices as well

as favorite activities which children enjoyed doing. According to rank, these choices of favorite comic books made by Manhattan sixth grade children were:

Donald Duck
 Roy Rogers
 Bugs Bunny
 Walt Disney Comic
 Batman and Robin
 Looney Tunes
 Gene Autry
 Superman
 Porky Pig

Western, Captain Marvel and Superboy

Some of these choices are in agreement with Witty's (17) study done in 1941. "Donald Duck", "Superman", and "Batman" appeared on his list of 11 favorites. Those same three received the first three places in McCarthy and Smith's (10) study in 1943.

In answer to the question asked on the questionnaire, "Which of the characters would you like to have for your friends and pal around with you?", the ranking of the characters receiving the most votes was:

Donald Duck and Bugs Bunny
 Roy Rogers
 Gene Autry
 Batman

Porky Pig

Sniffles and Mary Jane

Superman

Captain Marvel

Only two characters, "Superman" and "Dick Tracy" received enough votes to make them stand out from the numerous single choices given by the children in answer to the question, "Which of the characters, if any, do you really dislike?"

"Superman" appeared as a favorite comic book, a character liked by some children, although second from the bottom of that list, and as a character receiving first place on a disliked list.

These findings, regarding characters in the comics, bear out Josette Frank's (5) statement when she said:

When parents contemplate the varied cavalcade of people who touch their children's lives at one point or another they can hardly ignore the fact that these children, millions of them, are keeping high company with a most oddly assorted assemblage of comic characters.

There are also other findings in this study which are in agreement with hers. She said that the so-called "suggestive" comics are not to be found among those which children choose for themselves. None was found in this study. She recognized Walt Disney's ability to give very human characteristics to his animal characters and she believed that that was what made children adore them. These comics seem to follow the child's own fantasy. She wrote: "Mickey Mouse does all the things

that any little boy would love to do--and gets away with it." This study brought out the popularity of animal comics.

Children's love for animals, adventure and noble deeds could partly explain why "Roy Rogers" and "Gene Autry" rate with "Donald Duck", "Porky Pig", and "Bugs Bunny" and are admired heroes in today's comics. Some children commented about their love for horses. "Captain Marvel" and "Superman" could satisfy their desire for dangerous adventure. Children are fascinated by the speed of our modern, mechanized equipment and look upon it as an achievement in our time.

The question of whether or not the school failed to provide an interesting and stimulating curriculum of activities, thereby causing children to turn to comics, is answered by the children's responses to the statement in the questionnaire, "Check the one activity you like to do best if your teacher gave you your choice." Physical education was chosen by 62 children; reading a comic was chosen by 19; reading a library book by 11; and having art experience by 8.

Even though reading comic books was given second place, that choice was the choice of a little less than one-fifth of the population tested; while the school provided regularly the choices of four-fifths of the population. One might conclude, then, that children do not read comics because of failure on the part of the school to provide interesting activities.

Statistical treatment in this study consisted of the computation of the Product Moment Coefficients of Correlation between the following measures:

Brown Personality Inventory For Children and

I.Q. scores from The Henmon-Nelson Test of Mental Ability

Stanford Achievement Reading Age (Reading age in months)

Comic book quantity-quality scores

Comic book quantity scores

Comic book quality scores

Stanford Achievement Reading Age (Reading age in months) and

Comic book quantity scores

Comic book quality scores

I.Q. scores from The Henmon-Nelson Test of Mental Ability

Henmon-Nelson Test Of Mental Ability (Mental age in months)

Comic book quantity scores

Stanford Achievement Reading Age (Reading age in months).

The net or partial coefficient of correlation was computed between Stanford Achievement Reading Age and comic book quantity scores, with Mental Age ruled out.

As a severe test of the possible agreement of teachers' estimation of children's school adjustment and their classification designated by the results of the Brown Personality Inventory, the following comparison was made: The 16 children whom the teachers classified as having excellent adjustment and the 15 whom they designated as below average in adjustment

and needing clinical attention were compared on the basis of their Brown Personality Inventory scores.

These same children were also compared on the "quantity" and "quality" of their comic book reading to see if the mean differences were significant.

Table 1 shows the coefficients of correlation between the raw scores on the Brown Personality Inventory For Children and raw scores on other measures. All the coefficients are positive but low. Statistically, they are not significant. Some of the low correlations may be partly explained because of the "coarse" scores obtained by the use of such techniques as "quantity". The number of books read taken as a measure of "quantity of reading" may be a poor score for indicating the actual amount read, because the factors of "scanning" and reading for comprehension are both involved as well as whether or not a book is read in its entirety. The validity may not be very high because of different ideas about reading or practices involved in a child's report. The Brown test has a reliability coefficient of .86. It is one of the newer tests but the method of determining its validity could be questioned. The chief weakness of most personality tests is the uncertainty of their validity.

The general trend of all these results seems to indicate that personality adjustment, as measured by the Brown Personality Inventory, apparently is not related to "quantity" or

"quality" of comic book reading. Neither is it related to mental ability or reading achievement. The fact that the correlations are not higher than they are serves to emphasize the point that the elimination of comic book reading by children in no way guarantees good personality adjustment, or that the reading of comic books assures poor personality adjustment in children. Moreover, a high I.Q. or high reading achievement does not guarantee good adjustment as measured by the test. They possibly are factors, but are only part of the influence operating in personality adjustment.

Table 1. Coefficients of correlations between raw scores on the Brown Personality Inventory For Children and raw scores from other measures.

Variables	:Coefficient of :correlation
The Henmon-Nelson Test of Mental Ability	.129
The Stanford Achievement Reading Test (computed into age in months)	.075
Comic book quantity-quality scores	.018
Comic book quality	.038
Comic book quantity	.124

Table 2. Coefficients of correlations between raw scores on Stanford Achievement Reading Test, Form F (Reading age in months) and raw scores on other measures.

Variables	:Coefficient of :correlation
Comic quantity score	.001
Comic quality score	.153
Henmon-Nelson Test Of Mental Ability (I.Q.)	.796

Table 2 shows the coefficients of correlations between raw scores on the Stanford Achievement Reading Test, Form F (reading age in months) and the raw scores on other measures. The correlations are all positive but only one is statistically significant; that is, the coefficient .796 found between I.Q. scores and reading achievement. A coefficient of correlation as high as this shows that there is definite relationship between intelligence and reading achievement and is in agreement with usual findings. Louttit (9) reported a coefficient of correlation of .75 found between group tests of intelligence and reading.

The other two correlations indicate that reading achievement is probably not improved or retarded by either quantity or quality of comic book reading. There was no trend of comic book reading being done by either the advanced readers or the poorer ones.

Table 3. Coefficients of correlation between Mental Age in Months computed from the Henmon-Nelson Test Of Mental Ability and the raw scores from other measures.

Variables	:Coefficients of :correlation
Stanford Achievement Reading Test (computed into reading age in months)	.625
Comic book quantity scores	.037

Table 3 gives the coefficients of correlation between mental age computed from the Henmon-Nelson Test Of Mental Ability and other measures. Both correlations are positive; but one is very low. A coefficient of correlation .625 between reading age and mental age is statistically significant and not very different from that found between I.Q. scores and reading age. The significance of the correlation was tested by use of t value.¹ The t value of 7.93 is large enough to assure the rejection of the null hypothesis (that the true coefficient of correlation between reading achievement and mental age is zero) at .05 level of confidence.

The very low coefficient of correlation of .037 found between mental age and comic book quantity scores seems to indicate that mental age has very little to do with quantity of comic book reading. The appeal of the comics seems to

¹ Formula used in Appendix.

hold a fascination for all levels of mental accomplishments according to this study.

Table 4. Means and Standard deviations of adjustment groups A and B for the various measures used for comparison.¹

Measure	: Group :	: Number :	Mean	: Standard : : deviation
Brown	A	16	19.70	13.161
	B	15	18.80	11.910
Comic book quantity scores	A	16	6.20	7.464
	B	15	11.20	16.880
Comic book quality scores	A	16	1.83	.868
	B	15	2.22	.785

¹ Group A consists of the 16 children placed by teachers in the best school adjustment classification.

Group B consists of the 15 children placed by teachers in school adjustment classifications as below average and needing clinical attention.

Table 5. Reliability of the differences between the means of adjustment groups A and B for the different measures.

Measure	: :Difference: :	: Standard : : error of : : difference:	Critical ratio D/SDD
Brown	.90	1.2024	.74
Comic book quantity scores	5.00	1.30	3.84
Comic book quality scores	.39	.0779	5.00

The means and standard deviations of the total scores for each group on the three different measures are given in Table 4. Group A had the largest standard deviations on the Brown Personality Inventory and also on the comic book quality scores. Group B had the largest standard deviations on the comic book quantity scores. These standard deviations indicate that there are some wide individual differences. Group B had a slightly smaller mean score than Group A on the Brown Personality Inventory. Group A had a mean quality score of 1.83 which put its quality rating in classification A (no objection) of the Cincinnati Rating. Group B had a mean quality score of 2.22 with a Cincinnati Rating of B (some objection). The biggest difference in mean scores for the two groups was in comic book quantity scores.

In Table 5, the differences between the means of adjustment Groups A and B, on the various measures and the reliability of these differences are shown. The critical ratio of .74 between Group A and Group B on the Brown scores is not significant. A critical ratio of 5.00 between Group A and Group B on comic book quality scores is statistically significant as indicated by the table of t .¹ Entering the table with 29 degrees of freedom, a critical ratio of 2.04 or larger rejects the null hypothesis (that the true difference

¹ Garret, Henry E. "Statistics in Psychology and Education", third edition. (Longmans, Green and Co., New York), Table 29, p. 190.

between adjustment Group A and adjustment Group B in quality of comic book reading is zero) at the .05 level of confidence. In five times out of 100 trials, a divergence as large as 2.04 or larger may be expected in the positive and negative directions. A critical ratio of 3.84 between Group A and Group B on the comic book quantity scores is statistically significant at the .05 level of confidence. Again the null hypothesis has been rejected and one would expect to find, in five times out of 100 trials, a divergence as large as 2.04 in the positive and negative directions. The fact that there was no significant difference between the two groups on the Brown test may be interpreted to mean that there was not agreement between teachers' classification of school adjustment and what Brown's test measured.

The significant differences found between the two groups on the quality and quantity of comic book scores suggest that teachers may be somewhat better able to classify children on personality adjustment than the Brown test. However, each child was rated by one teacher only and the teacher is part of the situation at school. Moreover, there is a possibility that teachers were biased and classified children, as maladjusted, because they knew what they read and how much. There is also the possibility that the differences in personality trends in children of sixth grade level were not differentiated sufficiently to be detected by the personality measure used.

EVALUATION

What then, does this study show? It shows that personality adjustment, as measured by the Brown test, may not be affected by either the quantity of quality of comic book reading. The fact that reading age was not apparently related to quantity of comic book reading is significant, because it is contrary to public opinion. Many educators have held the point of view that comic book reading was closely related to mental age. This study does not reveal such findings. Usually the poor readers are also low in mental age. The readers of comic books were not all poor readers. The children who were high in reading age had with about equal frequency included them in their reading program. When mental age was partialled out, the coefficient of correlation found between quantity of comic books read and reading age was only $-.030$.

One of the disappointing findings in this study was the fact that there was no significant difference between Brown Personality Inventory averages for Groups A and B. A possible explanation could be the limitation and weakness of teachers' classifications as set forth by Wickman (16) who said: "It is only when the behavior disorders of a child are of a certain type that the teachers attach significance to them in interpreting the entire behavior adjustment of the child." He felt that teachers finally became so accustomed

to mannerisms and habits of children that those things lose their implications of symptoms of maladjustment. Another explanation could be the possible low generality of personality traits, or the absence of any significant difference could be interpreted to mean that the "coarse" measuring techniques were not sensitive to slight differences. The fact that there was no significant statistical difference between the averages for the two groups indicates that whatever the Brown Personality Inventory measured about these children, it was not distinguished by their teachers.

Leads for effective follow-up studies were suggested, in some instances, by children's responses on the personal questionnaire. Controls on buying, such as the economic factor and parent's censorship, might be factors in operation affecting quantity and quality of comics read. As has been suggested before, the amount of time spent reading comic books in relation to other activities should be a better measure than number of books read. Another lead could be a study of those personalities who are in agreement as to one group of comic book heroes against personalities who are in agreement on another group of comic book heroes. If a large enough group of children could be found who did not like comics and did not read them, it might be very worthwhile to study their personality adjustment as compared with the personality adjustment of those children who read excessively.

Children do not all like comic books for the same reasons. There are so many factors entering into their likes and dislikes that it seems important to know what makes the appeal to the particular child and how it fits into his pattern of adjustment. Some attempts have been made to study this problem, but the findings were not conclusive. One of the difficulties involved in this problem is whether or not the child can actually analyze the situation well enough to know why he really likes a particular comic book. Vocabulary and spelling deficiencies, if investigations were done by means of writing, could prevent children from giving correct analysis because of their inability to use or spell a word or words. It seems to be characteristic of children to make substitution for words that they cannot spell.

This study substantiates some of the findings of other investigators, discredits some and adds a few of its own.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

1. One hundred children in the sixth grade of Manhattan, Kansas were given the Brown Personality Inventory For Children as well as a personal questionnaire regarding comic books and other facts pertaining to this study.

2. I. Q. and mental age scores obtained from The Henmon-Nelson Test Of Mental Ability were copied from the school records as well as scores from the Stanford Achievement

Reading Test, Form F.

3. Children listed by their teachers as well adjusted or poorly adjusted were studied as Group A and Group B.

4. The Cincinnati Rating For 555 Comic Books was used to compute the "quality" and "quantity-quality" comic book scores.

5. Ten different correlations were computed from data obtained.

6. Adjustment Groups A and B were compared on three different measures. They were: Brown Personality Inventory For Children, comic book quantity scores and comic book quality scores.

On the whole, the data in this study did not reveal any relationship between personality adjustment, as measured by the Brown Personality Inventory, and quantity or quality of comic book reading. Only two correlations were found to be statistically significant. They were .796 found between reading age and I.Q. scores and .625 between reading age and mental age.

Teachers' classifications did not distinguish whatever is measured by the Brown Personality Inventory. Reading age was probably not affected by the quantity or quality of comic book reading. The quantity of comic books read apparently had no relationship to mental age.

The mean number of comic books read per week by Manhattan,

Kansas sixth grade children was 9.25. It was interesting to note that the mean quality comic book score of this group of children was 1.72, which puts it into the first classification (no objection) of the Cincinnati Rating.

These facts led to the conclusion that parents and teachers may be unduly alarmed regarding children's interests in comic books. It could be that the worst thing about them is that they take time from other activities that might be more worthwhile. On the otherhand, children apparently have lots of "spare" time and they could be engaging in activities that are far more damaging than reading comic books. Perhaps it is better for children to read a comic book than nothing at all. Since the comic book industry has grown to be such a huge one and publishers claim now to feel a responsibility to their readers and since the public, such as the Cincinnati group, is evaluating comics and working with the publishers to produce better ones, it is possible that in the future the end product will be something that children have already formed the habit of reading and is also something that educators can recommend.

Whatever is the outcome, it seems safe to conclude that comic books are a part of our way of life today just as much as television, movies, and radios are. They can no longer be ignored. Our problem now is to make them work for us.

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APPENDIX

Personal Questionnaire

Name _____ Age _____

1. Do you like comic books? Yes _____ No _____

2. Which one do you like best? _____

3. Which ones do you like next best? _____

_____4. Which of the characters would you like to have for your
friends and pal around with you?

_____5. Which of the characters do you really dislike?

_____6. Why do you like the characters you listed in question
number 4?

_____7. Why don't you like the characters you listed in question
number 5?

8. How many books do you read a week?

_____ cartoon books (comic)

_____ other books

9. What kind of stories do you like best? _____

10. Do you have a favorite magazine? Yes _____ No _____

If you do, what is it? _____

11. How much time everyday would you like to have your teacher allow you to read comic books? _____

12. Check the one you like to do best if your teacher gave you your choice.

1. _____ Have art
2. _____ Read a comic book
3. _____ Have physical education
4. _____ Read a book from the library

13. Is there anything else besides the characters in comic books that you like? Yes _____ No _____

If so, what is it? _____

14. Tell me anything else about comics books that you want to. _____

Teacher's Classification of Children

1. The child who has excellent adjustment to school. (Individuals who improve school by their presence, brings objects to share with others, often is the "star" in the room.)

1. _____ 3. _____
2. _____ 4. _____

2. The child who has good adjustment to school. (Cooperative, happy, doing good work, shows evidence of enthusiasm, lots of friends, likes school and teachers.)

1. _____ 4. _____
2. _____ 5. _____
3. _____ 6. _____

3. The child who is average in adjustment. (Prepares assignments, does routine assignments, gives attention, reasonably docile.)

1. _____ 9. _____
2. _____ 10. _____
3. _____ 11. _____
4. _____ 12. _____
5. _____ 13. _____
6. _____ 14. _____
7. _____ 15. _____
8. _____ 16. _____

4. The child who is below average in adjustment. (Doing poor work, not cooperative, shows dislike to school but does attend, indifferent, poor attention, likes only play activities, daydreams, uncomfortable unless has the attention of teachers. Brings distracting materials to school on the sly, withdrawn or noticeably shy.) Space is limited. Please list on back of sheet.

1. _____ 2. _____

5. The child who is very poorly adjusted and needs clinical attention. (Failing in school work, unhappy individuals, extreme lack of friends, hostile, disorderly, antagonistic, willful traunt, maladjusted as far as relations to other children are concerned.)

1. _____ 2. _____
3. _____ 4. _____

Statistical Formulae Used

1. The coefficients of correlation, as recommended by Tiffin,
Industrial Psychology, page 360

$$r = \frac{N \sum xy - \sum x \sum y}{\sqrt{N \sum x^2 - (\sum x)^2} \sqrt{N \sum y^2 - (\sum y)^2}}$$

2. The standard deviation, as recommended by Garrett (11)
page 61

$$S.D. = \sqrt{\frac{\sum Fx'^2}{N} - c^2} \times i \text{ (interval)}$$

3. The standard error of the mean, as recommended by Garrett
(24a) p. 109, for (N less than 50)

$$\sigma_M = \frac{\sigma}{\sqrt{(N-1)}}$$

4. The standard error of the difference between two means,
as recommended by Garrett (29) p. 207 (when samples are
small)

$$\sigma_D = \sqrt{\frac{\sigma_1^2 M_1}{N-1} + \frac{\sigma_2^2 M_2}{N-1}}$$

5. t for determining the significance of a computed r on the
null hypothesis, Garrett (53) p. 298

$$t = \frac{r \sqrt{N-2}}{\sqrt{1-r^2}}$$

6. Net or partial coefficient of correlation, Garrett (87) p. 410

$$r_{12.3} = \frac{r_{12} - r_{13} r_{23}}{\sqrt{1-r_{13}^2} \sqrt{1-r_{23}^2}}$$

THE RELATIONSHIP OF COMIC BOOK READING
TO PERSONALITY ADJUSTMENT

by

TERESA ANDERSON GRIFFIN

B. S., University of Kansas, 1943

AN ABSTRACT OF A THESIS

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

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Since comic books have become so widely read they have received the attention of a number of individuals, who are working with youth. Studies have been made about their role in scholastic development, their word content and psychological effects upon children's personality adjustment from reading them.

The purpose of this study was to determine if there is any relationship between the "quantity" and "quality" of comic book reading and personality adjustment. Specifically, the problem was first, to determine the relationship between comic book reading and personality adjustment in the school. Secondly, to determine the relationship between comic book reading and general personality adjustment.

The subjects for this study were 100 sixth grade children enrolled in Woodrow Wilson, Eugene Field, Bluemont, and Roosevelt elementary schools in Manhattan, Kansas who liked comics well enough to give three choices of favorite comic books on their questionnaires. The teachers were asked to place the children, enrolled in their classes, into the five classifications of personality adjustment provided by the form which described school adjustment as "excellent", "good", "average", "below average", and "poorly adjusted or needing clinical attention".

The children were given a personal questionnaire to secure information regarding favorite comic books and the number read,

characters liked and disliked, favorite activities and other information pertinent to this study. Following the questionnaire, the Brown Personality Inventory For Children was administered. I.Q. scores and mental ages from The Henmon-Nelson Test Of Mental Ability and reading age scores from The Stanford Achievement Test, Form F were copied from the school records. From The Cincinnati Rating For 555 Comic Books,¹ each child's choice of favorite comic books was assigned a score, (depending upon its rating) totaled and divided by three to find the average quality of each child's choice of comics. This quotient was called the "quality" score. The "quality" score was then multiplied by the number of books read per week. This product was called the "quantity-quality" score.

Statistical treatment in this study consisted of the computation of the Product-Moment Coefficients of correlation between the following measures:

Brown Personality Inventory For Children and

I.Q. scores from The Henmon Nelson Test Of Mental Ability
 Stanford Achievement Reading Age (Reading age in months)
 Comic book quantity-quality scores
 Comic book quantity scores
 Comic book quality scores

Stanford Achievement Reading Age (Reading age in months) and

Comic book quantity scores
 Comic book quality scores
 I.Q. scores from The Henmon Nelson Test Of Mental Ability

¹ Parents Magazine, 555 Magazines Rated, February 2, 1950, 25-38-39 p. 83-89.

The Henmon Nelson Test Of Mental Ability (Mental Age in Months) and

Comic book quantity scores
Stanford Achievement Reading age (Reading age in months)

The net or partial coefficient of correlation was computed between Stanford Achievement Reading age and comic book quantity scores, with mental age ruled out. As a severe test of the possible agreement of teachers' classification of children's school adjustment and their classification designated by the results of the Brown Personality Inventory, the following comparison was made: Group A, the 16 children whom the teachers classified as having excellent adjustment and Group B, the 15 whom they designated as below average in adjustment and needing clinical attention were compared on the basis of their Brown Personality Inventory scores. These same children were also compared on the "quantity" and "quality" of their comic book reading to see if the mean differences were significant.

The results of this study seem to indicate that personality adjustment, as measured by the Brown Personality Inventory For Children, apparently is not related to "quantity" or "quality" of comic book reading. Moreover it is not related to mental ability or reading achievement. Only two of the 10 correlations computed were significant. They were .796 found between reading age and I.Q. scores and .625 between reading age and mental age. Findings suggest that reading achievement is probably not improved or retarded by either quantity or

quality of comic book reading. There was no trend of such reading being done by either the advanced readers or the poorer ones. There was no evidence to indicate that mental age was related to quantity of comic book reading. The fascination for comics prevails at all levels of mental accomplishments. There was lack of agreement between the teachers' classification of school adjustment and what Brown's test measured. Significant differences were found between Groups A and B on the quality and quantity of comic book reading.