Chapter 11
Comics and Community:
Exploring the Relationship Between Society, Education, and Citizenship

Justin Martin
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0698-0049
Whitworth University, USA

Mark Killian
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3193-5530
Whitworth University, USA

Angelo Letizia
Notre Dame of Maryland University, USA

ABSTRACT

The authors use the setting, text, and form of comics to explore the relationship between society, education, and citizenship. The relationship is explored through analyses rooted in three distinct disciplines and applied to three superheroes whose narratives are often rooted in the communities in which they live: sociology (Daredevil and Hell's Kitchen), psychology (Black Panther and Wakanda), and citizenship education (Batman and Gotham). Collectively, these analyses highlight the potential of an interdisciplinary investigation of comics for providing opportunities for educators, researchers, and laypersons to (re)imagine what it means to live in a community with others. After the superheroes (and comics) are discussed within their respective analytical frames, implications for educators and researchers will be discussed. The chapter concludes with suggestions for using comics to aid in students' formulation and articulation of evidence-based, well-reasoned arguments about matters related to (re)imagined communities and citizenship education.

INTRODUCTION

Society in the 21st century is volatile, complex, visual, and fluid to use a few descriptors. The point is, scholars and students need tools that match this volatility. Comics may provide such a tool. Over the last two decades scholars have examined how the comic form can be used in a variety of disciplines, fields, and areas such as journalism, history, social studies education, psychology, leadership, literacy, disability studies, queer theory, linguistics, ethnography, and feminism to name a few (Alaniz, 2016; Brown, 2012; Cohn, 2013; Duncan, et al., 2015; Frey & Fisher, 2008; Letizia, 2020; Nyberg, 2012; Ricca, 2012; Queensbury, 2019; Saraceni, 2016; Stuller, 2012; Zullo, 2020). Scholars have examined the art, the text, storytelling and the interaction between text and visual elements in relation to their disciplines. This present work is situated in this growing corpus of literature.

Through its many features, the comic medium offers myriad ways for readers to engage with characters, reflect on their decisions, and ponder the characters' relationships with the broader social contexts in which they live. By analyzing these features specifically through the prism of superhero comics, this chapter aims to highlight ways these features have implications for thinking about the relationship between society, education, and citizenship. At a general level, citizenship can be defined as a set of rights and obligations that people who live in a nation-state possess (Banks, 2008). However, a more robust and contextualized conception of citizenship is put forth in the chapter. In addition to focusing on superhero comics, a common thread throughout the chapter will be the examination of a specific category of superheroes: superheroes who appear to live within a social or societal context, an "imagined community," that itself can be viewed as its own character within the narratives. Moreover, these superhero narratives will be explored by centering the role of *setting*, *text*, and *form* within the comics medium.

Anderson (1983/2006) developed the concept of the imagined community to describe nationalist movements in the late twentieth century. In response to previous research that thinks of nations as the imagined state of numerous genuine communities, Anderson argues that all communities, large or small, are imagined (1983/2006). Every community conceives of itself as a deep, horizontal comradeship, distinguished by languages, performances, and technologies that are real (i.e., they are enacted), yet believed into existence. This belief extends from the "imaginary," narratives that inculcate cultural norms and values into a group of people. Anderson notes that novels and newspapers (i.e., narrative forms) provide "the technical means for 're-presenting' the kind of imagined community that is the nation" (2006, p. 25). Like the literary forms used in Anderson's analysis, the authors argue that the comic provides a field for analyzing imagined communities. Within comics there are ways in which societies re-present themselves, imagining social contexts that reflect sociological, educational, and citizenship realities.

Specifically, this present chapter investigates the imaginaries present in comics from three distinct disciplines/fields and respective comic features: sociology (setting), psychology (text), and citizenship education (form). In the first three sections, the authors examine comic narratives from their various disciplines. Killian connects Hell's Kitchen (Daredevil) to theories of urban sociology. Next, Martin discusses Black Panther narratives within a moral psychology framework. Then Letizia highlights the connections between citizenship education and lessons from Gotham City.

Yet this present volume is equally concerned with pedagogy and taking the insights gleaned from these various disciplines and making them applicable and actionable for students. Comics have made tremendous inroads into K-12 and college classrooms (Burger, 2018; Duncan, Smith & Levitz, 2015; Letizia, 2020; Weiner & Syma, 2013) and the authors hope that the present work can add to that trend. In the fourth section, the authors bring together their analyses in an interdisciplinary fashion. They focus

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