Participations
Journal of Audience & Reception Studies

Volume 9, Issue 2
November 2012

Writing to Superman: Towards an understanding of the social networks of comic-book fans

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Abstract

This paper posits that letter writers to comic books form rudimentary social networks by engaging in a discursive community of fans through their letters. This work is based on a survey of letters to the comic books *Action Comics* and *Superman* from 1967-1977. The paper shows how the discursive community shaped identities of its participants as fans, collectors and for many as comic book professionals.

Keywords: Superman, Fans, Discourse, Community

Superman is a phenomenon that extends beyond comic books and has entered American and global culture through numerous incarnations such as film and television series. The popularity of Superman is easy enough to establish but explaining that popularity is another matter. Sean T. Collins a professional writer on comics (and sometimes of comics) blogged on March 11, 2010 that 'Batman's the guy you wanna be; Superman's the guy you know you ought to be, if only you could. The decency fantasy writ large' (Collins, 2010). If this view is correct I think it explains a general interest in Superman, that is, a willingness to watch an episode of *The Adventures of Superman* and/or *Smallville* on television or perhaps see a Superman film at the cinema. But to me it does not explain a sustained engagement with the character through reading comic books. I have read many Superman comics including every story from 1938 to 1945, and while I have an explanation for the early popularity of Superman, which I offer in my book *Comic Strips and Consumer Culture*, I have long struggled to understand why he remained as popular as he did in comic book form in the late 1960s and 1970s. In part that may be because like so many young comic book fans I turned to Marvel Comics in those years and Superman seemed passé to me. I thought I might find the answer to this question in the letters to the editor pages in *Action Comics* and *Superman*. The letters pages contained much information about why particular fans liked certain Superman stories and not others, but looking for an overarching reason, or even a series of consistent reasons, why the letter writers liked Superman proved futile except for one thing. By and large comic book readers who wrote letters liked Superman comics because they liked superhero comic books and Superman was the first of those heroes. In the course of my research it became clear that many of these letter writers were part of social networks related to comics that shifted from protean forms to more formal groupings in these years. For many fans their like of Superman was embedded in social practices of reading in which writing letters to the comic book played a large role. The origins of Superman lay in a similar community and by extension I think much of the characters continuing popularity lays in this relationship and fans knowledge of it. Superman marked the start of superhero comics and that makes him un-ignorable for comic book fans. Many fans of Superman are fans of not just the character, but of the circumstances of his creation, a story not easily separated from the character.

The rise of Superman

The origins of Superman lay in a science fiction community that developed in the United States in the interwar years. To talk about that community we need to first understand a little about the relationship between writers and publishers and how that affects such communities. Roger Chartier, a French cultural historian, notes that we need to distinguish between “text” and “print.” “Text” involves authors writing and “print” publishers publishing. The two may be linked but they are not one in the same. What writers intend for their work and the ways in which publishers market it may be at odds (Chartier 1989:161). As John Cheng notes in *Astounding Wonder: Imagining Science and Science Fiction in Interwar America* such distinctions applied to science fiction that was at the same time a genre of fiction, several publishing ventures, and activities such as reading and letter writing. As Cheng further notes the ‘the pulps gave rise to science fiction’s name, its recognition as a genre and category, and to the social character of its overlapping reading, writing, and fan communities and their attendant networks’ (Cheng 2012: pp. 12-16).

I think it might be useful to think about superhero comic books, their characters and their readers in a similar fashion: by seeing the industry and the readers as social networks bordering on discursive communities and with this notion in mind trying to trace the nature of that discourse by looking at the participation of fans in letter writing. Jean-Paul Gabilliet reminds us that there are different levels of engagement with comics is useful here. As he notes, comic book readers may be fans and collectors, but not all readers engage in this level of activity. Likewise most fans may be collectors, but not all collectors are necessarily fans. And not all fans engage in the same types and array of activities, such as publishing fanzines and attending conferences (Gabilliet 2010: 256). Trying to position letter writers in this community of comic book readers it might be useful to see them engaged in at very least a rudimentary form of social networking with those writing more letters forming a discursive community of sorts. Other research on letter writers to comic books by Anthony Coman (2012) and Matthew J. Pustz (2007) lends support to seeing these writers as engaged in a process of community formation. For Coman writing on letters to the Marvel comic *The*

Nam writers to this comic found healing in a return to a traumatic past and an opened ended discussion in the letters page about the nature of representation because of the bonds of community created by the letters page. Pustz in a broad sweep across several decades of letter writing and numerous titles and genres of comics finds the community both a key element in the creation of a whole culture of comics and also a resource of fresh talent. Likewise my more focussed research on two Superman comics suggests that a significant number of fans that wrote letters to the editors transformed the activity into professional work in and on comics.

In the early 1930s the creators of Superman Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, who were then high school students, were active participants in the science fiction fan community. In January 1933 in the third issue of their self-published fanzine *Science Fiction: The Advance Guard of Future Civilization* Siegel and Shuster published their illustrated article entitled “The Reign of the Superman.” The story was about not the Superman most people are familiar with, but rather a monomaniacal figure created by a science experiment. Other than the name Superman, some omniscient like powers, an outer space connection through meteor dust, and the presence of a bald headed evil scientist the story had no connection with the costumed character of the same name. Jerry Siegel has been a science fiction fan since at least 1928 when he bought the August issue of Hugo Gernsback’s *Amazing Stories*. Gerard Jones argues in his book *Men of Tomorrow,* that the fan communities that grew around this and other pulp magazines were efforts by adolescent boys to stem of the harshness of life by a ‘hyperrational ordering’ of the appropriate dimensions of science fiction and their likes and dislikes within the genre. Siegel like other fans wrote letters to the pulps and corresponded privately with other letter writers. In 1929 he produced an early fan magazine, fanzine, *Cosmic Stories* on his school’s mimeograph machine (albeit with a limited run of 10 copies). Most importantly Siegel staked his claim as a fan by advertising the fanzine in Gernsback’s *Science Wonder Stories*. Likewise in 1932 Siegel advertised his new fanzine in the science fiction pulps and arranged a deal with Mort Weisinger, another fanzine publisher, to cooperate on obtaining subscriptions. It was from this fan community that Siegel learned of Philip Wylie’s novel *Gladiator* , which with its ‘superhuman … man made out of iron’ certainly inspired Siegel’s ‘Reign of the Superman and his later Superman (Jones 2005: 34-37; 78; 346).

Siegel concluded ‘Reign of the Superman’ with his maniacal title character declaring, ‘If I had worked for the good of humanity, my name would have gone down in history with a blessing’. Taking his own words at face value Siegel in collaboration with Joe Shuster developed a comic strip version of a superhero character named Superman and shopped it around to various publishing syndicates. Eventually the nascent DC Comics picked up the character for a new comic book and the existing comic strip panels were rearranged for the debut issue in June 1938. The pair signed a standard contract transferring all rights to the publisher in return for a one-time payment of $130. My account here truncates a long drawn out process about which there are numerous conflicting accounts many of them emanating from a single source, Jerry Siegel. These accounts are as familiar to fans as the origins story of the character.

The origins of Superman lay then not just in science fiction, but within the science fiction fan community. Many, but not all of the pulp publishers, and fans that constituted science fiction entered the booming comic book market in the late 1930s. Mort Weisinger, and his associate Julius Schwartz, who had like Siegel been teenage science fiction fans, had in the years Siegel was shopping Superman become literary agents for science fiction writers. Weisinger used that experience into becoming the editor of *Wonder*. By 1941 he moved on and became an editor at DC. Schwartz joined him there in 1944. Weisinger was one of the first to parlay experience as a fan into a career. He had used his fan connections in science fiction with the field to coral a group of writers whose work he sold to editors of magazines who lacked experience in that genre. Although the publishers could not determine the culture of science fiction, fans who became professionals like Weisinger, not only held different parts of the community together in creative tension, but also established an industry model. Fans could aspire to be professionals. Fans who became professionals looked to the fan community for emerging talent.

How conscious comic book publishers in the 1940s were of the ability to engage fans in a social network is not entirely clear. Weisinger did not exactly engage fans. Rather he bullied and cajoled former fans who were now his writers including the unfortunate Jerry Siegel. But beginning in September 1958 Weisinger added a letters page to the numerous Superman comic books under his editorship. As Pete Coogan and Will Jacob and Gerard Jones have noted these pages were at the start childish in tone, but they did give Weisinger feedback from his readers. Moreover they, and the letters pages in other comics, lay the ground for the creation of an active self-conscious comic fandom. The story goes something like this: Fans began to write to DC Comics and because DC comics printed addresses they wrote directly to each other. These fans began publishing fanzines such as *Alter Ego* and one Roy Thomas joined Marvel Comics. Some of the most familiar comic book writers and artists of the late 1960s and 1970s moved from fan activities directly to being comic book professionals. In addition to Thomas this included Len Wein, Archie Goodwin, Marv Wolfman, Cary Bates, and Mike Friedrich (Coogan 2010: pp. 52-61).

But what I have in mind as a social network and discursive community would need to produce more than just a few professional writers. The letters page in the Superman comic offers strong evidence of this existing. I have done two samplings of the letters page in two comic books *Action Comics* and *Superman*. I conducted two separate reviews. In my first I took a very small sampling of the letters page in the *Superman* comic book once a year from September 1958 to 1978. Having done this survey and recognized some names I expanded my sample and looked at all the letters pages in both *Action Comics* and *Superman* from January 1967 to early 1977. There are some gaps in my survey most notably *Action Comics* August 1973 No. 426 - November 1974 No. 441, but nonetheless I looked at a large sample of a 1,000 letters. I chose these years for several reasons. Although in 1967 Mort Weisinger still edited the letters page soon after Julius Schwartz took them over and his letter's pages are often mentioned as something special in that letters became more thoughtful. I also wanted to go up to early 1977 publication dates to catch any letters that mentioned the bicentennial celebration of 1976 and DC's treatment of it; remember here that comics the July 1976 issues of both books appeared in April and the comic on the stands in July had a September cover date. As it turned out there was little of great significance in these letters but I had hoped for some reflection on Superman's importance to America. My third reason for looking at this period was that it covered a time when I read comics, stopped reading them as uncool, and then started reading them again.[1]

Readers' letters

Paul Levitz the long time DC employee and one time publisher estimated that in these years DC published between ten and twenty five percent of letters to the editor of superhero titles like *Superman*. Selection depended on volume of mail and the quality of letters and writing regularly was no guarantee of publication (Levitz 2011). Nonetheless ninety writers wrote over a third (352) of the 1000 letters I sampled. That is to say less than ten percent of writers wrote thirty five percent of the letters. The average number of letters published from this group of writers who had two or more letters published was almost four letters. Richard H. Morrissey with twenty-six letters over 8.75 years wrote the most letters and over the longest time. Guy Lillian III wrote two letters over 7.17 for the fewest number of letters published over the longest time. Lillian was more of a Flash fan. Twenty-three people had letters published over a space of more than two years. Seven wrote letters published over a time of more than five years. Forty-two people had more than two letters published and seven more than ten published. The average number of years over which this group wrote letters to these two comics was 1.55 years.

What these figures suggest is that the comic book fans letter writers were highly variegated. Most often letter writing was a singular event or at least once published it was unlikely that another letter would be published. On the evidence of published fan letters it would seem that writing such letters was also a short lived exercise for many fans since the average span of letter appearing is under two years. This tells us something of the letter writing/publishing experience as a fan activity, but it does not necessarily mean that fan activity was limited to such a time span since it is hard to establish any extended coloration between writing letters and reading and/or collecting comic books. Even so it is clear that for some of these comic book readers writing letters was part of a much broader engagement with comics.

My survey of published letters revealed a good number of names that comic book fans would recognize instantly. For instance in January 1968 the future creator of Cerebus the then eleven year old Dave Sim wrote from Kitchner, Ontario in Canada to *Superman* thanking DC on behalf of "all Canadian readers" for the images of the 1967 Montreal Expo as a fine tribute by DC to the Canadian centennial. A year earlier in January 1967 Mike Benton, then around seventeen years old, had a letter published commenting on a more action oriented story in *Superman* #190 October 1966, which unbeknown to him had been written by the fifteen year old wunderkind of comics, Jim Shooter, who some years later became editor in chief at Marvel. Benton may not be a name that is instantly familiar even to comic book fans. His *History of Comic Books* published in the early 1990s by the obscure Taylor Publishing of Dallas is nonetheless a reference source for a range of authors from Gerard Jones in his *Men of Tomorrow,* David Hajdu in *The Ten Cent Plague,* and Bradford Wright in *Comic Book Nation.* Benton currently runs a company called Custom Comic Services that provides propaganda comics to businesses and social causes (Weiland 1990; Bails 2006). Both men developed a professional life in comics albeit at different ends of the spectrum with Sim acclaimed by his peers as one of the greatest comics creators and Benton running a small publishing company.

Issue #359 of *Action Comics* in February 1968 contained letters from Dave Cockrum from San Diego, Tony Isabella from Cleveland, and Martin Pasko from Clifton, New Jersey. Although I have only found one letter each from Cockrum and Isabella in *Action* and *Superman*, all three were regular letter writers to comics. For instance, Cockrum and Isabella both wrote letters to Marvel's *Fantastic Four* and Pasko and Isabella wrote to *Daredevil* (Smith 1983). In their letters to *Action* Pasko asked who the new cover artist was (Neal Adams), Cockrum complained about Supergirl's hair style and Isabella welcomed the array of new foes for Superman and enjoyed an instance in which Superman thought before using his fists. There is nothing particularly startling about these letters. Such letters probably helped DC gauge the appeal of different artists and storylines. These letters would have helped letter writers and readers begin to get a sense of each other and to locate each other in a community of letter writers. Pasko and Isabella became comic book writers and Cockrum an artist best known for his work on X-Men.

The letters page then was a way into the profession. Others who appeared in the letters columns and went on to become writers and editors at DC include Mark Evanier (three letters), Martin Bob Rodi (eight), Bob Rozakis (ten), and Peter Sanderson (three). Evanier is widely known for crafting the letters page in *Groo the Wanderer*, which he co-writes, to the point where it is an inherent part of reading the comic. Elliot S. Maggin on the other hand wrote one letter to *Superman* #238 June 1971 and six months later in January 1972 had a Superman story published and went on to be one of the key writers of the comic book throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s. Letter writing was not a particular hallmark of talent. As a sixteen year old Frank Miller wrote one letter to the third issue of an obscure Marvel title, *The Cat*, in 1973 and only broke into comics in 1978 (Smith 1983). Not everyone who wrote to comics entered the profession. George Oildziey who went on to work as a composer and orchestrator mentioned in his July 1967 letter to *Action Comics* that he and four friends planned to name their group after a DC super-hero. Although Oildziey never worked in comics he worked on films such as *Spy Kids, Once Upon a Time in Mexico, Kill Bill, and Sin City*, all of which and most notable the last, have strong comic book influences and links.

Beppe Sabatini, another member of the letter writing community who aspired to work in comics, wrote several letters to both DC and Marvel. His letter in Superman # 328

October 1978 criticised the aforementioned Martin Pasko's use of Kryptonite as a plot device in Superman stories. I met Beppe in May 1985 when he worked at the Curious Bookshop in East Lansing, Michigan. It was at the time a bookshop that sold comics and later expanded opening a shop devoted solely to comics. Beppe who was attending Michigan State University worked in the store part time and aspired to be a comic book writer. He already had a story accepted by DC and had another coming out soon. That story appeared in *Action Comics* #572 October 1985. The key plot point was Superman's compassion. Beppe moved to California in 1986 where he wrote for several semi-professional fanzines and worked for Eclipse Comics. Eventually he completed a BA with a double major in Computer Science and Comparative Literature, May 1993 when he was 37. He now works as a software engineer (Bails 2006; Sabitini 2012). When I searched for Beppe's current details on the web I found a reference by Douglas Wolk, a writer who frequently does pieces on comics in the quality press, to Beppe once having been his boss. In an email to me in April 2010 Wolk explained that he worked at the Curious Bookshop for seven or eight years stocking shelves and the like. This history is a useful reminder of the way individuals and communities overlap and interact. Indeed as it happened I wrote a review of Wolk's 2008 collection *Reading Comics* and although I never harboured any sentiment to write comics I and many other scholars who write on comics run in the same crowd as the readers with that aspiration (Wolk 2010; Gordon 2008). The networks and communities shaped by writing letters were part of a broader array of comic book readers and did not exist in isolation from them, but rather as a set of practices that some readers engaged in.

Other figures like Richard Morrissey and Irene Vartanoff allow us to see some of the broader dimensions of those who wrote letters to Superman comics and the ways in which being part of the letter writing fan community shaped their lives. Morrissey was the most prolific of the letter writers to *Superman* and *Action* for which I have data. The first letter I found from Morrissey was in the June 1968 issue of *Action Comics*; the last in the February 1977 issue of *Superman*. I found twenty-six letters in all. Most likely there are more after my cut off date and possibly before and during. He was born January 23, 1954 and died May 22, 2001 aged 47. In his many letters to *Action* and *Superman* he took issue with misleading covers, poor inking of pencils, lazy plot devices, and recycled stories. He criticized hack writing and praised innovative stories that surprised him. That these were sometimes by the same writer mattered little to Morrissey whose interest was in the character and his representation not in star writers and artists. On the other hand he worked long and hard to discover who these anonymous writers and artists were and in his letter to *Action* # 422 March 1973 he wrote 'Leo Dorfman – along with Otto Binder, Robert Bernstein, Edward Hamilton and the other writers of the Weisinger era – deserve appreciation for their many years on anonymous, but sometimes brilliant efforts'.

As well as comic books Morrissey had an interest in the Wizard of Oz and participated in an online listserv fan community on Oz in the 1990s. In 1985 he had a letter published in the *New York Times* on Disney's adaption of one of the Frank Bum's other Oz works. He studied law but did not practice save to file a 1982 trademark registration for his friend Robert Jennings's fanzine *Comic World*.[2] Mostly he worked as a circuit designer according to the information he provided on the Oz Digest. There Morrissey described his reading and collecting of Frank Baum's Oz stories. But even in that forum fellow comic book readers and fans cropped up. On January 27, 1997 Morrissey wrote in reply to several posts and asked a question of a poster: 'Are you the same Dwayne Best who used to subscribe to *Batmania* when I published it? (Talk about fandom crossovers!)'. And Best replied two days later that indeed he was one in the same (Oz Digest 1997). In October 1996 Morrissey corrected a fellow Oz Digest member's account of a rhyming character that appeared in *Action Comics*. Morrissey also said he was working on a book about Superman and had 'talked to (I believe) all his living editors and most of his living writers and artists'. And Morrissey drew these comic book connections out further relating a Supergirl story from *Adventure Comics* #394 (1970) that clearly drew inspiration from the Wizard of Oz and Alan Moore's *Lost Girls*, which included a grown up Dorothy (Oz Digest 1996).

Fellow letter writers Mark Evanier and Tony Isabella wrote obituaries of Morrissey. Both noted that he did a lot of work in giving credit to earlier writers of comic books whose stories were un-credited. Evanier noted that despite selling a story or two to comic book publishers Morrissey realized his talents lay elsewhere. Morrissey wanted a life in comics and when he could not get that as a writer of comic books he found other ways to make his life in comics. For Morrissey much of that life was discovering who had written the anonymous stories he enjoyed in his youth and connecting those writers with fans. This process involved using social networks of fans that went as far on one occasion to raise funds from fans for an airfare for early DC writer John Broome to attend a comic con (Isabella 2001; Evanier 2001).

Irene Vartanoff wrote many letters during the 1960s, and my research only captured the tail end of her letter-writing career. The first I found as a letter in the February 1967 issue of *Action* and the last I found in the October 1970 issue of *Action*. She was in College when her first letter was published in 1967 but earlier she had sent notes to DC and even submitted a Lois Lane story to Mort Weisinger in 1965. Indeed she had also been invited to the DC office in New York and had a VIP tour when still in high school. But when she asked Julius Schwartz for a job as a writer he told her to go home and get married; advice that did not sit well. Vartanoff sold some stories to DC, but only one seems to have been published in *Young Romance* in May 1972 (Vartanoff 2010). From 1974 to 1980 she worked for Marvel in editorial and then left for DC where she worked until1982 leaving to work as an editor on romance novels (Vartanoff 2010). She now writes romance novels.

In June 1970 *Action Comics* # 389 published a letter from the fourteen year old Alvin Yellon of Highland Park, Illinois complaining that the letters column was "monopolized" by Vartanoff and others because the editor had a bias for "intellectual" letters. In her letter in Action #393 October 1970 Vartanoff took Yellon to task for this assertion. She informed him, and the collective readership, that her and other letters were chose because:

> We *work* on them. We take the time to be legible, coherent, polite, humorous, and, hopefully, intelligent. All that isn't enough, though. Plenty of "intellectual" letters never make the columns. If someone else happens to write a more thought-provoking letter that month, ours are rejected with the same indifference, as would be a smudgily penciled, unsigned 'I hate your mag' card. Those are the breaks.

What Yellon may have thought of this take down is unknown since he never seems to have written to a comic again rather shifting his attention to *Sports Illustrated* where he had a letter published on May 20, 1974 (Yellon 1974). But the exchange led to further letters and showed something of the letter writers awareness of each other and their engagement with the letters column that I think is fair to call a discursive community.

In *Action* #395 December 1970 Arelene Lo dedicated a poem to Yellon and his ilk who she suggested if "not a master of the written word, or a great literary critic who can point out obscure parallels or do detailed character analysis" then they might try some doggerel verse such as her that began:

> A pox on Martin Pasko
> A plague on Irene V.
> And fie to all the other fans
> More fortunate than me

Action #397 February 1971 printed a letter from John Krzyston who praised Vartanoff as 'a legend in the comic world' and whose letters he always enjoyed with the October 1970 letter being no exception. The April 1971 issue of *Action* contained a letter from Martin Pasko who responded with his own poem name checking creators like Denny O'Neil, Mike Friedrich, Gardner Fox and John Broome, thanking Arlene Lo, and saying it was time for a change of subject before someone like Yellon wrote again. But the last word went to William Blau who in the August issue used this chain of letters to suggest that DC should try to improve on the four month lag in publishing letters of comment on a particular issue. His complaint was that unless "you save back issues" such matters were hard to follow. This exchange of letters shows a community of readers and letter writers highly aware of each other and at very least able to identify frequency of letters published and the qualities of those letters. Moreover Blau's letter raises the issue of a reader and letter writer who may not have been a collector.

Sometimes letter writers regretted their earlier criticism. Joe Peluso who wrote ten letters between 1971 and 1975 and who now owns the Mint Condition Comics & Baseball Cards store in Port Washington, New York seemed to do so. In his letter printed in *Action* #401 June 1971 Peluso criticized an Imaginary Story. Although in that letter he did not mention the story author by name in a follow-up letter in October 1971 he felt like a 'heel' for his comments and admitted that Leo Dorfman had done a good job with another story.

Mark Lucke from Beeville, Texas who wrote seven letters between December 1971 and August 1973 also had second thoughts on passing judgment about a Dorfman story saying in a follow-up letter in *Action* #408 January 1972 that he did not mean to 'put Leo Dorfman down' in an earlier letter to *Action*. Such decisions may have followed having letters printed and a recognition that a sharp tongue may get you published, but may not get you friends. Or it may simply be that on reflection these two fifteen year olds, at the time, thought themselves too harsh on Dorfman.

The letter writers

The career of letter writers beyond their letter writing days is varied. Of those that I can find Guy Lillian III is now a defense attorney in Shreveport LA. He moved from being a letter writer from Walnut, California to an editorial assistant in New York and then like so many others on to something else. He publishes the science fiction fanzine *Challenger* and writes about comics there from time to time (Vartanoff 2010). Other earlier letters writers such as Gerard Triano, who wrote fifteen letters between 1970 and 1973, maintain an interest in some form of publishing. Triano works as an accountant for a publisher and reviews books on Amazon. Gary Skinner who wrote thirteen letters between 1968 and 1972 seems to still be an active comic book fan in his local community. And Clint Thomas who wrote twelve letters between 1973 and 1975 is a journalist in West Virginia where he grew up (Lillian 2009; Triano 2000; Rhodes 2005; Thomas 2012).

In a 2009 interview Vartanoff reflected on this period:

> My generation of comic book fans had no comic book stores to go to, so we met each other through letter columns, fanzines, and conventions, which started quite small and thus were great breeding grounds for friendships. My first convention was in 1966, and I made lifelong friendships there. I also corresponded regularly with lots of comics fans, mostly male of course. Many of my comics friends were determined to break into the business, and they lived in the New York metro area. We kept in touch with each other and invited others into our circle. And we made connections with editors, whom we besieged with story ideas and samples while we were still in college (Vartanoff 2009).

Not all the letter writers were part of this circle, but it certainly shaped a community. Peter Sanderson offers much evidence of this case. The October 1976 issue of *Superman* #304 carried Sanderson's letter complementing the Imaginary Story that appeared in issue 300. For Sanderson part of the appeal of this story by Elliot S. Maggin and Cary Bates was that it 'presented an argument against people being dependant on heroes'. Twenty three years old at the time of writing the letter Sanderson noted that he gave up reading Superman comics "many years ago" which suggests as much precociousness as many of the other letter writers. Nonetheless he displays a good deal of familiarity with the character and must have recommenced reading it sometime in between especially since he had a letter published in *Superman* #291 September 1975 and another letter in *Action* # 448 June 1975. In addition to writing to Superman Sanderson wrote to numerous other DC Comics and also had over twenty letters published in various Marvel comics (Smith 1983). Sanderson used the knowledge gathered through these activities to gain positions with both DC and Marvel Comics in the early to mid-1980s when he worked on producing guides to the characters of the two comic universes. Sanderson studied at Columbia University earning his BA and an MA and a MPhil in English Literature. In May 2010 Chronicle Books published his book *Obsessed with Marvel*, which covers Marvel Comics' entire history from 1939.

Sanderson wrote some 9,000 words on his blog about the memorial service held for Julius Schwartz in Manhattan on 18 March 2004. He noted that among the many writers and editors of comics who paid tribute so too did fans. Towards the end of the memorial there 'came another message from an absent mourner, a surprising voice from the past. In the 1960s there was a small, prolific cadre of writers who regularly turned up in Julie Schwartz's letter columns, the fan critics with the most incisive and stylishly written LOCs (Letters of Comment). The foremost of these writers, the dean of LOC correspondents, was the erudite and aristocratically named Guy H. Lillian III. I've never met him, and he was not there, but he had sent in a LOC, by e-mail'. And after the memorial Sanderson was part of 'a group that decamped to a nearby restaurant for lunch, and ended up sitting across from, and meeting for the first time, Irene Vartanoff, another of the leading lights of the Silver Age Schwartz lettercols. As a fan, I greatly admired Irene's work as I did Lillian's and others, and was thrilled when Julie began printing my letters regularly, too, elevating me into this honorable circle. … that I should finally meet Irene, finally put a face and voice to the name, at the memorial for the man we both wrote letters to decades ago. Irene made the point that Julie was our editor, too: that we knew we had to meet his high standards, to do our best work writing these reviews of his books, in order that he would print them in his letter columns. She's right, and those letters were not just my first published work, but my first works of comics criticism. I went on to do more such work, in those oxymoronic entities, professional fanzines, which led in large part to my many years of work chronicling continuity for the Big Two, Marvel and DC, a satisfying way to make a living until recent years' (Sanderson 2004).

All this might seem like I am a little late to the party of scholars who work on audiences, readers, and fans. So let me come back to my starting point, which was why did people read Superman comics. The letters pages do not provide answers for why all the readers, but for a group of readers reading the comics involved being part of a community, I have called it a social network and a discursive community. Tracing that discourse and the exact nature of the networks is a large task and this article is just a small part of what that would entail. One important things that stands out to me is that where I have been able to find information it seems that this engagement has been life-long; if not always to comics then to associated fields like publishing. For instance, the February 1968 issue of *Action Comics* that contained letters from Martin Pasko, Tony Isabella, and Dave Cockrum also included a letter from Matt Huber from Brazil, Indiana, among others and I was able to find some information about him. In the same year he wrote to *Action* Huber joined the Brazil Concert Band and he is as at mid-2012 its Musical Director. The Band dates back to 1858 and played for the Lincoln-Douglas debates. To be sure the comic letter writing community does not have that pedigree, but as I drew close to finishing this piece I wondered about Huber and his comic reading experience and I emailed him at the address for the Brazil Concert Band. Two and a half hours later I received his reply complete with detail of his comic book reading experience. Huber retired after teaching in public schools for thirty-three years. His father a Popeye fan got him started on comics as a pre-schooler. He commenced reading DC Superman comics in elementary school, and of the Marvel Comics only read *Sgt Fury*. He bought comics weekly through high school, but ceased in 1971 when he commenced college. Around the time he wrote the letter to *Action* Huber and a friend between them purchased the bulk of another older student's collection. Huber keeps his comics in acid proof covers in acid proof boxes and the friend who sold him some of the collection still wishes he had not done so. Although he long ago stopped reading comic books he recently purchased a replacement copy of *Superman Annual* #1 from August 1960 because his existing copy had lost its cover. In the previous week he had shared his comic book collection with a band mate who teaches a course on comics at DePauw University. He continues to read comic strips and likes older strips like Beetle Bailey, but also enjoys Mutts and Zits. Although he stopped reading comic books Huber remains connected to them through his collection (Huber 2012). This might seem simply a remnant of youth preserved as nostalgia, and yet Huber took the time on a Saturday morning to reply to a stranger's inquiry about a letter written over forty years ago. His willingness to share his collection and to discuss comic book readership by email seem to me hallmarks of community and discourse. To return to Gabilliet's reminder about the variegated experience of comic book readers, Huber was a reader, is a collector, and remains a member of a social network engaged in discussions about comics. I was excited, but not surprised, to receive Huber's response so quickly. Indeed so sure was I that he would reply that I had begun this passage of the article at the same time as composing my email to him. And of course he replied because he is a fan. And, as small as it may seem, that is just my point.

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Notes:

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[1] Three Excel spreadsheets of my data and ways in which I aggregated it are available for download here (EDITORS INSERT LINK). Please cite this article if you use this data.

[2] http://www.seravia.com/trademark/united-states/jennings-robert-the-comic-world-1qj9lsqvg (accessed June 21, 2011).

Instead of social networking users can decide to subscribe respectively to follow or unsubscribe respectively to unfollow a certain pinboard. Nevertheless, due to the similarities to microblogging Arinia can be considered a very near relative of the web 2.0 tool. Therefore, insights from this particular case study could provide valuable implications for microblogging research Usage behavior: the information food chain Arinia is an integral part of the company s communication and information management architecture.Â Although there are some cross-sectional pinboards the whole company and therefore Arinia is organized towards the customer. The sales persons create a pinboard when they first gain deeper contact with a prospective customer. Writing to Superman: Towards an understanding of the social networks of comic-book fans. I Gordon. Participations 9 (2), 120-132, 2012. 8. 2012. Mass Market Modernism: Comic Strips and the Culture of Consumption. I Gordon. Australasian Journal of American Studies 14 (2), 49-66, 1995. 7. 1995. From The Bulletin to Comics: Comic Art in Australia, 1890-1950. I Gordon. Bonzer: Australian Comics, 1900s-1990s, 1-14, 1999. 6*. 1999.Â 1991. Refiguring media: Tee shirts as a site of audience engagement with superheroes. I Gordon. The Information Society 32 (5), 326-332, 2016. 4. 2016. Culture of consumption: Commodification through" Superman: Return to Krypton". I Gordon. Critical Approaches to Comics: Theories and Methods, 157-166, 2012. 4. 2012. The Comics of Charles Schulz collects new essays on the work of the creator of the immensely popular Peanuts comic strip. Despite Schulz's celebrity, few scholarly books on his work and career have been published. This collection serves as a foundation for future study not only of Charles Schulz (1922-2000) but, more broadly, of the understudied medium of newspaper comics. Schulz's Peanuts ran for a half century, during which time he drew the strip and its characters to express keen observations on postwar American life and culture. As Peanuts' popularity grew, Schulz had opport