

Evaluating the Influences of Fredric Wertham and *Seduction of the Innocent* to Establish Their  
Relation to Contemporary and Cold War Period Mass Media Regulation

AP Research

May 2, 2019

Word Count: 4989

### Abstract

Minimal research has been conducted pertaining to Fredric Wertham and his relation to the field of mass communication. This lack of scholarly research has provided a gap in the historical development of mass communications, and the differentiation of psychiatric and psychoanalytical based studies to empirical and survey-based studies. Bart Beaty's dissertation *All Our Innocences: Fredric Wertham, Mass Culture and the Rise of the Media Effects Paradigm, 1940 - 1972* (1999) addresses this gap and its relation to Fredric Wertham, and it serves as the primary basis for this study. The purpose of this study is to determine and examine the influences of Fredric Wertham's *Seduction of the Innocent* (1954) and compare them to both Cold War and contemporary mass communication and media theories. This study will identify and examine influences in the three categories: political, social, and psychological. Once divided into the three categories, influences were eliminated through a process based on the General Elimination Methodology, and compared to contemporary mass communication studies as well as Cold War era studies. The study identified nine total influences, and upon comparison identified influences of psychological basis were not identifiable within both contemporary and Cold War mass media regulation comparison. Despite the psychological influences being disregarded in traditional mass communication research, *Seduction of the Innocent* was determined to fit within the scope of mass communications.

### Introduction

Mass culture from postwar United States and its relation to Fredric Wertham's *Seduction of the Innocent* (1954) serve as the primary basis for this study. Despite significant influence throughout the twentieth century, Fredric Wertham is a largely disregarded historical figure. Wertham practiced as the psychiatrist whose insight served fundamental in the ruling of court cases including *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) and the espionage case of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg (1950-1953). Moreover, Wertham proved progressivist in the treatment of racial minorities, as he founded the LaFargue Clinic (1946), the first African American psychiatric facility located in Harlem, New York. However, the research methodology and flawed conclusions Wertham utilized in *Seduction of the Innocent* to claim comic books cause juvenile delinquency left Wertham castigated by researchers until well after his death.

Wertham's omission from the history of mass communications is largely in part due to the majority of scholarship consisting of the denunciation of the experimental methodology utilized in *Seduction of the Innocent* rather than the literature's place in the larger scope of mass communications. The first denunciation of *Seduction of the Innocent* occurs in Joseph Klapper's (1960) *The Effects of Mass Communication* in which he declares Wertham "provides no acceptable scientific evidence for his ascription of comic book influence" and this claim set precedent for the scholarly review of Wertham's work (1960, n.p.). Despite evident clinical errors in Wertham's study, the clinical methodology Wertham provides is largely denounced due to the lack of empirical data which became legitimized in Cold War era America as an attempt to eliminate public anxiety from social change in mass media.

The acceptance of Wertham's methodology to be primarily based on falsifications and a lack of empirical data allowed for researchers to interpret Wertham as a McCarthyite or reactionist to social changes. As a result, Wertham was widely regarded by comic book fans as the cause of the Comics Code Authority, implemented in 1954 in response to Wertham's testimony in a collection of comic book hearings. Despite Wertham publicly stating "...I detest censorship" in a Senate Subcommittee Hearing on April 21, 1954, he was characterized as a reactionary bent on the censorship of large media conglomerates rather than a researcher concerned with the implications of mass media on society.

### **Literature Review**

Research pertaining to Wertham's *Seduction of the Innocent* consists of scholars who misunderstood Wertham's stance towards mass culture and mass communications. The initial scholarly works addressing *Seduction of the Innocent* characterize Wertham as a comic book censor. This classification of censor has resulted in many studies disregarding Wertham's relation to mass communications. For instance, Jed Rasula (1990) in his research addressing mass culture and Wertham's question: "How did Nietzsche get into the nursery?" discusses Wertham in relation to Norbert Muhlen, a Cold War era comic book researcher, as a means to denounce Wertham's methodology and support the flawed claim Wertham's motivation was "to exterminate the comic book industry" (p. 64). Rasula's analysis involves an overreliance on the basis Wertham despised the comic book industry, albeit likely true. Rasula characterizes this distaste to be purely censorship due to the flaws in the execution of Wertham's study rather than establish its presence within the mass communications literature. "The hysteria of a Fredric Wertham," and the characterization of Wertham as a McCarthyist reactionary is evident in both

studies following and preceding it (Rasula, 1990, p. 72). For instance, Amy Kiste-Nyberg (1998) approaches Wertham and *Seduction of the Innocent* through the establishment of the work's relation to the scope of mass communications, but similarly to Rasula she argues Wertham's primary incentive was censorship. Furthermore, James Gilbert (1986), a primary influence of Nyberg's work, approaches Wertham in his book, *A Cycle of Outrage*, to determine how Wertham, a well-established media critic, fell to irrelevancy after *Seduction of the Innocent*. Gilbert's work offers one of the initial scholarly attempts to characterize Wertham within the scope of mass communications, and his research presents the belief Wertham's prominence arose due to the cyclic nature of moral panic towards mass culture.

The primary discussion of Fredric Wertham and his influences and their relation to the scope of mass communications has been conducted by Bart Beaty. *Fredric Wertham and the Critique of Mass Culture* (2005) is currently the only true biographical literature pertaining to Wertham and his life. Beaty establishes the influences and ideologies behind Wertham's work through his background as a psychiatrist as well as through the establishment of his research in context with mass communications. Beaty's study prior to his book, his 1999 dissertation, is an examination of Wertham's omission from the mass communication field just after the publication of *Seduction of the Innocent*. The purpose of this research is to demonstrate in order for the mass communications field to establish legitimacy, research that did not conform to their standards of empirical based studies was disregarded. However, the study examines Wertham's work through its methodology and its comparison to other Cold War mass communications studies. In fact, Beaty emphasizes "despite the important contributions that psychiatry and psychoanalysis have made to the development of communications, the clinical method has never

been regarded as scientifically rigorous enough to qualify as valid in the eyes of media effects researchers” (1999, p. 12). With Bart Beaty’s research pertaining primarily to Wertham’s methodology and being omitted from the mass communications field, there is a gap within the current literature in relation to the influences of Fredric Wertham’s *Seduction of the Innocent* and how they fit within the scope of mass communications including both contemporary and Cold War era scholarship.

### **Question**

What social, political, and psychological factors identifiable within the published and unpublished work of Fredric Wertham can be effectively established as influences for his book, *Seduction of the Innocent*? How do these influences compare to both contemporary and Cold War methodologies of mass communication regulation?

### **Method**

Anecdotal data was collected through the examination of Fredric Wertham’s published and unpublished work with the intention of identifying potential influences. The two primary sources of data were *Seduction of the Innocent* and documents from the Fredric Wertham collection at the Library of Congress. Further data was gathered from multiple recorded interviews or accounts of Wertham on public record including his congressional testimony pertaining to the censorship of comic books in 1954. The data was categorized into the three categories: political, social, and psychological.

The initial data collection operated under the General Elimination Methodology which is comprised of two stages: identification of possible explanations and the ruling out of explanations. This methodology was utilized due to the amount of data collected and the

necessity to eliminate a majority of the data. The lack of empirical data and statistics also required a methodology applicable to anecdotal data lacking association to statistical values. Furthermore, the General Elimination Methodology is a data collection technique used in the measurement of influence, primarily without the association of empirical scales or models.

The remaining influences then underwent a comparative analysis to both contemporary and Cold War era mass communication studies. The influences of Fredric Wertham and *Seduction of the Innocent* were evaluated and compared under Denis McQuail's (2010) reasons contemporary media is regulated. McQuail authored *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory* (1983) and functioned as a foundational researcher in the mass communications field, so his reasons provide an accurate representation of contemporary beliefs for comparative analysis. The reasons are as follows:

1. The management of what is arguably the key economic resource in the emerging 'information society', with a very high dependence on all forms of communication.
2. The protection of public order and support for instruments of government and justice.
3. The protection of individual and sectional rights and interests that might be harmed by unrestricted use of public means of communication.
4. The promotion of the efficiency and development of the communication system, by way of technical standardization, innovation, connectivity and universal provision.
5. The promotion of access, freedom to communicate, diversity and universal provision as well as securing communicative and cultural ends chosen by the people for themselves.

6. Maintaining conditions for effective operation of free markets in media services, especially competition and access, protection of consumers, stimulating innovation and expansion (p. 3).

After a comparison and evaluation of the influences to the contemporary reasons for mass media regulation, the Wertham influences were evaluated for their relationship to the Social Responsibility Theory. The Social Responsibility Theory upholds the principle of freedom of speech, but also operates under the assumption media is responsible and acts according to the needs of the society. This theory was utilized for comparison due to its liberalism which offers a more representative comparison in regards to Wertham. Fredric Wertham's influences were evaluated and compared to the principles of the Hutchins Commission (1947), the foundational group of the Social Responsibility Theory. The principles of how mass media should operate are as follows:

1. Provide a truthfull, comprehensive, and intelligent account of the day's events in context, which gives them meaning.
2. Provide a forum for the exchange of comment and criticism.
3. Provide a representative picture of the constituent groups in society.
4. Be responsible for the presentation and clarification of the goals and values of society.
5. Provide full access to the day's intelligence (p. 113-114).

### **Results**

The General Elimination Methodology narrowed the potential influences to nine total influences divided into the three categories of political, social, and psychological. Anecdotal data



providing little to no recurrent ideas or thought processes were eliminated from consideration in the interest of determining the most accurate comparison to contemporary and Cold War era mass communication theories.

### **Political**

Despite initial research suggesting political ideologies and Cold War era hysteria being regarded as a focal point in the understanding of Fredric Wertham, there was little concrete evidence of political influences. Only one political influence was identified: Wertham's progressivist and liberal agenda. As Reibman (2004), describes him, Wertham is "a traditional left-wing European intellectual and the product of the Enlightenment tradition" (p. 11). James E. Reibman authors the introduction to the 2004 reprint of *Seduction of the Innocent* in which he provides analysis of the several influences of Fredric Wertham. In congruence with both progressivist and liberal ideologies, Wertham calls for reforms in relation to both the distribution and age requirements of acquiring and reading certain comic books. Contrarily to the largely conservative field of mass communications, Wertham includes direct calls for reform largely in the view of the public. The public audience of *Seduction of the Innocent* suggests Wertham's intention was to cause reform through the "Enlightenment tradition" of bettering society through the human attainment of knowledge.

Despite there being little political influence, it is necessary to note Fredric Wertham and *Seduction of the Innocent* largely ignore the elephant in the room, communism. Even though the Second Red Scare and the spread of McCarthyism occurs just prior to Wertham's research publication in 1954, Wertham chooses to ignore the topic entirely.

### **Social**

With the social influences possessing both the least constraints and the most frequency, large quantities of anecdotal data were eliminated from contention. Concepts including Wertham's claim comic books influence illiteracy, connection to Ralph Ellison and his novel *Invisible Man* (1952), and Wertham's distaste for the comic book medium were eliminated as potential influences. The General Elimination Methodology constrained the data to five influences which include the concepts of the innocent childhood and protecting the innocence of American children, childhood protections outweigh the complete full expression rights of the 1st Amendment right free speech, Herbert Gans' classic mass culture critique media harms the reader, the poor depiction of minorities in comic books, and the American child has been subjugated to a market.

Wertham's belief in an innocent childhood is a foundational principle recurrent throughout the text of *Seduction of the Innocent*. One of the primary intentions of his research was to inform the populous what their children were reading and consuming within comic books. On several accounts Wertham explicitly states a primary influence or motivation of the

publication of *Seduction of the Innocent* is to protect the well-being of children. For instance, in a letter to Frederic G. Melcher on Mar. 26, 1954 Fredric Wertham writes, "I am not interested at all in the comic book publishers, and only secondarily in comic books. What does concern me in my book *Seduction of the Innocent* is children and their mental health." While the validity of the first statement cannot be verified, the second sentence possesses particular interest because it draws comparison to similar statements Wertham released pertaining to his studies on comic books and juvenile delinquency. For instance, in an unpublished interview after Wertham's retirement he states, "My main interest is not in comic books or even mass media, but in children and young people" (Decker, 1987, n.p.). In other words, more than all else Fredric Wertham's study *Seduction of the Innocent* focuses on the well-being of children.

With similar regard to his emphasis on children, Wertham understood society's desire to protect and maintain an innocent childhood as more important than the infringement of the basic right, free speech. For instance, Reibman (2004) discusses how "the competing interests of unfettered free expression and responsible protection" of children was a focal point of Wertham's arguments established in *Seduction of the Innocent* (p. 31). Essentially, Wertham understood small restrictions to the 1st Amendment right of freedom of speech, as inconsequential to maintaining an innocent childhood. However, this influence as it pertains to Wertham and *Seduction of the Innocent* is very convoluted, as Wertham on several accounts explains he opposes censorship. The most prominent example being Fredric Wertham's reassurance to Congress during his testimony against comic books he opposed censorship. Despite these seemingly conflicting ideas, Wertham establishes he never advocated for outright

ensorship of the comic book industry, as he proposed reform and regulation of comic books for children as a means to uphold the protection of the American childhood.

Throughout the text of *Seduction of the Innocent* Wertham asserts the comic book medium possesses harmful effects against children. Often explaining comic books aid in the decline of literacy and are a primary cause of juvenile delinquency, Wertham utilizes Herbert Gans' second classic critique of mass culture, "it harms the reader" in conjunction with the third critique that "it harms society in general" (Beatty, 1999). The application of both these principles to the comic book medium allows for Wertham to establish comics as being a primary cause of juvenile delinquency. In fact, Wertham utilizes a description of a six panel sequence in an undisclosed comic book to emphasize both the tantalizing violence and the ability to cause illiteracy. He cites the sequence, "Zip! Crash! Sock! Splat! Bam! Smash!" to convey his reasons comic books are a detriment to society as well as the reader (Wertham, p. 8).

Throughout both his early psychiatric career and the text of *Seduction of the Innocent* Fredric Wertham illustrated reform calls for equal status and portrayal of all minorities. Wertham's opinions towards minorities evident through his foundation of the LaFargue Clinic (1946) establishes him as an early figure vouching for equal rights and the opposition of segregation. Wertham's view of minorities is largely opposed in their depiction within comic books. In fact, *Seduction of the Innocent* includes a specific panel depicting "frightened natives" and provides an image of two colored, indigenous people strung up by their hands on ropes

(Wertham, p. 194). Wertham's caption to the panel stating "corpses of colored people strung up by their wrists" suggests his discontent with the portrayal of the minority group (Appendix A).

In a 2005 debate with fellow comic book researcher Dr. Craig Fischer, Dr. Bart Beaty establishes "Wertham considered the commercial aspect of the comic book industry as its central vice" due to the establishment of the American child as a consumer (12/15/05). Wertham expresses this claim when he asserts "We have reduced children to a market" (As cited in Beaty, 2005). Wertham establishes the industry and comic book publishers as "a very small group of men [that] is lurking behind [a child] intent on getting most [of their] money away from [them]" (p. 254). Essentially, Wertham, like many Cold War era scholars, understood mass consumerism as a degradation of society under the determination corporate owners have a singular focus of profits. As a result of this determination, Wertham understood the comic book industry to be a product of mass culture which in his definition included little care for the mental well-being of the American public, primarily children.

### **Psychological**

Psychological influences for the purpose of this study, consist of psychiatric ideologies, Wertham's clinical research experience and its relation to children, and the practices of psychiatry and psychology during the Cold War era. Ideologies of foundational psychologists, Sigmund Freud and St. Augustine, were eliminated from the study due to limited relation to *Seduction of the Innocent* as a mass communications study. Through the General Elimination Method three psychological influences were identified. The three influences established were Wertham's understanding of violence in society being inherited rather than an innate human behavior, Wertham's desire to practice a form of psychology entitled "social psychiatry" as a

result of his clinical research, and Wertham's displeasure with the flawed psychiatric research supporting the comic book publishers.

The understanding violence is not innate and his inherited is foundational to Wertham's approach in *Seduction of the Innocent* (1954). The primary example being within the title, *Seduction of the Innocent*. Wertham utilizes the word seduction not only to attract his target audience, but as a means to express the American child is being corrupted by comic books to commit acts of juvenile delinquency. As a result, Wertham establishes violence is environment based, and thus, can be eliminated from society. His attacks of comic books and mass communications as a whole reflect this, as he aimed to eliminate violence from society. For instance, in his later published work, *A Sign for Cain* (1966) Wertham asserts society possesses the ability "to conquer and to abolish [violence]" (p. 374). Furthermore, in an unpublished lecture entitled *Human Violence and Society* Wertham discusses how human violence possesses great power and "occupies such a key position in the power structure of any society" because of its influence on both individuals exposed to direct violence as well as the society as a whole (n.d.). Wertham also exhibits opposition to the concept of "an inborn biologically fixed instinct of violence in man" because it "creates an entirely false and nihilistic destructive image of man" (p. 4). Rather he argues man has "the capacity and the physiological apparatus for violence" which further establishes Wertham's understanding of violence as an avoidable social construct (Wertham, p. 4)

The psychological influence, "social psychiatry," as Wertham termed it, functioned as the primary basis for Wertham's research methodology. In fact, Wertham outlines his intentions for the practice of social psychiatry with a paper entitled *Social Psychiatry* (Library of Congress).

Wertham's definition of the practice explained "social factors [are] to be studied by sociology and not psychologically" and emphasized "unsocial psychiatry gives people inferiority feelings" (n.p.). In other words, Wertham aimed to establish psychological practices in terms of society rather than establishing blame within the individual, a primary characteristic of the psychoanalytic approach prevalent during the Cold War. As a result, Wertham's methodology established itself within a middle ground failing to conform with either the mass communication field and Wertham's primary practice of psychiatry. For instance, Bart Beaty (2005) established the Cold War methodologies for research were experimental lab studies and surveys involving the completion of punchcards (Beaty Fischer Debate, 12/15/05). Beaty further explains Wertham's skepticism of these methodologies, hence his reliance on "social psychiatry." Moreover, Wertham's desire to practice "social psychiatry" stemmed from his clinical experience with juvenile delinquents. For instance, in a 1969 letter communication with Dwight Decker, publisher of the Fanzine "Torch," Wertham expressed how he attempted to "prevent young people from being sent to reformatories where they are often very badly treated," and how he "also helped a number of young people so they were not sent to the electric chair" (1969). As a result, the practice of "social psychiatry" served focal in the establishment of the research methodology as well as the target audience of *Seduction of the Innocent*.

Another fundamental influence in the writing of the *Seduction of the Innocent* is Wertham's opposition to the psychiatric practice in support of the mass media conglomerate, the comic book industry. Similar to his opposition to mass media, Wertham opposes the psychiatric practice backing the industry for their flawed practice and support of a negative media portrayal of their field. For instance, the comic book industry cites paid researchers to establish legitimacy,

and with Wertham's research contradicting their claims of no harm to children he goes as far to assert, "I have a hard time understanding how any doctor or child expert or psychologist can put his name to that" (Congressional Testimony, 1954). Furthermore, Wertham demonstrates significant opposition to the portrayal of psychological and doctoral practices within comic books themselves, as he cites the cover of *Crime Detective Comics #9* (Appendix B). The cover depicts a criminal robbing the office of a psychiatric practitioner, with the criminal being discovered by the police, and he exclaims, "But--I tell ya I came here becuz I was thinking about my mind!" (Wertham, 1954, p. 204). Wertham suggests clear disapproval with the depiction of his professional practice with the citing of this particular panel within the text. As a result, Wertham establishes the flawed psychiatric practice supporting the comic book industry as a forefront issue addressed within *Seduction of the Innocent*.

### **Discussion**

After the identification of the ten influences, each were compared to Denis McQuail's (2010) reasons for mass media regulation and the Social Responsibility Theory as established by the Hutchins Commission (1947).

### **Contemporary Comparison**

Upon comparison to the contemporary guidelines outlined by Denis McQuail (2010), Wertham's three psychiatric influences are largely ignored in contemporary beliefs of mass media regulation, but Wertham's aim to protect the American child and minorities is largely reflected within the current understanding of mass communications. For the purposes of this study, the primary comparison was completed with guidelines 2, 3, 5, and 6 due to their relevance to Wertham's form of mass communication.



Through the identification of influences with the General Elimination Methodology, it was revealed Fredric Wertham had several biases pertaining to his research primarily within the influences categorized as psychological. As a result of both some considerable bias and the limited influence of psychology on contemporary mass communications, two of three psychiatric influences were not identifiable within any of McQuail's (2010) reasons for regulating mass media. Wertham's influences of "social psychiatry" and his opposition to the flawed psychiatric practice of the comic book industry are very selective and reflective of the bias prevalent in *Seduction of the Innocent* and consequently not observable in McQuail's (2010) reasons for regulation. In accordance with Bart Beaty (1999), the psychiatric methodology does not conform to traditional forms of mass communications. However, Wertham's reliance on environmental influences, as he applied to violence, is addressed in Reason 3 which states, "The protection of individual and sectional rights and interests that might be harmed by unrestricted use of public means of communication" (McQuail, p. 3). Simply stated, modern mass communications operates under the understanding mass media, an environmental factor, can influence the user negatively as Herbert Gans' classic mass culture critique suggests. Despite Wertham's bias in his overreliance of environmental factors, he effectively understood a primary concern of mass communications is the effect on the audience.

Wertham's emphasis on the social impact the comic book has on the American child is reflective of the regulations instituted in contemporary mass communications. Similarly, Wertham's progressivist view towards social minorities within mass media is demonstrated in protections of contemporary mass communications. For instance, both minorities or children could be applied to the general regulation, Reason 3, because as Wertham presented both of their

rights were infringed upon within comic books (McQuail, p. 3). Although McQuail (2010) never explicitly states willingness to restrict the 1st Amendment right, he does not suggest direct opposition. As a result, Wertham's research is reflective of the protection of individual rights of all peoples. However, McQuail's (2010) reasoning for mass media regulation does directly counteract one of Wertham's social influences. Wertham's opposition to the subjugation of the American child to a market is directly refuted by Reason 6 which consists of "maintaining conditions for effective operation of free markets" and "protection of consumers" (McQuail, p. 3). Simply stated, current mass communication regulation consists of encouraging capitalist consumerism even if the target consumer is the American child.

Despite some of the guidelines in McQuail's (2010) reasoning containing diction suggesting compliance with Wertham's liberalism, there is no explicit statements suggesting reform. In fact, the reforms Wertham asks for in *Seduction of the Innocent* have been implemented, so the guidelines do not demonstrate political party influence. The only reference to politics is in Reason 2, and it only states mass media is regulated with the intention of maintaining public order (McQuail, p.3). As a result, Wertham's limited political influence is not reflected within contemporary mass media regulation.

### **Cold War Comparison**

The Social Responsibility Theory as defined by the Hutchins Commission (1947) is representative of Wertham's political liberalism as well as his emphasis on protecting the youth and social minorities. However, it ignores the psychological influences which possess significant bias to Wertham's individual agenda.

Wertham's political liberalism and call for reform is foundational within the principles of the Social Responsibility Theory. In fact, the concept of media producers accepting responsibility for their impact on society involves governmental involvement rather than more conservative ideals of limited government and laissez faire economics. Wertham's liberalism involved with the wider target audience of *Seduction of the Innocent* is also reflected with the Hutchins Commission (1947) guidelines because Reason 2 calls for "a forum for the exchange of comment and criticism" which accurately defines the intentions of Wertham's research (p. 113-114). In a sense, Wertham's political liberalism evident within *Seduction of the Innocent* is reflective of the Social Responsibility Theory, as the theory is liberal in nature.

Wertham's desire to protect both children and social minorities is reflected within the Social Responsibility Theory, as the theory's primary intention is to maintain social order and stability within a society. For instance, both Reason 3, "provide a representative picture of the constituent groups in society," and Reason 4, "Be responsible for the presentation and clarification of the goals and values of society" suggest the protection of individual rights in accordance with the needs of social stability (p. 113-114). The "constituent groups" as stated include the children and minorities Wertham discusses, and the demand for a "representative picture" is in accordance with Wertham's opposition to the depiction of minorities in the "Frightened Natives" panel (Appendix A). Moreover, the Social Responsibility Theory's purpose of maintaining social order in accordance to the needs of society and the government suggests support of Wertham's belief in restricting the 1st Amendment right. Despite the Social Responsibility Theory possessing many similar intentions, it never addresses Wertham's concepts of subjugating the American child to a market as well as the mass media critique media

harms the reader. The Social Responsibility predominantly acts in accordance with Fredric Wertham's social influences regarding the protection of individual rights through regulation.

Similarly to both Bart Beaty's findings and the comparison to contemporary mass media regulation, the three psychological influences are not present within the Social Responsibility Theory. As a result of both individual biases, Wertham's opposition to the psychiatric practice in support of the comic book industry and social psychiatry were not identifiable. Furthermore, Wertham's belief of violence to be inherited and his reliance on environmental factors as causation are simply not addressed within the Hutchins Commission (1947) definition.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to establish the influences of Fredric Wertham and *Seduction of the Innocent*, and to determine their place within the scope of mass communications. The study resulted in the identification of nine influences: one political, five social, and three psychological. Upon comparison of these influences to contemporary and Cold War mass media regulations, it was determined the psychological influences are largely more reflective of personal bias than mass media practices. However, multiple foundational concepts exemplify Wertham's work to be relevant within the context of mass communications. For example, both the Social Responsibility Theory and McQuail (2010) complied with Wertham's emphasis on the protections of individual rights of children and minorities. The Social Responsibility Theory also reflected Wertham's liberalism. Furthermore, within the context of mass communication Wertham serves as an example of the ever more prevalent problem of flawed research and information. All in all, despite Wertham's research consisting of bias and flaws, both which have been researched heavily, the social influences of *Seduction of the*

*Innocent* (1947) and their compliance with traditional mass media regulation should be noted, as Wertham's study serves as an essential study within the larger scope of mass communication.

### **Future Research**

With limited evidence of political influence on Wertham being identified, future research could focus on the political aspects of *Seduction of the Innocent* and their relation to the study of mass communication. In an in depth analysis, the reasons the threat of Communism is omitted from Wertham's work could be identified. Another avenue of research could be a more in depth discussion of Wertham's opposition of child capitalist markets and determine how these markets are reflected within the field of mass communication.

### **Limitations**

The primary limitations concerning this research were the limited access to the Library of Congress Fredric Wertham Collection, as access to the collection was limited to the digitized documents. Further limitation occurred with efforts to conduct interviews with contemporary scholars, as scheduling conflicts caused any additional scholarly insight from being achieved. Moreover, the study was limited to comparison of one Cold War mass communications theory, so the comparative analysis may not be reflective of the whole scope of postwar mass communications.

## References

- Beatty, B.H., (2005). *Fredric wertham and the critique of mass culture*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.
- Beatty, B.H. (1999). *All our innocences: Fredric wertham, mass culture and the rise of the media effects paradigm, 1940 - 1972* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). McGill University, Montreal, Canada.
- Bernard, W. (2013). *Warren Bernard's Citations and Fredric Wertham Documents*. Retrieved from <http://www.tcj.com/warren-bernard-1954/>
- California. (1954). Hearings before the subcommittee to investigate juvenile delinquency of the committee on the judiciary united states senate eighty-third congress. *Investigation of juvenile delinquency in the united states*, 2(89), 1-446. Retrieved from <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=umn.31951d02113184b;view=1up;seq=7>
- Chapter 3 Literature Review: Social Responsibility. (2011). *Shodhganga*, 107-155. Retrieved from [http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/61314/10/10\\_chapter%203.pdf](http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/61314/10/10_chapter%203.pdf)
- Cloutier, J.C. (2010). The comic book world of ralph ellison's the invisible man. *A forum on fiction* (pp. 294-319). Durham: Duke University Press.

- Cuilenburg, J. & McQuail, D. (2003). Media policy paradigm shifts: Towards a new communications policy paradigm. *European Journal of Communication*, Vol 18(2): 181–207. Retrieved from [www.sagepublications.com](http://www.sagepublications.com)
- Decker, D. (1997). Fredric wertham- Anti-comics crusader who turned advocate. In *The art bin*. Retrieved from <https://art-bin.com/art/awertham.html>
- Gilbert, J. (1986). *A cycle of outrage: America's reaction to the juvenile delinquent in the 1950s*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hajdu, D. (2008). *The ten cent plague: The great comic-book scare and how it changed america*. New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux.
- Let's you and him fight: Fredric wertham and the critique of mass culture*. (2005). Retrieved from <http://www.comicsreporter.com/index.php/briefings/commentary/3607/>
- Lost seduction of the innocent*. (2019). Retrieved from <http://www.lostsoti.org/>
- Manuscript Division, U.S. Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (2010). *Fredric wertham papers* [Data set]. Retrieved from <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/eadmss.ms010146>
- McQuail, D. (2010). Module 2: unit 11: media regulation. *Department of Media & Communication Attenborough Building University of Leicester University Road Leicester, LE1 7RH*, 2 (11), 1-30. Retrieved from

[https://www2.le.ac.uk/projects/oer/oers/media-and-communication/copy\\_of\\_media-history-and-social-regulation-mod-2-unit-11](https://www2.le.ac.uk/projects/oer/oers/media-and-communication/copy_of_media-history-and-social-regulation-mod-2-unit-11)

Rasula, J. (1990). Nietzsche in the nursery: Naive classics and surrogate parents in postwar american cultural debates. *Representations*, 29. 50-77. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2928418>

Reibman, J.E. (Ed.) (2004). Introduction. *Seduction of the innocent*

Tsui, J., & Lucas, B. (2013). Methodologies for measuring influence. *GSDRC*, 1-12.

Wertham, F. (1954). Letter to Frederic G. Melcher on Mar. 26, 1954. *Library of Congress*. 37. Retrieved from <http://www.tcj.com/warren-bernard-1954/>

Wertham, F. (1954). *Seduction of the innocent*. New York: Rinehart and Company.

Wertham, F. (1966). *A sign for cain*. London, England: MacMillan Publishing Company.

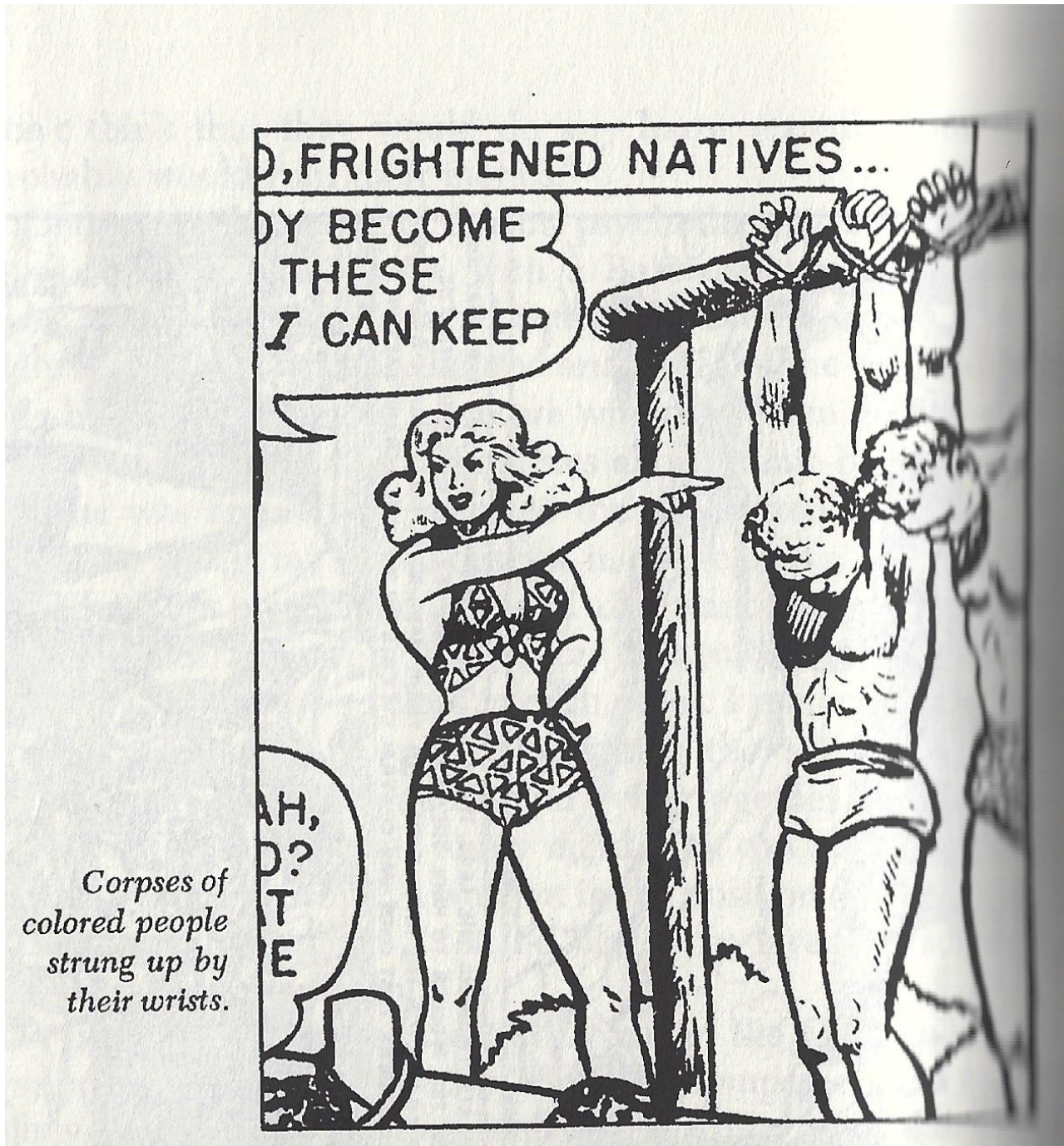
Wertham, F. (n.d.). Human Violence and Society (Unpublished). *Library of Congress*, n.p.. Retrieved from <http://www.tcj.com/warren-bernard-1954/>

Wertham, F. (n.d.). Social psychiatry. *Library of Congress*, n.p. Retrieved from <http://www.tcj.com/warren-bernard-1954/>



Appendix A

*Seduction of the Innocent* (1954) page 194, "Frightened Natives" Panel



Appendix B

*Seduction of the Innocent* (1954) page 204, "Crime Detective Comics #9" Cover

