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Powerful Marginality:

Feminist Scholarship through Comics [Transcript]

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❖

PAGE 1

This article examines how the comics medium can be used to address epistemological, rhetorical, and representational concerns raised by feminist scholars. Drawing together feminist studies and comics studies theories, I examine how the storytelling tools of the comics medium can create reflexive and situated narratives that make visible the relationship between the reader, the writer, and the text. Building on a growing body of scholarship presented in comics form, I develop my argument through both comics and prose. Through this graphic argument, I explore potential points of connection between feminist epistemology and comics narrative, examining how the comics medium can help feminist researchers to create meaning in ways that center positionality, subjectivity, and multiple truths.

Introduction

Over the past decade, comics scholars have developed sophisticated frameworks and vocabularies for deconstructing and analyzing feminist comics. By examining feminist comics across a range of genres and eras, these scholars argue that the verbal and visual complexity of the comics medium makes it particularly well suited for telling stories that deal with issues of embodiment, autobiography, and memory. Building on these arguments, I further contend that the comics medium is also well suited for presenting academic feminist research because the medium itself contains powerful storytelling tools that are aligned with feminist approaches to knowledge. In this article, I argue that the comics medium can be useful for feminist scholars who wish to present their research in reflexive and experimental ways. However, rather than just telling you about it—

Panel 1.1

(The article transitions mid-sentence from prose to a single row of comics panels at the bottom of the first page. Rachel, a white woman in her early 30s with blonde hair and a teal dress, sits behind a table, waving at the reader.)

RACHEL: —it might just be easier to ***show*** you.
RACHEL: Hi, I'm Rachel—

Panel 1.2
(Rachel holds up a page of comics.)

RACHEL: —and I'm joining this issue of *JOMR* to talk about how ***comics***
                                 can be used in academic scholarship—

Panel 1.3
*(Rachel walks past a row of bookshelves where two people are examining the books. The three shelves are labeled **Race**, **Class**, and **Gender**, respectively.)*

RACHEL: —to explore identity, history, and theory in ways that align
                                 with feminist approaches to knowledge.
RACHEL: So, let's begin!

PAGE 2

Panel 2.1
(Rachel leans against a bookshelf, arms folded across her chest.)

RACHEL: As I was saying, I'm taking a slightly different view of the
                                 relationship between ***comics*** and ***feminism***.

Panel 2.2
*(Three small inset panels. The first inset panel shows a nature scene containing a stream and trees. The second inset panel contains a stick figure and a speech balloon. The third inset panel contains a narration box. Different elements of the comics medium are labeled, including **panel**, **gutter**, **frame**, **dialogue**, and **narration**.)*

CAPTION(RACHEL):   Rather than thinking about the ***content*** and the ***context*** of
                                 comics, I'm particularly interested in the comics ***form***—

Panel 2.3
*(Close-up on the cover of the book **Narrative Across Media: The Language of Storytelling**, edited by Marie-Laure Ryan.)*

CAPTION (RACHEL):   —particularly how comics as a medium can make us think—
QUOTE FROM BOOK: A medium is "a category that truly makes a difference about
                                 what stories can be evoked or told, how they are presented,
                                 why they are communicated and how they are experienced"
                                 (18).

Panel 2.4
(Rachel stands at the bottom of a tall, skinny panel against a dark background.)

RACHEL: —and think *differently*—

Panel 2.5
(A white woman with brown hair and glasses gazes at her reflection in an oval wall mirror.)

CAPTION (RACHEL):   —about bodies and identity—

Panel 2.6
(A group of protesters outside of the Supreme Court Building. One protester holds a rainbow flag and others hold signs that read **Resist***,* **BLM [Black Lives Matter]***,* **No.***, and* **Stop It.***)*

CAPTION (RACHEL):   —about politics—

Panel 2.7
(A globe surrounded by colorful light.)

CAPTION (RACHEL):   —about space and time—

Panel 2.8
(A laptop sits on top of a messy stack of papers.)

CAPTION (RACHEL):   —and about writing itself—

Panel 2.9
(A Black woman with short hair stands at a lectern onstage in front of an audience, gesturing at a projection screen. The screen contains images of a pen, a computer, a pair of headphones, and a video camera.)

CAPTION (RACHEL):   —in ways that support the epistemological and representational goals of feminist scholars.

Panel 2.10
(Rachel sits on the floor to the right of a tall stack of comics and graphic novels. The spines on the books read: **Fun Home***,* **Persepolis***,* **Bitch Planet***,* **The Best We Could Do,** *and* **The Big Feminist But***.)*

RACHEL: The comics medium is not only useful for telling fiction and
                                     nonfiction stories with feminist and social justice themes.

Panel 2.11
(A small silhouette of Rachel.)

RACHEL: Rather, I argue that the comics medium is **uniquely suited** for
                                     talking about and **enacting** feminist approaches to knowledge
RACHEL: because it offers storytelling tools that can—

Panel 2.12
(A woman sits at a table behind a laptop, with a coffee cup in easy reach.)

CAPTION (RACHEL):   —encourage reflexive and situated writing—
QUOTE FROM LAPTOP: As I sit down to write this draft…

Panel 2.13
(A paper with the title "Conclusions" written at the top" is covered with colorful post-it notes with questions like: **What if?**, **How do we know?**, **Proof?**, **Second opinion**, **Says who?**, **What about…?**, *and* **Who decides?** *)*

CAPTION (RACHEL):   —enable the circulation of contested narratives—

Panel 2.14
(A globe with three magnifying boxes. In the first box, two people hold hands with a heart above them. In the second box, a person holds a basket while harvesting a garden. In the third box, a person begins to write "1+" on a blackboard.)

CAPTION (RACHEL):   —and connect experiences across time, space, and scale.

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Panel 3.1
(Rachel holds up one finger.)

RACHEL: So, in this article, rather than focusing on a specific text or
                                     genre of comics—

Panel 3.2
(Three images connected in a cycle of arrows. The first image shows a computer, a stack of paper and a folder labelled **Notes***. The second image contains a page of comics panels and a pencil. The third image contains a person seated at a table, reading a book of comics.)*

CAPTION (RACHEL):   I want to focus on what the conventions of comics *do*, how
                           these storytelling properties might allow scholars to construct
                           and share their work differently.

Panel 3.3
*(An intersecting street sign, containing **Comics** in one direction and **Feminism** in the other.)*

CAPTION (RACHEL):   Certainly, the productive intersection between comics and
                           feminism isn't new.

Panel 3.4
*(A pile of overlapping comix covers. The visible titles include: **It Ain't Me Babe**, **Tits and Clits**,
and **Wimmen's Comix**.)*

CAPTION (RACHEL):   For decades, feminist authors have used comics to discuss issues
                           of politics, identity, and trauma.

Panel 3.5
*(Rachel leans on a small bookshelf labelled **Comics** that stands on its own. Several feet away is a set of
connected bookcases labelled **Literature**, **Art**, and **Nonfiction**.)*

RACHEL: In fact, Rocco Versaci argues that the history and legacy of
                           underground comix has infused the medium with a ***"powerful
                           marginality"*** that allows authors creative flexibility (27).

Panel 3.6
(Rachel gestures at a room full of bookshelves.)

RACHEL: These same storytelling tools are also deeply relevant for
                           feminist scholars who want to present their research in
                           complex, contested, and reflexive ways.

Panel 3.7
*(Rachel stands in a borderless panel, shouting through a megaphone. A speech balloon emerges from the
megaphone, extending across the gutter into Panel 8, connected to the next speech balloon.)*

RACHEL: Indeed, for feminist scholars who are dedicated to telling stories
                           from the *margins*—stories that *listen* to and *amplify* the
                           voices of marginalized people—

Panel 3.8
(An ivory tower appears at the top of a hill with a winding path leading down to the foreground. At the bottom right-hand corner, a woman with short brown hair and a headband pushes against the panel boundary, causing it to extend into the gutter.)

RACHEL: —This powerful marginality is also ***rhetorically*** powerful, allowing authors to push the boundaries of their scholarship and reach new and different audiences.

Panel 3.9
(Rachel holds up the megaphone.)

RACHEL: Although I could make countless arguments about the use of comics in academic work, I'll focus on three main points here:

Panel 3.10
*(A party scene under a banner reading, **Congratulations.** To the left, a man holds hands with a smiling young girl next to a cat. To the right, a person with a tall punk haircut talks to a woman seated in a wheelchair.)*

CAPTION (RACHEL):   ***First***, the comics medium provides visual clues about people and contexts that prose alone cannot.

Panel 3.11
*(A jigsaw puzzle, where each puzzle piece contains a word related to the research and writing process, including: **Bias, Perspective, Opinion, Evidence, Politics.** The final puzzle piece, **Purpose**, has yet to be fitted into the puzzle. The edges of the puzzle are not square, but still contain unfitted edges.)*

CAPTION (RACHEL):   ***Second***, the comics medium allows the author to present
multiple truths and to call attention to the construction of the text.

Panel 3.12
(Two inset panels. The first inset panel shows a young, redheaded girl posing in a purple heart T-shirt and tutu. The second inset panel shows an older, redhead masculine person with short hair and a beard holding a photograph of the young girl and pointing to themself.)

CAPTION (RACHEL):   And finally, ***third***, the comics medium can move quickly across time and space, connecting seemingly disparate contexts and ideas.

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—PART 1—
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Panel 4.1
(Rachel gestures at a blackboard with the heading FEMST 101 written at the top.)

CAPTION (NARR):   Part 1: Reflexivity & Embodiment
RACHEL: Feminist scholars have argued that ***reflexivity*** and ***positionality*** are essential to feminist research and writing.
RACHEL: Since the early days of academic feminisms, scholars from a range of disciplines have argued that reflexive research and writing practices require the author to reflect on their identities and experiences and to consider how their positionality shapes their relationship to their argument.

TEXT (BLACKBOARD):   Reflexivity:
-Wilkinson (1988): 'Disciplined self-reflection'(432)
-Attention to personal involvement and power in research and writing
TEXT (BLACKBOARD):   Positionality:
-Look @ how identities 'position' perspective
-England (1994): Expose 'the partiality of our perspective'(86)

Panel 4.2
(Rachel holds up two books to show the back cover of each containing an author bio.)

RACHEL: Knowing who an author ***is*** gives readers critical context about their commitments and motivations for writing.

Panel 4.3
(A shadowy figure with a question mark on its featureless face sits at a computer.)

RACHEL: In prose academic writing, we only really know what the writer tells us about themselves in the line of argument.

Panel 4.4
(Two pieces of writing with text boxes extending from each.)

CAPTION (RACHEL):   Of course, some writers may choose to discuss their personal identities or relationship to the content in their texts.

QUOTE FROM PAPER 1: As a queer Chicanx woman…
QUOTE FROM PAPER 2: After living in this community for ten years…

Panel 4.5
(A computer screen displaying the first page of this article.)

CAPTION (RACHEL):   But often, the only information that a reader has access to is the
                           author's name and professional affiliation.
TEXT (COMPUTER):   Powerful Marginality: Feminist Scholarship through the Comics
                           Medium, Rachel Rys ◆ UCSB

Panel 4.6
(Rachel stands in the lower left-hand corner of the panel. The bottom of the speech balloon fades into the gray background.)

RACHEL: Everything else must be researched or assumed and, frequently,
                           the relationship between the author and their text…
RACHEL: just fades into the background.

Panel 4.7
(A split panel showing two characters in different locations. On the left-hand side of the panel, a person stands in front of a mountain range, wearing backpacking gear. In the right-hand side of the panel, a smiling woman in a tank top stands in front of a busy city scene.)

CAPTION (RACHEL):   The comics medium, however, makes it simple — and often
                           necessary—to include visual information about the ***speaker***
                           and ***context***.

Panel 4.8
(Three characters appear: a balding man, a woman in shorts and a T-shirt, and a person wearing a mohawk and skirt.)

CAPTION (RACHEL):   Because this multimodal form typically includes a visual
                           representation of the narrator and/or the characters, most
                           comics text is directly tied to a distinct, embodied speaker.
PERSON 1:   Like me!
PERSON 2:   And me!
PERSON 3:   And me!

PAGE 5

Panel 5.1

(Rachel stands with her arms out straight to her sides.)

RACHEL: For example, even though you may not have consciously noticed it, I have a **body**.

Panel 5.2

(Rachel's head and torso, surrounded by narration boxes that describe her.)

CAPTION (RACHEL): Without explicitly telling you anything about myself, you already have a lot of information about me as a person and scholar. Even though I haven't mentioned it, you have probably already deduced that I am:
CAPTION (RACHEL): white
CAPTION (RACHEL): a woman
CAPTION (RACHEL): able-bodied
CAPTION (RACHEL): young(ish)
CAPTION (RACHEL): or a host of other identities.

Panel 5.3

(Rachel stands in a classroom behind a lectern that has a sign on the front reading "UCSB." Over her right shoulder, a window looks out over a beach with a palm tree.)

RACHEL: You may also be able to make guesses about my age, location and profession based on clues from my clothing and environment.

Panel 5.4

*(A sketchbook titled **Sketches** containing scribbled drawings of people.)*

CAPTION (RACHEL): These choices have absolutely been deliberate.

Panel 5.5

(Rachel continues to lean on the lectern.)

RACHEL: By this point in the article, I have already been drawn 17 times (and erased 300 more…***yikes!***).
RACHEL: Trust me, the author has thought really hard about what I look like.

Panel 5.6
(Rachel, talking over a dark background.)

RACHEL: Importantly, I didn't have to interrupt my narrative to give you this information about myself as a speaker.

RACHEL: Since we met on page one, all the text has been read in my voice—

RACHEL: —presented through dialogue and narration, inextricably tied to my embodied representation.

Panel 5.7
(Rachel points at panel 5.8. Her speech balloon extends over the gutter into that panel, making one long string of speech balloons.)

RACHEL: This is made possible by the assumption that text is narrative, that words emanate from a speaker and exist in time.

Panel 5.8
(This panel contains 4 inset panels, each containing the words, "Feminism saved my life." The first inset panel is borderless. The second inset panel has a border around the panel. The third inset panel contains the text inside a speech balloon inside of the bordered panel. The fourth inset panel now shows this speech balloon being spoken by a white woman with brown hair and a green sweater.)

RACHEL: For example, imagine if I take a simple piece of prose—
RACHEL: —and place it in a panel. Immediately, I've situated it in time, given it a beat.

RACHEL: If I contain that text in a speech balloon, it becomes an utterance, a statement of position.

RACHEL: Now, by attaching it to an embodied speaker, I give it perspective, a place of origin.

Panel 5.9
*(Rachel leans over and points at inset panel containing six different inset panels, each containing a face and a speech balloon reading: **Feminism saved my life**. The text remains consistent throughout, but, as Rachel narrates, the drawings shift to match the described characteristics. The first inset panel shows the same woman from panel 5.8. The second inset panel shows a woman with darker skin and hair. The third inset panel shows an older woman with glasses. The fourth inset panel shows a man with a beard. The fifth inset panel shows a person with short blue hair, glasses, and earrings. The sixth inset panel shows a person wearing a head covering.)*

RACHEL: Even if the text stays the same, see how the meaning shifts—

RACHEL: —if the speaker is a different race

RACHEL: or age

RACHEL: or if they are drawn with a different gender or gender presentation,

RACHEL: or with religious or culturally significant clothing.

PAGE 6

Panel 6.1

(A diagonal line divides the panel. On the left side of the dividing line, a silhouette of a person in a dress stands next to the silhouette of a person in pants, both with arms outstretched. On the right side of the line, their reflections are visible, with swapped clothing.)

CAPTION (RACHEL):   Granted, someone's visual form may not capture the complexities of self-making or someone's disputed relationship to their body.

Panel 6.2

(A clothesline containing a vest, a gown, a suit, a pair of plaid pants, and a dress, along with multiple pairs of shoes.)

CAPTION (RACHEL):   However, as comics scholars like Jane Tolmie and Elisabeth El Refaie have argued, the comics medium is particularly well-suited for stories that contest the meaning of bodies and objects because it requires a careful attention to materiality.

Panel 6.3

(Rachel stands in the middle of library stacks, in silhouette.)

RACHEL: Importantly, it is not only the physical body that provides perspective for these utterances — the *context* surrounding the speaker can also change the reader's interpretation.

Panel 6.4

(Rachel points to an inset panel containing a picture of the person from panel 5.8 with short blue hair, glasses, and earrings. As in panel 5.8, the person says, "Feminism saved my life.")

RACHEL: For example, I can take a simple panel like this—

Panel 6.5
(Rachel stands in the middle of the panel with her back to the reader, hands clasped behind her back, looking at two inset panels. In the left inset panel, the blue-haired person is seated in a wheelchair next to a ramp leading to a building. In the right inset panel, they are holding an infant next to another adult and baby under a banner reading **Queer Parenting Group***.)*

RACHEL: And *zoom out*, depicting the speaker in a broader context
RACHEL: and providing a more complex picture that reinforces the
                                     relationship between *speech* and *speaker*.

Panel 6.6
(A series of three photos taped to the wall, all showing the blue-haired person saying, "Feminism saved my life." In the first photo, they appear in front of a school building. In the second, they appear in front of a church. In the third, they appear in a protest scene, holding a sign that reads **Trans rights are human rights***.)*

CAPTION (RACHEL):   The ability to show this speech and this speaker in a broader
                                     frame offers powerful context that can change the resonance of
                                     piece of text, without additional narration.

Panel 6.7
(An all-black panel.)

RACHEL (OFF-PANEL):   For feminist scholars, using these tools in the context of first-
                                     person narration provides a sustained awareness of the
                                     relationship between the *author* and the *text* that remains,

RACHEL (OFF-PANEL):   even in panels where the narrator does not appear.

Panel 6.8
(Rachel sitting at a table with several sheets of paper and a recording device, pointing at herself.)

RACHEL: In so doing, comics can provide a more nuanced and situated
                                     account of the research process, depicting the author—

Panel 6.9
(The blue-haired person is shown sitting at a table with a cup of coffee in front of them, waving at the reader)

CAPTION (RACHEL):   —their research participants or interlocutors—

Panel 6.10
(A coffee shop storefront with several small sidewalk tables and chairs out front. The building sign reads **Java Station** *and a sign on the window reads* **Coffee***.)*

CAPTION (RACHEL):   —the context—

Panel 6.11
(Rachel and the blue-haired person sit across from each other at a table inside of the coffee shop.)

CAPTION (RACHEL):   —and, ideally, the site of interaction where these elements
                                        converge.
CAPTION (RACHEL):   …But more on that later.

<div align="center">

—PART 2—
PAGE 7

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Panel 7.1
(Rachel sits, leaning against the panel frame, with a stack of books at her feet.)

CAPTION (NARR):   Part 2: Contested Narrative and Cross-Discursivity.
RACHEL: Beyond offering an opportunity to reflect on the situated
                                        position of the author or interlocutors—

Panel 7.2
(A book on a round table. The cover reads **The Definitive Guide to Feminist Theory***.)*

CAPTION (RACHEL):   —the comics medium can be used in strategic ways to question
                                        the objectivity and fixity of a text—

Panel 7.3
(Zoomed out from the previous panel, **A Definitive Guide to Feminist Theory** *sits in front of
a large bookcase with the sign* **Feminist Theory***. Rachel sits on the floor in front of the bookcase.)*

RACHEL: —and to present multiple and conflicted truths.

Panel 7.4
(Rachel holds the book in her left hand and a polaroid in her right hand).

RACHEL: In prose academic writing, it can be challenging for a writer to
                                        present an argument and their reaction to it, their comments
                                        and reflections, their hesitations and caveats.

Panel 7.5

(A pair of scissors sits on top of a pile of papers with sections cut out.)

CAPTION (RACHEL):   Even when a writer wants to include metacommentary, it is often situated outside the line of argument, relegated to endnotes or cut completely.

CAPTION (RACHEL):   In the absence of this authorial context, academic research is often read as objective, fixed.

Panel 7.6

(Rachel sits behind a laptop. Behind her is a garbage can full of balled-up paper.)

RACHEL: However, the comics medium contains storytelling tools that can enable the circulation of contested narratives, those that present knowledge while maintaining a focus on the construction of the text.

Panel 7.7

(Overlapping speech balloons.)

CAPTION (RACHEL):   Because the comics medium is inherently dialogic—

Panel 7.8

(An inset panel showing a figure near a moon and trees with a narration box and dialogue balloon.)

CAPTION (RACHEL):   —it can incorporate multiple voices into a single comics panel by overlaying

CAPTION (RACHEL):   the narrative voice

CAPTION (RACHEL):   the speaking characters

CAPTION (RACHEL):   and the visual components.

Panel 7.9

*(The Modern Fiction Studies article "**Introduction: Graphic Narratives**" by Hillary Chute and Marianne DeKoven.)*

CAPTION (RACHEL):   In fact, Hillary Chute and Marianne DeKoven argue that the comics medium is ***cross-discursive***, containing important information at each of these levels.

QUOTE FROM ARTICLE: The medium of comics is cross-discursive because it is composed of "verbal and visual narratives that do not simply blend together, creating a unified whole, but rather, remain distinct" (769).

Panel 7.10

(A zipper that is partially zipped, with a separated section in the middle.)

CAPTION (RACHEL):   This cross-discursivity is particularly useful for feminist scholars
                         because it can create moments of alignment and of critical
                         distance between these different discourses—

Panel 7.11

(Rachel, speaking to the reader.)

RACHEL: —allowing writers to strategically manipulate each element
                         independently
RACHEL: in ways that can *support* or *deepen*, *interrupt* or *clarify*
RACHEL: the assumed relationship between narrative, dialogue, and
                         visuals.

Panel 7.12

(Rachel leans over the panel border of an inset panel. A second Rachel inside that panel looks up, annoyed.)

RACHEL 1:   Because these discourses don't automatically blend, the writer
                         can stage moments where multiple selves interact and conflict.
RACHEL 2:   Hey.

PAGE 8

Panel 8.1

*(Rachel gestures toward a stacked set of blocks labeled **Text**, **Context**, **Dialogue**, and **Narration**.)*

RACHEL: Let's look at another example here, one that highlights the
                         function of cross-discursivity by slowly layering the different
                         elements on the page.

Panel 8.2

(Close-up on a blackboard full of text.)

RACHEL: We can take a piece of text outlining a common narrative about
                         feminist history (one that scholars have critiqued as overly
                         simplistic)—

TEXT (BLACKBOARD):   <u>Waves of Feminism:</u>
                       <u>1st Wave</u> - 1890s-1920s, suffrage, basic rights
                       <u>2nd Wave</u> - 1960s & 1970s, sex, birth control, work
                       <u>3rd Wave</u> - 1990s-2000s, bodies, diversity, represent.
                       <u>4th Wave</u> - 2000s-now, sexual harassment, tech.

Panel 8.3
(The same blackboard from panel 8.2, in a classroom with a podium.)

RACHEL: And place it in context, providing additional information about
                       the rhetorical situation in which it appears.

Panel 8.4
(Rachel 1, operating a crane, which extends into panel 8.5. Her dialogue balloons also extend into panels 8.5 and 8.6.)

RACHEL 1:   Furthermore, we can show how this particular narrative is
                       maintained
RACHEL 1:   by adding into the picture an institutional voice and context
RACHEL 1:   that depicts how this narrative is valued, reinforced, and
                       disseminated.

Panel 8.5
(Rachel 2 clings to a rope as the crane from Panel 8.4 lowers her into the classroom scene from panel 8.3.)

Panel 8.6
(Rachel 2 points at the blackboard, which still lists the waves of feminism.)
RACHEL 2:   This is very important—make sure you study it.

Panel 8.7
(Rachel 1, wearing a construction hat, speaks to the reader.)

RACHEL 1:   An image like this reminds us that these narratives aren't
                       neutral—that they gain consensus through passive repetition
                       and active effort.

Panel 8.8
(Rachel, in silhouette, speaks to the reader.)

RACHEL 1:   Importantly, by strategically manipulating the relationship
                             between the visuals, dialogue, and framing narration the writer
                             can tell a story *that* **aligns** with the image and dialogue
RACHEL 1:   *or* that **subverts** the image and dialogue entirely
RACHEL 1:   creating a cross-discursive representation that either reinforces
                             or disrupts.

Panel 8.9
(Inset within Panel 8.8, this is a repeat of Panel 8.6—Rachel 2 pointing at the blackboard. Her dialogue is repeated as well, but a new caption is added to show new context, which plays off the speech balloon in 8.8 right next to it.)

CAPTION (RACHEL 2):   If they learned nothing else in this course, at least they'd know
                       this history.

Panel 8.9
(Also inset within Panel 8.8, this is another repeat of Panel 8.6 with another new caption.)

CAPTION (RACHEL 2):   Although this model was no longer popular, as a feminist
                       historian, I thought knowing this context was worth the effort.

Panel 8.10
(Again, another repeat of Panel 8.6 inset within 8.8. This one, sitting on another row, corresponds to the "subversion" mentioned in the dialogue of 8.8.)

CAPTION (RACHEL 2):   At the time, I thought this was actually really important; it
                       wasn't until later that I realized how reductive this model was.

Panel 8.11
(One more repeat of Panel 8.6 inset within 8.8.)

CAPTION (RACHEL 2):   I didn't really think this was important, but I was required to
                       teach a textbook that doubled down on this metaphor.

Panel 8.12
(Rachel 1, still in her hard hat, holds one caption from this panel over her head with her left hand, the second caption tucked underneath her right arm.)

CAPTION (RACHEL 1):   The interplay between these different elements in a single
                       autobiographical comics panel—

CAPTION (RACHEL 1):   gives a glimpse of interiority and perspective—

Panel 8.10
*(A piece of paper titled ***Not so ~~final~~ draft** on a desktop, covered in post-it notes, with a pencil next to it.)*

CAPTION (RACHEL 1):   —allowing the writer to circulate comments, clarifications, and critiques along with their seemingly static prose.

—PART 3—
PAGE 9

Panel 9.1
(Rachel stands in the back rows of an empty lecture hall.)

CAPTION (NARR):	Part 3: Memory & Temporality
RACHEL:	Feminist scholars have argued that stories about the past are never neutral but, rather, reflect the writer's present concerns and future desires.
RACHEL:	As feminist and postcolonial theorist Gayatri Spivak argues, "The past is a past present. What is marked is the site of desire" (119).
RACHEL:	While representations of the past are neither neutral nor objective, writers often employ rhetorical techniques that erase their role in constructing the text.

Panel 9.2
(The text of the introduction to this article, overlaid with narrative captions to show it in a new context.)

CAPTION (RACHEL):	Writing that attempts to make claims about the past— including my own introduction to this article—is always motivated, reframing history to meet the writer's needs
CAPTION (RACHEL):	marking temporal shifts
CAPTION (RACHEL):	categorizing and collapsing viewpoints
CAPTION (RACHEL):	creating gaps in order to fill them.

Panel 9.3

*(The title page of "**What Is a Feminist Theorist Responsible for?**" article by Clare Hemmings.)*

CAPTION (RACHEL): To challenge these political erasures, feminist scholar Clare Hemmings calls for a tactics of memory that will allow writers to fold in and recombine traces of erased histories.

QUOTE (ARTICLE): "Developing a tactics of memory… might allow us to challenge some of the political erasures that these stories effect. The intention is modest in that respect, wanting to surface what is potently absent through recombination" (75).

Panel 9.4

(Rachel, gesturing toward the bamboo in panel 9.5.)

RACHEL: Other feminist scholars have called for ***rhizomatic*** reading and writing practices, a framework adapted from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari emphasizing nonlinear and nonhierarchical connections.

Panel 9.5

(A cross-section of a tree, above and below ground, next to a similar cross-section of bamboo.)

CAPTION (RACHEL): Unlike a tree, which requires linear, progressive, and ordered branching—

CAPTION (RACHEL): —a rhizome, like bamboo or ginger, is a "network of multiple branching roots and shoots with no central axis, no unified point of origin, and no given direction of growth" (173).

Panel 9.6

(A close-up of the interconnected networks of a rhizome.)

CAPTION (RACHEL): Scholars like Elizabeth Grosz and Juana María Rodríguez have incorporated the concept of the rhizome into a distinctly feminist practice, arguing that it can be used to draw connections across

CAPTION (RACHEL): identities

CAPTION (RACHEL): trajectories

CAPTION (RACHEL): and movements.

Panel 9.7

(Rachel points at a blackboard in the lecture hall from 9.1.)

RACHEL:	Such rhizomatic reading and writing practices emphasize connection, heterogeneity, and multiplicity.
TEXT (BLACKBOARD):	<u>Grosz (1993)</u> <u>Connection</u>: bring together diverse fragments: theories, objects and practices <u>Heterogeneity</u>: Multiple connections across levels, domains, dimensions, functions, effects, aims <u>Multiplicity</u>: a proliferation of processes

Panel 9.8

(Rachel, speaking to the reader.)

RACHEL:	Due to its flexible tools for representing temporality and spatiality, comics can serve as a tactics of memory—one that is both recombinatory and rhizomatic—
RACHEL:	able to combine and rearrange temporal traces across time, space, and scale.

PAGE 10

Panel 10.1

(A series of captions over an abstract blue background meander toward Rachel, who speaks the last line in a dialogue balloon.)

CAPTION (RACHEL):	Rather than
CAPTION (RACHEL):	telling a
CAPTION (RACHEL):	linear or
CAPTION (RACHEL):	teleological
CAPTION (RACHEL):	story that
CAPTION (RACHEL):	travels straight
CAPTION (RACHEL):	from past
RACHEL:	to present—

Panel 10.2

(A loop of arrows titled "Past" "Present" and "Future".)

CAPTION (RACHEL):	—the comics medium allows the writer to curate and juxtapose
CAPTION (RACHEL):	past, present, and future

CAPTION (RACHEL):   moments on the page.

Panel 10.3
(A person with short hair, viewed from behind, studies the space between two blank comics panels.)

CAPTION (RACHEL):   This flexible narrative structure is produced through elision and absence, through the essential gaps created by the comics gutter.

Panel 10.4
(A giant web of interconnected blank comics panels.)

CAPTION (RACHEL):   It is in these marginal spaces that comics readers engage in what Scott McCloud calls closure: "observing the parts, but perceiving the whole" (63).

Panel 10.5
(A solid gray panel.)

CAPTION (RACHEL):   This mapping from panel to panel, from part to whole, can be used to bring together diverse fragments—

CAPTION (RACHEL):   and to recombine, fold in, or draw connections across spaces, places, and contexts.

Panel 10.6
*(Three inset panels, with arrows pointing from them to different spots on a globe. The first shows a scene from the International Women's Day strike in Spain, with a banner reading **Sin nosotras, el mundo se para**. The second inset panel shows a Saudi woman driving a car. The third shows a smartphone, depicting the covert participation of Chinese women in the #metoo movement (when the hashtag #metoo was censored by the government, women continued to share their stories via a localized code of that combines the emojis for Rice ⊖ ("Mi") and Bunny 🐇 ("Tu").)*

RACHEL: For example, a writer can explode a single moment across geographic distance, using the comics medium to both represent and create connections.

Panel 10.7
(Rachel, pointing at panel 10.6. and 10.8)

RACHEL: *Or,* the writer can shift the scope and scale of the story between panels—

Panel 10.8

(Over a gray background, the next four panels are inset, overlapping each other, with captions juxtaposed above each.)

CAPTION (RACHEL):   —moving seamlessly from the personal to the local
CAPTION (RACHEL):   From the local to the global
CAPTION (RACHEL):   And back again—

Panel 10.9

(Inset from 10.8, another Rachel, in a pink dress, draws a comic.)

CAPTION (RACHEL 3):   I drew my first comic on 11/8/16.

Panel 10.10

(Also inset from 10.8. Close up on a group of protesters—one holds a sign reading "Not my president.")

CAPTION (RACHEL 3):   It was election night and protests raged outside all night.

Panel 10.11

(Also inset from 10.8. A huge throng of protesters, zoomed out, in front of a large building. Above the crowd floats a balloon depicting Donald Trump as a baby.)

CAPTION (RACHEL 3):   Around the world, people gathered, marched, wondered.

Panel 10.12

(One more inset from 10.8. A blank grid of comics panels on a page.)

CAPTION (RACHEL 3):   In the stillness of my apartment, I drew heavy, black grids.

Panel 10.13

(Rachel 1 speaks directly to the reader.)

RACHEL: Allowing the writer to draw together ordinary and
                          extraordinary events and circumstances,
RACHEL: reinforcing the connection between *personal* and *political*.

<div align="center">

—PART 4—
PAGE 12

</div>

Panel 12.1

*(*Rachel stands between three bamboo shoots with visible roots and rhizomes.*)*

CAPTION (NARR):   Conclusion: Lines of Flight
RACHEL: I hope that this article is read as an opening, one possible "line
                                          of flight" that connects comics, feminism, and academic writing
                                          practices.

Panel 12.2

(Rachel speaks directly to the reader.)

RACHEL: I've argued here that the comics medium contains powerful
                                          storytelling tools that align with feminist approaches to
                                          knowledge—
RACHEL: and which productively address many key concerns within
                                          academic feminist writing and writing—

Panel 12.3

(Two silhouettes, each with a dialogue balloon, surrounded by trees.)

CAPTION (RACHEL):   —providing critical context about speaker and setting that
                                          situates the text—

Panel 12.4

*(The silhouettes, trees, and dialog balloons from the Panel 12.3 lay disassembled and scattered across a
work surface, next to a tape dispenser.)*

CAPTION (RACHEL):   —developing richly layered panels that reinforce or subvert—

Panel 12.5

*(The same scene of speakers, dialogue, and trees from panel 12.3, but with a more richly colored mountain
scene extending outside of the panel confines.)*

CAPTION (RACHEL):   —creating narrative links across time, space, and scale—

Panel 12.6
(Rachel stands before a dark background.)

RACHEL: Throughout this article, I've made the relatively vague claims
                             that the comics medium is "aligned with" feminist epistemology
                             or "can be useful" for feminist scholars.
RACHEL: While I've deliberately left these claims open-ended, the
                             question remains:

Panel 12.7
(A light blue panel with an un-bordered caption inside.)

CAPTION (RACHEL):   What might this look like in practice?

Panel 12.8

(Rachel stands in the middle of a path with dense bamboo on either side.)

RACHEL: First of all, it is a call for researchers to express and share their
                             work in comics—adding comics to the range of methodological
                             and representational tools available to scholars—

Panel 12.9
(Two books: **Unflattening** *by Nick Sousanis and* **Understanding Rhetoric** *by Elizabeth Losh,
Johnathan Alexander, Kevin Cannon, Zander Cannon. Additionally, the digital journal* **Sequentials**
by the TRACE Innovation Initiative is displayed on a tablet.)

CAPTION (RACHEL):   —and contributing to a growing canon of work that uses the
                             comics form to talk about comics or to present other research.

Panel 12.10
(A gray background covered with a pattern of blue dialogue balloons).

CAPTION (RACHEL):   As comics scholarship becomes more readily available, used,
                        and discussed
CAPTION (RACHEL):   it builds a case for the theoretical and rhetorical complexity of
                        the medium.

Panel 12.11
(Three books: **Queer: A Graphic History** *by Meg-John Barker and Julia Scheele;* **A People's
History** *by Howard Zinn, Paul Buhle, and Mike Konopacki; and* **Comics for Choice**, *edited by
Hazel Newlevant, Whit Taylor, and Ø.K. Fox.)*

CAPTION (RACHEL):   For researchers who are unable or unwilling to dabble in the comics form, this may also mean pursuing partnerships between researchers and comics creators

CAPTION (RACHEL):   that combine specialized content knowledge and storytelling craft to develop compelling texts.

Panel 12.12
(Rachel speaks to the reader.)

RACHEL: Beyond the creation of new comics, this piece also echoes calls to consider existing comics as examples of complex scholarship and theory in their own right—

Panel 12.13
(A dark background with a comic left open to show the panels.)

CAPTION (RACHEL):   —offering content and storytelling tools that are both theoretical and political.

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Panel 13.1
(Rachel's silhouette stands with arms open in front of a green patterned background.)

RACHEL: Finally—and importantly for my home discipline of feminist studies—it is a call to critically consider the dominant forms and practices of academic writing.

Panel 13.2
*(The cover of **Emergent Writing Methodologies in Feminist Studies**, ed. Mona Livholts)*

CAPTION (RACHEL):   Mona Livholts argues that the relative scarcity of conversations about the form of academic writing points to the—

QUOTE FROM BOOK: "dominance of mainstream textual form that does not need to name itself" (6).

Panel 13.3
(A stack of papers on a table including comics, text, images, and charts.)
CAPTION (RACHEL):   By seeking out new rhetorical and representational tools and exploring scholarly research through emergent and

experimental forms like comics, these unnamed forms become named, available for both question and critique.

Panel 13.4
(Rachel speaks to the reader.)
.

RACHEL: Feminist scholar Eva Bendix Petersen writes, "As research continues to be a privileged form of knowledge production, or story-telling,

RACHEL: we are expressly obliged to attend to the stories that we tell and how we tell them" (Petersen 2016, 6).

Panel 13.5
(A background of bamboo)

CAPTION (RACHEL):   By attending to these stories, and by implementing multimodal argumentative and narrative tools that self-consciously connect identities, practices, and histories

CAPTION (RACHEL):   feminist scholars can draw on the powerful marginality of the comics medium

CAPTION (RACHEL):   to disrupt expected practices of scholarly writing and to center forms that align with feminist approaches to knowledge.

Notes

As I hope this exploratory comic has conveyed, my goal here is to gesture to some of the productive possibilities of the comics medium for feminist researchers who wish to create and share knowledge through emergent and experimental forms. Translating research across medium allows us to explore new rhetorical and representational tools—and to reflect on both the strengths and limits of our current approaches. As this is my first foray into experimental writing *and* my first attempt at making comics, these twelve comics pages have opened additional lines of both questioning and possibility.

Panel 13.6
(A cropped version of panel 12.1 where Rachel stands between three bamboo shoots with visible roots and rhizomes.)

RACHEL: I hope that this article is read as an opening, one possible "line of flight" that connects comics, feminism, and academic writing practices.

The reference to "lines of flight" in my conclusion draws once more from Deleuze and Guattari, who argue that—if ruptured—rhizomes can sprout anew along old lines or create "new lines of flight… directions in motion" (p. 35). This relationship between rhizomes and comics has been explored in multiple works and ways, including as a theoretical framework for analyzing comic book culture (Jeffery, 2016), as a visual metaphor (Sousanis, 2015), and as a flexible storytelling (non-)structure for the digital project *Rhizcomics* (Helms, 2017). Importantly, metaphors of connection and rupture, of roots and motion, offer powerful metaphors for critically examining identity and identity formation as well (Rodríguez, 2003, p. 22).

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Panel 14.1

(A cropped version of Panel 4.3)

Because reflexivity plays such a significant role in feminist studies scholarship, it comes as no surprise that many of the storytelling tools I analyze within this piece have been primarily discussed within the context of autobiographical and life writing comics. In fact, the first sections of my argument refer to a specific subset of narrative tools that are often used in first-person, single-authored comics—those that include an embodied version of the author-narrator on the page. For feminist scholars, this close attention to the embodiment, practices, and habits of everyday life is essential. As Jane Tolmie (2013) argues, comics are "precisely about matters of essential cultural urgency at the everyday level…" (p. xvi).

Panel 14.2

(A cropped version of panel 6.1)

Hillary Chute (2010) further argues that the ability to visualize the "ongoing procedure of self and subjectivity constructs 'ordinary' experiences as relevant and political" (140).

Panel 14.3

(A cropped version of panel 11.6)

This visuality facilitates a political reading of everyday events, such as the panel below [referring to panel 11.6] that brings together scenes from the International Women's Day strike in Spain, the repeal of the driving ban for women in Saudi Arabia, and the covert participation of Chinese women in the #MeToo movement (when the hashtag #MeToo was censored by the government, women continued to connect and share by substituting the characters or emojis for Rice "Mi") and Bunny ("Tu")).

Panel 14.4
(Repeat of panels 6.8-6.11)

The comics medium offers a tactics of memory that pictures and recombines traces of everyday life. These same narrative tools are also available to feminist scholars—leaving an open opportunity for scholars to share not only their research *products*, but also their *process*: the situated interaction, decision-making, and thought processes that underlie scholarly work.

References

This project is indebted to the important work done by feminist comics scholars to identify specific narrative tools and to initiate conversations about the connections between identity, power, and form. While the comics medium offers incredible argumentative density, I've found it to be spatially and logistically challenging to incorporate the breadth of references expected of scholarly work into the comics form. Undoubtedly, the practices and politics of citation for scholarship written in the comics medium will require additional examination and experimentation—another line of flight perhaps?

❖

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