



**WONDER(ING) WOMEN:
INVESTIGATING GENDER POLITICS AND ART EDUCATION
WITHIN GRAPHICA**

COURTNEY LEE WEIDA

Abstract

Problems of gender representation persist within many superhero comics, but interventions of critical pedagogy with alternative sources from *graphica* can address certain inequalities. In this feminist review of *graphica*, I have selected several examples of contemporary comic books and graphic novels to introduce educators to potential sites of critical feminist public pedagogy. *Graphica*, if considered as sequential art as well as products of youth and adult subcultures, may be many people's first literacy experience, and many devotees continue reading comics for their whole lives. My goal in this feminist *graphica* review is to introduce readers to a spectrum of comic books and graphic novels that are often peripheral to art education, gender studies, and *graphica* studies.

**Intersections at the Margins: *Graphica*, Gender Studies,
and Art Education**

As a middle school art teacher, an art education professor, and sometimes teaching artist for elementary school students, I have observed student interest in a range of graphic literature, including comic books, manga, and graphic novels. *Graphica* is a broad term often employed by educators and comic book authors, as a sort of catchall for such a variety of graphic media containing sequential, narrative art. For instance, Fordham University's 2009 conference on comic books and graphic novels in the classroom was titled "Graphica in Education." Graphic literature is distinguished from other genres with use of conventions in form such as thought balloons, speech bubbles, and rectangular panels. The difference between many graphic novels and comic books is often a question of sequence and length. Graphic novels may alternate pages of wordless panels and sections of imageless prose, expanding the possibilities of the genre. Many graphic novels written by women are singular, stand-alone works, or perhaps have only one or two sequels.¹

There is a rich and complicated layering of spatial and conceptual *outsider-ness* to be considered at the intersection of art education, gender studies, and graphic literature studies. Each of these categories might be considered marginal within their respective academic fields and locales. Art is learned in universities, schools, homes, museums, and many other places including the public pedagogy of *graphica* and other forms of visual culture. Graphic novels and comics are popular forms of education and are found within a range of publications as well as the revered *New Yorker Magazine*. It also graces spaces of graffiti and zine culture, and can even be contextualized within philosophical discourse.² The unique character and status of each field and its sites pose both obstacles and freedoms to be explored in pedagogy. In the case of comic books and graphic novels, often the line is especially blurred between different

1. This is the case with Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis and Persepolis 2*, which details much of her child and adolescent life story in Iran.

2. For example, see Fred Van Lente and Ryan Dunlavey's *Action Philosophers* 2006-2009 comic book series.

types of media (via film adaptations and various formats).

What do young women identify as protagonists, subjects, and objects of comics and graphic novels in the hyper-masculine re-emergences of *Batman*, *Superman*, and *Hellboy*? As an artist and teacher, I enjoy these as much as I relish *Persepolis*. Interestingly, it is not female superheroes, but male ones whose appearances consistently transgress gender codes; for they juxtapose muscular, masculine bodies with flamboyant, colorful, and form-fitting attire usually more typical of feminine fashion (e.g., tights, capes). A few examples include Batman, Robin, Superman, Spiderman, Wolverine, Cyclops, Green Lantern, Mr. Fantastic, and Captain America. Such outfits also appear provocative, and can make the wearer seem somewhat exposed. This sexualized hypermasculinity complicates gender roles and stereotypes in that both male and female comic characters arouse sexual fantasy with unrealistic bodies and their powers to save the world.

In this feminist review of graphica, I have selected works addressing middle childhood and adolescent girls, such as *Chiggers* and *Persepolis*.³ I also examine graphic literature addressing adolescence and young adulthood, particularly alternative cartoonist Gabrielle Bell's *Lucky*, graphica by the *Guerrilla Girls*, and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* graphic novels. *Power Girl Comics* serve as an emblem of future aims of feminist inquiry in graphica. Power Girl/Karen Starr is a superheroine whose costume lacks the usual defining letter or symbol emblazoned across the chest of the superhero uniform. Instead of a blank space, however, Power Girl has a hole in her costume. As she is female, this hole reveals (and even highlights) her ample chest. In this way, the corporal sexuality of her costume is linked to its symbolic ambiguity and openness. As viewers, we have to grapple with her body, her gender, and obscured versus imagined aspects of her identity all at once, because of our own objectifying and sexualizing gaze.

3. See Appendix A for the selected comics and graphic novels by women, and Appendix B for selected digital resources addressing graphica and gender that informed my review.

Aesthetic Re-presentations: Repetitions of Feminine Idea(l)s in Graphica

The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2011)⁴ notes that many branches of feminism have been consistently associated with justice for women and the eradication of sexism. Whether in superhero comics or other indie publications of graphica, issues of inequity extend from readership to representation to authorship. Cartoonist Nicole Hollander (of the comic strip *Sylvia*) lamented the range of gender inequalities within comic book culture during a 2005 interview:

Opportunities for women cartoonists have not opened up. Just count the number of women in the comic pages. Count the number of women who are characters in the comic pages. Count the number of women who are characters in strips. Even the animals are guys. (p. 47)

Gabrielle Bell (2006) recounts in her graphic novel *Lucky* how male artists and comic book consumers often discount women artists and criticize them for drawing men (especially male superheroes) in effeminate ways. Styles of body rendering can be extremely politicized in this regard. Gender impacts the way we understand imagery, and colors both our perceptions and the ways in which we write/draw. Researcher of the senses, Constance Classen (1998) has observed “the senses are inflected with gender values . . . The sense of sight, for example is often considered to be associated with masculinity, and the sense of touch with femininity” (p. 63). We might ask students to consider aesthetics of movement, possibilities of the gaze, and visible interactions of touching and speaking that impact how we engage with comics and graphic novels.

Teaching Comics and Corporeal Considerations

I have taught about graphica and issues of the gaze within formal college courses addressing gender in art and in art education. Concurrently, I also worked with elementary and middle school students in Boston

4. See <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2011/entries/feminism>.

and New York. In teaching college courses addressing female body image and/or instructional units examining critical literacy in urban middle schools, I often invited students to look at popular characters from recent and traditional (yet iconic) superhero comics. Subsequently, we reflect and share our observations and interpretations. My teaching observations coincide with recent art education research regarding perceptions of iconic female figures in toys and comics.⁵ Students in my courses have noticed that the appearances of Wonder Woman, Super Girl, The Black Canary, Catwoman, Hawkgirl, Lara Croft, Elektra, Raven, Witchblade, Sailor Moon and other female characters share a stereotypical Hollywoodesque aesthetic of shampoo-commercial hair, an impossibly slender yet voluptuous physique, and overall Caucasian appearance. Their clothing is generally tight, revealing, and sleek.

If we conceptualize superheroes as fictional leaders, role models, or even unlikely educators, these physical representations are problematically restrictive. However, as we investigate characters and creators more deeply, other images and narratives begin to emerge. For example, artist Barbara Slate (2010) has pointed out that she and other female comic book artists have subtly changed the voluptuous dimensions of Betty and Veronica to make them more realistic. Similarly, author-cum-Wonder Woman writer Jodi Picoult noted in a *New York Times* article that she requested an artistic breast reduction for Wonder Woman (quoted in Gustine, 2010, p. C9).

Another example of identity politics that defies appearances is the potential of the superhero's fantastic life to mirror and echo the ordinary lives of readers. In action, superheroes (and heroines) exhibit interesting, and at times, conflicting alter egos. The superhero, like the archetype of deity within a pantheon, finds a way to question morality, yet does so only in the midst of extreme life-or-death choices. The world of the superhero is a hyperbole and microcosm for our world in relationship to the individual ego. Several of my students, as pre-service teachers, have

5. For example, art educator Wagner-Ott (2002) has noted multicultural/non-white Barbies appear as if they were white dolls painted a different color. This is to say that these representations include the lips, noses, eyes, hair texture, and figures of impossibly slender white women.

found art lessons about comic book heroes popular among their own students. By creating a highly principled and empowered character, the artist/author reflects upon and infuses their self-identity and gender into the superhero, but within an attractively extraordinary framework. Popular fiction writer Jodi Picoult agreed to author some Wonder Woman narratives so that she could explore amazing feats and conflicts of women, including Agent Diana Price (Wonder Woman's day-time personality). In this instance, the extraordinary qualities of the superhero world are as compelling for readers as for creators, and the human sides of heroes are also taken into consideration.

Removing Robin and Mary Jane: Re-writing and Undoing Female Characters

Beyond representations of female body and costume, there are many complex gender issues to be explored in superhero comics' characterizations and storylines. While most students are familiar with token female superheroes, these characters often exist in roles far removed from male counterparts. Within the comic book narratives of DC superhero Batman, there was but one female Robin that accompanied Bruce Wayne: Stephanie Brown. As might be expected, her tenure at his side was rather brief. Unlike the previous fallen male Robin, she was denied any sort of memorial by Batman (or in effect, the comic book authors of DC comics) at the end of her time as Batman's support. This is an especially problematic exclusion, given the claims of Gareth Schott (2010) regarding homoeroticism in early Batman comics between Batman and (male) Robins (p. 28). A potentially liberatory context of queerness in the 1950s for Batman and male Robins are not matched by equally empowering gendered otherness several years later for Stephanie Brown.

In a similar vein, the Spiderman comics contain re-tellings and retroactive storylines in which Peter Parker's marriage to Mary Jane is removed. These revisions represent a strikingly similar un-doing or even un-saying of a female character and her importance. GirlWonder.org is a website devoted to analysis and protest of such gender injustice, and includes a call to DC Comics to integrate a memorial for the sole female Robin into Batman mythology. Such a memorial is even imagined and

featured on the website, along with the catchy tagline “Because capes aren’t just for boys.” The website itself serves as a sort of memorial not only by virtue of its content, but also in its format. The site is no longer updated and functional as a community forum, operating instead as an archive. As readers ponder incongruence and absences, sites like these not only bear witness to the original writing, but also provide educative forums for readers to question revisions. This type of analysis is valuable in a variety of historical contexts for feminist education.

Collecting Comics: Cautionary Archival Tales

While computer-networking sites pose provocative spaces for records and commentary on superheroes and graphica, issues of library collection and access become relevant in structuring gender conscious curriculum. Although many children’s libraries and youth programs have accepted graphic novels and comics as part of their reading repertoire; one major persisting educational concern about graphica (as with much youth-oriented media) is many adults’ inability to consume, relate, and react to it. For those parents and teachers that endeavor to become familiar with the media children choose, the sheer bulk and variety of comics and graphic novels can be quite daunting. As an educator, I have observed that adults may endorse or tolerate male-dominated superhero content purely because of name recognition from their own childhoods, such as Batman and Superman. On the one hand, this shows the cross-generational potential of graphica to touch the lives of many different authors, artists, and readers through the same characters. Many adults can bond over having the figures or icons of G.I. Joe or Barbie play some roles in a collective past, even if they never read the related comics, nor kept up with its current iterations. As a further example, educators who encountered original texts like *The Babysitters’ Club*, *Hardy Boys*, and *Nancy Drew* as children wax nostalgic in the face of re-inventions of in comic book forms of the present. However, it is important to be aware that the volumes and books we read as children are not the same as those being consumed by our children and students under the same franchise or brand, and so we can make few assumptions about their content.

While the false sense of familiarity with a comic book’s content

because of name recognition is a factor in misconceptions about graphica’s various forms, different perceptions and definitions of controversial content also impacts parental approval and the adoption of these texts by teachers. Some of my students have noted that comics and graphic novels by women tend toward interpersonal and journal-like styles, as in the case of works by Hope Larson, Gabrielle Bell, or Marjane Satrapi. These works can be extensively angry and subtly violent, but often are overt (or graphic) around controversial issues like sex and sexuality. Meanwhile, much of the comics they see consumed by teenage boys are controversial around issues that are violent, scatological, and only briefly sexualized. Formerly mentioned comic book writer Gabrielle Bell has noted these tendencies during her teaching experiences with adolescent boys, summarizing (with good humor and illustrative examples) the male youth culture of representing drugs, violence, bodily functions, and expletives in comic books.

Comic Book Education: Constructing Gender and Literacy

One’s predisposition towards a familiar name or character might cause parents, librarians, and educators to overlook or neglect lesser-known independent (indie) comics. Sometimes these works may have greater educative potential and more inclusive representation of gender, culture, and sexuality. Historically, the growth of graphica among youth was often accompanied by concerns of appropriateness and even censorship.⁶ To expand upon gendered dimensions of consumer culture surrounding comics versus graphic novels, there are parallels within readership and authorship. As feminist and comic book author Trina Robbins (2002) has noted:

Although the ratio of female comic readers to male comics readers continues to be comparatively small, the majority of women who do read comics tend to gravitate to the indies . . . Possibly due to the fact that more women are drawing comics

6. The rise of juvenile delinquency in the 1940s was anecdotally linked with comic book consumption, leading to censorship laws in several states (Hajdu, 2008; McDivitt, 1989).

today than ever before, and drawing them for indies, the field of independent or small press comics has become feminized. (p. 3)

These feminizing tendencies, if feminizing means the inclusion of women's agency as producers of cultural narratives in male dominated narrative artforms, is evident in RiotGrrl culture and zones, where localized celebrity, activism, and self-publishing is especially valued. Hand-made, self-published zines provide a rich forum for example, Cristy Road's *Indestructible* brings zine conventions of handwriting, type-writing, and Xeroxed printing into one format within a graphic novel-like diary about punk subculture. The creation of any comic book involves skills of storyteller, illustrator, typographer, and graphic designer. The comic book artist develops these skills to create graphic novels.

As graphica is a form of sequential and often narrative art, the practices of consumption and those of literacy required of its readership can be quite sophisticated. In fact, I have frequently noted that students with dyslexia show interest and adaptive readership of graphic novels. These graphic novels often contain unusual panels, sequencing, or symbolism that perplexes more seasoned, yet traditional readers. As teachers, we can recognize the dual influence of traditional art media and graphic literature as forms of learning and visual literacy. In comic books and graphic novels, images and texts are interrelated and layered, but can be read or scanned in a variety of ways (Williams, 2008). In this way, each reader constructs literacy itself individually.

In his article on lesson planning and comic books, Ted Stearn (2004) has proposed principles of visual narratives for educators to consider not only in reading, but also in the creation of graphica. These principles emphasize the capacity to engage learning dimensions of drawing, design, pacing, staging, acting, and writing within educational use of comics and graphic novels. Similarly, Masami Toku (2001) has examined adolescent interest in Manga as a sort of art education antidote to the U-Curve of development in which many adolescents become frustrated, disengaged, and permanently disinterested in art-making. Beyond this valuable developmental point, I would particularly emphasize the artistic innovations of a growing body of graphic literature by women that blur the boundaries of bookmaking and comics.

Expanding upon visual literacies into hands-on learning experiences, we may observe that in studio art classes, the unique and valuable distinctions between manufactured comics and hand-made graphic novels are quite palpable in their creation. I have worked with several young art students in K-12 who repeatedly sketch *Dragon Ball Z* characters or superheroes in their sketchbooks or notebooks in art class and beyond school. There is a reverence and significance in the sketch itself, but a conflicting impermanence to the site that contains it. Meanwhile, in bookmaking projects, I find that students are more likely to approach graphic novel formats as a unified combination or synthesis of hand-crafted object, polished poetry or prose, and finished drawings or other visual compositions. The structures as well as the narrative content within are interwoven in the finished products.

Teachers and students can delight in overlapping categories of graphica with artists' books such as the autobiographical work of Lynda Barry or Maira Kalman's *Principles of Uncertainty*. Lynda Barry's work *What it is* questions the word and the image continuously in a graphic novel and diary-like format. Barry refers to her book as the space (mentally, imaginatively, and philosophically) where her entire life history is "still alive" (2008, np). Lynda Barry's books intersect bookarts, graphica, and diary genres, and exhibit a profound knowledge of her media's history, including references to the lineage of bookworks and William Blake's work. Specifically, I propose that students can create related objects of graphica with a range of artistic modalities, from bookmaking to sketching, writing, and calligraphy. Autobiographical graphic literature and self-portraiture approaches to graphica are rich areas for explorations of both aesthetics and identity.

Fun Home, Willow, and Guerrilla Girls: Depicting Gender and Otherness

Alison Bechdel is a lesbian author and activist who works within autobiography and drawing to create an inventive form of graphic memoir. Bechdel's *Fun Home* is a complex autobiography of her youth, the construction and destruction of family and home around her father's mental illness, homosexuality, and suicide; and her young adult experi-

ences as a lesbian. Subsequently, her adult characters in *Dykes to Watch Out For* include lesbians, bisexuals, transgendered people, and even men and straight characters. Each is shown with relatable needs, experiences, and understandings.

While Bechdel's graphic novels and ongoing comic strips pose particularly nuanced and intelligent representations of women, I do not wish to suggest that thoughtful feminist narratives are purely the domains of women authors. Sam Kieth notably wrote *Four Women*, an intense and mature graphic novel about the friendships and shared trauma of four female friends. Impressively, each woman is of a different age and represents distinctive personalities, developed over the course of the story. Over the course of subsequent meetings and therapy sessions, these characters' subtly-handled perspectives color their collective re-telling of a life-altering brutal attack and rape. Additionally, many comic books can be seen as transgressive in their approaches to gender and identity. For example, the *RANMA* manga series and *Dead Boy Detectives* comic books involve cross-dressing and literal trans-gendering/gendered transformation as part of the supernatural element of their narratives.

Buffy the Vampire Slayer poses another supernatural example of alternative sexuality. Many comic book "geeks" who were teens or young adults in the 1990s loved *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (BTVS), especially Willow Rosenberg, a female intellectual, Wiccan, and member of the LGBT community. This 1997-2003 television, action-figure franchise, and comic book/graphic novel series persists across generations and forms of media. Willow, a lead character in the television and comic series, is an unusual principal comic book character in that she is a Pagan and a lesbian. In conversations with comic book readers and educators at the 2009 National Art Education Association Conventions and the 2009 Graphica in Education Conference, I have been surprised at the ways in which Willow's identity impacted fans. Specifically, viewers/readers often mused that because they knew Willow as an uncertain fifteen year old, her gradual awakening to sexuality (in this case, queer sexuality) was not "othered" in the ways one might expect.

The same was true of her alternative religious path. As Willow grew up with her fans, her following mimicked the development associated with a friend relationship. Willow's sexual identity was not read

nor inscribed as a stigma or stereotype, because it is represented and constructed over time. *Buffy the Vampire Television Series* (BTVS) can be seen as a show exemplifying many different kinds of development and learning within shifting contexts, including academic, experiential, and spiritual (Jarvis, 2005). Willow also doubled as the "Dark Willow" villain or "big bad" at the close of season six in 2003, problematizing her role as a heroic female character. Specifically, Willow was ultimately saved from evil forces and/or herself through the intervention of a male character, Xander. Even so, readers that continue to follow the BTVS legacy through fan fiction and consumption of the graphica series that has emerged can continue to engage with constructivist understandings of the characters' growth and development in relationship to their own lives.

Other educative potentiality of comics within feminist frameworks can be observed in their capacity to address women of color crossing boundaries and undoing caricatures without being "exoticed" (to borrow a term from art education researcher Elizabeth Garber, 1995, p. 222). The Guerrilla Girls are often overlooked but devoted producers of graphica and purveyors of such art education. Best known for their feminist graffiti and subversive posters, these gorilla-masked guerrilla artists also have published unique books of art history that critique the sexism and racism of the canon through comic book formats of narrative. Within most of their publications, they use thought balloons and speech bubbles to alter photographs with their own messages (Figure 1). These unconventional texts of art histories examine gender identity, sexuality, race, and other aspects of women's lives not always explored in traditional encyclopedias, histories, or even comprehensive Wikipedia entries. Comic panels in *The Guerrilla Girls' Bedside Companion to Western Art History* (2007), for example, often function as footnotes to art history: illustrating and humanizing how female artists overcame sexism in their artistic career paths. Similarly, Bentley Boyd's *Wonder Women* reframes historical figures Clara Barton, Harriet Tubman, Susan B. Anthony, and Helen Keller as superheroes. Notably, this publication follows state learning frameworks.⁷

7. Bentley Boyd's website addresses learning standards and his comics, state by state in areas like history: <http://www.chestercomix.com/state-standards/>

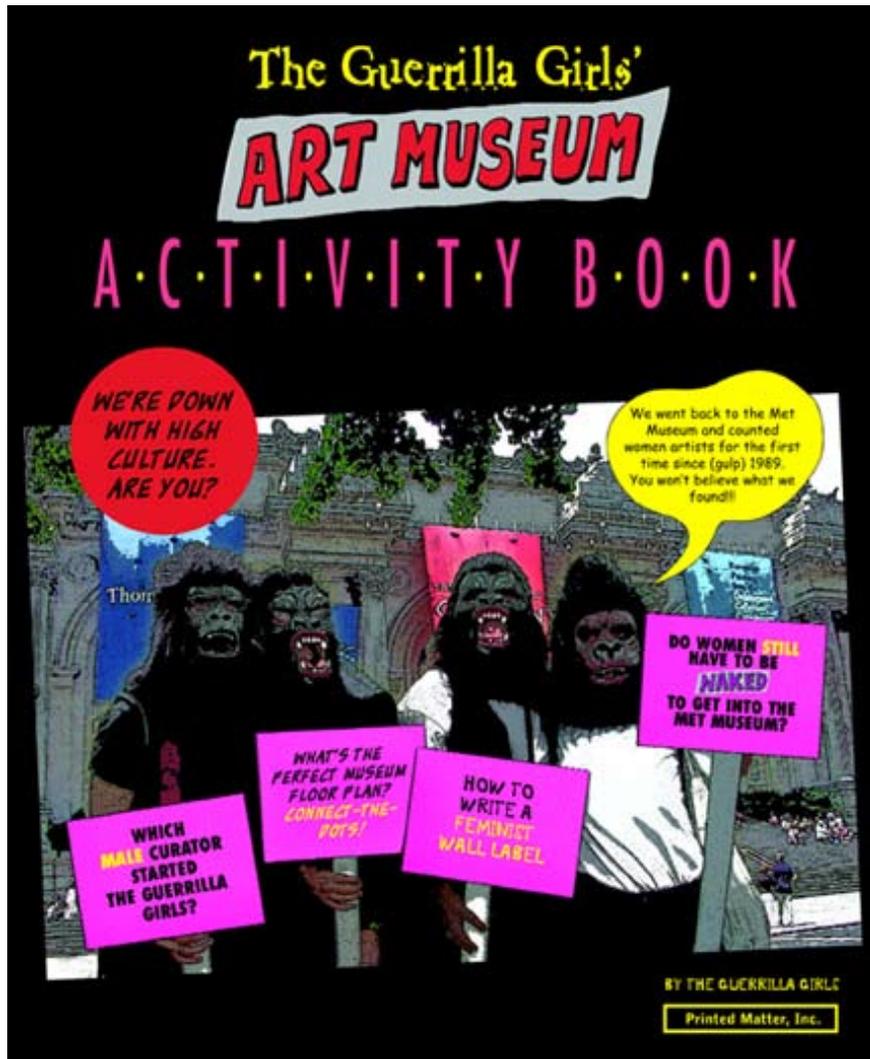


Figure 1. Guerrilla Girls' Art Museum Activity Book cover image. © by Guerrilla Girls. Courtesy www.guerrillagirls.com.

Redefining Authorship in Graphica

Like the Guerrilla Girls, who adopt names of famous women artists to mask their true identities (along with fabulous gorilla masks), I

have found that other “superheroines” apparently took up superheroine masks as they penned education articles. For instance, some publications are attributed to “Bat Girl” or “Oracle,” otherwise known as “Barbara Gordon,” demonstrating how librarians and teachers are currently adopting superheroine personas to publish (Foster, 2004, p. 30). This particular form of ghostwriting mimics the secret identity or alter ego of comic book heroines, highlighting another interesting way of reading and writing about comics. We might well ask students and teachers to reflect seriously and playfully about what they would do and say if they had a superhero(ine) mask and/or anonymity, sphere of influence, and superpowers to impact change. Further, Barbara Gordon is an intriguing female characterization of superpower, for her mythology includes a crippling injury that transforms her from an able-bodied superheroine into a paraplegic. However, Gordon reinvents herself as a martial artist and computer expert as her second superheroine identity, Oracle.

Recently, middle school art educator Amber Ward (2010) has used so-called Fantasy Facebook so that her students can reinvent themselves and their social circles to create idealized, imagined profiles. In this way, one can construct digital identities that link to real sites pertaining to students’ personal goals, historical figures and events, and creative storytelling. I also wonder how students might explore gendered selves and storylines. What might one do or say differently within the persona of a male hero or a female superheroine? Or how would one live or act differently as a superhero, who, like many aforementioned gods or goddesses, could change genders?

Gender Ambivalence in Graphica

Hope Larson’s *Chiggers* is an example of gender ambivalence in graphica. At face value a simple piece of graphica for and about girls at summer camp: this book weaves many different types of information and relational experience into its narrative. *Chiggers* gives rich instruction for playing card games, provides a humorous “ad libs” approach to conversation, includes vocabulary tests about camp, details diagrams of how to make a friendship bracelet, and offers a wonderfully comprehensive scientific explanation of the phenomenon of lightning. Each of these



Figure 2. Page 49 of *Chiggers*. © Hope Larson. Courtesy of the artist.

“lessons” fit within the complex interpersonal exchanges and experiences of the female protagonist. Further, the graphic novel elegantly inserts notes and journal entries from the protagonist as part of the plot (Figure 2).

Gender ambivalences in graphica are productively challenging to stereotypes of masculinity and femininity and create new cultural narratives that push against hypersexuality as the storyline within the complexities of human desire.⁸ In this way, we may recognize and critique essentialism of gender in comic book culture, and strive to move beyond it within richer, more inclusive approaches to bodies, narratives, and genres.

8. In some of my earlier research (2008), I emphasized ambivalence as a useful concept for thinking about art and about identity, as we can raise questions about the tensions of social expectations and women’s various reactions as artists and viewers.

References

- Barry, L. (2008). *What it is*. Quebec: Drawn and Quarterly.
- Bechdel, A. (2007). *Fun home: A family tragicomic*. New York, NY: Mariner Books.
- Bell, G. (2006). *Lucky*. Montreal: Drawn and Quarterly.
- Classen, C. (1998). *The color of angels: Cosmology, gender, and the aesthetic imagination*. London: Routledge.
- Foster, K. (2004). Graphic novels in libraries: An Expert's opinion. *Library Media Connection*, 22(5), 30.
- Garber, E. (1995). Teaching art in the context of culture: A Study in the borderlands. *Studies in Art Education*, 36(4), 218-232.
- Guerrilla Girls. (2007). *The Guerrilla Girls' bedside companion to the history of western art*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Gustine, G. (2010, June 29). Makeover for Wonder Woman at 69. *New York Times*. C9.
- Hajdu, D. (2008, March 23). Horror! Suspense! Censorship!; A cultural critic recounts how comics were ripped out of kids' grubby hands. *The Washington Post*. BW08.
- Haslanger, S., Tuana, N., & O'Connor, P. (2011). Topics in feminism. In E. Zalta (Ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Retrieved from <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2011/entries/feminism-topics/>
- Hollander, N. (2005). Interview. In M. Dooley & S. Heller (Eds.), *The Education of a comics artist* (pp. 46-48). New York, NY: Allworth Press.
- Jarvis, C. (2005). Real stakeholder education?: Lifelong learning in the Buffyverse. *Studies in the Education of Adults*, 37(1), 31-46.
- Kieth, S. (2002). *Four women*. New York, NY: Wildstorm.
- Larson, H. (2008). *Chiggers*. New York: Simon and Schuster's Children's Publishing.
- McDivitt, A. (1989). Get real // Sex and violence creep into comics as characters grow up. *Floridian*. 1D.
- Robbins, T. (2002). Gender differences in comics. *Image & narrative: Online magazine of the visual narrative*. Np.
- Satrapa, M. (2007). *The complete Persepolis*. New York, NY: Pantheon Books.
- Schott, G. (2010). From fan appropriation to industry re-appropriation: The sexual identity of comic superheroes. *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics*, 1(1), 17-29.
- Stearn, T. (2005). The Importance of teaching comics. In M. Dooley & S. Heller (Eds.), *The education of a comics artist* (pp. 229-231). New York, NY: Allworth Press.
- Toku, M. (2001). What is manga?: The Influence of pop culture in adolescence. *Art Education*, 54(2), 11-16.
- Van Lente, F., & Dunlavey, R. (2009). *Action Philosophers!* Brooklyn, NY: Evil Twin Comics.
- Wagner-Ott, A. (2002). An analysis of gender identity through dolls and action figure politics in art education. *Studies in Art Education*, 43(3), 246-63.
- Weida, C. (2008). Ambivalences of art: Nuance, contradiction, and duality in the words and works of women in contemporary ceramics. Doctoral dissertation, Columbia University Teachers College.
- Williams, R. M.-C. (2008). Image, text, and story: Comics and graphic novels in the classroom. *Art Education*, 61(6), 14-18.

Appendix A: Selected Comics and Graphic Novels by Women

Chiggers (2008). Hope Larson (artist/author). Alladin.
Grey Horses (2006). Hope Larson (artist/author). Oni Press.
Dead Boy Detectives. (2005). Jill Thompson (artist/author). Vertigo.
Elf Quest. (2005). Wendy and Richard Pini. (artists/authors) DC Comics.
Lucky (2006). Gabriel Bell (artist/author). Drawn and Quarterly.
Persepolis. (2003). Marjane Satrapi. (artist/author). Pantheon Comics.
Token (2008). Alisa Kwitney and Artist Joelle Jones (writers). DC Comics.
Will You Still Love Me if I Wet the Bed? (2005). (artist/author). Liz Prince. Top Shelf.

Appendix B: Selected Digital Resources Addressing Graphica and Gender

<http://userpages.umbc.edu/~korenman/wmst/persepolis.html>
*Listserv discussion concerning the use of Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* in teaching

<http://blog-aauw.org/2009/12/17/gender-violence-a-look-at-female-comic-book-characters/>
*Blog discussion of gender violence and comic book characters

<http://www.blogger.com/where-my-ladies-strong-women-graphic-novels-part-one>
*Blog resource post of strong female characters in graphica

<http://motherjones.com/media/2007/07/supergirls-gone-wild-gender-bias-comics-shortchanges-superwomen>
*Article addressing gender bias in female superheroes

http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/resources/educational/lessons/secondary/gender_portrayal/gender_stereotypes.cfm
*Media Awareness Center lesson plan addressing gender and comics

<http://www.comicvine.com/gender-change/12-55776/Wiki/editable-content-about-the-notion-of-gender-change-in-which-a-character-s-identity-is-radically-transformed>

<http://hubpages.com/hub/Gay-Comic-Book-Characters>
*List and descriptions of openly gay comic book characters

<http://www.blogger.com/girls-who-love-comics-need-feminist-mentors>
*Blog post about girls and comic book consumption, addressing issues of gender and body image with quotes from artists/authors

<http://girl-wonder.org/>
*"Because capes aren't just for boys"

<http://www.heaven4heroes.com/heaven4heroes/Intro.html>
*Artist site of author of *The SUPERGIRLS: Fashion, Feminism, Fantasy, and the History of Comic Book Heroines*

About the Author

Courtney Lee Weida is an assistant professor of art education at Adelphi University. She has taught visual art and poetry with children through schools, camps, museums, and afterschool programs. Her recent research explores gender issues, zine production, and cybercultures.

Correspondence regarding this article should be addressed to the author at cweida@adelphi.edu.