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SIMULTANEOUS INTERSECTIONALITY IN THE COMICS OF CATEL AND SABRINA JONES: UNDERSTANDING WOMEN'S LIFE STORIES

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DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the
College of Arts and Sciences
at the University of Kentucky

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2020

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

SIMULTANEOUS INTERSECTIONALITY IN THE COMICS OF CATEL AND SABRINA JONES: UNDERSTANDING WOMEN'S LIFE STORIES

The project examines how the theories of simultaneity and intersectionality are useful in analyzing the lived experiences of the authors and their subjects. Specifically, this dissertation analyzes how French comic artist Catel and American comics artist Sabrina Jones use the medium of comics to recount their autobiographical stories within and alongside their biographical stories of Benoîte Groult and Margaret Sanger, respectively.

KEYWORDS: Intersectionality, Simultaneity, Women's Narrative, Comics, Graphic Novels

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DEDICATION

To my baby bear

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

> "The resources available to us for benign access to each other, for vaulting the mere blue air that separates us, are few but powerful: language, image, and experience."
>
> —Toni Morrison, *The Origin of Others*

1.1 Introduction

This dissertation uses a French and a U.S. feminist comics authors, situated in their national context, to explore women's narratives as they tell stories about the lives of other women as well as their own experiences within the same context of systems of oppressions. Specifically, I analyze and compare how two contemporary women comics artists share their own life narratives as a way to expose and examine, and literally illustrate, their connections to the women who are their biographical subjects. The comics artists, Catel, who is French, and Sabrina Jones, who is U.S. born, share their personal stories (creating a space of vulnerability and connection with their subjects) while telling the stories of Benoîte Groult and Margaret Sanger, respectively. The works of Catel and Jones use the stories of Groult and Sanger to literally show lived experiences within systems of oppression. As suggested by Toni Morrison in *The Origin of Others*, the use of "language, image, and experience" is a powerful way to "access" or connect with others. For feminist scholars, comics combines these three elements—language, image, and experience—to view women's lives in ways that highlight simultaneous intersectionality.

Catel's and Jones' use of the comics medium shows how the lives of women are whole and irreducible. I propose the conceptual use of simultaneous intersectionality to understand the similarities in the works of both artists, Catel and Jones, and their messages. The medium of comics in itself allows for an understanding of simultaneous lived experiences of the women through its production of "language, image, and experience" on the page to create a narrative. An analysis of Catel and Jones will contribute to feminist understandings of women's lived experiences through comics, which imply an expression of simultaneity—an irreducible experience—on the pages. Readers of the work are thus invited by the medium to apply simultaneous intersectionality, allowing for expanded understandings of lived experiences in systems of oppression.

Comics use of image and text creates a medium allowing expression of thought to be performed in accessible connections between, in the cases of Catel and Jones, artist

and subject. Hillary Chute argues, "Comics teaches us to pay attention to the knowledge produced by images, and to consider, in our analytic models, not only the dialogics… but further, W. J. T. Mitchells' classic question *What do pictures want?*" ("Drawing is a Way of Thinking": 633). As comics artists, Catel and Jones use both words and images in order to create meaning. They use the form to create a narrative structure to tell a story. Catel and Jones use both the genre of biography and autobiography to create a story. They utilize as Chute states succinctly, "drawing is a way of thinking" ("Drawing is a Way of Thinking": 633). Catel and Jones share their thoughts and process of creating their comics art and how it creates their connections with their subjects—Groult and Sanger—whose lived experiences are connected to systems of oppression that continue to exist in the experiences of Catel and Jones.

Catel and Sabrina Jones, both white, middle-class women born in the 1960s, are comics artists who write and draw biographical graphic narratives. On the surface, their works examine the life story of an individual, Benoîte Groult and Margaret Sanger respectively, as is traditional in biographies. However, closer examination reveals that the artists are doing more than simply recounting the biography of an individual; they are also showing the connection that Catel and Jones feel to their subjects, and the experiences of their subjects, as well as their own experiences within the same or substantially similar systems of oppression that remain in place in a different (later) time and within locational context (national state systems, France and the United States)—or across time and space.

While we can be left to assume that the often-cited quote by scholars of biography from Paul Murray Kendall applies, "any biography uneasily shelters an autobiography within it" (*The Art of Biography*: x), Catel and Jones are not inadvertently revealing their own life connections to their subjects. Catel and Jones make deliberate artistic and narrative choices to incorporate their own autobiographies in the respective biographical works. By incorporating their life stories with their subjects, Catel and Jones create visual and textual narratives that present to the reader a visualization of similarities in lived experiences of women within systems of oppression across time and space.

Linda Wagner-Martin, in *Telling Women's Lives: The New Biography*, discusses the difficulties women writers face when creating works about other women. Wagner-Martin argues that "[a]t issue is the way literary history has sometimes prevented women from telling stories—their own, those of their female friends and relatives, and those narratives of women's lives that they have created from their rich imaginations" (x). Catel and Jones create stories about two women who may be relatively unknown to larger populations, although who are accessible contemporarily to Catel, in the case of Groult, and historically to Jones, in the case of Sanger. The artists, through their medium of graphics or comics, show simultaneous experiences across time and space, thus presenting the subjects as whole and irreducible individuals.

How individuals' life experiences occur within a temporal and locational context, yet transcend across "time and space," becomes an important point of inquiry to

understand how Catel and Jones make connections with their subjects. In her analysis of Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*, Hillary Chute argues,

> And while *Persepolis* may show trauma as (unfortunately) ordinary, it rejects the idea that it is (or should ever be) normal, suggesting everywhere that the ethical visual and verbal practice of 'not forgetting' is not merely about exposing and challenging the virulent machinations of 'official histories' but is more specifically about examining and bearing witness to the intertwining of the everyday and the historical. (*Graphic Women:* 156).

Both Catel and Jones explore and navigate their temporal and spatial locations relative to their subjects in their comics. Their comics examine and explore how women's every day, lived experiences are affected by their contexts, bound by the systems of oppression in place, but more importantly, Catel and Jones show how connections with other women's lived experiences can form understandings of these systems and their impacts on the lives of women across time and space.

Simultaneity is understood as happenings occurring at the same time. Physicists like Einstein theorized about whether simultaneity exists and the physical consequences of its properties. However, from a philosophical standpoint, simultaneity is a consequence of human perception[1]. By using the term "simultaneity," I mean to emphasize the synthesis of human perceptions through a single time and space, as well as across time (chronologically) and space (locations).

Individuals perceive the world and experience it through their bodies, including their brains, and synthesize their experiences into one "self." Merleau-Ponty discusses the way the body and perception interact to create knowledge in his essay "The problem of the body" in *Phenomenology of Perception.* He argues, "I consider my body, which is my point of view upon the world, as one of the objects of the world" (73), which shows the connection between the body, knowledge and understanding, and the outside world. Merleau-Ponty continues by arguing, "I treat my own perceptual history as a result of my relations with the objective world" (73). In essence, Merleau-Ponty is considering how experiences and perceptions are a form of knowledge of the self. Catel and Jones use the medium of comics to make connections between their own lived experiences and those of their subjects, creating works that show their subjects' lives in relative time and space, and by extension create an expression of the lives of women that are whole and

[1] I discuss in Chapter 2 the contribution of philosophical inquiry concerning simultaneity through French philosopher Henri Bergson (1859-1941). More precisely, I reference the public debate he had with Albert Einstein concerning the concept of time. The significance for feminist theory and simultaneity relies not in the scientific understanding of simultaneity, but rather how philosophers, like Bergson, have questioned how human understanding of time is changed because of perception. Leon Jacobson in his "Translator's Notes" of Bergson's *Duration and Simultaneity* states, "[humans] have at our disposal the concept of simultaneity; and we owe this concept to our ability to perceive external flows of events either together with the flow of our own duration, or separately from it, or, still better, both separately and together, at one and the same time" (vii). As Jacobson points out and prefaces Bergson's original argument, Bergson's line of inquiry concerns how the human mind processes time through perception.

irreducible across time and space. Or in other words, the medium produces a narrative of women experiencing a full and non-fragmented humanity across time and space.

Catel and Jones create works that examine their own present moment and personal experiences through the lens of their subject's personal experiences. However, as Wagner-Martin explains, telling women's stories is not straightforward nor singular. Wagner-Martin argues that

> Telling a woman's life, however, is less formulaic. For one thing, most women's lives are a tightly woven mesh of public and private events. The primary definition of a woman's selfhood is likely to be this combined public-private identity. So, to write the story of these interconnected parts of a woman's life, in order to tell her complete story, means creating different structures for women's biography. (6)

Wagner-Martin's argument refers to different and new ways of telling stories distinct from traditional storytelling because traditional genres, structures, and methods do not suffice for women to express their lived experiences[2].

Editors Sidonie Smith's and Julia Watson's *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*[3] dedicated a section of their book to "Modes and Genres." In Leigh Gilmore's essay in this section, "Autobiographics," she discusses and explains how she analyzes how women write about their lives using new forms. Gilmore argues,

> [Julian of Norwich, Gertrude Stein, Monique Wittig, and Minnie Bruce Pratt] removed themselves in material and psychological ways from a social economy in which they would function as objects of exchange through self-representational practices and social and political acts and choices, and they represented their identities through an emphasis on the *I* that contrasts with the *I* in the traditional forms or epistemologies they restructure…. (184)

Women in the past have altered the conventions of genre in order to represent their identities. In the examples Gilmore cites, women authors wrote to remove themselves from being read as an object and instead created new ways of expressing themselves.

Similarly, Catel and Jones use unconventional forms of storytelling. To tell women's lives, both Catel and Jones draw the connections between their own personal lived experiences and their subjects lived experiences. They show readers how the auto/biographical stories of women's identities cannot be disconnected nor reduced to a singular illustration or paragraph in prose. To respond to Wagner-Martin's argument,

[3] Although Wagner-Martin contends with women's biographies, and Smith and Watson work on women's autobiographies, the essays, in the third part of Smith and Watson's collection, include titles like "Autography/Transformation/Asymmetry" (Jeanne Perreault), "Sacred Secrets: A Strategy for Survival" (Doris Summer), "Resisting Autobiography: Out-Law Genres and Transnational Feminist Subjects" (Caren Kaplan). I highlight the titles in this section because these authors consider how women transgress the genre's conventions for gendered reasons and Smith and Watson recognize the value in examining how and why women write in non-conventional ways.

comics literally and visually expand the method used to present women's lived experiences and engage with the audience through the demands of the comics medium.

Catel and Jones' storytelling through comics uses an influential medium. Comics in the European market has had a different trajectory than that of the United States. In the United States, I would argue that the most recognizable form of comics relates to superheroes. The Franco-Belgian[4] comics market centers around storytelling through a variety of genres, such as adventure stories, however the superhero genre is an "American" genre not developed in the Franco-Belgian market. Rather, the Franco-Belgian market focuses on characters and their day-to-day routines and adventures. Importantly, in the Franco-Belgian market, comics was dubbed the 9th art, in direct relationship with the other arts (painting, architecture, and music to name a few) and continues to garner a respectability that the comics tradition in the United States still seeks. Mark Williams reports comics sales in France for 2018 with 12% of the book market represented by the comics medium. Seb Emina, discussing sales for the Franco-Belgian market in *The New York Times*, reports that comics in 2018 grossed around $580 million dollars and over 5000 titles[5]. Both Catel and Jones are participating in a medium that allows them to creatively tell their life stories, as well as a medium that reaches a large audience in both France and the United States, respectively.

Catel and Jones each tell (parts of) the life story of her subject and also incorporate (parts of) their own life story into the graphic narrative. In addition, each artist adds an element to her storytelling that is self-reflective of the artist's engagement with the story. The artists position (literally and figuratively) their own life story in the text while simultaneously intertwining it with the biography of their subject. The simultaneous intertwining makes the life story of the subject less an objective topic or theme, and more an expression of how life stories of whole human beings can be or are connected.

Comics artist Scott McCloud's seminal work *Understanding Comics* defines comics as "juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer" (9)[6]. Since comics is already double in form—it tells stories using words and pictures

[4] The French and Belgian comics market is often discussed in terms of Belgium and France because of the shared language as well as a shared comics history.

[5] See: Emina, Seb. "In France, Comic Books Are Serious Business." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 29 Jan. 2019., Gary, Nicolas. "BD Adulte, Jeunesse, Manga : Les Ventes Décollent En Librairie." *Actualitté*, 18 Jan. 2019., Williams, Mark. "Comics and Graphic Novel Sales up 6.3% in French Independent Bookstores, Accounting for 12% of Revenue." *The New Publishing Standard*, 20 Jan. 2019. Calvin Reid reports that in the United States in 2018, the same year to compare directly with the Franco-Belgian market, sales for comics was around $1.09 billion. See: Reid, Calvin. "2018 North American Comics Sales Rise to $1.09 Billion." *PublishersWeekly.com*, 03 May, 2019

[6] While this particular definition has been challenged by scholars like Thierry Grœnsteen, McCloud's definition will suffice. For the purposes of this dissertation, I will use the word comics, or graphic narrative as a synonym, to refer to the works of Catel and Jones. Current usage among comics scholars is to use the word "comics" as a singular when referring to the medium, e.g. *Comics is a medium of image and text*.

simultaneously[7]—it is striking how these women comics artists create multiple narratives within or using the simultaneous medium.

1.2 Catel (1964-)

Catel Muller, a French comics artist who goes artistically by her first name, published *Ainsi soit Benoîte Groult* in 2013. *Ainsi soit Benoîte Groult* is marketed as a biography about the French feminist scholar Benoîte Groult (1920-2016). Groult's most famous work is *Ainsi soit-elle* (1975), which has sold over a million copies. Catel plays with the famous work and title for her comic book about Groult. Groult's book title serves as a pun. The French expression "ainsi soit-il" means "amen." Groult feminizes the subject pronoun to "elle" and thus states "a(wo)men" instead of "amen." Groult is also known for her autobiographical novels, and her scholarship about the writings of Olympe de Gouges[8].

Catel juxtaposes her life with Groult's by drawing links between the systems of oppression that both feel—mainly systemic sexism. Both women are white, members of the bourgeoisie, and the intellectual elite in French society. The work centers on Catel interviewing Groult and the formation of their friendship while Groult recounts her life, gives talks and presentations, and they discuss Catel's work as an artist and a woman and the difficulties both have experienced. Catel's hybrid work—biography and autobiography—in the hybrid medium of comics—text and image—is also showing the connection she feels to Groult. Specifically, Catel shows the simultaneity of lived experiences, specifically Groult's and her own, through time and space in systems of oppression by juxtaposing those lived experiences.

1.3 Sabrina Jones (1960-)

Sabrina Jones, an American/U.S. comics artist, wrote the auto/biographical graphic narrative *Our Lady of Birth Control: A Cartoonist's Encounter with Margaret Sanger* (2016), which juxtaposes Jones' and Sanger's political activism for women's reproductive rights with the stories of their lives experiencing systems of oppression. Jones, a feminist activist, personalizes her own sexual education and fight for women's reproductive rights with Margaret Sanger's (1879-1966) life narrative. The presentation of simultaneous life narratives exposes women's oppression through their bodies and reproductive rights during multiple time periods as well as through varied historical contexts.

[7] For more on the scholarly conversation on defining comics, see Grœnsteen, McCloud, Eisner, Chute, Cohn, and Peeters.

[8] Olympe de Gouges (1748-1793) was a French revolutionary figure that wrote "The Declaration of the Rights of Woman" and was one of only three (purported) women guillotined during the Revolution. She was guillotined for her political engagement.

Jones' art is educational and politically engaged. Or as one reviewer from the *Library Journal* stated, "The feminist slogan 'the personal is political' was never more apt as when considering contraception, and Jones's account shows how one committed person can change the world." Jones' work, I would argue, also flips the slogan to make it read "the political is personal" with this work as she shows how politics affects her and affected Sanger personally.

A key distinction between Catel's and Jones' respective works is that Jones did not know her subject "personally." However, the argument can be made that for Jones, as is implied by the religious connotation of the title, that Sanger is a very personal figure with whom she shares an intimacy. Like Catel and Groult, both Jones and Sanger are white, educated, middle class women. Sanger, it should be noted, did start her life poor; she was able to change her class distinction through education and marriage.

Jones' work on Margaret Sanger is a call to political activism concerning women's right to various methods of birth control. Jones also uses simultaneity to show women's oppression through their lack of control over their bodies. Jones' use of temporal and spatial simultaneity between Sanger and herself, like Catel and Groult, highlights the figurative prisons women are confined in.

1.4 Comics as Simultaneous Narratives

The medium of comics allows for certain creative juxtapositions that other forms of *writing,* strictly speaking, do not. Catel and Jones construct a sequence of images and texts in order to tell a story to their reader. In essence, their comic strips or panels—the sequence of images on each page—is the artist's narrative structure. The hybrid narrative structure[9] with the blended genre of autobiography and biography works to expose visually and textually women's historical and contemporary oppression by subverting hegemonic forms of storytelling, that is, a prose biography detailing the lives of their subjects. Catel and Jones use the graphic narrative to show and tell women's historical and contemporary experiences as irreducible within systems of oppression.

This dissertation project addresses the following questions within this narrative genre: How and to what effect do Catel and Jones connect and blend their own contemporary narratives simultaneously with the lives of their subjects in the auto/biographical comics they produce? What are the implications and impact for understanding women's lives and lived experiences through the use of this type of simultaneous narratives? How does "simultaneity" allow us as feminist scholars to expand how we understand and visualize intersectionality (discussed below), while

[9] By "hybrid," I mean the use of two distinct methods of storytelling mixed into one which creates a new method of storytelling, i.e. *comics*.

analyzing/examining the structures and systems (of oppression) that impact women's lives and lived experiences?

1.5 Intersectionality and Simultaneity

The theory of intersectionality, as outlined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color*, proposes to explain how different identities converge and cause people to experience systems of oppression. Crenshaw argues,

> I should say at the outset that intersectionality is not being offered here as some new, totalizing theory of identity. Nor do I mean to suggest that violence against women of color can be explained through the specific frameworks of race and gender considered here. Indeed, factors I address only in part or not at all, such as class or sexuality, are often as critical in shaping the experiences of women of color. My focus on the intersections of race and gender only highlights the need to account for multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed. (1993: 1244-1245)

Crenshaw's argument examines how race, class, and gender intersect in the lived experiences of women of color. For example, she considers how a woman's race and/or class shapes and influences her lived experiences when she is denied access to services, education, and opportunities because of her race and/or class.

However, as Crenshaw argues, it is still only part of the woman's experience that is examined, leaving a fragmented understanding of the whole human being because, as cited above, it "only highlights the need to account for multiple grounds of identity." Intersectionality is not to be conflated with a couple of identities such as race or gender, but as a frame for how as feminist scholars we can understand human experiences based on multiple identities within systems of oppression.

When addressing women's lived experiences, particular experiences may/should be given priority in analysis. Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge give an example of prioritizing one identity over another in their book, *Intersectionality*. They state,

> People generally use intersectionality as an analytic tool to solve problems that they or others around them face. Most US colleges and universities, for example, face the challenge of building more inclusive and fair communities. The social divisions of class, race, gender, ethnicity, citizenship, sexuality, and ability are especially evident with higher education. (2)

The example Collins and Bilge offer centers a question of fairness or justice. However, as they point out, the solution that university administrators often employed were piecemeal options, or "colleges recruited and served groups one at a time, offering, for example, special programs for African Americans, Latinos, women, gays and lesbians, veterans, returning students, and persons with disabilities" (2-3). The solution to

administrators, as Collins and Bilge point out, was to address each identity individually[10]. Subsequently, groups whose experiences denied them access to higher education could "see themselves" in the college context, but only in terms of single identity categories.

Different aspects, or socially constructed markers, of an individual's identity highlight distinct experiences in systems of oppression. Collins and Bilge write,

> Each of these social movements elevated one category of analysis and action above others, for example, race within the civil rights movement, or gender within feminism or class within the union movement. Because African American women were simultaneously black *and* female *and* workers, these single-focus lenses on social inequality left little space to address the complex social problems that they face. Black women's specific issues remained subordinated within each movement because no social movement by itself would, nor could, address the entirety of discriminations they faced. (3)

The experiences of Black women workers highlight the distinctions they felt within social movements addressing systems of oppression.

To contend with the limiting problem of identities, feminist scholars who use intersectionality as a tool or theory often acknowledge a list of human experiences they cannot reasonably address in their scholarship because the scope is too large. For example, Judith Butler argues, "theories of feminist identity that elaborate predicates of color, sexuality, ethnicity, class, and able-bodiness invariably close with an embarrassed 'etc.' at the end of the list" (*Gender Trouble:* 196). The "etc."— or the ongoing list that is too long to include—that Butler references is the exhaustive list of "identities" that feminist scholars hope to analyze in order to expose systems of oppression.

Intersectionality as a theory strives to examine how different identities of the "etc." cause people to experience systems of oppression since different people experience their identities differently. Carastathis argues, "Intersectionality-as-challenge urges us to grapple with and overcome our entrenched perceptual-cognitive habits of essentialism, categorical purity, and segregation" (*Intersectionality*: 3). Both Butler and Carastathis are arguing that the connections across the "etc." of identities resists essentialism of experience and instead creates unique experiences in systems of oppression.

Intersectionality as a framework for analysis should not be understood or employed as an additive of identities—a checklist or an "embarrassed etc.," but rather lead to making visible the simultaneity of human experiences. Butler responds to her own apparent criticism of the "embarrassed etc." with an encouraging and hopeful reading of the etc.'s purpose. She argues, "[the 'etc.'] is a sign of exhaustion as well as

[10] Collins and Bilge follow up their example with the obvious critique that "it became clearer that this one-at-a-time approach not only was slow, but that most students fit into more than one category" (3). They then provide examples of cross-identities such as first-generation women, or first-generation Latinos. However, their larger goal was that the "one-at-a-time" approach addressed some inequalities but could disadvantage certain groups that fit into other categories. Thus, as Collins and Bilge argue, using intersectionality may better address inequality and fairness in a system that disadvantages certain identities.

of the illimitable process of signification itself" (196). Since *et cetera* is Latin for "and the rest," *etc.* can be defined as a continual and infinite list of possibilities. Butler tries to show hope in its use as a continuation too long to publish or elaborate for the reader. Abstractly, the *et cetera* becomes the written stand-in to verbally represent the entire list of identities for the person analyzed in the system of oppression.

It is important to understand that identities and experiences are not synonymous. One's identities can impact the experiences one has, or an experience may shape an identity. Or as Beauvoir famously stated, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (273). The second part to Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* shows how a person's identity shapes the experiences they have, but also that experience shapes a person's identity. Beauvoir also shows how the terms are linked through human perception. Butler uses the term *identity/identities* because Butler is signaling a person's self-hood or individuality is composed of multiple *identities*. An individual's various *identities* may or may not be perceived by others. For example, a person who has a congenital heart defect may have an invisible disability as part of their identity, whereas a person using a wheelchair for mobility may have a disability that is part of their identity and visible[11].

The individual may understand *identities* as markers that differentiate them from and link them to others[12]. Individuals participate in communities differently based on their *identities* and their (visible or invisible) *identities* inform their *experiences* within those communities. Identities may change or alter over time, or in different contexts. An example would be a woman who has an amputated arm. The woman is perceived as a woman as well as a differently abled person after her arm was amputated. Her amputation may influence the kind of jobs she has access to, such as no longer being a construction worker which requires two arms.

In conceptualizing an individual, I prefer to use the term "experiences" instead of identities. In part, and to oversimplify, identities and experiences are a distinction of being (an identity) and having (experiences). An individual perceives themselves in terms of their identities. That individual has and accumulates experiences. Beauvoir's chapter in *The Second Sex* on "Childhood" describes how children identify or are identified by sex and then acquire experiences that shape their identity. Beauvoir gives the example of how playing with a doll teaches a girl to identify as a passive woman and also how to be a woman through the experience of playing as a woman (283). Experiences denotes and connotes how an individual may perceive their own (possibly

[11] There are always exceptions to these categories. Some identities are more visible than others; some people "pass" when their identity is not visible and is concealed.

[12] I explain further in chapter 2 how phenomenologists conceptualize experience and how intersectionality as a framework works to expand understanding of experiences. Kalwant Bhopal's article about interviewing Gypsy families and Asian women distinguishes between shared identities versus experiences and how empathy can occur with either. The article does well to distinguish identity as something one is and that an experience is something one has. See: Bhopal, Kalwant. "Gender, Identity and Experience: Researching Marginalised Groups." Women's Studies International Forum, vol. 33, no. 3, 2010, pp. 188–195.

invisible) identities. The use of *identity* seems fixed even if scholars[13] agree distinctions and differences exist within the term. If we use a different person as an example — a man with multiple sclerosis — then his identities as a differently abled person are similar to the above woman with an amputated arm, except that one of his identities may not be perceived or perceived accurately by others – having multiple sclerosis. His experiences as a man with multiple sclerosis may influence the kind of jobs that he has access to, again, such as not being able to be employed in construction work because of physical limitations. The distinction is, he still has experiences related to or based on his identity whether he discloses his identity or not. Individuals perceive their experiences simultaneously within their understanding of their own identities and the perception of others about their identities. That is to say, a person perceives their self as a whole, simultaneously including all the experiences they associate with their identities.

I concede that some experiences move to the foreground in particular contexts, and thus may disproportionately determine experiences. This does not negate the experiences of a person's whole self across time and space. Teresa de Lauretis discusses this point in *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema.* De Lauretis explains: "I use [experience]… in the general sense of a *process* by which, for all social beings, subjectivity is constructed. Through that process one places oneself or is placed in social reality, and so perceives and comprehends as subjective (referring to, even originating in, oneself) those relations—material, economic, and interpersonal—which are in fact social and, in a larger perspective, historical" (159). De Lauretis explains how lived experiences are not shaped in a vacuum, but rather continuously and subjectively in a particular context for the individual. De Lauretis continues by arguing:

> The process is continuous, its achievement unending or daily renewed. For each person, therefore, subjectivity is an ongoing construction, not a fixed point of departure or arrival from which one then interacts with the world. On the contrary, it is the effect of that interaction—which I call experience; and thus it is produced not by external ideas, values, or material causes, but by one's personal, subjective, engagement in the practices, discourses, and institutions that lend significance (value, meaning, and affect) to the events of the world. (159)

In essence, an experience may be more important or salient to an individual within a given time or location (or both); however, the other lived experiences of the individual are maintained and continuously re-understood or re-evaluated into the self. De Lauretis points to the contextualization of lived experiences and explains how each experience does not exist as a singular moment but exists simultaneously.

[13] Here I am directly thinking about scholars like Crenshaw who emphasizes building coalitions across identities. But also I am drawing on how Carastathis interprets Crenshaw's work concerning coalitions and what it means for individuals. Carastathis states: "When we give in to pressures to reduce the differences that constitute our identities, we are foreclosing a potential coalition with all those who share the repressed or excluded identities—not to mention betraying the possibility of a coalition among all parts of ourselves" (*Intersectionality*: 166).

In her chapter "The Power of Time: Temporal Experiences and A-temporal Thinking?" Schües reminds us that "When considering experiences, the most important notion to understand here is *intentionality*. Experiences are intentional: someone perceives something, feels something, thinks something" (61). Centering the lived experiences of an individual focuses on their perceptions of the self. Schües continues by explaining that individual's experiences are not singularly located in one space and time, but are continuous across time and space. In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty argues a similar point to Schües' about gendered experiences. Merleau-Ponty argues, "even though my present condenses within itself the time gone by and the time to come, it only possesses them in intention" (72). Thus, while an individual may place more importance on an identity at a particular moment, they do not erase prior experiences, current experiences, or anticipated ones.

Human beings experience the self as a synthesized being. Synthesizing experiences, identities, and temporal moments creates unique human beings, as well as unique experiences that create the human experience across time. As Anna Carasthasis explains in her book *Intersectionality: Origins, Contestations, Horizons* (2016), "Indeed, simultaneity—*the nonfragmentation of a phenomenological experience*—may be the most elusive of the purported analytic merits of intersectionality. At best, simultaneity seems to be a function of an integrative meta-analysis that synthesizes essentially additive data." (59: emphasis mine). Carastathis' argument about simultaneity is that each individual has a non-fragmented perspective of who she is.

Carastathis refers to simultaneity as "elusive" because it requires examining the whole rather than only parts of a person's experience. The elusive nature of simultaneity results in one of the main criticisms of intersectionality[14]. The criticism (Nash 2012; Weigman) focuses on how analysis of an individual's experiences in systems of oppression often focuses on one aspect, or a couple, of a person's experience (e.g. race, gender) to the exclusion of their other experiences that the individual perceives. Thus, critics argue that the use of intersectionality as analysis by feminist scholars about an individual's experience may be additive—it adds up to only part of their experiences analyzed rather than the whole, or becomes an "embarrassed etc." Or, as Nash (2008) and Weigman argue, intersectionality reduces an individual to a fragmented analysis by excluding all other experiences.

An understanding of a human being as a whole, irreducible being is difficult to conceptualize. Intersectionality as a method may be used to show the simultaneity of an individual's experiences. Carastathis argues, "as a methodological commitment in quantitative and qualitative research, irreducibility may displace simultaneity" (59). Simultaneity is difficult to access, see, or write about because of the scope of human experiences. The written *et cetera,* which Butler defines as the "illimitable process of

[14] I discuss further and in greater detail the criticisms in Chapter 2. See: Nash, Jennifer C. "Re-thinking Intersectionality." *Feminist Review*. 2008: 1-15.; Weigman, Robyn. *Object Lessons*. Durham: Duke University Press. 2012.

signification" (196) that tries to make visible what Carastathis calls "the nonfragmentation of the phenomenological experience" (59), does not fully capture the entirety of human experience. For one, *etc.*, written as three letters and a period, is visually small. *Etc.* is an all-encompassing yet unenumerated list that cannot show the links and relationships between all of the variables of the human experience.

Phenomenologists, such as Merleau-Ponty, Beauvoir, Butler, and Schües, have long used metaphors in order to explain ways to conceptualize how humans synthesize their perceptions about their experience. I find the use of metaphors intellectually intriguing because scholars are trying to use words — *the embarrassed etc.* — to explain and capture the whole of an individual's human experience. French phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty argues in his book *Phenomenology of Perception*, "If the object is to achieve a perfect density or, in other words, if there is to be an absolute object, it must be an infinity of different perspectives condensed into a strict coexistence, and it must be given as if through a single act of vision comprising a thousand gazes" (72). While Merleau-Ponty is referring to a person's perception of an object through varying interactions at different times, the same analysis applies to how an individual considers her own self. An individual will conceptualize her self from different perspectives, experiences, across time and in different locations, in a "coexistence" (72) and "as if through a single act of vision" (72). Simultaneity of the self is perceptions coexisting through a singular lens.

Simultaneity as theory destabilizes fragmented representation of the self. Carastathis argues how fragmented representation is often a starting point for intersectionality. Carastathis argues,

> [i]ntersectionality can make visible categorical exclusion, but it cannot remedy it at the level of representation; instead of complacency with received categories, it urges their reconceptualization—taking as the starting point for this process the social location of groups whose concrete, 'simultaneous' experiences have been fragmented and distorted beyond recognition. (6)

Intersectionality should expose the systems of oppression that deny an individual their rights as a whole human, or that reduce a person to a singular or simplified identity. However, representing a fragmented experience in systems of oppression may distort the larger systemic problems. For example, in analysis of national education test scores, scholars may focus on the trends in performance of children based on their race or ethnicity without examining how questions of class or gender also affect test scores[15]. Thus, the scholars may propose solutions to address the problems based on results that

[15] For national statistics that consider race of students alone, see https://uncf.org/pages/k-12-disparity-facts-and-stats; for analysis of socioeconomic (class) impact on standardized tests, see Croizet, Jean-Claude, and Marion Dutrévis. "Socioeconomic Status and Intelligence: Why Test Scores Do Not Equal Merit." *Journal of Poverty*, vol. 8, no. 3, 2004, pp. 91–107.; for analysis that shows the discrepencies between the impacts of ethnicity, race, and gender, see https://www.brookings.edu/research/race-gaps-in-sat-scores-highlight-inequality-and-hinder-upward-mobility/

fragment and reduce the systemic oppression to one part (identity) of the student's lived experience.

In this context, the fragmentation becomes a synecdoche—a part that represents the whole. Collins and Bilge argue, "Some critics construe intersectionality as inherently flawed due to overemphasis on identity, and even recommend abandoning intersectionality together. Others also point to the overemphasis on identity within intersectionality, counselling intersectionality scholars to pay less attention to it" (124).

The synecdoche is a fragmented representation of the whole person (a singular identity) which leads to misunderstanding the synthesized experiences of the whole human being. Fragmentation of the individual's lived experiences only exposes a part of or partial systems of oppression. Replacing the whole with the fragmented part within a narrative subsequently distorts how the systems of oppression are understood.

I argue that flipping simultaneity from an outcome of intersectionality to prioritizing it with and alongside intersectionality could expand how we, as feminist scholars, make visible whole human experiences within systems of oppression. Rather than hoping, as Carastathis argues, that simultaneity is a conclusion of intersectional theory in application, fore-fronting simultaneity allows us to analyze human experiences in systems of oppression through similarities and differences, by comparing and contrasting the lived experiences of individuals as a whole. Analyzing the experiences of an individual, in the case of auto/biographical comics in this dissertation, alongside the experiences of other individuals, whether those experiences are taking place in the same or different time and space, can lead to new ways of understanding systems of oppression and the human experience.

The theory of intersectionality seeks to analyze and understand human experiences within systems of oppression. In praxis, intersectionality strives to expose and dismantle systems of oppression through an analysis of these experiences. Feminist scholars like Crenshaw and Carastathis honor the agency of individuals to affect change through a careful examination of the ways a person distinctly experiences oppressive systems. They concede that human experiences are not founded on one criterion of experience, and systems of oppression do not function by simply focusing on one aspect of an individual's existence. Rather, systems of oppression function in complicated ways that affect individuals differently as they synthesize their experiences across identities and time.

Feminist scholars, like Crenshaw, are faced with the challenge of not fragmenting the individual's experience while using intersectionality for analysis. Contending with the largesse of human experience, may cause elimination of parts of an individual's identities while adding up other identities to expose systems of oppression. However, if the analysis shows how an individual partially experiences oppression then only part of the systems of oppression are exposed. For example, analysis of women who experience wage discrimination in the work force may only present a partial understanding of wage

discrimination if the understanding is over-generalized and does not separately analyze the experiences of wage discrimination of women based on race/ethnicity/racialization (for example, Latinx or Hispanic women versus White women) and other simultaneous identities, such as Muslim religious practice[16].

Comics as a medium may initially seem incongruous with emphasizing simultaneity in an intersectional approach. Comics is sequential images on a page, or necessarily fragmented images of a person's story—not too dissimilar in presentation to a scrapbook or collection of family photographs. Comics' frames on the surface seem to reinforce the critique of intersectionality as an additive approach or a reduction of human experiences to a (partial or at best two dimensional) snapshot. However, comics scholars like McCloud, Grœnsteen, and Chute emphasize the structure of comics as images in sequence. Chute argues, "Images in comics appear in fragments, just as they do in actual recollection… The art of crafting words and pictures mimics the procedure of memory" (*Graphic Narrative*: 4). The fragments are linked together, juxtaposed against and with other images to create meaning within a narrative structure.

The form of comics serves simultaneity. The comics artist is able to sequence multiple images through time and space on a single page. The form and sequence of images allow the reader to see and read the images individually as well as juxtaposed against the other images on the page—as both singularly and a whole. The comics page reinforces and forefronts seeing the human experience simultaneously "as if through a single act of vision comprising a thousand gazes" (Merleau-Ponty: 72). Chute explains how the comics medium allows for multiple temporal and spatial understandings while she discusses the subjects of her book in *Graphic Women*. Chute argues, "the comics form not only presents a child protagonist and an adult narrator but also gives voice simultaneously to both perspectives, even within the space of a single panel, layering temporalities and narrative positions" (5). The medium thus offers an opportunity to understand women's lived experiences as simultaneous.

This dissertation project addresses and recognizes how Catel and Jones use simultaneity in their comics to show the simultaneity of their lived experiences in systems of oppression. The simultaneous autobiographical and biographical narratives expand the scope of how we can see and understand an individual's experiences within systems of oppression. Or, as Chute argues, "Formally and stylistically distinct, (re-) imagining history in different ways, [these works] revise a traditional understanding of literary life narratives, articulating a sophisticated representational aesthetics and ethics" (*Graphic Women*: 27). Seeing simultaneous images and narratives allows the reader

[16] For example, see Frader, Laura L. "Définir Le Droit Au Travail: Rapports Sociaux De Sexe, Famille Et Salaire En France Aux XIXe Et XXe Siècles." *Le Mouvement Social*, no. 184, 1998, pp. 5–22. Her article discusses how women's right to work and a higher salary in France are affected by gender and perceptions of men as a family's primary "breadwinner." However, her argument does not take into consideration questions of race and/or ethnicity that may also exclude women from certain types of salaried positions in France, thus presenting only a partial picture of a larger systemic problem.

access to seeing the whole experiences of individuals. Simultaneous images and narratives also help the reader understand how systems of oppression affect individuals differently based on seeing separate human beings simultaneously presented, as well as the reader's own experiences.

1.6 Challenges of Feminist Histories

It is important to recognize that Catel and Jones come from different countries, France and the United States, respectively, as well as acknowledging that these countries have different feminist histories. The historical and cultural context from which both artists come challenges how we can interpret and understand their lived experiences.

First and foremost, both women artists created their works and published them in their maternal languages and published their works in their native countries. Catel's work has not been published in English[17]. In order to fully understand the traditions and histories that Catel explores in the text, the reader would need to be able to read the original French. The same applies to Jones' work—reading in English presents and preserves the original meanings of Jones' text.

While both artists explore feminist histories that pertain to their own cultural context, I recognize the value in understanding and knowing the feminist histories in both countries in how they are similar but also in how they diverge from each other. Both countries have established literary and artistic traditions, both have distinct political trajectories, and both have unique concepts of national identity that impact how I analyze and read their works.

The chapters on the theoretical use of simultaneous intersectionality as well as the individual chapters on Catel and Jones further discuss the traditions from both France and the United States. I elaborate on how the feminist histories that both artists draw from position them within their own cultural moments. Each artist, Catel and Jones, examines their own historical feminist narratives from their own political and contemporary standpoint.

1.7 Narrative Theory as Method

While reading and researching for this project, I am struck by how often the core of human experience is a "story." Humans strive for, desire, want, and need stories[18]. We read, watch, consume, and tell stories in order to interact with other human beings. In *Story and Situation: Narrative Seduction and the Power of Fiction,* Ross Chambers

[17] At the time of writing this dissertation, the work has yet to be published in English. All translations are my own.

[18] For a brief historical overview of tracing the oldest story and scholars seeking to analyze the evolutionary need for stories, see: http://www.bbc.com/culture/story/20180503-our-fiction-addiction-why-humans-need-stories

explains how narrative is contextualized within human relationships. Chambers argues there is "the social fact that narrative mediates human relationships and derives its 'meaning' from them" (4). As human beings, we use stories to relate to other human beings. Through the stories we create and hear, we come to understand ourselves and other humans.

Human experience is recounted, told, and structured through the stories we tell. In the episode "The Big Bang" of *Doctor Who,* the eleventh Doctor leans over a sleeping child and explains to her that she will not forget him, but instead he will be a story in her head. The Doctor then states, "We are all stories in the end" (40:09). In the end, the comics artists featured in this dissertation (re)create a story by recounting the stories of their subjects and their own lives.

Comics is a medium that juxtaposes image/text in a sequence to tell a story. Analyzing how the stories about human experience are told in this medium becomes a method for effectively examining simultaneous intersectionality. In other words, comics, as a medium, relies on how the image and text work together, simultaneously, in order to tell a story.

Contributing directly to the field of narratology—or the study of narrative, is beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, the tools for analysis provided in the discipline of narratology serve to enlighten how we perceive and understand human experience in systems of oppression. As Susan S. Lanser writes in her chapter "Toward (a Queerer and) More (Feminist) Narratology" of the co-edited *Narrative Theory Unbound: Queer and Feminist Interventions* (2015), "Acknowledging not only that narrative is effectively intersectional but that intersectionality is effectively narrative may increase the value of narratological tools and methods across genres and disciplines by integrating formal patterns with social ones" (33: emphasis mine). Narrative analysis serves as an analytic tool for simultaneous intersectionality because it is through stories that humans share their lived experiences.

Lanser's argument highlights a key aspect of narratology-— it is inherently a social construct based on formal patterns. The stories we tell are based in cultural institutions. Analyzing Catel's and Jones' narrative structures shows how these comics artists create three simultaneous layers of narrative. First, the comics artists tell these stories using the voice of their subject, often citing, quoting, or documenting the subject's story with the subject's own words. Second, the artists use their own voices, their own words, and their own art to narrate and interweave autobiographical information. Third, the artists add another layer of self-reflection, outside the main story, on the connections of the life narratives. The self-reflection that the artists add to their works include questions about identity, women's stories, private and public matters, and feminist histories.

Catel and Jones create simultaneous intersectional narratives to make connections between themselves and Groult and Sanger (respectively). While the artists share the stories, giving the reader a view of the lived experiences of their subjects, we can analyze

how the artists and their subjects experience systems of oppression through time and space. The way Catel and Jones tell their own and their subjects' stories, the way they reveal to the reader their personal and their subjects' experiences within systems of oppression expands our view of how systems of oppression operate. Studying the artists' stories and narrative structure shows the relationships these artists form with their subjects through their experiences. As Gerard Genette[19] argues in *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, "Analysis of narrative discourse will thus be for me, essentially, a study of the relationships between narrative and story, between narrative and narrating, and (to the extent that they are inscribed in the narrative discourse) between story and narrating" (29). Genette's argument shows that the way humans tell stories creates an understanding of relationships. Catel and Jones use their storytelling techniques to share their relationships and experiences on multiple levels (as detailed in the chapters on the work of each).

1.8 In Sum

This dissertation will contribute to feminist scholarship on women's lived experiences in systems of oppression by using narrative analysis to explain how simultaneity is necessary to the phenomenological application (understanding meanings within a given context) and operationalization of intersectionality. Simultaneity, in the cases presented in this project, includes a chronological element in intersectionality by showing women's relationships to each other's lives, the connections and parallels. In comics, this takes place in the same time frame (the frame) and may also capture experiences across time in the same space (the page). Simultaneity is a necessary component of the theory of intersectionality in order to visualize women as whole—irreducible—with and alongside other women within a given context or structure of oppression.

Specifically, looking at comics artists and how their works tell simultaneous, intersectional stories can help feminist scholars expand how they examine systems of oppression. Expanding how feminist scholars analyze these works will allow a fuller and larger understanding of the interaction of a whole human being with other whole human beings within systems of oppression.

Considering the research questions for this project, I present a chapter on simultaneity and intersectionality as the framing theory, and how the two theories work together to create a better understanding of women's lived experiences in systems of oppression. This is followed by a chapter on narrative theory as the method for analyzing comics; narrative theory will further our understanding of how feminist scholars can use narrative analysis to better understand the stories of marginalized groups and how the stories contribute to the larger social/cultural narrative. Stories are culturally

[19] Genette's use of these terms is further defined in my chapter on narratology as the basis for the analytic method used in this dissertation.

bound; studying their form and breaks from tradition clarifies how lived experiences differ within systems of oppression. Stories can also expose ways artists fight systems that oppress them by making visible and sharing their lived experiences with an audience.

The chapter on Catel first contextualizes French feminism and French national identity as distinct from the American (United States of America) construct of national identity. The chapter then explores Catel's narrative structure and presents the reader the simultaneous intersectionalities both Catel and her subject, Benoîte Groult, experience in their lives. Catel's work shows the reader two women's lived experiences through time and space within the same systems of oppression.

The chapter on Jones contextualizes the American/U.S. feminist/reproductive rights movement in which Jones participates. I elaborate on how Jones uses narrative to expose women's oppression through reproductive rights. Jones' work shows us how Margaret Sanger's and her own lived experiences allows us a richer understanding of our analysis of systems of oppression across time and space.

The final chapter is a discussion of how an expanded view of intersectionality via simultaneity changes how we see and understand women's lives in theory, in analysis, and in praxis. I conclude with recognizing that how—the method and medium—artists and people tell their stories provides us, as feminist scholars who study lived experiences in systems of oppression an opportunity to understand the whole human being, rather than a fragmented picture. I discuss other works that could be analyzed using the theory of simultaneous intersectionality and employing a narrative method, and how that analysis might benefit from these methods—expanding our understanding the lived experiences of women.

CHAPTER 2. THEORIES OF SIMULTANEITY AND INTERSECTIONALITY—OR TOWARDS A SIMULTANEOUS INTERSECTIONALITY

2.1 Intersectionality

Before I explore how to consider combining intersectionality and simultaneity, I want to address each theory's history and examine key criticism. Discussion of its history and critical reception elucidates the ways it is useful for this project as well as explaining how both theories can flip how we understand human experience in systems of oppression.

Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw's seminal essay, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics" (1989), proposed an analytic framework for understanding that oppression cannot be reduced to singular identities—i.e. race *or* gender. Crenshaw's essay proposed the term *intersectionality* to express the ways women of color faced systems of oppression on simultaneous axes of identity. Crenshaw's argument based in legal practices that excluded and oppressed women of color exposed and subsequently changed the ways feminists approached systems of oppression.

Crenshaw's use of the term *intersectionality* has historical basis in the politics and activism of women of color. Women of color had spent almost a century examining the ways their race and gender oppressed them. Black women in the 19th century wrote about their exclusion from white women suffrage groups while also writing about their exclusion from questions about race because they were women. Decades of Black women writers and political activists argued against their simultaneous oppression of race and gender. Each referring to the duality, simultaneity, or interlocking (Combahee River Collective: 1974) aspect of identities reinforcing oppression.

Sojourner Truth's question and rallying speech "Ain't I a woman?" (1851) eloquently presages intersectionality. She states,

> Dat man ober dar say dat womin needs to be helped into carriages and lifted ober ditches, and to hab de best place everywhar. Nobody eber helps me into carriages, or ober mud puddles, or gibs me any best place! And a'n't I a woman? Look at my arm! I have ploughed, and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And a'n't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man—when I could get it—and bear de lash as well! And a'n't I a woman? I have borne thirteen chilren, and seen 'em mos' all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And a'n't I a woman? (Let Nobody Turn Us Around: 67)

While on the one hand Truth addresses concerns about her gendered experiences, on the other hand, she exposes her experiences with racism.

Truth's speech is often cited for analysis of how gender and racism intersect within systems of oppression—specifically how she is treated or ignored based on her gender and race. However, Truth describes her experiences beyond race and gender. Truth's speech about her experiences include her perceptions of her able-body, her work, her motherhood, and also her reactions. Each of these distinct experiences intersects wholly with and inseparably from gender and race. For example, Truth's experiences with motherhood intersects with her able-body and her gender and her race as well as her class.

Crenshaw later argued, in her essay "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color" (1991), that the uses of intersectionality as a framework could further understanding social constructions that reinforce oppression. Crenshaw argues that examining how race and gender interact simultaneously exposes the political and cultural systems and conditions that oppress women of color. At the core of her argument, Crenshaw analyzes how race is gendered and gender is raced for women of color. In turn, Crenshaw's argument provides an invaluable framework for examining systems of oppression.

Crenshaw's essays built on the foundation already created by women of color in their writing and activism, such as previously cited Sojourner Truth. Crenshaw's work suggested a framework for theorists to analyze the cultural and political implications of intersections, or the simultaneity of experiences affecting women of color. And her argument gave feminists a new path for asking questions concerning race, class, gender, and sexuality, *etc*. However, the key element to Crenshaw's work was to consider the axes of identity as simultaneously experienced.

Crenshaw's work succinctly summarized and named a history of works analyzing the oppressive experiences that women of color had endured. In her essay *Re-Thinking Intersectionality,* Jennifer Nash argues,

> Myriad feminist scholars have destabilized the notion of a universal 'woman' without explicitly mobilizing the term 'intersectionality,' arguing that 'woman' itself is contested and fractured terrain, and that the experience of 'woman' is always constituted by subjects with vastly different interests. To that end, intersectionality has provided a name to a pre-existing theoretical and political commitment. (2008)

Nash recognizes that intersectionality as a theory shows how (in this case) women may experience the same systems of oppression differently from each other.

Nash's argument is correct insofar as intersectionality works against an idea of a universal woman since each individual perceives herself and experiences her life differently from the next. Crenshaw's argument for intersectionality clearly shows how women's experiences vary based on distinctly perceived experiences. Crenshaw's work suggests that political gain can be found in the similarities of experiences. She refers to these similarities between women's perceptions and experiences as "coalitions." Coalitions could be formed through oppressed experiences people have/had in order to

expose and subvert systems of oppression. The term coalition focused on similarities, not sameness, while also acknowledging that differences exist.

While Crenshaw's work went largely without critique for several years, scholars began to take issue with certain aspects of intersectionality. Scholars who critique intersectionality as fundamentally flawed propose that intersectionality either reinforces the hegemonic norms by comparing the oppressed to the non-oppressed, and/or that intersectionality reduces a person's identities to one aspect of their oppression (Nash 2008; Weigman 2012; Puar 2007).

Nash argues that intersectionality is often conflated with Black women. Her critique of intersectionality argues that the theory becomes a reduction of Black women as "prototypical" subjects, which becomes reductive. This reduction, according to Nash, stems from not being able to define intersectionality or the ability to define its methodology. The lack of well-defined parameters and the conflation of intersectionality with Black women leads to reinforcing the power structures of a culture's hegemonic norms. While offering poetry as an example of how people have analyzed the experiences of Black women, Nash argues "the notion that black women's experiences can be reduced solely to *marginalization*, romanticize and idealize positions of social subordination and reinstall conceptions that Black women's bodies are sites of 'strength' and 'transcendence' rather than complex spaces of multiple meanings" (8). Nash's criticism argues how Black women's experiences can be reduced to a singular or universal experience applied to all Black women which is counter to what Crenshaw originally proposes.

Nash's critique of intersectionality comes from her reading that Crenshaw only examines Black women's experiences from "gender and race" while ignoring other axes of identity that may contribute to oppression and marginalization. She argues:

> "With little attention to the role that sexuality, nationality, or class, for example, might play in mediating or entrenching black women's experiences of 'burdens', black women function exclusively as sites that demonstrate the importance of race-and-gender, rendering black women's experiences the aggregate of race and gender. Furthermore, Crenshaw offers little attention to the ways in which race and gender function as social processes in distinctive ways for particular black women in varying historical moments. That is, black women's race and gender are treated as trans-historical constants that mark all black women in similar ways." (7)

In essence, the conflation of intersectionality with Black women reduces them to sameness and one singular idea—"race-and-gender"—effectively erasing and making invisible other axes of identity through time and space.

Nash continues: "First, while seeking to underscore problems of exclusion within feminist and anti-racist theory, black women are treated as a unitary and monolithic entity. That is, differences between black women, including class and sexuality, are obscured in the service of presenting 'black women' as a category that opposes both

'whites' and 'black men'" (8). According to Nash's critique, the conflation of intersectionality with Black women creates a universal Black woman, or a singular identity, rather than eliminating the essentialist construct and showing the distinction of experiences. Nash's critique of intersectionality shows how creating a universal experience only reinforces the system of oppression.

In her essay "Institutionalizing the Margins" (2014), Nash further challenges the ambiguity of intersectionality when she argues,

> When intersectionality is imagined as feminism's future, intersectionality sheds black women in a post-racial feminism that either presumes that black women need not be the center of intersectional work because intersectionality's virtue is complexity not identity politics *or* that intersectionality is an endlessly expansive analytic that can— and should—describe all subjects' experiences. (46)

Nash criticisms of intersectionality questions whether only certain individuals with certain identities are intersectional or if all individuals are intersectional.

Subsequently, Nash's argument and criticisms about intersectionality arise from how to define the theory and how to use it. Indeed, conflating intersectionality—a theory of systems of oppression and how individuals experience said systems differently—with a group of people as defined by two identity markers is problematic. And her criticism of intersectionality not having a clear system of methods in order to achieve its intended outcomes also poses a problem for the feminist scholar.

Nash advances the critical notion that intersectionality caters to identity politics. I would argue that this is more to do with a conflation of words that are synonymous rather than intent of use of intersectional theory. An individual's experience may be similar to that of another's experience. One could argue two human beings loosely share an experience or recognize the similarities between the two moments. These experiences can be based on an (supposed) identifiable marker such as race, or gender, or age. Since these identifiable markers are part of human experience, often, they are considered to be a part of a person's identity, or even a defining part of a person's identity. However, it is possible that a person has an identity and their experiences do not correspond with that particular identity.

However, to counter Nash's critique, does a theoretical construct that analyzes and exposes how individuals experience systems of oppression need one particular methodology? Or does the theory of intersectionality cross disciplinary constraints in order to provide scholars a theoretical construct to understand power constructs and how they are used to oppress? I argue that Crenshaw intends intersectionality as path forward for understanding and empathizing with human beings. As previously cited in the introduction and it bears repeating, Crenshaw argues,

> I should say at the outset that intersectionality is not being offered here as some new, totalizing theory of identity. Nor do I mean to suggest that violence against women of color can be explained through the specific frameworks of race and

> gender considered here. Indeed, factors I address only in part or not at all, such as class or sexuality, are often as critical in shaping the experiences of women of color. My focus on the intersections of race and gender only highlights the need to account for multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed. (1993: 1244-1245)

Crenshaw's framework of intersectionality looks to analyze how the "social world is constructed" through the examination of lived experiences of individuals. And Crenshaw's quote addresses directly the critique of not reducing lived experiences to two identities.

In her book, *Intersectionality: Origins, Contestations, Horizons* (2016), Anna Carastathis analyzes the history of the theory of intersectionality and its contemporary criticisms. Carastathis argues, "intersectionality seems to have been 'easily' appropriated by the white-dominated mainstream of feminist thought, even as Black feminism and women-of-color feminisms remain at the margins (or, are fetishized as tokens of 'difference') and the social groups for which they advocate are systemically excluded from academic institutions" (2). Carastathis aptly points out that through appropriation, intersectionality has had the unintended consequence of reinforcing systematic marginalization and exclusion of the *Other*.

The importance of Carastathis' manuscript is in her provocative re-reading of Crenshaw's original essays. Carastathis contextualizes the theory through its history and then makes an argument for a different reading of Kimberlé Crenshaw's 1989 and 1991 essays in order to address the aforementioned criticisms of intersectionality. Carastathis' analysis reiterates three key points to Crenshaw's original essays:

> an overlooked metaphor that served as a companion metaphor to the now-famous intersection metaphor— that of the basement (1989, 151–52); an overlooked footnote in which Crenshaw makes it explicit that she intends 'intersectionality' to serve as a provisional concept (1991, 1244–45n9); and an overlooked normative conclusion in which she argues that the implication of intersectionality for a theory and a politics of identity is that identities should be viewed as coalitions (1991, 1299). (5)

Intersectionality, as a concept that can evolve, theorizes how people experience systems of oppression similarly but also differently.

Carastathis argues against Nash's critiques as ignoring key elements to Crenshaw's original argument. Carastathis argues, "Intersectionality-as-challenge urges us to grapple with and overcome our entrenched perceptual-cognitive habits of essentialism, categorical purity, and segregation" (4). Rather than examining an individual's experiences through a hegemonic categorization, Carastathis insists on Crenshaw's proposal that experiences through intersectionality be viewed *as coalitions*. Carastathis states, "the reason for my insistence on this point is that I think the continued use of essentialist categories constructed through the privileging of the normative or prototypical members of groups reproduces (instead of contesting) this privilege at the prereflective, perceptual level" (6). On the one hand Carastathis agrees with Nash about

the conflation, on the other hand, Carastathis points out that Crenshaw presaged that problem through her conception of coalitions.

Coalitions emphasize shared experiences without focusing on identity. Crenshaw's original point about coalitions shifts the focus away from oppressive and hegemonic understandings of identity. The distinction in the reading Carastathis provides of Crenshaw's work creates distinct implications from the interpretation of intersectionality. Using intersectionality to apply meaning to identity emphasizes sameness while reinforcing hegemonic norms. However, using intersectionality to focus on shared experiences emphasizes similarities while acknowledging distinctions and differences. Emphasizing similarities destabilizes hegemonic norms by eliminating reductive categorization.

Carastathis further re-emphasizes Crenshaw's argument about the importance of "re-imagining" identities and their connections. She argues, "how the political potential of intersectionality lies in our ability to reimagine our identities and our alignments in coalitional terms, revealing the inherent and potential impurity of categories by practicing their interconnectedness" (6-7). Carastathis sees the political consequences of denying an essentialist construct of identities within systems of oppression. It allows for a richer and more complex understanding of individual's experiences.

For Carastathis, the benefit of creating new coalitions does not only stem from the elimination of a universalist identity, but also eliminates what Elizabeth Martínez refers to as the "Oppression Olympics"—where comparisons of who has it worse subsequently erase groups. Carastathis argues,

> The last benefit attributed to intersectionality is inclusivity. The claim is that as a theoretical paradigm, intersectionality can act as a corrective against the white solipsism, heteronormativity, elitism, and ableism of dominant power and hegemonic feminist theory by making social locations and experiences visible that are occluded in essentialist and exclusionary constructions of the category 'women.' (57)

Again, intersectionality recognizes differences while considering similarities.

More specifically however, it is Carastathis' argument about the analytic benefits that intersectionality provides that is applicable to this project: "simultaneity, complexity, irreducibility, and inclusivity" (56). As previously discussed, intersectionality should be inclusive to individuals and groups rather than exclusionary based on the quantity or quality of their suffering. The benefits of an intersectional approach are the inclusion of all through acceptance of them as complex and whole individuals.

Using intersectionality as the theory for this project also allows for the analysis of new coalitions. Rather than analyzing women who are categorized through hegemonic norms and essentialist views of "woman," examining the narratives of women's experiences through time and space expands how we can understand systems of

oppression. The women's narratives show/expose/elaborate similar life experiences in different contexts.

2.2 Simultaneity

The question of simultaneity and human experience has implications of expansion for the theory of intersectionality. Since one of the merits of using intersectionality is simultaneity, understanding what simultaneity is and how it functions becomes vital from a feminist standpoint. At which point, we can then see how simultaneity impacts our understanding of systems of oppression.

In order to better understand simultaneity, or what Carastathis argues is a theoretical consequence of intersectionality, I want to discuss the theory of phenomenology and its implications for simultaneity. Phenomenologists study perception and experience. The synthesis of a person's experiences and perceptions is achieved through simultaneity. Therefore, simultaneity occurs because of a human's ability to synthesize human perception.

In 1922, Henri Bergson published the book *Duration and Simultaneity: Bergson and the Einsteinian Universe*. The work is based on a public debate Bergson had with Albert Einstein in which they discussed the concept of time, and more importantly, simultaneity. During the debate, Einstein, as a physicist, conceived of time through scientific constructs. Einstein argued that simultaneity does not exist since happenings within the physical world occur in their own temporal and spatial moment. In essence, Einstein's argument was that time and space are the same thing. Einstein argued his point using the laws of physics which later had larger scientific implications. Critically, the public debate was considered a failure for the philosopher Bergson and Einstein went on to further his research in physics.

However, as later phenomenologists have argued (see Derrida), Bergson did not "lose" the debate. Derrida, (see also Merleau-Ponty), argues that since Bergson was not arguing from a scientific standpoint and Einstein was, there could be no winner or loser. The debate broke down because the two could not/would not concede/accept differing epistemologies. Bergson argued through the perspective of a phenomenologist—or a philosopher who studies the experience of consciousness. Bergson was interested in understanding simultaneity through distinct experiences versus scientific existence. Experience for Bergson is always related to human perception and how humans understand their perceptions.

In his later manuscripts, Bergson argues that although physicists may understand simultaneity through scientific analysis, as a philosopher, he comes to different conclusions about simultaneity because of human perception. Bergson argues that humans cannot separate themselves from their perceptions. And humans are able to synthesize multiple happenings into simultaneous occurrences because of perception.

Bergson's argument is grounded in philosophical understanding of perception and experience rather than a scientific understanding of physics.

From a modern standpoint, their debate seems futile since both parties come from separate disciplines and epistemological foundations. Carman states "Phenomenology is an attempt to describe the basic structures of human experience and understanding from a first person point of view, in contrast to the reflective, third person perspective that tends to dominate scientific knowledge and common sense" (viii: Carman: Phenomenology of Perception). Perception is always from the subjective human experience, which is the foundation of Bergson's argument.

Since human beings cannot separate themselves from their perceptions, that is to say, their perceptions are always the foundation for their understanding and knowledge, humans are able to synthesize multiple experiences or perceptions through simultaneity. But simultaneity can also incorporate the many experiences of perception from varying times into the present moment. The phenomenology of human experience is temporally constructed as well. For example, an adult can ride a bike and perceive the sensation of wind on their body, hear the traffic around them, feel their legs pedaling and their hands guiding the bike, while remembering and perceiving the feeling they had as a child riding a bike.

However, the perception of time is never only one singular moment. Instead human perception of time (can) synthesize(s) moments from the past into the present. Merleau-Ponty discusses the effect of synthesizing temporal moments while looking at an object. He argues,

> Each present definitively establishes a point of time that solicits the recognition of all others. Thus, the object is seen from all times just as it is seen from all places, and by the same means, namely, the horizon structure. The present still holds in hand the immediate past, but without positing it as an object, and since this immediate past likewise retains the past that immediately preceded it, time gone but is entirely taken up and grasped in the present. (71)

Humans are able to perceive objects at different moments in time and to maintain the varying perceptions. For example, a person can consider how the sun changes the view from a window depending on time of day and season.

Merleau-Ponty argues that perception of temporal times may change based on new contexts. He states,

> In the same way, even though my present condenses within itself the time gone by and the time to come, it only possesses them in intention. And if, for example, the consciousness that I now have of my past appears to me to match precisely what it was, this past that I claim to take hold of again is not itself the past in person; it is my past such as I now see it, and I have perhaps altered it. Perhaps in the future I will similarly misjudge the present that I am currently living. (72)

The perception of experiences and synthesizing of new temporal moments gives the individual the ability to perceive and understand the self in new (synthesized) ways. The example that best clarifies Merleau-Ponty's point is the one of revisiting a childhood primary school, or childhood home. Although the space may not have changed in shape or size, an adult experiences a change in perspective from having grown physically as well as emotionally. Thus, the person may perceive the space both in new ways while also perceiving it in ways from the past.

Merleau-Ponty argues that perception of time does not equal permanence. Human perception of temporal experiences can change through time based on historical context and changes to the individual. However, perceived past moments that are synthesized into the present may seem precise. And yet, over time and through new experiences, these same perceived moments can be altered to have new meanings and understandings. Feminist scholars, like Wagner-Martin, who seek to reexamine the past in their reclamation projects, "seeking their mother's gardens[20]" change the present context by recognizing and re-contextualizing historical contexts.

Perception abstracts and becomes more open or infinite in possibilities of interpretation. The openness of human experiences does not mean that the perception becomes uncertain or questionable. But rather, that the perception of intangible experiences allows for new possible interpretations through new simultaneous synthesis of experiences (Merleau-Ponty: 72).

Merleau-Ponty's argument about perception becomes grounded through/by the body. He argues, "we must not say that our body is *in* space, nor for that matter *in* time. It *inhabits* space and time" (140: emphasis Merleau-Ponty's). He argues that the body always exists in the present time, in the now. Since the body is perpetually in the present, the body is in a perpetual state of synthesizing and resynthesizing its perceptions (141).

While Merleau-Ponty makes the argument about how perception is grounded through the body inhabiting time and space, Simone de Beauvoir expands and furthers his argument through a gendered perspective. Beauvoir's pivotal book, *The Second Sex*, uses phenomenology to give an analysis of how gender is culturally constructed. Beauvoir begins her cultural analysis of gender by arguing, "Presence in the world vigorously implies the positing of a body that is both a thing of the world and a point of view on his world: but this body need not possess this or that particular structure" (24). Indeed, bodies that perceive the world and their context can be made with physical variations and still labeled as either male or female.

Beauvoir argues that if gender is culturally conceived, and located at the body, then perception is fundamentally gendered. She argues, "As Merleau-Ponty rightly said, man is not a natural species: he is a historical idea. Woman is not a fixed reality, but a becoming; she has to be compared with man in her becoming; that is, her *possibilities*

[20] See: Walker, Alice. *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983. Print.

have to be defined" (45). Beauvoir argues that gender's construction is always through and by culture.

Beauvoir's often cited statement, "On ne naît pas femme : on le devient," ("One isn't born woman: one becomes it") summarizes succinctly the cultural implications of gender (283). Beauvoir's quote presages deconstructionists and poststructuralists later in the 20th century. Not only does it summarize succinctly that gender is culturally constructed, Beauvoir uses language to deconstruct the gender binary of man/woman by using a gender ambiguous subject pronoun "on" in juxtaposition with "femme" or woman. But she also then shuns the feminine object pronoun "la" (her) in favor of "le" (it) in order to emphasize that gender itself is an abstract concept. Beauvoir uses language to rather cleverly reinforce and expose the cultural construction[21].

It should be noted that Beauvoir's famous quote comes from volume II of *The Second Sex* called "Lived Experience." Her argument relies on the lived experience(s) of women. Beauvoir's cultural analysis of gender is through the lens of phenomenology. And Beauvoir argues that experience and perception are located at/in the body. She argues, "For girls and boys, the body is first the radiation of a subjectivity, the instrument that brings about the comprehension of the world: they apprehend the universe through their eyes and hands, and not through their sexual parts" (283). Knowledge and understanding form through perception and experience which is always located at the site of the body.

Perception, it seems, is contextualized through the body and its experiences. Beauvoir argues, "if the body is not a *thing*, it is a situation; it is our grasp on the world and the outline for our projects" (46). Beauvoir contends that since children do not experience the world—or more precisely, learn about the world—through their genitalia, that gender constructions are a cultural construction imposed upon individuals of particular sexes. Gender is thus, a cultural construction also located at the body. The body *is* how individuals perceive. Therefore, experiences are culturally constructed through a gendered lens.

Judith Butler furthers Beauvoir's argument of gender as a cultural construct in *Gender Trouble*. Butler argues that Beauvoir is correct in her assumption that "on le devient" (one becomes it—woman) and that it is "an ongoing discursive practice, it is open to intervention and resignification" (45). While cultural constructs shift, the idea of gender is an ever-changing concept. In turn, this means women's gendered experiences also always change and shift.

Butler's theory of performativity serves well to show how gender is culturally constructed. However, Butler's theory of gender performativity abstracts the body and moves away from concrete experience and perception. As Toril Moi argues in her essay

[21] I think that most translations fall short in recreating the double punch of her statement. Butler herself pulls at this, but rather than analyzing the gender ambiguity of "on," she looks at it from the English tradition/translation of "one." (151: *Gender Trouble*)

"What is a Woman?", "For Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty, human transcendence—human freedom—is always incarnated, that is to say that it always presents itself in the shape of a human body" (63) As Moi counters Butler's post-structuralist argument, she reiterates both Beauvoir's and Merleau-Ponty's argument that the body is "a fundamental kind of situation, in that it founds [one's] experience of [oneself] and the world" (63). Since humans cannot separate themselves from their bodies, and all perceptions are through and by their bodies, experiences are always shaped through and by the body—including gender.

Moi argues, "In many ways, 'lived experience' designates the whole of a person's subjectivity" (63) in order to show how an individual interacts with the world and vice versa. Moi argues, "In my view, poststructuralist theorists of sex and gender are held prisoners by theoretical mirages of their own making. This becomes starkly evident in Butler's attempt to show that 'sex' or 'nature' or 'biology' or 'the body' is as constructed as gender" (46). Moi's critique of Butler remains in the concrete notion that humans are born with a body that functions and works in particular ways to that body. For example, bodies born with a uterus are likely to have a menstrual cycle during the course of a lifetime. Moi's argument is that a menstrual cycle is not culturally constructed. Rather, perceptions of a menstrual cycle are culturally constructed.

Moi's critique of Butler abstracting the body directly links to her understanding of identity politics. Moi states,

> In spite of her attempts to free herself from identity politics, it appears that, for Butler, the question of gender remains intrinsically bound up with the question of identity. In fact, poststructuralists regularly denounce any belief in a 'coherent inner self' or in 'coherent categories called women and men' as theoretically unsound and politically reactionary. (56)

This point furthers Moi's critique of how post-structuralists deny a person's agency by conceiving of the body as abstract.

Individuals perceive the world through their bodies and synthesize their experiences into one self. And while it is important to consider the ways gender, a culturally constructed category, impacts how an individual perceives and experiences, it is also important to understand that gender is culturally constructed within a temporal and spatial context. Moi argues while referencing Sartre, Beauvoir, and Merleau-Ponty, "To claim that the body *is* a situation is not the same thing as to say that it is placed *within* some other situation. The body both is a situation *and* is placed within other situations" (65). Human perceptions are as bound by the body that perceives them as by the cultural context where they are located. A white, bourgeois French woman, for example, in the early 1900s, wearing a whale-bone corset, ankle boots, a bustled dress worn to her ankles, hat and gloves, at the beach perceives her gender differently than a woman of same race and class at the same beach 100 years later. Although both women perceive and experience through their bodies, they both also perceive their gendered experiences through the time and space of their cultural moment.

Simultaneity is the synthesis of perceptions through time and space. As previously cited, "[The body] *inhabits* space and time," (Merleau-Ponty) which in turn explains how the cultural construct of gender is located in a specific temporal/spatial context. Gender constructs can change as contexts and/or times change, however, these constructs are always perceived through the body. Christina Schües argues in the introduction to *Toward a Feminist Phenomenology of Time*:

> *The* gender, *the* woman, and *the* man are concepts that are as senseless as saying *the* time. Thus, for both we might pose the same kind of question: How does time show itself? How does gender show itself? And: how does gender show itself in relation to time? And how does time show itself in relation gender? Thus, temporality is gendered, gendering is temporal. (8)

Time is important for understanding the gendered experience because individuals have experiences in temporal moments which are gendered.

Beauvoir and Butler (see also Moi, Merleau-Ponty, Schües) contribute to understanding human perception of simultaneity. Feminist theorists add to the theory of simultaneity by showing how human experience cannot be reduced to a singular identity or context, but that simultaneity reflects an entire human experience in and through time. Time is also a phenomenological experience and, more importantly, a gendered experience. In the introduction to *Toward a Feminist Phenomenology of Time*, Christina Schües continues, "A feminist approach always concerns the reevaluations of power relations within society, as, for example, the question of the relevance of time when discussing power relations or asymmetrical hierarchies between men and women" (6). A common example given of analysis for gender, time, and systems of oppression, is how much free-labor women provide—be it housework, service in academia, child-rearing—versus men.

Schües continues her argument by stating, "Experiences are gendered insofar as they are bound to the body and to the world. Experiences, as phenomenologists have clearly shown, are always temporal, and, as feminist theorists have argued, experiences are also gendered; thus, the interrelation between time and gender must be examined" (7). Indeed, how women experience and perceive their self in time, through time, as well as how they experience time becomes vital to understanding simultaneity.

The individual experiences the self simultaneously. Moi argues, "To think of a woman as sex plus gender plus race and so on is to miss the fact that the experience of being white or black is not detachable from the experience of being male or female" (36: "What is a Woman?"). Fragmenting and reducing the experiences of an individual to additive perceptions opposes the simultaneous self. As previously cited, Schües reminds us that "When considering experiences, the most important notion to understand here is *intentionality*. Experiences are intentional: someone perceives something, feels something, thinks something" ("The Power of Time": 61). Intentionality, as understood by phenomenologists as relating to mental perceptions either real or imaginary, relates to the whole experience of the individual. Schües argues,

> my body is the center of orientation in space and time, and this body is gendered. Thus, I temporally and spatially structure the world around me from a gendered orientation. Perspectival (visual) perception originates from the '*difference*' inherent in the 'now' (and the 'here'). By virtue of being a gendered body, I am situated in a presence that continuously elapses into my past that remains my past, my personified, gendered past. (66)

Schües is specifically arguing how gender changes the way an individual experiences time.

Since the individual synthesizes the self from their own experiences, Schües elaborates the point by summarizing Merleau-Ponty and Husserl but then adding,

> My own spatial and temporal existence is indispensable for me, for it is 'the primary condition of all living perception.' My body, being affective, inhabits time and space, perceiving them from an orientation determined by my point of view. Thus, any perception takes place from the particular center of orientation 'now' and 'there.' (66)

Schües thus concludes that lived experiences, such as gender, as well as experiences across time and space, "now and there" inform all subsequent perspectives. An individual perceives their self simultaneously which includes identities and experiences across time and space.

Simultaneity is the understanding that humans perceive the world and themselves and are simultaneously perceiving their lived experiences through time and space. Simultaneity is the expression of the whole human beings lived experiences. Cultural constructions, like gender, as well as temporal moments affect human perceptions and thus affect the simultaneity of whole human beings. Simultaneity is the person's self created through their lived experiences.

2.3 Simultaneous Intersectionality

Analyzing systems of oppression through time and space can expose the *nonfragmentation of the phenomenological experience*. Examining coalitions that are formed through differing temporal contexts can expand how we understand women's lived experiences. When Crenshaw first conceived of intersectionality, she states:

> In mapping the intersections of race and gender, the concept does engage dominant assumptions that race and gender are essentially separate categories. By tracing the categories to their intersections, I hope to suggest a methodology that will disrupt the tendencies to see race and gender as exclusive or separable. While the primary intersections that I explore here are between race and gender, the concept can and should be expanded by factoring in issues such as class, sexual orientation, age, and color. (1241-1242)

Crenshaw points to the irreducible quality of lived experiences. Crenshaw also encourages scholars to examine and analyze more phenomenological experiences in order to expand our understanding of people's experiences within systems of oppression.

Generational coalitions are often overlooked or taken for granted in our analyses of systems of oppression. Analyzing, side by side, similarities between generations can help us see systems of oppression while looking at whole individuals alongside other whole individuals. Silvia Stoller, in her chapter "Gender and Anonymous Temporality," discusses how our experiences are shaped through temporal relationships. Stoller argues, "there is an anonymous sphere of temporality on the level of sociality. Our social relations are not only deeply shaped by generational structures that remain mostly unconscious to us while relating to each other (e.g. the relation of a daughter to her mother), our interactions also take place within a certain time and they are always part of a historical epoch" (87). Stoller's argument expands how feminist scholars can analyze simultaneous, intersectional stories because scholars do not necessarily need to limit themselves to one cultural time frame. Instead, feminist scholars can expand their understanding of simultaneous intersectionality by forming coalitions across time and space.

Expanding how we understand becomes a challenge to epistemological norms. In *Unflattening*, Sousanis explores the history of epistemological thinking through graphic narrative. Expanding our perspective to simultaneous intersectionality opens perspectives or "unflattens" our understanding. Through the act of "unflattening" or expanding the scope of understanding, scholars can change how they perceive the lived experiences of whole human beings. The immediate impact is to see the whole of the context. From a feminist standpoint, seeing the whole human being allows the feminist scholar to understand how systems of oppression impact the whole human being rather than part.

Simultaneous intersectionality requires looking for connections or coalitions through history and other locations. Simultaneity, the synthesized human experience, allows the feminist scholar to see and form coalitions across time and space. If we look at the stories of different people and examine their experiences within systems of oppression, if we examine them side by side, and look at the coalitions, but also the distinctions, the variations, then we can better see/understand how systems of oppression work to affect different people differently. Or as Allison Weir argues, "This different understanding is predicated on a noncategorical conception of identity: not identity as sameness, but an ethical-relational and political model of identity, defined through relationships with other people and through identification with what is meaningful to us, with what we find significant" (116: *Global Feminism and Transformative Identity Politics*).

Catel and Jones make visible the representations of their own identities. These particular artists illustrate their phenomenological experiences as women. At the same time, they show how their experiences cannot be fixed to one singular experience. Catel

and Jones show the reader their synthesized self by drawing their simultaneous experiences of identities, representing and showing what is not always visible.

"The nonfragmentation of a phenomenological experience" is exactly what Catel and Jones in these works are literally showing the reader. The women artists create narratives that illustrate the simultaneity of their (the artists' and the subjects') identities and lived experiences. The comics form allows Catel and Jones to make visible the connections between lives, time, and space to expose oppression, politics, and cultural norms that have silenced the artists' voices. Weir argues, "This horizon, formed by the particular attachments, commitments, and identifications that give one's life significance, is essentially dialogical: we form our identities through our relationships, commitments to and identifications with particular others and collective 'we's'" (117). The two women comics artists create and produce comics that requires the reader to confront the nonfragmentation or simultaneity of the artists' and their subjects' lived experiences.

Both Jones and Catel narrate her own story, but they also narrate their subject's story–Margaret Sanger and Benoîte Groult respectively—while creating a self-reflective meta-narrative as well. In the process, they create simultaneous narratives. The artist links the two stories together visually and textually, creating an intertwined narrative—an autobiography and a biography. The narrative structure they use and illustrate has implications for women's storytelling. The artists use simultaneity in order to expose to the reader their whole identities as women and their connections to other whole and irreducible women across time.

Since the narratives exist simultaneously in the comics, that is, the narratives exist concurrently in space and time, the artists show the reader how their experiences should not or cannot be considered separately. The artists use simultaneity to show the irreducibility of their lives and identities. Comics lend themselves to "showing" by virtue of their visual and textual juxtaposition. They can simultaneously show us and tell us about a person's lived experiences, whereas a text (e.g. a novel) can only tell us.

Catel and Jones do not just imagine their identities, but they "reimagine" them in the way they render their drawings on the page to tell their life story. The artists express and draw the "interconnectedness" of their identities with the life story of their subject. The artists visually and textually create the very intersectional coalitions in their comics.

For this project, the comics artists show through their narrative structure the simultaneity of their lived experiences, framed with and against the lived experiences of their subject's life. The artists illustrate to their reader how their lives are connected, and how they cannot be reduced to a singular identity or experience.

A simultaneous intersectionality gives voice to a gendered experience. Since simultaneity is experienced through gender, all experiences are gendered. However, systems of oppression do not value all gendered experiences equally. Systems of oppression function to deny access to or to limit certain humans from having services, education, finances, to name a few. Simultaneous intersectionality giving voice to a

gendered experience is important for women because it allows them to share their *nonfragmentation of a phenomenological experience*. In essence, simultaneous intersectionality gives us an opportunity to recognize a whole human being and to understand their full humanity.

Simultaneous intersectionality shows whole experiences of women who exist in systems of oppression. Simultaneous intersectionality exposes those whole experiences not as the embarrassed *etc.* but instead as the infinite experience(s) of each individual person. Women's stories are often erased, dismissed, or only partly told. The world of stories is filled with and told by the gendered experience of men. When women's stories are told, they are often qualified and marginalized for being the wrong experience(s). Life experiences are always constructed through and by gender. And those gender constructs, which fragment the experience of women, are part of systems of oppression. Rather than focusing on the fragmentation, redirecting our attention as feminist scholars to a "simultaneous intersectionality" could expand the scope for feminists to see whole human beings in systems of oppression.

CHAPTER 3. ANALYTICS/METHOD

3.1 Terms and Definitions

In this chapter, I explain how narrative analysis will be used as a method. It is not my goal to contribute necessarily to the field of narratology. However, the tools for analysis provided in the discipline of narratology can serve to understand how we perceive and understand human experiences in systems of oppression. The tools of narratology correspond with intersectionality. As Susan Lanser argues, "Acknowledging not only that narrative is effectively intersectional but that intersectionality is effectively narrative may increase the value of narratological tools and methods across genres and disciplines by integrating formal patterns with social ones" (33: *Unbound*). Intersectionality is the analysis of human experiences in systems of oppression. As humans, we recount, tell, share, show, and explain our experiences in narrative form. Lanser's argument recognizes the human and social interaction of narrative as a way of understanding systems of oppression.

I present Gerard Genette's definition of the three types of *narrative* from *Narrative Discourse: an Essay in Method* (1980). Due to the heavy use of the word "narrative" in scholarship and my own work, I italicize the word when I am invoking his definitions for clarity. I also present Genette's terms and its relationship to Catel's and Jones' works. The significance of these terms for my project lies with how Genette's definitions and vocabulary become the method for my analysis. I henceforth adopt these terms as Genette uses them for consistency.

Genette argues that the ambiguity of the term narrative often leads to confusion about what is being analyzed. Genette gives examples of how the term narrative is often used in readings of *The Odyssey* and *Ulysses,* which have multiple meanings that create ambiguity in the analyses. Genette synthesizes the various uses of the term narrative into three distinct parts: 1) the *story*, "the oral or written discourse that undertakes to tell of an event or a series of events;" 2) the *narrative*, "the succession of events, real or fictitious, that are the subjects of [the first definition's] discourse, and to their several relations of linking, opposition, repetition, etc.;" and 3) the *narrating*[22], "an event: not, however, the event that is recounted, but the event that consists of someone recounting something: the act of narrating taken in itself" (25-26).

Genette defines *meta-narrative* as "a narrative within a narrative" (228, note 41) and further elaborates on the definition in *Figures II* (1969). He argues that *meta-narratives* are also *narratives*, however, they are not part of the overarching *narrative* in the work. *Meta-narratives* operate outside of the main *narrative*. They can serve as a frame to the *story* or offer differing perspectives.

[22] To follow grammatical rules of usage, I will use the derivative forms of *narrating* as appropriate: *narrate*, *narrator*, *narration, narratee*.

In her essay, "Giving an Account of Themselves: Metanarration [sic] and the Structure of Address in *The Office* and *The Real Housewives*," Robyn Warhol explains "we are accustomed to thinking of metanarration (or the self-reflexive activity of narrators who draw attention to the text's status as an act of narration) as a convention for interrupting the reality effect of narrative, or for disrupting mimesis with reminders of the diegesis that makes it possible" (64). In effect, *meta-narratives* emphasize and draw attention to the text's *narrative* and how it is structured. An excellent visual example of *meta-narrative* is the film *The Princess Bride* (1987). The overarching *narrative* is about how Wesley saves Princess Buttercup. However, the *meta-narrative* is that "The Princess Bride" is a *story* being read aloud to a sick child by his grandfather. Its purpose is to frame the *story* while also providing commentary and perspective about *narrative* and draws attention to the act of *narrating* a *story* to a *narratee*.

Genette argues that most analyses of narrative focus on the first definition: the *story*. He argues that "analysis of narrative discourse as I understand it constantly implies a study of relationships: on the one hand the relationship between a discourse and the events that it recounts (narrative in its second meaning), on the other hand the relationship between the same discourse and the act that produces it, actually or fictively (narrative in its third meaning)" (26-27). The *story* itself, in essence, overshadows the relationship of the *narrative*, while also taking for granted the relationship of the *narration* to the text.

While Genette's definitions serve as the basis for his argument to create a vocabulary for narratology—the theory of narrative studies and its subsequent implications—and to analyze how *story*, *narrative*, and *narrating* work together, one striking criticism of his work is that he fails to consider the relationship of context. Ross Chambers argues in *Story and Situation: Narrative Seduction and the Power of Fiction* that "the significance of the story is determined less by its actual content than by the point of its being told, that is, *the relationships mediated by the act of narration*" (3: emphasis mine). Likewise, Barbara Smith argues in her essay "Narrative Versions, Narrative Theories" that "someone telling someone else that something happened" is always part of a larger "*social transaction*" where both parties must have "some interest in telling or listening to that narrative" (232-233: emphasis mine). Both Chambers and Smith emphasize that stories are told to someone in order to relate "something."

While giving an example of how context affects the social interaction, Chambers, an openly gay scholar argues, "Consider, for example, a 'faggot' joke told by gay people among themselves, by a straight person to a gay person and even, just conceivably, by a gay person to a straight person. In each of these cases, the significance of the story is determined less by its actual content than by the point of its being told, that is the relationships mediated by the act of narration" (3). The context exposes the purpose of the *story* and *narrative* in the first place. Both scholars argue that the context of relating the story is vital to understand the *narrative*, *story,* and *narrating*.

As previously cited in the introduction, Chambers argues, "the social fact that narrative mediates human relationships and derives its 'meaning' from them; that, consequently, it depends on social agreements, implicit pacts or contract in order to produce exchanges that themselves are a function of desires, purposes, and constraints" (4). *Narratives* themselves are social constructs created for and by humans.

In the aforementioned example of *The Princess Bride,* the context of the grandfather reading the *story* to his grandson is important for the viewer of the film. The *meta-narrative* serves to expose to the viewer that s/he is watching/listening to a fairytale like the grandson. The viewer is made aware of being told a *story*. Moreover, the *meta-narrative* emphasizes the social agreement and human relationships, or the context, of *The Princess Bride* as a *story* being *narrated* to a child while also emphasizing the *narrative* to the spectator.

The cultural construct of *narrative* extends beyond why a *story* is being *narrated.* In *Narrative Theory*, Robyn Warhol argues "the identity, experience, and socio-cultural-historical circumstances of the author—not to mention the reader—are important in understanding the ways that narrative participates in the politics of gender" (39). Considering Virginia Woolf's work *A Room of Her Own,* in which Woolf explores how men exclude women from access to spaces that promote women's ideas and works despite women's talent. When discussing Woolf's work, Woolf's identity and socio-cultural-historical experiences become important elements of the discussion in order to contextualize her feminist work.

Warhol explains the importance of the *narratee* in the production of works. She argues, "Briefly, the narratee is constituted by the set of assumptions and attitudes the narrator invokes through word choices, explanations, direct address, and gaps in the storytelling" (144). The *narratee* is the invisible person to whom the *narrator* is telling the story. However, the *narratee* is not always and does not have to be the reader holding the book. Warhol adds, "The narratee—whose characteristics emerge through close reading of what the narrator does and does not need to say—exists only in the text" (144). Epistolary novels—novels constructed of letters or correspondence—are an example of the *narratee* and reader as separate entities. In epistolary novels, a character writes a letter to someone, or *narrates* to someone else, the *narratee*.

Warhol continues by distinguishing the physical reader from the *narratee*. She argues, "The actual reader, by contrast, is the embodied person who holds the book and reads. The implied reader is a figure hovering between these two entities, the virtual projection of a consciousness that can tune into the narrator's message—an imaginary reader who 'gets it,' even—or especially—when the narratee appears to be in the dark" (144). Again, the implied reader is who the *meta-narrative* is drawn and written for—the imagined person who holds the finished product, learning across time and space about women's lived experiences in systems of oppression. In the case of *The Princess Bride,* the actual reader is the spectator, watching the film and getting the jokes of the *meta-narrative* that the *narratee*—the little boy, sick in bed—does not get.

3.2 Gender and Narrative

In her 1986 article, "Toward a Feminist Narratology," Susan Lanser asked, "whether feminist criticism, and particularly the study of narratives by women, might benefit from the methods and insights of narratology and whether narratology, in turn, might be altered by the understandings of feminist criticism and the experience of women's texts" (342). Lanser's question stemmed from seeing potential benefits for narratology scholars to understand narratives of the Other, as defined by Beauvoir. Lanser argued that scholars in the field of narratology had mostly ignored questions about how gender impacted analysis of *narrative* (343). Lanser argues that works produced by women could have different answers to questions asked about men's works.

In *Narrative Theory: Core Concepts & Critical Debates*, Robyn Warhol explains how feminist scholars, like Susan Lanser, have added to the critical approach of narrative theory. Warhol's historical contextualization explains how feminist narratologists, challenged formalists and traditional narratologists, like Genette, through a feminist critique of gender and narrative. Warhol states:

> That idea was based on the feminist assumption that texts are always linked to the material circumstances of the history that produces and receives them, an assumption that contradicted the formalist stance of classical narratology and that through the intervention of such influential figures as Gerald Prince has come to be accepted within the broader practice of narrative theory, especially as it is applies to ethnically marked or postcolonial texts. (p.9)

Warhol argues that narratologists, like Prince, have been accepted for their work contextualizing *narratives* in cultural contexts. Her argument concludes that questions about gender in *narratives* are valid.

Warhol continues by arguing that "Nothing in any of the other contemporary versions of narrative theory prohibits attention to gender, sexuality, class, or other politically significant and historically grounded differences. What chiefly sets feminist narrative theory apart is its insistence on placing those issues at the center of the inquiry" (p.11). Warhol points to a feminist intervention in the field of narratology. Warhol's argument explains how narratology can be a useful tool or method for feminist scholarship.

Genette's distinctions between *story*, *narrative*, and *narrating/narration* and the way they work together have implications for understanding gender. Robyn Warhol argues "A text has its origin in the material world, a world where gender shapes perceptions and realities that go into writing and reading of books" (*Narrative Theory*, 39). Genette's theory creates an analytic structure that effectively proposes a definition for narrative. However, Genette's theoretical framework, when applied to all narratives, does not necessarily take into consideration that cultural/social differences such as gender could impact *story*, *narrative*, and *narrating*. But Genette's theory does not preclude it

either. Since gender, a culturally constructed concept, is located at the body and perception occurs through the body, then gender impacts both production and reception of *narratives.*

Returning to Lanser's article, "Toward a Feminist Narratology," Lanser gives a sample reading of how feminist literary criticism and narratology could work together in order to better analyze a text. She does so by offering a critical reading of a text called "Female Ingenuity." Lanser points out there is no indication of who the author is or why it was written. However, her analysis shows that it is a letter written to a friend with a double meaning to it that has to be decoded. The letter, read one way, indicates the *narrator* is happily married. The text, read the second way (i.e. every other line), indicates that the *narrator* is unhappily married (346-347).

For Lanser, questions about *narrator* gender become important since it can change the *narratee's* understanding of a text. Lanser's analysis leads her to summarize Bakhtin[23]'s ideas about voice in text, "That in narrative there is no single voice, that in far subtler situations than this one, voice impinges upon voice, yielding a structure in which discourses of and for the other constitute the discourses of self" (349). Lanser links the idea of multiple *narrative voices*[24] as a common structural element in women's *narratives*. Genette defines *narrative voice* as "not only the person who carries out or submits to the action, but also the person (the same one or another) who reports it, and, if need be, all those people who participate, even though passively, in this narrating activity" (213). For Lanser, in the case of "Female Ingenuity," she explains that a double *voice* is used by the *narrator* because the *narrator* assumes her husband will read all of her correspondence and censor her. The importance of considering voice is in understanding who is telling the *story* and their relationship to the *narrative*.

Lanser argues, "For the condition of being woman in a male-dominated society may well necessitate the double voice, whether as conscious subterfuge or as tragic dispossession of the self" (349) and "though polyphony is more pronounced and more consequential in women's narratives and in the narratives of other dominated peoples" (Lanser: 1986, 350). Lanser establishes a commonality in women's writing through their use of *narrative structure*. The common thread, which Lanser notes is not true of all women's writing, is that women writers are often oppressed in a patriarchal society by virtue of their gender. The polyphony in works by women writers is an expression or representation of their own systemic oppression, as in the case of "Female Ingenuity." Systems of oppression have caused women writers to use different *voices*—the *voice* of the oppressor, the *voice* of their true self, the *voice* of the oppressed—and to shift between *voices* in their works.

[23] Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975) was a Russian literary critic. His analysis of how language is a social contract and how novels can exhibit diverse uses of discourse is useful for understanding different contexts. See: Bakhtin, M M, and Michael Holquist. 'Discourse in the Novel," *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981.

[24] See: Lanser, Susan S. "Sexing the Narrative: Propriety, Desire, and the Engendering of Narratology." Narrative, Vol. 3, No. 1. Ohio State University Press: 1995. P.85-94

Robyn Warhol succinctly argues in her article, "How Narration Produces Gender: Femininity as Affect and Effect in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*," that authors employ *narrative* techniques that reproduce gender. Warhol argues, "gender gets produced and reproduced through countless cultural patterns, including narrative strategies associated with texts that are marked within a given culture as 'masculine' (such as adventure stories) or 'feminine' (such as good-cry novels like *The Color Purple*)" (183). One such *narrative* strategy that produces and reproduces gender includes *narrative voice*, or focalization as Warhol[25] refers to it. *Narrative voice* represents the character's and/or *narrator's* perceptions. The *narrator* may be a male who *narrates* his perceptions of a female character. The female character's *voice* could be confident and intelligent, but the male *narrator's voice* could refer to the character as emotional. *Voice* changes based on cultural context, including gender.

Susan Lanser's and Robyn Warhol's edited volume, *Narrative Theory Unbound: Queer and Feminist Interventions*, "[explores] the many ways in which narrative represents, structures, and constitutes gender and sexuality, as well as the ways these concepts inflect narrative itself" (3). In their introduction, Lanser and Warhol argue that the intersection of gender and narrative exposes the ways that lived experiences are culturally constructed. They argue, "the gendering of writing and reading has its basis in—and an impact upon—lived experiences in the material world" (7). Lanser and Warhol explain how *narrative* recounts the simultaneity of lived experiences while also possibly impacting the lived experiences of the reader. Lanser and Warhol further argue, "…both gender and sexuality exist along a variegated spectrum that individual subjects experience in shifting ways across a lifetime" (7). Lanser and Warhol explain how temporality is part of simultaneity when they say "across a lifetime." Lived experiences of shift and change, and authors' and readers' gendered experiences influence their production and reception of texts.

As I will argue, Catel and Jones create *narratives* that represent their gender experienced across each of their own lifetimes. Catel and Jones intentionally connect their experiences simultaneously with their subject's lives. The *narratives* Catel and Jones create explore how gender tells a *story*, and also how a *story* is gendered. Each artist questions and explores specifically women's distinct experiences.

The *meta-narrative* that these Catel and Jones use serves as a distinct interaction between *narrator* and *story*, and *narrator* and *narrative*. On the one hand, these women artists, at the *meta-narrative* level, are forming a relationship with the reader by declaring themselves the artist of their own work—creating and exposing their distinct artistic style and voice. On the other hand, they are creating a self-reflective *narrative* about their process *as* a woman artist and the connection they feel to another woman and her life experiences as a woman. The simultaneity of the gendered *narratives* shows the reader the simultaneity of lived experiences.

[25] Warhol use the word focalization rather than employing Genette's term *voice*.

Lanser explains, "For women writers, as feminist criticism has long noted, the distinction between private and public contexts is a crucial and a complicated one. Traditionally speaking, the sanctions against women's writing have taken the form not of prohibitions to write at all but of prohibitions to write for a public audience" ("Toward a Feminist Narratology", 352). As I will argue, Catel and Jones utilize *narrative* structures, in effect, to question how gender has constructed their own *story*. Moreover, they illustrate the way gender has constructed other women's *stories* across time and space. In the following chapters on Catel's and Jones' works, I will analyze how the women artists act as *narrator* of their *story*. Moreover, I will examine the *narrative* implications of the relationships between their *story*, *narrative*, and *narration* and how their works expose simultaneity for the women artists.

3.3 Comics or Graphic Narratives

The medium of comics—a hybrid art of words and images—allows for certain creative juxtapositions that other forms of *writing* or film do not. Scott McCloud defines comics in his book *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* as "juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer" (9)[26]. Both Catel and Jones construct a sequence of images and texts in order to tell a *story* to her reader. In essence, both artists' comic strips or panels—the very sequence of text and images on each page—is the artist's *narrative* structure.

Using *narrative* analysis of how each artist constructs her strips, panels or pages reveals meaning. Scott McCloud analyzes the use of words and images in his book. As McCloud explains, words and images work together in different ways. The same *narrative* can be visually and textually represented in multiple ways that change how the reader understands the work. Text and image work together and/or against each other for the reader to construct meaning. How one reads text influences how one reads pictures, and vice versa (155-156). For example, a comic strip could have a simple statement of "I came home after a long day." The images themselves could be a literal interpretation of the character returning home, they could be a flashback of the various tiring activities the character did, they could be images of clocks slowly ticking by emphasizing the passage of time. In each case, the words work with and against the images to create meaning.

The reader also interprets the text and images on the page individually—in each individual comics frame—as well as holistically—with and against all the frames on the page. For example, comics are images in sequence. Readers will follow the sequence of images in order on a page, interpreting each image alone. But they will also interpret the

[26] While this particular definition has been challenged by scholars like Thierry Groensteen as unduly excluding some works and also being too inclusive, McCloud's definition will suffice for this project since this project does not look to intervene on defining the medium of comics. See: Groensteen, Thierry. *The System of Comics*. Jackson: U of Mississippi, 2007. Print.

current image with/against the preceding image and the next image. The reader's eye, possibly looking back and ahead at different images on the page. Comics *narrative* structure causes the reader to construct and reconstruct meaning while reading.

Image/text in comics, according to McCloud, work to show and tell. McCloud illustrates his point by giving the example of children at school during show-and-tell. McCloud states, "As children, we 'show' and 'tell' *interchangeably*, words and images combining to transmit a *connected series of ideas*" (152: emphasis his). An example of this image/text behavior for show-and-tell continues into adulthood when adults use their phones to show pictures they have taken while telling a *story.* How text/image function together to show and tell is part of the *narrative* structure that the women artists in this project use to *narrate* the *story*. The comics medium distinctly allows for a simultaneous *narrative* structure of showing and telling. Or, as McCloud explains with his flipped description of comics: "to tell was to show—and to show was to tell" (161). McCloud argues, the ways that the images and text work together is part of the *narrative*. McCloud identifies how words and images in comics create different effects (153-155). Sometimes, the text expresses literally what is happening in the *story* while the images are free to make connections to other parts of the *story.* The reader is able to understand these connections by constructing meaning from the *narrative* structure of images and words showing and telling.

French comics scholar, Thierry Grœnsteen, has written extensively on the system of comics as a medium. In his first manuscript, *System of Comics*, Grœnsteen analyzes what comics are and how they work as a medium in order to tell a *story*. In his second manuscript, *Comics and Narration*, Grœnsteen uses narratology to better analyze comics as a medium. He argues:

> I do not believe in the possibility of establishing a general science of narratology that would be valid across all types of narratives in whatever medium. I believe that the issue of the narrator can legitimately be raised in relation to any type of story, but that the question should be posed afresh for each medium, because each has its own enunciative mechanism and, consequently, a distinct narratological configuration. (80-81)

Grœnsteen's argument expresses the need to consider how medium changes how narratological questions are answered. More specifically, Grœnsteen elaborates by arguing, "comics narration is essentially founded on the articulation of images within a sequence" (85). This dissertation project will use narratology as a tool to analyze graphic narratives and needs to take into consideration how the analysis of text and images change the understanding of *narrative.*

Although Grœnsteen invokes Genette's definitions and uses them, his argument proceeds to analyze the way *narrative* functions in the comics medium. Like McCloud, Grœnsteen discusses at length the idea that comics show and tell. Grœnsteen analyzes how an artist's style impacts *narrative* structures for the reader and argues, "Readers who are confronted with a comic, whether or not they perceive the presence of a narrative

agent, of someone telling them something, cannot, in any case, fail to be aware that the images that they are looking at *have been drawn*, that they are artifacts" (85). Grœnsteen's main arguments applies this project and how I will interpret how Catel and Jones construct their comics as *narrator* of their works. Grœnsteen argues, "Any drawing is by its nature a codification and a stylization of reality, the result of a reading of the world" (85). Analysis of *narrative* includes examining how Catel and Jones represent their gendered perceptions, i.e. their lived experiences.

Often, in response to arguments about comics and *narrative* structure, one may ask "but isn't that true of film as well?" Since both mediums tell a *story* using images and words, Grœnsteen explains that readers are confronted with an artifact differently than film. He points to the physicality of the artifact, the reader's control of pace and rhythm, as well as the accumulation of images rather than the replacement of images in a film (82). Grœnsteen argues "It is not therefore possible to invoke any effect of erasure of the narrator, which is normally the consequence of this 'happening as we watch' impression. It remains to be seen whether, conversely, the enunciative mechanism of comics actually calls forth the notion of a narrator, and in what way" (82). While reading the works for this project, as a reader, I am in control of the pace I read and turn the pages, how long I look at images, as well as recognizing that I have the ability to look at multiple images simultaneously. The *narrative* structure of the comics medium allows and encourages simultaneity.

Grœnsteen further discusses the temporality of the comics reader and the *narrative* structure. Specifically, Grœnsteen invokes the subtle and yet seemingly obvious visual difference between comics and film:

> Unlike those in film, comics images do not create the illusion that the events are taking place as we read. Several factors work against this—in particular: the visible discontinuity of the sequential flow of the narrative; the fact that readers cannot forget the physical, concrete situation in which they find themselves, that of having a book in their hands (or in front of them), and turning the pages, at a rhythm that is not imposed but under their control; finally, the fact that each new image does not obliterate the previous one, does not take its place, but is added to it on the mode of accumulation, collection, with the totality of images remaining easily accessible at any time (82).

Readers set the pace of their reading and are able to look at the *narrative* sequentially, but are also able to make connections and recreate meaning through the structure of comics.

Grœnsteen takes into consideration how the *narrator* in comics changes the reader's understanding if the comic is autobiographical. I will discuss implications of the autobiographical genre and *narrative* below. For the moment, I think that Grœnsteen's analysis of comics and the *narrator* in relationship to artistic style are pertinent. While McCloud argues that artistic style in comics, or the rendering of the art, conveys meaning to the reader, Grœnsteen differs in opinion on how this affects understanding *narrative* and *story*. Grœnsteen confronts the question of believability over meaning. Grœnsteen

argues that the comics reader can "believe" in the *story* no matter the artistic style. Realistic art, or art that looks closer to a photograph, versus abstract art or art that presents the minimum to convey meaning, according to Grœnsteen, have no influence on the reader's acceptance of the *story* (112). An example of abstracted art would be Marjane Satrapi's autobiographic comic *Persepolis.* The art is in black and white, without shading, minimalist, and almost childlike. While the art is minimalist, it does not affect the believability of the *story* Satrapi *narrates.*

However, Grœnsteen does argue "What is highly significant, on the other hand, and highly consequential, is the option that the monstrator has of changing style in the course of the narrative, and the different modalizations that its graphic line may undergo, dictated by impulse or intention" (112). Changes in style may not affect the reader's acceptance of the *story*, but the reader may infer meaning and a change in purpose from the artist [27]. Grœnsteen argues, "It has often and quite rightly been emphasized that the graphic image, insofar as it is handmade, has to be read in reference to the signature of its maker" (85). Artistic style and artistic choices become part of the artists' *narrative* structure by *narrating* their perception of the world. The artists use their art to *narrate* and to interpret the *story* for the reader.

Grœnsteen notes that the form of comics and the interplay of showing and telling creates an effect of emphasizing and/or deemphasizing certain elements of *narrative* structure (81). The effect varies depending on the nature of the text and its purpose. However, I will argue that the *narrative* structure in comics offer Catel and Jones a powerful way of showing and telling women's *stories* of oppression across time.

Feminist comics scholars like Hillary Chute and Deborah Elizabeth Whaley have both examined how comics represent and portray women on the page. Chute has written extensively on the autobiographical traumas of women comics artists and the gendered oppressions the artists have faced. In her work *Graphic Women*, Chute analyzes the systemic censoring of the five artists she analyzes, their style, and their narrative structures as gendered works. Whaley has published extensively on Black women in comics. In her work, *Black Women in Sequence*, Whaley argues that comics are "a viable form for understanding how popular literature and visual culture reflects the real and imagined place of women of African descent in nation making, politics, and cultural production" (8). Whaley's manuscript shows how comics function to produce gendered and racialized *stories* that reinforce and create meaning for the reader.

[27] Popular examples of the two ends of the spectrum would be Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home* and Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*. While Bechdel's style verges on realism to faithfully reproduce her childhood home down to the pattern in the wallpaper, Satrapi uses an abstract and almost childlike artistic style to draw her work. Both works, with opposing styles, remain believable to the reader.

3.4 Auto/Biography and Narrative

Both Catel and Jones have created comics that fall into the genre of biography as well as autobiography. Catel and Jones examine the life of another woman who has fought against systems of oppression. They also, within their respective works, examine their own lives and experiences within systems of oppression. Biography and autobiography have their own *narrative* functions. When an artist chooses to mix or blend biography and autobiography, they are choosing to alter the *narrative* and how the *narrative* functions in its cultural context. Moreover, since readers have assumptions about *narrative* structures, i.e. I assume an autobiography's *narrator* is the author, authors may choose to mix and blend *narrative* structures to challenge a reader's preconceived assumptions. One reason, I will argue, is that the artists presented in this project are using the blended *narrative* structure to educate the reader about systems of oppression.

Biographical works are works that analyze and recount the *story* of a person's life. Specifically, the subject of a biography is not the author. The author chooses a subject and as Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson explain in *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives,* "scholars of other people's lives document and interpret those lives from a point of view external to the subject" (5). Catel and Jones examine the life of their subjects from an outside perspective and provide "multiple forms of evidence, including historical documents, interviews, and family archives" (Smith and Watson, 6-7). The significance of the "evidence" is that it supports the *story* and provides proof of the *narration*. Both Jones and Catel, as I will show, provide analysis and interpretation of their respective biographical subject's *stories*.

For women's life *stories,* one form of oppression has been in the form of erasure. In *The Challenge of Feminist Biography: Writing the Lives of Modern American Women,* the editors argue, "[women biographers] learned how hard it was for any of our subjects to lead lives that we would have considered totally admirable, for they, like us, could never fully escape the culture in which they lived" (12). As we will see in the next two chapters, Catel and Jones explore their *stories* and their subject's *stories* of oppression across time and space. In recounting the *story* of their subjects, Catel and Jones try to rectify an erasure of women's *stories*. They both explore the difficulties and also the importance of recounting women's lives. The two *narratives,* and the two *stories* that Catel and Jones create, expose a "phenomenological experience"—the subjective and distinct experiences of each. Exposing the phenomenological experience of each woman, then connecting them (textually and visually) gives feminist theorists a new way of visualizing women's *narratives* as simultaneously intersectional.

Lauren Kane explains in her article, "How Not to Be Forgotten," the importance of feminist biographers to tell women's *stories*. Kane argues:

> The project of unearthing the rich lives of forgotten women artists can quickly become personal for their women biographers, and the questions of merit become

> difficult to parse out from a hunger for retroactive justice. When we do this work as critics, we are hoping to implicitly express how we've changed, as a society, by recognizing a previously unacknowledged greatness. (The Paris Review)

Kane further argues, "we are making an effort to repay a debt of overdue attention—and maybe in doing so, we assure ourselves that there is a future that will remember, or recognize, us, our peers, the women we admire today. There's no way to guarantee it, but maybe when we do this work we're paying it forward while paying it backward, driven by the blind hope that there will be space for what we've done after we have ceased to do it" (the Paris Review). Catel and Jones are filling in the gaps and erasures in the past by adding women's *stories* for recognition. Catel and Jones as feminist biographers and artists seek to acknowledge women's *stories* in their *narratives* in the hopes that they too, will be recognized as artists. In doing so, Catel and Jones show the reader a simultaneous intersectionality that contends with erasure.

And while Paul Murray Kendall reminds us that "any biography uneasily shelters an autobiography within it" (x), we can consider how some artists may explicitly incorporate autobiographical information in their respective work. Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* mixes the two genres in a mixed medium form and creates a *narrative* structure simultaneously. Bechdel's work *narrates* her father's biography as a closeted gay man while also *narrating* her own autobiography as a lesbian woman. Bechdel uses the hybrid genre and comics medium to expose simultaneous intersectionality.

In Philippe Lejeune's seminal text, *On Autobiography*, he lays out a definition not only for the genre itself, but then how the text functions narratologically. In his initial, and often cited, chapter "The Autobiographical Pact," Lejeune argues that the initial problem with defining the autobiographical genre is due to the conflation of the genre with biography as well as the novel (3). He then proceeds to distinguish the very defining features that make an autobiography distinct:

> Definition: Retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality.
>
> The definition brings into play elements belonging to four different categories:
>
> 1. *Form of language*
>
> a. narrative
>
> b. in prose
>
> 2. *Subject treated*: individual's life, story of a personality
>
> 3. *Situation of the author*: the author (whose name refers to a real person) and the narrator are identical

4. *Position of the narrator*

    a. the narrator and the principal character are identical

    b. retrospective point of view of the narrative (4).

According to Lejeune, in order for a work to be considered an autobiography, all conditions have to be met, otherwise, the work falls into a different genre. In the case of biographical works, condition 4a is not met (3). Catel and Jones create simultaneous *narratives* that meet the conditions of autobiography and biography.

The *narrative* structure links to the hybridity of the auto/biography. Hybrid works can be viewed as a mixture of two or more genres, such as biography and autobiography. In the case of Catel and Jones, their works are a hybrid of the autobiographical and biographical genres. Smith and Watson argue,

> Auto/biography, or a/b. This acronym signals the interrelatedness of autobiographical narrative and biography. Although the slash marks their fluid boundary, they are in several senses different, even opposed, forms (see chapter 1). The term also designates a mode of the autobiographical that inserts biography/ies within an autobiography, or the converse, a personal narrative within a biography. (256)

In the case of Bechdel, she sees and feels the "interrelatedness" of her *story* with that of her father's *story*. Bechdel then shows the reader the connections of her personal *story* with their subject's *story* through their *narrative* structure.

One should not conflate the term hybrid with simultaneity. While simultaneity refers to the perception of lived experiences synthesized into a whole, e.g. a 42 year old woman remembering the sensations of riding a bike for the first time as a child, hybridity should be understood as a blending or mixture of genres that do not necessarily take place at the same time. A hybrid text like an auto/biography has elements of both autobiography and biography but they are not necessarily perceived at the same time.

Layering and sequencing the artist's life with the life of their subject creates *narrative* layers. The *narrative* layers create irreducible relationships. That is to say, the connections and relationships they experience cannot be reduced to a singular link, but rather their relationships are formed through the simultaneity of their whole lived experiences. One implication of these *narrative* relationships is in how these women artists cannot, or maybe choose to not, disentangle the two life *narratives*. As I will further discuss, Catel and Jones incorporate a polyphony of *narrative voice*. The artist's personal *story*, her autobiography, is *narratively* structured to intertwine with her subject's life *story*.

Grœnsteen's article, "Problems on Autorepresentation" in *Autobiographismes : Bande dessinée et representation de soi*[28] on self-portraiture in autobiographical comics

[28] The title of the collected essays translates to: *Autobiographisms: Comics and Representation of the Self.* All quotes from Groensteen's article have been translated by me.

repeats and reinforces the ideas he argues in *Comics and Narration*. While Grœnsteen acknowledges Lejeune's main point in his definition of the autobiographical genre, that the author, narrator and main character are the same, Grœnsteen argues that comics complicate the definition. His point is that the author draws the *narrator* and main character in the text, distancing his/her representation further from the author (53). Grœnsteen asserts, "This means that the identity between author and character is very relative. One represents the other, assuredly, but monstration reifies the graphic self as an 'actor' (a persona, and so, a mask), endowed with its own identity. The actor is made to play a role and given stage directions" (*Comics and Narration:* 99). Grœnsteen is arguing that in autobiographical comics, the author/artist is not simply employing "I" to *narrate* but is also drawing an avatar or a stand-in that becomes a character to represent the author/artist. The author/artist can subsequently distance herself from the *narrative*.

In the case of Bechdel, she points to and emphasizes that she, the artist, drew the comic in her *meta-narrative*. Bechdel signals to the reader that she is not only telling the *story* of her subject, but that she is also telling the reader her *story* while explicitly gesturing to the act of creating a comic. Artists embody their work through the act of drawing themselves and their subject. In her essay "Autographic Disclosures and Genealogies of Desire in Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home*," Julia Watson examines how the hybrid form of comics allows for complicated examination of gender and sexuality in autobiographies. Watson argues, "The practice of composing autobiography implies doubling the self… That splitting of self into observer ad observed is redoubled in autographics, where the dual media of words and drawing, and their segmentation into boxes, panels, and pages offer multiple possibilities for interpreting experience, reworking memory, and staging self-reflection" (124-125). Artistically rendering her memories, Bechdel is able to interpret her childhood experiences.

The *narrative* impact for artists like Bechdel, as they draw themselves and their respective *stories*, is that they use the auto/biographical genre in comics to voice multiple phenomenological experiences to the reader. Grœnsteen argues that auto/biographers use the medium of comics to represent multiplicity in experience. He states, "Comic art has entered the era of narrative polygraphism and polyphony" (117). In essence, comics allows for simultaneous *voices* as well as simultaneous *narratives*—visually and textually.

Auto/biographical comics allows artists like Bechdel to center feminist voices and explore simultaneous intersectionality. While discussing Alison Bechdel's auto/biographical comic in her essay, Watson states:

> Narrative theorists such as David Herman also consider Bechdel's' use of visual tags or labels in the frame to mark different temporalities of experience for the narrating I. For feminist autobiography critics such as myself, Bechdel creates a richly complex storytelling world, grounded both in the everyday experience of mid-twentieth-century American small-town family life and in the feminist

> practice of making the personal political through hybrid forms of personal criticism. (133)

Auto/biographies can create and show the reader different *narrative* I's as well as engaging feminist practices of showing how their personal experiences are political. Analysis of how the comics medium structures *narrative,* as well as the genre of auto/biography, can show feminist scholars how Catel and Jones show the reader simultaneous intersectionality across time and space. The artists *narratives* allow the reader to see shared *stories* of women's experiences in systems of oppression.

CHAPTER 4. CATEL AND BENOÎTE GROULT

In this chapter, I will provide an analysis of Catel's work *Ainsi soit Benoîte Groult*. I will first give some background and context about French feminism that is vital to understanding how Catel portrays Groult and herself. Then, I will use narrative analysis to show how Catel structures her *narrative, story,* and *meta-narrative* in the work. This analysis will then lead to my argument about how Catel shows the reader simultaneous intersectionality.

French comics artist Catel Muller (who goes professionally by Catel) was born in Strasbourg, France in 1964. Catel's *Ainsi soit Benoîte Groult* (2013) was the follow-up biographical graphic novel to her work *Kiki de Montparnasse* (2007). The success of *Kiki de Montparnasse*, gave Catel the creative license to choose the subject for her next biographical work. *Kiki de Montparnasse* is a biographical comic about the model and muse to American photographer Man Ray. The work itself chronicles the life and influence that Kiki had on avant-garde artists living in Paris in the 1920s. Catel's work won prominent awards at the Angoulême International Comics Festival. Most notably, she was awarded the *Grand prix RTL de la bande dessinée* as well as *le Prix du public Essentiel à Angoulème*.

The significance of these awards stems in the prizes. RTL is a popular, national radio station that promotes the award-winning comic book for up to two hundred thousand euros. The second notable prize Catel won was *le Prix de public Essentiel à Angoulême*, which is a prize supported by the large bookstore la Fnac. La Fnac is a highly prevalent French bookstore that is equivalent to Amazon and Barnes & Noble. As part of the prize, La Fnac further promoted the biographical comic on a national scale in its stores and on the Internet. Both prizes subsequently led to additional promotion of her work in prominent and popular spaces.

Catel's success with *Kiki de Montparnasse* led to interviews that allowed Catel to vocalize her feminist views. Catel states during an interview for *L'Etudiant*[29]:

> Much later, when I met Marjane Satrapi who was working on *Persepolis*, I dared to say to my mother that I had had too easy a childhood and that I didn't have any complicated personal stories to borrow from for drawing. When she responded that I could maybe speak about women who fought so that I could have that life now, the idea was born. (Manceau 40: translation mine)

The quote from the interview exposes the very personal and political position where Catel situates herself in her work. Catel deliberately *situates*[30] herself artistically with

[29] *L'Étudiant* is a monthly syndicated magazine for high school and university students to guide them in their career choices during their academic studies. The website and magazine offer interviews with professionals in every major sector in order to inspire and provide career guidance.

[30] Pierre Bourdieu's *The Field of Cultural Production* can provide helpful insight to how Catel situates her own reading and personal framework. Catel's "position-taking", as Bourdieu would call it, stems from the need to distinguish herself in a predominantly male profession.

Satrapi telling the story of women who have established a better life, fought for women, or who were extraordinary.

Catel's *position-taking* allows her to differentiate herself from female competitors. When she implicates her identity as a white, middle-aged, middle-class woman as an obstacle to further her career, she does so in direct comparison to Marjane Satrapi, an Iranian born, middle-aged immigrant living in political exile in France. Catel contends that Satrapi's life as *other* gives Satrapi's works the artistic advantage of revealing conflict and marginalization due to one's gender. For Catel, Satrapi's difference serves to distinguish her from other comics artists and subsequently brings her more success.

Catel's *position-taking* may seem ironic considering the tradition of French feminists to view "woman as a class" or who discuss "the universal woman." By comparing another woman's experience with a system of oppression against Catel's own experiences, Catel seemingly invokes intersectionality. However, I argue that Catel acknowledges *differance* to *situate* herself competitively while continuing to invoke the French feminist view of the universal woman.

To answer the question of why Catel universalizes women's experiences, we need only to examine some prominent French feminists, and we can see how Catel's feminist politics have been formed. While feminists in France have fought and continue to fight for women's rights and equality in France, the arguments and positions they have taken diverge slightly from that of their American counterparts. French feminists have continued to make arguments for women's equality based on their own local, cultural, and political context.

4.1 The Universal Citizen

In this particular section, I examine how French feminist thinkers have worked with and against national politics in order to make gains within their culture. I will also look at important French feminists whose work is foundational to understanding the complexities of French national identity and the role women play in society. These foundational writers and thinkers are the feminists Catel draws upon in her works. Catel represents herself in relationship to these writers.

Joan Scott, American scholar of French history, argues in her book *Only Paradoxes to Offer*, French feminists often (are forced to) construct their arguments *paradoxically*. Scott defines paradox as "a sign of the capacity to balance complexly contrary thoughts and feelings and, by extension, poetic creativity. Ordinary usage carries traces of these formal and aesthetic meanings, but it most often employs 'paradox' to mean an opinion that challenges prevailing orthodoxy that is contrary to received tradition. Paradox marks a position at odds with the dominant one by stressing its difference from it" (4). Which is to say, French feminists often use the idea of the "universal woman" while also reinforcing the very difference in women's experiences.

Scott explains the way that the French define national identity creates the cultural context for the paradox. Since the First Republic, the French have ideologically based their construct of national identity on an abstracted and universal individual. The French argue that by eliminating ties to other aspects of identity (e.g. religion, race, ethnicity, class), then true equality can be obtained for its citizens. Scott argues, "[Abstraction] also meant treating them as disembodied, apart from the distinguishing physical characteristics of physiognomy, skin color, and sex. This abstraction made it possible to posit a fundamental human sameness, a set of universal traits, and thus opened the way for thinking about political, social, and even economic equality" (6: *Only Paradoxes to Offer*).

It is in the creation of a philosophical sameness that French feminists have been obligated to bind themselves in order to be considered French, or as full citizens. To achieve (full) citizenship, French feminists had to work within the discursive practices of the politicians definition of national identity. Scott states, "historically modern Western feminism is constituted by the discursive practices of democratic politics that have equated individuality with masculinity" (5). However, women's sex had been the difference on which women were excluded from the universal definition of the individual. Scott argues, "Feminism was a protest against women's political exclusion; its goal was to eliminate 'sexual difference' in politics, but it had to make its claims on behalf of 'women' (who were discursively produced through 'sexual difference'). To the extent that it acted for 'women,' feminism produced the 'sexual difference' it sought to eliminate" (3). Subsequently, the paradox for women in the construct of French national identity has forced feminists to paradoxically argue for a universal woman.

While French politics has erased difference as a means to achieve equality for all of its citizens, French feminists often apply a similar argument to push their women's rights agenda forward. In her book, *Politics of the Veil*, Joan Scott analyzes how French politics ignores intersectionality and analyzes this through the French ban of the hijab worn by Muslim women. Scott discusses how the universal citizen reinforces the paradox of gender discrimination in France. She argues, "The leaders of the feminist *mouvement pour la parité*[31] insisted that discrimination against women in politics would end only when it was understood that all individuals came in one of two sexes" (13). French feminists had to take care and point to the abstracted and universal citizen that they too were. In essence, French feminists had to argue that they were excluded based on sex, and yet experienced universally the same ideological concept of French nationalism.

Scott makes a clever feminist intervention for intersectionality in *Politics of the Veil*. She argues, "Paradoxically, it's difference that is common to us all" (20). While French feminists arguing against systemic sexism continued to uphold a universal

[31] *Mouvement pour la parité* translates to Movement for Equality. *Parité* in French is used to address equality between the sexes and is often employed to meet representative quotas in the workforce for men and women.

womanhood, Scott points out that they could have maintained the significance of difference as the universal theme of human experience. However, as Scott argues, difference is a problematic identity marker for the French, when in reference to national identity. She argues, "France insists on assimilation to a singular culture, the embrace of a shared language, history, and political ideology. The ideology is French republicanism" (12). Once a person is French, a singular and universal, national identity is imposed on the individual.

Olympe de Gouges, a famous political orator and writer during the French Revolution, was guillotined for her political beliefs and writings. Gouges wrote *The Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen* (1791). The title of the text itself draws attention to the disparity in rights between men and women. By flipping the title to "women" and the "female" citizen, Gouges draws attention to its counterpart *The Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen* (1789) and the assumption that women are categorically denied rights and citizenship. Throughout the declaration, Groult adds "and women" to each of the rights, signaling and highlighting the discrepancies in equality and liberty for all.

Gouges works elaborated on how women suffered under the oppression of men. She explained that "women have the right to mount the scaffold, they must also have the right to mount the tribunal" (Article X). Gouges quickly points out the paradox in men's versus women's rights: women can be held legally responsible for crimes against which they are not permitted to defend themselves.

Furthermore, Gouges' satirical rhetoric in the *Declaration* establishes equality between the sexes by challenging rights to inheritance as well as declaring paternity. She argues for the economic status of women to be equal to that of men. Inheritance laws, as well as established hiring practices in certain fields, often discriminate against women and forces them to rely on marriage (or men) in order to raise their economic status. These discrepancies between rights only created larger gaps for woman as class.

Women exist in all the groups and yet are marginalized in all the groups. Ignored and lack equality. As fifty percent of the population, their oppression exists across the board (universally) but their oppression "classes" them as less than man in all of these categories.

While fully acknowledging her own privilege, Catel positions herself and her work among those French feminists who view the rights of women as a universal issue. Catel states:

> When I was 16 years old, my mother gave me a copy of *Ainsi soit-elle* by Benoîte Groult. What a revelation! This book, simply written and the distancing that Benoîte Groult shows, opened my eyes on the condition of women in the world, the horrors of female mutilation, for example, made me understand that I was privileged. (40)

Catel recognizes the privilege of her life as a white, middle-class, French woman.

However, Catel's feminist focus remains on the plight of women, universally. Catel relates the universal experience of women to her own personal experiences in the comics industry. During that same interview, Catel describes her younger self not understanding how a woman could make comics, that is to say, Catel did not see how she could become a comics artist. And then later in her life, Catel describes how the overwhelming majority of men artists ignored her and fellow women artists at comics conventions during networking events. Catel states, "a lot of battles remain to be led for the cause of women at work. Where feminism can play a role, is in showing that men are not the competition, but the partners with whom we can advance and be creative" (40). This revealing statement shows how Catel understands feminism—as a way to remove competition between the sexes and to create partnerships. Catel's argument highlights Gouges' idea about national identity—that it is a partnership between the sexes.

According to Catel, women only make up 20% of the comics industry (*L'Etudiant*: 37)[32]. In 2013, Senator's in the French government released a White Paper on institutional sexism in the Arts in France. Not only does the paper reveal the difficulties for women in gaining access to teaching positions at the academies, but it also reveals the overwhelming statistic that less than 10% of comics producers/makers in France are women. Although Catel's number is an overestimation, it exposes that Catel is correct in her perception about the lack of parity. Catel also discusses that, as an artist, she did not have any models of women comics artists to follow because of the lack of parity (*L'Etudiant*: 37). This perception lead Catel in the early stages of her career to do what most French women artists do; she became an illustrator for children's books.

Since the success of *Kiki de Montparnasse,* Catel has become a proverbial "squeaky wheel" in the French comics industry—bemoaning the treatment and shunning of women comics artists in France. This includes the recent shunning of any women artists for the Grand Prize at the Angoulême Comics Festival in 2017. The response for the Women's Comics Collective called, BDEgalité created a website and stated, "We rise up against this obvious discrimination, this total negation of our representation in a

[32] Parity in comics production has been discussed in numerous articles that support Catel's assertion. The questions about women producers of comics in France compares to the United States: how many women are hired or given line credits for artistic contributions to works? Although the United States employs a larger percentage of women, there is still disparity in the numbers. 17.2% and 16.8% of the creators of comics for the large publishing houses, DC and Marvel respectively, are women. Numbers for smaller and independent presses are harder to track, but Alexander Huls, has written about larger percentages of women makers working and creating for independent presses. See: O'Brien, Chris. "France's Comic Book Festival Starts a Culture War By Nominating Zero Women for Its Grand Prize." Medium, Au Milieu, 20 Oct. 2017; Snaije, Olivia. "Art and Anguish at Angoulême: Where Are the Women in Comics?" Publishing Perspectives, 5 Feb. 2016; Grunenwald, Joe. "Women in Comics, By The Numbers: Summer and Fall 2018." The Beat, 14 Feb. 2019.; Huls, Alexander. "The Small Publishers Boosting Female Talent in Comics." Pacific Standard, 20 Oct. 2017.

medium which includes more and more women." BDEgalité quickly noted that in the 42 years the International Festival had existed, only one woman had ever won a prize—Claire Bretécher—and her prize was a tenth anniversary prize in 1982.

Catel's used her identification as a feminist seeking parity in comics to further point out the discrimination within the industry. Catel argued, "One must force things, as in politically or in situations dominated by men. If there isn't representation, then there isn't an example. And without models, it is impossible to identify oneself as a young woman author" (*L'Etudiant*). Catel's statement seems to draw a parallel between the feminist movement in France for parity in politics. In essence, Catel believes in applying the political strategy of force that French feminists used to in order to achieve equality, forcing representation and modeling the desired outcome.

BDEgalité created their online manifesto in order to explain their feminist standpoint within the comics industry. Within the cultural context of France, BDEgalité strives for parity in an industry in which there is ideally no more sexism. The manifesto states:

> Publishing 'feminine' collections is misogynistic. This creates a differentiation and a hierarchy with the rest of literature, with universality of readings that would address themselves—in opposition—with the male sex. Why must women be outside of the universal? Differentiation of this sort, on the basis of stereotypes alone, only has negative effects on the perception that women themselves have about their own self-confidence and their own performances. The same happens for men, above all, if they feel attracted to what a phantom authority labels 'feminine.' While one continues to make masculine the norm and feminine a particular inferior, children will persist in using the insult of 'girl' and 'homosexual' in schools[33]. (BDEgalité)

In order to prove their point, the women artists have collected anecdotes from their group and others of the various sexisms they have faced within the industry. These anecdotes attest to the stereotypes and perceptions of what it means to be a woman, girl, or feminine. Catel strongly positions herself within the movement and vocalizes the movement's feminist philosophy.

Thus, Catel's subject of Benoîte Groult for a graphic novel is not a surprise. *Ainsi soit Benoîte Groult* is, in part, a work that acknowledges and teaches about the history of French feminism. Catel gives the aforementioned Benoîte Groult the space to educate the reader on vital points to the feminist construct of the "universal woman." Like Catel's mother who introduced Catel to feminism through Groult's work, Catel encourages her reader to engage with Groult to learn about feminism. And throughout the work, Catel emphasizes Groult's expertise on the revolutionary and polemical figure Olympe de Gouges.

[33] Translation mine.

Catel's work continues to expand the "woman as class" argument by citing Groult's personal research to educate herself in feminism. Groult cites Flora Tristan as an example of the foundational feminists who establish "women as class." Tristan, a militant feminist writer, was known as a socialist who argued for workers' rights in the early 1800s. Tristan eloquently claims, "The most oppressed man can oppress an other, his wife. She is the proletariat of the proletariat itself" *(L'Union ouvrière*: 1843*).* Her argument is that woman is oppressed as a class by an already oppressed working class. Tristan acknowledges that workers (men) needed more rights and representation. However, Tristan argues that women remain entirely unacknowledged within society. Thus, Tristan argues succinctly that the already oppressed have the power to further oppress women.

Groult continues to forcefully cite the French feminist tradition of "woman as class" in her feminist philosophy when she cites Simone de Beauvoir several times. In her first citation, Groult quotes from *The Second Sex*: "Speaking is a subversive act, the first step in Freedom." Groult refers to this text as "foundational" to her feminist consciousness. And it is in this foundational piece, that Beauvoir makes the argument for the "universal women", as well as "woman as class," simply because women are found in all races, religions, and socio-economic levels. Beauvoir's argument resonates with Groult as will be later discussed.

Although the idea "woman as class" which invokes Beauvoir, is not new in feminism, it does concern feminists who want to consider an intersectional approach to their views. However, this particular set of French feminists that Groult and Catel cite have long made the connection between "woman as class" and the "universal woman." In *The Second Sex,* Beauvoir argues that Bebel makes the most compelling analogy for "woman as class" compared to the proletariat. Beauvoir shows that groups of people (Jews, Blacks, the colonized) have histories, languages, and cultures that preceded the distinct historic moments that oppressed them. Whereas the proletariat and women have no distinct historical moments to explain when they became oppressed (8).

Beauvoir's distinction between "woman as class," by comparing her to the proletariat, as Tristan before her, with other oppressed groups serves to ultimately categorize women universally, despite other systems of oppression. This distinction universalizes women because it shows the common experience is oppression for women. Unlike other oppressed groups, Beauvoir posits that women do not have a unifying culture, race, religion, economic interest, or even social conditions to bind and link them to a *we*. Yet, women across all those groups find themselves oppressed. And it is in this very lack of commonality that *all* women find themselves—universally (8-9).

Beauvoir argues, "…the two sexes have never divided the world up equally; and still today, even though her condition is changing, woman is heavily handicapped. In no country is her legal status identical to man's, and often it puts her at a considerable disadvantage. Even when her rights are recognized abstractly, long-standing habit keeps them from being concretely manifested in customs" (9). Beauvoir's continues to argue

the universal oppression of women, and even when some women in some places have more rights, Beauvoir exposes how women remain oppressed within the system.

Although Beauvoir's argument is often cited as one of the roots for modern feminism, it seems problematic for American feminists in light of Kimberlé Crenshaw's work on intersectionality. However, the notion of a "universal woman" is not necessarily a problematic idea for French feminists. Specifically, both Groult and Catel adopt the "universal woman" with ease while ignoring, erasing, or dismissing an intersectional idea about systems of oppression. Groult states, "And we aren't a 'category' of the population. They often make that lamentable argument to us. We aren't the category of Muslims, homosexuals, or the handicapped…. *They* reclaim their own rights. We are in all the categories. Women are half the human population" (202). Although it seems that Groult is making the argument that women face multiple fronts of oppression in her argument, she is actually emphasizing that no matter the oppressive system, all women, universally, are oppressed. At the same time, Groult is bemoaning the fact that other groups are gaining political and economic rights that women are still categorically denied.

French feminists have historically accepted and argued for the idea of the universal woman. In part, this is because the French construct national identity on the universal individual. Gouges satirically challenged the revolutionary concepts of equality for men while excluding women. However, French national identity based on the universal citizen comes from the French Revolution. Ideologically, the French ascribe to the idea of a singular citizen that is freed from any notions, ideas, or identities that could tie him/her to another group or entity.

French national identity has been defined by its imagined construct of sameness. Joan W. Scott examines French universalism and national identity in several of her works. As previously cited, Scott argues, that the French define their national identity as "assimilation to a singular culture, the embrace of a shared language, history, and political ideology. The ideology is French republicanism" (12). French national identity, according to Scott, presupposes a universalism of defining characteristics, in which all its citizens share and express those same qualities free from religion, ethnicity, race, and class, subsequently erasing any individual's difference (12-16). The singular nature of national identity is subsequently expressed through abstraction.

In her book about the history of French feminism, *Only Paradoxes to Offer*, Joan Scott argues "the individual is the abstract prototype for the human… [this] definition was often employed in political theory as the basis for the claim that there were natural and universal human rights that gave men a common claim to the political rights of the citizen. The revolutionary philosophers made abstract individualism the rhetorical basis for their republic" (5). Gouges, Tristan, and Beauvoir argued that women were erroneously excluded from these universal rights because of their gender.

French women, historically, were denied full citizenship and the rights therein based on their difference in gender[34]. Joan Scott, again, exposes the problem feminists faced in arguing for universal rights in, *Parité!: Sexual Equality and the Crisis of French Universalism*, "The dilemma that confronted generations of feminists was how to make a case for the inclusion of women (as citizens, voters, elected representatives) when the difference of sex was considered an obstacle to abstraction, and when women were taken as the embodiment of the difference of sex" (5). The paradox of being treated differently because one is different while trying to participate in universality creates for feminists a difficult paradox to surmount.

Scott argues, "That equality is achieved, in French political theory, by making one's social, religious, ethnic, and other origins irrelevant in the public sphere; it is as an abstract individual that one becomes a French citizen. Universalism—the oneness, the sameness of all individuals—is taken to be the antithesis of communalism[35]" (11). For example, the hijab calls attention to the relevance of one's own gender and religious beliefs, and possibly ethnic background. Therefore, the hijab becomes a visual representation of the antithesis of French universalism by visually representing communalism.

4.2 Catel's Use of *Story*

Ainsi soit Benoîte Groult opens with a two-page prologue, revealing intimate details of her own life and work (Figure 1). Catel provides the reader with information about her own *story.* She sits in her studio, talking on the phone, José-Luis Bocquet (her writing and romantic partner) reading on the sofa in the background. The reader sees where she lives, what her studio looks like, is given an intimate glimpse of her domestic and private life, and witnesses a phone call from the editor at *La Liberation*[36] offering her a comics spread about whomever Catel chooses.

With carte blanche, Catel deliberates the possibilities and considers two prominent women. Catel considers, on the one hand, Claire Bretécher (née: 1940)[37] who

[34] The Napoleoninc Code in the early 19th Century legally defined women as lesser to children and the mentally ill. Women were legally subjugated to their father's, husband's, or male guardian's. The Napoleonic Code stated "People refused legal rights are minors, married women, criminals, and the mentally ill." **(**Code: 1388)

[35] Scott defines *communalism* as related to the American idea of multi-faceted identities or hyphenated identities (e.g. African-American).

[36] *La Libération* is a daily newspaper in France founded by Jean-Paul Sartre and July. It is a "socialist-centrist-left" leaning newspaper.

[37] Bretécher is best known for a comic strip called *Agrippine*, which features an adolescent girl navigating a teenager's life and the subsequently "normal" adolescent problems e.g. grades in school and what to do on a Saturday night. For a point of reference, the comic itself is analogous to the American comic strip *Zits* by Jerry Scott and Jim Borgman. However, it is her other work *Frustrated,* for which she is also well known. *Frustrated* was a comic that Bretécher made weekly in the 70s (first in *Pilote* 1971-1973 and then in *Le Nouvel Observateur* 1973-1981). This strip established her reputation as a comics artist who challenged and exposed cultural conflicts felt by French citizens. Roland Barthes praised her work and

was mentioned above for having been the only woman to win a prominent prize at the Angoulême Comics Festival. Bretécher is a central and important figure to Catel's *story* since Bretécher was the first French woman in comics to have her own strip; she established her career and reputation in 1960s France; and she is the first French woman to have name recognition in the French comics industry. Bretécher's *Frustrated* are one-page strips, done in black ink, with a casual and fast style. They are simple and visually abstract. There are no recurring characters, although the majority of her characters identify as part of the French intellectual elite (the *intellos*) and the bourgeoisie. Bretécher's work often examines the experiences of women navigating culturally relevant questions about gender and their role in society.

On the other hand, Catel considers Benoîte Groult, the feminist scholar whose work introduced Catel to feminism. Catel chooses to work on the prominent French feminist writer, Benoîte Groult. Groult agrees to the interview process without fully understanding that she will be featured in a comic. During the interviews, Groult regularly comments on Catel's drawing and sketches as exemplified in Figure 2 when she states, "You had the time to make all of these drawings while coming to see me?" (Figure 2: first frame). Catel includes the interviews as part of their shared *story*. The event of interviewing Groult, for Catel, is just as significant as the *stories* that Groult *narrates* about her own life to Catel.

Catel documents Benoîte's life *story* by drawing and interpreting the events and moments shared with her. The biographical events focus primarily on recounting the moments that exemplify how Benoîte became a feminist or why she still is. Catel visually distinguishes Benoîte's biographical *story* from the interviews as *story* through her use of frames[38].

Catel draws a square frame around the images that show the events and connected moments in Benoîte's *story*. However, during the interviews, Benoîte is almost always drawn without a frame. The use of frames or lack-thereof distinguishes the shared *story* and the biographical *story* as *narrated* by Benoîte. Catel creates the visual *narrative* with Benoîte's voice *narrating* her own *story* (Figure 4). The text in the boxes above each frame represents Benoîte *narrating* to Catel her *story*. In this case, Benoîte *narrates* the emotional and legal difficulties of women who did not want to be pregnant. The speech bubbles represent the conversations and dialogue from the past.

Catel shows us the connections between the past and the present, as well as the connections between Benoîte's *story* and their shared *story*. Catel shows the reader how Benoîte continues to actively engage in feminism by documenting Benoîte giving a talk at UNESCO about Olympe de Gouges (Figure 3). Again, the reader sees Benoîte, frameless on the page, reading her paper to the audience. Catel uses the same visual cues

stated "She is the best sociologist of our society" (1973 citation and better translation). Bretécher's work established a model for Catel in the comics industry.

[38] Frames in comics terms are the lines or boxes drawn around and image to separate and distinguish it from other images on the page.

of framing in order to show the reader which part of Benoîte's *story* that Catel is documenting. In this case, Catel is documenting a shared moment in both their *stories*. Benoîte's voice *narrates* in speech bubbles and then in the boxes above the semi-framed images. The last four images on the page are drawn with only a partially closed frame. The semi-framed images are Catel showing us part of her own personal *story*.

Catel visually juxtaposes her *story* with Benoîte's *story*. Catel shares with the reader a private text-message exchange with her daughter. Her daughter asks, "Hey mom! Are you getting me at the end of school?" Catel shows the reader her response of "It's your dad who's coming, sweetie… He has you this week…" During this exchange, Catel reveals part of her intimate and private *story* by sharing details about her family life. Specifically, Catel's *story* reveals that she is divorced and a mother. Catel's personal revelation links to Benoîte's speech directly as Benoîte explains to the audience about Olympe de Gouges fighting for women's emancipation, which Benoîte explains the only right Gouges ever saw realized in Revolutionary France was the right to divorce. Catel visually juxtaposes Benoîte's *narration* of "…the RIGHT to DIVORCE" over her own *narration* of responding to her daughter.

The significance of Catel sharing any detail about her private/family life is important to note because this is not common in dominant French culture. Family is culturally considered to be a "private" matter that is shared and discussed only among very close and intimate friends. To share this with the unknown reader is in this sense remarkable and significant. However, this also marks another moment in the story when Catel shifts simultaneously from biographical genre to the autobiographical.

4.3 Catel's Use of *Narrating*

In the same opening sequence of the graphic novel (Figure 1), we see Catel debating her "competing" choices[39] through the side-by-side framing. These two pages serve as background information to the completed 326-page graphic novel, or part of the *story*. However, the first two pages reinforce Catel as a *narrating* voice in the work. She is the visual *narrator* of the overall *story*—and she is also a character in it. Emphasizing her own *narrative* voice centers Catel as the artist that created the finished book which reinforces her desire for equality for women in the comics industry.

Catel as *narrator* signals to the reader that her voice and her interpretation are significant. Catel draws her gendered experience as a marginalized artist and explicitly highlighting her *narrative* voice counterargues the societal norm of male-dominated producers in comics. In these first two pages, Catel emphasizes her *narrating* by sharing with the reader her process of choosing a subject. Catel *narrates* why she chooses her

[39] She narrows her choices to two women: Claire Bretécher, the first woman comics artist who came to prominence in the late 60s, and Benoîte Groult, a famous French feminist. The image shows a famous Bretécher character, *Agrippine*, sitting on the Bretécher's shoulder saying that Bretécher could draw her own life, whereas, Groult comments that she finds the idea "funny".

subject and how the graphic novel began. Catel drawing herself, pen in hand at her drawing table, reinforces visibly her drawings and her interpretations as *narrator* as a woman artist. Catel visually portrays for her reader a model of the woman comics artist at work. Catel as *narrator* draws for the reader a representation of a gendered experience while also presenting a model for future women comics artists.

In Image 3, Catel draws and illustrates Benoîte's *story* and Catel's *story* using both women as *narrator*. While the words in the word bubbles come from Benoîte's talk, clearly indicating her as the overall *narrator* in the moment, Catel reinforces her own *narrating* voice through modeling for us a woman artist in the act of drawing. Catel is visually *narrating* and documenting Benoîte's *story* and *narration*. Catel is also *narrating* her own *story* on this page.

Both of these pages emphasize the blended *stories* and *narrators* the reader encounters. The first page (Figure 1) gives the reader an autobiographical *narrator* who deliberately situates her *story* as the forefront of the overall *narrative*. The second image (Figure 4) emphasizes the biographical *story*—Benoîte—and allows her to *narrate* her story through Catel's visual *narrative*. But it also serves to incorporate simultaneously Catel's (Figure 3**)** autobiographical *story* through her voice as *narrator*. Catel's use of *narrating* allows both women, in the same space, a way to express their thoughts simultaneously about sexism in society. Catel emphasizes both *narrating* voices simultaneously as important.

4.4 Catel's Use of *Narrative* and *Meta-Narrative*

Returning to the opening sequence of the graphic narrative, the last frame emphasizes that Catel has decided who her subject will be. She sits at her drawing desk with her pen in her hand, her partner stating what is an "obvious" choice. The "obvious" choice becomes clear to the reader later within the text when we learn that Catel's mother introduced her to Groult's work. Bocquet knows that Catel values her feminist connection to Groult and as well as Catel's fight against sexism in the French comics industry. The comics medium's *narrative* structure is able to condense a conversation and decision visually and textually within two pages, while also revealing information about Catel's *story* and as *narrator* to the entire graphic novel. In other words, the reader sees part of the artist's personal life (*story*) and also holds the finished work in her hands (*narrator*). The visual and textual layout serve as the *narrative* structure for the overall graphic novel.

Although the opening pages serve as a *narrative*[40] frame—they make the connections and links to explain to the reader how and why Catel started the graphic

[40] A definition found in the introduction of the dissertation. However, for repetition: per Genette: 1) *story:* "the oral or written discourse that undertakes to tell of an event or a series of events;" 2) *narrative:* "the succession of events, real or fictitious, that are the subjects of [the first definition's] discourse, and to their several relations of linking, opposition, repetition, etc.;" 3) *narrating:* "an event: not, however, the event

novel—the first two pages also serve as a *meta-narrative* where Catel offers the reader a moment of self-reflection. (We will see how Jones flips the *narrative* frame in her work in the next chapter). Catel creates an overarching *narrative* about the creation of the work which is "outside" the *narrative* of Benoîte's and Catel's *story.* The reader holds the finished product in her hand knowing that this *meta-narrative* serves to explain the inspiration for the work as a whole and models a woman artist making a comic.

As previously stated, Catel shows and tells the reader what her life is like as an artist, as well as from whom she draws inspiration. The first two pages show Catel linking herself to the first prominent woman comics artist in France as well as linking herself to a prominent French feminist scholar. This *meta-narrative* sequence shows the reader who Catel considers to be her greatest influence as a woman comics artist and her introduction to feminism.

While Catel regularly draws herself as a sketching-artist throughout the graphic novel—which serves to reinforce her *narrating* voice—she reinforces her process of making and drawing by including drawn replicas of her notebooks and her pen. Catel continuously adds a self-reflective *meta-narrative* to the comic. The images of her notebooks and pens visually represent her *meta-narrative.* The notebooks are outside of the overarching story, however, they link Catel's self-reflection about her artistry to the finished work and *narrative* in the reader's hands. The self-reflective notebooks also link Catel's personal *narrative* back to Groult's *narrative* since they are usually depictions of moments spent with Groult.

In Figure 2, Catel replies to Groult, "Yes, my notebook is like a diary. I note[41] everything, sometimes very quickly!" (Figure 2: first frame). As Groult also "notes" the sketches, Catel asks her to "write" in her sketchbook, which is faithfully reproduced (Figure 2: frame 3). The reader sees and understands that Catel drew both of the images, the original and the re-creation of it in the comic book. She is not just an artist interviewing her subject. Catel's life and work, her "diary" and her notes, are inserted in the comic to underline her significance and relationship to this project and the Groult's *narrative*. Catel's *meta-narrative* shows her process of linking the process of interviewing Groult and showing Groult's *story* as well as Catel making the comic.

Catel links the *narrative* of Benoîte's talk at UNESCO (Figure 3) with Catel's personal *story* of divorce, as mentioned before. However, Catel uses *meta-narrative* to link the two *stories*. As Catel documents the event of Groult's talk (*story*) with her own life event, the connection of the six images on the page to tell that story are the *narrative* structure. Catel continues to show the reader herself drawing in her notebook. In this case, she is drawing Olympe de Gouges, the person Groult is speaking about. (At the time of the talk, Catel was in the process of drawing a biographical graphic novel about

that is recounted, but the event that consists of someone recounting something: the act of narrating taken in itself" (25-26).

[41] The use of the French word "noter" means to notice or remark upon, to grade. Her sketches are her observations.

Gouges.) Catel shows the reader her self-reflective *meta-narrative* and how her personal work is related to Groult and Groult's *story*. However, Catel also layers in a self-reflective comment, Groult's *narrating* voice about "the RIGHT to DIVORCE" (Figure 3: 6th frame) and Catel's own intimate experience with divorce.

4.5 Simultaneity in *Ainsi soit Benoîte Groult*

Examining the *narrative* structure, and how Catel uses *story*, *narrative*, *narrator*, and *meta-narrative* helps the reader understand how Catel exposes simultaneity. The image of the sketchbook (Figure 2**)** reinforces the comics medium as simultaneous image and text, a *mise-en-abyme*[42] of the graphic novel—Groult's words and Catel's images working together. This "proto-comic" reveals the value and importance of Groult's work for Catel the artist while also reinforcing the *narrative* layers of the two lives and ultimately the graphic novel in the reader's hands. Both artist and writer are linked in this singular work and also through their distinct works. But their *stories, narratives,* and *narrating* voices are linked simultaneously through the graphic novel. The reader sees them each as whole, separate person, and yet simultaneously linked. Redrawing the sketchbook is a visual and textual moment of self-reflection about being an artist that Catel shows the reader—the simultaneity of Catel's and Groult's life *stories,* and art, connected through the use of image/text.

The relationship that Catel and Groult ultimately share is one of friendship and confidant (Figures 4-6). While she draws Groult's biography, she distinguishes it visually from their interviews and from her meta-presence in the work. The visual distinction allows the reader to follow Groult's past *story*, as *narrated* by Benoîte to Catel in the contemporary moment. The biographical *narrative* is visually framed, closing in the already passed moments and memories—sharing intimate and personal "snapshots" of Benoîte's *story* with the reader (Figure 4). The visual *narrative* structure emphasizes the simultaneity of the *stories*. Benoîte *narrates* her past, reliving her memories in the contemporaneous moment while being interviewed by Catel. However, Catel is aware that the visual *narrative* is experienced in a third simultaneous moment—the reader's. Catel purposefully structures the images together in a sequence that links all the moments for a reader to make simultaneous connections.

Catel draws and interprets the biographical *narrative* from her time interviewing Groult, but also working from Groult's own work and scholarship. Catel, however, always interprets Groult's life *narrative* by showing not only the past *story*, but also the contemporary moment of the interview, while using the *meta-narrative* to link the third and simultaneous moment of the reader. Catel uses the *meta-narrative* to self-reflect to the reader her process as a woman artist.

[42] A mise-en-abyme is a literary or visual trope that describes a sort of mirror representation of the larger work. The play within a play in *Hamlet* or Van Eyck's reflection in the mirror while painting the painting *The Marriage of Arnolfini* often serve as examples.

In contrast, the drawings from the interviews are open and frameless expressing the easy and open friendship the two develop and share over the course of the project (Figure 5). The open framing around the contemporary Groult also expresses the abstract idea that Groult cannot be contained or imprisoned. The open framing can be understood as a metaphor for Groult's feminist liberation. This stylistic choice on Catel's part shows the reader how to read the *narrative* structure of the graphic novel. Catel's style also reinforces her interpretation of the *narrative* through her voice as *narrator*. Catel makes artistic choices that she imposes throughout the work to guide the reader through the *narrative.* Groult's *narrated* past is framed in traditional boxes, Groult's contemporary *story* is open and free of frames, while Catel's *meta-narrative* fluctuates between framing and lack of framing. These visual clues guide the reader to interpreting and understanding the *narrative* structure.

Catel shows how Groult is simultaneously the woman from her past experiences, the contemporary woman in the interviews and her current experiences, as well as the link to Catel and her own life. Catel shows the reader the simultaneity of their life experiences (*story*) temporally and spatially. She visually and textually shows the reader her *meta-narrative* awareness of her own life experience with divorce and shared custody, with Groult's scholarship and words (*narrating*) about Olympe de Gouges' juxtaposed. The scholarly paper that Groult gives connects the feminist history in which she participates to Catel's work and life which allows Catel to make artistic connections between Groult's lived experiences and her (Catel's) own.

Each juxtaposed and fragmented image adds up to a whole perspective, a simultaneous nonfragmented *narrative*. Each image serves to show the reader the simultaneity of Catel's and Benoîte's *stories* through time and space. Not only is each woman able to experience the different moments of her *story* through simultaneity, Catel is able to simultaneously examine them and link them together through visual and textual structure of the comics medium.

4.6 Simultaneous Intersectionality in *Ainsi soit Benoîte Groult*

Catel's and Benoîte's shared, open intimacy is important to Catel because it allows her to understand another person's lived experiences through shared *stories.* While one can argue that there is nothing new in women's shared friendships, this particular relationship bridges generations and exposes a shared system of oppression.

Groult shares with Catel a love letter from a former lover that she carries with her in her wallet (Figure 5). Catel starts the page by asking Groult "you were able to keep both the men of your life?" To which Groult explains "yes." Groult then elaborates that her husband (Paul) was jealous of her American lover (Kurt) but that their marriage remained intact. She explains that both her husband and lover died in 2004 and that Kurt wrote her a letter that his daughter mailed to her. In a moment of daring, Catel asks to read Groult's letter but quickly recants, feeling she may have overstepped her bounds.

However, Groult shares the private letter with Catel. Catel then reproduces the private and shared letter within the comic for the reader (Figure 5). The reproduced letter visually becomes a biographical artifact that exposes the simultaneous intersectionality of Benoîte's lived experiences of love, marriage, and loss while being shared with Catel and the reader.

First and foremost, it is an artifact for Benoîte's private and intimate life—a hand written letter from a lover that was not her husband. Benoîte reveals to Catel her open marriage with Paul (her third husband) and about Kurt, her American lover from World War II (Figure 5). For Groult, love and marriage are not necessarily a monogamous matter. Groult states in her autobiography, *My Escape: An Autobiography*, "I had always thought that in order to survive living together, you have to agree not on the virtues of fidelity, which are fleeting and change easily into a prison, but on the fundamentals: ethics, morals (or the absence of morals), religious beliefs (or the absence of religion), political opinions, not to mention culinary tastes (we eat two or three times a day after all)" (154-155). Groult sees monogamy in marriage a "prison" and fights to resist the heteronormative system of oppression often imposed inequitably on women.

While Catel draws Benoîte's non-hegemonic perspective on relationships, Catel also shows the reader that Benoîte's relationship with her lover persisted for decades and well into her "third-age." The simultaneous *narratives* through time and space show how Benoîte has resisted and challenged systems of oppression that deny women their right to sexual autonomy and access to their sexual desires. For Benoîte, these suppressions in her sexuality have been to resist institutional ideas about marriage as well as ideas about sex and sexuality only being for the young.

Catel also shows how Benoîte's children accepted Benoîte's views on sexual relationships (256-262). Benoîte's lived experiences continuously challenged hegemonic norms about women's relationships and roles within them. Catel illustrates the multifaceted and unconventional identities of Benoîte—as a non-monogamous married woman, as an elderly woman with an active sex life, as well as her children's acceptance of her non-conformist lifestyle. Catel shows the reader how Benoîte challenges the very hegemonic notions the reader may have for a 90-year-old widow. Catel exposes this system of oppression simultaneously through time and space in Benoîte's life.

The act of Groult sharing a private relationship (through the letter) with Catel links the two in a moment of intimate friendship—as confidante. Benoîte shares her experience and the intersections of her non-normative life, which exposes her to vulnerability, potential judgment, and scorn. Catel, however, is moved by having access to Benoîte's private experience. Catel faithfully reproduces, by her own hand, the love letter, written by Kurt. The manifestation—and I mean this literally as Catel manually reproduces someone else's handwriting, she manually reproduces the personal mark of another human being—of the letter subsequently connects Catel physically to Benoîte's lived experience. Catel does not simply read the letter. She experiences the letter through the act of creating an artifact and lived experience from the past and connecting

it to the present. Although Catel could have simply shown the reader the act of reading Benoîte's private letter, the reproduction itself creates an archive for the reader which connects the reader simultaneously through time and space to Groult's lived experiences. Benoîte's lived experience of her affair with her American lover is simultaneous to that of Catel's lived experience of reproducing the letter as well as the reader's reading the artifact of the letter. All three moments occur on the page in a simultaneous visual and textual moment.

This project is a biographical comic book for Catel, and also a personal one in which she reveals intimate conversations with her eventual friend. The biography blends with the autobiography, and Catel again shows the reader how the relationship and project move her, with the train as a metaphor, physically and emotionally, with Catel looking at her sketchbook and reading the note[43] Groult leaves for her (Figure 6). Catel again reproduces her notebook and *meta-narrative*, an artifact of Catel making the graphic novel. Catel manifests Groult's handwritten note in her notebook. Catel shows the reader that connection between the two; again, Groult's words leave their (visual) mark, as it were, on Catel, the ribbon bookmark overlapping the comic book frame, visually linking the relationship(s) between the differing *narratives*.

Catel shows and connects the reader to simultaneous *narratives* by combining elements of *story, narrative, narration,* and/or *meta-narrative*. Through simultaneity, or the juxtaposition of lived experiences visually and textually drawn, we can see that a woman's lived experiences cannot be reduced or fragmented to a single image or moment. Catel shows us that Groult's life is the culmination of *non-fragmented phenomenological experiences*—experiences that Groult perceives and remembers simultaneously. These simultaneous *stories* and *narratives* show us Groult as a whole woman across time. Catel also shows us her own *story* and *narrative* as linked with Groult.

4.7 In Conclusion

Catel uses the medium of comics to visually and textually show hers and Groult's lived experiences in systems of oppression. Catel models for her reader a woman artist creating a comic strip in order to address the systemic oppression in the comics industry that she has experienced. Catel draws and shares with the reader parts of Groult's *story* that challenge hegemonic norms about women's relationships. Catel visually and textually combines these lived experiences on the same page in order to connect and blend them. The implications for feminist scholars reading simultaneous narratives is that we can understand women's lived experiences in systems of oppression across time and space. Although Catel's and Groult's experiences are different from each other, Catel and Groult experience gendered oppression and are able to form coalitions across

[43] "May 24, 2010. Hyères. We have talked for 3 days. We have laughed—we have also cried. With friendship, Benoîte" (translation mine).

time and space by connecting their experiences. Through a recognition of Catel drawing a *nonfragmentation of lived experiences* in her graphic novel, we as feminist scholars can examine how different women experience systems of oppression different while maintaining and understanding women as whole human being.

Figure 1 Opening Pages of *Ainsi soit Benoîte Groult*

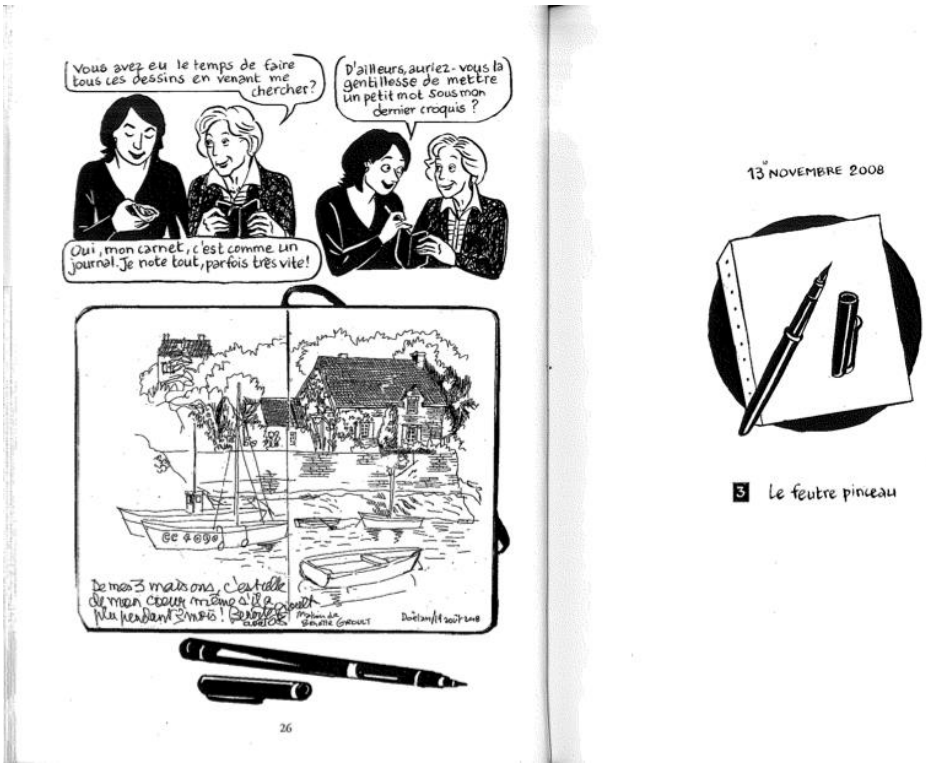

Figure 2 Proto Comic in *Ainsi soit Benoîte Groult*

Figure 3 Groult Speaking at UNESCO

Figure 4 Groult Recounting Life Story to Catel

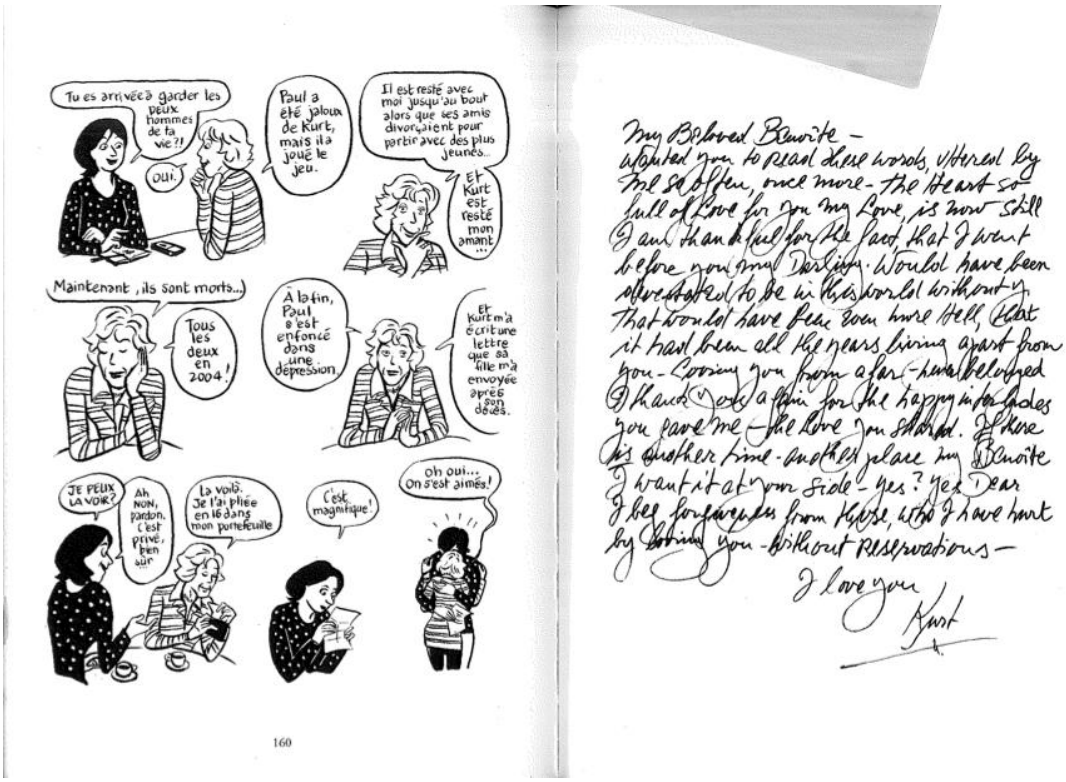

Figure 5 Intimacy Between Catel and Groult

Figure 6 Connections Between Groult and Catel

CHAPTER 5. SABRINA JONES AND MARGRET SANGER

Sabrina Jones' age, education, and projected career choices parallel those of Catel's, but within a U.S. context. Sabrina Jones, born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1960, attended art school and "didn't plan to be a cartoonist when [she] grew up" (*Sabrinaland*). However, Jones' explains in *Our Lady of Birth Control: a Cartoonist's Encounter with Margaret Sanger* (Figure 7) that her childhood and adolescence during the 60s and 70s informed her politics and career (5-10). In particular a sexual revolution and the rise of what has later been called Second Wave Feminism influenced Jones' adolescence through social and political uprisings in the United States. Much like Catel in France, the feminist movement in the United States shaped how Jones thought about gender and politics. For Catel, her mother introduced feminism to Catel through Groult. The introduction of the birth control pill, women's rights, and abortion rights during the 60s and 70s in the United States marked Jones' adolescence significantly by creating a personal and political engagement with her own body and her rights as a woman. As we will see from her work, Jones engages in political activism concerning reproductive rights on behalf of herself and others.

The political shift and public debate concerning women's rights in the United States, often referred to as the Second Wave (of feminism), that followed during the late 70s and 80s had an equally important impact on Jones' future. During the late 70s and early 80s, women's rights to access abortion came under political attack and jeopardized what Jones considered to be a fundamental right for women. These political shifts and public debates guided Jones' career choices. In an interview for the Dutch comics website "Barbarus cultureel webtijdschrift," Jones explains, "My first experience with activist art was for the pro-choice movement in the 1980s, after my adolescent fantasies of liberation were confronted with a wall of Republican and evangelical backlash." The backlash against women's reproductive rights in the United States, namely the legal battle concerning restrictions and access to abortion, in the 80s directly lead Jones to become politically active. Jones began using her art skills for feminist activism. She drew and illustrated posters for events and demonstrations in support of women's reproductive rights and states on her personal website, "At the onslaught of the Reagan era I joined a group of pro-choice artists called Carnival Knowledge. That summer after art school, I brandished homemade signs at anti- nuclear [sic] demonstrations, and staged games about reproductive rights at street fairs" (*Sabrinaland*). During the 1980s, Jones found the use and contribution of her art as her personal way to engage in political activism.

For Jones, access to bodily autonomy, or the right to access an abortion, is central to her self-definition as a feminist. Jones states, "The [U.S.} Supreme Court established our legal right to abortion in 1973, but clinics are still under attack both physically and legally, because we have yet to create widespread acceptance of women's human rights. I believe art can help influence the culture to affirm all of our humanity." (Barbarus).

Jones' artwork and activism during the 1980s gained notice by the creators of *World War 3—a radically progressive comics series*. She was asked to contribute to *World War 3* (124), which compiles comics written and drawn by politically active artists. Jones states on her personal website, "I didn't plan to be a cartoonist when I grew up. My youthful artistic ambitions were somewhat vaguer, leaving me open to persuasion by *World War 3* editor Seth Tobocman. He wanted a feminist artist to strike some gender balance in the radical comics magazine he had started with Peter Kuper" (*Sabrinaland*). *World War 3,* co-created by Paul Buhle, gave Jones the opportunity to participate actively in comics creation that aligned with her own political activism. Jones regularly contributed work about her female experiences concerning sex, relationships, and politics to the edited volumes of *World War 3* (Figure 8). The cover image of *World War 3* shows the artistic and political engagement that the edited work dedicates itself to. Although the cover image is not by Jones, it does exemplify the political subject matter the edited work supports in its artists. In this instance, an artist sits at his drawing desk wearing a gas mask while the urban decay of progress in the background pollutes the air. A butterfly arrives at the inkwell, which serves as a symbol of artistic hope through political activism.

However, Jones felt something was missing for herself and her fellow women comics artists. While at *World War 3* in the 90s, Jones felt the highly male dominated comics industry, including *World War 3,* did not provide a dedicated forum for women to discuss their *stories* as women. Jones, along with Isabella Bannerman and Ann Decker, created *Girl Talk* **(**Figure 9: Cover Art), a comic series designed for and by women to share their own work. As the three editors explain in the editor's note on the inside cover, "Girl Talk is the voice without makeup, survival tips for real life, letting off steam, love songs to the one that got away. The editors are all veterans of *World War 3 Illustrated,* who liked what happened when the women went off in the corner to talk" (*Girl Talk #1, 1995*). In essence, *Girl Talk* was to be a comics forum where women could discuss and relate their *stories* about being a woman, in a safe space. *Girl Talk* was a comics forum for women to explore what it meant to them to be women and comics artists.

The concept of *Girl Talk* was not new. Jones' work creating *Girl Talk* parallels that of other feminist comics artists in the past, such as Trina Robbins. Artist and "herstorian" Trina Robbins has chronicled women in the comics industry for several decades. In her book, *Pretty in Ink: North American Women Cartoonists 1896-2013*, Robbins describes how she and other contemporary women comics artists founded "Wimmen's Comix" in 1972. Robbins explains that the women were able "to produce the first ongoing all-woman comic book, which survived for 20 years. *Wimmen's* started out, and remained, a collective" (129). *Wimmen's* was a starting point in the underground comix movement for women comics artists to find a voice in a man dominated industry. The creation of "Wimmen's Comix" participated in Second Wave feminist ideals of giving women dedicated space to create and produce *stories.* Robbins explains further, "*Wimmen's Comix* showcased women cartoonists for 20 years. Among

the most well-known women cartoonists who emerged in the 1970s, 1980s, and early '90s, … were Phoebe Gloeckner, Carol Tyler, Lynda Barry, Mary Fleener, and *National Lampoon* cartoonists Shary Flenniken and M.K. Brown" (136). *Wimmen's* not only gave many comics artists their start, but it also served as a model for a collaborative comics publication for women.

Girl Talk created another space and forum where women could publish their work. *Girl Talk* began after "Wimmen's Comix" stopped publishing due to financial issues. *Girl Talk* focused primarily on autobiographical works—as opposed to fictional creations. The publication did allow for fictional as well as non-fictional creativity for artists to discuss everything from their sex-lives to misogyny, from politics to friendships. *Girl Talk* gave Jones a space where she could publish her political thoughts about being a woman in America—including but not limited to her experience with sexual harassment (*Girl Talk #2 6-14*).

Because of Jones' work overlapping her political beliefs and activism with her art, Paul Buhle approached Jones about working on a feminist biography of dancer Isadora Duncan. In an interview for "Power to the Panels," Buhle explains:

> The idea of radical biography is an old one and sometimes very successful, but only for icons. Emma [Goldstein] and Isadora [Duncan] are those icons. Their memoirs sold heavily for decades, and seem 'cultural' as much as 'political.' Only a few publishers so far take the risk of producing such books and those publishers deserve great credit. The publishers are delighted at the results. And I think the art in these two books is fantastic. (AIGA: 2008)

With the work of *Isadora Duncan: A Graphic Biography* (2008: Figure 10), Jones shows the complicated and conflicting life events in Duncan's life. However, conforming to Jones' personal political beliefs, Jones represents Duncan's radical lifestyle as a woman opposed to marriage and monogamy in the early 20th century. Particularly, Jones focuses on Duncan's beliefs about motherhood and relationships/sexuality. Jones also portrays how Duncan's beliefs and lifestyle informed her dance and subsequently impacted modern dance in the 20th century.

For Jones, the appeal in Duncan's *story* lies in Duncan refusing to conform to traditional cultural norms. In the interview for "Barbarus," Jones states, "I'm drawn to stories about women whose struggle to become themselves has meant breaking down barriers and opening the way for others. That's led me to graphic biographies of birth control advocate Margaret Sanger, modern dancer Isadora Duncan, and urban planner Jane Jacobs" (Barbarus). Jones portrays Duncan in her loose-fitting clothes, dancing across the pages, eschewing a corset and marriage (Figure 11) while documenting the impact and influence Duncan had on later dancers.

One complication of working on biographies is conflicting versions of the same events in a person's life. Jones openly discusses in the work conflicting accounts of the same *story* about Duncan. And although Jones understood the variations, or nuances, in

biographical information about Duncan, she confronted it within the work and moved forward. Jones states:

> Even unreliable sources are valuable, because they give the flavor of their time and the personality of the teller. For hard factchecking, I often relied on Peter Kurth's thoroughly researched biography, 'Isadora, A Sensational Life.' But the gray areas in biography are ones of interpretation, not simple historical fact. Was she obnoxious or delightful? Ridiculous or sublime? I tried to take in all the contradictions, and then go with my gut. I'm more of an artist than a historian. (CBR: 2009)

As Jones states, her activism means portraying, as an artist, the lived experiences of women. This includes messy contradictions, rather than drawing the historical facts (Figure 12). Jones shows the reader her research about Duncan by showing the reader her reading multiple versions of Duncan's life. Jones includes the conflict of differing versions in the bottom frame. Jones represents her reaction to contradictory versions of Duncan's *story*—on the one hand she states, "You go girl!" and on the other hand she states, "She lied!" (Figure 12). Jones shares the conflict with the reader to explicitly declare the work as researched as well as interpreted like she discusses in the quote above.

In 2013, Jones continued her activism and began work on a new edition of Marc Mauer's *Race to Incarcerate* (1999). Mauer's work analyzes the American prison complex system and the inequities in justice, sentencing, and imprisonment faced by people of color in America. Mauer's analyses rest on statistics and data he collected while working for the Sentencing Project[44]. The graphic rendering Mauer's work speaks to Jones' continued political interests and feminist views about educating a general audience to the inequities faced by marginalized groups in America. Jones argues, "I've done some comics based on the work of other justice activists: *The Real Cost of Prisons*, and *Race to Incarcerate*, and the injustices I learned about were so outrageous that I thought I ought to do something about it. Until I realized that my graphic adaptation of their message was probably the best way for me to contribute" (*Barbarus*). Jones uses her art as activism to elevate and echo *narratives* of Others who may not be heard or listened to. Jones wants her art to participate in social justice and feminist activism.

Jones' views on political activism and her personal belief that art can shape and influence are combined. Jones states, "I found the cheap, portable comic book to be a seductive medium for messages personal and political. People aren't intimidated by it because it isn't Art – or is it?" (*Sabrinaland*). Activism is at the root of her work and shapes her art, in turn, as she hopes to educate her reader about feminism.

Sabrina Jones' auto/biographical graphic narrative *Our Lady of Birth Control: a Cartoonist's Encounter with Margaret Sanger* (2016) blends political activism with

[44] https://www.sentencingproject.org/about-us/ The Sentencing Project is a group founded to advocate, research, and inform to change policies concerning incarceration in America. They publish data annually about the prison system.

women's life stories. In the interview for "Barbarus" Jones states, "I write and illustrate comics and graphic novels on social justice and radical history" (2016). The work on Margaret Sanger works within her comics production as a form of feminist activism. Jones personalizes the work with the *story* of her own sexual education and fight for women's reproductive rights and juxtaposes it with Margaret Sanger's life *narrative*. Margaret Sanger (1879-1966) was a nurse and political activist in the United States who fought for all women's rights to safe and effective birth control. As I will discuss below, the methods varied for some women. Sanger was one of the founding members of what is referred to today as Planned Parenthood.

Sanger's *story* is politically polemical because of her ideology concerning reproduction. Viewed by some as a leader in reproductive justice for women's rights, Sanger is also rightly viewed as a proponent of eugenics and reviled for the reproductive rights movement access to abortion. Problematically, Sanger was a proponent of eugenics—the philosophy of influencing the outcomes of human evolution through control of who is allowed to reproduce. In her autobiography, *Margaret Sanger: An Autobiography* (1938), Sanger argues, "The eugenists wanted to shift the birth control emphasis from less children for the poor to more children for the rich. We went back of that and sought first to stop the multiplication of the unfit. This appeared the most important and greatest step towards race betterment" (374-375). Sanger's own words concerning access to birth control were not only for women to have bodily autonomy over their reproduction, but also to control those deemed *unfit*.

In a two-volume, edited collection of Sanger's letters, articles, and diaries, titled *The Selected Papers of Margaret Sanger: The Woman Rebel 1900-1928 v.1*, entry 119 expands on Sanger's ideas about the relationship between birth control and eugenics. Sanger argues, "While I personally believe in the sterilization of the feeble-minded, the insane and the syphilitic, I have not been able to discover that these measures are more than superficial deterrents when applied to the constantly growing stream of the unfit…" (253-254). Sanger's politics of bodily autonomy only applied to those she understood as *fit,* not to the general population of the lower classes. Sanger emphasizes the latter point when she continues her argument: "These measures do not touch those great masses, who through economic pressure populate the slums and there produce in their helplessness other helpless, diseased and incompetent masses, who overwhelm all that eugenics can do among those whose economic condition is better" (253-254). For Sanger, her support of eugenics did not resolve the problem of poverty for women who were *fit* but impoverished due to constant child-rearing. Sanger does not link poverty with *fitness*. For Sanger, bearing more children maintains the poor's economic burden which in turn makes the children diseased and helpless because of overpopulation, not because of a biological construct inherent to social classes. Solving the overpopulation with birth control would create healthy children.

In Jonathon Eig's book on the history of birth control in America, *The Birth of the Pill* (2014), Eig outlines the social and political context of the United States during the

late 19th and early 20th centuries. In Eig's analysis of Sanger and the eugenics movement, he argues, "[Sanger] found herself acceding to the eugenicists, who enjoyed greater respectability in the United States at the time than birth-control advocates" (53). Sanger's adoption of certain eugenics thoughts lead her to "[join] calls for criminals, illiterates, prostitutes, and drug addicts to be separated from the rest of society. That these views were widely embraced in the 1920s and 1930s doesn't make them easier to fathom" (53). Sanger's views on birth control and eugenics show her lack of intersectionality—insofar as Sanger does not consider why or how people may be in those positions such as race, gender, and class. Eig provides a moral judgment on Sanger's thinking. He argues that Sanger's views may have been common but that they were not morally right. Sanger did not take into consideration women's reproductive choices beyond class and *fitness*.

Sônia Correa and Rosalind Petchesky, in their article "Reproductive and Sexual Rights: A Feminist Perspective" (1994) write about reproductive rights in the Southern countries that are outside of the "Western" tradition. Their article analyzes through intersectionality the ways feminist theory has constructed and problematized reproductive rights at the expense of Others—or marginalized populations that do not fit into a white, Western, middle-class demographic. Correa and Petschesky argue that "the concept of sexual and reproductive *rights* is being enlarged to address the *social needs* that erode reproductive and sexual choice for the majority of the world's women, who are poor" (135) through feminist works by various feminist scholars of color and women from Southern countries. Correa's and Petschesky's work can be applied retrospectively to understand Sanger's views as limiting women's reproductive rights through a western, white, middle-class perspective. Sanger's views on birth control may have applied to "all women" but her focus was on addressing the birth rate for those she considered Other—the poor and *unfit*—since middle-class, white women already had access to contraception options.

Jean H. Baker in her book, *Margaret Sanger: A Life of Passion* (2011) writes about Sanger and summarizes Sanger's view on eugenics and birth control when she states:

> Sanger had accepted the socialist definition of class as an economic category; now she described a multitiered society based on birth control—those, mostly the wealthy, who had private doctors, practiced contraception, and had small families; another group who wanted birth control but had no legal right to it; the uneducated who needed clinics; and finally, the reckless and unfit who, if they did not stop reproducing, must be disciplined to do so. (163)

As Baker argues, Sanger's ideology did not address the systems that controlled women's lives. Rather, Sanger recognized a class system and how class affected choices about reproduction. Women who had money had access to contraception and women who were poor did not have the same access. Sanger's views about reproduction were limited to believing that women who controlled their reproduction would be able to solve all their

economic and class problems. Again, as Baker's argument shows, Sanger believed in eugenics if women would not opt to limit their reproduction as a form of "discipline."

As for abortion, Sanger supported abortion but only in the case of saving the mother's life. Sanger herself declares her distinction between abortion and birth control in entry number 73 of her personal letters, written in 1932, "[abortion] is an alternative that I cannot too strongly condemn…. The practice of it merely for limitation of offspring is dangerous and vicious" (149). Sanger sought to restrict abortion as birth control through the practice of effective birth control. She argues, "Abortion destroys the already fertilized ovum or the embryo; contraception, as I have carefully explained, prevents the fertilizing of the ovum by keeping the male cells away. Thus, it prevents the beginning of life" (150). Baker states, "Convinced that birth control was the solution to thousands of illegal abortions performed in the United States every year, Sanger approved of abortion as a last resort, and she made clear the distinction between it and birth control" (85-86). Sanger's views on distinguishing between birth control and abortion show her limitations on what Sanger considers bodily autonomy. Sanger does not understand that birth control, which should prevent conception, could fail, thus leaving abortion as a possible fail-safe. Nor did Sanger take into consideration that a woman may choose abortion rather than use birth control.

In Jones' work about Sanger, Jones contends with Sanger's views on eugenics and abortion and confronts them. Similarly to her work on Isadora Duncan, she does not ignore the controversial or the contradictory information on her subject which I will discuss further below. Jones uses the graphic novel to express her own political views on reproductive rights juxtaposed with those of Sanger's. In the work, Jones also documents her research about Sanger's life by reading Sanger's autobiography, reading biographies about Sanger's life, and visiting locations where Sanger worked. Her documented research shows her engagement with Sanger's views and politics. Jones' use of simultaneous life *narratives*, that of Sanger's activism as well as Jones', exposes women's oppression through their bodies and reproductive rights during multiple time periods as well as across varied historical contexts.

Jones' research/art is at once educational and politically engaged. Or as *Library Journal,* in an editorial review of Jones' work, stated "The feminist slogan 'the personal is political' was never more apt as when considering contraception, and Jones's account shows how one committed person can change the world" (*Softskull*). The work itself shows how Jones is personally committed to working actively to fight for women's political rights to control their fertility in conjunction with and comparison to Sanger's work for reproductive rights.

Jones' work, I would argue, flips the slogan to make it read "the political is personal" with this work as she shows how politics affects her and affected Sanger personally. As illustrated below, Jones draws her volunteer work with women at abortion clinics and compares it to Sanger's political fight for women's access to birth control. Jones draws and represents her personal reactions to politics that affect women's lives

and her subsequent political engagement and activism. The major difference in this work—compared to Catel's— is that Jones did not know Sanger "personally" the way Catel had the opportunity to know Groult. Jones' relationship with Sanger is formed exclusively through reading, visiting sites, and research. However, for Jones, as is implied by the religious connotation of the title—*Our Lady of Birth Control*—Sanger is a very personal figure with whom she shares a sacred intimacy.

5.1 Jones Use of *Story*

Jones, much like Catel, opens her book with an autobiographical account. Jones' first pages offer the *story* of her sexual education during the 1970s in the United States. While the 70s saw the rise of Second Wave feminism and a (purported) sexual revolution, Jones retrospectively *tells* her personal *story* of learning about sex. As she explains in the first couple of pages of the graphic novel, her parents did not talk to her about sex, but rather "maybe they figured I'd learn it at school" (6). Instead, Jones *telling* the reader about her sexual education and eventual use of contraception links to the subject of the biography and how Sanger impacted women's sexual freedom through contraception.

Jones begins the graphic novel, and the *narrative* with a retrospective during her puberty. The first chapter, titled "Sex Ed Seventies Style," Jones *narrates* how during her adolescence, the book *Women Unite: Our Bodies Our Selves* (1971) appeared on her family's bookshelf at home. *Women Unite*, "a book by and for women" as it states on the cover, is a manual about women's bodies, sexual health, and relationships. The book was created by feminist groups in order to medically intervene in women's health and educate women during the 70s. *Women Unite* wanted to educate women about their bodies from women's perspectives and not through men's perspectives. The feminist groups that wrote *Women Unite* thought men controlled the information about women's bodies. The group's sexual (health) activism aimed to write a book by women and for women that would subvert men's control of information and that would empower women to know their own bodies. Jones reproduces several of the images from the manual used to instruct women about their anatomy and its function (Figure 13**)**. Jones' *story* shows the reader Jones' sexual education while also educating the reader about the movement as well as sexual health.

Jones begins *narrating* her *story* with the arrival of *Women Unite* instead of focusing on intimate detail about her childhood or her family. She shows *Women Unite's* initial impact on her life, Jones draws for the reader how the power of knowledge changed Jones' life (Figures 13 and 14). These initial pages of Jones reading the manual ultimately lead to knowledge about her body and sexual health, which in turn leads her to Planned Parenthood where her education is furthered and she receives contraception. The manual serves as an initial introduction to feminism because the manual empowered women to have knowledge about their bodies that was often concealed from them. For Jones, the manual's empowerment of women to make decisions about their bodies

introduced Jones to feminism much the same way that *Ainsi soit-elle* by Groult served as an introduction to feminism for Catel.

Jones draws an image of her younger self whisking the book away to her room to study and read (Figure 13). Jones *narrates* to the reader, "when no one was looking, I took it up to my bedroom." Jones faithfully reproduces images of the book floating around her younger self as she learns about her body. The first pages of the graphic novel (Figures 13 and 14) detail a brief, one-frame comment about the lack of a sex education from her parents juxtaposed with the detailed education she receives through *Women Unite* and at school. The brevity of her parents' sexual education in her *story* correlates directly with her parents' impact on her sexual education—Jones was educated through feminist organizations like *Women United*, a feminist teacher, and Planned Parenthood. *Women Unite*, a feminist health manual, inspired her to go to Planned Parenthood, an organization founded in part by Margaret Sanger, to seek more information about sex and birth control. *Women Unite* is the same kind of manual that Sanger herself frequently published, as discussed below, in order to educate women about the questions they had concerning their sexual health. Both *Women Unite* and Sanger's publications sought to educate women about their bodies and their sexual health and empower them with knowledge.

Jones' initial personal *story* about her youth during the sexual revolution links to contemporary and historical politics concerning women's reproductive rights in America. Jones makes these links by juxtaposing her *story* and Sanger's *story*. Jones provides historical context in her *story* for her current political activism about reproductive rights (Figures 14 and 15). First, Jones shows us her introduction to Planned Parenthood, founded by Sanger, and initiation to contraception. Then Jones draws herself talking with Sanger, which I discuss later, and stating that abortion is "under siege" (Figure 15: first frame). Jones references the political activism against women's rights to abortion. Specifically, Jones shows how she volunteered in her *story* at abortion clinics and Planned Parenthood. Jones shows her volunteer work as integral to her *story* and politics and Sanger's fight for the right to access birth control.

For Jones, the fight for the right to control one's fertility is an ongoing battle (Figure 15). To contextualize this part of Jones' *story*, the pages before this image show the dangers women (and doctors) face for exercising their rights through masses of protestors screaming at clients. In the first frame (Figure 15), Jones imagines a conversation with Sanger in which she argues for the right to access abortion. Since Jones argues access to abortion is "under siege", she then shows the reader her *story's* connection of her activism and art to protecting access to abortion. Jones reproduces, in the graphic novel, a page of one of her publications from *WW3* which can be seen on the right-hand side (Figure 15). Jones shares with the reader her continued activism and also cites her previously published work about abortion rights. The self-reference in her *story* shows her personal activism as well as her activism with her art beyond the finished work of *Our Lady of Birth Control.*

Jones begins her biography of Sanger similarly to her own. Jones contextualizes Sanger's *story* of childhood and education. However, since Jones does not have the advantage of meeting and interviewing her subject like Catel, Jones' interpretation of Sanger's *story* and *narrative* is due to interpersonal distance. Similar to a traditional biographer, Jones must rely solely on historical research in order to analyze and create Sanger's biography. Subsequently, Jones interprets Sanger's *story* chronologically. However, Jones continually shows us, the reader, the connections she makes between the two *stories*—Sanger's and her own.

Jones begins Sanger's *story* by documenting how Sanger's childhood was affected by family size. Sanger's and Jones' sexual education are in stark contrast to each other since Jones had access to information in books, whereas Sanger experienced the effects of her mother's continuous childbirth. Jones' *narrates* Sanger's childhood in the chapter "The Atheist's Angel" from information gathered from Jones' research. In *Margaret Sanger: An Autobiography,* Sanger states "[Father] hated the slavery of pattern and following of examples and believed in the equality of the sexes; not only did he come out strongly for woman suffrage in the wake of Susan B. Anthony… [he] fought for free libraries, free education, free books in the public schools, and freedom of the mind from dogma and can't" (17). Jones shows some of Sanger's father's political/social beliefs which informed and shaped Sanger's motivations and political beliefs. Jones draws from Sanger's autobiographical *telling* of her own *story* and shows Sanger's father as a champion of worker's rights, anti-religious, a healer, and a storyteller (Figure 16). The influence and impact of Sanger's father to Sanger's *story* is in direct contrast with that of Jones' uninvolved parents in the first chapter. Jones' parents passively engage in her sexual education, a book appears on the shelf, whereas Sanger's father actively engages with his children.

Sanger's comments in her autobiography about her childhood often speak to the size of her family—her mother had eleven children. However strongly Sanger's father felt concerning women's rights, the consequences from sexual activity and childbirth had a profound effect on all the children in the Sanger home. With each new child in the Sanger home, responsibility for the home and finances fell more and more to the Sanger children. Children economically impacted the Sanger household. Sanger explains how her thinking about family size changed over time when Sanger states, "To me the distinction between happiness and unhappiness in childhood was one of small families and of large families rather than of wealth and poverty… we always had another baby coming, another baby coming" (*Autobiography*, 28). Sanger explains how she personally understood, in her youth, how family size linked only to an emotional well-being—one's happiness. However, as Sanger got older, she understood family size to be a distinction between wealth and poverty. The reader understands Sanger's commentary that she understood the link between family size and class, but also the inextricable link to one's emotional state. For Sanger, smaller families are happier but also wealthier.

Sanger explains what may have been the reason for her youthful understanding of family size. She states, "Large families were associated with poverty, toil, unemployment, drunkenness, cruelty, fighting, jails; the small ones with cleanliness, leisure, freedom, light, space, sunshine" (*Autobiography,* 28). Sanger's family was also large and poor, however, her father moved them to live in the woods nearby the town. Since Sanger did not grow up in the densely populated area of town, her childhood was filled with light, space, sunshine as well as the gift of "imagination" (*Autobiography:* 13-14). Although Sanger's childhood was filled with shared responsibility for maintaining the home, it is easy to understand how she did not necessarily associate class and family size at first.

Jones illustrates Sanger's earlier and later sentiments of sadness from family size to class in Sanger's *story* while also drawing a direct correlation between family size and class/economic status. Jones shows (Figure 17), in an area that takes most of the page, a young Sanger holding a baby with a mop in her hand, staring off into the distance looking sad surrounded by framed images of Sanger and her older siblings financially helping the family. Jones shows Sanger's older brothers and sister working to financially support the family—the brothers begin working in a glass factory and a sister, hunched over a pram, becomes a nanny. Jones draws Sanger on the page without a frame, holding a baby and a mop handle, visually turned away from the other obligatory chores she has to do, cooking and laundry, which are framed, as if she is looking outside of the page. Jones represents Sanger's *story* as simultaneously free through her desires and intellect—the large Sanger looking off in the distance—while also showing how she was trapped by her family's condition—Margaret framed literally hunched over cooking and hidden from view while doing laundry. The frames, much like how Catel uses frames with Groult, can be read to represent a metaphorical prison. The oversized Sanger, unframed and looking up and away from her metaphoric prison of being trapped in an oversized and impoverished family.

Continuing with Sanger's *story*, Jones emphasizes how Sanger guided and made decisions for her family based on Sanger's lived experiences as a nurse. One example of Sanger's decisive nature can be seen in the image (Figure 18) concerning where and how her family would live. Jones portrays Sanger as saying, "As a nurse, I was constantly in the midst of LIFE (and death.) Now I am far from them. We've drifted into a swamp" (40). The image shows Sanger holding a newborn baby as well as a skull, in between two moments. Sanger's life as a nurse let her experience the impact of child-rearing for women as I will discuss further below. At this point in Sanger's *story*, she chooses between her suburban life and moving back to New York to pursue her nursing career. On the following page, Jones draws Sanger flying through the air, a dove also in midflight, guiding her husband like an angel back to New York City.

Jones continues to *narrate* Sanger's *story* where she becomes an activist and nurse in New York during the chapter, "Madonna of Bohemia." Sanger's activism was linked to her politics at the time. While in New York, Sanger joined the Socialist Party

and began giving speeches about women's health. Sanger states, "something more was needed to assuage the condition of the very poor. It was both absurd and futile to struggle over pennies when fast-coming babies required dollars to feed them" (*Autobiography,* 85). Sanger's recognition of the intersection, for poor women, of health, population, and class furthered her speaking career.

As a nurse, Sanger began examining the context of women's conditions and primarily concluded that poverty due to overpopulation was the only extenuating circumstance for women. In Sanger's autobiography she describes the conditions of poor women and repeatedly giving birth for lack of birth control. During this time, Sanger began trying to understand and analyze the problems of poor women. Sanger states "A woman in childbirth was not merely a woman in childbirth. My expanded outlook included a view of her background, her potentialities as a human being, the kind of children she was bearing, and what was going to happen to them" (*Autobiography,* 87). This quote points to Sanger's ideas concerning the *unfit,* or those who according to eugenicists should not reproduce because she began considering not only class but fitness—intelligence and the health of the children the women were producing. *Unfit* women, according to Sanger, would produce *unfit* children. Whereas *fit* women who were poor, could have their economic condition improved while having fewer *fit* children.

Jones tries to excuse the philosophy and defends Sanger's thinking by spending a chapter of the book, "False Charges," confronting Sanger's views on eugenics (Figure 19). Jones opens the chapter of Sanger's posthumous *story* by *narrating*, "In the years since Margaret Sanger's death in 1966, she has been vilified as a RACIST! The woman who inspired HITLER!" The words "racist" and "the woman who inspired Hitler!" are in speech bubbles that point to disembodied arms. However, Jones does not directly cite Sanger's critics. Jones visually and textually counterargues against the claims of Sanger's critics by using the title "False Charges" as well as the image and speech of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. on the opposing page. The image of and strong praise for Sanger by King works in direct contrast to the images of the hooded Klansman and the face of Hitler surrounding Sanger on the next page.

Jones continues her counterargument (Figure 19), as seen in the bottom frames, by pointing to the fact that Sanger opened an integrated clinic in Harlem in 1930 as well as "worked to bring contraception to African Americans" in the South. In the bottom three images, Jones portrays Sanger in front of a building that represents the clinic in Harlem and connects the image of Martin Luther King Jr on the opposing page, as well as the next image of a car with a "plus" sign that symbolizes doctors. The third image shows a woman holding a map of the United States walking on a globe with the information that Sanger helped found Planned Parenthood. These three images represent Sanger's geographical movement in order to promote birth control. However, none of these images address directly whether Sanger promoted birth control among black communities for racist reasons or not. Eugenics could have influenced Sanger's motives.

Jones draws the appeal and overwhelming success of Sanger's advice (Figure 19) from when Sanger began writing for a women's journal—"The New York Call" in 1913. Sanger published answers to women's questions about their health and bodies in a seven article series called "What Every Girl Should Know." Jones portrays on the page the context of Sanger being asked to write the series and to educated women about their bodies. In the first frame, Jones uses a speech bubble that asks, "Mrs. Sanger, I love my babies, but we can't afford any more. How do the rich ladies keep their families small?" (Figure 20: first frame). The first frame also shows several rows of women behind the one woman asking the question. The question about controlling family size was pervasive in Sanger's nursing career and often repeatedly asked. Sanger commented often that she had no answers for them since information was either lacking or forbidden. But Jones draws Sanger responding to the question from a political standpoint in the third frame that women's suffrage will not free women if they do not have knowledge about their bodies. Jones continues Sanger's *story* by portraying the published article after Comstock ordered it censored (Figure 20: last frame). Jones draws the large vertical box on Sanger's article with the words "NOTHING" in all caps, as if Comstock was personally responding to Sanger's title "What Every Girl Should Know." Jones illustrates Sanger's shock and outrage at the censorship as Sanger asks "Where's my article?" with a look of horror on Sanger's face. Jones goes on in other pages to chronicle the events in Sanger's *story* fighting the Comstock Law as unjust.

Jones emphasizes the importance of these events in Sanger's *story* because they express how women's lives were unequivocally controlled through sexual activity and censorship. Women's bodies were either physically controlled by doctors and laws or knowledge about their bodies was controlled by doctors and policy makers at the time. In this particular case during Sanger's *story*, Jones shows how the Comstock Law—a law passed in1873 that allowed the Postal Service to decide if something in the U.S. mail was indecent or obscene and then ban it—impacted Sanger's work to educate women on their sexual health. Specifically, Sanger's offense in the article "What Every Girl Should Know" was mentioning gonorrhea and syphilis. Jones continues Sanger's *story* by contextualizing the Comstock Law as well as explaining Sanger's offense (*Our Lady:* 56). And yet, men's lives were not affected in the same ways as women's. Knowledge about treatments and medical health for men were widely available and circulated. For Sanger, the lived experiences for women to control their reproductive rights becomes vital for some women's fight for equality—specifically women who were *fit*.

One of Sanger's anecdotes that she regularly told crowds while speaking publicly, was about Sadie Sachs (*Autobiography:* 89). According to Sanger, Sachs had tried to self-induce an abortion and almost died due to infection. Jones' visual *narrative* has the necessary effect on the reader that Sanger sought when she told the *story*. The reader understands and empathizes with a woman who faces "destitution linked with excessive childbearing" (*Autobiography,* 89). When Sachs finally recovered, Jones depicts her asking the fateful question Sanger would share with her audiences, "But what can I do to prevent it?" To which the doctor responds, "You want to have your cake and eat it too,

do you? Well, it can't be done. Tell Jake to sleep on the roof" (Figure 21). After being treated and cared for by a doctor and Sanger, the doctor told Sachs to have no more of these incidents or she would die but refused to explain how to prevent it.

According to Sanger, Sachs got pregnant again and then died due to complications of another self-induced abortion. Jones chooses to dramatize Sanger's version of the anecdote because it shows the ill-effects of not being able to control reproduction. Most Sanger scholars agree[45] that the story was a conglomeration of different women's lives that Sanger had treated. However, even if it were not a singular anecdote, these shared *stories* of women's lived experiences showed the pervasive threat women faced from Sanger's perspective. A lack of bodily autonomy threatened women's lives as well as the inability to control one's fertility.

However, and contradictory to what Sanger reported, as Daniel Scott Smith explains in "Family Limitations, Sexual Control, and Domestic Feminism in Victorian America," the decline in the fertility rate in women during the 19th century was in part due to their changing role in the family. Smith states, "The great transition in fertility is a central event in the history of woman. A dominant theme in the history is that women have not shaped their own lives. Things are done to women, not by them. Thus, it is important to examine the extent to which nineteenth-century women did gain control over their reproductive lives" (44). Smith argues that many women began to deny their husbands access to sex, as was suggested by the doctor above in the Sachs anecdote. Another popular method according to Smith's research was withdrawal. Depending on access to funds and class, men frequenting prostitutes and brothels was a common approach that also prevented reproduction with their wives. I point to this because Sanger's *story* reflects a woman trying to alleviate a problem for women of a particular class, or *fitness* while also recognizing that women of the upper-classes were already addressing the issue of reproduction.

As Jones depicts in Sanger's *story*, Sanger, however, became frustrated with the inconsistent effectiveness of contraceptive methods available to women in her research. Jones shows Sanger at the library pouring over medical books and articles suggesting "vinegar, quinine, boric acid, condoms, suppositories, douches, and laxatives" (Figure 22). Jones shows Sanger seeking knowledge about how to prevent pregnancy. After this point in the Sanger's *story*, Jones continues with Sanger's travels to France in order to discover purported contraceptive techniques by the French. However, Sanger's travels to Europe to discover the techniques used by French women bore similar information as her research in the United States. Jones shows Sanger seeking knowledge in order to help educate women about their bodies in order to help them control their fertility.

[45] See: *The Selected Papers of Margaret Sanger v.2: Birth Control Comes of Age, 1928-1939* for more about Sadie Sachs and Margaret Sanger's use of the anecdote in speeches, letters, and articles.

5.2 Jones Use of *Narrative* and *Narration*

Jones structures the visual *narrative* of Sanger's *story* in chronological order. The effect of this *narrative* structure allows the reader to follow a cause-effect sequencing of the events in Sanger's life. We can compare Jones' *narrative* with that of Catel's and note the distinctions in chronology are due to Catel interviewing Groult, whereas Jones cannot interview Sanger. This *narrative* structure of time also allows for an emphasis on Sanger's expanding sexual education and political activism over time. This *narrative* structure directly compares to Jones' personal progression of understanding and seeing the connections to Sanger as well. Jones breaks up Sanger's *narrative* and incorporates her own personal *narrative* to juxtapose with Sanger's. Thus, Jones links the two *narratives*.

Jones often imposes her voice over the biographic *narrative* in order to give the reader key information and transitions from times and settings. Although this is not a distinct feature to biographic comics and can be directly compared to Catel's work, Jones guides the reader to notice specific details**.** For example, when Jones confronts Sanger's beliefs about eugenics (Figure 19), Jones *narrates* when she wants to make connections and links between the two *narratives*. Jones states, "In the years since Margaret Sanger's death in 1966, she has been vilified as a…" and then shows in speech bubbles "Racist" and "Hitler." Jones portrays Sanger on the page, opening the clinic in Harlem, but Jones' *narration* links the two times—between opening her clinic in Harlem and her critics calling her a racist and Hitler. Jones often marks her own *narration* in boxed text or distinguishes it as floating over the images and Sanger's voice in speech bubbles. In this example, Sanger asks "What did I do to attract such calumny?" Jones uses Sanger's voice in order to express to the reader that the accusations against Sanger are false. However, in this case, Jones is guiding the reader through the *narrative* connections that she is making.

Sanger's *narrative* remains biographic in nature with Jones adding *narration* in order to guide the reader. In Jones' chapter "The Atheist's Angel", the reader learns that Sanger grew up in poverty, was the "6th of 11 children" (16), and was raised outside of any particular church. But rather than citing Sanger's words from her autobiography about her childhood, Jones interprets the *story* that she *narrates* herself. Jones tells the reader the information she considers important and controls the *narrative.* Where in her autobiography Sanger says, "Christmases were on the poverty line" (13), Jones draws six frames that show the family grateful for a meal and then Margaret seeking Christmas presents from a church. The priest rejects Margaret and says "I've got nothing for you. Get away. You child of the Devil!" (Figure 23). Jones interprets the *narrative* by expanding on the Sanger's *story* of poor Christmases. Jones *narrates* that Sanger's father was losing work, and then Jones creates dialogue that says, "We're fortunate to have this meal," and shows that a bowl of potatoes is "fortunate" for a meal. And Jones interprets Sanger's childhood poverty for the reader by drawing her rejection by a priest giving out Christmas presents to poor children. Jones uses the *narrative* structure of comics to

interpret, through fiction, and express, through image and text, the poverty felt by Sanger in her childhood.

As she continues Sanger's biography, Jones portrays through her own *narration* of images what Sanger felt about family size. Jones *narrates*, "With a shrinking income, and a growing family, Margaret's older brothers went to work at the glass factory… 8-year old Maggie took charge of her younger siblings, did housework, and helped with the laundry they took in for money" (Figure 17). Jones uses her own voice to explain to the reader Sanger's factual context. Jones *narrates* in the text boxes to guide the reader about the impoverished conditions of Sanger's family and how the children were expected to contribute. In doing so, Jones' *narration* also implies critique or pity for her situation when juxtaposed with the images. As Jones shows the older children working in order to sustain the family in five frames, Jones shows the reader that the birth of additional children shortened the childhood of the older kids in the family. The *narration* combined with the visual *narrative* creates an effect of sadness or pity. None of the images show the Sanger children happily playing or going to school, but rather working to earn money or to maintain the house.

With Jones' own autobiographical *narrative*, Jones recounts her *narrative* in retrospective. She does not *narrate* her *story* in the present, but instead looks back on her life at key moments. This is distinct from Catel, who does not provide autobiographical chapters but autobiographical moments; Catel is featured in a contemporaneous moment with Groult while interviewing her. Jones, however, *narrates* her autobiography in chronological order and not in a contemporaneous moment. The significant moments in Jones' *story* always connect to Sanger's *story* and what Jones perceives as a shared feminist philosophy between her and Sanger. Jones thinks of Sanger, believes her to be, and interprets Sanger as a feminist. For Jones, the criticism by opponents to birth control and abortion for women is an attack on women wanting to express sexual autonomy and freedom from reproduction (discussed further below in Jones' use of *meta-narrative*).

5.3 Jones Use of *Meta-Narrative*

Whereas Catel opens *Ainsi soit Benoîte Groult* with a *meta-narrative* about how she decided to create the graphic novel about Groult, Jones ends her graphic novel with a similar *meta-narrative.* While lounging in her living room and watching television (Figure 24), Jones portrays an intimate scene of her own *story*. The reader sees Jones watching the news with her partner and commenting on women's rights to birth control to him. Jones watches the Sandra Fluke[46] testimony in 2012 before Democratic members of Congress. Fluke's testimony discusses the need for a mandate of coverage for contraception by insurance companies associated with religiously affiliated institutions.

[46] Sandra Fluke (1981-) is an American Lawyer who testified before Democratic members of Congress concerning the importance of health insurance companies of religious institutions covering birth control prescriptions in 2012. Fluke had originally been invited by Democratic leaders to speak to the House Oversight Committee but was denied by Republicans.

Several religiously affiliated insurance companies, as well as companies that were owned by religious conservatives, wanted the right to not cover birth control for women since it was in opposition to their religious beliefs.

The chapter shows Jones citing directly from Fluke's testimony while also adding the radio personality of Rush Limbaugh, a conservative radio host, referring to Fluke as a "slut" and a "prostitute" (Figure 24: second page, second frame). Fluke's testimony received a lot of press coverage including that of Limbaugh. Limbaugh critiqued Fluke and her thoughts on contraception by using pejorative terms that referenced Fluke's sex life. It should be noted that Fluke did not once reference her own sexual activity during her speech. Jones creates a *narrative* that visually cuts between Fluke and Limbaugh as if they are debating each other.

With the visual *narrative* of the Fluke and Limbaugh dialogue, Jones creates a *narrative* structure that puts two people who do not speak to each other, in direct conversation. In creating this dialogue, Jones creates a *meta-narrative* directed at the reader. The reader is lead to understand that Jones is making an argument about birth control and "morality" by citing two different sources and having them seemingly respond to each other—in this case, Fluke who supports birth control for medical reasons and Limbaugh who accuses Fluke of immoral sexual behavior. Jones ends the chapter using this *meta-narrative* to directly address the reader by expressing her exasperation with the notion that Fluke and Limbaugh are having the same argument that has been had and repeated for a century. At the end of the two-page *meta-narrative*, we see Jones reacting in frustration to the news broadcast about Fluke being shamed for wanting access to birth control.

In the last frame, Jones draws the part of her *story* when she is inspired to write/draw about Margaret Sanger. Sitting at her drawing desk and commenting on the continuous argument against women's reproductive rights, Jones continues her *meta-narrative* that Sanger should be the subject of her next book—the very book that the reader has just finished reading. Jones visually portrays herself in conversation with Sanger by drawing her floating into the frame and making the counter argument in conversation "I always said they can't claim to be for women's health. They want to control our morals" (Figure 24: last frame). Jones finishes the work with a reflection on the creation of the work itself.

The *meta-narrative* of the text culminates in an explanation of why Jones chose both the autobiographical and biographical *narratives*. Rather than starting her *story* with why Jones chose Sanger, Jones instead recounts her own *story* and Sanger's *story* by intertwining and comparing the two *narratives*. Jones links the *stories* through a *narrative* based on shared experiences about sexual health and reproduction. In the "Barbarus" interview, Jones states, "Now, as I study historical social movements, I like to show how personal experience can drive people to overstep their prescribed roles and shake up the social order." The entire graphic novel shows how both Jones and Sanger

step out of their prescribed gender roles and instead work for social and political change for women.

Throughout the text, Jones uses religious figures and icons as a *meta-narrative* in the text. The religious representations refer to the physical work as well as Jones' reflection on birth control. The title of the work, *Our Lady of Birth Control* is a direct association with the Christian icon of Mary—a sacred mother figure known for birthing Jesus—ironically as a virgin. The last image of the book (Figure 24: last frame), shows a floating Sanger, which again serves as reverential treatment. Sanger, who died in 1966, floats like a ghost or angel into the frame rather than appearing full-bodied. Jones also depicts her floating from above, in a higher position. Figuratively, this shows Sanger coming from heaven, like an angel heralding a Truth. For Jones, Sanger represents a feminist icon that should be revered for her work for contraception and social change for women.

In another example from earlier in the book (Figure 14), Jones shows a younger version of herself talking to Sanger and explaining the need for abortion clinics. In Jones' *meta-narrative*, she states "If Margaret Sanger could see this scene" (122) and then portrays Sanger appearing from the ground praised and adored by naked women. Sanger comes from inky swirls at the bottom of the frame and responds to Jones by saying "I fought for **birth control** to spare women from having **abortions**, which were quite common, if **illegal**, and often **lethal**" (Figure 15: emphasis Jones). During this intertwining and imagined *narrative dialogue* between the two women, Jones responds that people are human and make mistakes and that abortions are still necessary. In Jones' *meta-narrative,* she reflects and confronts Sanger's position on abortion while also representing her as some sort of goddess worshipped by women.

Throughout her book about Sanger, Jones compares and links her own personal sexual liberation with (a) religious experience(s) by using various religious icons from multiple and varied religions in Jones' and Sanger's *story*. The religious link seems potentially contentious between the "pro-life" and the "pro-choice" movements since the "pro-life" movement often argues from a religious or moral context. And thus, the "pro-life" movement argues that "pro-choice" activists are opposed to religious understanding or are immoral. Jones radically flips Sanger into a religious icon for women's reproductive rights by representing various religious motifs and images throughout the book. Jones draws Sanger as a serpent slithering down a fruit tree (Figure 7), as a devil with horns (Figure 25), as a two-headed Janus figure (Figure 18), and as a harpy (Figure 26) just to name a few.

The imagery linking women's sexuality and various religious icons also transforms these experiences from being oppositional to that of a religious experience or thinking. Jones uses the religious imagery throughout the book to link women's health and morality as is referenced on the last page in the imaginary dialogue between Sanger and Jones. As Jones shows throughout the book, women controlling their own

reproductive destiny brings them closer to being God by allowing them to decide when they are fertile rather than a random occurrence outside their control.

In Jones' initial *story* at Planned Parenthood, Jones depicts a hand reaching from a cloud, like the hand of (a) God, fingers pinching a small round pill (Figure 27). The image can be interpreted as either God's hand bestowing the pill on women or, women taking control and picking up the pill. Either interpretation leads the reader to understand that for Jones, the sexual revolution was about knowledge and control over reproduction. Knowledge, again for Jones, is tantamount to a religious experience. Jones states, "we came for the pill" under the image of the hand of God followed by the frame showing Jones putting pamphlets in her back-pack and *narrating* "and we got an education" (Figure 27). Again, Jones shows the reader in her *story* how Planned Parenthood sought to educate the plural "we"—or women—about their bodies and sexual health and the influence it had on Jones' life. Yet, this visually religious interpretation reinforces Jones' *meta-narrative* as she uses figures and images to make connections outside the original *story* and *narrative.*

Jones does not limit the religious icons exclusively to Sanger. Jones visually represents herself with six arms (Figure 14), evoking the Hindu goddess of sex and love Parvati or more specifically Bhavani, a version of Parvati who represents the goddess of life and fertility. Jones, as iconic goddess, represents each arm holding a different form of birth control in place of the traditional sword and lotus flower. Jones' visual representation implies that controlling reproduction gives women a god-like status to control love and the body through infertility. With each birth control option drawn, there is text in her *story* listing her personal pro/con list and then explaining the method she chose—the pill. Jones' visual depiction of choice and goddess-like status shows how she reflects back on her *story* and how she views it as empowered through knowledge and choice of contraception. Moreover, her choice to represent herself as a female goddess rather than a male one emphasizes Jones' gendered interpretation of her right to bodily autonomy. Jones' visual self-reflection acts as a *meta-narrative* interpretation of Jones' looking back on her life choices.

Religious icons and *narratives* portray the human reproductive cycle, perpetuated through sexual reproduction. Jones continues linking the theme of religion and sex and death (Figure 28). She shows a reference to Adam and Eve pulling apples from the forbidden tree. Jones draws the tree trunk as a skeleton with the snake wrapped around its arms and upper body. She visually creates a metaphor between knowledge of sex and death which repeats itself throughout the book in both Jones' and later, Sanger's *narrative.* Sexual reproduction leads to birth which then leads to death.

Jones represents death repeatedly throughout the text. The figurative drawings are, again, a self-reflective moment for the reader to understand as Jones looking back on her life. The self-reflection offers a *meta-narrative* because it is not literal and did not take place during her *story*. Jones shows in her *story* the foreboding events to come later in the sexual revolution—the AIDS crisis (Figure 28). In the last and largest portion of

the page, Jones is caught between a figurative image of Liberty and one of Death. Jones draws her younger self dancing carefree and enjoying her sexual freedom found through birth control, which is represented by the icon of Liberty. Jones constructs this part of the *narrative* in three frames. The first frame shows Liberty holding the scales of justice. The frame *narrates* how Roe v. Wade further provides freedom to women through abortion should birth control fail. In the second frame, Jones draws herself opening the door to a skeleton representing Death, or the impending AIDS crisis in the 1980s. In the first two frames, Jones reflects on her personal *story* in a *meta-narrative* as between two important moments in American history. The first is (sexual) freedom or the new found rights women had in access to birth control and abortion. The second is death or the toll of the AIDS crisis on those who were sexually active. Death represents how the AIDS crisis in the 1980s introduced a new, deadly danger to women preventing them from having total freedom over their bodies again.

Continuing with religious representation, Jones represents Sanger as a religious figure. Jones draws Sanger with devil horns and a tail (Figure 25**)**. The demonic rendering implicates the rhetoric used to describe Sanger and women who have abortions. Jones contends that critiquing Planned Parenthood participates and perpetuates arguments against Sanger. Jones *narrates*, "Attacks on Planned Parenthood and abortion take aim at a woman who fought to legalize birth control a century ago" (Figure 25).

In between chapters, Jones has three drawings of three fertility goddesses from varying cultures and time periods (Figure 31). These transitional images reiterate Jones' reflection on Sanger as a god-like figure. As Jones critiques and rallies against Reagan's anti-abortion politics during the 80s, she makes again the religious link between women controlling their fertility by stating the inverse. While conversing with a friend about birth control, Jones' friend states "They should have the awesome power of primordial fertility goddesses" (43). Jones flips the political statement by saying the reverse, "or in this case, infertility goddesses" (43). Jones' statement about "infertility goddesses" emphasizes a woman's right not to reproduce rather than the political argument of emphasizing a woman's right to choose "when" to reproduce. For Jones, "when" emphasizes that all women will and want to reproduce. The argument for the pill that it allows women the right to choose "when" they reproduce reinforces the hegemonic and gendered norm that women always want to have children. The statement's subtle and humorous flip shows how Jones sees the default concerning women's reproduction. For Jones, the question is not first and foremost about "choosing when" but is primarily "choosing not to." Jones argues that most women use birth control in order to not reproduce—to choose infertility. And choosing infertility is a gifted power from Sanger's figurative goddess knowledge.

Jones reinforces the religious overtone of controlling fertility when she shows a hand preventing a sperm from reaching the ovum (Figure 29). The ovum, first observed

by C.E. von Baer (1792-1876) in 1828[47] lead to questions and misunderstandings about how fertilization occurred in humans. In Jones' portrayal of the hand acting like divine intervention to pregnancy, Jones creates a diaphragm through religious imagery.

Jones creates a *meta-narrative* about access to abortion in the comic as well with an intertextual citation of her own prior work (Figure 15). Jones shows her younger self volunteering at an abortion clinic. Jones offers to show her comic strip about abortion to two other volunteers, "Do you want to see my comics strip about abortion rights?" (122). In the *story*, Sabrina poses the question, however, the question is also asked of the reader, to continue reading and see the work Jones has done. The page reproduces one of Jones' published comics from *World War 3*. The reproduced comic shows how according to Jones she "uses her right to abortion daily." Jones' statement is in response to feeling safer if she is sexually assaulted by knowing she could have an abortion if she were to get pregnant. Jones uses the comic to show that she has used her art as an activist for abortion rights for a long time. However, the page also reinforces to the reader that Jones is the artist and has created *Our Lady of Birth Control* in order to educate as an activist. The entire work shows how women's reproductive rights are "continually under siege" (122). Or as Sabrina, about her career and politics, says, "At last, the perfect confluence of Art, Activism, and Love!" (127).

5.4 Simultaneous Intersectionality in Jones' Work

Jones makes use of the simultaneous *narrative* structure in order to make the connections for the reader to see the *nonfragmentation of phenomenological experiences.* Jones uses the comics form in order to show the simultaneity of various experiences across time and space through her use of *meta-narrative*. Jones works to examine her present moment through her own personal experiences, and through the lens of Sanger's personal experiences. "Telling a woman's life, however, is less formulaic. For one thing, most women's lives are a tightly woven mesh of public and private events. The primary definition of a woman's selfhood is likely to be this combined public-private identity. So, to write the story of these interconnected parts of a woman's life, in order to tell her complete story, means creating different structures for women's biography" (Wagner-Martin: 6). Jones draws the connections between her lived experiences and those of Sanger and shows us how she cannot disconnect the stories no more than she can reduce the gendered experiences to a singular illustration or paragraph in prose.

For example, during Sanger's *story,* Sanger is collecting random women's stories to share as anecdotes in her research on the need for contraception (Figure 30). Sanger collects data through women's shared experiences (Figure 30). Jones renders this part of Sanger's *story* by drawing the women and using speech bubbles to give voice to those

[47] See: Laqueur, Thomas. *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud.* Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1990. Print. Laqueur's work gives a medical history of understanding sex and sexual difference.

countless stories women shared with Sanger. Sanger sits in the top, left side of a double page, with a note pad in hand, asking women to share with her their *story*. Various women and their plight with uncontrolled fertility explain their worries, fears, and problems. Jones portrays these women's *stories* in various emotional and mental states, in varying detail of family life, and in various locations. However, she structures their stories inside the body of two nudes on two separate pages.

Jones confines and marks the women's stories by imposing them in the shared space of a woman's outlined body. The women's stories are confined in the outline of the nude but also serve to mark the body of the nude. Jones' visual commentary links all the women and their stories together through the body itself. No matter how distinct their experiences, their stories are shared through a common and connected space—the female body. Jones' art makes this connection visually by creating a collation of shared women's lived experiences for the reader to understand. Women's bodies act as a prison when women cannot control their bodies because they are confined or trapped by forced lived experiences. Visually, the women are trapped inside the body because they cannot control their fertility. Even Sanger is ultimately enclosed within the female body, as she is drawn by Jones in the left thigh of a woman, responding to the woman in the right thigh that she cannot perform an abortion. The two pages offer a visual of simultaneous intersectionality since we can see the lived experiences of women across time and space in an oppressive system that denies them access to or limits their reproductive rights.

Jones makes the question of access to abortion across time and space visible when she draws herself confronting Sanger and Sanger's views (Figure 15). In the two-page layout, as previously discussed, Jones shows an adored Sanger[48] discussing her views on abortion. This interlude between Jones and Sanger acts as an introduction for Jones to discuss her activism for abortion rights. The imagined dialogue also shows how the impact of Sanger's work to bring access to birth control to women[49] has succeeded but is still fallible due to human error—the man's or the woman's. The first panel's dialogue between Jones and Sanger shows the continued systemic oppression that women feel at not being able to control their fertility. Jones portrays Sanger as saying, "I fought for **BIRTH CONTROL** to spare women from having **ABORTIONS**, which were quite common, if **ILLEGAL**, and often **LETHAL**" (Figure 15). To which Jones responds, "But birth control isn't PERFECT and neither are MEN and WOMEN, so we still need access to abortion, which is **LEGAL**, but continually under **SIEGE**." The dialogue shows how both women, Jones and Sanger, are concerned for the legality of access to abortion and birth control. However, Jones, in the dialogue, highlights that access and

[48] Earlier I discuss how Jones draws naked women at the feet of Sanger coming up from ink swirls. The depiction of the women, who are unnamed, shows them looking up at Sanger as though they are adoring her—or worshipping her.

[49] Sanger's goal was to bring access to birth control to any and all women who wanted to control their fertility.

the legality are "continually under siege." The continued legal battle concerning women's access to abortion[50] exists across time and space for both Sanger and Jones.

Jones then shows the reader her own past experiences volunteering as well as citations of her past publications concerning abortion rights (Figure 15). The opposite page shows a previously published comic strip where Jones discusses how "I use my abortion rights every day. I use them just to walk down the street." The visual and textual narrative structure shows Sanger's and Jones' lived experiences in different times and spaces, but makes a shared connection within the same space of the two-page comics *narrative*. Both women have lived experiences within systems of oppression that deny them (women) access to birth control or abortion across time and space.

Jones reminds the reader that we are reading a comic book that biographizes Sanger's life by drawing a part of Sanger's *story*. The act of drawing, much like Catel manually reproducing the love letter to Groult from Groult's lover, shows the reader the Jones is interpreting and connecting her art to other women's whole lives. Jones believes women face oppression at the site of their bodies when they are denied the rights to control their bodies. Sanger focused on the intersection of class and gender through the location of women's bodies. The chapters that Jones creates of her own *story*—such as "Saturday Morning Siege" where she volunteers at the abortion clinic—reveal Jones' shared connection to Sanger's *story* of gendered oppression located through reproduction rights.

Sanger discovered through nursing that the poor and the destitute were not singularly defined by their class. Sanger states, "[The women] were living, breathing, human beings, with hopes, fears, and aspirations like my own, yet their weary, misshapen bodies, 'always ailing, never failing,' were destined to be thrown on the scrap heap before they were thirty-five" (*Autobiography*, 89). Sanger recognized within the lower class of women she tried to help a humanity in their lived experiences. However, because of the inability to control fertility, the poor were destined to never experience a full humanity. Childbirth and child-rearing were directly associated with the emotional state, physical well-being, and financial situation of the women. Sanger's thoughts begin to try to see the human being's lived experiences.

Jones use of *story* overlaps with both her philosophy of political activism and Sanger's—sexual education for all women. Jones educates the reader about sexual health and reproduction rights through Sanger's *story* as well as her own *story*. Jones shows Sanger's frustration since various methods had existed to prevent pregnancy for centuries—albeit methods with varying results. However, the Comstock Law in the late 19th century had prevented the mailing and dissemination of information to women. Equally, it had prevented medical professionals from being able to publish information deemed "lascivious." This information was primarily focused on information concerning

[50] As I will explain, access to birth control is continually under siege when Jones discusses the Sandra Fluke testimony before the United States Congress.

women's bodies. Jones shows the reader the multitude of lived experiences of women across time and space simultaneously.

The political link for both Sanger and Jones rests in the notion of how women are denied their full humanity through a denial of knowledge or access to knowledge. While Sanger fought the Comstock Law in order to educate, Jones states, "The Supreme Court established our legal right to abortion in 1973, but clinics are still under attack both physically and legally, because we have yet to create widespread acceptance of women's human rights. I believe art can help influence the culture to affirm all of our humanity" (*Barbarus*). Jones perceives the connection of women's lived experiences simultaneously across time and space—specifically, Jones perceives the connection between Sanger's *story* and her own. While Jones portrays parts and pieces of Sanger's *story* through a graphic *narrative*, Jones continues to show Sanger as a whole human being with *nonfragmented phenomenological experiences*—a woman who came from a poor, large family whose experience as a nurse compelled her to try to help "all" women.

Jones elaborates the shared connection between herself and Sanger when Jones explains why she chose Sanger for her work (Figure 24). While Jones portrays Fluke's lived experience of testifying before Congress, Jones makes the connection between her own lived experiences with reproductive rights activism, Fluke's testimony, and Sanger's fight for access to birth control. In a moment of political activism by creating a comic book about Sanger on reproductive rights, Jones connects her own activism with Sanger's by directly addressing Sanger. Jones, sitting at her drawing table, includes, "A century after Margaret Sanger began her fight for birth control, a woman is still publicly shamed for advocating it" (Figure 24). Jones emphasizes the continued fight for reproductive rights but also draws herself at the drawing table, where Jones combines her art and her activism. Jones portrays Sanger explaining the system of oppression women face concerning their fertility as "They want to control our morals" (Figure 24). Jones draws the connection of simultaneous intersectionality between the lived experiences of women (Jones, Fluke, and Sanger) fighting for their right to control their bodies.

While Sanger embraced eugenics and believed in forced sterilization of the "unfit," Sanger did want all women to be educated about their bodies (including the "unfit"). As a feminist scholar, I cannot excuse Sanger's inability to reconcile her desire to free certain women while forcing other women out of a right to choose or not contraception with her ideas of forced sterilization for those *unfit*. Nor do I excuse Jones softening and defense of Sanger's philosophy as "Margaret's interest in eugenics was based on health not race" which conflates the accusation that Sanger was racist with her beliefs about eugenics. Sanger was very clear about her position on forced sterilization in her letters, as previously discussed. However, Jones does excuse Sanger's position on the reproductive rights of those with mental disabilities by saying "but Sanger's attitudes were characteristic of her time" (141). Jones contends that a modern standpoint has changed our contemporary understanding, at least in part because of the disability rights movement.

It could be argued, as Sanger might have, that since Sanger was looking to access to birth control options for women as a way to improve class—except those who were categorized as *unfit* would not have been able to change (improve) their class, and forced sterilization and eugenics did not make the lives of the *unfit* better nor improve their condition within systems of oppression. In spite of Sanger's flawed or prejudiced views, Jones sees positives in the activism for women's rights to control their bodies that Sanger fought for. So while we may not agree with Sanger's views, and Jones may attempt to excuse them by contextualizing them as contemporary to Sanger's situation, Jones shows women's simultaneous lived experiences across time and space within systems of oppression that persist and present women with many of the same barriers and challenges.

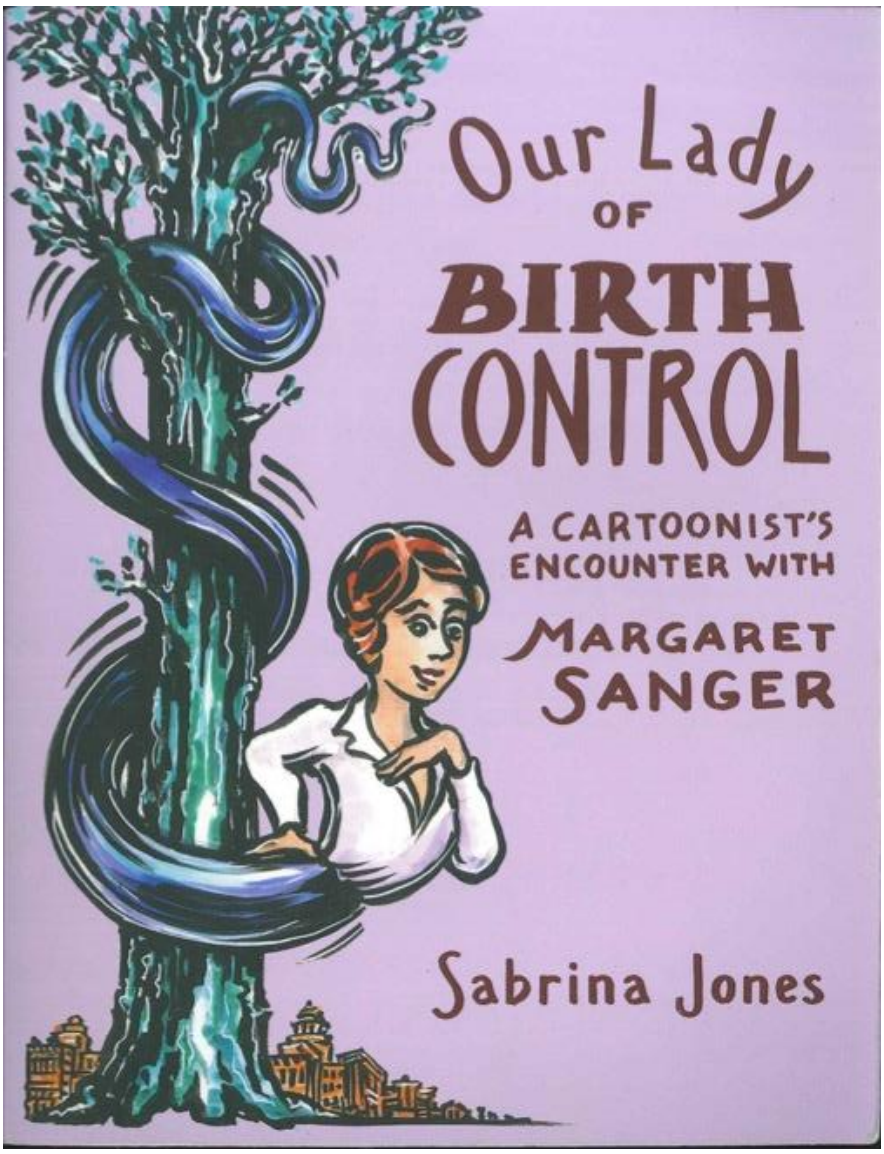

Figure 7 Cover of *Our Lady of Birth Control* by Jones

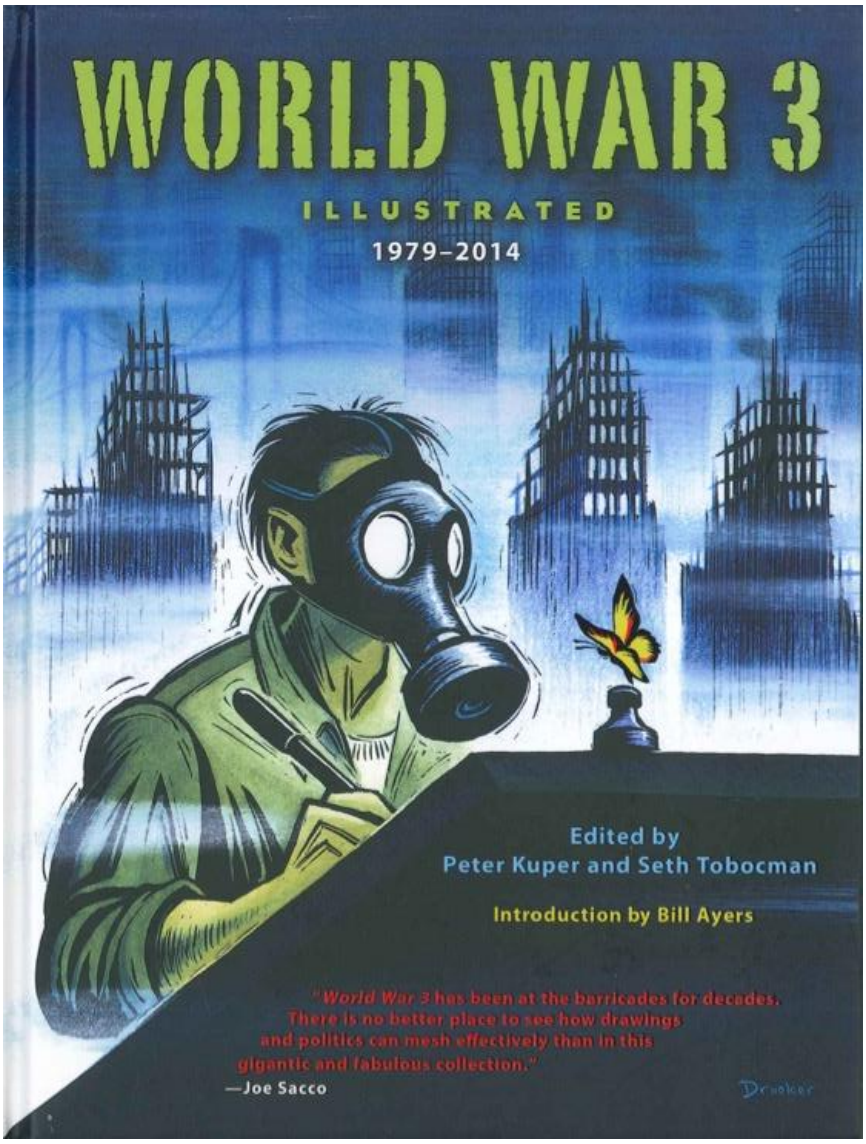

Figure 8 Cover of *World War 3*

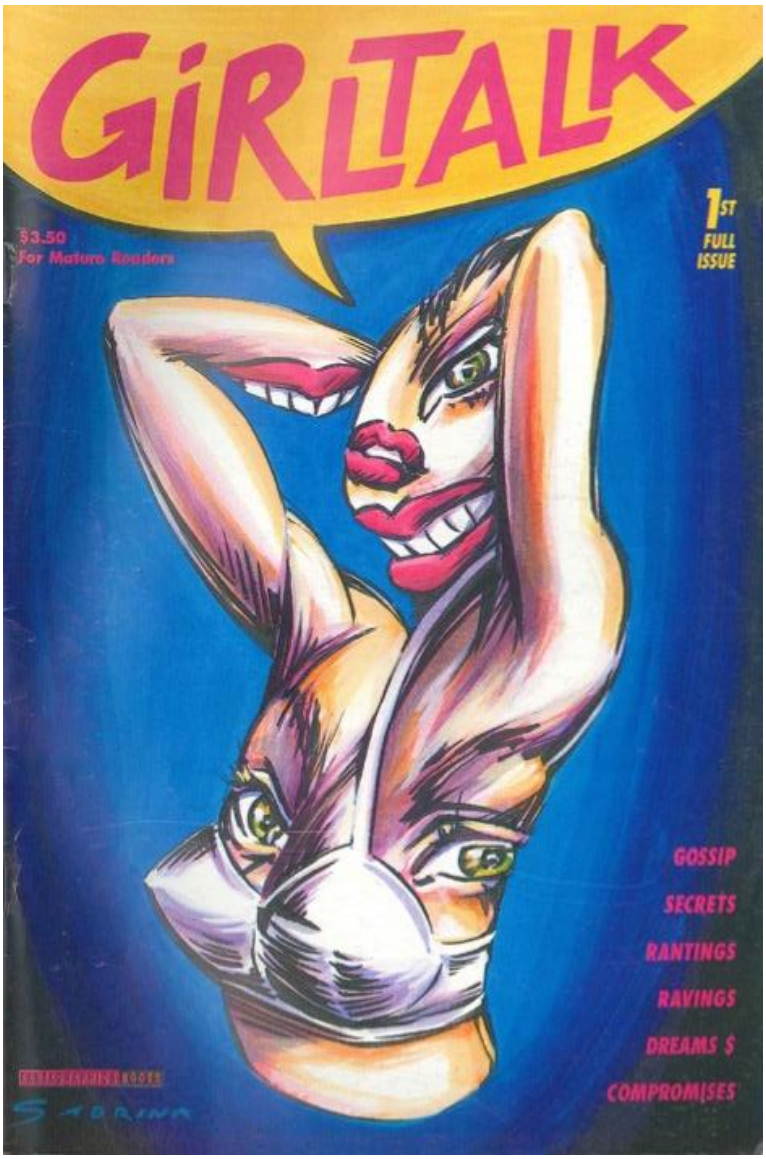

Figure 9 Cover of *Girl Talk*

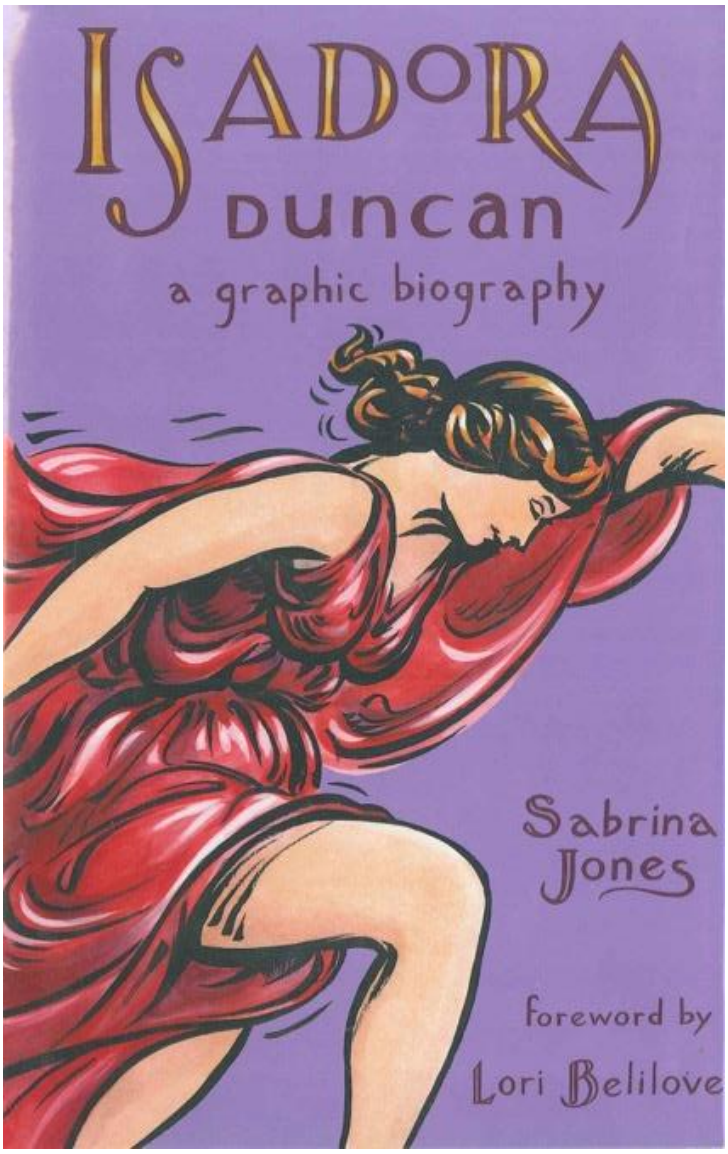

Figure 10 Cover of *Isadora Duncan* by Jones

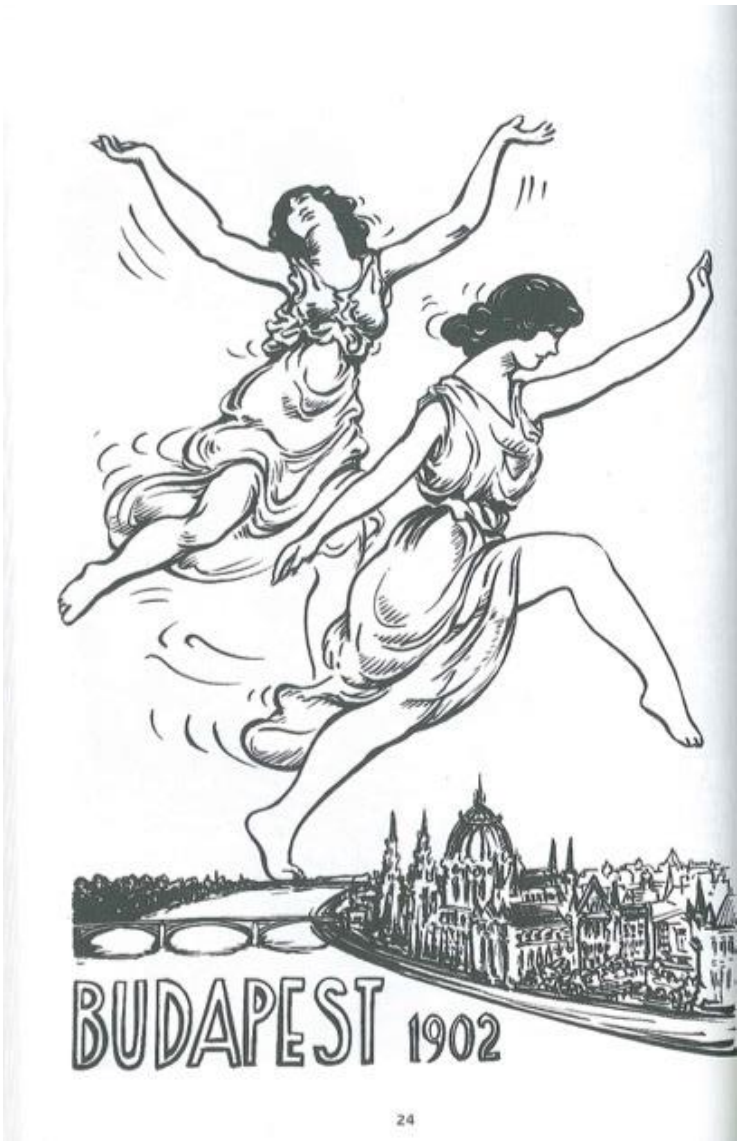

Figure 11 Isabella Duncan Dancing on Page

Figure 12 Jones' Reacts to Conflicting Narratives

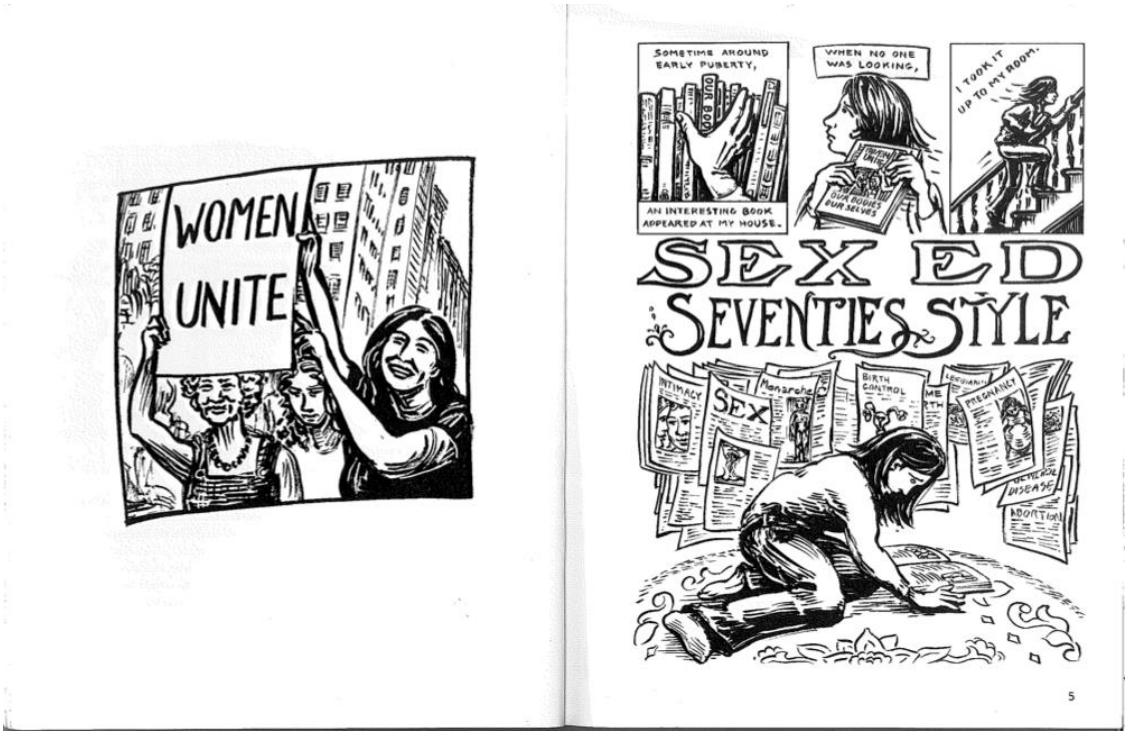

Figure 13 Jones and Sexual Education

Figure 14 Jones and Birth Control

Figure 15 Jones' Artistic Activism

Figure 16 Sanger's Father

Figure 17 Sanger's Childhood

Figure 18 Sanger's Life Choices

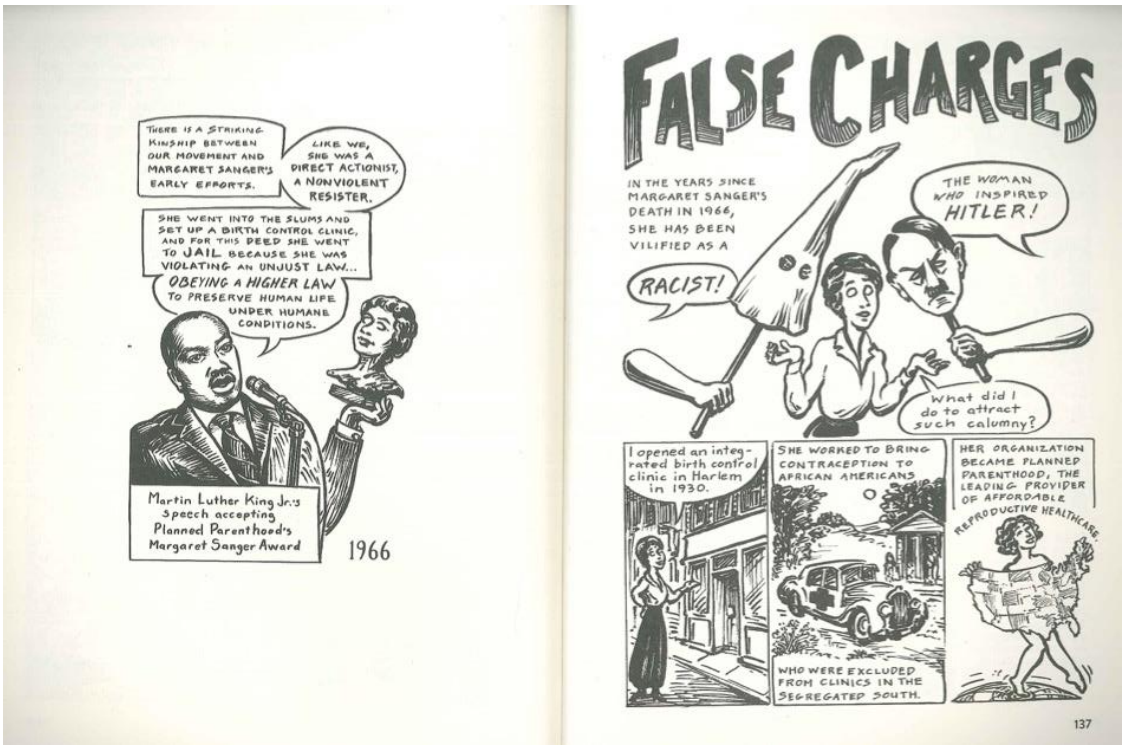

Figure 19 Sanger and Martin Luther King Jr

Figure 20 Sanger and the Comstock Law

Figure 21 Sanger Recounts the Sachs Anecdote

Figure 22 Sanger Researches Birth Control Methods

Figure 23 Sanger's Childhood Revisited

Figure 24 Jones Draws Inspiration

Figure 25 Sanger as the Devil

Figure 26 A Harpy

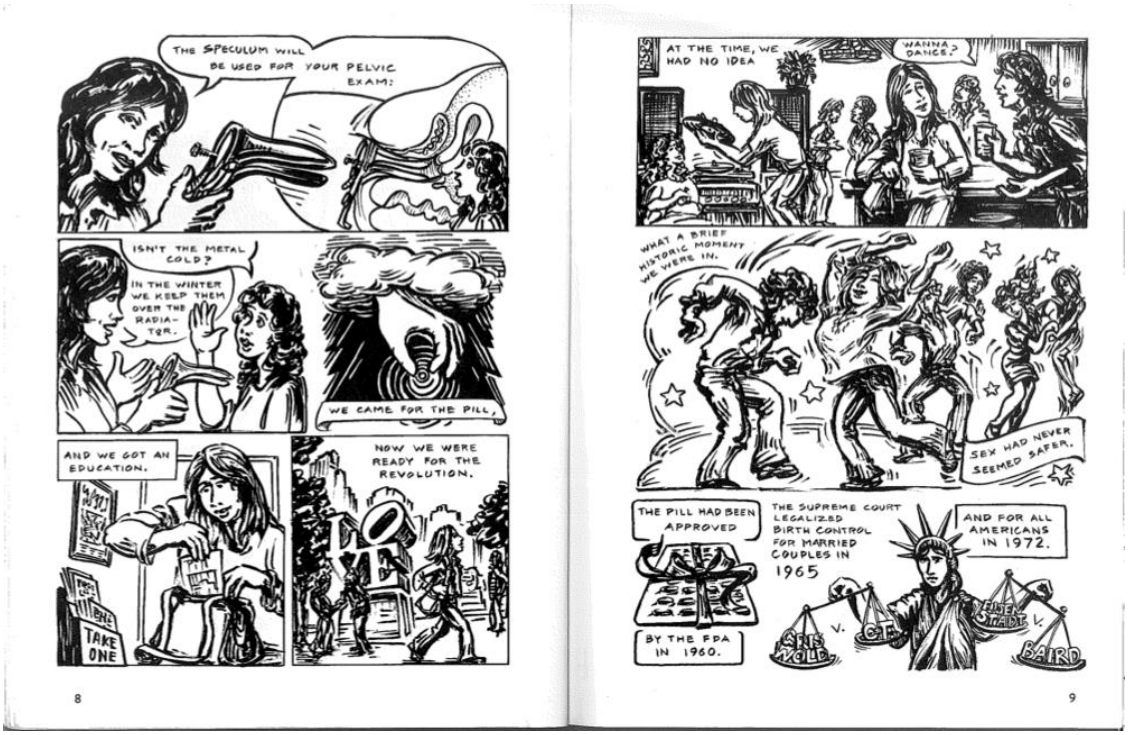

Figure 27 The Hand of God

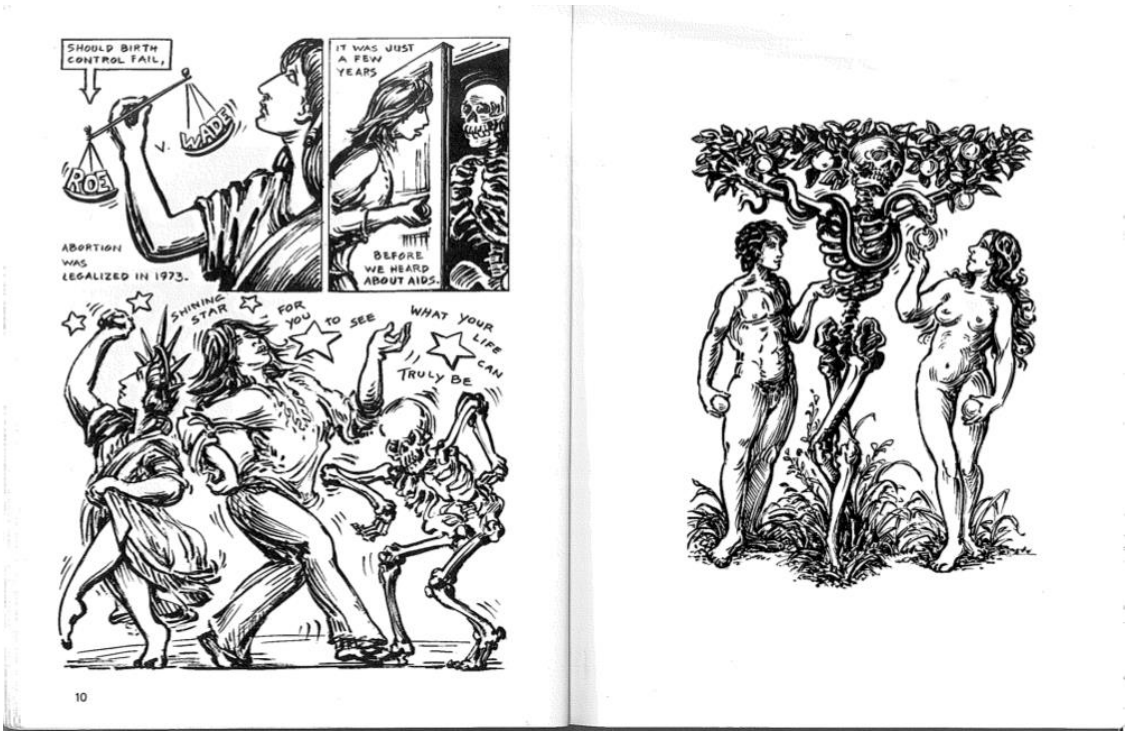

Figure 28 Death and Adam and Eve

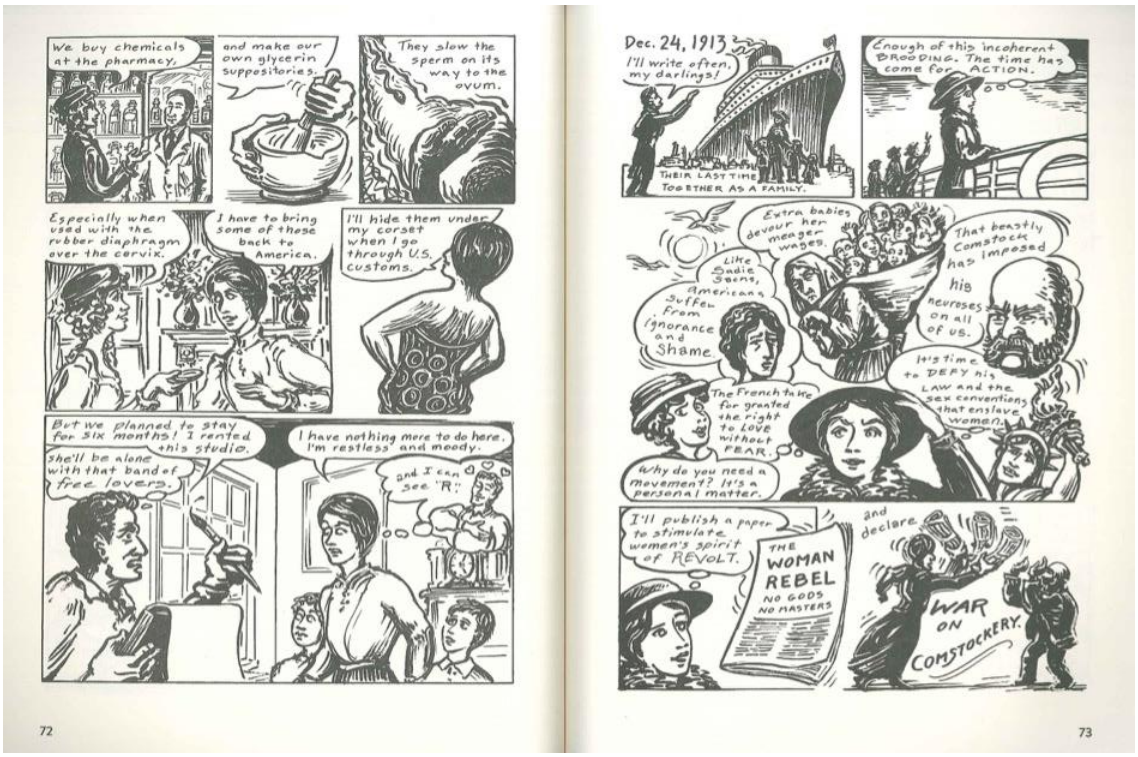

Figure 29 Sanger Smuggles Birth Control

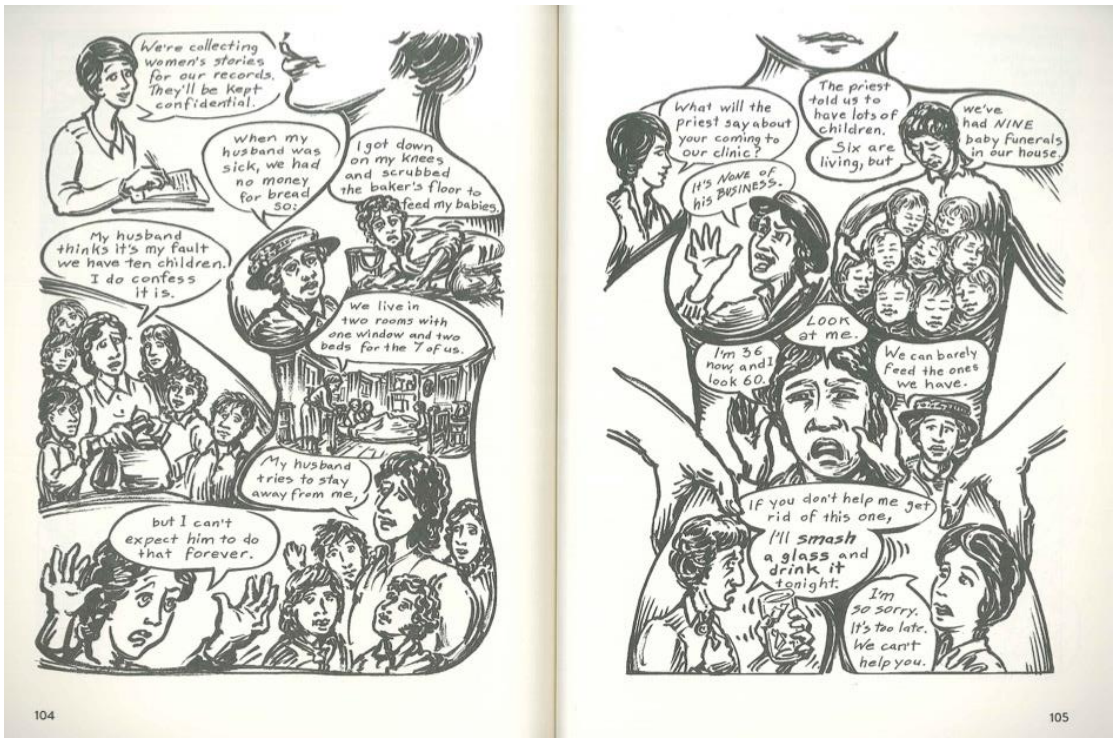

Figure 30 Trapped by Women's Bodies

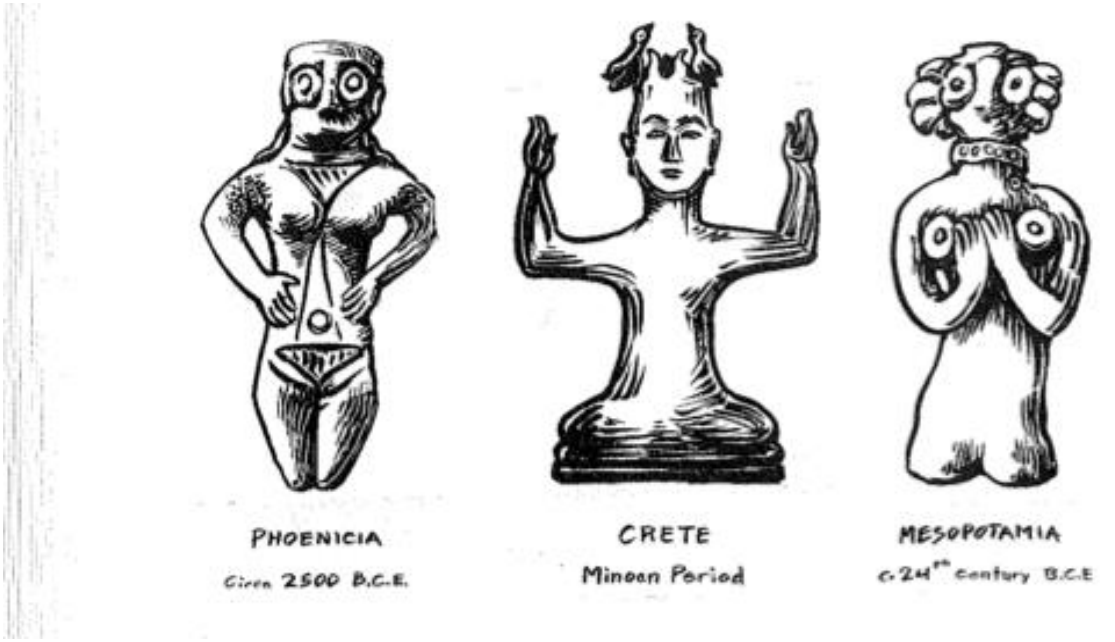

Figure 31 Goddess Figurines

CHAPTER 6. DISCUSSION AND CONTRIBUTIONS

This dissertation is about understanding how women comics artists visually expand our understanding of women's lived experiences in systems of oppression. Using simultaneity and intersectionality (or simultaneous intersectionality) as a theoretical framework to analyze the comics Catel and Jones create shows how women use creative narrative structures to share their stories and make connections with other women across time and space. My contributions are three-fold: I show how women artists illustrate simultaneous intersectionality in the United States and France as a way of making connections across time and spaces; I show how simultaneous intersectionality can be explored and examined in women's graphic narratives by examination of text and images used to depict experiences of women; and, I add to how our understanding of women's experiences, such as with sexism and reproductive rights, can be expanded across time and space through textual and image connections that expose structures of oppression.

Below, I address each research question from the first chapter, and then elaborate on my scholarly contributions. I then briefly summarize my conclusions and discuss applications to works by other comics artists. Finally, I discuss the theoretical framework and give my concluding thoughts.

6.1 Research Questions and Contributions

6.1.1 *Auto/biographical Comics: How and to what effect do Catel and Jones connect and blend their own contemporary narratives simultaneously with the lives of their subjects in the auto/biographical comics they produce?*

For the first research question, I immediately consider the saying, *a picture is worth a thousand words*. The comics medium allows for a fuller reading of life stories because each page is composed of multiple images with each image containing its own meaning and nuance as a part of the larger *narrative*. Each individual image works with and/or against the other images on the page simultaneously creating and recreating meaning.

As discussed in the chapters about Catel's and Jones' works, the images presented in comics simultaneously fragment the reader's views but also create a whole perspective. The fragmented images offer multiple perspectives simultaneously through time and/or space of the person's life. Each image presents meaning about a lived experience in a contextualized moment. However, the periphery of the reader's eye continually sees the other images at the same time. The reader sees different women's life experiences beside and with each other. And as the reader's eye moves across and over the images, the reader also taking in the whole page, seeing the fragments together, and creating newer, more whole meanings.

The comics medium allows women to tell often-fragmented stories about their identities and experiences. The artists show their lived experiences of their identities to the reader. Each image allows the artist to fragment down to the core and examine their identities in a moment and in a space while also presenting those moments alongside other moments and experiences simultaneously. Each image lending itself to a close analysis of the fragment as I have done while examining Catel's and Jones' works. Close analysis of specific images provides insight into contextualized moments.

Yet, there is not just one image presented. The key to the medium and comics' ability to show the reader a simultaneous intersectionality relies heavily on its narrative structure of images sequentially linked to tell a story. While each image can be viewed as a singular point (moment and space) in a person's narrative, the simultaneity of other images on the page shows that one singular image is reductive about the person's identity and story. The reader sees and reads one image along with the other images simultaneously. An individual's *story* is composed of all the parts and pieces of their various identities and experiences in all spaces and in all times of their *story*. An individual's life experience works similarly to how the comics page constructs single moments and a whole simultaneously. My analysis of their works examined and analyzed the meaning that multiple simultaneous images create that show women's lived experiences.

Catel and Jones create a *narrative* that *narrates* an individual's *story* to a reader. Each artist also shares her own personal context by creating a *meta-narrative* that offers and comments self-reflexively on her own life, framing the *narrative* of her own work and her own *story.* The context created by the *meta-narrative* exposes the shared connections between the women's lives—both artist and subject—in the original *narrative* through simultaneous intersectionality. It is through the narrative analysis of Catel's and Jones' work that we can see how they show the reader simultaneous intersectionalities within systems of oppression across different times and spaces.

6.1.2 *Simultaneous Narratives: What are the implications and impact for understanding women's lives through these simultaneous narratives?*

The second question allows feminist scholars to see the shared experiences of whole human beings within systems of oppression across time and space. Simultaneous narrative structures create the possibility of seeing how systems of oppression change or do not change over time. These comics narratives also allow for an expansion of how women can form and feel relationships across time and space.

Catel and Jones show and tell their *story* to someone that they imagine and create—an ideal reader. As Catel and Jones *narrate* their subject's *story,* as well as their own, the ideal *narratee* reads and listens and learns about their experiences. The *narratee* is vital to the purpose of the *meta-narrative* Catel and Jones create because each

artist seeks to show their phenomenological experiences to a receptive audience. Catel and Jones seek to share their *stories* and to educate their reader about shared similarities with other women's lives. Sharing their lived experiences across time and space with their subjects allows the reader to potentially see her own similar lived experiences across time and space.

For Catel and Jones, the *meta-narrative* serves as a *narrative* within and outside a *narrative* where the artists share their reflections on their phenomenological experiences. Rather than erasing their own voices from the *narrative*, the artists expand the story to make connections between themselves and their subjects. As Lanser argues, "Intersectional thinking would reject an approach to narrative that assumes identities to be predictable or predictive, yet would understand the narrative genealogies, along with our ways of thinking about them, are doubtless shaped by intersectional configurations" (28). The artists' *meta-narrative* offers more than a different perspective or a frame for the other *narratives*. The artists draw (attention to) their sketchbooks, their inkblots, themselves at their drawing desks working on the *story.* The artists use the *meta-narrative* to *narrate* to the reader—or to themselves in a moment of self-reflection—how they, the woman artist, created this finished product with an interior awareness of the *narratives* in the reader's hand.

Each artist emphasizes her gendered experience of producing a *narrative*. Both Catel and Jones explore the relationship of their lived experiences as women artists. Both artists consider and explore moments in their lives where their art intersects their lived experiences as women—Catel, as a divorced women while drawing Groult, and Jones, sharing her activism for reproductive rights and autobiographical work for other comics. Gendered experiences are central to how Catel and Jones understand their *narratives*.

The *meta-narrative* allows Catel and Jones to show how they work, not hidden from sight. The artist's *meta-narrative* serves to expose the productive aesthetic tension of claiming the status of being an artist—a patriarchal domain. This occurs while allowing for a dialogue with another *narrative* which also exists in a patriarchal domain—the biography—that is intertwined with the artist's own personal narrative.

6.1.3 *Visualizing Intersectionality: How does "simultaneity" allow us as feminist scholars to expand how we understand and visualize intersectionality (discussed below), while analyzing/examining the structures and systems (of oppression) that impact women's lives and lived experiences?*

For the third question, I analyze how Catel and Jones show that systems of oppression have been maintained through different times and spaces. Individuals experience systems of oppression differently. In part, because each individual's simultaneous experiences inform how they experience the systems of oppression. Individuals perceive their lived experiences through their identities. The works of Catel

and Jones serve to confirm that expanding our perception to a simultaneous intersectionality—seeing the simultaneity of a person's lived experiences in systems of oppression—allows us to see how individuals within the same culture may experience the systems of oppression differently.

Crenshaw refers to intersectionality as a *framework*. Frameworks are schemes or systems based on concepts. However, frameworks are also support structures that enclose or support ways of looking at, showing, and seeing—much the same way that a picture frame, or a comic book frame, enclose an image to support the snapshot moment. Intersectionality as a framework allows a snapshot of how individuals experience systems of oppression. The snapshot inside the framework only gives a partial view of the individual inside a system but looking at the simultaneous images and snapshots gives a wholistic understanding of the individual. We, as feminist scholars, should remain careful and vigilant to recognize simultaneity of lived experiences of humans who cannot be reduced to finite, limited identities. In other words, the whole individual cannot be and should not be reduced to a couple of images.

Comics allows for the cumulations of snapshots or limited moments and spaces that form a holistic understanding. These hybrid works of text and image in sequence show us snapshots that connect to each other to create a simultaneous view of lived experiences. Comics makes visible to us the whole individual next to other whole individuals. The reader is invited to see how the unified whole of one individual contends with the same systemic oppressions that another whole individual contends with. Comparatively, the reader is invited to see and understand two simultaneous contexts while also seeing the same system of oppression in different times and spaces.

Simultaneous intersectionality pushes for an expansion of how to see and understand an individual. Rather than reducing the individual to a reductive understanding of a specific "intersection" of identities like race and gender, simultaneous intersectionality permits a person's story to be seen and shown as a unified whole through multiple viewings of their lived experiences. The unified whole shows their full humanity and how systems of oppression seek to deny or devalue their whole humanity.

For Catel and Jones, the *meta-narrative* serves as a *narrative* within and outside a *narrative* where the artists share their reflections on their phenomenological experiences. Rather than erasing their own voices from the *narrative*, the artists make connections between themselves and their subjects. In the example of Catel, she collaborates with a feminist scholar, Benoîte Groult who shares her own personal experiences with Catel. Jones, on the other hand, explores her personal relationship with the deceased Margaret Sanger.

Catel's and Jones' works bring importance to what the editors of *The Challenge of Feminist Biography: Writing the Lives of Modern American Women* call "A focus on the female life-cycle experience" (9). Women's lived experiences are important for understanding how different women experience systems of oppression. Warhol explains

in “A Feminist Approach to Narrative”, “Feminist narrative theory takes that communication as a given but tries always to frame its analysis with as much socio-historical context as can be known for the author and readers in question” (10). Catel and Jones show the reader the context for their *stories* by framing their phenomenological experiences in systems of oppression through the cultural context of their and their subject’s time and space.

6.2 Contributions to Understanding Women’s Lives

This project positions simultaneity from an outcome of intersectional analysis to a dual theoretical framework with intersectionality. I argue that my analysis of Catel’s and Jones’ graphic narratives exposes how they, as artists, do simultaneous intersectionality. Catel and Jones, as graphic artists of auto/biography, make visible the lived experiences of women as whole human beings in systems of oppression through time and space. I add to feminist scholarship by analyzing how women artists in the comics medium use their auto/biographical *stories* to explicitly show the reader simultaneous experiences. This encourages the reader to consider their own simultaneous experiences with and next to other whole human beings lived experiences. The reader thus expands the scope of how they see and understand individuals.

Analyzing Catel’s and Jones’ narrative structures shows how these comics artists create and use three simultaneous layers of narrative. Catel and Jones document their subject’s lives giving voice to their *stories* by citing them in their *narratives.* Catel and Jones also document their own autobiographical *stories* in their art and narrative structures. And they weave the dual *stories/narratives* through a *meta-narrative,* which adds another layer of self-reflection, outside the primary *story*, connecting the women’s lived experiences across time and space. The lived experiences of the subjects and artists examine questions about identity. Specifically, the *narratives* examine questions of identity concerning gender, class, sex and sexuality, private and public matters, and feminist histories.

The artists share their lived experiences and connections to other women’s lived experiences across time and space in order to show the similarities of their experiences in systems of oppression. Catel and Jones use the comics medium to expand the scope of how the reader sees and understands women’s lived experiences across space and time.

6.3 Applications to Other Works

Catel’s and Jones’ graphic novels are not the only graphic novels by women to blend auto/biography about women’s lives. Historically, women have produced hybrid works or been drawn to non-traditional mediums in order to tell their stories. Both Catel and Jones are continuing within the tradition of hybrid narratives. The attraction to the hybrid narrative may lie in the idea that hegemonic narratives do not tell the stories of

marginalized groups. Hegemonic narratives promote and reinforce their own established norms by othering different structures. As an example discussed in academia, readings listed on syllabi frequently conform to a hegemonic cannon of white, male authors who use similar narratives. If marginalized artists, such as women artists, are excluded as voices in mainstream media, then historically speaking, women artists have told their story in other spaces and in other ways. While comics have been predominantly produced and made by men, women are publishing works in the medium in order to tell their life stories with images and words.

This project examines questions about women's lives and the oppressions they experience in two works; other works could reveal similar frameworks about identity and oppression. Narratives about race, class, sexuality, and able-bodiness are frequent topics in auto/biographical comics. There is potential to examine how memoirs, biographies, and autobiographies in prose as opposed to the comics medium reveal a simultaneous framework for understanding relationships presented in the text. Other works may continue to show a whole individual rather than a fragmented or reductive perspective within systems of oppression. Several comics that blend auto/biography, also work intergenerational through family *stories,* which could offer insight to local and transnational relationships. Below, I elaborate on several possible works that could be examined through simultaneous intersectionality.

Alison Bechdel's work *Fun Home: a Family Tragicomic* (2007) weaves her life narrative with that of her father's story. *Fun Home* does not interweave Bechdel's personal narrative with that of another woman, which distinguishes it from Catel and Jones. Bechdel recounts her father's biography, who she interprets as the story of a queer man in the closet, and links his story to her own coming out story. Fun Home narratively blends questions about sexuality and queer identity, which informs how Bechdel understands her own identity as a lesbian, and her own experiences vis a vis her father.

Fun Home exposes how context of systems of oppression shapes and forms identities[51]. In addition, and distinctly from the texts for this project, Bechdel has a familial relationship with the subject of her book. She created this work a decade after her father's death. Bechdel elaborates on the personal connection through her recounting of conversations, treating her family home and photo albums as an archive, and documenting her and her father's past. Bechdel shows us two simultaneous stories with her father—her past with him and her present with him in her memories.

Further exploration of Bechdel's work could show us how we can see a whole individual through simultaneous intersectionality. More specifically, Bechdel's work could be read to explore how simultaneous intersectionality can be used in seeing whole individuals within family structures. Considering how the work examines sexuality through a generational lens, the work could serve to show how systems of oppression are

[51] For more critical analysis of comics and trauma shaping identity, see Chute, Hillary L. *Graphic Women: Life Narrative and Contemporary Comics*., 2010. Print.

experienced through multiple generations. While Bechdel's father experiences privileges as a white, straight-presenting man (albeit a closeted gay man), the simultaneous intersectionality shows how his privilege systemically oppresses her while he himself experiences systemic oppression.

Another work, Sarah Leavitt's auto/biographic narrative *Tangles: A Story About Alzheimer's, My Mother, and Me* (2012), documents Leavitt's mother's progression with Alzheimer's. In this comic, Leavitt recounts parts of her childhood with her mother as well as telling the story of the life of her mother. The touching narratives expose the difficulties of a person slowly declining with a disease that destroys memory while her daughter ultimately captures those memories with her own narrative documenting her mother's life. Leavitt's work contends with the intersections of gender and sexuality and focuses primarily on personal and domestic oppressions due to illness.

For Leavitt, "[t]he problem of being recognized as someone's daughter, someone's wife, or someone's mother rather than as oneself, is a recurrent motif; …to balance the demands of loved ones against her individual needs" (Wagner-Martin: x-xi) illustrates the simultaneity of inseparable life experiences. Leavitt explores the way her life changes while becoming the primary caretaker of her mother. The exploration of the two life stories and how women are particularly affected by age, disease, loss of memory and able-bodies as well as the expected roll of caretaker for aging parents could be explored further. Further analysis of this work could show how one individual experiencing a system of oppression in turn causes the simultaneous oppression of another.

Belle Yang's work *Forget Sorrow: An Ancestral Tale* (2010) explores how her violent relationship with an ex-boyfriend leads her to explore her family's history and immigration from China to the United States. Simultaneous intersectionality could show how violence, as a means of oppression and reinforcing systems of oppression, is experienced in transnational contexts. Exploration of racial and immigrant perspectives in a new culture with that of a first-generation child who suffers from domestic violence could show how domestic and political violence are linked for marginalized groups that experience transnational identities across generations.

These four works are examples of women's works that show and tell a gendered experience and reveal connections to other people's lives. Simultaneous intersectionality could be expanded to include the experiences of men in relationship to women across time and space. Men have gendered experiences and multiple identities that impact their lives within the same larger, cultural systems of oppression that women experience. Other texts could expose transnational connections between lived experiences since images and text could work with and against each other to show and analyze different cultural spaces and how they inform lived experiences. Yang's comic, as previously discussed, would be a fruitful project for analyzing movement across languages, cultures, and systems of oppression.

6.4 Simultaneity in Systems of Oppression

Kimberlé Crenshaw proposed the framework of intersectionality to examine and analyze human experiences in systems of oppression. The strength of Crenshaw's contribution to the field is in her recognition that humans experience systems of oppression in varied ways because of their multiple identities. As Carastathis argues against Crenshaw's critics, who view intersectionality as a reinforcement of oppression or as a reductive to individuals, Carastathis points out that intersectionality has simultaneity as an intended consequence through analysis of systems of oppression. That is to say, feminist scholars using an intersectional framework should see simultaneity, or the *nonfragmentation of phenomenological experiences*, as a result of their analysis.

From theory to praxis, Catel and Jones are using their art to educate their readers about their feminist histories. They use their art to show and share the lived experiences of women who came before them, but they also share their own lived experiences by connecting their own lives to that of their subjects. As a reader of these works, examining how I read intersectionality in the lives of others allows me to see and understand women's whole lived experiences, and my own connections with the artists and subjects. Reading the comics of Catel and Jones, and in the future, other artists, teaching these works and looking at how they show and tell their lived experiences simultaneously with the lived experiences of others offers an expanded view to me and to others of how women experiences systems of oppression. In some cases, those systems exist across time and space, generationally, and in some cases, political changes may have occurred on some fronts, but not others. These comics artists model for women a possible way of sharing lived experiences within systems of oppression as a way to see and understand that these systems of oppression still exist. And that the reader may also exist in the same or a similar system. Subsequently, their work gives readers, even those who are resistant to analyzing systems of oppression, access. Comics, in particular, make more visible in ways that prose does not, in ways that film does not, the simultaneity of lived experiences.

In acknowledging the works of artists exposing lived experiences within systems of oppression through their *narratives*, feminist scholars can expand how they visualize and understand lived experiences within systems of oppression. Expanding the scope of how we, as feminist scholars, understand lived experiences within systems of oppression allows us to see simultaneity. Recognizing whole human's experiences across time and space then permits us to see the simultaneous experiences within the system of oppression. Catel and Jones, as comics artists, show and tell a simultaneous intersectionality within systems of oppression.

There are many published auto/biographical comics by women. There is a strong literary tradition of women working within hybrid genres. For example, Hélène Cixous' writing challenged the male dominated literary world by creating a hybrid space in the literary world to explore her voice as a woman. The artist's self-reflectivity expresses and exposes the artist's voice. Or, as Hélène Cixous states in her 1977 essay "Coming to

Writing," "Maybe I have written to see; to have what I never would have had; so that having would be the privilege not of the hand that takes and encloses, of the gullet, of the gut; but of the hand that points out, of fingers that see, that design, from the tips of the fingers that transcribe by the sweet dictates of vision" (4). Cixous argues that the act of writing exposes and shows that which can be distinctly "woman." For Cixous, writing, or being an artist, allows her to explore what she has been systemically denied because she is a woman. It is through the creative process of writing that writer's find their voice. Catel and Jones create comics. Their writing includes art, which in turn allows them to seek and find the voices of other women. Catel and Jones, and other artists who seek to explore frameworks of identity in systems of oppression, show their reader connections between whole human beings. The connections they explore show their differing lived experiences with systems of oppression across time and space.

The lived experiences these women artists show and tell through their work provide the opportunity to understand individuals across time and space. As a transnational medium, and as humans who are drawn to visual showing as a way of expressing our thoughts, visual storytelling provides ways of seeing and looking from other cultures and contexts in ways that learning an entire language may limit[52]. Analyzing how artists present simultaneous intersectionality within systems of oppression allows me to understand the multiple and complicated ways humans, and women in particular, are denied their full humanity by these continuing structural systems. At the same time, the format—the text and images that (re)create the experiences of Catel, Groult, Jones, and Sanger — these artists use to create the *narratives* allows them to make visible the *nonfragmentation of the phenomenological experiences* of each individual subject of the auto/biography.

[52] Learning the original language of the texts itself provides access to the original meaning and a nuanced understanding of the text. Translations of texts may prove problematic, but the visual in comics still provides access points to the stories across borders or frames, as it were. I argue here that the visual aspect of the medium itself along with the language maintains the original cultural identity in ways that language proves problematic.

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