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in Women's and Gender Studies



**Counter-Sites: The Articulation of Feminist Friendships and
the Summer Camp in *Lumberjanes***

by Monica Lafaire Mejia

Central European University

Department of Gender Studies

In partial fulfillment for the GEMMA Erasmus Mundus Master's Degree in Women's and
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Main Supervisor: Jasmina Lukic (Central European University)

Second Supervisor: Irene Pérez Fernández (Universidad de Oviedo)

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Approved by

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Abstract

In my thesis I analyze the representation of the friendships in the American comic *Lumberjanes* (BOOM! Box, 2014-ongoing) and the environment that fosters them. I argue that *Lumberjanes* is disrupting postfeminist representations of female friendships prevalent in U.S. youth media by articulating feminist friendships among a group of tweens in a summer camp. I delineate the elements that construct these relationships into nonhierarchical supportive networks for the characters. I emphasize the feminist potential that *Lumberjanes* has to challenge the representation of heteronormative relations and traditional gender roles. Furthermore, I bring an analysis of space to show the way in which the counter-site of the summer camp allows or hinders the existence of the feminist relationships. I remark on the importance of alternative environments, removed from hegemonic gender norms, for the development of the character's identities.

En mi tesis analizo la representación de las amistades en el cómic estadounidense *Lumberjanes* (BOOM! Box, 2014-en publicación) y el entorno que las facilita. Considero que *Lumberjanes*, al articular una amistad feminista entre un grupo de preadolescentes en un campamento de verano, altera la representación postfeminista de las amistades entre mujeres, tan común en los medios estadounidenses dirigidos al público juvenil. Hago énfasis en el potencial feminista que tiene *Lumberjanes* para cuestionar la representación de las relaciones y los roles de género heteronormativos. Además, hago un análisis del espacio para demostrar la manera en que el contra-sitio del campamento permite o limita la existencia de relaciones feministas. Destaco la importancia de entornos alternativos, alejados de la hegemonía de género, en el desarrollo de las identidades de los personajes.

Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of original research; it contains no materials accepted for any other degree in any other institution and no materials previously written and/or published by another person, except where appropriate acknowledgment is made in the form of bibliographical reference.

I further declare that the following word count for this thesis are accurate:

Body of thesis (all chapters excluding notes, references, appendices, etc.): 21,215 words.

Entire manuscript: 23,465 words.

Signed _____

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Introduction

“Get in loser. We’re going shopping”
Regina George, *Mean Girls* (2004)

Since the 1990s, the representation of female friendships in U.S. mainstream media has been suffused with postfeminist sensibilities. TV shows, movies, books, comics and music videos have presented images of girls feuding with other girls for male attention or putting each other down for diverging from heteropatriarchal norms of conduct and appearance. Packaged as ‘girl power’, postfeminist popular media for youth encourages consumerism, regulates beauty standards, and normalizes the myth of romantic love, female competition and compulsory heterosexuality through stories with female leads that take for granted gender equality and other feminist gains. Postfeminist media takes into account feminism only to do a disservice to it.

I grew up in a Mexican middle-class family during the 1990s, where I was imbued in U.S. popular culture from an early age. Most of youth culture in Mexico was —and still is— imported from our northern neighbor, which not only means watching the most recent Disney film or TV show, but also participating in consumer culture: having the lunchbox with the image of the characters, the clothes, the shoes, the doll. I was surrounded by postfeminist media where, on the one hand, girls and young women were the protagonists of the story; on the other, the narratives contributed towards toxic ideas about womanhood that limited the representation of women. Feminist analysts of postfeminist U.S. media have pointed out the contradictions of girl culture, and have called out popular culture for entrenching sexist, racist and classist stereotypes (McRobbie, 2009; Tasker and Negra, 2007a; Gill and Christina Scharff, 2011).

At first glance, the formula of *Lumberjanes* (2014-ongoing) does not seem so different from other cultural products for youth produced in the U.S., so why were reviewers so quick to label it as a feminist comic? According to some, it was the presence of female characters fighting monsters (Regan, 2014), but *The Powerpuff Girls* (1998-2005) and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003) also do that and they are emblematic postfeminist characters (Hains, 2009; Rowe Karlyn, 2010). Having a group of girls as protagonists does not necessarily make it feminist either, as can be exemplified by the movie *Mean Girls* (2004). I became interested in understanding why the comic was being labeled as feminist, to determine if the comic actually had feminist sensibilities, or if readers were labeling as such based on new feminist visibilities on the media. I chose to analyze the friendships in the comic for the important role that these relationships have in *Lumberjanes* and in feminism.

By analyzing the representation of the friendships in the comic, a central point of the narrative, I can assert the underlying feminist values that *Lumberjanes* deposits on nonhierarchical supportive networks. At the same time, I pay attention to the celebration of friendships as a feminist site of resistance. I bring an analysis of space to demonstrate how a separate sphere of action allows the existence of the alternative girlhood, while still being in dialogue with hegemonic expectations for youth. For the analysis I take into account the first 44 issues of *Lumberjanes* (2014-2017), as at the moment of my research that is where the most recent story arc is closed. I will not consider the three annual specials, *Lumberjanes: Beyond Bayleaf* (2015), *Makin' the Ghost of It* (2016) and *Faire and Square* (2017), nor the recently published middle grade novels *Lumberjanes: Unicorn Power!* (2017) and *Lumberjanes: The Moon Is Up* (2018) in order to limit the scope of my research to the monthly comics.

In my research I use feminist theories developed in the analysis of patterns present in Western media culture that indicate a postfeminist sensibility. Rosalind Gill (2007) identified that postfeminism, rather than a cultural backlash against feminism, consists of practices and discourses closely related with neoliberal ideologies —choice, agency, freedom— that entangle feminist with anti-feminist themes in a sensibility that permeates media culture. Most postfeminist media analysis focus on media produced in the U.S. after the 1990s: TV shows, movies and women’s magazines. So far, American comics have not received much attention as a medium for analysis of postfeminism. On the other hand, feminist scholars studying comics in the U.S. have worked on recognizing and reevaluating female creators, as well as analyzing female-created American comics and female superheroes. The attention to superwomen may be because they are more popular in the comic book industry, as is the whole superhero genre; it may be due to the research possibilities of several parallel storylines and adaptations to other storytelling mediums; or it may be because they are regarded as an emblematic site to look at Western cultural ideals of womanhood.

Although I find this strand of research interesting, I perceive that female characters who do not have superpowers have not been given as much consideration. My research intends to bridge this gap by looking at *Lumberjanes* (2014-ongoing), a comic created in the U.S. by four self-identified women about a group of girls in a summer camp that weaves girl power discourse with feminist values and identities. An analysis of *Lumberjanes* will contribute to feminist scholarship of media representation of female friendships and young women in comics. Furthermore, it will contribute to the understanding of the contradictions and negotiations that media created for young women engages with.

This is a comic that relies on the empowerment of girls as something that is taken for granted, but what is the language of that empowerment? What is it based on? In what way is *Lumberjanes* disrupting certain postfeminist representations of young women in comics, while reproducing others? How is this comic creating a space within the industry that provides readers with a wider range of female identified and non-binary characters? How is the comic articulating different girlhoods? How is it creating a space for feminism in popular culture? In what way is *Lumberjanes* participating in the current visibility of feminism in the media?

To answer these questions, I focus on the characters' interpersonal relationships — friendships— and the place they inhabit —the heterotopic space of the camp— as in both cases relations are central to the construction of identity, an entanglement of relations that inform each other, and where the negotiations between feminism and postfeminism are visible. Through the creation of a sense of place, drawn from identifying with a place (Rose, 2002, p. 89), the characters articulate their belonging within a community. The place is built through relations, so the characters' identity is tied to place and the network of social relations that occur therein.

The thesis is divided into three chapters. The first one places my research in the context of postfeminist media culture and girl culture. The concept of postfeminism has been in use for more than thirty years with divergent meanings, here I follow Angela McRobbie's (2004) definition of postfeminism and Rosalind Gill's (2007) later complexification of the term, in order to better understand the current visibility of some feminisms that coexist with a normalization of postfeminist sensibilities. Following this, I talk about the circumstances of the creation of the comic *Lumberjanes* and delineate certain elements that make it a unique

cultural product in the current American comic industry. The second chapter is an analysis of the articulation of the main characters' friendships, to establish how their representation challenges postfeminist sensibilities. The comic indicates the potential of feminist networks of kinship, as reflected in friendship, to disrupt heteronormative relations and traditional gender roles. The third chapter is an analysis of the setting where the action takes place, the summer camp. I use Michel Foucault's (1986) concept of heterotopia to show how the creation of a counter space enables power relations to shift.

At a time when feminism is becoming a trendy identity to acquire and the term is commodified to promote brands, the distinction between feminist and postfeminist discourse in media is increasingly blurry. Certain feminisms are having a moment, but that does not mean that postfeminism is being displaced; quite the opposite, both discourses are becoming more entangled. Popular culture is one of the privileged sites where production and reproduction of mediated feminisms and femininities occur, and it is where I direct my attention to study representations of gender relations.

Chapter 1

Literature review and context

When Angela McRobbie published "Post-Feminism and Popular Culture" in 2004, feminism in Western media culture was repudiated. It was common to find feminists misrepresented and ridiculed in U.S. popular culture, usually in opposition to the main female character. What these representations communicated was that equality had already been achieved, and in a society where men and women were equal, feminists were no longer necessary. Set in that cultural context, McRobbie defines postfeminism as a backlash, a reaction against the visibility in the media and the legal triumphs that the feminist movement had in the seventies.¹ Although postfeminism is a term that has been present in feminist cultural studies since the 1980s, its meaning is still disputed.

Gill (2007) builds on McRobbie's conception of postfeminism and elaborates that it is not only a feature present in media, but a sensibility in which Western media culture is imbued. This definition gives flexibility to the term, since postfeminism is not something that media either has or does not have, but rather all media is being produced in a context that validates the assumptions of postfeminism. That way, feminist affinities can appear in a lesser or greater extent in a text, allowing for the possibility of the same text slipping and containing coincidences with contradictory positions such as postfeminism. Expanding on the use of the

¹ Some of these victories in the U.S. are Roe v. Wade in 1973, the approval of the Equal Rights Amendment by the U.S. Senate in 1972, the triumph of Billy Jean King over Bobby Riggs in the tennis match called 'The battle of the sexes' in 1973, and the gender discrimination lawsuit against Newsweek magazine brought forth by sixty of its female employees in 1970.

concept, Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff (2011) refer to four: an analytical perspective, a break within the feminist scholarship; an historical shift, to indicate a before and after the Second Wave; a backlash discourse; and a sensibility that permeates all cultural aspects.

The popular perception of feminism has changed since the publications of these texts. Currently, there is a recognition of certain gender inequalities, which makes feminism relevant in the mainstream again, to the point of gaining a renewed visibility. This has led to questions regarding the usefulness of the category of postfeminism. Has it become obsolete, now that is evident that equality has not been achieved? Faced with these academic doubts, Gill (2016) reviews her position regarding postfeminist sensibilities in the second half of the decade of 2010 and concludes that while the media is recognizing some feminist issues — and ignoring many others— the way in which they are addressed is closely related to a neoliberal logic that goes according to hegemonic interests.

Currently, then, it has become more common for texts to mix a commodified feminism and postfeminist sensibilities in the same message. Some authors (Genz, 2006; Keller, 2015) problematize this binary opposition and find a politics of postfeminism that give agency to subjects, albeit on an individualistic level. Other authors have theorized the intermediate place where exchanges between feminism and postfeminism occur, calling them popular feminisms (Banet-Weiser and Portwood-Stacer, 2017) or emergent feminisms (Keller and Ryan, 2018). The revisions made by Gill (2016, 2017) allows us to identify texts —with a wide distribution— that operate within a neocolonial capitalist system, yet promote feminist themes, but are not necessarily working to dismantle patriarchy, and are even on occasion accomplices in unjust systems.

I recognize in *Lumberjanes* a discourse situated within popular feminism that bridges commercial and political interests in a cultural product with a wide readership. In the comic, feminist issues and postfeminist sensibilities are present. To identify both, and indicate the way they are materialized in the comic, I first trace the shift of postfeminism from an active undoing of feminism, as conceptualized by McRobbie, to the current popularity of feminism as an identity that is being claimed, even if it is being commodified. Later, I review girl culture and the contradictions inherent to it, linked to postfeminist sensibilities and, finally, I conclude with an overview of *Lumberjanes*.

What is postfeminism

Angela McRobbie's text "Post-feminism and Popular Culture" (2004) establishes the basis of postfeminism as backlash. In the essay, she analyses the way popular movies, TV shows and magazines produced after 1990 in the U.S. and the U.K. for women and teenagers were undermining feminist gains. She calls this process an "undoing of feminism": "post-feminism positively draws on and invokes feminism as that which can be taken into account, to suggest that equality is achieved, in order to install a whole repertoire of new meanings which emphasize that it is no longer needed" (McRobbie, 2004, p. 255). She further states that postfeminism is breaking with feminist histories and political activity. It demands of young women a separation from feminism in order to be recognized as modern girls. Because apparently feminism is no longer needed, feminists are portrayed in the media as outdated and redundant, and young women do not want to be associated with that.

Postfeminist popular culture was especially visible in TV and movies during the 1990s and early 2000s. Because it assumes that gender equality has been achieved, translated into women's access to the workplace and thus gaining consumer citizenship, it became

common to find female protagonists in these projects. The widespread visibility of women in media promoted a false notion of equality while producing self-policing subjects through the beauty industrial complex (McRobbie, 2009, p. 63). Postfeminism invisibilizes systemic oppressions by placing responsibility on individuals for their own success or failure in a neoliberal world. Furthermore, it erases or misrepresents women who do not conform to hegemonic ideas of womanhood,² as well as people who bring politics back from where postfeminism banished them. Postfeminism does not allow for the existence of collective power that questions and transforms the institutions towards real freedom for everyone.

The preferred subjects of postfeminism are young white middle class heterosexual women. It centers its discourse around them, universalizing their experience through different mediums of storytelling, but it does not mean that other subjects are not affected by it. In the intersection of traditional and neoliberal values, postfeminism requires a compromise from women. McRobbie calls this a “double entanglement” (McRobbie, 2004, p. 255): in acceptance of neo-conservatism, women gain choice, empowerment, agency and freedom. It is especially profitable to target girls, who are bombarded by discourses regulating their appearance, their desires and their emotions. Girls are surrounded by contradictions, on the one hand, the media celebrates their capacities, girls are encouraged to

² Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) establish the term ‘hegemonic masculinity’ to designate the socially and historically constructed form of masculinity taken as an ideal in any determined culture. It is relational, which means that all other forms of masculinities are compared to the hegemonic one. Although the authors do not define hegemonic femininity, it is understood that there is also a hierarchy of femininities, all subordinate to hegemonic masculinity.

become whoever they want; on the other, they still have to live in a patriarchal world that molds them to fit hegemonic gender roles.

After McRobbie's essay the conversation expanded and the use of postfeminism in academia diversified (Gill, 2007; Tasker and Negra, 2007a; McRobbie, 2009; Gill and Scharff, 2011; Budgeon, 2011). At the same time, human and economic interests were starting to bring feminist themes into mainstream platforms. In 2012, the World Bank launched its first World Development report focusing on gender equality; in 2013, Sheryl Sandberg published *Lean In*; one year later, during the MTV Video Music Awards, Beyoncé performed in front of a huge sign that read 'feminist'; a couple months after that, the UN campaign HeForShe launched with actress Emma Watson as spokesperson. The changed Western cultural context now recognizes some feminist claims as valid, so how do we make sense of postfeminism in coexistence with feminist visibility on the media?

The state of postfeminism now

Popular discourse has shifted in recent years and media with it. As opposed to the years following the 1980s backlash (Faludi, 1991), feminism has gained visibility as a talking point and buzzword. 'Feminist' has become an identity to embrace in popular culture as well. Rosalind Gill (2007) reflects on the transformation of postfeminism in the public eye since the publication of the essay where she established the characteristics of the postfeminist sensibility. Now it is not so much about the undoing of feminism, but is rather about placing the responsibility of improving social inequalities on individuals —preventing the creation of community networks— the personal transformation through consumerism, and no real systemic change. I concur there has been a media embrace of the word feminism —as seen on popular feminisms like neoliberal feminism, that has co-opted activist discourse and

molded feminist issues to fit hegemonic discourse and capitalist ideals— but not necessarily of the politics, which signals the pervasiveness of the current postfeminist sensibility.

Gill (2016; 2017) observes how postfeminism has changed in the last ten years, it went from a clear disavowal of feminist politics and a rupture between generations in which it demanded girls to distance themselves from feminism in order for them to be legible as modern young women (McRobbie, 2004, p. 260; McRobbie, 2009, p. 2), to a commodification of feminism in which the liberation of all women is equated to the individual, and often economic, choices made by some women.

Feminism seemed redundant because equality appeared to have been achieved, women had the freedom to choose to wear make up, for example, and embrace a traditional femininity without that being a sign of patriarchal oppression. Now, apparently, applying makeup can be labeled as a feminist act, because wearing lipstick can make you feel empowered in a patriarchal system that oppresses women. In the second instance there is a recognition of inequality, and an identification with the label feminist, but both are participating in the reproduction of beauty norms and self-surveillance.

The new visibility of popular feminism hinges on choice and the empowerment of women, resulting in an expansion of the concept ‘feminist’ to encompass products and practices, and diluting the meaning (Valenti, 2014). Capitalizing on this, both people and corporations have branded themselves and their actions as feminist (Pruchniewska, 2017), including Kim Kardashian’s selfie and Sarah Palin’s conservative political platform (Gibson and Heyse, 2014). Neoliberal ideas and sensibilities are taken for granted, individualism, meritocracy, empowerment, choice, internalized surveillance are part of our everyday lives, which makes postfeminism harder to recognize (Gill, 2017).

Despite postfeminism's shifts, its preferred subjects are still young women (McRobbie, 2009; Bae, 2011); girlhood is still a site where consumer identities are encouraged. The girl power discourse of the nineties and early noughties was a great force in the visibilization of (some) young women's stories in the media, but also normalized postfeminist sensibilities. The next section regards the relation of postfeminism and girl culture, as *Lumberjanes* belongs to it. The creators are influenced by nineties' girl power texts, and they are contributing to the production of girl culture by making a comic about a group of girls that is intended to be read by everyone, but especially by young women (Dietsch, 2014).

Girl culture

Girl power culture popularized during the nineties gave young women a space to see themselves reflected in media and created ways for self-expression. Although originally it was a reclamation of women's place in the music industry, specifically in the underground punk movement of Washington state —brought by the early nineties Riot Grrrl movement that championed feminist issues and self-sufficiency— it did not take long for mainstream culture to take notice, strip it from its politics and co-opt it. By the mid nineties, girl power was fraught with postfeminist themes, it became a slogan that appeared next to any product targeted at girls. Girl power recognizes young women's agency, even if it is used for neoliberal purposes; but girls' power has not always been celebrated.

In her book *Girls: Feminine Adolescence in Popular Culture and Cultural Theory* (2002), Catherine Driscoll makes a history of discourses about female adolescence to show the way girlhood has been talked about and understood through various ways of thinking. She does this not with the intention of finding an initial source or pure essence of what

girlhood is meant to be, or to demonstrate a cause and effect of certain representations, but to map girlhood as it has been culturally produced. According to her findings, through media and cultural studies girls have been characterized as passive audiences, as impressionable consumers. Driscoll disagrees with this depiction, and argues for girls' participation in the cultural production of girlhood. It is especially evident in girl power discourse, a narrative that is still present in contemporary girl culture: it is produced both by mainstream media and its target audience. Driscoll connects girl culture with postfeminism in the elements that produce girl culture as a regulatory discourse. Girl culture, for its unique position in the intersection of politics and popular culture, encompasses "commodity, style and identity" (Driscoll, 2008, p. 17).

Girl power was used to indicate agency and resistance against a cultural arrangement that repeatedly sidelined young women, it was originally a marker of 'do-it-yourself' culture, where female creativity was encouraged through the production of independent music and zines, in opposition to the sexist music industry and punk scene in the U.S. The concept now does not hold any radical notion and, popularized by the Spice Girls, has become a slogan. What started as a demand for a reevaluation of young women's importance in cultural and political life, and an assertion of girls' potential for action, has been "normalized within the discourses of consumer culture" (Banet-Weiser, 2004, p. 119). As popular as the tagline is, it does not indicate youth's widespread identification with feminist themes.

Girl culture of the nineties and noughties had a prevalent postfeminist sensibility. It celebrated girlhood as a site of power, agency and choice. It declared that girls had the potential to accomplish anything they set their minds to, because they were just as capable as boys. Girl power discourse is aspirational, empowering, fun, positive, encouraging,

commodified. It does not take into account any systemic oppression, which results in a postracial and heteronormative representation of girlhood. The media produced during that time demonstrates how feminist and postfeminist discourses are entangled. It could be said that TV shows of that era became the precursor of current popular feminisms on the media. Women-led programs became very popular, and little by little, as mainstream media picked up feminist themes, token visibility gave way to better developed and more diverse characters in entertainment.

Some media scholars have questioned the authenticity of popular feminist discourse in TV shows. In an article about Nickelodeon's³ position as a producer of girl power culture, Sarah Banet-Weiser (2004) problematizes the role of media created for young female audiences. Her intention is to determine whether the programming of the channel was riding the trend wave of girl power, or whether it meant a new way to do feminism that had children's television as a key producer of knowledge and practices. Her conclusions are a reminder that academic work that tries to clearly resolve if something is or is not feminist might be missing the contradictions and entanglements of girl culture. As Sarah Projansky (2007) suggests, postfeminist discourse is characterized by juxtaposition, both/and instead of either/or.

³ A popular children's television network from the U.S.

Contradictions of girl culture

Sarah Banet-Weiser (2004) found that the TV shows she analyzed both capitalize on and produce girl power culture, which might result in the coexistence of contradictory discourses in the same text. She argues that girl culture is inherently ambiguous, since however much political agency it advocates, it is bound to consumerism. The author identifies in Nickelodeon's programming a "complicity to the system" that both makes a "positive gender portrayal" (Banet-Weiser, 2004, p. 127) and depicts empowered individuals as consumer citizens, who in turn circle back to the channel, that profits from it. I extend her conclusion to comics, magazines, movies, and other media that promotes girl power in consumer culture. The endgame of all mainstream media is to make a profit.

As I have mentioned before, popular feminisms are currently having a moment of cultural acceptance. In the neoliberal media culture, it is an identity that is being sought after to increase profit; commodities are taking precedence over politics. Visibility does not necessarily bring change. What Banet-Weiser explains with the "economy of visibility" (2018) is that representation is turning into the goal, instead of it being the means to bring attention to underlying systemic injustices.

We should not dismiss the power of visibility. The presence of women on screens, or on the pages of comic books, is a recognition of women as participants in social and political life. Of course, there is also the issue of representation and the roles that women play in the media. But because what is not named does not exist, girls, as well as feminists, need first to exist in popular culture to begin thinking about the way they are represented and what that means for the material realities of youth. We should problematize the popular feminist visibilities present in media produced in girl culture.

What can be found in the commercially imbued popular feminism is a juxtaposition of social and individual concerns that speaks to young people on their terms. At the same time, it takes for granted feminism—it is now “common sense” (Gill, 2007, p. 161)—insofar as it concedes boys and girls the same opportunities, and actively advocates for girls’ agency and political engagement through female visibility in media. The assumption of feminist gains, in conjunction with a depoliticized discourse, could lead to what Danielle Giffort identifies as “implicit feminism” (Giffort, 2011, p. 569).

Opposite to what Urszula Pruchniewska writes of online creators who self-brand themselves as feminists without any explicit feminist perspective in their work (Pruchniewska, 2017), Giffort’s implicit feminism refers to a practice attuned to feminism, without labeling it as such. For example, Joss Whedon, the creator of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003) has talked about his intention to create a heroine that subverted the trope of the petite defenseless blonde girl of the horror genre (Cocca, 2016, p. 158, 167). Her heroine could defend herself and save the world, but also hang out with her school friends at the shopping mall. According to him, the path toward a change in Western culture—in which smart and powerful female heroes that both men and women root for become a regular element of popular media—could only happen through implicit feminism. Instead of lecturing about the power and effects of patriarchy, his solution for reaching a larger audience is to use “popular tropes in popular culture that people are comfortable with, while simultaneously undermining them in an entertaining way” (Cocca, 2016, p. 160). *Buffy* was a show that mixed cultural critique with the realities of teenagers and included a dose of the supernatural.

Buffy embodies the girl power discourse present in postfeminist youth media: a heroine that fights as well, or even better, than any man. Independent and empowered, she embraces her femininity complying with heteronormative beauty standards. She is a strong, transgressive and exceptional woman. *Buffy* is a strong influence in *Lumberjanes*, the creators as well as the official press release for the launch of the comics reference it (Dietsch, 2014; Pantozzi, 2014). In a similar way, *Lumberjanes* employs supernatural elements to start conversations about the fears and uncertainties of the characters regarding family, adolescence and their identities, while normalizing feminist issues in girl culture. Although *Lumberjanes* does not explicitly name feminism, I find that the absence is intended as a strategy to avoid immediate rejection from an environment that is still hostile towards feminism as a political practice. And without naming it, the comic contributes to the normalization of feminist sensibilities in U.S. popular culture.

***Lumberjanes*, an all-ages comic for girls**

Lumberjanes is a monthly comic published in the U.S. by BOOM! Box, an imprint of the independent comic publisher BOOM! Studios. While it is labeled as an all-ages comic, its target audience are preteens and teens. The classification does not really work as a content rating; it is more a marketing strategy to not exclude any possible readers from the story. While everyone is welcome to read it, it is particularly created for girls.⁴ The creative team

⁴ The original pitch for *Lumberjanes*, printed at the end of the extended edition *Lumberjanes to the Max Vol. 1* (2015), indicates that the series is for “girls of all ages (but especially 9-14)”.

has been vocal regarding their intention to make a comic where young women could see themselves, and to let girls know that they also belong in the world of comics.

The story follows a group of friends at camp during one summer, where they become the center of strange paranormal events. It launched in April, 2014, originally planned as an eight issue miniseries, but due to the initial response of readers it was extended to an ongoing series. The first two issues sold out as soon as they were released and quickly got a second printing, both outselling the projected number of orders.⁵ One year later, the trade paperback sold out during the pre-order period, before it was even released. The comics have been commercially successful, attracting a wide readership comprised of children, teenagers, and adults. People both in and outside the comic industry have been lauding the comics since the first issue was published. In 2015, *Lumberjanes* won two Eisner awards, a prize given annually recognizing outstanding works in the comic industry: one for Best New Series and the other for Best Publication for Teens. The series was also recognized by the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) in 2016 as an Outstanding Comic Book for its representation in media of the LGBTQ community. The series might make the jump from paper to screen in the near future, as the books were optioned by 20th Century Fox and there are plans to make the story into a live-action movie.

The comic was created by Brooke A. Allen, Grace Ellis, Noelle Stevenson and Shannon Watters. At that time Watters was an editor at BOOM! Studios, she was in charge

⁵ Rich Johnston, 2014, "Lumberjanes #2 Sells Out 12,000 Print Run –Twice Initial Orders– And Goes to Second Printing", *Bleeding Cool*, retrieved from <https://www.bleedingcool.com/2014/05/29/lumberjanes-2-sells-out-12000-print-run-twice-initial-orders-and-goes-to-second-printing/>

of the new imprint and was looking for fun experimental comics to support, she wanted to create a space for creator-owned comics that could fill some of the gaps she perceived in a mostly-male industry producing books for mostly-male readers. She got in touch with Grace Ellis, who was a writer for *Autostraddle*, a blog and online community created by queer women. They threw around some fun ideas for a comic they would enjoy writing, something they would have liked had it existed when they were both young girls (ComicWow!, 2014; GameSpot Universe, 2014; Gilly, 2016). They both grew up in the nineties, so they enjoyed cultural products that showed women in leading roles, like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003), *Sailor Moon* (1992-1997), *The Baby-Sitters Club* (1990), and *Sabrina the Teenage Witch* (1996-2003). However, they were aware of the limiting representations of girlhood in those influences (Dietsch, 2014), as they presented a model of heterosexual, white middle class girl.

Mainstream media popularized in the U.S. during the postfeminist boom of the mid 1990s and early 2000s created characters that expressed feminist social concerns only to portray them as ridiculous or unnecessary based on the myth that equality had been achieved, as Rebecca C. Hains (2009) shows in her analysis of the character Femme Fatale from *The Powerpuff Girls* and Shego from *Kim Possible*. Anita Sarkeesian calls it the “Straw Feminist” trope in one of her Trope vs. Women video essays (2011), giving several examples using popular TV shows to explain how feminist characters are used for laughs and to demarcate the strong intelligent female protagonist from feminism and political action.

With this in mind, Watters and Ellis came up with the concept of a group of girls in a summer camp battling monsters, and invited Noelle Stevenson to join the project as a co-writer and concept art developer. She had a popular webcomic, *Nimona*, and was known for

her fanart illustrations on Tumblr, where she also discussed sexism in comics and in superhero movies. The participation of Stevenson gave the project a far-reaching appeal thanks to her large online fanbase: she currently has 77,456 followers on twitter, compared to Ellis' 6,195 or Watters' 8,985.⁶

Lumberjanes is a publication where women are writing and drawing stories that go against the majority male lead stories in comics. Its success shows that there is space and demand in the industry for other perspectives, different voices, to enrich the medium and allow multiplicity (Massey, 1999, p. 3). The creators are demonstrating that diversity is not a weakness, and have followed the comics' teamwork spirit by collaborating with more than forty guest artists, almost all of them women, who have been commissioned to illustrate the variant covers.⁷ Variants are limited single issue covers, different to the official one, illustrated by artists that give their own spin to the characters. Variants were popularized in the nineties to increase sales; comic publishers released limited number of issues with a special cover, making it a prized item for readers to collect. It was not about the story, but an object to possess in order to complete a collection. People would buy several issues of the same number because they had different covers.

A technique originally devised to increase profit is giving women creators a platform to showcase their talent, it is building a network of women supporting women and it is

⁶ Data collected from Twitter on February 11, 2018 by accessing the online profiles of Noelle Stevenson (@gingerhazing) <https://twitter.com/gingerhazing>, Grace Ellis (@gracecellis) from <https://twitter.com/gracecellis>, and Shannon Watters (@shanito) <https://twitter.com/shanito>.

⁷ A cover gallery that includes the credits of the creators is available on *Comic Vine*: <https://comicvine.gamespot.com/lumberjanes/4050-72941/>

contributing to the expansion of the representation of girls in comics. As opposed to the actual cover of the issue, which serves to attract readers and give them an idea of what they will read in the following pages, the alternative covers are a way to develop the story's universe beyond the narrative arcs and for the artists to freely portray the characters as they desire. The range of illustrators from different backgrounds working on the variant covers presents an opportunity to visualize the characters in a different light. Since each artist gives their own style to the characters, artists also bring with them their own palette of colors, which means that depending on who illustrates that month's variant, the protagonists will be more or less racialized; this is a good thing for an increased visibilization of women of color in comics, as in the original character design all the girls are light skinned. In trade paperbacks, where a couple of issues are collected and published as a single book, the variants are included as a gallery at the end of the book.

As demonstrated by Comicsgate —last year's organized harassment campaign online that targeted women and people of color writing for Marvel— comic industry's gatekeepers can be very hostile towards anyone who threatens their status quo, meaning books written for and by white heterosexual men. However, the demographics and sensibilities in the comic industry are changing, and *Lumberjanes* is part of that. The context of the production of this comic shows an active decision from the creative partners to be consistent with the values portrayed in the comics, where community, collaboration and support creates a safe and alternative space for female identified people. In the next section I shall analyze the heart of the comics' community, friendship, to see how the articulation of it presents a disruption of postfeminist representations of female friend groups in Western media.

Chapter 2

Feminist friendships in *Lumberjanes*

The topic of friendship is common in U.S. mainstream media. Non romantic relationships have been constantly depicted in movies, TV shows, books, comics, and music. In this chapter I focus on the representation of friendship in *Lumberjanes* as I find it to be an articulation of feminist friendship between women, and an opposition to postfeminist representations of these relationships. In order to demarcate feminist friendships, I first establish what I mean by postfeminist friendships in mainstream media. Later I establish the potential of friendships between women for feminism, and the way their representation challenges widespread postfeminist sensibilities in media. I end the chapter with an analysis of the friendships in *Lumberjanes* to show how their articulation disrupts heteronormative representations of female friendships in youth media.

While friendship is part of many narratives in popular culture, especially in fiction targeted at young people, like *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, the *Percy Jackson* series or *Wonder*,⁸ I will limit the scope of my research to representations of friendships between women in U.S. mainstream media produced for women as their target audience.

Postfeminist representations of friendships

Alison Winch refers to postfeminist friendships among women as a site of patriarchal reproduction of power “where women are complicit in the regulation and policing of female

⁸ Books that are in the New York Times Best Sellers list for the week of May 27, 2018. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/books/best-sellers/series-books/> on May 18, 2018.

bodies” (2013, p. 5). In her study of two books written by a pair of female friends that instruct readers in matters of body image —how to dress in *What Not to Wear* and how to eat in *Skinny Bitch*— Winch theorizes female friendship in postfeminist contexts. Drawing from Angela McRobbie’s postfeminism (2009), in which the self is a project that can be transformed through commodification —the makeover— to achieve authentic femininity, Winch concludes that friendship between women has been emphasized in media to show it as an essential element of a normal reality for girls and women, an asset to gain that authenticity. The cultural emphasis of female friendships is not placed on the loving and fulfilling relationships between women; instead, it is placed on the regulating activities in which female friendships engage, “peer control” (Winch, 2013, p. 2), under the guise of care for the other’s well-being.

Winch develops the concept “girlfriend culture” (2011) to name the mediated image of postfeminist friendships between women that have been popularized since the end of the 1990s. The girlfriends promoted by these images create “intimate networks of comparison, feedback and motivation” (Winch, 2013, p. 2) that, while giving a sense of belonging to a group, “regulate their consumers around body image by inducing feelings of shame and humiliation” (Winch, 2013, p. 10), paving the way for toxic relationships like the ones the characters of *Heathers* (1989), *Mean Girls* (2004) or *Gossip Girl* (2007-2012) are engaged in.

Although the self-regulatory practices of girlfriend culture can be found in media produced for women of all ages, youth media has become a preferred site for the normalization of heteronormative girlfriendship discourse. Young women have been consumers of media created for older audiences (Tally, 2005), as it was not until the end of

1990s that the entertainment industry started producing media especially for preadolescent girls. The category of “tween”⁹ is a recent marketing strategy designed to capture a large consumer group (Tally, 2005, p. 313). Tweens are a profitable niche market for the influence they have in their parent’s purchasing decisions (Myers, 2013, p. 194), and for their loyalty as an audience. It is evident in the abundance of book and movie series, like *The Princess Diaries* (published in 2000), *Gossip Girl* (published in 2002) or *High School Musical* (2007). After having a successful first installment, the products become profitable brands for its several sequels, spinoffs and adaptations to other mediums. The creation of the tween consumer demographic resulted in an increase of media produced for young women (Rowe Karlyn, 2010, p. 6). Preteen narratives are ideal for the reproduction of girlfriend culture because the audience has an important consumer potential and is ready to adopt consumerist practices for their ties to normative femininity.

It is important to clarify that even though stories about female friendship became almost a staple of youth media after the 2000s, seen in movies like *Bring it On* (2000), *The Cheetah Girls* (2003), *The Sisterhood of the Travelling Pants* (2005), *Wild Child* (2008) and *Pitch Perfect* (2013), a careful consideration of the power dynamics in the relationships as well as an analysis of the normative messages transmitted can reveal how girlfriend culture reinforces postfeminist sensibilities and anti-feminist messages. In 2013, Kristen Myers analyzed four popular teen shows that have been praised for having central female characters,

⁹ Catherine Driscoll (2008) and Rebecca Hains (2009) use the word “tween” to define the mental state and attitude of girls who are between childhood and adolescence.

The Suite Life of Zack & Cody (2005-2008), *Hannah Montana* (2007-2011), *iCarly* (2007-2012) and *Wizards of Waverly Place* (2007-2012), and found a strong postfeminist content in all of them as the shows “celebrated beauty and heterosexual coupling, demonized strong and unattractive women, and valorized antisocial girls” (Myers, 2013, p. 198).

Postfeminist representations of young women engaged in hierarchical relationships among peers —like the protagonist girl and her sidekick from *Lizzie McGuire* (2001-2004) and *13 Going on 30* (2004), or the queen bee and her squad seen in *Clueless* (1996), *The Hot Chick* (2002), *The Duff* (2015) or *F the Prom* (2017)— have been abundant. The constructed girlfriends reinforces femininity as a “bodily property” (Gill, 2007, p. 149) and encourages women to recognize “comparison, envy and competitiveness” (Winch, 2011, p. 363) as part of friendship. Girlfriend culture promotes the “girlfriend gaze” (Winch, 2013, p. 5) to monitor each other.

The girlfriend gaze makes women surveil their friend’s physical appearance and attitudes, as well as self-policing, done under the belief that it is for the health and happiness of the other person. Postfeminist media links appearance with women’s value, furthering the notion that the closest we are to an idealized beauty standard the happier we will be. Makeover culture reinforces the idea of the transformation of the inner self through changing the outside by the consumption of commodities. It is telling readers and viewers that if they only change how they look all of their problems will vanish, without acknowledging systemic oppressions and social inequalities. Movies like *The Princess Diaries* (2001), *Freaky Friday* (2003), *Confessions of a Teenage Drama Queen* (2004), *A Cinderella Story* (2004) and *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006) have their lead (white, middle class, heterosexual, thin) female character go through a physical transformation in order to reveal their true inner self. In these

stories, the main characters are on a journey of self discovery, and after the completion of trials they learn that self worth is more important than royal titles or fashionable clothes. Even if the characters come to this realization at the end, the movies glorify consumerism with shopping montages that equate purchasing power with self empowerment. Postfeminist representations of female friendships also uphold heteronormativity (Myers, 2013), for even when the male love interests are minor characters, the protagonists are paired up with them as a reward to indicate successful femininity and a happy ending (Winch, 2013), as seen in movies like *Winning London* (2001) and *Frozen* (2013).

Friendships among women, then, are a marker of normative femininity. Furthermore, postfeminist girlfriends do not translate into a feminist alliance of all women. In the current entanglement of popular feminist visibilities and postfeminist sensibilities, Akane Kanai (2017) has observed how feminism is instrumentalized in online girlfriendly spaces. She establishes that, currently, friendships are being valued as an important relationship in women's lives, but are still immersed in competition and comparison with other groups of girlfriends, resulting in a hierarchy of 'my friends' over 'other girls'. Noting the influence of Western media culture, Kanai remarks that "girlfriendship in popular culture has been conflated with feminism, both personalizing and reducing feminism to female friendship and associated affects of care, mutual warmth and fun" (Kanai, 2017, p. 247). According to Kanai, the girlfriendship enacted by the girls online, like when they show appreciation and support for their friends yet are fast to criticize other girls perceived to be a threat to their hetero-relations, is a selective reconfiguration of certain feminist ideas that suit their normative femininities. The new visibility of feminism in mainstream media has brought a popularization of themes and concepts picked and chosen, mostly depoliticized, that are

included in texts in order to indicate that the authors take into account feminism to subsequently disregard it or instrumentalize it.

Feminist friendships

As we have seen, groups of girls in mainstream media and girlfriendship are common in postfeminist representations of friendships that produce and reproduce heteronormativity. Female friendships do not automatically equate with feminist friendships, as the relationships discussed in the previous section are still inscribed in what Janice Raymond calls “heteroreality” (1986), where women exist solely in relation to men. Raymond identifies here an opportunity for the transformation of gender relations, and calls for a recognition of friendship’s “social and political power” (Raymond, 1986). She writes that the potential of feminist friendships relies on the decentering of men in women’s relationships.

Similarly, in her study of feminist relationships, Marilyn Friedman considers friendships to have “socially transformative potential” (Friedman, 1993, p. 5-6), and Ivy Schweitzer, tracing the philosophy of friendship in Western culture, emphasizes friendship among women as a “potentially subversive form of affiliation” (Schweitzer, 2016, p. 339). Another writer who has theorized feminist friendship, Sasha Roseneil, remarks on the way “the practices and theoretical concerns of feminists of previous eras and the social transformations of the contemporary world” (Roseneil, 2006, p. 339) come together in these meaningful relationships.

Feminist friendships among women have the potential to disrupt androcentric and heteronormative discourses that center on romantic hetero-relations (Walton, Weatherall and Jackson, 2002, p. 685) and can shift the narrative to allow other forms of intimate and caring relations fostered in a community of friends. For the relationship to be a productive

engagement for both persons involved it has to be a mutual appreciation for the other person as they are, not an attempt to assimilate the other into the self. Feminist friendships presuppose the dissolution of hierarchies as well as a recognition and appreciation of difference.

To foster feminist friendships among women, Susan Marine and Ruth Lewis emphasize the importance of spaces where women can form alliances and be “validated and acknowledged” (Marine and Lewis, 2017, p. 9). The authors recognize that “community is singularly important in young women’s feminism, emergent feminist consciousness, and in their enactment of feminist movement” (Marine and Lewis, 2017, p. 5). Likewise, Laurence Bachman writes how the friendships, as well as the physical spaces that allow them, “provide women with a place where they find respite from men, become aware of gender relations, take action to further their emancipation and receive support for their subversion” (Bachmann, 2014, p. 176).

I have referred here to the main aspects of feminist friendships that relate to my analysis of the representation of friendships in *Lumberjanes*: in the comic there is a challenge to the assumption of the heterosexual couple as the only site where caregiving and intimacy occur, and the characters benefit from the availability of a safe space separate from heteronormative men where they can develop their friendships. Based on this, and on what the aforementioned writers point out regarding the characteristics of feminist friendships, I conceive that representations of feminist friendships between women depict a sincere commitment to each other, without acting for their own selfish interests. The community created infuses a sense of belonging among the friends, who care for each other and allow others to take care of them as well. The friendships give a sense of worth in everyone,

promoting confidence and respect for people in and outside of the friendship. Next I analyze the articulation of friendships in *Lumberjanes* to look at the way the comic presents female relationships.

An ensemble cast without hierarchies

The comic tells the story of a group of tweens in a summer camp. Similar to the Girl Scouts, the Lumberjane scouts have activities outdoors and earn badges according to their performance; however, the Lumberjanes encounter mythological and ancient creatures, solve riddles and confront supernatural beings. Ripley, April, Jo, Molly and Mal are the five protagonists of *Lumberjanes*. The comic, and the scouts, take the name from a play on words resulting from gender swapping the term lumberjack, a popular U.S. representation of hypermasculinity embodied by a flannel wearing bearded man with a rough look. The characters in the series challenge the gendered image of the outdoors person, as well as any possible assumptions of what a female version of a lumberjack might look like, as the girls are not lumberjacks with pony tails. Besides the five main scouts, there is also Jen, the cabin leader; Rosie, the camp director; Nellie, the previous camp director who has the power to shapeshift into a bear and protects the forest; as well as the rest of the campers and other supporting characters, like the parents of the scouts and the older Lumberjanes.

The visual style of the comic is similar to that of recent popular animated cartoons developed for Disney XD and Cartoon Network that appeal to both young people and adults. Characters with rubbery arms and colorful design are not the only elements that connect *Lumberjanes* with the cartoons, some of them also make use of paranormal elements to tell

an emotional story, while portraying diverse masculinities,¹⁰ or address varied feminist themes on a mainstream platform, like questioning gender binary¹¹ or portraying a queer living community.¹² Each character in the comic is distinctly drawn, their clothes and hair style reinforce their individuality and accentuate certain traits of their personalities. Nevertheless, the girls are not typified.



Panel 1. Cover of the first issue

For example, of the five girls, April is the one who seems more traditionally feminine, wearing her long red hair tied over her head with a ribbon, wearing long earrings and pink

¹⁰ *Gravity Falls* (2012-2016) and *Over the Garden Wall* (2014).

¹¹ *Adventure Time* (2010-2018).

¹² *Steven Universe* (2013-ongoing).

outfits, liking glitter, writing a diary and being obsessed with mermaids. However, she is not written to be a damsel in distress. April has extraordinary physical strength that allows her to win an arm-wrestling duel with a very muscular male statue, transport her own mountain of suitcases without her dad's help, subdue an antlered wolf with a chokehold or carry a big tree trunk over her shoulder. She often challenges creatures without fear, does not shy away from confrontation and is ready to defend herself and her friends in physical combat with creatures larger and older than April that underestimate her for her feminine appearance.

Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards talk about how reclaiming girly cultural elements and aesthetics can be powerful for young women (Baumgardner and Richards, 2004, p. 60), as traditional femininity has been devalued and mocked. The authors assert that girls should not have to reject femininity in order to be taken into account. Women should be able to like the color pink without having to fit into a stereotyped idea of what a woman behaves or looks like, or without rejecting their feminist identity. April embraces her girly looks and interests, but is not bound by them, showing readers that there is no powerlessness in femininity. Nevertheless, she is one of five main characters, April represents only one possible way of being a girl and expressing herself. An ensemble cast with other well-developed leading female characters, each with their own style, interests and abilities, disrupts a uniform female representation in popular culture, for it shows diverse ways to be a girl, outside of a hierarchy and all of them valid.

Even though April's character combines femininity and physical strength, belonging to a group of other well-developed leading female characters prevents her from being the token 'strong female character', a very common trope in popular media that appeared in the last couple of years as a way to show that women can do the same thing as men can, but in

heels (McDougall, 2013). The strong female character appears in media as the sole woman in stories full of men, where her purpose is to look pretty while showing physical and mental strength, like Hit-Girl in *Kick-Ass* (2010), Black Widow in *The Avengers* (2012), Gamora in *Guardians of the Galaxy* (2014) or Princess Leia and Rey in the *Star Wars* franchise (1977-ongoing). While it is exciting to see female characters take on active roles, the strong female character representation objectifies women and does not develop them into complex characters. Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra have called the strong female character an “icon of female empowerment within postfeminist culture” (2007b, p. 20), because instead of exploring what makes female characters interesting, traditionally masculine traits are enacted by female bodies and celebrated as groundbreaking.

Diverse abilities explored in the comic open up the range of experiences and skills that girls have, disrupting gender roles and breaking hierarchies, for in the camp no one scout is any more important than another. Jo enjoys maths and is very good at engineering; Molly is exceptionally agile with anagrams; Mal excels at analyzing her environment and the resources at hand in order to design action plans; Ripley is a wild card impossible to predict, but while she seems to be in a world of her own, she manages to successfully intervene in crucial moments to help the group. While postfeminism encourages self-surveillance to achieve an erasure of difference (Gill and Scharff, 2011, p. 4), *Lumberjanes* celebrates these differences, marking each trait that make the characters unique. The scouts see the value of a diverse group of friends to maintain a network of nonhierarchical connections among women.

Female friendships are not portrayed as a site for cattiness and competition, like the Ashleys from *Recess* (1997-2001) or the Plastics from *Mean Girls*. Instead, the comic

explores feminist concerns in the way it articulates friendship, creating a caring and engaging community for girls. The scouts do not fit a mold where diversity is used as tokenism, instead they get to be developed as characters with backstories, and individual as well as collective goals. The relationships shown in *Lumberjanes* present a vision of friendship that supports each of its members, the possibility of a community where every element of the social fabric is there to aid the girls' development. The comic is showing the value of a supporting friendship through a group of diverse girls with different sexualities, body types, family backgrounds, skills and types of intelligences. When the comic introduces topics like being attracted to a friend of the same sex, being trans, or still figuring if you fit any of the binary gender categories, it is used as an opportunity to normalize non-normative aspects of the characters' identities and to demonstrate that everyone is welcome in the *Lumberjanes* community.

“Friendship to the max!”

The five protagonist and Jen, their cabin leader, live in the Roanoke cabin, named after the lost colony founded in 16th century by Sir Walter Raleigh. The girls, known in the camp as the Roanokes, show their support and care for each other with physical and verbal displays of affection. The way the Roanokes live their friendships is attuned to what Maria Lugones (Lugones and Rosezelle, 1995) writes about feminist friendships: they are a chosen decision, a constant act of will to show the other person care and support, without it being an obligation. Friendship is not a duty, it is a demonstration of love and an affirmation of mutual commitment.

It is common to see the Roanokes demonstrating affection and support by holding each other or putting an arm around the shoulders of someone who is feeling scared,

overwhelmed or questioning their belonging in the camp. It is often common for them to verbally encourage each other when someone is uncertain about their abilities or knowledge. The group is also fond of praising each other after successfully completing a task. They make sure to express their feelings of appreciation and care for each other. Their words are powerful, and letting another person know how you feel about them, in positive terms, strengthens the bond two people have and elevates self-esteem (Friedman, 1993, p. 219). All of these acts are conscious decisions taken by the characters to assert their friendship and their belonging in the group.

This willingness to participate in the friendship is especially evident in Jen, who gets involved in her camper's adventures, going further than what it is expected of her as cabin supervisor. Her position as counselor and the age difference with her campers does not prevent her from developing a friendship with the girls. Even though Jen has to make sure that the Roanokes are safe, as part of her job, the connection they develop is deeper than just employee-customer. Marilyn Friedman recognizes that when relationships are framed in a hierarchical structure—as it would be the case of camp counselor and scouts—genuine friendship is possible if there is a balance of respect and care that counteracts the unequal position (1993, p. 190).

The Lumberjanes camp was not always a space that fostered intergenerational friendships. There is a clear shift in the camp management that consciously prioritizes friendship as a source of empowerment among campers, the camp's motto: "Friendship to the max!". The comic shows, through a series of flashbacks, how life was at the camp when it was run by Nellie. The past is shown in opposition to the current camp arrangements under the supervision of Rosie. To emphasize the benefits of the camp's turn from a strict

militarized camp towards a loving community, readers are introduced to Abigail, who appears for the first time in issue #13. She represents the negative consequences of the absence of friendship.

The Lumberjanes used to resemble a training camp, with very strict rules where jokes and pranks were punished. When Nellie was the director of the camp their motto was “Protect and serve”. She tried to prepare the girls to be physically strong, disciplined and self-regulated, she did not foster relationships among them. For her, friendship is a weakness that distracts girls from what she considers important training for their future (issue #23). Based on what we learn from the past of the camp, like the panels showing flashbacks (issue #15) or when the Roanokes find the old training grounds (issue #34), the camp was militarized. Training girls to be as strong as boys is related with postfeminist ideas of a girl’s capability, situating a boy’s socially sanctioned behavior as more valuable: instead of radically transforming the social relations and organizations that prevent girls from gaining agency for who they are, girls are taught to mold themselves into an approved version of womanhood that adopts certain masculine traits. In contrast, Rosie’s direction of the camp eliminates the comparison between the gender binary and embraces activities that have been socially constructed as masculine —active physical activities— as well as feminine —artistic activities— giving the same value to both of them.



Panel 2. #16.1 A flashback to how camp was run when Nellie was director

Although both Nellie and Rosie have the safety of the girls in mind, they have very different ideas of how to achieve it. Rosie's vision is for scouts relying on a community of like-minded people who appreciate each other for who they are, have their friends' interests in mind and are aware of the ways their actions can affect other people. Even though Rosie and the old camp director do not get along, in the face of a threat to the camp they often manage to put their differences aside for a moment to work together towards achieving a common goal: the well-being of the girls. It also becomes an opportunity for Rosie to show that the camp is stronger when the members live in harmony, not under an abusive hierarchical system.

Rosie was a Lumberjane scout when Nellie was the director, her best friend was Abigail, with whom she had a romantic relationship. When Abigail disobeyed direct orders and was exiled from the Lumberjanes, Rosie did not intercede for her. For years Abigail has been living by herself in a big fancy cabin without any kind of support network, no one even knew she had been in the forest all this time. Later in the story arc, in issue #16, Abigail is determined to get rid of a very dangerous ancient creature called Grootslang, against everyone's attempts to dissuade her. Her plan fails because she does not listen to the people who care about her: she decides to work by herself, and attack a creature that was not a threat to anyone. Her stubbornness to excel by herself, without any help, puts her in a dangerous situation that risked bringing danger to the campers and the rest of the forest creatures. Abigail's actions are the result of unresolved feelings of betrayal and isolation. Because she was shunned out of the Lumberjanes, she brooded resentment and a strong desire to prove that she did not need a community to be successful and brave.

The example of Abigail shows the old camp's disregard for emotional support and, in contrast, emphasizes the power of friendship as a generative and healing energy. It is in fact friendship that brings Jo back to life, after Diane, the roman goddess disguised as regular tween, turns her into stone in issue #8, and later admits that she does not know how to undo the petrification. The power of friendship turns out to be more powerful than a goddess.

One of the Lumberjanes precepts is that no one is left behind, physically or emotionally. No matter the situation, the Roanokes assist their fellow campers so everyone can achieve the same goals or solve their problems.



Panel 3. #10.4 April is bored, but the campers do not go on adventures alone





Panel 4. #16.12 and #16.13 The Roanokes disobey Nellie because they cannot stay put knowing that other Lumberjanes need help



Panel 5. #43.24 Molly feels guilty for putting the camp in danger, so she tries to make it right by herself, but the rest of the Roanokes catch up with her

The friendships promoted in the comics are not decreed to be eternal and all enduring, nor everyone involved is perfect, sometimes feelings are hurt and apologies take place. The Lumberjanes handbook recognizes that time passes and people can change, but hopefully the relationships made on solid foundations can resist challenges. And if that is not the case, what they strive for is that at least for the duration of the relationship all of the involved gave their best for the other, assuming the best of people.

Space for female socialization: Decentering hetero-relations

The environment where the girls make their friendships contributes to the creation of a network that decenters hetero-relations. There is no explicit mention of the reason why the Lumberjanes scouts have a separated camp from the Scouting Lads, the boys across the lake, but it is understood that both organizations were founded with the same purpose and clearly gender segregated, as it is read in both of their signs marking the entrance of each camp. While the Lads' say "Mr. Theodore Tarquin Reginald Lancelot Herman Crumpet's Camp for Boys", over at "Miss Qiunzella Thiskwin Penniquiquil Thistle Crumpet's Camp" someone replaced "Girl" with "Hardcore Lady Types", broadening the definition of who can be in the camp, distancing itself from any normative idea of femininity that the concept 'girl' could indicate, and leaving it vague enough for campers to embody whatever they interpret as "hardcore lady type".

Furthermore, the Lumberjanes scouts do not have to be measured against a hegemonic masculinity because the Scouting Lads, the boys in the camp across the lake, do not comply with it, so there is no point of comparison within the gender binary that establishes which activities are male and therefore privileges them. The comic makes a critique of toxic

masculinity in its characterization of the Scouting Lads' camp director, who emphatically disapproves of the Scouting Lads' chosen activities.

When the Lumberjanes meet the Scouting Lads, in issue #4, they discover that the boys are very orderly, like to keep their cabin neat, everyone is wearing their uniform according to the manual and the boys actually have scouting knowledge, unlike the Roanokes. The boys are seen to be happily baking cookies, drinking tea, knitting and making puzzles, all indoor activities that are not thought as traditionally masculine, when thinking in a dichotomic way of boys being active and rowdy and girls being passive and obedient. On the other hand, the camp director is a parody of hegemonic masculinity: the body proportions are exaggerated, his dialogues are written in all caps, as if shouting is the only tone of voice he is able to communicate.

He clearly does not support the chosen activities of the Lads, as he barges in screaming at them for non conforming to his idea of masculinity ("men should be splitting woods and smoking pipes" #4.10) and mocking them for doing what they enjoy. The boys clearly shrink in his presence during that violent exchange. The camp director is the representation of a toxic masculinity that imposes expectations on boys that they are not interested in fulfilling. He is red with anger, big, hairy and muscular, and is seen carrying at least two visible weapons: an axe and a knife.

The relationships that the Lumberjanes establish with the Scouting Lads are about helping, defending and supporting each other; they are centered around friendship, not heterosexual romance. The Roanokes exist independently from the boys in the Scouting Lads camp. In the comic, we read a story of care and love, as opposed to catty competitiveness among young girls for either the attention of boys or for the false idea that only one can get

recognition for their achievements over the rest. It shows that other types of relationships are possible. It gives importance to affectivity networks that are external to the nuclear family, demonstrating that there are various sites where young people can find power and worth.

In postfeminist representations of female relationships, girls fight over boys (*Mean Girls*), female friendships are taken for granted in women's search for heterosexual relationships (*How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days*, 2003), and even when women have good friendships they are still represented as unfulfilled singletons (*Bridget Jones*, 2001) because these portrayals do not conceptualize friendship as a system of intimate relationships that can provide them with care, power and value. The comic, however, decenters heterorelations (Roseneil, 2006, p. 334) by giving importance to friendship, it puts the spotlight on kinship as opposed to romantic love. *Lumberjanes* acknowledges the necessity of women and non-binary people maintaining friendships on their own right, not in relation to men. Furthermore, the cohabitation system of the cabins shows a female centric living arrangement that allows for the existence of interconnected and diverse relationships in the same space without privileging one over others.

Although the Roanokes are friends, within the group the girls have distinct ways in which they relate to each other. Because each character is different, they have distinct relationships between each other. This is a disruption of postfeminist representations in which friends in groups are assimilated to behave like clones of each other, like Anna, Lana and Fontana, from *The Princess Diaries*, whose names even sound similar. Recognizing that people can have caring and respectful connections that are unique to each friend is feminist because it allows for a broader network of support without inciting jealousy or competition between friends.

Friendship is a learning process

Although there are no big fights or loud confrontations among the core group of protagonists, they do encounter some frictions with supporting characters; in the end, the conflicts are resolved in a positive manner. The way characters deal with conflict indicates a strength in the relationships depicted. According to Friedman, respect and affection directed towards our friends pushes us to act in ways we probably would not have otherwise, bringing us out of our comfort zone; because we trust the person we extend our trust to their moral ideals (1993, p. 194). Friendships expand our understanding of the world because they allow us to see it from a different perspective, one that we might not have had otherwise. However, the comic does not assume that all friendships are effortless, it shows the learning process that some of the Roanokes go through to transform their viewpoints. The longstanding friendship between Jo and April does not have preference over the more recent one between April and Barney's, there is space for both and more, but to arrive at that understanding there is an initial conflict that has to be resolved.

The story arc where the confrontation between Jo and Barney occurs spans a couple of issues (#14-17). Jo becomes increasingly irritated by Barney, to the point of snapping at April for including them¹³ in her space. Jo did not have any problem with Barney when they were away at their own camp, but when Jo perceives an intrusion into her friend group, she feels threatened.

¹³ I refer to Barney with the pronouns they and them, as the character requests to other campers in issue #33. In the comic issues before that, Barney is identified with the pronouns he and him, as seen in panel 6.

April's relationship with the other Roanokes does not make Jo feel uncomfortable, but with Barney it is different. The story arc starts with a display of the Roanokes' lack of basic survival skills, they do not know how to set up a tent or make a fire. Their shortfalls are contrasted with Barney's excellent outdoor knowledge like tracking creatures through the woods, building a shelter or making herbal remedies. But while the rest of the group appreciates Barney's contributions, Jo feels unprepared and inadequate in the presence of Barney. She used to be the one that solved the Roanokes' navigational problems and now she feels replaced by Barney. April's praise for them only makes it worse for Jo.



Panel 6. #14.19 April praises Barney's tracking abilities



Panel 7. #17.6 Jo clarifies how she feels regarding Barney

Jo's rising rejection of Barney can also be read as a reaction to an intrusion from an apparent male figure into her group of self-identified girls. In a defensive action, she is trying to protect her community. Barney sometimes interrupts the Roanokes to give lengthy and sometimes unnecessary explanations. Jo's fear is also based on best friend tropes common in heteronormative popular culture, where the friend is replaced by a male romantic interest.

As the story progresses, the group needs to work together to locate Jen and help Rosie defeat an ancient creature, but tensions rise between April and Jo as the latter becomes more hostile towards Barney. April is quick to take Barney into the group, and does not question how the rest of the girls feel about them. She does not understand where Jo's rejection is coming from, because April perceives that what is good for her, is good for the group. Both April and Jo use plural pronouns when they are expressing themselves —“WE don't need your help” and “Barney's our friend” (issue #17.6)— indicating how intertwined their identities are with the group, as they feel at ease speaking on behalf of the other girls.

It is only in the midst of the battle against the creature when Jo pairs up with Barney to save their friends, and realizes that Barney only wanted to help. Unlike the Lumberjanes,

Barney does not seem to be used to working with a team, and their eagerness to belong is read by Jo as them being a know-it-all, trying to prove their knowledge over the girls. Jo thought that Barney would take her place as April's best friend; however, *Lumberjanes'* articulation of friendship is not a pyramid, but a web of interconnections. By the end of the arc Jo realizes that April's relationship with Barney is different than the one she has with April, and both can coexist because each is unique in their own way.

Additionally, Barney does not only exist as a plot device to advance Jo and April's relationship, they have their own circles of friends in the Lumberjanes and in the Scouting Lads camps, and their transition from one camp to the other develops through several issues. When Barney is welcomed into the Lumberjanes camp, they do not bunk with the Roanokes, their closest friends, but instead is placed in the Zodiac cabin. There, Barney establishes new relationships with other campers, who quickly welcome them and are ready to stick up for them when they perceive that another camper is being mean to Barney. Barney's living arrangement provides them with a larger support system that now includes the campers of two different cabins. Barney is the node that connects the Roanokes and the Zodiacs, but Barney does not give one preference over the other. In issue #33 the comic explores the relationship of Barney with their new cabin mates, it is their first day together. The Roanokes appear only in the last three pages, sharing the panels with the Zodiacs in one big group.

This issue is significant because it decenters the story from the leading five characters, demonstrating that even peripheral characters have interesting stories, which we not often get to see. A look into the friendship dynamics of a different group of campers shows that the relationships that the Roanokes have are not an exception, but rather close and interconnected friendships are happening all over camp. Through their experiences, the

protagonists find out that learning how to be a good friend and person is an ongoing process, but will be able to take it on if they are confident in their abilities and have a strong network behind them.

Implicit and explicit feminism

The camp, as an organization, openly encourages friendship. It is declared in the motto and in the manual, in the activities available for the campers and in the guidelines for getting scout badges. Some of them clearly state that in order to earn the badge the campers must accomplish the activities surrounded by their friends, acknowledging that the support of these relationships are crucial for the success of the enterprises in camp, and outside of it, in the rest of the campers' lives, although it is never said that these relationships are feminist. Similar to what Danielle Giffort identifies as "implicit feminism" (2011, p. 569) in her study of the practices of a music camp for girls in the U.S. that prefers to show feminism in action rather than labeling themselves as a feminist camp, what *Lumberjanes* is doing is putting forth a possibility of feminist friendships that could serve as a map towards more equitable relationships among girls, without explicitly saying the word "feminism".

Even though the word is absent from the comic issues considered in this research, there are clear visual and verbal links to feminism in *Lumberjanes*. Here I review three: the character design of Rosie, the camp director, the axe of the original founder of the camp, and the use of female trailblazers as exclamations.

Rosie is a muscular woman who wears a purple plaid shirt with the sleeves rolled up, boots, and khaki hiking shorts. Her hair is bright orange and is kept in place with a red polka dot bandana. She has several tattoos on her arms and neck, visible among them a star, a mermaid, an anchor and a heart with an arrow. Both the name and the red bandana are a

direct reference to Rosie the Riveter, an iconic image of female empowerment. Rosie has a small collection of axes, among them there is one that has magical properties and that belonged to Jane, the first Lumberjane (issue #43). The weapon is a double axe called labrys, a symbol adopted by feminists and lesbians for its connection to Amazon warriors (Keena, 2012).

The previous references are illustrations, unlike the naming of more than forty famous feminists and groundbreaking women; those are unmissable verbal invocations. Every time a Lumberjane scout expresses surprise, fear or excitement, instead of swearing they call out the name of a woman whose life or work connects to feminism and the women's movement. Some of them might be better known than others, like U.S. journalist and activist Ida B. Wells —“SWEET IDA B. WELLS YOU'RE ALL ALIVE” (issue #19.22)— or U.S. oceanographer Sylvia Earle —“Holy Sylvia Earle, I've got something” (issue #18.5)—. The action lends itself to a funny reference, but it is also a learning opportunity for readers, especially young ones, who might be inclined to look up the referenced women and their feats.

The articulation of implicitly feminist friendships offers readers the possibility to see diverse ways of expressing support and care in a non-heteronormative environment. Next, I analyze how this community is constructed as a counter-site and in what ways its specific characteristics allow for the existence of the Lumberjanes camp, as well as its relationship with the camper's identities.

Chapter 3

The camp as a heterotopia

In the previous chapter I showed the importance of friendships in the comic, and how these representations disrupt certain postfeminist sensibilities currently found in mainstream media, specifically the focus on individualistic identities, heteronormative relations, and physical strength as the only power available to young women. In the following chapter I shall analyze where the action of the comic is set, based on the Foucauldian concept of heterotopia.

If space, as Doreen Massey asserts, is “constructed out of the multiplicity of social relations across all spatial scales” (Massey, 1994, p. 4), then we cannot think of it as depoliticized and static. The question of place has been thought of in girlhood studies as a site for self-making (Reid-Walsh and Mitchell, 2004; Bondy, 2012; Ali Eglinton, 2013; Rentschler and Mitchell, 2016a). The construction of girls’ identity is influenced by and affects their physical and historical location (Rentschler and Mitchell, 2016b). Space, as well as identity, is relational. They are both continually being constructed. There is no inner essence of place or of girlhood; they are both constructed through interactions with other people as well as with their environment.

Massey argues that places are “constantly shifting articulations of social relations through time” (Massey, 1995, p. 188), and they are never really isolated from other places but instead defined by and in constant transformation due to the relations built through and with it. Her critique of the notion of place as a stable and delimited space is useful for thinking about the romanticization of places (Massey, 2002). With her critique in mind, I look at the representation of place in the comic, the Lumberjanes summer camp, to make visible the

relations that constitute it. Is the *Lumberjanes* camp represented as a place in construction or one that is stable? What is the purpose of this articulation of the camp? Who creates that representation and who is being privileged by it? Politicizing space shows the power structures in place and can serve as a map to resist them.

Thinking of places as relational, I use Foucault's concept of heterotopia. In the essay "Of Other Spaces" (1986), he states that spaces can be described by the "network of relations" (p. 24) with sites, and singles out those exemplary ones which "are linked with all the others" yet "contradict all the other sites" (p. 24). They can be of two types: utopias, unreal places that project a perfect version of reality; and heterotopias, traceable in real locations. The latter are a disruption of time and space that exist in relation to other spaces, which in turn create this heterotopic 'third space' that mirrors reality in an alternative to spaces outside of it. Heterotopias are "counter-sites" (Foucault, 1986, p. 24) because they reflect or flip the relationship with other places, but they are available to visit and explore as any other place.

In the case of *Lumberjanes*, the summer camp is where distinct places overlap to create a new site with characteristics of its own, articulating a unique space that challenges the places that relate to it. By which I mean that the comic is not pure fantasy fiction, it combines fantastic elements like yetis and other mythological characters, and presents them in a realistic fiction backdrop, a summer camp in contemporary U.S., where they interact with tweens. Heterotopic spaces are counter-sites that show imperfections and lacunae in our reality by reflecting an improved or alternative version of it. The *Lumberjanes* summer camp pokes holes into the assumed naturalness of certain practices by demonstrating that different practices are equally possible as they are constructions. For example, in this specific place,

certain tropes common in fantasy fiction, like Little Red Riding Hood, are subverted in a way that show the disempowering representation of young women in the original version. The counter-site of the Lumberjanes summer camp uncovers certain aspects previously unnoticed in the worlds that it is bringing together.

For the purpose of my study, Foucault's concept is useful to locate the camp as a place where young self-identified women and gender non-conforming people can exist outside of rigid social norms in a space that depends on other spaces to produce a new environment. Following the principles delineated by Foucault, I analyze how the camp constitutes a heterotopia by looking at each of the principles that Foucault enumerates. The chapter is divided into five sections, one for each of the principles: heterotopias can be found in every culture; societies give them different functions, even the same heterotopia can function differently across time; they can be a juxtaposition of spaces; heterotopias are linked with breaches in time; and they rely on a controlled admittance.

Furthermore, I link the counter-site of the Lumberjanes summer camp to a reconsideration of what Rosalind Gill calls the transformation of postfeminism. Gill revisits postfeminist sensibilities ten years after the publication of her essay "Postfeminist media culture: Elements of a Sensibility" (2007) and looks into the ways postfeminism has mutated. She concludes that new feminist visibilities, far from making postfeminism irrelevant, coexist with postfeminist culture resulting in a blurring of clear boundaries. Postfeminism has transformed and, in most Western cultures, has become the new normal, a "gendered neoliberalism" (Gill, 2017, p. 609) that makes the process of identifying the undoing of feminism (McRobbie, 2004) harder than it was ten years ago. The contradictions of postfeminist discourse have been normalized through the "new cultural prominence of

feminism” (Gill, 2017, p. 612). I find these contradictions in *Lumberjanes* in the way it brings forth some feminist issues, at the expense of obscuring or dismissing others. The comic is giving visibility to a community of non-normative girls, expanding the available representation of young women and LGBTQ characters in youth media. It is doing so by creating a space free from certain oppressions, like heteronormativity, but it avoids a critical engagement with others, like racism and colonialism.

By analyzing the camp as a heterotopic space I show the importance of an alternative site for the development of the campers’ identities and relationships. The comic places the camp as a safe space for the youth by creating an environment that subverts gender expectations and breaks with dichotomies. The camp as a heterotopia disrupts the heteronormative conception of who is admitted to a girl’s camp by allowing the participation of self-identified girls and gender non-conforming people. It also destabilizes hegemonic representation of U.S. girlhood, one that generalizes the subjectivity of white, middle-class, Christian, heterosexual (albeit assumed, as sexuality is not encouraged in the girls) women.

As this chapter deals with space, I analyze the way the comic deals with intersecting oppressions, racialized bodies and a history of colonization. I question how, in the process of reinterpreting certain aspects of sexist representations, reclaiming them on behalf of feminism, other oppressions might be reinscribed. I reflect on the gains and losses of ignoring socio-historical context in the creation of a space where everyone can be released from external pressures. I do this in order to illuminate how the current entanglement of feminist and postfeminist discourses that Gill identifies —that went from repudiating feminism (McRobbie, 2009) to the celebration of a narrow conception of certain, neoliberal, feminisms (Gill, 2017)— is present in the comic.

Space for transition

In girlhood studies, heterotopia has been employed to refer to spaces where girls shape their identities in an environment where they feel at ease and in control. In reference to real places “set in opposition to most places” (Reid-Walsh and Mitchell, 2004, p. 178), Jacqueline Reid-Walsh and Claudia Mitchell name as an example of a heterotopic space the personal webpages that girl’s create online from the privacy of their bedrooms. There, girls form communities outside patriarchal spaces and norms. In a similar way, in her study of girls creating identities in online spaces, Connie Morrison (2016) uses the term heterotopia to name the virtual space of networking sites where girls create an alternate identity through avatars.

Following the notion of a safe place for girls to formulate their self-image outside of hegemonic determinants, I conceive the Lumberjanes camp and the surrounding forest as a heterotopia. The scouts are able to freely explore their gender identity and sexuality because they are inhabiting a heterotopic space. Based on Adrienne Rich’s analysis of compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 1980), where she locates the ways male power controls women’s bodies, emotions and sexuality, maintaining women’s oppression, I locate the heterotopic space of camp as outside of the rules of the patriarchal space: in the camp compulsory heterosexuality does not exist.

The first principle of heterotopias, as established by Foucault, is that there is no one universal heterotopia, yet every culture has them. Out of the two distinctions he makes, the camp is what he calls a “crisis heterotopia”. These are places for “individuals who are, in relation to society (...) in a state of crisis” (p. 24), the transition from childhood to adulthood is one of these states. Adolescence is a complex site where time and place intersect to produce

meaning. Teenagers are limited to certain spaces; they have more freedom than children but they are not granted entrance to the realm of adulthood. It is a finite stage of development with an established beginning and end, but this transition is rather imperceptible. Heterotopias are sites that are simultaneously there and not there, both existing in a traceable location and discursively constructed.

The campers are tweens, a stage even more situated within the in-between-ness than adolescence —leading up to adulthood and leaving childhood behind— because the protagonists are almost adolescents, but not quite there yet. This fringe stage echoes the place where the girls go to spend their summer, a place outside of their regular environment — school, home— but not complete wilderness. The camp can be a restorative space for certain girls who do not have safe spaces in their regular lives, it is a site for community building and resistance against the patriarchal socialization that young women go through in the contemporary U.S., asserting their own value and the value of female friendship as a valid form of intimacy.

I find it significant that the heterotopias that Reid-Walsh, Mitchell and Morrison observe in their ethnographic studies take place in the private sphere, within the binary of public and private space. The camp as heterotopia situates girls outside of the private, in the outdoors. In cultural representations, the wilderness has been populated by boys and men adventuring into it, taming it or using it to further their self-development (Hendel, 2006, p. 9). The comic, then, disrupts masculinized narratives of the adventure story and creates space(s) for girls to explore their transition stage without following an individualized arc, but one of a communal passage.

In the Lumberjanes camp nothing is as it seems. The forest is unpredictable, and it is even set as a dangerous place, but as the Roanokes venture further they discover that as long as they are together they will be able to deal with whatever is thrown at them. There is a recurrent motif of eyes looking in at camp from the shadows (issues #1.5, #4.22 #13.21, #25.6, #40.22), surveilling the Lumberjane scouts. McRobbie (2009, p. 63) identified patriarchal surveillance in the way girls self-police their own bodies, and Gill (2007, p. 149) makes the connection between self-surveillance, neoliberalism and postfeminism by the shift of an outside male gaze to an internalized one in which women are being told to freely choose to be subjects instead of objects of desire. In the comic, the gaze is placed outside the girls, denoting that the girls have not internalized the self or peer-policing. The gaze is represented with eyes and eye-shaped objects, like medallions; it is looking at the campers from the margins of the panels and occasionally embodied in creatures that disrupt their activities. The girls get to confront them —and triumph— in a literal way: the creatures disappear when the Lumberjanes hit them in the eye-shaped medallion.



Panel 8. #5.18 Molly hits a dinosaur right in the eye-shaped medallion making it disappear

It is set early on in the comic that the rules that govern the world as we know it do not necessarily apply in the Lumberjanes camp. The inclusion of supernatural elements is a reminder that the place where the girls are is similar but not quite the same as our known environment, and it allows for other kinds of disruptions without showing them as too inconceivable. It creates the conditions for the Roanokes to learn what they are capable of, somewhere where “the rest of the world doesn’t matter” (Dietsch, 2014). Later in this chapter I shall look into how the comic produces this blank slate for girls to create their own meanings and what might be the cost of representing this possibility.

The camp brings out different aspects of the girls’ personalities, Mal feels like she is not brave like the rest of the Roanokes, and is frustrated at the dissonance between her life outside camp and in camp. She felt more confident back home than surrounded by mysterious events. But for Molly it is the opposite, back home she does not have a lot of friends and her family puts too much pressure on her to comply to a mold that she does not want to fit, so for her there is greater freedom in the camp. The Lumberjanes camp allows the tweens a distance from their known space and permits them to be themselves, to come into themselves without familiar pressures. The camp gives them a place to rid themselves of imposed expectations. In the following pages I point out how Molly’s story arc reflects the self-development she achieves in the camp, supported by her friends and an adequate space for transition: she comes to terms with her sexuality and confronts paternal figures, even though it is not her own parents.

Readers understand Molly’s family situation after issue #13, a flashback story of the first day at camp. We get to know a little more about the protagonist’s family life. Everyone except for Molly’s, who just appears looking lost when Mal introduces herself in the parking

lot. As the comic progresses, Molly becomes more and more interested in the possibility of staying in the forest even after the summer ends. Learning that there is a precedent —Rosie and Abigail used to be Lumberjane scouts when they were younger and they still live in the woods as adults— she asks the Bear Woman how she too can stay.



Panel 9. #11.6 Molly does not want the summer to end



Panel 10. #12.11 Molly asks the Bear Woman why she is still in the forest

At the same time that we read of Molly's desire to prolong her stay at camp, we get more information about Molly's problematic relationship with her parents. When she receives a letter from them, in issue #25, she reads it and does not share it with anyone else, even though she seems visibly upset by its content. She decides to carry her emotional baggage by herself. Some of the Roanoke girls start noticing that Molly does not get along with her family when Diane complains about her relatives. Being the daughter of the god Zeus, Diane is familiar with meddling and controlling parents.



Panel 11. #25.7 and #25.8 Molly got mail



Panel 12. #29.16 Dianne is complaining about her family, and Molly empathizes with her



Panel 13. #29.18 Mal and Ripley talk about Molly's letter

A couple of issues later, Mal lets Molly know that she can rely on her to talk about her feelings regarding the letter, if that is what Molly wants. It is not until then that Molly opens up about the guilt she feels for enjoying camp even though she believes her parents would not approve of her adventures and the relationship she has with Mal. Molly does not feel her relationship with her parents is as supportive as she would like and does not confide in them. The layout of the panel where Molly says her parents would not approve of her friends indicates that it is Mal and their relationship that they would not approve of. The information is emphasized by the pause that precedes it, indicated with a double ellipsis and a gutter.¹⁴ The image of Mal takes the majority of the panel, juxtaposed to Molly's speech balloon enunciating "my friends". In the sequence where this conversation occurs, three of

¹⁴ The space between panels.

the panels have a blur of green as the background, centering the attention of the readers on the two girls and the information that they are transmitting. Because the forest behind them is not clearly illustrated, Molly and Mal seem to be suspended in a separate world by themselves, surrounded by shades of green. In the fourth panel the forest is back, returning the girls to the heterotopic space of the camp where they inhabit it with their friends, but still separated from Molly's parents.

Molly does not want her parents knowing that she likes a girl, because it goes against what they expect from her. By being in the camp away from them, Molly is experiencing release from parental pressure to conform to a normative heterosexual femininity. In the camp she has enough freedom, support and safety to explore her identity and sexuality.



Panel 14. #31.15 Molly talks to Mal about her parents' expectations

When we finally meet Molly's parents is in issue #40, at the end of parent's day at the camp, we get a glimpse of how strict and thoughtless her mom is with Molly when the first thing she says after not seeing her for weeks is a scolding reprimand. Her dad stands back and does not intervene to stop her mom from pulling Molly's arm and violently rubbing the dirt off her cheek. Additionally, the mother is angry because they got lost on their way to the camp, not realizing that Molly sent them the wrong directions on purpose so they would

not be able to arrive to the camp and visit her. It is Rosie who understands the situation and interrupts Molly's mom, driving her away from the Roanokes with the pretext of parent's day being over.



Panel 15. #40.16 When Molly's parents arrive for Parents' day her mom scolds her for being too dirty

A couple of issues before, we see Molly come out to defend Diane from her father, Zeus.¹⁵ When the girls discover that Zeus has been setting traps and endangering their friends, only to keep Diane close to him, Molly gets angry. Not intimidated by the god, in the face of

¹⁵ Molly confronts one of the most ancient gods, the father of deities and mortals, the patriarch of the Olympians. However, the portrayal that *Lumberjanes* makes of the powerful god is defanged, it is a comic representation of Zeus, caricaturing his role as father. It is worth noting that both times the god makes an appearance is as an anthropomorphized animal: a bull (issue #8) and a swan (issue #32). In Greek mythology, Zeus took these forms to rape Europa and Leda, respectively. The comic takes the image of Zeus at its most violent and attempts to render him harmless.

what she recognizes as an abuse of paternal power, she jumps in and explains why Zeus' overprotective actions are coming from a place of fear and have negative repercussions on his daughters' emotions. In a stark contrast of how she reacts in the face of her own controlling parents, she projects her frustrations when she confronts Zeus, because she is unable to tell her parents how they make her feel. It is telling, then, that she is more afraid of her mother than of a famously powerful god.



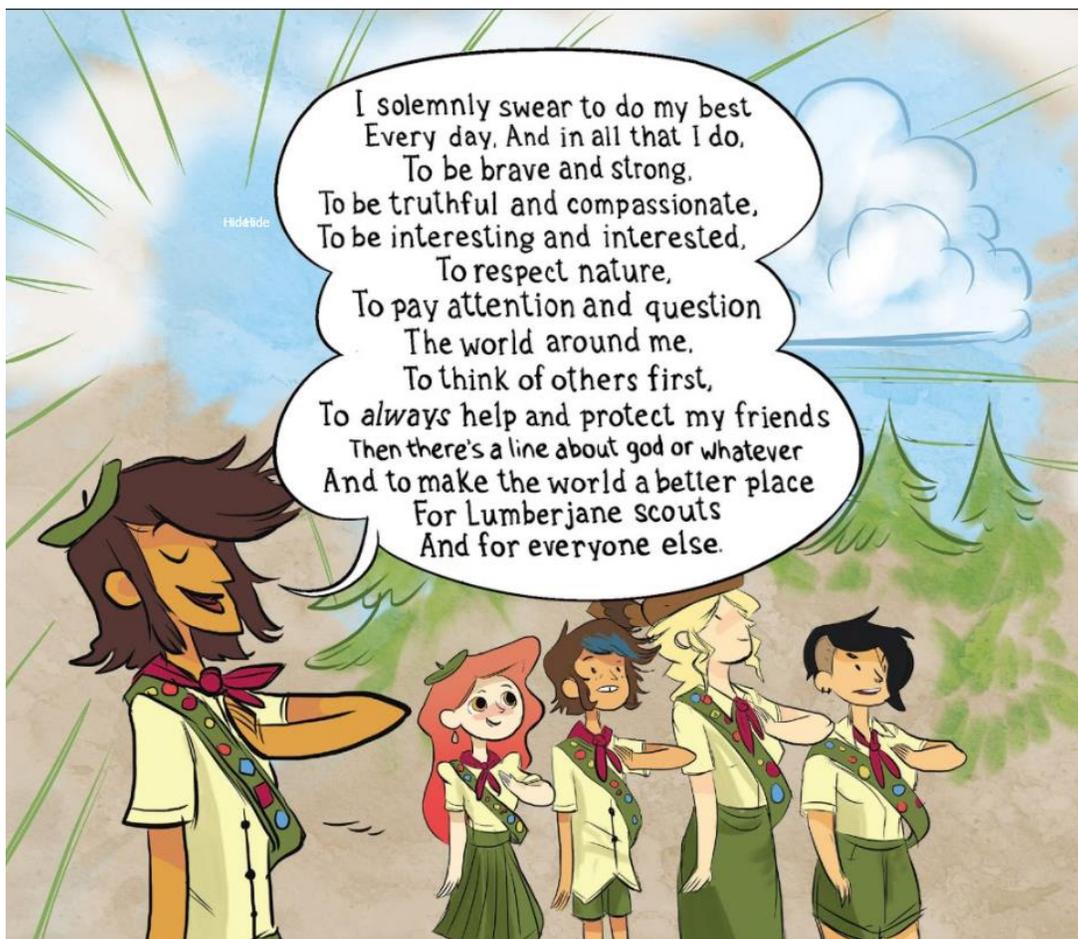
Panel 16. #32.15 Molly confronts Zeus to defend Diane

Same heterotopia, different function

Foucault mentions that every society creates heterotopias, although they do not look or function the same, not even within the same culture. The camp functioned differently when Rosie was a camper than how it does now that she is the camp director. The training that the girls follow is not the same as that of their predecessors, even though it is the exact place where previous generations of Lumberjanes have lived. The different uses that campers made of the space can be seen when the Roanokes find the abandoned training grounds and they repurpose them to use them as a roller derby track. The constant references to the handbook included along with the series serves to show the passing of time between generations of scouts and the consequent incongruity that occurs when the everyday practices in the camp have gone beyond the guidelines. Now it is the act that regulates the proper way of being, and rules should be readapted. In the following examples I shall analyze three instances that show how the Lumberjanes camp that the Roanokes inhabit is different from the one dictated by the campers' field manual: the pledge, the use of uniform in camp, and the camp as a women-only space.

As I have mentioned before, the trade paperback format includes information as paratexts that the single issues of the comic do not. The design of the trade edition makes it look like it is a Lumberjanes Field Manual published in 1984, it has a space for the owner of the book to write their name and the name of the scout troop to which they belong. It also includes a letter from the High Council on page four. Although the letter is different in every book, all of them welcome new scouts into a group of people who will contribute to their personal and communal development. Underneath the message is the Lumberjanes Pledge, next to an illustration of a scout wearing the proper uniform. Of the thirteen lines in the

pledge, one is illegible because someone crossed out the part that has to do with god. And when Jo recites the pledge, at the end of the first issue, she skips it by saying “Then there’s a line about god or whatever” (issue #1.21). The comic makes sure to show that the scouts are not afraid to change the rules and break with tradition when it does not fit anymore or when they do not adhere to certain beliefs, because the space that they are inhabiting is not the same as the one the earlier generations of Lumberjanes inhabited. The space is transformed by the use that the campers make of it, as well as by the interactions the campers have with the space.



Panel 17. #1.23 Jo is the only one of the Roanokes who knows the pledge by heart

In the single issues different paratexts can be found. The credits page, behind the cover, shows ripped pages from the field manual, one of them relates to the uniform guidelines. It seems like someone took out the part that has to do with the proper wearing of the uniform. Accompanying the text of the guidelines there is an illustration of a scout demonstrating the correct styling of the uniform while on camp, over which someone has drawn with a red pen patches, mismatched socks, and bruises. This goes along with the panel #16, where we see the Roanokes on a rare occasion when they are wearing the uniform, as it is only the camp counselors who wear them every day. Comparing what we see on that panel with what we know of the guidelines, we can assert that the Roanokes took several creative liberties in their styling, without negative consequences. Each Roanoke is wearing her uniform in a different way, projecting their own diverse personalities on their clothes, for example April, being the most conventionally feminine, has a pleated skirt and shoulder pads; or Ripley, who has her shirt untucked and looks scruffy, as if she got dressed absentmindedly.

While that would have been unthinkable years before, as we saw in the flashback panel 2 (issue #16.1), now the Lumberjanes do not even have to wear their uniform during the camp if they do not want to. The absence of a uniform worn by campers moves from showing a visible mark that recognizes them as belonging to an organization, towards a non material identifier: each person acting according to the ideas set forth by the camp. They do not need to wear the uniform to be a Lumberjane, facilitating the transfer of knowledge from the space of camp to the spaces that are not camp, situating the girls in a transitory place from where they will eventually leave as well as blurring the borders of the heterotopic space. The campers wear their everyday clothes in camp, which highlights the normalization of their individual selves. The campers do not put up or perform an alternative identity that only takes

place in the camp during summer and once the camp ends it will stay there, instead allowing for permeable identities that inform each other, inside and outside the camp.

Although there are some remarks made by the scouts regarding the outdated nature of the handbook in some of its regulations (issues #10.4 and #25.14), it is not until Barney asks to join the Lumberjanes that a shift towards a break in the gender binary is made evident. When Barney asks the Grand Lodge¹⁶ to be accepted with the scouts, they have already worked with the Roanokes before, and since their last adventure Barney had questioned their place in the Scouting Lads (issues #17.6 and #17.21).



Panel 18. #17.21 Barney talks with Jo about their feelings of belonging and identity

For Jo, a trans girl, being recognized as a girl gives her the freedom in the camp that she had not experienced anywhere else before. But for Barney freedom comes by being unrecognizable within the binary. Both identities are valid in this heterotopia because it is

¹⁶ The Grand Lodge is composed of the eldest Lumberjanes, they are in charge of writing the handbook.

not ruled by strict hegemonic gender norms. Both Jo and Barney left constricting environments that did not allow their gender expression and found a space in the camp. The camp as a counter-site allows *Lumberjanes* to explore an alternative site for the development of the campers' identities and relationships. The comic places the camp as a safe space for the youth by creating an environment that subverts gender expectations and breaks with dichotomies.

Furthermore, each character gets to experience who they are in order to feel comfortable with themselves. It is only Barney's place to decide if the Lumberjanes camp is where they belong, no one else can or should decide for them (issue #28.21). However, this does not mean that the concept "girl" has expanded to include Barney, but that the camp has shifted towards admitting self-identified girls and gender non-conforming people. When the manuals were written there was a clear intention behind them to teach young women survival skills as well as how to decorate a cake or be a good hostess, sticking to traditional domestic expectations for young girls while encouraging them to be as outdoorsy as boys. The fragments available read as a manual for girls to excel in every discipline, it follows the idea of the supergirl who can do everything she sets her mind to, from karate to scrapbooking, and to not be limited by her femininity. The manual does not invite the scouts to think about why they might need these skills, avoiding any reflection about systemic gender oppression or differentiated gender expectations for boys and girls. It limits itself to teaching Lumberjanes all types of skills while emphasizing the importance of the friendships made during camp, so that girls can rely on them when they are back home.

Connection between worlds

Female youth has been a preferred site to place meanings of social well-being that are detached from the real girls at issue. It has more to do with gendered notions of nation building, attached to the conception of women as fragile creatures to be protected, than with youth. Young women —represented (Projansky, 2007) and real (Driscoll, 2002) — are seen as a marker of democracy in Western countries; based on their access to education or a life free from violence, they are turned into symbols of development and hope (McRobbie, 2009). Interest in girls' well-being is linked to the shaping of citizens under heteronormative regulations, which develops into policies intended to shape womanhood —from infancy into a neoliberal idea of the female citizen— as well as restraining deviant identities.

In popular culture narratives, boys tend to be universal while girls are an allegory (*Moana*, 2016), a mystery to solve (*500 Days of Summer*, 2009), a prize to win (*Aladdin*, 1992), a success story to serve as a role model for other girls (*Zootopia*, 2016). Departing from the diverse meanings converging in the representation of girlhood, I explore other sites where meanings converge in one place, seemingly incompatible, yet existing in the same place.

The camp and the surrounding grounds are in an unidentified location in the U.S., as one envelope addressed to Rosie states they are in Deep Woods, U.S.A. (issue #25.6). It represents only a small part of the world, but it is the entirety of the scouts' world. Although it appears to be isolated from the outside world, whatever happens there has real consequences for the campers. In issue #43 magical bubbles appear floating around camp, altering time and affecting whoever touches them. Jen and Ripley accidentally burst one, so Ripley grows older while Jen grows younger. They both wonder how their lives will be going

forward if they do not figure out a way to change back, Ripley is excited because she assumes she knows how to drive now, and Jen is worried about having to repeat every grade in school (issue #44). Even though they know that there are fantastical elements happening everyday at camp, something that would not happen outside of camp, they are aware that the effects are not confined to only that space. The Lumberjanes understand the existence of both spaces separated and yet overlapped.

Similarly, when Molly and Mal make the discovery of a Lost World in a parallel dimension that can be accessed from the camp through portals and an out of service outhouse, they quickly overcome their initial surprise and continue their adventure in the new environment, an expansion of their previously known universe. These breaches of the world's limits show the juxtaposition of spaces as well as the porousness of their borders, a topic I cover later in this chapter.



Panel 19. #10.14 Molly and Mal follow the Bear Woman into another dimension

The juxtaposition of spaces in *Lumberjanes* achieves to mark a separation from the outside world, while still taking it into account, I refer here to intertexts. The constant visual and verbal callbacks to films, TV shows and literary products that the comic includes situate the action within a contemporary American context. The comic is littered with references to paranormal events, myths and popular culture. This intertextuality creates a connection with readers by presupposing certain knowledge from the audience and builds on it to reinforce moods or themes within the comic. These references also serve to show how diverse influences merge in this particular cultural product, both high and low art have a space here. It is as probable to find references to Arthur Conan Doyle or Shakespeare as it is to *Frozen* (2013), *Scooby Doo* (1969-present) or *Mission Impossible* (1996). The comic speaks

effortlessly a language of current popular culture that readers of all ages may recognize, creating a connection between the fictional world of the camp and the material reality of readers who are aware of the existence of the media referenced in the comic. Yet, the distance that the fantastical elements create give a sensation that the world of *Lumberjanes* is not exactly like ours; because it is not our ‘real’ world, we believe that nothing is too unachievable in the heterotopia of the camp. The freedom that the girls find at camp is achieved because they are in that specific place of intersecting spaces.

In the imagery of the camp several spaces come together to conform this heterotopia, I focus on how the frontier myth is used here to disrupt masculine narratives in pursuit of women’s agency. In the story of the comic, the elimination of a character’s context might represent a detachment from heteronormative impositions, enabling the camp to become a community of equals who share similar values and where everyone is encouraged to become their best self to better care for the emotional and physical needs of the group, themselves, and the environment. However, the freedom experienced by the girls in camp might come at the expense of reinscribing settler colonial narratives.

The myth of the American frontier is present in the comic through direct references, like the name of the English colony, Roanoke, and the coonskin cap that Molly wears, evocative of those famously worn by frontiersmen and pioneers Daniel Boone or Davy Crockett. The frontier myth has hegemonic masculinity at its core, it portrays a young man’s journey into the wild unknown—which tends to be represented as feminized (Hendel, 2006, p. 1) therefore virgin and conquerable—in which his self-reliance is shown as his greatest asset. These narratives celebrate “individualism, toughness, and confidence” (Gibson and Heyse, 2014, p. 101). In these stories the white boy/man goes away from what he considers

a constraining society in an escape from its rules. The frontiersmen tales are imbued with nationalism as they relate to the creation of America, most of them embarked towards the West in search of land, furthering the reach of the colonies and stealing territories from Native Americans. Supported by religious beliefs, colonizers considered Indigenous people as non-humans, as they did not have the same worship practices; beliefs like the Doctrine of Discovery and Manifest Destiny validated Euro-American expansionism over non-Christian territories. Equally determinant to the colonizers' entitlement to the land was the settlers' notion of civilization and progress, as the way Native Americans were working the land was not in line with settlers' parameters of development.

Figures like Boone, Crockett, Buffalo Bill and other frontier heroes were immortalized through dime novels and similar popular and cheap publications. These had a wide distribution in the second half of the 19th century. In the pages of these publications people could read fictionalized and exaggerated accounts of great heroism and violence against indigenous people. Once real men, these pioneers were turned into legends after their feats were blown out of proportion and read by many (McIntosh, 2006; Paul, 2014). It is also worth mentioning that the image of the stereotypical lumberjack, an incredibly strong bearded man wearing flannel and carrying an axe, comes from stories of Paul Bunyan, a figure mythicized by "frontier tall tales" (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1998). That the myths of these men were cemented through the circulation of stories in a popular medium only reinforces the importance that representation has.

The comic relies on these recognizable figures in order to reclaim them. *Lumberjanes* subverts the masculine narrative and disrupts the individualism and androcentrism of frontier myths by not centering the story on one man, but on a group of young women and non-binary

people. However, the frontier is not vanished entirely, the reversal of roles and values at work in the *Lumberjanes* camp depends on the existence of these tropes. And while the comic affirms the value of women-centric narratives, as well as nonhierarchical relationships among girls, it does so by placing gender as the distinct unifying characteristic, and does not take into account the settler narrative that the frontier myths reinscribe. The absence of men in an adventure narrative set in the outdoors is transforming the frontier narrative; however, *Lumberjanes* is also participating in its reproduction with the erasure of Native Americans.

Frontiersmen went West with the certainty that the land they were claiming for themselves —and their country— was vacant and therefore available for the taking by anyone. This conception was based on the dehumanization of Native Americans, as settlers were aware of their presence in the territory, but justified colonization based on the assumption that non-Christians were subhumans and had no claim to the land. However, the land was not for frontiersmen to be owned or to be designated as a national park or campgrounds, for that matter. The land was part of the Native American tribes and peoples had been living there long before Europeans arrived on the American continent. *Lumberjanes* does not acknowledge the existence of Native Americans and furthers the notion of empty space. The setting of the camp does not have a definite location, somewhere in the U.S., but all territory is colonized territory in the U.S. The omission of indigenous people contrasts with the visible imagery from the frontier myth. Erin Hendel (2006) notes a similar tension in her reading of two frontier narratives centered around a female protagonist, Willa Cather's *O Pioneers!* and Mourning Dove's *Cogewea, the Half-Blood*: "white women's empowerment at the frontier depend upon the idea of 'free land' and continue to deny agency

to Native American subjects” (Hendel, 2006, p. 25). So while the *Lumberjanes* narrative might be shifting certain values, the underlying power structure remains in place.

I argue that the camp is established as a neutral place outside of external influences—like family, classmates, technology or media—and outside of certain spaces that require specific social conducts, in an exercise of visualization of what a safe space for the unrestricted development of girls and the socialization into a feminist community would look like. *Lumberjanes* is showing a world that is not constrained by gender roles or heteronormativity—i.e. having a pair of lesbian couples in the comic—it is showing a possible unity among women, transwomen and gender non-conforming people. Within that, it validates the various ways to be a girl, embracing both traditionally feminine and masculine traits, detaching them from an ideal embodiment. However, it places gender, within a settler colonial narrative, as the most important marker of identity, blurring intersecting oppressions, like race or ethnicity, into invisibility. The comic does not acknowledge that the bodies that come to camp have a history and have been racialized outside of camp.

I consider that the camp erases these meanings for the advancement of an argument about equality, but “the idea of space as racially neutral often is complicit with white privilege” (Sullivan, 2006, p. 143). The freedom of movement that comes with white privilege is an element of post-racial America, present in current postfeminist sensibilities (Gill, 2016). The comic is not making a critique of the way spaces are segregated and mobility is limited for certain bodies, instead it asserts that everyone has the freedom to safely be outdoors or to be equally at risk from the supernatural elements.

Time

According to Foucault's fourth principle, heterotopias "are most often linked to slices of time" (Foucault, 1986, p. 26). The action of the comics occurs during the summer, which makes it a temporal disruption of regular time —the campers' routine back home— and regular space —they need to travel to get away from their daily life—. The action occurs within a limited and defined period of time, which makes it a suspension of time outside of the campgrounds. Additionally, unexplained supernatural events alter the regular passing of time within the campsite, resulting in a lag of time inside the camp compared to the world outside of it. The break in time permeates the identity of the space, as the Lumberjanes camp is given a function to exist only for the campers during the summer months. Once a year the camp comes into being as a temporal occurrence. The disruption of regular time creates a perceived bubble that separates the campers from their ordinary lives.

The storytelling medium also plays a role in the distortion of time, the comic stretches time in a way that a temporal occurrence —summer camp— is perceived to last an indefinite amount of time. As readers, we do not know exactly how long the Lumberjanes have been at the camp, but we do know that all the protagonists' adventures are happening during the same summer. By which it means that even though in the story time only a couple of weeks have passed, readers have been immersed in that narrative world for years —if they started reading since its launch in 2014— as new installments are released every month.

Inside the camp, time is stretched but it is also collapsed. It is a juxtaposition that encompasses past and present, sometimes mixing them up and creating another space altogether. In the parallel dimension, accessible through portals located inside the campgrounds, time is jumbled. There are dinosaurs and roman ruins, as well as a Marie Curie

statue. In there, the passing of time has its own rules, which do not go according to the time of the camp. When Molly and Mal accidentally traverse to the Lost World in issue #10, they only leave the camp for four hours, but they spend several nights in the parallel dimension. The story arc from issues #10, #11 and #12 shows the temporal dislocation that takes place in the camp. The comic alternates between Molly and Mal's adventure in an unknown place with April, Jo and Ripley's quest to gain as many badges possible during their free day at camp. By positioning both storylines in parallel, the comic highlights the time differences between the two of them. The Lost World adventure is framed within a four hour day at camp, so readers can have a reference of how time is experienced by the campers who travelled through the portal and the campers who stayed. For April, Jo and Ripley, it was only an evening, while for Molly and Mal it was a couple of days in a life or death situation in which they were emotionally vulnerable, it cemented their relationship. The story arc ends with Mal promising to tell the rest of the Roanokes about their stay on the Lost World, in an act that demonstrates that Mal trusts her friends will believe their adventure, and that sharing her experience will strength their friendship. There is no jealousy on her part to keep the experience she had with Molly private; on the contrary, she wants to share with the other Roanokes the new knowledge that she and Molly have about the camp. The telling of the story also creates a connection between the camp time and the parallel space time.

Similarly, all of the scouts' activities during camp proceed at a different pace. When Jo talks to one of her dads she learns that, according to him, she has been at the camp for less than a week, yet she was sure it had been weeks. What the Lumberjanes live in the camp, then, has the added layer of time disruption, which precludes the regularization of the outside norms within the camp. If such an everyday construction, like time, does not apply equally

in the camp as it would outside of it, then it only shows that even the more taken for granted elements in our lives can exist differently. I read the disconnection of times inside and outside the camp also as a representation of how youth might perceive certain experiences or periods of time as infinite, but compared to the ‘actual’ passage of time they occurred within a limited time frame.

Borders

The fifth principle that Foucault names is the opening and closing system that heterotopic spaces have, which both “isolates them and makes them penetrable” (1986, p. 26). It is a form of regulating the entrance and exit to the space. Although some heterotopic spaces may seem like they are freely available to anyone, there are visible or invisible access barriers for the bodies that inhabit or visit them. At the same time, the porousness of the borders allows for transit between spaces. The borders that surround the campgrounds are not visible, there is no fence or wall, and under the sign marking the entrance of the camp there are no doors; however, that does not mean that the borders are not there. Invisible, they still create a separation between the world of the camp and the rest of the world. The comic makes an effort to locate the space of the camp somewhere else, a Neverland outside ordinary time and space, yet reachable through specific ways of entry.

Within these borders the campers can roam freely, the boundaries provide safety and protection, as well as a visible demarcation of attitudes related to spaces. In the camp, the Lumberjanes do not have to act as they would outside of the camp, they can explore different aspects of their personalities, reinventing themselves, without external judgements. Although there is an inside/outside delimitation between the camp and other spaces, inside the camp

the borders are fuzzier: portals opening randomly around the campgrounds (issues #22 and #23) are destabilizing time and space between worlds.

The possibility of mobility between worlds for the Lumberjanes represents flexibility, a passage, from known to unknown and back again. The camp sets girls in a controlled space that is in between their known setting —house, school— with established social norms, and a completely unknown space —Lumberjanes summer camp—. In what becomes a rite of passage set in a liminal environment they learn, through the accomplishment of tasks, how to be reinserted into a regulated world. However, the young female identified and non-binary people are initiated into an empowering and non-androcentric supporting community. The crossing of borders can mean an escape from external frames of reference, a way for girls to find agency outside of patriarchal culture. But the space cannot exist completely isolated, it is through the negotiations and transactions that comes into being. In the same way, as much as the identities of the campers are constructed within the borders of the camp, they are also dependent to the world outside of the camp. It is significant then to look at how the negotiations occur when bodies cross borders in the comic.

The discourse that appears in the Lumberjanes manual celebrates diversity and difference among the girls in the camp; however, the comic does not tackle intersectionality directly. The camp seems to erase any systemic distinction that the racialized and gendered bodies participating in the activities might have outside of camp. There is no mention of the camp's fees or of any other material requirements, so I cannot assert if money becomes a barrier for allowing and denying entrance to certain girls who do not have the economic means to spend a summer in a space that is structured with both learning time and leisure

time in mind. It is noticeable, however, that the camp is located in a secluded area, so transportation would be an obstacle for some families.

The way in which some families are introduced in issue #13 shows the contrasts of the socioeconomic backgrounds of the Roanokes, but only to introduce the idea of the camp as a separate space from the rest of the world that is outside of the camp: in here, it does not matter where you come from or who your parents are, because everyone is treated the same. By not acknowledging the diverse systemic inequalities that girls face outside the camp there is a risk of erasure, placing upon the individuals the power to overcome systemic obstacles. When Jo's dads drive her to the camp she asks to be dropped off before they arrive, so no one sees her "James Bond's car". We see her, a single child, sitting in the backseat of the car, where she is typing on a laptop and surrounded by screens. She is afraid to be treated differently at camp based on something that she thinks does not define her, the money that her dads have, so she prefers to walk the rest of the way to the Lumberjanes camp.



Panel 20. #13.3 Jo walks the rest of the way to the camp

Right after we are shown Jo's family, we see Ripley's. She is crammed in the backseat of a van with her eight siblings and her grandma, there are loud noises and unpleasant smells. Even though both girls come from different backgrounds and have different interests, they become friends. The summer camp serves as an equalizer among youth, where it does not matter who your family is or what you did outside of the camp space, what matters is who you can be without external biases. This, however, glosses over other markers of identity.

The comic rarely gives importance to the ethnic or racial identities of the non-white characters, resulting in characters who have different skin color, but the same facial features and verbal expressions, uniformed and whitewashed.

Conclusions

Lumberjanes' representation of friendships is a break from postfeminist articulations of female friendships. With an ensemble cast, the creators of the comic have created diverse characters who are not tokenized and who have developed backstories that allow readers to see more than one perspective in the story. By constantly showing —along the course of more than forty issues— how the characters gain strength and self-confidence from their friendships, the comic makes explicit the value of these relationships in the formation of the campers' communal identities, as *Lumberjanes* and *Roanokes*. The comic proposes an alternative identity construction for the characters based on feminist relationships. Even though the comic never openly labels itself as feminist, it makes use of other devices to spread feminist knowledge, as seen in the exclamations of names of feminist trailblazers instead of saying swear words. *Lumberjanes* presents to readers —especially young cis and trans women— an articulation of friendships that disrupts negative mainstream U.S. youth media representations of feminist ideas by portraying a community committed to foster caring networks based on mutual recognition that do not privilege women's relationship to men or reproduce hierarchies.

The friendships are central to the feminist sensibilities of the comic for the way they articulate a communal story of self-identified women and non-binary people that takes place in the heterotopic space of the summer camp. The unique functions of the counter-site produce an alternative environment where several spaces overlap and render it ideal for the campers' identities' development away from heteronormative spaces. The juxtaposition of fantasy and realism have the characters navigate a place of freedom where the rules from outside of the camp do not apply to their relationships and selves inside the camp. To achieve

this tabula rasa, however, the comic erases some external factors that would influence the campers' subjectivities, like race and socioeconomic position, and invisibilizes intersectional oppressions. In the case of the absence of Native Americans in the comic and the use of American frontier imagery, it even reproduces a settler colonial narrative.

Even though it is still infrequent to encounter feminist friendships that could counter the toxic narrative of female competition while portraying feminism in pop culture in a positive light, *Lumberjanes* succeeds in showing a possible scenario where relationships among women are encouraged, celebrated and valued, creating spaces of resistance against hegemonic scripts of relationality through the formulation of feminist friendships from a young age.

For future research about the entanglement of feminist and postfeminist sensibilities in contemporary media that portrays female friendship, I suggest the recent interest in reviving 1990s and 2000s movies and TV shows from the U.S. In the last two years, there has been a surge of TV shows reboots that market themselves to young audiences as inclusive and feminist. *Riverdale* (2017-ongoing) has several queer characters; *One Day at a Time* (2017-ongoing) shows a Cuban-American lesbian teen; *The Powerpuff Girls* (2016-ongoing) is apparently so feminist it annoyed some critics (Thurm, 2016); the upcoming *Charmed* (2018) was recast with non-white actresses and the show description announces it will be a "fierce, funny, feminist reboot of the original" (Evans, 2018) in which one of the characters will be lesbian; and in the TV show version of *Heathers* (no release date) the teen tyrants include a gender queer person, a biracial woman and a fat queen bee. A careful study of this new wave of apparently inclusive TV shows would further our understanding of the ways

postfeminist media continues to take into account current feminist issues, and now LGBTQ issues and identity politics, to appeal to young audiences.

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