Understanding Gender Identity Among Women Cosplayers of the Gotham City Sirens

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Abstract
As popular culture has an increasing presence in America, so do its various sub-cultures. One of such sub-cultures is the world of comic book fans known as cosplayers. Cosplayers dress-up and emulate characters at comic book conventions throughout the United States and the world—a practice known as cosplay, also described as costume-play. Despite the growing popularity of cosplay, little is known about this population. In this research, I set out to answer the following research question: why are women choosing to dress-up and embody these characters (the Gotham City Sirens) when they are often viewed as oversexualized. In order to answer my research question, I focused on women who chose to cosplay characters from the Gotham City Sirens – Catwoman, Harley Quinn, and Poison Ivy – who are frequently depicted in “glamorized” or hypersexualized illustrations. My data collection included participant observation, literature review, and semi-structured interviews. Recruiting participants from local Central Florida comic book conventions, I conducted 19 in-depth semi-structured interviews with the women cosplayers about their perspectives on the characters and their cosplays. My findings derived from the analysis of the interview narratives identified three emerging dominant themes – sexuality, body image, and personal identity. Based on this research, there is a concluding realization that empowerment and self-reflection are prevalent in women cosplayers. These are important findings because they are essential to the understanding of how gender identity is perceived in cosplay. When cosplayers connect with their characters on a personal level, often empowerment and self-reflection are the outcomes; due to the connection they foster with the character for the sake of performance.

Notes
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Gotham City Sirens. Genres: Action, Adventure, Superhero. Publisher: DC Comics. This all-new series features the bad girls of Gotham City! Catwoman, Poison Ivy and Harley Quinn are tired of playing by other people's rules regardless of which side of the law they're on. These tough ladies have a new agenda that's all their own, and they'll use any means necessary to pursue it. But can they get along and work as a team? And who will get hurt along the way?

UNDERSTANDING GENDER IDENTITY AMONG WOMEN COSPLAYERS OF THE GOTHAM CITY SIRENS.

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