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Managing Cosplay Performance: The Forms and Expectations of Convention Roleplay

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by

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ABSTRACT

Managing Cosplay Performance: The Forms and Expectations of Convention Roleplay

by

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Costume play (i.e. cosplay) is a performance of fandom rife with rituals and communication practices. Cosplay roleplaying performances are cultural practices that reveal how cosplayers interact with one another and among non-cosplaying members of their fandoms. This study examines the expectations that cosplayers hold for roleplay, the forms of roleplay, and the ways in which roleplay can become an instigator of harassment. Through the lens of Face-Negotiation Theory, the author discusses how roleplay functions to maintain or threaten the public images of cosplayers and their audiences, and what strategies cosplayers implement to avoid the loss of face.

DEDICATION

To the fans, who are as creative and passionate as the artists they love.

And to Dr. Andrew Herrmann, for teaching me how to talk like an academic while thinking like a fanboy.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Chapter 1. Introduction

I attend a photo shoot at an anime convention, dressed as the superhero/teacher All Might from the series *My Hero Academia.* Around me is a horde of my fellow fans, all dressed as other characters from the series. Many are dressed as my (All Might's) students, and they approach me by asking for pictures, asking me questions that reference our shared source text ("Are you secretly Midoriya's dad?") or quoting my catchphrase ("Go beyond! Plus Ultra!"). Others are dressed as characters that the fans frequently pair with me (All Might) romantically (a practice referred to as "shipping"), and they ask for me to hug them or even kiss their cheek for a picture they will share online. One woman is even dressed as All Might as well, transforming the character's hulking physique into a more feminine frame that is equally (or even more so) accepted by the series' fans. Quotes are shouted, poses are photographed, in-jokes and references are spattered amongst the various ongoing conversations, and through it all, I see a community of people presenting themselves on two fronts: fellow fans of an animated TV series, and performers of represented characters. These images, so preciously maintained, are the backbone of social interactions between members of the cosplay community.

I am a cosplayer, and as such I have experienced firsthand how the cosplay community's practices and standards, particularly those regarding roleplay, have formed a unique culture. This thesis is an examination of roleplaying performances in the cosplay community, specifically focused upon the expectations that cosplayers hold regarding roleplay, the forms roleplay takes, and the ways in which roleplay can become an arena of conflict and harassment among cosplayers and their audiences. Using Face-Negotiation Theory, I discuss how roleplaying performances function as interpersonal interactions, and I introduce two new concepts–the superface and subface–that reconceptualize how Face-Negotiation Theory approaches the maintenance of public image in ways that may apply beyond the realm of cosplay performance.

Additionally, I show how cosplayers hold differing and, in some cases, fundamentally opposed understandings of cosplay roleplaying performances.

In order to understand how roleplay fits into the interconnecting cultural phenomena of cosplay performance and fan expression, it is necessary to review the literature that inspired this research. The first chapter of this thesis broadly explores the various concepts and theories regarding popular culture, fans, and fandom. The chapter continues with a more in-depth analysis of costume play (i.e. cosplay), including how it functions as both an expression of fan culture and a culture of its own, the impact it has upon participants' identities, and the seemingly contradicting expectations that scholars have noted in regards to cosplay roleplaying performances. It concludes with a summary of Face-Negotiation Theory, and how this theoretical framework allowed me to conceptualize roleplay as a form of facework.

Chapter Two outlines the qualitative methods–specifically interviews, focus groups, and ethnographic participant observations–that were used to collect the data, as well as the use of Charmaz's (2014) grounded theory approach in data analysis. These methods were used because they allowed me to integrate myself further within the cosplay community, to witness cosplay roleplaying performances firsthand, and to engage in direct conversations with cosplayers that revealed their roleplay opinions and practices.

Chapter Three discusses the findings of this study. I begin with an explanation of my new terms "superface" and "subface" and how they reconceptualize Face-Negotiation Theory to acknowledge multiple, simultaneous face roles. This is followed by an examination of cosplayers' expectations for roleplay, which are stretched along a continuum that has no desire for roleplay on one end and roleplay being treated as a necessity on the other. Additionally, research showed that different forms of roleplay served as different types of facework, with

solidarity facework being the most commonly observed. Lastly, various instigators of roleplay harassment are explored, as well as the conflict management techniques that cosplayers proposed to address harassment.

In Chapter Four, I conclude by discussing some of the limitations of the study, including personal biases and topics that fell beyond the scope of the study. Additionally, I examine a number of possibilities for future research, including expanding the superface and subface constructs into areas beyond cosplay, narrowing the focus to roleplay practices within individual fandoms or even around individual characters, focusing more strongly on the internal dynamic between cosplayers and their embodied characters, and exploring the impact that costuming has on roleplay performance.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

The San Diego Comic Con (SDCC), one of the largest fan conventions in the United States, draws up to 150,000 attendees annually, injecting over $150 million dollars into the local economy (Salkowitz, 2012, p. 3); that is not to mention thousands of other conventions being annually held around the world. Five of the top ten highest grossing films of all time are superhero films, while three of the remaining films are deeply rooted in science fiction elements (Box Office Mojo, 2019). Both these facts point to a truth that permeates modern popular culture in America and the world abroad: this is the age of the geek. While "geeks" and "fans" were once widely mocked due to their unconventional interests (Herrmann, 2018; Jensen, 1992), the advent of the Internet provided an outlet for the convergence of fandom, making way for a "wider acceptance and purposeful mainstreaming of fannish activities" (Busse, 2013, p. 80). The Internet has also allowed for "a postmillenial convergence of media and the concurrent explosion of online channels for connecting fans with the objects of their fandom" (Salkowitz, 2012, p. 15), which has cultivated "a 'participatory culture' which in turn has challenged the restrictions imposed by media producers" (Gn, 2011, p. 584). While stigma toward geeks and fans persists among certain groups, comics, animation, and other forms of traditionally geeky media have been pushed to the forefront of the entertainment industry groups (Herrmann, 2018, p. 290). To quote Dunn and Hermann (2014), "over the years, geek culture has become pop culture" (p. 4).

If geeks and fans' interests are influencing pop culture, then there is a need to understand how fandom functions, both on the collective and individual level. As Jensen (1992) noted, older stereotypes portray the fan as an "obsessed loner, suffering from a disease of isolation, or a frenzied crowd member, suffering from a disease of contagion. In either case, the fan is seen as irrational, out of control, and prey to a number of external forces" (p. 13). Modern fandom cannot be confined to such negative stereotyping, as anyone with a significant, emotional

connection to some form of popular culture–be it traditionally "geeky" content like comics and animation or more conventional content like music and sports–can be considered a fan (Herrmann, 2013). In the literal sense, fandom refers either to "the state or attitude of being a fan" or "all the fans" of a specific topic (Merriam-Webster, 2019)–such as the collective fans of the *Harry Potter* franchise–but this does not capture fandom's increasing impact on social life. Duchesne (2005) offers a more meaningful definition of fandom: "fandom is a particular kind of performance that many members boldly explore, playing with identity and finding their own layers of meaning" (p. 18). Duchesne's definition has two important elements that allows for a better analysis of fandom. First, fandom as "performance" means that there are behaviors and practices inherent to fandom; in other words, fandom is something in which one participates. Second, the use of "many members" implies that fandoms are collective; fandoms are made up of individuals who have shared experiences, beliefs, and ideals. These elements combined leads to an understanding of fandoms as cultures.

Any given fandom is a culture, which in turn may be made up of numerous other fandoms/cultures. For instance, fans of Japanese anime can be broken down further into fans of individual anime franchises, each sharing characteristics with other anime fandoms while remaining distinct not only in the object of fandom but in cultural practices and values specific to that fandom. Viewing fandoms as cultures aids in understanding how important pop culture is in shaping collective ideologies and personal identities. Herrmann (2013) notes, "our identities and identifications with popular culture artifacts assist in our creation of self. Our identities and pop culture have a long-term recursive relationship" (p. 7). If geek/fan culture is pop culture, and if fandoms themselves act as cultures of their own, then fandoms can and should be examined for their practices to determine what makes fan culture so prominent in our society. Among the

many fan practices, the act of cosplay sparks particular interest due to its overtly performative nature and its presence within various fandoms.

Cosplay: A Performance of Fandom

Cosplay, a portmanteau of "costume" and "play" (Winge, 2006, p. 67), was first coined in 1984 by Japanese reporter Nobuyuki Takahashi to refer to the costume masquerades held at World-Con in Los Angeles (YsabelGo, 2015). Fans of Japanese anime and manga series quickly adopted the costuming practices of the US into their own fan conventions. They added new elements to the practice of cosplay, such as organized costume performances and panels of cosplayers who would attend fan conventions (Winge, 2006). These new practices made their way back into conventions in the United States in the 1980s, along with a growing demand for Japanese anime and manga and, as a result, cosplay in its modern form was born.

Of course, cosplay itself is not simply an act of "costume roleplay." Such a broad definition would include nearly every form of costumed performance. Winge (2006) describes cosplay as a way that fans engage in "constructing or purchasing costumes, learning signature poses and dialogue, and performing at conventions and parties, as they transform themselves from 'real world' identities into chosen (fictional) characters" (Winge, 2006, p. 65). It is this last part of Winge's definition that is important; what separates cosplay from other costumed acts is the embodiment of a character in the real world. Unlike stage acting, cosplayers aren't placing themselves into the world of the text by taking on the role of the narrative's characters in a staged setting that ignores the world around it. Instead, a cosplayer performs as the embodied character in the real-world context surrounding the performance. As Gn (2011) describes it:

> In cosplay, the image of the character is detached from the narrative of the text, while being an imitation or lived experience in the body of the subject. Unlike stage performers

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who re-enact and adhere to the narrative of the text, cosplayers place a greater focus on

the 'likeness' and aesthetics of the imitation. (p. 589)

The cosplayer is transposing the image and identity of a character onto themselves to make place for that character in reality. They may adopt the mannerisms of the character, but they maintain an awareness of the real world around them.

Domsch (2014) emphasizes the significance of embodying characters in cosplay by comparing cosplay to the medieval mystery plays in 13th century Europe. These plays, in which actors would portray biblical figures and recreate biblical scenes, were used as a means of "staging icons," embodying characters from a "narrative storyworld" to show how the source material has "its own ontological level of existence" (p. 129). In other words, the actors would emphasize the real-world significance of the narrative storyworld by creating a physical space for the storyworld to manifest (p. 135-136). Domsch suggests cosplayers have this same underlying motive. Cosplay is about more than pretending to be a fictional character; it's about physically manifesting that character to express the real-world significance of a specific narrative storyworld. Since cosplayers embody their chosen characters through their dress and behavior, the term "embodied character" will be used in this study to refer to the character that cosplayer has chosen for their performance.

This dedication to embodying characters reveals another core aspect of cosplay: a simultaneous dedication to and deviation from the source text. Hale (2014) offers insight into this seemingly contradictory relationship with his definition of cosplay:

The term describes a performative action in which one dons a costume and/or accessories and manipulates his or her posture, gesture, and language in order to generate meaningful

correspondences and contrasts between a given body and a set of texts from which it is

modeled and made to relate. (p. 8)

Hale's (2014) definition states that cosplay creates both "meaningful correspondences and

contrasts" to "a set of texts" (p. 8). The cosplayer is not recreating the original text in their

performance. Instead, the cosplayer is using the original text as a guideline to model a new

performance. In this new performance, the cosplayer can interpret how a character would look

and behave in a scenario never encountered in the original texts, a scenario in reality. As Amon

(2014) noted, "cosplaying thus bears a strong potential for departures from the narrative because

as living beings performing static characters, cosplayers must take their characters into situations

and narratives beyond those found in the [texts]" (para. 2.3). The cosplayer is embodying their

character in the real world and, in doing so, the cosplayer is forced to interpret and improvise

how they believe the character would behave in reality. While these performances may be

scripted (although they rarely are), the scripts are developed not as part of the source text but as

an interpretation of how the source text could be translated into reality.

Hale's (2014) use of "texts" in his definition of cosplay refers to any narrative source:

books, comics, animated television series, movies, and any medium where a story is told and a

distinct, recognizable character or character archetype is presented. Texts are not limited to

fictional sources; cosplayers may choose to imitate the appearance and mannerisms of real

people, such as celebrities and historical figures. Cosplayers who choose to imitate real people

blur the boundary between cosplay and other costumed acts, such as historical reenactments or

live action roleplaying. What separates cosplay from other costumed performances is the

cosplayer's connection with and dedication to a specific fandom, source text, and character, as

well as the manifestation of the character into reality rather than a staged, fictional setting (Hale, 2014).

While cosplay is a performance of fandom, it is not limited to any particular fandom or text: "it is not uncommon to see many cosplayers move frequently and fluidly between different characters and [fandoms] according to their changing interests and passions" (Rahman, Wing-sun, & Cheung, 2012, p. 320). A cosplayer can play an almost unlimited number of characters if they so desire. Cosplayers may choose to dress as characters from anime, video games, comics, or any number of pop culture mediums. Regardless of fandom, they all share practices and rituals, such as posing for pictures and exchanging dialogue that references the source text, that separate them from other practitioners of fan performance, such as fan fiction writers (Hale, 2014). In fact, cosplayers subvert their own engagement with their fandoms, as a cosplayer's performance "radically complicates the paradigm of the fan as an active producer or manipulator of the canonical text" (Gn, 2011, p. 583). As Gn (2011) explains:

> On the one hand, it is the physical imitation of the image that emancipates the character from the narrative of the text, thereby giving the subject an avenue to express 'alternative identities, scenarios and experiences.' On the other hand, the practice of cosplay – with its simulation of artificiality and ambiguity that demands its own form of hermeneutic – implies a consumption of the image beyond the site of difference. For the cosplayer, it is not only the modification of the text that is liberating (or, in other instances, subversive), but also the consumption of the image that becomes a pleasurable, embodied experience. (p. 583-584)

Thus, cosplayers can be studied not only as fans of specific franchises and intellectual properties, but also as performers who play with their own relationships to their fandoms and interact with

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other fans through specific rituals and behaviors. In other words, *cosplay functions as both a performance of fandom and as a culture of its own.* Through the performance of an embodied character, cosplayers are able to redefine not only said characters but also themselves by roleplaying an identity separate from their everyday persona.

Cosplay Roleplay as Identity Exploration

Simply put, *roleplay* is when a cosplayer "manipulates his or her posture, gesture, and language" (Hale, 2014, p. 8) in an effort to imitate their embodied character in scenarios beyond those of the character's source text. However, roleplaying performances in cosplay are much more than impersonations. Lamerichs (2011) notes the effect that enacting fictional characters and their texts can have on shaping personal identity:

> Cosplay does not just fictionalize everyday life and give it an aesthetic dimension; it also shows how the fictional shapes the actual. Ultimately, cosplay is a vital example of how identity is constructed. Fans construct their own identity by associating themselves with fictional characters and embodying them. Cosplay emphasizes that the self not only narrates fiction but is partly fictional as well. It is through interaction with stories that we can imagine and perform ourselves. (para. 6.2)

The cosplayer's connection to their embodied character transcends a temporary acting role. Embodied characters come from a text that has deeply impacted the cosplayer's personal identity. For cosplayers, the performance of the character is a performance of self; they do not wish to become the character that they have embodied, but they wish to show in their performances what elements of the character and the texts have become ingrained in their own identities. As Herrmann (2013) puts it, "our identities and identifications with popular culture artifacts assist in our creation of self" (p. 7).

Lamerichs' view of fiction constructing identity is echoed in Turner's (1982) description of how a stage drama, "a genre of cultural performance" (p. 107), can impact social dramas, the four-phase processes that "arise out of conflict" and "occur 'on all levels of social organization'" to enact social reformation (p. 106). Turner claims that stage dramas help to establish the rules of performance within the everyday social drama:

[The stage drama's] message and rhetoric feed back into the latent processual structure of the social drama and partly account for its ready ritualization. Life itself now becomes a mirror held up to art, and the living now *perform* their lives, for the protagonists of a social drama, a "drama of living," have been equipped by aesthetic drama with some of their most salient opinions, imageries, tropes, and ideological perspectives. (1982, p. 108)

Turner insists that being engaged in social life is a form of performance, a social "work" performance that stands opposed to the stage "leisure" performance defined as "a non-work, even an anti-work phase in the life of the person who also works" (p. 36). Work and leisure are co-dependent factors of social life, with social and stage performances forming a cyclical pattern where each deconstructs and reconstructs the other in a system of constant cultural change: "perhaps the deepest experience is through drama; *not* through social drama, or stage drama (or its equivalent) *alone*, but in the circulatory or oscillatory process of their mutual and incessant modification" (1982, p. 108).

Cosplay falls into the category of these leisure performances, these "liminoid" spaces that serve as "an independent domain of creative activity, not simply a distorted mirror-image, mask, or cloak for structural activity in the 'centers' or 'mainstreams' of 'productive social labor'" (Turner, 1982, p. 33). Derived from Turner's (1982) observations of the liminal ritual phases of pre-industrial tribal societies, the liminoid is "a genre of leisure enjoyment, not an obligatory

ritual, it is play-separated-from-work" (p. 43) that forms in industrial societies to replace the

obligatory liminal rituals. It maintains the "analysis of culture into factors and their free or

'ludic' recombination in any and every possible pattern, however weird" (p. 28) that gives

liminal rituals their transformative power. Turner insists that the liminoid spaces, specifically

those of theatrical nature, do more than just maintain social order:

> Theatre, though it has abandoned its former ritual, claims to be a means of
>
> communication with invisible powers and ultimate reality, and can still assert,
>
> particularly since the rise of depth psychology, that it represents the reality behind the
>
> role-playing masks, that even its masks, so to speak, are "negations of the negation."
>
> They present the false face in order to portray the possibility of a true face. (p. 115)

Turner claimed that the "true" self was found not in the "mundane world that is false, illusory,

the home of the *persona*" but in the "theatre that is real, the world of the *individual*, and by its

very existence representing a standing critique of all social structure which shape human beings"

(p. 116). While cosplay and traditional stage acting are different forms of performance, cosplay

certainly seems to align with Turner's definition of a liminoid experience; it is an optional,

playful form of leisure that draws from cultural elements (i.e. texts) to disrupt and subvert

everyday social performances. That subversion of everyday performance, as Berlatsky (2013)

notes, allows the cosplayer to express themselves in ways unburdened by mundane social

obligation in the same way as Turner's liminoid performances: "cosplay is deliberately about

fakeness…. That fakeness, though, isn't manipulative; it's fun, and often, contradictorily, an

authentic expression of the folks under the costumes" (para. 3).

A crucial distinction between the liminal and liminoid is the focus on collective vs.

individuality. The liminal subdues the individual to emphasize communitas, while the liminoid

lays "great public stress on the individual innovator, the unique person who dares and opts to create" (Turner, 1982, p. 43). It may be that the liminoid's focus on the individual makes it difficult to find a universal standard for roleplaying performances within the cosplay community. That is, because the liminoid experience of cosplay is so deeply rooted in the individual, establishing a single set of guidelines to define the purpose and extent of roleplay among cosplayers may be impossible.

Between Cosplayer and Character

There is a connection between the cosplayer and the character that transcends mere aesthetic appeal. A study by Rosenberg and Letamendi (2018) revealed that 72.3% of the cosplayers they surveyed (672 of their 929 participants) chose to cosplay characters primarily on the basis of internal factors such as personality and character history (para. 3.6). The characters that a cosplayer chooses to dress as have some element of their identities that draws the cosplayer to them, something that echoes inside the cosplayer's own identity. Dunn and Herrmann (in press) found similar results during their survey research.

With that in mind, cosplay roleplaying is an interesting performance to examine because it involves superimposing the embodied character's personality traits over the identity of the cosplayer, much like how the character's physical appearance is superimposed over the cosplayer's body. By "superimposed," I do not mean to suggest that the cosplayer's "true" identity–or at least, the identity that they use in their everyday performances–is repressed in favor of a dramatized, fictional persona. Instead, by roleplaying the embodied character, the cosplayer is taking on multiple identities simultaneously, which in turn forms a new identity, one that Schechner (1985) might term the "not-not-me" (p. 123). Schechner describes this "not-not-me" as a liminal experience that performers enter when taking on the role of a character:

[The performer] performs in the field between a negative and a double negative, a field of limitless potential, free as it is from both the person (not) and the person impersonated (not not)…. Olivier is not Hamlet, but also he is not not Hamlet: his performance is between a denial of being another (= I am me) and a denial of not being another (= I am Hamlet). (p. 123)

This "not-not-me" performance identity, which stems from the human ability to have "multiple selves coexist in an unresolved dialectical tension" (p. 6), occurs when performers "are neither themselves nor their roles" (p. 124), when a performer's assumption of multiple identities results in a breakdown of those identities into something new. As Berlatsky (2013) notes, this not-not-me identity is central to cosplay performance:

Cosplaying is exhilarating both because it is fake and because it's real. It lets the participants be who they're not, and also be who they are. In that, it's not so much different than any art… Fiction in whatever form is both fake and real; it's artificial, but it can speak truth. (para 7)

In fact, cosplayers may engage even deeper with this "not-not-me" identity than traditional stage performers due to the improvisational nature of cosplay roleplaying. Scripted roleplaying performances do exist (e.g. masquerades and costume contests), but far more common are spur-of-the-moment performances that require cosplayers to constantly and variably interpret how their embodied characters would behave rather than following a preset script. In other words, most cosplayers don't have the benefit of a script to guide their actions, so they must make the shift between their everyday identity and the identity of their embodied characters seamless enough to be called upon at any given instant while in costume. "Part of the cosplayer's role is to

be in character at all times the costume is worn, to be ready to perform, or pose when requested"

(Bainbridge & Norris, 2013, para. 12).

Cosplay roleplaying is what Schechner (1985) calls a "transportation performance," a performance where "the performers are 'taken somewhere' but at the end, often assisted by others, they are 'cooled down' and reenter ordinary life just about where they went in" (p. 125-126). It is a temporary experience, one in which the cosplayer enters a performative world and assumes a new identity but returns essentially unchanged; the not-not-me identity is limited to the performance itself. As Rahman, Wing-sun, and Cheung (2012) note, this identity transportation can serve as a form of escapism for cosplayers, allowing them to "enter into an imaginative world or into dreamlike states of hyperreality" in order to "momentarily leave behind their stresses, burdens, anxieties, boredom, and the disappointments of everyday life" and experience "pleasure, self-gratification, and personal fulfillment" (p. 333). Additionally, the temporary nature of a transportation performance allows cosplayers to engage in self-gratifying activities that may not be accessible in their everyday social performances:

> Performers may enjoy the pleasurable moments being looked at by spectators, or they may be obsessed in objectifying themselves. In other words, cosplay allows enthusiasts to momentarily change their identity in order to create an exciting, extraordinary, and contented self rather than attempting a real-life transformation. (Rahman et al., 2012, p. 334)

However, Schechner (1985) claims that just because this performance is temporary does not mean the effects it has on the performer's identity are temporary as well. "A series of transportation performances can achieve a transformation" if the transportation performances are repeated, with the transformation occurring "over a long series of performances, each of which

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moves the performer slightly" (p. 126). Hetherington (1998) echoes this idea of repetitive

performances constructing identity, stating that "production of chosen identities takes place

through a series of performances, or occasions in which identity processes are played out" (p.

19). That is, if a performer repeats a specific performance with enough regularity, then that

performance will gradually alter their everyday identity as well. Such transformations may occur

among cosplayers who have chosen to cosplay a specific character–or even characters who share

specific personality traits (e.g. confidence, compassion, cleverness)–on a regular basis.

Even if a cosplayer only chooses to embody a specific character once, the cosplayer is

still able to experiment with their own identity by weakening the boundary between their own

identity and the identity of an embodied character:

Participants are constantly exchanging and negotiating the boundaries of "affective play"

between "inner" and "outer" or between what is "real" (the real self) and what is

"fantasy" (the imaginative self). In other words, the identification of the cosplayers is not

stagnant; it often shifts and evolves over the course of time without a fixed boundary.

(Rahman et al., 2012, p. 321)

Not only does this blending of cosplayer and character identity allow the cosplayer to explore

new personality traits, it also allows them to better express personal characteristics that they may

possess but feel uncomfortable revealing in their everyday performances. Mongan (2015) notes

how cosplay draws out elements of the cosplayer's identity that may be suppressed or unnoticed

in his or her daily life by embodying a character that shares those character traits:

Rather than trying to be something or someone that I'm not, I'm teasing out things already

inside of me. I loved being Lilith, for example, not because I could pretend I was strong,

but because it reminded me of how strong I actually am. Spending time in these

characters' skins helps reminds me of who I want to be and who I already am. (para. 11)

Likewise, Nichols (2019) notes that the cosplayer's ability to change between costumes allows

them to explore various aspects of their own identity over the course of a single convention:

[Cosplayers] seek to cosplay a variety of elements of their identities. Cosplay is a venue

in which they may be coy, sweet, strong, badass, vulnerable, violent, outgoing,

introverted or intelligent, all in the same weekend. No longer restricted to one image,

appearance or expression of self, [cosplayers] are empowered through cosplay to work

creatively, constructing those images that will best represent their identity. The fact that

they may do so in an environment that accepts and even actively encourages such

embodied and performative experimentation makes the space of cosplay unique. (p. 276)

The ability to change costumes allows the cosplayer to change their performance, giving them

freedom to explore the various elements of their identity. Because the cosplayer can change

costumes, they can also change how their audience expects them to perform, even if said

audience has previously seen them in a different costume giving a different performance. The

change in costume signals to the audience that one performance has ended and a new

performance has begun. This gives cosplayers more freedom to explore various aspects of their

identity, as they are not limited by their audience's expectations to maintain a specific

performance.

Despite cosplay's potential for personal exploration, or perhaps because of this potential,

the performance of cosplay has not always been accepted as a "legitimate" form of fan

performance. It is important to note that cosplay has historically faced prejudice from the broader

fan culture.

Hegemonic Masculinity in Fandom and Cosplay

Coppa (2006) noted that there is an internal "geek hierarchy" in fan culture that tends to "privilege the written word over the spoken one and mind over body," with the highest regarded fan practices being those that represent "literary values (the mind, the word, the 'original statement')" and those toward the bottom having "theatrical [values] (repetition, performance, embodied action)" (p. 231). Cosplay, with its focus on costuming the body and performing characters, clearly fits into this latter category of theatrical fan performance. Busse (2013) suggests that the lower placement of theatrical fan performances on the geek hierarchy is due to a desire among fans to draw less negative attention from outsiders, thus appearing more "normal" to the general public:

> Geek hierarchies in general function in a particular way: by finding someone who is more unusual, less mainstream, more out there, fans can raise their own status. I'd suggest that such a hierarchy is deeply invested in ideas of normalcy as defined by the outside, i.e., fans internalize outside definitions of normal behavior in order to define internal hierarchies. As a result, many clearly visible fan activities are judged and described as cringeworthy. (p. 80)

With cosplay being an explicitly external and visible expression of fandom, it draws more attention than other, more private fan practices. Thus, cosplayers might be looked down on by their fellow fans for drawing too much attention from the ever-judging eyes of those outside of the community.

Other scholars attribute prejudice against cosplay to misogyny in the broader geek culture, which looks down on the traditionally feminine elements of cosplay:

> Sewing and making your own costume, as many participants do; putting on elaborate makeup; participating in contests where competitors spin for the judges like runway

models—all of these emphatically treat geek culture as fashion, that most despised, and

not coincidentally most feminized, of art forms. (Berlatsky, 2013, para. 2)

Unfortunately, this hegemonic masculinity isn't limited to cosplay; many areas of fan and geek

culture are still deeply misogynist, featuring sexist elements such as "the hypersexualization of

women in comics and video games, the practice of killing off women in comics, known as

'women in refrigerators,' and other forms of overt sexism" (Herrmann, 2018, p. 291). Salkowitz

(2012) noted that despite fan culture's movement toward "a much more equal gender balance"

(p. 77) in terms of the increasing number of female fans, the male-centric origins of geek culture

instigates pushback against fandoms targeted more strongly towards female fans, such as the

criticism against the "invasion" of the *Twilight* fandom at the 2008 San Diego Comic Con (p.

78). As Shimabokuru (2013) points out, such sexism has the potential to prevent female fans

from participating in public fan practices, "because they are afraid that if they do, that some

screaming fanboy or (God help us) 'expert' will tell them that they don't know what they're

talking about and to go away" (para. 7). One can only hope that with the ever-increasing number

of female fans and geeks, this notion of fan culture as a "boy's club" will disappear and allow

fans to display their appreciation for their fandoms in whatever form they please, regardless of

the fans' gender identities.

While the hegemonic masculinity in both fandom culture and cosplay culture are

reprehensible and deeply problematic, it does reveal an important element of both: these cultures

have expectations for their members' behaviors and presentation of self. While some of these

expectations may be unreasonable and entrenched in misogynistic thought, others are intrinsic to

the nature of cosplay. Specifically, the embodiment of a character–the core component of

cosplay performance–brings with it certain expectations of how one should imitate a character's appearance and behavior.

Roleplaying Expectations in the Cosplay Community

One might expect that, while in costume, cosplayers tend to remain in-character, so that assuming the costume equals assuming the role. Bainbridge and Norris (2013) strongly support this claim:

> Cosplay is as much about assuming the habitus of the character (the way they act) as it is in wearing the clothes. It is about embodying the character, providing an accurate and authentic experience in terms of body features and behaviours as much as dress. (para. 11)

Rahman et al. (2012) also insist roleplaying is imperative to the performance of cosplay, that "achieving an accurate depiction and embodiment of their chosen character (facial and bodily expressions and appropriate postures) is of the utmost importance to the performers and spectators alike" (p. 322). They also note that roleplay serves as a means of displaying commitment to one's fandom:

> A cosplay performance also demonstrates the degree to which a participant is committed to a group in general and to a character in particular. Cosplayers must fervently believe in the role that they are playing. Otherwise, their act or performance will become a form of self-deception and be considered inauthentic or non-genuine. (2012, p. 325)

Because of this desire to demonstrate commitment to a particular fandom, cosplayers "pay enormous attention to both verbal and non-verbal expression, and meticulous focus on the costume, image, and persona of their chosen character" (Rahman et al., 2012, p. 324-325).

However, many cosplay scholars have pointed out the lack of universal standards for roleplaying performances among cosplayers. Roleplay seems to have various degrees of

significance among cosplayers, with those at one extreme being "obsessed with a given character, re-creating that character with meticulous attention to detail and performing as that character as often as time and money allow" (Winge, 2006, p. 68) and those at the other extreme engaging in "a more casual practice in which a fan simply wears the costume and socializes in it" (Lamerichs, 2011, para. 1.5). Even Rahman et al. (2012) recognized that "the level of commitment, engagement, and involvement of every individual (both cosplayers/performers and onlookers/observers) could vary from absolute to partial to negligible, or from sincere to cynical" (p. 323). Busse (2013) claims that some fans may discourage cosplay roleplaying, as they consider roleplay "too fannish" of a fan practice and believe that the "emotional investment seems too intense" (p. 84). Such variance between cosplayers' opinions on roleplaying performances makes the construction of cosplay roleplaying standards challenging.

Another complicating factor in determining roleplay expectations is the multitude of forms that cosplay roleplaying can take. Roleplaying can be something as simple and informal as posing for a picture or exchanging dialogue that references the character's text (Hale, 2014, p. 8). It might be a highly structured and widely observed event such as a costume contest or prepared skit (Lamerichs, 2011, para. 1.1). Such a variety of roleplaying performances raises several questions about the extent to which cosplayers are expected to engage in roleplay. Must they participate in all forms of roleplaying performance, or only certain ones? Which roleplaying performances are most common? Which are held in the highest regard? Is there an obligation or expectation that cosplayers engage in roleplay at all? This last question challenges the very definition of cosplay: is roleplaying essential or optional to the act of cosplay? This is one of the central questions this study aims to address from the perspective of cosplayers.

Costuming methods' effects on roleplay expectations. While an explicit, universal set of standards for roleplaying performances within the cosplay community does not and perhaps cannot exist, Hale (2014) does note that the type of costume a cosplayer wears is likely to impact the roleplaying expectations placed upon them. Generic character representation involves dressing as a non-specific character archetype, such as robot or superhero. This results in simple archetypical roleplay expectations, rather than the performance of a specific character. Rather than demand an acute understanding of a given text, generic character representations "reproduce generic structure with minimal modulation or deviations from those sign configurations that index a particular generic form" (Hale, 2014, p. 12). For example, a cosplayer dressed as a zombie may be expected to shuffle slowly and moan for brains, but they are not obligated to imitate any particular actions or dialogue exchanges from a specific text.

In contrast, discrete character representation, the "material and performative reproduction or replication of a distinct and recognizable subject from a particular body of texts" (Hale, 2014, p. 10), tends to have more demanding roleplay expectations because the cosplayer is dressing as a specific, recognizable character:

> For those Dragon Con attendees familiar with the *Venture Brothers* and its cast of characters, Toll's costume and performance demonstrated his familiarity and commitment to the text. It was a declaration of personal identity and membership within this community of fans. (p. 11)

Discrete character representation, then, acts as a symbol of shared appreciation for a given text between members of a particular fandom. The cosplayer's costume and performance signify the importance that the embodied character and the text has to them. It also invites others who have

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similar relationships to the text to interact with the cosplayer. Discrete character representation creates a feeling of community among cosplayers who share the same fandom.

Discrete character representation can be further broken down into two subcategories, each with its own roleplay expectations. The first is direct imitation, in which costumes "maintain fidelity between what is realized in performance and the imitated text" (Hale, 2014, p. 14). Direct imitation tends to have stricter roleplay standards since the cosplayer is attempting to recreate the character as accurately to the text as possible: "a source text is not only generative; it is also restrictive. An originating text also indicates how a given character should *not* look, sound, or act" (p. 17).

An example of direct imitation cosplay can be found in Amon's (2014) study on roleplaying performances among Disney cosplayers. This study revealed a strong dedication toward maintaining the innocence of the Disney brand that appears exclusive to this subset of the cosplay community. "As a leisure activity, cosplaying has the potential for creativity and imagination of play; however, for Disney cosplayers, this freedom of play is often ignored in favor of adherence to the Disney canon" (Amon, 2014, para. 2.2). According to Amon, this dogmatic attachment to maintaining a family-friendly image while in costume serves several personal purposes for Disney cosplayers: "demonstrating affinity for a film and a personal knowledge of the canon" (para. 2.2), minimizing "deviation from traditional formations of innocence through narrative" (para. 2.2), and blurring "the boundary between self and fictional character through the practice's playful relationship with constructions of identity" (para. 3.1). This last goal of Disney cosplayers serves as Amon's main focus, and she applies performance theory to explore the "junction of performer and character to find the boundary between self, or me, and character, or not me" (para. 3.1). Amon notes from her own experience that

superimposing a character's identity over one's personal identity results in certain personality traits becoming dramatized and emphasized:

> I am not a highly independent or adventurous person, but through cosplaying I experienced an expansion of that trait in my own identity; because Esmeralda would stride through the hall with confidence, I found myself striding with confidence, and because people identified my body as Esmeralda's, it did become her body, and surrogation for the character was achieved. (2014, para. 3.4)

Amon's study on Disney cosplayers reveals the sense of communal standards that occur not only among the cosplay community as a whole but also among subcategories of cosplayers divided by fandom.

The second form of discrete character representation is textual transformation, in which "a cosplayer maximizes the intertextual gap generated when a source text is adapted and (re)animated" (Hale, 2014, p. 19). Unlike direct imitation, textual transformations allow cosplayers more freedom in their roleplay because their costumes purposefully alter the image of and connection to the text: "this transformative act reduces fidelity, promotes 'critical ironic distance,' and creates points of contrast between the imitated and the imitative text" (Hale, 2014, p. 19). As a result, textual transformation cosplays allow cosplayers to display more of their personal identity through their costumes and performances.

Crossplay, gender-bending, and expectations of gender performance in cosplay. Two of the most common examples of textual transformation in cosplay costuming are crossplay, in which "the socially accepted gender of the [cosplayer] is at odds with that of the character" (Gn, 2011, p. 584), and gender-bending, in which a cosplayer alters the gender identity of the character to match their own. Both crossplay and gender-bending have apparent connections to

drag, which Butler (1993) describes as the performance of "a sign which is not the same as the body it figures, but which cannot be read without it" (p. 26). In fact, using Butler's definition, it could be argued that all cosplay performances are a form of drag, since the "sign" can differ from the body of the subject in more ways than gender alone: "drag is about identity, not just gender. Simulation of gender, race and (un)reality, we would argue, are all integral parts of the mimesis and habitus of the drag act and all frequently displayed in cosplay" (Bainbridge & Norris, 2013, para. 22).

Gn (2011) argues against the comparison between cosplay and drag, claiming that "cosplayers differ from the drag-queen … insofar as the embodiment of the object denotes a movement of the sign beyond the established gender dichotomy" (p. 589). That is, because cosplayers frequently dress as unreal, non-human, and sometimes even non-humanoid characters, they ignore drag's focus on subverting gender in terms of human bodies. This would separate even the seemingly gendered act of crossplay from drag, as crossplay "does not operate within a single field of difference" as drag does (Gn, 2011, p. 589). Instead, Gn suggests that in cosplay, "the subject's voice is concealed behind the masquerade," which differs from the subversive nature of drag in that the subject of cosplay is the performance of a separate character's identity, not the performance of self-identity: "it is the performing body of the cosplayer and not the subject's voice that becomes the spectacle" (2011, p. 590).

Bainbridge and Norris (2013) counter that "the fact that the cosplayer at the very least selects the character to be cosplayed represents a form of identity politics, where the character in some way aligns with the desires or bodily type (or both) of the cosplayer" (para. 14). They argue that while cosplay is more "disruptive" and less "subversive" than traditionally gendered drag acts–"a *play* more than a challenge" (2013, para. 21)–it functions as a form of drag not

limited to a single aspect of identity, one that "extends the possibilities for drag beyond gendered roles of kings and queens, to playing at being [another race] and playing at being unreal" (para. 19). In this way, cosplay is an elevated form of drag, a "posthuman drag… in the sense that a posthuman is one who can become or embody multiple identities (the very essence of the cosplayer)" (para. 27).

Regardless of whether cosplay wields the same subversive power as "traditional" drag acts, even Gn (2011) notes that "masquerading as a character of the opposite sex in cosplay can be perceived as an act of deviance insofar as it appears to subvert hetero-normative behaviours" (p. 589). Crossplay and gender-bending go about this deviance in different ways. In crossplay, the cosplayer is performing a character whose gender identity does not match their own. It is the cosplayer's own gender identity that is being played with in crossplay; they cast aside their everyday gender performance in favor of the gender performance assigned to their character. For example, suppose that a male cosplayer wanted to dress as the female character Sailor Moon. If the cosplayer chose to crossplay, he would not alter the character's appearance–or at least, alterations to the design would not be done in order to make the female character appear more masculine. Instead, the feminine elements of the character, such as her skirt and long hair, would be used to transpose the female identity of the character over the male identity of the cosplayer.

In contrast, gender-bending involves altering the character's gender identity to match that of the cosplayer. Instead of altering their own gender performance, cosplayers who engage in gender-bending are challenging the audience to reimagine the embodied character through a differently gendered lens. It is the gender identity of the character, not the cosplayer, which is being played with. Using the Sailor Moon example, a male cosplayer would alter the feminine aspects of the character (e.g. skirt) so that they appear more masculine (e.g. replacing the skirt

with pants or shorts). Thus the cosplayer is transposing his male identity over the female identity of the character.

Both crossplay and gender-bending raise interesting questions about how cosplayers are expected to engage in roleplaying performances. Is a male crossplayer expected to behave in a more traditionally feminine way when dressed as a female character, or would this simply reinforce heteronormative expectations? What elements of a character's personality, if any, are altered in the process of a gender-bending roleplay performance? While the answers to these questions undoubtedly differ between both cosplayers and embodied characters, there is no denying that crossplay and gender-bending have the power to disrupt roleplay expectations by explicitly playing with gender. Unfortunately, this disruption of cultural expectations can result in backlash from other members of the cosplay community.

Roleplay Harassment

Previously I discussed hegemonic masculinity in fandom and the trouble that has been caused for cosplayers by those outside of the cosplay community. Harassment towards cosplayers can come from people within the cosplay community as well. Lome (2016) addresses issues of body policing that persist in the cosplay community despite movements to make cosplay more inclusive:

> Cosplayers still encounter misconceptions as to whether people can cosplay characters of different genders, races, heights, weights, and so on. "You can't be that character because you are black!" "You are too fat to be x character!", and "A dude can't dress like a girl!" are still frequent complaints… This policing and prejudice, as well as sexual harassment, defeats what cosplay is about. (para. 4.1)

Much like harassment from outside the cosplay community, this sort of body policing tends to be deeply gendered, with much of the negative feedback being directed at women:

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What stands out is the amount of images mocking body shapes and gender conformity…

cosplayers judge themselves and others by accuracy, even when cosplaying characters

clearly not human. In fact, mocking seems pretty clear: if you aren't thin and pretty

enough, you shouldn't cosplay skinny female characters. (Busse, 2013, p. 86)

Other prominent issues within the cosplay community include photographs being taken without

consent (Zarin, 2017) and, perhaps most notoriously, sexual harassment, both physical and

verbal (Lome, 2016). These issues, while still prominent, have been addressed in part by the

"Cosplay is not Consent" movement that started in 2012 (*Fanlore*, 2018). This movement urges

fan convention attendees to ask for consent before touching or photographing cosplayers, as well

as to treat cosplayers with decency and respect.

However, cosplay scholars seem to have overlooked the harassive potential in roleplaying

performances. Instances of cosplayers refusing to step out-of-character or behaving

inappropriately because "that is how the character would act" are notorious within the cosplay

community. Conversely, convention attendees may pressure or even demand cosplayers to

roleplay in ways that make them uncomfortable. Some audiences may also harass a cosplayer

because they do not like the character that the cosplayer has embodied. In these scenarios, there

seems to be a misunderstanding of where the boundary between the character's identity and the

cosplayer's identity lies, within the mind(s) of either the cosplayer or his or her audience.

Goffman (1959) may offer some insight as to why this ambiguous boundary between

cosplayer and character can be problematic. He notes that performers may try to foster the

impression in their audiences that the performer's current performance is their "real"

performance, an accurate representation of their everyday identity:

Individuals often foster the impression that the routine they are presently performing is

their only routine or at least their most essential one. As previously suggested, the

audience, in turn, often assume that the character projected before them is all there is to

the individual who acts out the projection for them. (1959, p. 48)

This assumption of the current performance being "central" to the performer may contribute to

issues of roleplaying harassment within the cosplay community. In cases where the cosplayer

refuses to step out-of-character, they may be wishing to present themselves to others as if they

are their embodied character–or, to a more reasonable degree, that they share many personality

traits with said character–which audience members may not be willing to accept due to their

awareness that the performance is based on a fictional text. In cases where the audience pressures

cosplayers into roleplaying, the audience may be assuming that the cosplayer has chosen to dress

as their embodied character because said character's personality is similar to the cosplayer's

everyday identity, and by extension, the cosplayer is capable of and comfortable with performing

the character through roleplay. When a cosplayer fails to meet audience expectations, the

audience may be disappointed in the "acutely embarrassing wedge between the official

projection and reality" (p. 52).

It is my belief that this boundary between cosplayer and character identity can be

explored through an examination of cosplay roleplay. To this end, I explored Face-Negotiation

Theory (Goffman, 1967; Ting-Toomey, 1994) to see how cosplayers and their audiences use

roleplay as a means of maintaining (or threatening) the integrity of cosplay performances.

Face-Negotiation Theory and Cosplay Roleplaying Performances

Goffman (1967) was the first to situate the notion of face, which he described as "an

image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes" (p. 5), in Western research. Ting-

Toomey (1994) expanded on Goffman's concept of face, noting that face is a culturally-specific

presentation: "face entails the presentation of a civilized front to another individual within the webs of interconnected relationships in a particular culture" (p. 1). In short, face is a metaphor for the positive public image that people display, which is relative to their culture. Brown and Levinson (1978) utilized politeness theory to separate face into two categories: *positive face*, the "positive consistent self-image or 'personality' (crucially including the desire that this self-image be appreciated and approved of) claimed by interactions" (p. 66), and *negative face*, the "basic claim to territories, personal preserves, rights to non-distraction–i.e., to freedom of action and freedom from imposition" (p. 66). In other words, positive face is concerned with social acceptance and approval, while negative face is concerned with personal autonomy and freedom. Lim and Bowers (1991) re-named positive face to *fellowship-face* and negative face to *autonomy-face*. Additionally, they recognized a third type of face, the *competence-face*, which is concerned with "the image that one is a person of ability" (Lim, 1994, p. 211). For this study, I will be using Lim and Bowers' three categories of face.

Goffman (1967) noted that in all communication interactions, face may be maintained– that is, it "presents an image … that is internally consistent, that is supported by judgments and evidence conveyed by other participants, and that is confirmed by evidence conveyed through impersonal agencies of the situation" (p. 6-7). Likewise, face can be lost, either through "information that is brought forth in some way about [a person's] social worth which cannot be integrated" (p. 8) into the person's performance of self, or when a person "participates in a contact with others without having ready a line of the kind participants in such situations are expected to take" (p. 8). Goffman claims that everyone has *face concern*, a desire to maintain face and a fear of the loss of face. Goffman also claims that this face concern extends beyond the

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individual, that participants in social interactions have a face concern for not only themselves but their fellow participants:

> Just as a member of any group is expected to have self-respect, so also is he expected to sustain a standard of considerateness; he is expected to go to certain lengths to save the feelings and face of others present, and he is expected to do this willingly and spontaneously because of emotional identification with the others and with their feelings. (1967, p. 10)

Because each participant in an interaction has the power to positively or negatively impact the face of others, each participant must engage in *facework*, "the actions taken to deal with the face-wants of one and/or the other" (Lim, 1994, p. 211). As Lim (1994) notes, facework can be done to "promote, maintain, threaten or ignore the face-wants of the other," such that "at the most supportive extreme, facework actually gives face to another; at the opposite extreme, facework directly threatens the face of the other" (p. 212).

Lim and Bowers (1991) identified three forms of facework, each relating to one of their three forms of face. *Tact facework* addresses autonomy-face and "expresses to some degree one respects the other's freedom of action or autonomy," minimizing the restrictions on others' freedom to act as they desire (Lim, 1994, p. 212). *Solidarity facework* is concerned with fellowship-face and "expresses to some degree that one accepts the other as a member of an in-group," minimizing differences and maximizing similarities between individuals (p. 212). Lastly, *approbation facework* addresses competence-face and "shows to some degree that one appreciates and respects the other's general abilities and accomplishments," maximizing praise and minimizing blame (p. 212). Note that Lim is specifically interested in facework done toward others. However, these faceworks still function when considering how they relate to one's

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presentation of self. Self-oriented tact facework would be used to express one's freedom from others, self-oriented solidarity facework would be used to demonstrate that one belongs in the same in-group as others, and self-oriented approbation facework would be used to demonstrate one's abilities and accomplishments to others.

One or more of the three forms of facework is used in every communication interaction, especially those that threaten the face of the speaker. Ting-Toomey and Cole (1990) noted that in response to face-threatening acts, people utilize either *face-saving* strategies, which aim to avoid or prevent loss of face before it can occur, or *face-restoring* strategies, which aim to excuse or justify loss of face after the face-threatening act has caused embarrassment. These strategies all implement one or more of the forms of facework as described by Lim and Bowers (1991). Scholars (Ting-Toomey et al., 1991; Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2005) have also recognized different *face management* strategies used to deal with conflict, including avoiding (staying away from disagreement and negative exchanges), obliging (passively accommodating the needs and desires of others), compromising (attempting to find a middle-ground solution that satisfies some of both parties' desires), dominating (using influence or authority to force a desired decision to be made), and integrating (collaborating with others to find a solution that pleases most or all of both parties' desires or needs).

Through Face-Negotiation Theory, roleplay can be considered a face-saving (or face-threatening) strategy that implements one or more forms of facework to save (or threaten) face. In my findings, I examine how roleplay is used as facework, as well as what form of facework (tact, solidarity, or approbation) roleplay takes in the various scenarios that appear in my data. Additionally, I analyze how roleplay can serve as a face-threatening act. Lastly, I explore the

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conflict management strategies that cosplayers' use to deal with issues of roleplay harassment. Using this theoretical lens, I explore the following research questions.

Purpose of Study and Research Questions

There is much to examine when it comes to cosplay roleplay activities. The purpose of this study was to gather cosplayers' opinions on roleplay and observe roleplaying behaviors among cosplayers attending fan conventions in order to assess the value of roleplay to the cosplay community, as well as to individual cosplayers. This includes understanding how individuals use roleplay to engage with other members of the cosplay community in the convention setting, the impact that roleplay has upon cosplayers' personal identities, and the broader opinion that the cosplay community has on roleplaying performances. Part of this analysis involves understanding the acceptable forms and limits of roleplay; I want to understand the ways in which cosplayers could engage in roleplaying performances without overstepping the personal boundaries of other convention attendees. The study was guided by the following overarching research questions:

- How do cosplayers regard roleplay as a component of cosplay?

- How do cosplayers negotiate their expectations for roleplaying?

- How do various cosplay roleplay performances serve as forms of social engagement?

- To what extent does harassment and resistance to it occur during cosplay roleplay performances, and how are harassment and resistance to it communicated?

These questions, supplemented by the above literature on cosplay and performance studies, directed my research on cosplay roleplaying performances. Given these questions are about cosplay culture and the understanding of cosplay and roleplay by cosplayers themselves, the methods I utilized were qualitative in nature, a discussion to which I now turn.

Chapter 3. Methods

To better understand cosplay roleplaying performances from the perspective of cosplayers, this research took the form of three different qualitative research methods: interviews, focus groups, and ethnographic participant observations. As Geertz (1975) phrased it, I needed to approach this study not as "an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning" (p. 5). This interpretive approach considers knowledge as intersubjective, socially constructed meaning, which is perfect for analyzing individual perspectives and the connections between them (Adams, 2008; Bochner, 1994; Krizek, 1998).

Additionally, the use of qualitative methods recognize the impact that interaction between researcher and participant has on research (Ellis, Kiesinger, & Tillmann-Healy, 1997). I had to acknowledge I was engaging with my participants as part of a social encounter and collaboration (Herrmann, 2012), and I had to remain reflexive about how my presence and perspective impacted my findings. Before discussing how these qualitative methods were used in the final study, it is important to understand the preliminary study upon which this study was based.

Preliminary Project: An Overview

A preliminary version of this study focused on social expectations within the cosplay community. This preliminary project was open to all adult cosplayers. Flyers describing the project and containing my contact information were placed on East Tennessee State University's main campus, as well as local comic book stores. A digital copy of the flyer was posted on Facebook in cosplay group pages and on my Instagram account. These posts directed potential candidates to contact me through private messaging so that they would not be identified as participants by anyone who saw the post. Snowball sampling was also used; some participants offered the email addresses of other cosplayers they thought would be interested in the project. A standardized email was sent to snowball sample participants.

During this preliminary project, two one-on-one interviews were conducted. One participant was female, the other male. These interviews ran approximately one hour each. A focus group was conducted with two female participants and one male participant. The focus group lasted approximately ninety minutes. The interviews and the focus group were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Audio recordings of the transcripts were transferred to a private, password-protected computer and then encrypted to protect confidentiality. With the exception of gender, other identifiable data was omitted or altered to protect the participants' identities. Participants' names were replaced with pseudonyms to protect their confidentiality. Consent documents (ICD) were given to all participants at least 24 hours in advance of the scheduled meeting, and the ICD was explained in detail by me and signed by them at the interview/focus group prior to any of the interview/focus group questions.

Interviews and focus groups found elements that could not be directly observed in the field, including participants' likes, dislikes, perceptions, histories, and opinions (Galman, 2018, p. 85). The interview and focus group schedules were semi-structured. I developed broad foundational questions that were supported by more specific prompts that could be used or left unused depending on the participants' responses. The focus group schedule was drawn from the interview schedule, with the only major differences being the omission of some rapport-building questions in order to meet time restrictions.

Based on Charmaz's (2014) grounded theory, I engaged in initial coding, "naming segments of data with a label that simultaneously categorizes, summarizes, and accounts for each piece of data" (p. 111). I followed Charmaz's advice of using gerunds to "try to see action in each segment of data rather than applying pre-existing categories to the data" (p. 116). Coding for actions instead of topics or themes avoids "assigning types to people" that "casts them with

static labels" and "curbs our tendencies to make conceptual leaps and to adopt extant theories before we have done the necessary analytic work" (p.117). These gerund codes were applied line-by-line to the data in order to see "otherwise undetected patterns in everyday life" and "take compelling events apart and analyze what constitutes them and how they occurred" (p. 125). In short, the initial coding was designed to "understand acts and accounts, scenes and sentiments, stories and silences from our research participants' view" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 114) in as much detail as possible without jumping to any analytical conclusions.

Once I completed my initial coding, memos I drafted, "informal analytic notes," to "chart, record, and detail" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 162) the emerging concepts in the data. These memos provided a space for "making comparisons between data and data, data and codes, codes of data and other codes, codes and category, and category and concept and for articulating conjectures about these comparisons" (p. 163). Many of these memos were edited and used in the Findings Section of the preliminary study. I also used these memos to create more focused, conceptual codes that I could apply to the data. Assigning each of the new codes to a color, I highlighted the transcripts and field notes to connect each emerging concept with verbatim quotes to be used in the preliminary project.

One of the codes that emerged from this initial study was "active and reactive roleplay," a concept that I modified and expanded upon in the findings of the current study. Essentially, I noted that various cosplayers either tended to roleplay their characters hardly ever breaking character (active roleplay) or they responded to roleplay prompts from others (reactive roleplay). While my understanding of these concepts was not fully developed, the recognition of different roleplay approaches narrowed my project's focus roleplay as a specific phenomenon within the cosplay community, leading to the current study.

The Final Study

The preliminary project was modified to narrow its focus on roleplaying performances within the cosplay community. The interviews and focus group conducted during the preliminary project–now considered previously collected data (Waterfors, Akerstrom & Jacobsson, 2014)–were re-analyzed through this new lens, as many of the original participants' responses related to the new topic of roleplay.

Recruitment of participants. Using the same recruiting methods as those listed in the preliminary study, I gathered five new participants–three females and two males–to take part in one-on-one, long-form interviews with a revised interview schedule. In addition, the male participant from the preliminary study's focus group was invited for a follow-up interview. Many of his responses during the focus group were directly tied to roleplay performances in cosplay, and I wanted to uncover more of his opinions and experiences in a one-on-one interview. These interviews ranged from thirty minutes to an hour, depending on the length of the participants' responses. Between both the preliminary and later studies, ten people participated in either one-on-one interviews or the focus group: six females and four males.

Additionally, a field study program led by the Communication Department at Radford University allowed me to conduct ethnographic research across five days at the 2019 San Diego Comic Con (SDCC). This included semi-structured, anonymous, onsite interviews with 64 cosplayers–32 of them interviewed one-on-one, 7 interviewed as duos, and 6 interviewed as groups of 3–that ranged from one to fifteen minutes. Some of the results of this research were presented at a panel at SDCC.

Lastly, I conducted participant observations in the field at five conventions: the 2018 Yama-Con in Pigeon Forge, TN; the 2019 Knoxville Anime Day in Knoxville, TN; the 2019

Anime Boston Convention in Boston, MA; the 2019 RobCon in Kingsport, TN; and as mentioned previously, the 2019 San Diego Comic Con in San Diego, CA.

Observations included conversations and interactions between cosplayers and convention attendees that I either witnessed in person or engaged in directly. Essentially, I took note of anything that seemed connected to roleplay behaviors in cosplay. Observations also included notes taken from panels regarding cosplay held at these conventions. I did not collect the names, contact info, or other identifiable data of anyone I observed at these conventions. Because of this, informed consent was not requested, although I did receive verbal consent from convention panelists to use the notes from their panels as part of this study. Observation participants will be referred to by the costume they wore at the attended conventions.

Data collection methods. As in the preliminary project, the interviews in the expanded study were audio-recorded. The same protections (omission of identifiable data and use of a pseudonym) were given to later participants. While the interview schedule was changed to reflect the narrowed focus on cosplay roleplaying performances, the research standards as described in the preliminary study remained the same.

As in the full-length interviews, the condensed, onsite interviews were audio-recorded for verbatim transcription. The onsite interview schedule was a much more condensed version of the long-form interview schedule, with some of the questions slightly altered so that they didn't require much explanation. Because of the fast-paced nature of the convention setting, onsite interview participants were not asked to sign an ICD. Instead, they were read an informed consent script prior to the interview. While participants were not asked for any identifiable information (gender, race, hometown, contact info, etc.), some of them referred to themselves by their preferred gender pronouns or detailed experiences that they had due to their specific race.

Therefore, onsite interview participants' gender and race will only be mentioned in this study if these elements are essential in understanding the participants' responses. Onsite interview participants will be referred to by the costumes that they wore at SDCC.

While the interviews and focus group gave me access to cosplayers' opinions on roleplay performances, they did not allow me to witness these performances firsthand. Therefore, I turned to ethnographic participant observations in order to immerse myself in the culture of fan conventions and uncover "rules and norms that go unspoken" (Galman, 2018, p. 74). As Arnould and Wallendorf (1994) stated:

> Rather than asking people to comment about what they think they usually do or say... ethnographers prefer to observe them doing it... ethnographers observe actual people's behaviour in real time; and rather than asking respondents to generalize about their behaviour as in survey research, ethnographers record the particulars of naturally occurring behaviours and conversations. (p. 486)

I took detailed notes, capturing as much as I could within any given interaction. This included physical observations such as what was explicitly said between cosplayers and con attendees, body and facial language, and costume details. It also included my inner thoughts on what I witnessed in order to cement my own reactions to cosplay interactions for further exploration. I hoped to meet "the goal of balancing the inward and outward representations" (Goodall, 2000, p. 91). These notes and observations were necessary in order to gain a firsthand knowledge of the forms that roleplaying performances take among cosplayers, as well as how other convention attendees responded to these performances.

It is important to note that *I am a cosplayer*. Therefore, my ethnographic observations were not passive; I was not an unobtrusive observer. I actively participated in the cosplay culture–sometimes in-costume, other times in ordinary street clothes–while conducting research. I attended multiple conventions dressed as All Might, the superhero from the anime/manga series *My Hero Academia*. I delve deeper into the character of All Might and the *My Hero Academia* series at the beginning of the Findings Section. Moreover, as a participant observer, I actively took part in shaping many of the interactions that comprise my data. As Herrmann (2012), noted:

> Ethnography submerges the researcher in the experiences of the inhabitants – with the inhabitants – living their daily lives. It can include document collection, guided conversations, informal interviews, participant-observation, and self- reflexive interpretation. (p. 156)

I was an active participant, asking cosplayers informal, non-interview questions about their cosplays (e.g. "Who's this character?" "How did you make this?"), asking for pictures, posing for pictures (when in-costume), and engaging in various forms of roleplay with other cosplayers and convention attendees. This form of participant observation, which Geertz (1988) referred to as a "deep hanging out" (as cited in Galman, 2018, p. 74), was necessary in order to become initiated into the cosplay culture myself and develop my own firsthand experience with cosplay roleplaying performances. To quote Graue and Walsh (1998), "the researcher is not a fly on the wall or a frog in the pocket. The researcher is there. She cannot be otherwise. She is in the mix" (p. 91). Because I played such an active role in my research, it is more accurate to say that I "generated" the data more than I "collected" it, in accordance with Graue and Walsh's (1998) notions of data generation: "Data are not out there, waiting like tomatoes on a vine, to be picked. Acquiring data is a very active, creative, improvisational process. Data must be generated before

they can be collected" (p. 91). This sort of active interaction with my observed participants required that I negotiate a boundary between myself as a participant of the cosplay community and as an observing party, often switching between these roles to be both immersed in and observant of cosplay culture.

Combined with my interviews, I believe that my observations have given me enough of a detailed perspective on cosplay culture to understand, at least in part, how this community enacts and views roleplaying performances.

Data analysis. For the final study's data analysis, I focused much more heavily on Charmaz's (2014) grounded theory. As mentioned previously, audio recordings of interviews and the focus group were transcribed verbatim. I used the same methods of initial coding as described in the preliminary study, revisiting and recoding the interviews, focus group, and field notes from said study alongside the new data. During the final study, I searched harder for *in vivo* codes, "codes of participants' special language" that "help us to preserve participants' meanings of their views and actions in the coding itself" (p. 134). In short, the initial coding was designed to "understand acts and accounts, scenes and sentiments, stories and silences from our research participants' view" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 114) in as much detail as possible without jumping to any analytical conclusions.

Many codes (e.g. "touch and consent," "gender in cosplay," "expressing and sharing fandom," etc.) arose from this initial coding, some of which didn't make it into the final study (e.g. "shaming and canon appearance") due to a lack of significant data or a weak connection to the core theme of roleplay. Once initial coding was complete, I began a more focused coding, "using the most significant and/or frequent earlier codes to sift through and analyze large amounts of data" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 138). This stage involved "studying and assessing [my]

initial codes" (p. 140), sometimes even coding initial codes (p. 138), in order to "look for what these codes imply as well as what they reveal" (p. 140). Focused coding, then, "moves you out of immersion in data and brings you further into analysis" (p. 145). This transition from descriptive to conceptual coding required that I regularly check my personal biases in order to "guard against forcing [my] preconceptions on the data [I] code" (p. 155). From this focused coding process, I was able to divide my various initial codes into three major categories: "roleplay expectations," "forms of roleplay," and "roleplay harassment." These broader codes make up the major sections of my Findings.

As in the preliminary study, I drafted memos to explore and compare the emerging concepts in the data, as well as to pull out verbatim quotes that would be used in the final study. However, my re-reading of Charmaz (2014) guided me toward understanding all levels of coding as "emergent processes," where "unexpected ideas emerge" and "keep emerging" (p. 143). Since new ideas are always spawning from the data, I took greater diligence in drafting memos as frequently as possible in order to capture as many concepts and frameworks as possible. Each memo related to one of my initial codes, later modified to align with the overarching focused codes that I found. As in the preliminary study, many of these memos were edited to be used in the final draft of the study.

Using these qualitative methods to collect and analyze data, I uncovered various findings about cosplay roleplaying performances, as described in the following section.

Chapter 4. Findings

Three categories of findings emerged in my analysis of the data. First, I discuss various perspectives cosplayers hold on the importance of roleplay, along with some factors that impact the roleplay expectations placed on cosplayers. Second, I discuss the forms of roleplay I observed, in order to establish some of the ways in which cosplayers choose to embody their characters. Third, I conclude with a discussion of roleplay harassment, which is broken into three subcategories: possible initiating factors of roleplay harassment, the forms that roleplay harassment can take, and possible strategies for avoiding or dealing with harassment.

Before diving into my findings, I want to provide context for one of the characters and his source text that will regularly appear throughout this section. As I noted in Chapter Two, I attended multiple conventions while dressed as the superhero All Might from the anime/manga series *My Hero Academia*. *My Hero Academia* is a superhero action series based in a world where 80% of the Earth's population have developed superpowers, known as "quirks." Becoming a superhero is a potential profession for those whose powers make them well-suited for fighting crime and saving civilians and, as a result, schools are established to train young heroes for the dangers and challenges of the profession. Among the many heroes throughout the world, none are more revered or more powerful than All Might, who secretly plans to retire soon due to an injury he sustained while fighting a villain. All Might finds a successor in the protagonist Izuku Midoriya, and becomes a teacher to the young hero along with the rest of the latest hero students at U.A. High School, Japan's most prestigious hero academy.

With this context established, I begin by reviewing some central concepts of Face-Negotiation Theory (as well as introducing some new theoretical constructs of my own design) in order to show how I use them in my analysis of cosplay roleplaying performances.

Superface and Subface: Negotiating Multiple Face Roles

Most important to this study's use of Face-Negotiation Theory are Lim and Bowers'
(1991) three faces and the three forms of facework: fellowship-face (maintained by solidarity
facework), autonomy-face (maintained by tact facework), and competence-face (maintained by
approbation facework). Fellowship-face involves being seen as a member of an in-group and
being liked, autonomy-face involves having freedom to behave without interference or
oppression from others, and competence-face involves the acknowledgment of skills,
achievements, and knowledge. Facework is used to maintain these faces for both the self and
others in social interactions.

Face-Negotiation Theory is traditionally used to examine everyday interactions and the
ways in which people maintain or lose their everyday faces. Cosplay, however, exists in a
liminoid space where cosplayers temporarily put aside their everyday face for the performance of
a character. Additionally, cosplay's dual existence as a performance of fandom and a culture of
its own situates it at an intersection of performance: performance as a fan and performance as an
embodied character. In order to address all of the varieties, circumstances, and possibilities of
facework at the intersection of fandom and performance where cosplay exists, I am introducing
two new terms to explain how Face-Negotiation Theory can be applied to cosplay and similar
liminoid performances: "superface" and "subface." The *superface* can be understood as a
presented public image (i.e. face) that is comprised of two or more interconnected face roles
(*subfaces*), each of which is comprised of a fellowship-, autonomy-, and competence-face. These
terms acknowledge that a person's public image is reliant on their often simultaneous
performance of multiple face roles, and that these subfaces work together to construct the overall
public image that people present.

Because cosplay is both a performance of an embodied character and an expression of fandom, the *performer subface* and the *fan subface* are united into the *cosplayer superface*, as demonstrated in Figure 1. The performer subface is concerned with being recognized as a member of the cosplay community (fellowship-face), maintaining freedom over the performance of the character (autonomy-face), and being recognized as a skilled costumer and performer (competence-face). The fan subface is concerned with being perceived as a member of the in-group of the fandom (fellowship-face), being able to express and interpret the fandom's source text in whatever way the cosplayer chooses (autonomy-face), and being seen as knowledgeable about the fandom's source text (competence-face).

Using these new terms, I analyze how roleplay performances can act as facework for the performer and fan subfaces. Sometimes a single roleplay act could serve as facework for multiple faces simultaneously, even across subfaces. For example, a roleplay performance may demonstrate the cosplayer's knowledge of the source text and skill as a performer, which would serve as an approbation facework for both the performer and fan subfaces. The ability of a single roleplay performance to impact various faces reveals the interconnected nature of various subfaces through their affiliation to a higher superface.

While the cosplayer superface is a useful construct for analyzing the various face roles that cosplayers must engage in, cosplayers disagree on the extent roleplay can or should impact the preservation of face. The following section explores these differing expectations cosplayers hold towards roleplay and how these expectations impact cosplayers' approaches to their craft.
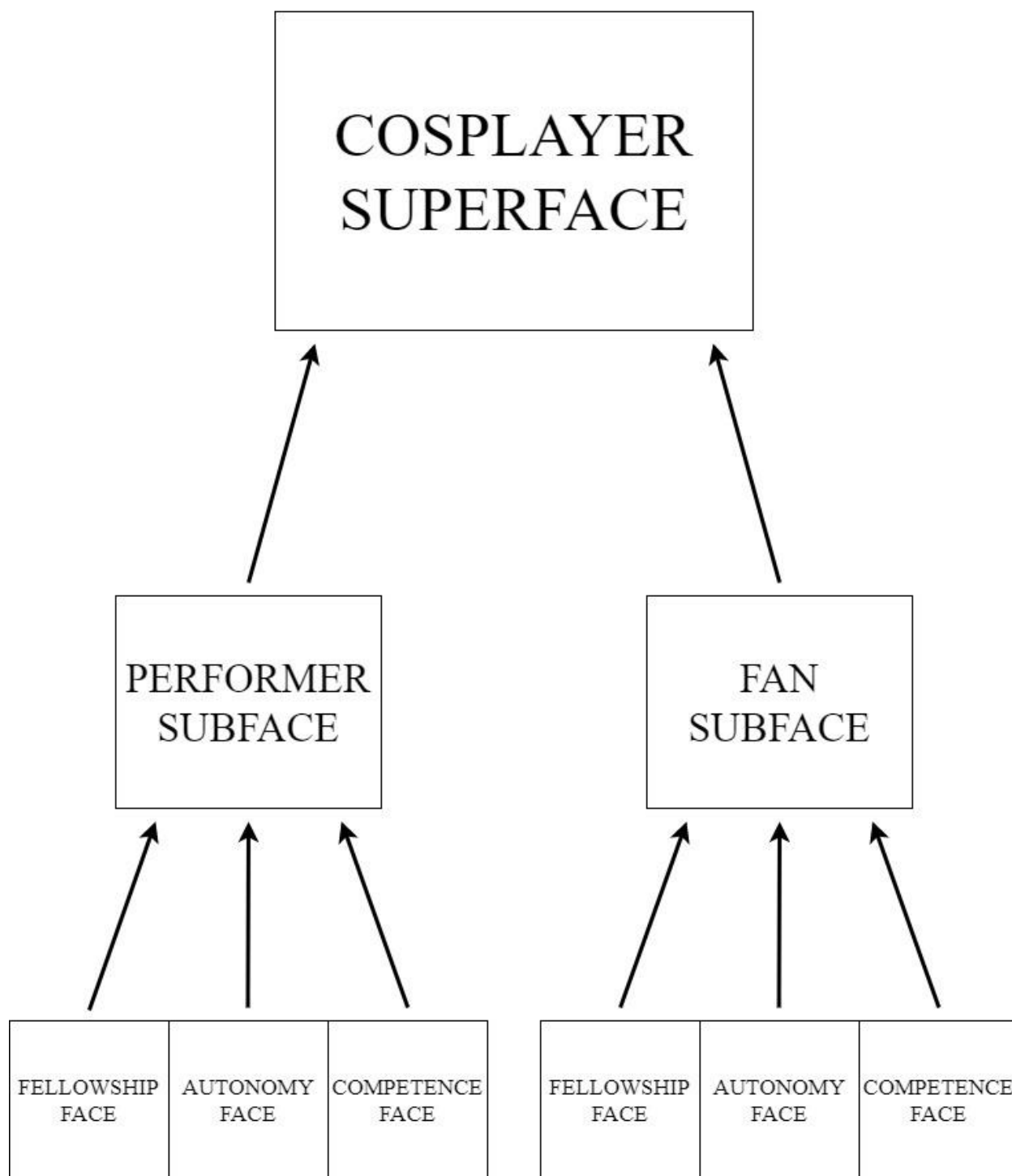
Figure 1. Cosplayer superface and subfaces

The Roleplay Continuum and Roleplay Expectations

Cosplayers were divided on how important roleplay was to cosplay itself. Many, like a cosplayer dressed as Ramuda Amemura from the Japanese multimedia project Hypnosis Microphone, stated that "cosplay does not imply roleplay," and that "roleplay is perfectly valid if it's consensual amongst all parties." However, it can threaten both the cosplay performance and the cosplayers themselves if not kept in check: "it can become a force of harassment, and it can become something that's not so great for the cosplayer or for those around the cosplayer to have to deal with." Others, like a cosplayer dressed as Buzz Lightyear from the Toy Story franchise, said that while they acknowledged "there is a lack of roleplay amongst most people," they enjoyed roleplaying themselves, despite being a niche performance in the cosplay community. "That's important to me, to actually get into character, not just wear a costume." Some, like a cosplay duo dressed as the mercenaries Deadpool and Gwenpool from Marvel Comics, lamented about what they perceived to be a declining interest in roleplay among cosplayers, wishing that others would engage in roleplay as they felt it improved the overall quality of the cosplay experience.

> **Isaac**: Do you think that other people at the convention sort of expect you to roleplay?
>
> **Deadpool**: God, it would be nice if they did, but I think they're kind of losing that expectation because most people don't cosplay. They just throw on the costume and wander around and that's really it.
>
> **Gwenpool**: But they do get really excited when you do roleplay.
>
> **Deadpool**: Absolutely.
>
> **Gwenpool**: They really get into it. It's not just a picture at that point.

In contrast, a few, such as a cosplayer dressed as Thor from Marvel Comics, went so far as to claim that cosplay requires roleplay, and that people who dress in costume, but don't roleplay their characters, aren't actually cosplaying:

> That's legitimately what cosplaying is. It's short for costume play…. To me, if you're cosplaying, then you should be playing the character…. Because to me, otherwise, you're not cosplaying. You're just wearing a costume. Not that there's anything wrong with it, but if you're going to say that you're a cosplayer, then I expect you to actually bring forth the character.

These varying stances on roleplay's importance to cosplay can be understood as being situated somewhere along the following continuum:

in-costume cosplay ←——————————————————→ in-character cosplay

At one extreme is "in-costume" cosplay, where roleplay is considered nonessential or even counterproductive to cosplay performance. In-costume cosplay is focused exclusively on the visually aesthetic imitation of the character through costuming. At the other extreme is "in-character" cosplay, where roleplay is an essential part of the performance of the embodied character, and a performance cannot be considered a true act of cosplay unless the cosplayer imitates the character in both aesthetics and behavior. In between these extremes are numerous mediated perspectives on roleplay's importance to cosplay performance. The following sections are dedicated to exploring the roleplay expectations of in-costume cosplay, in-character cosplay, and some of the many perspectives that lie between these extremes.

In-costume roleplay expectations. As one might expect, cosplayers who subscribed to the in-costume cosplay ideology held essentially no roleplay expectations for their fellow cosplayers. For some, such as long-form interviewee Felicia, this lack of interest in roleplay was

believed to be a widespread opinion, with cosplayers who enjoy roleplay being perceived as "kind of niche" and that they "tend to stay with their own people." However, some of the in-costume cosplayers believed roleplay expectations were common, and they felt these expectations put an unfair social pressure onto cosplayers to perform in-character, such as Ramuda expressed: "There's kind of this hidden layer that if you're cosplaying, you are expected to be that character while you cosplay, which can be not so fun sometimes." Ramuda expressed less tolerance for in-character cosplayers than Felicia, as she sees them as potential threat to her own cosplay experience due to the pressure to perform being placed on those who have no interest in acting like their embodied characters.

What these in-costume cosplayers are suggesting is that the cosplayer's performer subface also acts as a superface to two new subfaces: the costumer subface and the roleplayer subface, as demonstrated in Figure 2. According to in-costume cosplayers, the costumer and roleplayer subfaces are not inherently linked; behaving as the character does not necessarily impact the costumer subface, and the quality of the costume does not necessarily impact the roleplayer subface. For the in-costume cosplayer, the roleplayer subface is, at best, nonexistent; they have no desire to present themselves as roleplayers, and no one expects them to put on the face of a roleplayer. At worst, the roleplayer subface is a mask that has been forced on them; other con attendees and cosplayers have forcibly combined the costumer and roleplayer subfaces, so that to lose face for one is to lose face for the other. From the standpoint of the in-costume cosplayer, the expectation to roleplay is a threat to all three faces (competence, autonomy, and fellowship) of their performer subface. It threatens the competence face by connecting the quality of their costume to their ability to behave in-character, which they may not possess or desire to perform. Roleplay expectations threaten in-costume cosplayers' autonomy-face by
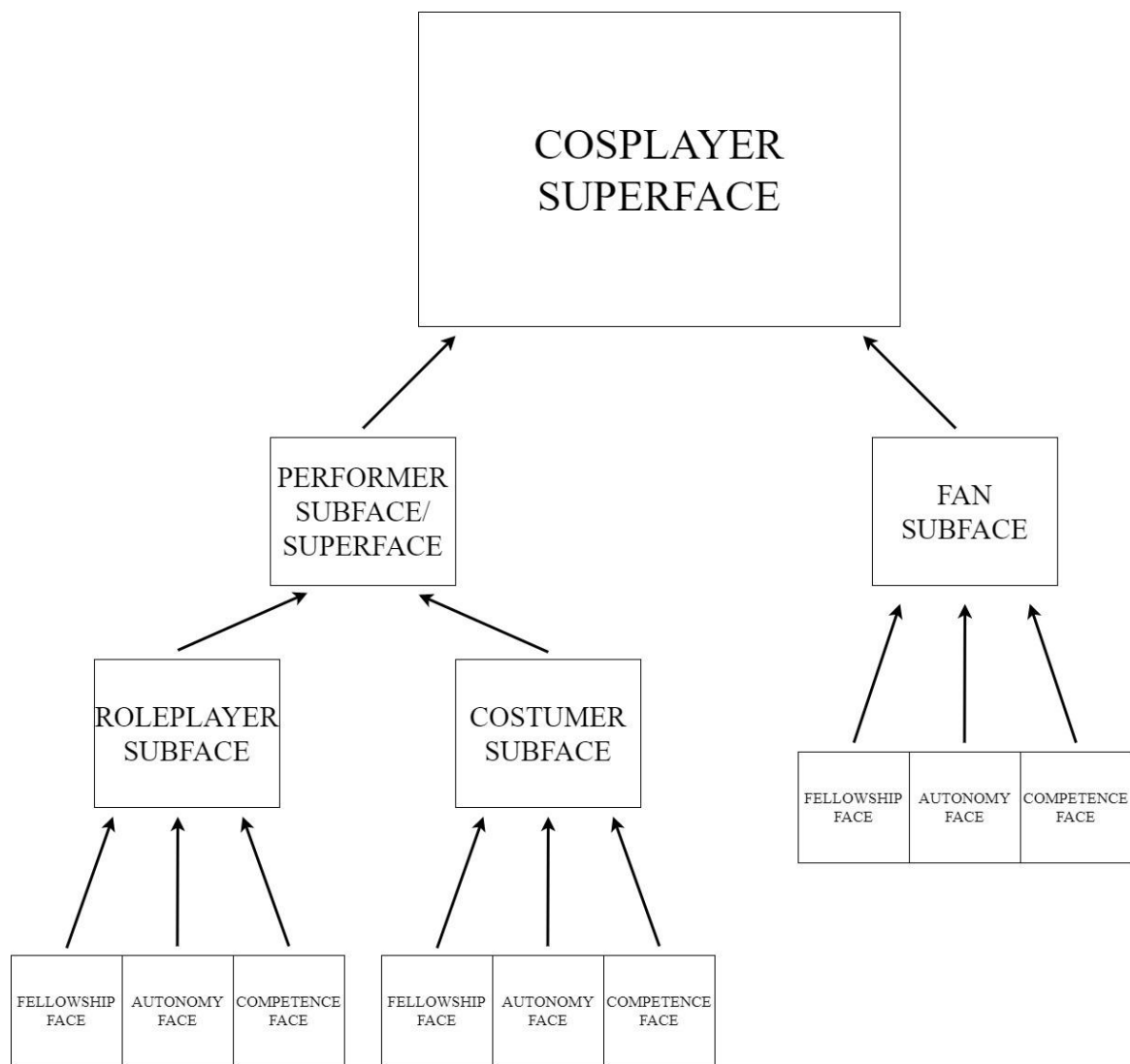
Figure 2. In-costume cosplayers' superfaces and subfaces

denying them their freedom to perform (or not perform) in the way they choose. Lastly, roleplay

expectations threaten in-costume cosplayers' fellowship-face by refusing to acknowledge them

as *real* cosplayers unless they engage in roleplay performances. Additionally, roleplay

expectations may threaten a cosplayer's fan subface by questioning their knowledge of the

source text (competence-face), forcing them to express their love of the fandom in a particular

way (autonomy-face) and calling into question the cosplayer's dedication to the fandom

(fellowship-face). With this understanding of how in-costume cosplayers view roleplay, it's no wonder some, like Ramuda, expressed hostility toward in-character cosplayers, who believe roleplay is a necessity to the cosplay performance.

Some participants believed that the idea of in-character cosplay was primarily held by rookie cosplayers or non-cosplaying con attendees, and that these groups tended to shift more toward an in-costume perspective as they became more familiarized with the practices of the cosplay community. According to a cosplayer dressed as the hero Hawks from *My Hero Academia,* "people that aren't that deep in the cosplay community" expect more roleplay because they have a misguided belief that cosplayers are "more actors than costumers." The Hawks cosplayer said that "once people are really immersed in cosplay, they know that [roleplay] is not as much of a thing." A focus group participant, Theresa, echoed this sentiment, claiming that non-cosplayers also tended to be more demanding of roleplay:

As far as full-on acting in-character, it tends to be the non-cosplayers that expect cosplayers to act like the characters. They're like, "Oh, you should be acting like this character. If you're going to cosplay Bulma, you need act like her. You need to talk like her." And it's like, "Well, I don't see you in cosplay. Why are you giving me advice?"

While it may be true that amateurs are more likely to desire seeing cosplayers behave as their embodied characters, that desire does not always diminish with time as Theresa and the Hawks cosplayer suggest. There were several veteran cosplayers who maintained the in-character approach to cosplay, as will be discussed in the following section.

In-character roleplay expectations. Cosplayers who subscribed to the in-character cosplay ideology expressed a common sentiment: choosing not to roleplay meant missing out on an important aspect of cosplay, one that elevates the cosplay experience beyond just an aesthetic

imitation of beloved characters. As the Medli cosplayer put it, "I feel like you should really get into your characters. You're here, you are your character, you worked on this, and you might as well go 100% and have fun with it." Some, such as a cosplayer dressed as Harley Quinn, expressed confusion as to why someone would put in all the effort of creating a costume but then choose not to roleplay the character: "Some people are really surprised when you're in-character. I don't know why. Some people just put on the costume, but they don't play, which is kind of lame, in my opinion. Why not just get into it, have fun with it, and go all in?"

The underlying assumption here is that cosplay is about presenting the character in their entirety, either as a means of playing with one's own identity or performing the character for other con attendees' enjoyment, or both. Though the costume provides an aesthetic transformation for the cosplayer, the character's embodiment isn't complete until the cosplayer accepts the role of the character, with all the behavioral changes that entails. Some, like focus group participant and long-form interviewee Jacob, went so far as to claim that the performance of the character was more important to the act of cosplay than the costume itself, noting that "casual cosplays exist" that only partially resemble the character in aesthetic appearance but "still get the idea across," while "personality can really help" in selling the performance of the character to others. For in-character cosplayers, the costumer subface and the roleplayer subface are inextricably fused into the performer subface (as was demonstrated in Figure 1), whose function is to embody the character as a performance for themselves and others.

The greatest difference between in-character cosplayers is whether they should be roleplaying actively or reactively. That is, should a cosplayer be presenting the character at all times (unless prompted to step out of their performance) or should they roleplay only when prompted to do so? Active roleplay was rare, as many cosplayers, including one dressed as

martial arts champion Hercule Satan from the anime series *Dragon Ball* Z, noted that altering

one's vocal patterns and body language could become taxing if done extensively: "Obviously,

I'm not going to be doing the voice for all of that or else my throat will die." Despite these sorts

of physical limitations, a few participants, such as the previously mentioned Thor cosplayer, did

insist that cosplayers should strive to present themselves as the characters as much as possible

while in costume: "Unless you're just having a regular conversation, you want to be in-

character." Note that there are exceptions where a cosplayer is drawn out of the performance of

their character in order to speak and act as themselves. Active roleplay demands not only that

cosplayers are willing and able to represent their embodied characters but also that they are

capable of recognizing and properly responding to prompts to step out of roleplay when the

situation demands it, as Chase describes:

> I think people do want to interact with you in-character. I think it's more fun for them.
>
> Now, there comes a time when somebody may want to talk you out of character, and then
>
> you come out of character and talk to the person. But while you're in-character, you're
>
> in-character…. I talk to you as the character. If you ask me questions, I've done research
>
> so that I can give you information... I am the character.

The active roleplayer, then, must know when to replace the face of the performer with the face of

the fan. Priority is placed upon the performer subface, but they must recognize when others are

asking them to step out of that role to engage each other as fellow fans, not as performer and

audience.

In contrast, reactive roleplay demands that the cosplayer responds in-character to roleplay

prompts from their audience, but it does not require them to present themselves as their character

continuously while in the presence of a potential audience. This approach gives the cosplayer

more opportunities to step out-of-character and act as themselves, but it also requires them to respond to their audiences rather than establishing their own roleplay performances. As long-form interviewee Harry describes, this requires the cosplayer to read their audience's expectations, as roleplay expectations vary:

> I think roleplay depends on the person that comes up and asks. If you can tell that they're really into it and they really want that experience of talking to that character, I would certainly be more apt to roleplay for them. On the other hand, if somebody comes up and just wants a picture, then roleplay is not something that I'm married too. I'm not going to poke at him and try to get him to interact with the character, because I know that can be uncomfortable for people.

This approach makes the cosplayer more of an opportunistic performer; while they may wish to roleplay themselves, they reserve their roleplay performances for a willing audience. Like active roleplayers, they must know when to switch between performer subface and fan subface, only instead of being pulled out of their performances, they are pulled into them. This prioritization of the fan subface over the performer subface is the core difference between reactive and active roleplayers.

Between the in-costume and in-character perspectives on roleplay are numerous mediated perspectives that acknowledge, to some extent, roleplay's significance to cosplay performance. Two of these perspectives will be explored in the following section.

Mediated roleplay expectations. There are as many differing roleplay expectations as there are cosplayers who hold a mediated position. Some, such as a cosplayer dressed as the villain Him from *The Powerpuff Girls*, felt that roleplay was entirely optional, and that there was no obligation for the cosplayer to live up to others' expectations:

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If they do expect roleplay, you're not obligated to live up to whatever their expectations are. I do whatever I want. If I feel like I'm in the mood to do their impressions or whatever, then I'll do it… sometimes you just don't really want to, you know.

For these participants, the audience's expectations are irrelevant. The form and extent of roleplay that they participate in is entirely their own choice. Roleplay, for them, is not about entertaining others but instead enjoying the performance for themselves. Because of this emphasis on personal choice over meeting expectations, these cosplayers are more concerned with their autonomy-faces than their fellowship- or competence-faces.

Another perspective, held by those such as a Wonder Woman cosplayer I interviewed, desired an audience that was accepting of and excited for the performance but didn't make demands to perform on the cosplayer:

It's actually a little disappointing when people don't get it. When you try to say something from the movie, and they're like, "What?" But I think some people maybe expect a little too much, where if you don't play along enough, they're almost like disappointed. It's like, well, you're not paying me to entertain you. I'm trying my best here.

This perspective assumes that the cosplayer wants to roleplay and that they want to maintain control over the roleplay performance. That is, while the cosplayer wants an audience that is eager for their performance, they want to be able to choose when to instigate and terminate roleplay, as well as what forms their roleplay performance takes. These cosplayers, then, are equally concerned with maintaining their autonomy-, competence-, and fellowship-faces; they want to maintain control over their performance, they want to be seen as skilled performers, and they want others to enjoy their roleplay performances.

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What's unique about the perspective is that the focus is on how the audience responds to a roleplay performance rather than how cosplayers themselves choose to roleplay. Some cosplayers may desire a spectator-only audience that does not directly participate in the performance. Others may desire their audience come into the performance when prompted, such as how a couple cosplayers dressed as Dark Link and Medli from *The Legend of Zelda* video game franchise described:

> **Dark Link**: If they give you [a performance], don't just be like, "Okay." Interact back. Keep it going.
>
> **Medli**: Yeah. Have fun. Be like, "I'm going to go 100% with you," so you both have a good time. I don't want them to feel alone or awkward.

The audience, of course, is able to accept or reject the performer's prompts as they see fit, but the expectation still exists that if a cosplayer begins roleplaying, their audience will respond appropriately. From this perspective, it is the faces of the audience, not the performer, that may be threatened due to their inability or refusal to properly participate in the roleplay performance.

There are countless mediated perspectives on roleplay to explore. A more comprehensive list of mediated perspectives may be possible, but such an endeavor is beyond the scope of this study and deserves further research. The following section takes our attention to an element of fandom, character popularity, which affects the roleplay expectations placed on cosplayers.

Popularity of character. There seems to be a correlation between the popularity of a character and the amount of roleplay convention attendees expected. While this makes sense intuitively, it also came out in a number of interviews and conversations with participants. Felicia suggested that a character's popularity influenced the amount of roleplay that was expected from cosplayers:

Depending on the fame of a character, there's definitely more roleplay expected. If it's just a small character, like from a book or from a comic book, it's not as expected. I think there's a level of expectation from the level of fame.

Focus group participant Sarah shared this viewpoint, stating that cosplayers dressed as popular characters were more likely to have con attendees demand that they roleplay:

If it's something that's really hot at the moment, you have more of a chance of having someone coming up to you and telling you, "Oh, act like this character," or telling you to do stuff when clearly you don't want to.

As a cosplayer dressed as Dipper Pines from the animated series *Gravity Falls* pointed out, this attention to popular characters also impacts cosplayers dressed as more obscure characters, as they might find it difficult to find an audience that will appreciate or even recognize their roleplay: "I feel like a lot of times people don't necessarily know what I'm cosplaying. Sometimes I'll do things from something very few people have heard of, and it's like they don't even notice I'm in costume." The connection between a character's popularity and the desire for roleplay seems rather straightforward; the more people there are who like a character, the more people there are who will desire to see that character embodied in reality. In the terms of Face-Negotiation Theory, the fellowship-face of the character (i.e. how much and how many people like the character) affects the amount of facework via roleplay that the cosplayer must utilize to maintain their performer subface.

In some cases, the character's popularity was more due to their status within the cosplay community itself rather than the fandom's appreciation of the character. The most obvious example of this is Deadpool, Marvel Comics' smart-mouthed mercenary that has become an icon of cosplay, for better and for worse. The character's zany and chaotic behavior has drawn

countless cosplayers to dress and perform as him, resulting in a common expectation for Deadpool cosplayers to roleplay their character, as stated in one interview with a cosplayer dressed as Powergirl from DC Comics:

> **Isaac**: Do you think that other people at the convention expect you to roleplay while you're in costume?
>
> **Powergirl**: Honestly, not really. Unless you're Deadpool, of course. Then it's like a given.

A Deadpool cosplayer I interviewed also noted that failure to meet these roleplay expectations can lead to awkward or disappointing interactions: "It would be very awkward if they found a very meek and shy Deadpool." The roleplay expectations for Deadpool and characters like him come from both fans' desire to see them embodied and the cosplay community's experiences with how these characters are typically performed.

Having addressed the varying roleplay expectations that cosplayers hold, I turn in the following section to an analysis of the various forms roleplay performances can take, and how these performances function as facework.

Forms of Roleplay

While there is a vast range of forms that cosplay roleplaying performances can take, my findings are limited to some of the most common or outstanding practices: direct quotes and references to the source text, roleplay questions that address cosplayers as their characters, physical roleplay that imitates characters' body patterns, the distribution of artifacts that reference the source text, silence and inaction that avoids breaking character, and meta-roleplay that simultaneously acknowledges the fiction of the performance and maintains the presentation of cosplayer as character. Each of these forms of roleplay seemed to have one or two forms of facework primarily attached to it.

Direct quotes/references as solidarity facework. Direct, in-character quotes were the most frequently observed form of roleplay. Every time I wore the All Might costume, attendees called out one of All Might's two catchphrases–"I am here!" or "Go beyond! Plus ultra!"– expecting me to respond in kind. In some instances, attendees would prompt me to say All Might's catchphrase by quoting the first half of my catchphrase (e.g. "Go beyond!"), to which I would respond with the latter half (e.g. "Plus ultra!"). These call-and-response exchanges were brief and frequent, and in some instances an attendee would shout my catchphrase from the other end of the hall or room, hoping I would respond although I did not know where the catchphrase originated.

Note that con attendees who engaged in this sort of call-and-response quoting were not roleplaying themselves (unless they were cosplaying a character who shares these catchphrases, such as other characters from *My Hero Academia*). Instead, con attendees were using the quote to initiate and participate in *my* roleplay performance. They are not embodying characters themselves, but they are actively engaging with my embodiment of the character and providing opportunities for me to further present myself as All Might.

This active participation with a cosplayer's roleplay performance serves as a form of face management, specifically solidarity facework aimed at the cosplayer's fan subface. The audience uses call-and-response quotes to express their recognition of the cosplayer's character through a verbal connection to the character (i.e. "Go beyond!"). In other words, through the quote, they are trying to establish a social association with the cosplayer by stating their shared knowledge of and appreciation for the fandom. The cosplayer, in turn, engages in this solidarity facework by responding to the call (i.e. "Plus ultra!"), thereby acknowledging the audience as a member of

the fandom's in-group. Solidarity facework like this is central to roleplay performances among cosplayers.

Sometimes direct quotes are applied to everyday scenarios, giving the quote a different context. During SDCC a cosplayer performing the wizard Gandalf from *The Lord of the Rings* helped a police officer direct traffic on a busy street outside of the San Diego Convention Center. The cosplayer quoted Gandalf, saying "You shall not pass!" indicating to pedestrians to stop and wait for traffic to clear. Because the cosplayer was acting in conjunction with the police officer, his commands were acknowledged as authoritorial. Pedestrians waited for the police and Gandalf to motion for them to cross the street. In this scenario, the cosplayer's costume and performance drew the pedestrian's attention, while the officer's uniform gave legitimacy to the cosplayer's performance as a director of traffic.

Quotes and references are also used to relieve social tensions. For example, during a panel at SDCC, one of the panelists, dressed as the magician Dr. Strange from Marvel Comics, arrived several minutes late. Another panelist commented that he should have used his time stone to arrive on time for the panel, referring to a magical artifact Dr. Strange possesses that allows him to manipulate time. The panelist was engaging in solidarity facework, drawing attention away from the inconvenience of their co-star's tardiness and toward the recognition of the late panelist's performance as Dr. Strange. The late panelist played along, responding with, "A wizard arrives precisely when he means to." This paraphrased quote by Gandalf from *The Lord of the Rings* indirectly referenced Dr. Strange's status as a wizard and the mysterious nature of such beings, turning the panelist's tardiness into part of the performance rather than an inconvenience for the panel. Because one of his fellow panelists offered him solidarity facework,

the Dr. Strange cosplayer was able to maintain his fellowship-face (not only as a cosplayer, but as a celebrity guest at the convention) to those attending the panel.

Roleplay questions as solidarity and approbation facework. Another common form of roleplay occurred when the audience asked the cosplayer's embodied character a question. The question is about a topic that the character, *not* the cosplayer, would be able to respond to, usually referring to some moment from the character's source narrative. For example, Felicia described her experience while cosplaying as Pyrrha Nikos, the kind-hearted huntress-in-training from the animated series *RWBY:*

> I will act as if I am Pyrrha. Like if someone comes up and asks me, "Hey Pyrrha, how did you do on that test last week?" I'll be like, "I think I nailed it. I hope the whole class had fun." Something like that, because that's just how her character is.

Audiences will often address cosplayers by their character's name, thereby framing the question as addressed to the character, not the cosplayer. Similar to direct quotes, there is an expectation for the cosplayer to respond in-character to these roleplay questions. Unlike direct quotes, however, roleplay questions allow the cosplayer to improvise a response rather than repeat a catchphrase. This improvisational challenge can become overbearing, as Harry described while dressed as Jon Snow, a popular character from the television series *Game of Thrones:*

> The most recent season of Game of Thrones had just aired, and in that last episode, Jon and Daenerys had sex. So I was asked, a couple of times, actually, "How was the boat sex, man?" There were a few times that I was like, "If only you knew," but then there were other times that I just kind of laughed it off.

"How was the boat sex?" refers to Jon Snow's sexual encounter with Daenerys in the series, not any nautical sexual encounters that Harry himself might have had. Therefore, Harry had to consider how Jon would respond to being asked that question.

A notable difference between roleplay questions and the call-and-response quoting is that roleplay questions function as both face-saving and face-threatening acts. Like quotes, roleplay questions function as solidarity facework for the fan subface by acknowledging the audience's shared appreciation of the fandom. However, roleplay questions also threaten the competence-face of the performer subface by asking them to improvise an in-character response rather than respond with a simple quote, thereby challenging their performance of the character. This also challenges the competence-face of the fan subface because it requires the cosplayer to be familiar with whatever element of the source text the audience is referring to in their question. While these face-threatening acts may be playful, cosplayers who are asked a roleplay question must still employ face-saving strategies to maintain their performance of the character. Using Harry as an example, although he may not have desired to repeat the same roleplay interaction with multiple con attendees, Harry either gave a repeated default response (i.e. "If only you knew") or deflected the prompt to roleplay by expressing amusement at the question itself (i.e. laughing it off). Harry, and perhaps other cosplayers, feel a desire to perform when called upon or to reject a roleplay prompt in a way that will not disappoint their audience and, by extension, cause them to lose face.

Sometimes a question directed at a character can provide an opportunity for the cosplayer to express their own opinion through the voice of the character, giving a sort of legitimacy to the opinion. For example, a Q&A panel where cosplayers dressed as characters from *My Hero Academia* responded to the audience's questions in-character. While the cosplayers were

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performing as their embodied characters, many of them expressed opinions that weren't canonically expressed by the characters themselves. For example, "Which heroes do you respect the most?" or "Which of their fellow heroes do you have a crush on?" While the questions were aimed at the characters, the answers were opinions that clearly belonged to the cosplayers themselves, although they didn't necessarily break character by expressing them. Instead, the panelists chose to interpret how their characters might express that particular opinion, thus strengthening their autonomy-faces as fans while maintaining their competence-faces as performers.

In contrast, roleplay can also be used to deflect a question that might have an unsatisfactory answer if answered honestly. During the *My Hero Academia* Q&A panel, I was dressed as All Might, who is a teacher to many of the panelists' embodied characters. I was asked to come onstage by a member of the panel to answer a question in-character. I was asked which of my students, among those at the panel, was my favorite. While I could have picked an actual character that I, as a fan, personally liked the best, I chose to use roleplay to deflect the answer, instead saying that I admired all of my students as prospective young heroes. This was a face-saving tactic; in order to preserve the audience's perception of me as All Might, I avoided presenting my own opinion (which may have threatened the fellowship-face of my fan subface by offering an unpopular opinion, or the competence-face of my performer subface by offering an opinion that my character did not share) and instead presented a response that I felt was appropriate to the character, thus strengthening the competence-face of my performer subface. This tactic was successful. The panel and the audience cheered and applauded this response, showing their appreciation to me staying true to All Might's persona rather than voicing my own opinion. Afterwards, I was approached by the members of the panel, who thanked me for taking

part and took a picture with me to commemorate the performance. We all shared an appreciation for not just the fandom but our collective performance of the fandom.

Physical roleplay as solidarity and approbation facework. Sometimes instead of using verbal references or questions, a con attendee will use body language to physically perform an action or pose. Another long-form interviewee, Danielle, described a scenario when she was dressed as Yuna from the video game *Final Fantasy X*:

I was in Yuna one time. After this person got my picture, they did the Yevon bow. I was like, "Okay. So this is what you want." So I did it back, and they said, "Praise be to Yevon." Then they just walked away. And I was like, "Oh my God! That was so cool!"

In this instance, the con attendee instigated roleplay by recreating a specific physical gesture (i.e. the Yevon bow) that characters regularly make in the game. Danielle responded in kind, prompting the direct quote "Praise be to Yevon," which confirmed that both Danielle and the con attendee were referencing the same element of the game and acknowledged their shared fandom. Like direct quotes, Danielle's experience was an act of call-and-response that served as solidarity facework for her fan subface by acknowledging her shared appreciation for the source text. This exchange was also an act of approbation facework for Danielle's fan subface that demonstrated her knowledge of the source text.

Physical roleplay does not have to involve the recreation of a specific physical act referencing the source material. As Chase points out, by changing their physical centers–the part of the body that people lead with–cosplayers can alter their body language to better represent their characters without having to recreate any particular physical action:

Where is Superman's center? What leads him, what part of his body? It's his chest, and the reason is, he can't be hurt. So he's totally open to anybody, and his chest, which is

invulnerable, stands out… But Batman's center is where? When he moves, he leads with his head, because he thinks. He doesn't have a super power. His power is his brain, which allows him to create devices which allow him to stay alive. He's always leading with his head. He's always thinking. If you can apply that to your character, it makes the character so much stronger.

This change in center allows cosplayers to roleplay more consistently, as they walk around the convention using their new center to represent the character, without making as much conscious effort. Changing center does not directly reference source material, but still gives the cosplayer more of their character's physical presence, thereby serving as a form of approbation facework for both the performer and fan subfaces by establishing cosplayers' understanding of their embodied characters and their ability to embody them before they can be challenged by audiences.

Physical roleplay, of course, can be more coordinated. Jacob described an experience where he and several other fans of the anime series *JoJo's Bizarre Adventure* tried to recreate a dance routine from the show:

Me and a bunch of random strangers tried to do this dance…. This is when we all came together as a collective, not knowing what we were doing, but enjoying what we're doing… it took a lot of organization, because 1) it had just came out one or two months ago, and 2) not all the moves are shown, because there are cutaways to psychedelic images… this is when we all came together and helped, because we had a stupid joke in mind, and by God, we're doing that stupid joke.

Despite his dismissal of the dance routine as a "stupid joke," Jacob acknowledges that choreographing, practicing, and organizing this dance routine took "a lot of organization." This

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routine was an act of approbation facework, demonstrating the *JoJo* cosplayers' skill and effort in performing a particular scene. This is especially impressive considering that it was coordinated with strangers, people that Jacob had only met online and whose first in-person meeting took place at the convention itself. Despite this lack of familiarity, these *JoJo* cosplayers collectively agreed to work on the routine individually and meet at the convention to perform. This collective performance served primarily as solidarity facework for the *JoJo* cosplayers' fan subfaces, as they expressed their appreciation of the fandom to each other, establishing their unity as a group.

Artifact distribution as solidarity and approbation facework. A rare but fascinating form of roleplay that arose in my data was artifact distribution. Artifact distribution refers to the act of handing out items that referenced the character's source texts to other convention attendees. For example, a cosplayer dressed as the Pokémon Dragonite handed out envelopes. This referenced a scene in the first *Pokémon* movie, where a Dragonite acted as a mail carrier and delivered mail to the main characters.

Artifact distribution can serve multiple purposes simultaneously. In the case of the Dragonite cosplayer, it signified to spectators that the cosplayer was dressed as a specific character–the mail carrier Dragonite from the movie, rather than a generic character type–the Dragonite "species" as a whole. It also served as a strong form of solidarity facework for the performer subface by bringing the audience into the performance through the acceptance of the artifact, both solidifying the Dragonite cosplayer's performance of the character and the audience's appreciation of the performance through the reception of the artifact. When interviewed, the Dragonite cosplayer confirmed that a desire for increased audience participation

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was part of the reason for his distribution of artifacts: "I want to make cosplay kind of an experience, an engaging experience with other people. So like for Dragonite, I'm giving mail."

Additionally, giving out these envelopes allowed the cosplayer to promote himself without appearing pushy or egotistical. Inside each envelope was a Pokémon card, a small piece of Dragonite fan art wishing con attendees a fun weekend, and most importantly, a business card with the cosplayer's social media information. Because additional gifts were given alongside the cosplayer's business card, and because the distribution of the artifact was itself a roleplay performance meant to entertain, the cosplayer managed to maintain the illusion that he was the mail carrier Dragonite while also inviting his audience to follow his social media account. In other words, the inclusion of additional gifts and the framing of self-promotion as a part of the performance was a face-saving tactic of solidarity facework designed to avoid the negative connotations surrounding promotional acts while still allowing the cosplayer to engage in self-promotion.

Another cosplayer used artifact distribution to accomplish a different purpose: education. A woman dressed as Ms. Frizzle from the animated series *The Magic School Bus* handed out cards with elements from the periodic table to her audience. In an interview, the cosplayer told me that she was a teacher, just like Ms. Frizzle, and that she wanted to "share a little science" with other con attendees. By giving away such items, she simultaneously reconfirmed her connection to her embodied character and used cosplay in a way that could enact positive change in the real world.

Sometimes artifact distribution can act as a test of other con attendees' knowledge of the cosplayer's source material. Long-form interviewee Megan described how, when dressed as the character V from the graphic novel and movie *V for Vendetta*, she would hand out roses to

random con attendees. "Some people think, 'Oh, that's so sweet.' But if you've watched the movie or read the comics, you know that means you're V's next victim. The people who know the character would gasp. I had one kid actually run away from me." By distributing roses, Megan could tell who understood the reference to the source material based on whether or not the rose was accepted. This served as a playful face-threatening act by challenging audience's knowledge of the source text (i.e. the competence-face of the fan subface), questioning if they're really in on the reference. The child who ran away used approbation facework to establish their shared knowledge of the source text. Artifact distribution, then, can serve as a sort of coded message, a way for cosplayers to determine who shares their understanding and love of the source material.

Silence and inaction as roleplay. There are situations where instead of reciting quotes or recreating physical actions, the cosplayer can roleplay by saying or doing nothing at all. For example, I interviewed a duo dressed as Danny Sexbang and Ninja Brian from the comedy band *Ninja Sex Party.* During the interview with these cosplayers, the Ninja Brian cosplayer never spoke, instead letting the Danny Sexbang cosplayer answer all of my questions while staring at us intently. In the band's songs and music videos, Ninja Brian never speaks, instead staring menacingly at his bandmate and sometimes "murdering" Danny in ridiculously violent ways. Even when I prompted the Brian cosplayer for a response, he refused to break character, instead staring at me in silence for the sake of maintaining his performance. This might have been uncomfortable to someone unfamiliar to the character or the band's running jokes, but as a fellow fan, I recognized and appreciated the cosplayer's dedication to maintaining his performance, even at the cost of sharing his opinion. That is, the Ninja Brian cosplayer strengthened the fellowship and competence-faces of both his performer and fan subfaces by

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dedicating himself to the silence of his performance. This silent performance told me more about the cosplayer's dedication to roleplay than any words might have conveyed. It told me that while in the presence of spectators, the cosplayer assumed the character's identity, performing as that character until he no longer had an audience. Such dedication is rare, but it creates a distinctly unique interaction between cosplayers and their spectators, one in which the cosplayers seem to be inviting their audience to see them not as fellow con attendees but instead as the embodied characters brought to life.

Sometimes roleplay can involve refusing a roleplay prompt and substituting another action. I interviewed a cosplayer dressed as Saitama, a superhero from the anime series *One Punch Man*, who had this to say: "people have been noticing me, like, 'Hey, Saitama, what's up?' Some are like 'Hey, let's fist bump.' Then I'm like 'I'm too scared to fist bump you, man.'" The cosplayer's refusal to fist bump with other con attendees references the character's ability to defeat (and often obliterate) any of his opponents in a single punch. By rejecting the fist bump, the cosplayer is rejecting one form of roleplay and substituting his own. This substitute serves as an unnecessary but welcomed act of approbation facework for the fan subface. In other words, the Saitama cosplayer's performance would not have been undermined if he had accepted the fist bump prompt, but by refusing it, he strengthens his fan competence-face by alluding to the character's destructive power.

Direct quotes and references; roleplay questions; physical roleplay, silence and inaction as roleplay, and artifact distribution are important aspects of roleplay for cosplayers. Generally speaking, roleplay is a precarious performance. Therefore, each of these aspects includes various face-saving and face-giving actions and activities utilized to keep the cosplayer "in their role."

Sometimes however, being in one's role is complicated by the facticity of the source material, which requires a form of roleplay to which I now turn.

Meta-roleplay: acknowledging both reality and source. In some instances, it may be impossible for a cosplayer not to acknowledge the fictional status of their character. Some interactions, by their very nature, bring the fiction to the forefront. I was at a convention dressed as All Might. In one room at this convention, video games were set up for con attendees to play, including *My Hero: One's Justice,* a fighting game based on *My Hero Academia.* All Might was one of the playable characters in this game; his status as a *fictional* character was obvious to everyone.

However, the forced acknowledgment of All Might as a fictional character did not eliminate roleplay possibilities. Instead, it allowed for a sort of meta-roleplay, in which I could simultaneously perform as All Might and acknowledge my character's fictional status. This meta-roleplay took the form of me making comments on my performance as a game player as opposed to my (All Might's) "real" fighting capabilities, encouraging sportsmanship by acknowledging my opponent's skill at the game in both victory and defeat, and making jokes that referenced the anime series, the game, and the fact that I was detached from both.

This wasn't a one-sided performance. Most if not all of the people I played against, as well as those who were watching us play the game, bantered with me as if they were playing against All Might himself. One player asked how it felt to "only be a B-tier character," referring to my (All Might's) ranking in the game. Another player chose to play as Izuku Midoriya, All Might's apprentice, and we treated the match as if it were a sparring session between teacher and student. As a result of my roleplay, more people wanted to play against me in the game, allowing

me to both engage with the source of my fandom (the game) and with my fellow fans for a longer period than if I had not performed as All Might.

This meta-roleplay was possible because of the division of the cosplay superface into the performer and fan subfaces. The performer subface is concerned with embodying the character, imitating their appearance and behaviors. The fan subface is concerned with being associated with fellow members of the fandom from which a cosplayer's character originates, acknowledging the shared understanding and appreciation of the source text between cosplayer and audience. Because a roleplay act serves as facework for both the performer and fan subfaces, these faces are inextricably linked in regards to roleplay.

The forced acknowledgment of All Might's fictional status threatened my competence-face as a performer by forcing my audience to recognize that I wasn't truly All Might, taking away from the validity of my performance of the character. Countering this threat directly by insisting that I was All Might not only would have done nothing to save face, it also would have threatened my everyday face as a regular person, as my audience might have questioned my mental stability in asserting my status as a fictional character. Instead, my continued performance as All Might strengthened my fellowship-face as a fellow fan, making my audience more accepting of me due to the obvious shared connection we had over the source text. Because roleplay is tied to both the performer and fan subfaces, I managed to save my face as a performer, not by denying the falseness of my performance but in showing my dedication to the performance by continuing it in the forced awareness of the character's fictionality. That is, engaging in solidarity facework for my fan subface also served as approbation facework for my performer subface by showing I could work around the forced recognition of my performance's falseness. My roleplay performance as All Might strengthened my competence-face as a

performer by demonstrating my costuming and acting skills *and* it strengthened my competence- and fellowship-faces as a fan by demonstrating my knowledge of and dedication to the source text.

There are undoubtedly numerous other ways in which cosplayers can engage in roleplay, but listing them all is a more daunting task than this study can reasonably undertake. I now turn to the ways in which roleplay can become a harassive force, and the methods that cosplayers may use to avoid or deal with this harassment.

Initiators of Roleplay Harassment

When asked about harassment, cosplayers tended to describe it by the forms it takes: non-consensual touch and photography, homophobic and transphobic comments, unwanted sexual advances, racial and gender gatekeeping in regards to costumes, among others. Each of these forms deserve a study of their own, but my focus on harassment here is on how it pertains to roleplay. While roleplay can serve as a way to positively engage with fellow fans, many cosplayers consider certain roleplay behaviors inappropriate or outright harassive. Based on the responses from my interview participants, I have developed a definition of roleplay harassment. *Roleplay harassment occurs when one party refuses to acknowledge and respect the personal boundaries and consent of the other party due to their dedication to the performance of a character.* Roleplay harassment can come from the cosplayer, in which the cosplayer behaves inappropriately towards their audience in order to maintain their character's persona. It can also come from the cosplayer's audience, in which the audience treats the cosplayer inappropriately due to the audience's desire to treat the cosplayer as if they are their embodied character. In either case, it seems that the loss of the autonomy-face for both the fan and performer subfaces is a primary factor in determining whether or not a roleplay interaction becomes harassment. What follows are some of the initiating factors that contribute to roleplay harassment.

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Poor communication of boundaries. During her interview, Felicia claimed that roleplay harassment stems from inefficient or insufficient communication between the cosplayer and their audience on personal boundaries: "There can be a disconnect between what the audience wants and what the cosplayer thinks the audience wants. A lot of the time, there's not really enough communication between the two." This perspective sees roleplay harassment as a communication failure, in which both parties are partly at fault–the cosplayer for crossing the personal boundaries of their audience, and the audience for not clearly explaining their personal boundaries to the cosplayer. In other words, both sides have failed to engage in proper face management to ensure that both sides save face and conflict does not arise. The solution, then, would be in integrating strategies that create a dialogue between cosplayer and audience to establish appropriate forms of roleplay performance.

In contrast, Danielle suggested that the burden falls on the person instigating roleplay, whether that is the cosplayer or their audience, to acquire the consent of the other party. "I think that any kind of interaction where one person is clearly not into it and is uncomfortable and wants to leave, but the other person persists, I think that could be considered harassment." Danielle is calling for an increased awareness of personal boundaries on the roleplayer's part, rather than placing any of the burden of communicating boundaries on the harassed party. To Danielle, it is the duty of the roleplaying party to acquire the other party's consent (or respect the other party's decision if consent is not given) before engaging in roleplay. In other words, in order to avoid harassment and conflict, cosplayers need to oblige the audience's denial of their roleplay, respecting their autonomy-faces. Danielle sees a person's boundaries as absolute, and it is the duty of the cosplayer to know them and respect them.

Inter-fandom conflict. Issues with communicating boundaries may stem from cultural differences between fandoms. Long-form interviewee Bonnie describes her experience as a member of convention staff having to deal with furries–fans of anthropomorphic animal characters–and how that community's standards of conduct came into conflict with other con attendees:

> We almost had to ban furries, because there were too many instances of furries just coming up to other cosplayers and like starting to nudge at them, basically doing that asking-for-pets thing that animals will do. It was to the point where people were getting uncomfortable and coming to staff directly to be like, "Hey, this is a problem. You need to get them to stop." It's just an entire fandom, a community base that seems to have its own views on what is appropriate.

According to Bonnie, the furries' roleplaying conduct, while unsettling to other con attendees, was acceptable within furry culture. Bonnie's perspective suggests that issues of roleplay harassment are extensions of cultural conflicts between fandoms, where different values are held by fans of different source materials. What might be tolerated or normal in one fandom might be considered a serious breach of conduct in another. In banning furries from the convention, con staff eliminated the cultural conflict by forcibly removing furries. This approach places priority on the roleplay standards of the broader cosplay community over those of the furry subculture.

Bonnie also suggested that some of this inter-fandom conflict could stem from the age differences between fandoms. She described how fans of the webcomic series *Homestuck* (about teenagers who accidentally start the apocalypse) entered the cosplay community in the early 2010s: "This was a bunch of 12 to 14 year olds who had never gone to conventions. They're just now part of this community, and they didn't really know what to do." Because the *Homestuck*

fandom was mostly comprised of preteens, and because this group was inexperienced with the cosplay community, *Homestuck* cosplayers frequently engaged in roleplay activities that other members of the cosplay community found obnoxious or inappropriate. As a result of the *Homestuck* fandom's behavior, many cosplayers and even conventions themselves started pushing back against the *Homestuck* community, removing roleplay Q&As that had become a staple of the fandom's roleplaying performances and being hypercritical of *Homestuck* cosplayers' behavior. A stigma developed toward the *Homestuck* fandom, and as a result the direction of harassment shifted from *Homestuck* cosplayers behaving inappropriately to other cosplayers treating *Homestuck* cosplayers inappropriately. That is, *Homestuck* cosplayers had lost their fellowship-faces with other con attendees:

> They were a bunch of 12 to 14 year olds who didn't know what they were doing... but a lot of older cosplayers would be like, "You're just a dumb little kid. You need to figure out that this isn't how you're supposed to do this." They were less teaching and ruder about that.

These inter-fandom and age gap issues eventually lessened as the *Homestuck* fandom grew up and learned to match their roleplay standards to the broader cosplay community:

> Most of the *Homestuck* fandom has grown up, moved on to other fandoms, and has actually learned if someone new is getting in the fandom, they have all of Tumblr's back history to look at for how to behave appropriately.

The solution to the *Homestuck* fandom's conflict, then, seems to be in obliging to the roleplay standards of the broader cosplay community, much how furries were forced to oblige or be removed from the convention. From this perspective, there are formal, immutable laws that

govern cosplay culture, and the fandoms and cosplayers who comprise cosplay culture must either obey these laws or face forced removal from the cosplay community.

These conflicts of roleplay standards reveal the intercultural elements at play between cosplayers of differing fandoms. Each fandom may have its own standards of conduct, but cosplay is a culture of its own, and the broader cosplay culture may not accept the behavior patterns that some of its composite fandoms allow. While these differences in cultural norms may explain some instances of roleplay harassment, there are certainly issues of harassment that are less about miscommunicated boundaries and more about neglect of said boundaries. That is, harassment can occur when cosplayers or their audiences consider the performance of the character more important than others' comfort with the performance.

Forgetting the fantasy. Neglect of boundaries may not be intentional, as some cosplayers may forget the real-world consequences of trying to recreate fictional scenarios. Sarah described such a situation when she brought her friend, a first-time cosplayer dressed as a Jedi from *Star Wars*, to her first convention:

> She actually had a lightsaber with her, too. There was another person who was cosplaying Boba Fett, and they came over and held out their weapon, a cosplay weapon. She swings out her sword and hits the weapon. I was like, "Oh God, please do not break."
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> Thankfully, it didn't.

While Sarah emphasized that this was a "simple mistake" on the part of a rookie cosplayer, it was a very real possibility that her friend's roleplay could have damaged the Boba Fett cosplayer's prop or harmed the cosplayer himself. Because she was caught up in recreating a fictional battle between a Jedi warrior and the bounty hunter Boba Fett, Sarah's friend ignored the potential danger of destroying someone else's property.

While this sort particular scenario may be seen as more innocent (although no less dangerous) than other forms of harassment, there are instances in which cosplayers or their audiences willfully place the fantasy of roleplay before personal boundaries, ignoring participants' feelings in favor of the performance of a character.

Character types. Part of the problem with roleplay harassment could be in the types of characters cosplayers choose to roleplay. Sometimes, due to the negative behaviors and personality traits of certain characters, roleplay can become inappropriate, since the translation of the character's behavior into the real world results in personal boundaries being crossed. This has resulted in certain characters gaining a reputation as problematic within the cosplay community, and cosplayers who want to roleplay these characters may find themselves facing stigma and criticism. Marvel's obnoxiously funny but completely unhinged Deadpool is probably the most popular character of this type. The question, then, is how to appropriately roleplay characters whose identities can lead to harassive and inappropriate behaviors, if such roleplay is even possible.

In his interview, Jacob suggested that some characters simply aren't fit to roleplay. He describes his encounters with a cosplayer dressed as the Pink Guy, the comedic persona of a YouTube comedian who is known for his bizarre and often politically incorrect style of humor:

> Are you familiar with Filthy Frank? The Pink Guy. I've seen a Pink Guy cosplayer who
> is a little bit too in-character, to the point where I've overheard someone say that security
> has already confronted him a bunch of times for harassment… He would basically do
> what you see in the Filthy Frank videos involving Pink Guy, or just other characters in
> general, when he's out in the public. Basically that. He does a good job with roleplaying
> the character, but the problem is not everyone's aware of the joke.

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To Jacob, the quality of the roleplay performance does not justify inappropriate behavior. A cosplayer can do an excellent job of embodying a character and still be harassively roleplaying, simply because the character itself is offensive or obnoxious. Jacob's suggestion, then, is to avoid potential conflict by not roleplaying characters whose personalities may lead to overstepping personal boundaries.

Bonnie also recounted her experiences with a Pink Guy cosplayer and agreed with Jacob's statement that certain characters simply aren't fit for roleplay:

> That has been confirmed that it's tied to that specific character. They're a very rude character. That's how they act, but that person just didn't understand, seemingly, the difference between doing it for a joke and for photos and events and stuff like that, and just actually getting in the way.

Bonnie added that "that kind of behavior just depends on the anonymity of what your costume is," claiming that certain costumes are designed to hide or disguise a cosplayer's features and, as a result, give cosplayers a feeling of anonymity that encourages them to behave without considering the consequences of their actions. In other words, because their masks remove threats to their everyday face, cosplayers who have hidden their faces feel less restrained by others' opinions of them. Regardless of whether or not the cosplayer's identity is hidden, certain characters behave in ways that are not appropriate to recreate in reality. The solution to roleplay harassment, from this perspective, is to know which characters are acceptable to roleplay and which are not, and to avoid the latter.

In contrast, Chase insisted that just because a character behaves inappropriately does not mean that the cosplayer should avoid roleplaying them. Instead, Chase suggested that cosplayers

wanting to roleplay their characters should focus on embodying the appropriate elements of a

character's personality while excluding the elements that are inappropriate to a given scenario:

> You don't have to choose the worst side of somebody, you know. If I'm doing Harley
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> Quinn or the Joker, I don't have to pick the worst of them. There are other sides you can
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> choose. Just be aware of the boundaries. It's all about choices… But I can't just totally
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> unleash some character out there or I'll get arrested. You can't do that. We can never
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> forget that we're performing, or then, you know, it would just be chaos and people would
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> get hurt.

For Chase, roleplay harassment comes from cosplayers' refusal to separate themselves from their

characters, not from the identity of the characters themselves. Cosplayers have to maintain the

boundaries between their own identities and their characters' in order to choose which elements

of the characters' identities are suited for roleplay and which are not. For Chase, roleplay

harassment can be avoided by compromising with the broader cosplay community on which

elements of a character's identity are acceptable to roleplay and which are not.

Hate the character, not the cosplayer. In contradistinction, audiences might harass a

cosplayer when they are embodying a character that the audience dislikes. In these cases, the

audience transposes their negative opinion of the characters onto cosplayers themselves, as long-

form interviewee Ron described in an experience he had while dressed as the infamously

perverted Minoru Mineta from *My Hero Academia*:

> I was called trash, and in the most extreme case, I was called a rapist. That one bothered
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> me a bit. It made me feel uncomfortable. I kind of wanted to get the heck out of there. It's
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> like, "Well, your character is a rapist, so you're a rapist." I wouldn't necessarily go that
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> far, calling someone a rapist. The other people who kept calling my character trash, I

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think they were kind of joking about it, but they were repetitive with it. I'm like, "I kind

of get the joke, but you don't have to keep doing it. It's kind of bumming me out, killing

my mood."

In the case of the harassers who called Ron "trash," the harasser is blurring the boundary

between character and cosplayer, ignoring the feelings of the person beneath the costume and

indulging in the fantasy in order to release their negative feelings toward the character. While

Ron brushed the "trash" comment off as a joke (i.e. avoiding conflict), the other comment, being

called a rapist, hit a lot harder:

It's not really fun to be called a rapist. I'm someone who absolutely hates the thought of

rape. I've never been a victim of it, but I know other people who have been a victim of it.

It ruins their life. Well, not necessarily completely ruins their life, but it has had a huge,

negative impact on them. They're scarred from that. Just calling someone a rapist like

that, I think it's just highly inappropriate, even as a joke. Like "trash," sure. That wasn't

too bad. I was like, "Yeah, whatever. It's fine." But calling someone a rapist, I don't

know.

The harasser who called Ron a rapist wasn't ignoring the cosplayer beneath the costume. They

were actively making the comparison between cosplayer and character, and they were assuming

that Ron shared the negative personality traits of the character he had chosen to embody. In other

words, because the character of Mineta had "lost face" to the audience through his inappropriate

behavior in the source text, Ron lost face (specifically fellowship-face) to the audience by

presenting himself as Mineta, as this particular audience assumed the embodiment of the

character was an acceptance of that character's core values. Ron stated that nothing could be

further from the truth:

I would never do anything like that, let alone even touch someone. My character might

do it, sure, and he's hated for it. There's no way in heck I would do that. I would act like

the character in a friendly sort of way. I'll make ridiculous faces, poses, whatever, as long

as they're appropriate. And if they're slightly inappropriate, I'll ask for consent, you

know. Simple as that.

Ron chose to cosplay as Mineta not because he wanted to represent a sexually perverse character but instead because he felt that Mineta was "supposed to be a joke. He's not supposed to be taken seriously. He's a joke character." Ron said that he enjoys these joke characters because they give him the opportunity to be more playful with his roleplay and posing than more serious characters: "I try to do a funny pose or face, maybe say something, get the other person smiling and giggling. That just makes it a better picture, when everyone's smiling." Joke characters, then, offer Ron an opportunity to strengthen the fellowship-face of his performer subface by engaging in playful and humorous acts of roleplay. The rapist comment, however, was not aimed at his performer subface, but rather his fan subface, and by association of the character's values, his everyday face. The harasser made the assumption that the cosplayer's identity aligned with the character's identity, and in turn started throwing out hurtful accusations toward a person who just wanted to enjoy his cosplay.

This sort of harassment can do more than just emotional damage. Sarah described how a group of *Homestuck* fans put a cosplayer in physically danger just to express their displeasure with the character:

In a *Homestuck* story, a character in *Homestuck*, Karkat, got a bucket thrown at him.

There was a convention event where a bunch of cosplayers ended up throwing a bunch of

buckets at a Karkat cosplayer. The cosplayer actually did get hit. They didn't have to go

to the hospital or anything, but they, oh my God, they were pelted with buckets. The

people who threw buckets, they were just being in-character. That was their excuse, but

they bruised this poor cosplayer.

In this instance, the harassers were both expressing their distaste for the character Karkat and

recreating a scene from the source material, the latter of which they used as an excuse for

physically harming the Karkat cosplayer. They ignored both the cosplayer beneath the costume

and the real-world ramifications of their actions just so that they could release some frustration

toward a fictional character. These instances show how important it is for both the cosplayer and

the audience to maintain an awareness of and respect for the boundary between the cosplayer and

the character.

Issues of harassment may also stem from broader social issues, especially those regarding

sexual identity. The following section examines two related issues of sex-based harassment

specifically tied to elements of roleplay: crossplay and genderbent harassment.

Crossplay and genderbent harassment. Though there are several issues of gender-

based and sexual harassment within the cosplay community, the issues most notably tied to

roleplay are crossplay and genderbent harassment. These issues can be considered roleplay

issues because cosplayers have chosen to alter their own gender performance through crossplay

or the gender performance of their embodied character through genderbending. Thus, harassment

towards crossplayers and genderbending cosplayers comes from their audience's negative

response to the cosplayers' gender performances. This kind of harassment, then, can be

considered a threat to a cosplayer's autonomy-face, both as a performer and in their everyday

personas, as audiences challenge the cosplayer's ability to perform as another sex for both the

purposes of cosplay and everyday life.

Very few of the interview participants stated that women who cosplayed as male characters, either through crossplay or genderbending, faced any notable harassment from others within the cosplay community. Danielle stated that female-to-male crossplay and genderbending "is a bit more accepted [than male-to-female], because it happens more often." Ron suggested that this acceptance of female-to-male cosplay may be due in part to the feminine designs of characters from certain fandoms: "A lot of male anime characters don't have as many manly features, and women can pull them off greatly." Bonnie claimed that at most, female-to-male crossplayers faced criticism on the quality of their costume and their ability to "pass" as male:

> If you don't contour your face well enough, or if you aren't able to pass essentially, as is a common term of the trans community, then it does offer that idea of, "Oh, why didn't you just genderbend the character? Why are you cosplaying the male version of this when you actually have breasts?"

While this form of criticism can be considered harassment, it has more to do with unfair and unrealistic aesthetic standards than condemning the performance of a character of the opposite sex. These are threats to the competence-face of cosplayers' performer subface; they challenge the quality of the cosplayers' costuming skills rather than their gender autonomy.

Male-to-female crossplayers and genderbending cosplayers receive far more harassment than their female counterparts. This seems to stem from transphobic issues that exist in the broader culture, beyond just the cosplay community. As Danielle stated, "I think that might just be a cultural thing that we need to get over. Women dressing as men is fine, but men dressing as women is a joke, or something to be derided for." Danielle also noted that, despite most people "being pretty accepting of crossplay," most male-to-female crossplayers will as least have to deal

with the shock or surprise from other con attendees when they realize that the female character does not match the biological sex of the cosplayer:

> I've seen some instances of men who cosplay female characters, and maybe they pass really well, until they open their mouths and talk. The male voice comes out, and then people will be like, "Whoa, what the fuck? That's so weird!" or some variation thereof. It's not necessarily in a positive context.

While this reaction to crossplay can be disheartening, some crossplayers have come to expect it and take no serious offense to their audience's surprise. At SDCC, I interviewed a crossplayer dressed as Princess Eilonwy from Disney's *Black Cauldron,* who stated, "I've noticed I've gotten mostly positive attention, and any negative attention has mostly been like, 'What?' Which I mean, isn't inherently bad. That's what you'd expect. I haven't been harassed."

In more extreme cases, crossplayers and genderbending cosplayers will be ridiculed or mocked for their presentation as female, although most of the participants agreed that this sort of harassment tended to happen online rather than in-person at conventions. As Danielle stated:

> There is the occasional person, in person, who will make a disparaging comment to a male crossplayer. That happens a lot online, too. People calling boys who cosplay female characters "traps" or other such derogatory terms, other such transphobic nonsense. That is definitely a big issue, too. That's more online, though, and less actually in person, but it's still definitely connected to cosplay.

Ron agreed that crossplayers tended to face more harassment online than in-person, saying that "probably 50% of the comments [on crossplayer's online photos] are just transphobic, or someone putting them down." Danielle stated that because a lot of crossplay harassment happens online, it is difficult to determine how many of the harassers are actually cosplayers themselves:

Maybe the crowd that goes to cons are just generally more positive. Maybe it's just

people who go online and have a couple of hours to kill who decide, "I'm going to harass

an innocent cosplayer today." I'm sure that's not what they actually think, but maybe it's

just that the social circles don't necessarily overlap.

Danielle suggested that while these online harassers might not be cosplayers themselves, they are

still "people who are following cosplayers, and I guess could be considered part of the

community, in a sick, twisted way." Therefore, while online crossplay harassment might involve

a broader population of people who are more loosely connected to the cosplay community, it is

still undoubtedly a serious issue within the cosplay community itself.

Sometimes harassment towards male-to-female crossplayers can take the form of sexual

harassment rather than transphobic comments. Felicia described a situation where one of her

male friends was sexually harassed while crossplaying:

I had a friend. It was a male who cosplayed a female character. A spectator came up to

him and was like, "Hey girl, you look pretty good in that outfit." My friend said,

"Thanks," and the other person was taken aback, definitely, because my friend dropped

his voice down. This person was harassing them because the character was female… This

guy, he kept persisting. It was unfortunate, but the man who was the harasser, he was

like, "Don't worry. I would still sleep with you, even though you are male." It was very

gross. My friend luckily was pulled away by their friend, but he broke down crying. He

was like, "That was gross, and I feel gross after that experience."

In this instance, the harasser did not reject the male crossplayer's performance as a female

character. Instead, the harasser embraced the performance too strongly; despite knowing the

crossplayer's biological sex, the harasser persisted in his sexual advances because of the

crossplayer's presentation as female. Jacob had also witnessed instances of this kind of sexual harassment toward crossplayers, saying that people "who look biologically female, or guys who are very good at crossdressing" were more likely to face sexual harassment than male-presenting cosplayers. This suggests that sexual harassment in cosplay might not be tied to the cosplayer's biological sex or everyday gender identity but instead to the gender performance that is being displayed while in-costume. Like transphobic comments, this sort of harassment is still a threat to the cosplayer's autonomy-face, as the harasser ignores the cosplayer's sexual autonomy in rejecting his harasser's sexual advances.

Every interview participant that discussed issues of crossplay harassment lamented that it was a problem. As Theresa said, "Saying that males can't play female characters, or females can't play male characters, that's an aspect that I think is really problematic in the cosplay community." A male cosplayer dressed as a genderbent Wonder Woman expressed his disappointment at the persisting transphobia in the cosplay community:

> There's always a type of harassment that you're going to experience if you're
> genderbending a male into a female. It's kind of disappointing, because you feel like you
> can at least make a step towards improving that, but there are always going to be those
> people, no matter what.

From this perspective, the best cosplayers can hope for is that they manage to avoid potential crossplay and genderbent harassers. Megan was more hopeful, believing that "people just have to get used to the idea" of male-to-female crossplay, claiming that it is the newness of the phenomenon that is drawing negative attention, and that crossplay harassment will disappear with familiarity. In her view, crossplay harassers will eventually bow down to the dominating control of the broader cosplay community, a culture that demands its members accept cosplay

performances regardless of the gender differences between cosplayer and character. Regardless

of their hope for the future of crossplay and genderbending, everyone was very supportive of the

notion that cosplayers should be able to dress as characters they love, regardless of gender

differences. Megan phrased it very succinctly: "Guys are just now getting brave enough to admit

they like to dress up as female characters. They're not doing it in a sexual or seductive way.

They're just, like most cosplayers, a fan."

Having touched upon the possible initiators of roleplay harassment, I now turn our

attention to two notable forms roleplay harassment may take, followed by some strategies that

cosplayers use to deal with or avoid harassment.

Forms of Roleplay Harassment

Though roleplay harassment takes many forms, the two most prominent forms in my data

were non-consensual touch and demanding roleplay.

Non-consensual touch and sexual harassment. Many interview participants addressed

issues of non-consensual touching within the cosplay community. Non-consensual touch

threatens cosplayers' autonomy-faces by ignoring their control over their own bodies. Ron in

particular stressed how important getting consent was before making physical contact: "I never

make physical contact unless the other person is absolutely OK with it… I'm talking about like a

shoulder tap or anything. You just don't want to touch them, period, unless they're okay with it."

Among the many issues of non-consensual touching in the cosplay community, there was a

notable concern about roleplay leading to non-consensual contact. Harry recalled one such

experience:

> I was there as Joker, and there were two very attractive Harley Quinns. They're like, "We
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> have to get a picture." I was like, "Oh my gosh. Okay." So they came up to me, put their

bodies on me, and kissed my cheek for the picture. There was no ask. It was just a thing

that they came up and did.

The Harley Quinn cosplayers assumed that because their character was romantically involved

with Harry's character, the Joker, that it would be acceptable for them to kiss Harry without

asking. In other words, they ignored Harry's personal boundaries and lack of consent in order to

roleplay their characters. Harry claimed that the kiss from the Harley cosplayers didn't make him

uncomfortable—an act of solidarity facework that minimized the negative aspect of them

breaching his personal space and focused instead on the positive experience of having cosplayers

want to get a picture with him. However, he recognized "that could have been a situation that

could have been uncomfortable for some people."

Non-consensual touch does not have to be inherently sexual in order to be harassive or

inappropriate. The Ramuda cosplayer I interviewed described a similar scenario to Harry's:

I was cosplaying Maka from Soul Eater, and in the show, the character's father, Spirit, is

very energetic. He's like, "Maka!" and he gives her big hugs, and it's very over-the-top

anime style… There was a grown-ass man cosplaying Spirit, and he just screams,

"Maka!" and bolts across the convention center. Then my friend—bless her heart, but we

were cringey weaboos at the age of 13—she was so excited to see a Spirit cosplayer. She

was like, "Spirit!" She ran over and hugged him, and they both just knocked into me. I

just went down. I'm like, "I want to be nowhere near a grown man. I'm 13 years old, and

I don't like men." I had no desire to be in that situation at all.

The Spirit cosplayer assumed that because his character shared a familiar relationship with

Ramuda's character—one of father and daughter—he could energetically approach her and make

physical contact without any request for consent, despite Ramuda having no desire to engage in

roleplay or have the Spirit cosplayer touch her. The Spirit cosplayer ignored Ramuda's boundaries and lack of consent, threatening her autonomy-face, because he assumed his character would be allowed to behave that way toward her character. Again, it seems that acknowledging the boundary between cosplayers and their characters is a key component to avoiding harassment and conflict.

Sometimes con attendees will assume that consent for one action is consent for them to do anything to the cosplayer. Several cosplayers expressed that when asking for consent, it is essential for the requesting party to make clear what they want to do. For example, a pair of cosplayers dressed as Gwen Stacy and Mary Jane Watson from Marvel's *Spider-Man* comics described a con attendee who they have repeatedly encountered:

> **Gwen**: There's one person, I won't say his name. I actually don't even know his name. He does ask, but he likes to pick up girls, throw them over his shoulder, and then show the butt to the camera and take a picture.

> **MJ**: And he doesn't mention that part. He's like, "Can I put you over my shoulder?" But he doesn't say that he's going to pivot your ass to the camera. And so it's unexpected, and it's kind of annoying.

> **Gwen**: We see him at every con, and we're always like, "Oh no. Run away."

The problem isn't necessarily that the con attendee wants to take a sexually charged photo of the cosplayers. The issue is that the cosplayer isn't making this element of the interaction known when asking for consent, instead only requesting that he be allowed to pick up the female cosplayer and put her over his shoulder. He is purposefully misleading what the interaction is going to entail by omitting the sexual nature of the picture. In other words, he is engaging in a *false* form of tact facework, where he pretends to respect female cosplayers' autonomy over their

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bodies but then misleadingly uses their consent to place them in a compromising position, removing their freedom to accept or deny being in a sexually charged photo.

Megan insisted that sexual or risqué behavior in general was inappropriate for cosplay, unless it was in the context of an adult's only convention or con event:

> Inappropriate poses are a problem, because there are kids in the area… That's why they have these after hours, the late-night conventions. So if you do have some dirty jokes or foul language, profanity, then do it after hours, once the kids are asleep.

Danielle partially shared this sentiment, stating that she believed that day-time conventions "should probably be kept family-friendly." However, Danielle was much more adamant than Megan that sexual roleplay was acceptable when placed within the proper context:

> If I was at an 18+ only con and someone just decided to come up behind me and grab my ass, then that would not be okay. If someone was like, "Hey, can I pretend that I'm grabbing your butt for a picture?" then I might be a little weirded out. I might say no, but I wouldn't be like, "Oh my God, I'm being harassed right now," because good communication and consent is attempting to happen. So I think that as long as communication lines are open and everyone's communicating boundaries and it's an appropriate setting to do so, good.

For Danielle, then, roleplay harassment stems from a lack of consent and communication rather than any inherent connection to sexual interactions. Neglecting consent, inherently, threatens a person's autonomy-face by forcing an interaction on them that they don't have control over. This neglect for consent can come from cosplayer and audience alike.

Demanding roleplay. A demanding audience can be just as harassive as a performer who does not know boundaries. An audience demanding roleplay threatens the cosplayer's autonomy-

face by challenging their freedom to perform their characters how and when they choose, and they challenge the cosplayer's competence face by forcing them into a scenario where they must improvise or risk failing at their performance. Many cosplayers expressed their discomfort at being pushed to roleplay their characters when they didn't want to. In Felicia's case, the demanding audience went so far as to film her without her consent, demanding that she perform for a camera without any preparation or notice:

> These two people came up to me, and they were like, "Hey, can you wait here? We have a friend who wants to see you." And I just thought, "Oh, they just might want a picture or just another friend who wants to talk." But then this guy came around with a GoPro. He was setting up this introduction to me. I was not prepared at all. So I was sort of thrust into this roleplaying action of being Pyrrha. I faltered halfway through, and I'm like, "I'm sorry. I freaked out. You kind of freaked me out." They were just like, "Okay, just keep going."

Even when Felicia made her discomfort known, her audience demanded that she continue with the performance: "They were more pushy than anything, for me to act as Pyrrha, for me to answer questions. I didn't know that I was going to be questioned." Felicia also noted that while she didn't necessarily feel unsafe, the experience made her feel obligated to meet her audience's expectations despite her discomfort: "I could have escaped that at any point, but I was just sort of frozen. Because I wanted to stay in-character, because I was enjoying being the character. But then when they came in and were demanding these things, to me it was uncomfortable." The audience manipulated her desire to represent the character to force her into a performance she didn't enjoy. That is, her desire to maintain the fellowship-face (i.e. being liked by others) of her performer subface fed into her loss of autonomy-face (i.e. her control over herself and her

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situation) for her performer subface. She said that she definitely considered this encounter a form

of harassment, and that "people need to realize that [cosplayers are] humans, and we can run out

of things to say or we can run out of ideas, our cosplay juice, as a character." Felicia, despite

enjoying her performance as Pyrrha, was unprepared for and uncomfortable with the demands of

her audience, which ruined any enjoyment she could have had in her roleplay performance.

Jacob noted that fans who are enthusiastic about "shipping"–the act of romantically

pairing two characters–were notoriously bad for demanding roleplay. He described a situation

where two of his friends were pressured into an uncomfortable picture because the photographer

shipped their characters:

Jacob: There's a popular ship between Undyne and Alphys. They told me that that one

person wanted a picture of them. They were doing pictures together. Then for the

last one, the person was like, "Now kiss." Then they're like, "Nope."

Isaac: Wow. Did that person push for them to do that?

Jacob: Yeah.

Isaac: They kept trying to get them to? Oh, yeah, that's definitely not cool.

Jacob: And I think they just walked off at that point. Yeah. It's a lot of shipping stuff,

that's when people get into a lot of trouble. That's when trouble tends to happen.

The photographer didn't request a romantic picture; they demanded it, and they continued to

pressure the cosplayers after they rejected the prompt. Jacob believes that shipping in particular

can lead to uncomfortable roleplay demands due to the romantic or sexual nature of shipping and

the devotion that these types of fans have to seeing their paired characters romantically interact.

Regardless of the reasoning, demanding roleplay was considered by many to be

incredibly disrespectful and harassive. A cosplayer dressed as the villainess Princess Morbucks

from the animated series *The Powerpuff Girls* stressed that con attendees need to remember that cosplayers are just people, not professional performers, and that they should be respected as fellow con attendees:

> Harassment can be being expected to want to take a picture, or being expected to just kind of be part of the con for people that don't want to cosplay, necessarily. You know, we're still here. We're still walking around, seeing all these things for the first time, enjoying it ourselves. So let's have that mutual respect. We're also here attending the con, just like people that aren't cosplaying.

There are undoubtedly more forms that roleplay harassment may take, but these two featured most prominently amongst the responses given. In response to being harassed, many cosplayers have developed strategies to minimize the possibility of future harassment, or to effectively escape a harassive scenario when it arises.

Perspectives on Preventing and Dealing with Cosplay Harassment

Most participants were surprisingly non-confrontational in their tactics for dealing with cosplay harassment, despite the strong opinions that most of them had on the subject. Very few, including a cosplayer dressed as Princess Yue from the animated series *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, said they would openly confront the harasser: "They usually respect the boundaries, and if they don't, you know, they're obviously told to." Even fewer, such as a genderbent Loki from Marvel Comics, stated that they would interfere if they saw someone else being harassed:

> This is our community, and we're pretty protective of it. So many people go out on a limb. They come here. They're really taking chances with being who they are. Clearly we're not introverts, so when we see somebody harassing them because they are, let's say, an Ariel who's a bit heavier. You don't get to make that judgment. If that's who she or he wants to be, that's who they're going to be and we'll stand behind them every time.

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The lack of common dominating practices for cosplayers to deal with harassment may speak to an underlying value that the broader cosplay community holds. However, as will be discussed in the final chapter of this study, further data collection and analysis will be necessary before drawing any solid conclusions on the cosplay community's underlying values.

Most participants, such as the aforementioned Power Girl cosplayer, expressed that the best way to deal with harassment was to ignore their harassers, instead focusing on their own internal feelings about cosplay:

I've seen some people that are afraid to cosplay because of how people would feel about them doing it. My thing is just do you, and just be happy. Who cares what other people think? As long as it's making you happy and it's not hurting yourself or anyone else, go for it.

Some, such as a cosplayer dressed as Captain America from Marvel Comics, suggested that most harassment is a sort of power play, and that in order to deprive harassers of their power, you cannot let them see that their harassment affects you:

If you're on the receiving end, whatever you do, do not show emotion. Don't show that you're offended, because a lot of this harassment is just a power play. If you show your emotion, that you're being affected by it, that signals to the harasser that they've kind of pushed the button and they can keep pressing the attack. If you just keep the stone face, you know, brush it off as if it didn't happen, you're going to be in a much better position. They'll get bored, because they want you to have a reaction.

This is an avoidance tactic, as rather than facing the source of their harassment, cosplayers turn inward to reassure themselves of their worth and ignore the external harassment they face. This approach assumes that the harasser is looking for an emotional response. While this might work

for verbal harassment, it does not cover situations where the cosplayer's emotional state may be irrelevant to the harasser's intentions, such as non-consensual touch or photography.

A few female participants, such as Theresa, noted that the presence of a male figure can deflect potential sexual harassment: "I think it helps a lot, as a female, to have a male friend or another male figure around." These male figures don't even have to be adults, as Theresa noted that her teen sons were usually enough to "detour any potential awkwardness from happening, you know, because I have a male figure with me." The aforementioned Wonder Woman cosplayer–not the one in a group with the other DC Amazons–actually noted that even the implication of a male presence can be enough to ward off potential harassment: "I've actually found that when I wear my wedding ring with a costume, regardless of whether the character's married, I actually have people who are less inclined to do that, versus when I don't wear it." The use of a male figure to deflect potential harassment could be seen as an avoidance tactic, as these women are avoiding the possible harassment that would occur when they are alone. The fact that women feel the need to attend conventions with men for their own safety goes to show that the cosplay community, fan conventions, and pop culture at large still has a long way to go to remove misogynistic tendencies from among its ranks.

As mentioned previously, the popularity of a character seems to be a factor in the amount of attention a cosplayer gets from other con attendees. Some cosplayers, like the aforementioned Ramuda cosplayer I interviewed, have decided to avoid the more popular characters in order to attract less attention from potential harassers, especially those who demand roleplay:

I think that's why I started doing a lot more obscure cosplays as I've gotten older. As I've been doing this for a while, I started cosplaying more and more obscure characters because the risk of harassment's a lot lower when less people know who you are. Which

is kind of sad, but at the end of the day, the constant expectation of you to be that

character is really strong.

As the Ramuda cosplayer noted, this avoidance tactic severely limits the cosplayer's choice of

characters to represent, and it also lessens the opportunities for positive attention. However,

some cosplayers have faced enough harassment to resort to such drastic measures.

Some cosplayers suggested that roleplaying the character can actually be used to deal

with harassment. Harry stated that the character can be "something that you can kind of hide

behind," an emotional barrier placed between the cosplayer and their harasser. According to

Harry, this approach lets the cosplayer deflect the harasser's actions from themselves to their

characters, which allows them to avoid emotional harm by combating the harassment with the

character's performance rather than the cosplayer's own emotional reactions:

> I'm the character, and so I'll respond as the character. I think that also kind of gives you
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> an out. If somebody was to hit on you or say something derogatory or whatever, you can
>
> then respond as that character, versus having to respond as yourself showing frustration,
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> becoming flustered.

This approach, like the Captain America cosplayer's approach, is an avoidance tactic that seems

better suited to issues of verbal harassment than non-consensual touch or photography.

Ron used roleplay as a way to promote consent. Using the persona of the pervy Minoru

Mineta, Ron posed for a picture in front of a "Cosplay Is Not Consent" sign in order to present

the difference between his character's opinion and his own:

> There was a sign at a con that said "Cosplay Is Not Consent." As my character, as a joke,
>
> I acted like I was devastated in front of the picture... I was like, "No!" My character, he
>
> was devastated, but that doesn't mean I actually don't support the movement. I'm 100%

for asking for consent. I even said that in my Instagram post. I said, "Even though this

character hates this, you still have to go by it."

By taking a photo of himself in costume acting "devastated" over the "Cosplay Is Not Consent"

sign, then making an online post that explains his real opinion on the subject, Ron used the

fandom's dislike of the character to promote the "Cosplay Is Not Consent" movement. The

intention of this post, aside from a playful act of roleplay, is for people to see the character

lamenting the need for consent, connect their dislike of the character to a disagreement with his

beliefs, and feel more strongly in support of the "Cosplay Is Not Consent" movement. Ron notes

that the inclusion of text explaining his own personal opinion, separate from the character, was

important to ensuring that people realized this photo was a playful way of expressing the

importance of consent rather than a genuine lament of the "Cosplay Is Not Consent" movement:

I spoke as a character, not necessarily for my own opinion, just in case people get that

confused. People can easily get a character's personality and a real person's personality

mixed up while at a convention or online. I just went ahead and plainly stated that, you

know.

This could be considered a dominating tactic in addressing harassment, as Ron is juxtaposing the

Mineta's infamous perversion against his own view of consent, thereby reinforcing the cultural

importance of requesting consent for pictures or touch.

Review

My most crucial findings are the development of the superface and subface constructs for

Face-Negotiation Theory, as well as the roleplay continuum for cosplayers. The former offers a

tool for analyzing not just cosplay but all social interactions as the management of numerous,

simultaneous face roles that work together to form overarching identities. The latter reveals core

differences between cosplayers' understandings of roleplay's function within cosplay, and can lead to future research as to how these differences lead to interpersonal conflict.

These findings do not cover all forms of roleplay, expectations of roleplay, or forms of roleplay harassment within the cosplay community. There are undoubtedly a vast number of perspectives that my findings don't cover due to the multitudes of cosplayers that comprise this community and their varying viewpoints on roleplay. Instead, this project aims to provide a select number of vantage points from which cosplayers understand roleplay in the hopes that other cosplayers can compare or contrast their own perspectives to those listed, as well as to provide a basic understanding of cosplay roleplaying to those uninitiated with the cosplay community. Future research into cosplay and its roleplay performances are certainly necessary for a more developed understanding of this culture's rituals and values. Future areas of research, as well as the limitations of this particular study, will be discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 5. Conclusion

This study explored the importance, function, and variety of roleplay performances in the cosplay community. The initial interest in roleplay spawned from a lack of consensus on roleplay's purpose and extent within the existing literature on cosplay. Ethnographic methods–interviews, focus groups, and participant observations–were utilized to collect and observe the opinions, experiences, and behaviors of cosplayers, including my own.

Face-Negotiation Theory allowed me to analyze how cosplayers and their audiences present themselves to one another. This included the various forms of facework they engaged in to present themselves as competent and autonomous, as well as to present themselves as fellow members of both their fandoms and the cosplay community at large. Through my new constructs of superface and subface, I was able to break down the multiple face roles (i.e. fan and performer subfaces) that cosplayers must simultaneously present and maintain. This allowed me to examine the ways in which facework for the performer subface could also act as facework for the fan subface, and vice versa, intertwining the two subfaces and contributing to the overall superface of the cosplayer. These new terms fit my findings well, allowing me to analyze the forms of roleplay in regards to the types of facework they enacted, to examine roleplay expectations in relation to which faces (fellowship, autonomy, and competence) and subfaces (performer and fan) were given priority, and to explore the initiators and forms of roleplay harassment through an understanding that these harassive acts threatened one or both of the cosplayer's subfaces. These new terms, superface and subface, could prove useful for future research into cosplay performances, as well as any study utilizing Face-Negotiation Theory in which subjects are simultaneously conducting facework for multiple face roles.

Perhaps the most notable conclusion to be drawn from my findings (aside from the superface and subface constructs) is the division of cosplayers along a spectrum of in-costume

and in-character roleplay expectations. This continuum, starting with cosplayers who refuse roleplay performances and ending in those who require roleplay, reveals underlying differences in how cosplayers understand the performer subface. In-costume cosplayers see the performer subface as comprised of a costumer and roleplayer subface, with the latter being considered optional to (or even distracting from) cosplay performance. In-character cosplayers see the performer subface as singular, assuming costuming and roleplay elements are inextricably linked together in the embodiment of the character. This divide among cosplayers likely plays a significant role in issues of conflict and harassment in the cosplay community. Of course, between each of these extremes lie a multitude of mediated perspectives on roleplay, and further research is needed to expand on these mediated positions.

The call-and-response nature of several roleplay forms–including direct quotes, roleplay questions, and physical roleplay–emphasizes the desire for audiences to feel like part of cosplayers' roleplay performances, stressing solidarity facework. Roleplay extends beyond the individual embodying the character, inviting fellow fans to strengthen or playfully challenge the performer and fan subfaces of cosplayers by presenting them with opportunities to expand upon their performance. Perhaps it could be concluded from this that the fellowship-face, both that of the fan and performer, is placed at the highest priority, as roleplay serves to strengthen the bond between cosplayers and their audiences. Future research could be dedicated to determining the participation boundaries, if any, that cosplayers place on their audiences, and how audiences respect (or ignore) these boundaries.

Roleplay harassment stemmed from many varying factors, each threatening different faces and requiring different conflict management styles to address properly. Some issues of roleplay harassment, notably crossplay harassment, seem to stem from social factors beyond the

scope of the cosplay community; broader cultural change may be necessary before these issues can be fully addressed. While cosplayers adamantly spoke out about their disdain for harassment, avoidance strategies seemed to be the most prominent means of dealing with harassers, suggesting that there may be an underlying cultural value cosplayers hold that keeps them from addressing harassment outright. This value was not conclusively found, and deserves further exploration.

Finally, I shall point to some of the limits of this study, as well as additional directions that could be useful for expanding our understanding of cosplay and its roleplaying performances.

Limitations

All research has limitations. However, rather than looking at limitations as shortcomings, I see these as opportunities for future research. This research was trimmed down in its focus compared to the preliminary project. I narrowed the focus of the study specifically to roleplaying performance, breaking this subject into three primary subtopics: roleplay forms, roleplay expectations, and roleplay harassment. Even so, each of these topics can merit a complete study of its own. However, this study's goal was not to provide a comprehensive explanation of all elements of roleplay performance among cosplayers. Like all qualitative research, this project aims to add to the academic discussion by analyzing the thoughts and experiences of a select few members of the culture and offering new vantage points from which to understand the topics presented.

Most field observations were conducted at cons held in east Tennessee, with the exceptions of San Diego Comic Con and Anime Boston, while interviews were split between 10 long-form interviews with east Tennessee cosplayers and 64 brief, onsite interviews with cosplayers at SDCC. Observed behaviors and cosplayers' opinions on roleplay could have more

basis in regional patterns than in cosplay culture nationally or internationally, although the international draw of SDCC made me confident that my onsite interviews included a regionally diverse participant pool. Regardless, while there may be room to examine regional differences in roleplay patterns among cosplayers, this study did not incorporate regional culture's impact on the roleplaying performances of individual cosplayers. Do cosplayers from the Appalachian region, for example, perform their cosplay or have different expectations for cosplayers than people from other regions? This, of course, would have to be part of a much broader future study (or studies).

There are of course biases on the part of the researcher: fandom bias and convention bias. I primarily spoke with and took notes on cosplayers who were dressed as characters I recognized, especially if I shared an appreciation for the character or fandom. This could have skewed my findings by leaving out cosplayers from fandoms that I did not recognize or care for, such as the horror genre. As a result, I may have neglected how members of those fandoms choose to perform their embodied characters. Similarly, there is convention bias. I attended fan conventions for genres and media forms that appealed to me. This included comic conventions, anime conventions, and multimedia conventions. Excluded from this study are horror cons, sci-fi cons, furry cons, and gaming cons, among others. While some cosplayers of these specific genres or media types may have been present at the conventions I attended, their preferred genres were not the central focus of the convention, and undoubtedly their behavior patterns differed than if they were attending a convention specifically suited to their interests. Researching how roleplay performances differ between various types of fan conventions is another area that requires further exploration.

The focus on fan conventions was a limitation itself. Fandoms do not only exist in the singular space and time when conventions are held. Fandom and cosplay communities have presence in other spaces, both tangible and virtual, especially on social media platforms and online forums (see Reinhard, 2018). More examination is needed on how alternative spaces to the traditional fan convention affect roleplaying performances.

While many roleplay performances were examined for this study, scripted performances were largely excluded. This was because scripted cosplay roleplaying performances share many elements with traditional theatre, an area of performance that has been discussed at length in academe. While there are certainly differences between the two practices that deserve further analysis, this study was more focused on improvised, on-the-spot roleplay performances in order to understand how roleplay functioned as a form of interpersonal interaction between cosplayers and their audiences.

Finally, the act of posing for photographs was mentioned only briefly throughout this study. While posing for photos can be considered a form of roleplay, as it involves the physical imitation of a character through body language, this topic was too broad to cover in detail here. Additionally, cosplay photography has already been discussed at length in other literature due to the widespread practice of photography in cosplay culture. I did not discuss it at length here so that it would not overshadow other forms of cosplay roleplay performance that have been overlooked in academic literature. Posing for photographs is a crucial cosplay ritual, perhaps the most commonly practiced cosplay ritual, and its nuances deserve to be examined in a study of its own.

Future Directions

As stated previously, the topic of roleplay performances in the cosplay community covers a broad number of cultural phenomena. Future research should narrow in on individual elements

of cosplay roleplaying, as well as examining how cultural elements outside of cosplay (e.g. region, religion, race, etc.) might impact roleplaying performances.

The concepts of the superface and subface offer exciting new avenues of analysis both within and without the subject of cosplay performance. In regards to cosplay, the interplay between the performer and fan subfaces (and perhaps the costumer and roleplayer subfaces, as conceptualized by in-costume cosplayers) deserve far more analysis. Are there other subfaces at work in a cosplay performance beyond the performer and fan subfaces? Can cosplay's dual status as an expression of fandom and a culture of its own rearrange the placement of the fan and cosplay faces; that is, can the cosplayer face become a subface to a fan superface? What other cosplay acts besides roleplay (e.g. costuming, photography, etc.) function as forms of facework? Beyond cosplay, one could question what superfaces people construct in their everyday lives, and what subfaces comprise them. For example, college professors might have their "professor" superface broken down into "scholar" and "teacher" subfaces that have different face roles (i.e. that of an academic researcher and that of a guiding mentor to students, respectively). The application of superface and subface to other areas of life opens up a world of questions. What internal and external factors impact which subfaces take priority? How can the strengthening or loss of one subface impact the other? I hope to see more research expand upon these concepts.

A deeper, more reflexive examination of my personal experience with cosplay roleplaying performances could offer a unique perspective on this subject. A personal narrative or autoethnographic piece about my own experience as a cosplayer could offer an insider's point of view as I code-switch from Isaac Price to All Might at fandom conventions. This could add to and expand upon the typology research Adam Tyma (in press) is currently exploring.

One factor of roleplay performances deserving of further analysis is the ways in which cosplayers initiate and terminate said performances. Data from my research showed that there were differing strategies cosplayers employed, including formal requests to initiate roleplay and using "shop talk"–talk about costume creation–to terminate roleplay. However, these findings were not developed enough to warrant discussing within the confines of this study. Further analysis of my current data, as well as further research specifically targeted towards roleplay initiating/terminating tactics, could reveal details about how cosplayers communicate their desires and boundaries in regards to roleplay performances. This, in turn, may uncover more ways in which cosplayers deal with or avoid conflict and harassment.

The extent to which character embodiment impacted cosplayers' personal identities deserves far more exploration. My data suggested that cosplay performances in general have numerous effects on personal identity, including increased confidence and opportunities to reevaluate core values and beliefs. There were even some participants who noted that cosplay was a sort of transportation performance–as described by Schechner (1985)–pulling them out of their everyday personas and into a new identity that exists between the character and cosplayer. While the exploration of cosplayers' internal character/self dynamic fell to the wayside in favor of a focus on interpersonal interactions, some of my findings point to future areas of study. For example, Ron's harassment experience raises questions not only about how cosplayers connect to their embodied characters but how audiences internalize the connections between cosplayers and their characters. How should cosplayers who are portraying despicable characters be treated? If they are treated with disdain, what is the effect of that on their identity? And if they are not treated with disdain, what does that say about the connection between cosplayer and character?

While such questions could not be explored here, they deserve further examination in a study of their own.

Costumes and props had a notable impact on the forms of roleplay that cosplayers engaged in. Some cosplayers used special mechanisms and props to recreate their character's supernatural abilities, while others combined multiple characters into a single costume so that they could either roleplay two characters simultaneously or perform as an amalgamation of two differing personalities. The extent that costuming influences roleplay deserves exploration in a study of its own, as there are a wide range of costuming practices that undoubtedly have an equally wide range of impacts on roleplay performances.

A fascinating form of roleplay performance arose from my data: causeplay (that is, cosplay that is used for social causes). From my data, I noted three primary forms of causeplay, each with a specific set of roleplay standards: 1) entertaining an audience–often children who are facing physiological, emotional, or socioeconomic hardship–as a form of community service, 2) performing for an audience in exchange for donations to a charitable cause, or 3) using the cultural recognition of iconic characters to enact social change. Causeplay's unique roleplay standards and practices were not included in the final study, as they required a more in-depth analysis than could be properly given within the confines of this research. There is plenty of room to explore how causeplay functions beyond the spaces of convention roleplay and makes a broader impact on society at large.

Participants frequently noted that young children seem to hold differing roleplay expectations than adults. Many attributed this to children's inability to differentiate between cosplayers and their embodied characters; that is, children see the cosplayers as if they are the characters genuinely brought to life. There is a lot of room to explore how this altered perception

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of cosplayers affects children's understanding of the cosplay community as a whole, as well as how cosplayers feel about the inclusion of young children within the community. Do cosplayers enjoy performing for children, or is it seen as a sort of burden? How do cosplayers maintain the illusion for children when their embodied characters have abilities or traits that are impossible to recreate in reality? The discussion of children in the cosplay community can offer a variety of new research perspectives.

One avenue of research could be in the examination of individual characters, such as the notorious Deadpool mentioned throughout this study, and how certain roleplay expectations and practices develop around cosplayers choosing to embody this character. This could include an analysis of how the cosplay performances of Deadpool differ from the canonical presentation of the character in officially licensed comics and other media. In other words, how do the collective fan performances of a character deviate from the character's source text, and what impacts do these deviations have? This sort of research could provide insight into how fans interpret and create meaning from their source of fandom, and how a fandom's source might be altered by the fans' collective interpretation of it.

Another approach could be in examining the roleplay performances within a specific media form, genre, or even individual fandom, such as Amon's (2014) research into Disney cosplayers. Of these, individual fandoms would likely provide the best area for focused, in-depth analysis. Roleplay performances are fandom rituals, and an examination of them could reveal core values shared by the fandom's members. Additionally, there may be room to analyze how cosplayers of a particular fandom differ from non-cosplaying members of the fandom. In other words, how does cosplay impact the ways in which fans engage with their fandom? This research could offer insights into the intersectionality between cosplay culture and fandom culture.

Examining cosplay and how it is performed provides meaningful understandings of how consumers of media interpret and engage with that media and with one another through said media. Cosplay in particular provides new ways for fans to engage with one another by embodying characters that have impacted their perceptions of themselves and the world around them. For many, this embodiment goes beyond an aesthetic similarity, and in roleplaying the characters with which they so strongly identify, they reveal aspects of both their personal identity and the broader culture of fandom to which they belong. Examining cosplay roleplaying performances offers an understanding of how performances, even those in liminoid spaces like cosplay, function as interpersonal interactions and address issues of personal presentation. Through the new constructs of superface and subface, this study has offered a new means of conceptualizing public image–for more than just cosplay–that explains how various face constructs must be simultaneously managed in order to maintain a presentation of a broader identity.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Preliminary Study Recruitment Email Template

My name is Isaac Price. I am a graduate student in the Department of Communication and Performance at East Tennessee State University. I am doing a study that involves the impact of cosplay on identity and the social expectations of cosplay performance. This study aims to minimize cosplay harassment at conventions and other public venues. I am looking for people who regularly cosplay and are 18 years or older. This study involves either a 1-on-1 interview or a focus group of 3-5 participants which should take about 1 hour or 1 ½ hour, respectively. The time and location of the interview/focus group will be determined based on participant convenience. Please think about participating. Participation is voluntary. If you have any questions please contact me at pricei@etsu.edu or 423-367-2687.

Sincerely,

Isaac Price

COSPLAYERS NEEDED

Participants needed for graduate research study

If you are a cosplayer who is 18 years or older, you can help fight against cosplay harassment by participating in a study investigating cosplay identity and the social expectations of cosplay. Participants will engage in either a 1 hour interview or a 1 & 1/2 hour focus group. Date and location TBD.

For more information, contact Isaac Price, ETSU graduate student in the Department of Communication and Performance, at

Approved by ETSU Campus IRB / Approval Date: October 16, 2018 / Expiration Date: October 15, 2019

423-567-2687 or pricei@etsu.edu.

Communicative Management of Cosplay Performance

Interview Schedule

Principal Investigator: Isaac Price

Aims or Goals:

1. To observe the connection between the public act of cosplay and the cosplayer's private identity
2. To compose a common understanding of cosplay expectations and etiquette.

Guidelines:

1. **X focus (Cosplay).** We are focusing today primarily on cosplay as it relates to personal identity and the social expectations in cosplay culture. I'll be asking you to share your personal experiences with and opinions on cosplay.

2. **Participation.** Participants are free to pass on any questions that they feel uncomfortable answering.

3. **Not about evaluation.** The purpose of this interview is to hear personal opinions and experiences. There are no correct or incorrect answers to the questions provided.

4. **Time.** This interview is estimated to last 1 hour, although it may run shorter depending on how quickly the participant responds to the questions and one another.

5. **Bathroom/Food.** The interviewer may interrupt the conversation for a short bathroom/snack break if needed.

6. **Cell phones.** Please silence and put away all cell phones during the duration of the interview. The interview will keep track of time.

7. **Follow-up interviews and field observations.** You will be asked to provide contact information in the event that the interviewer wants to set up a follow-up interview. Participation in follow-up interviews is entirely voluntary.

   Additionally, the principal investigator will be conducting field observation at pop culture conventions in the local area. There is a possibility that you may attend one of these conventions during one of these observations. If you are used as a subject of field observation, you will NOT be identified as an interview participant, and no identifiable information (name, contact info, etc.) will be collected or presented in the study. The PI will unobtrusively observe cosplayers at a public convention or conventions as a participant observer, taking notes on general communication phenomena emerging from interactions among convention goers and following no pre-determined data collection guide.

When We Write about Your Experiences:

1. This interviewer will be audio-recorded.

2. Only the interviewer, his research team, and members of ETSU's Institutional Review Board have access to the recorded audio files.

3. The audio recordings will be transcribed by the study's principal investigator (Isaac Price) in order to maintain accuracy to the participants' responses.

Interview Questions

1. **What is your history with cosplay?**

Possible prompts:

    a. Who or what got you into cosplay?

    b. How long have you been cosplaying?

    c. How old were you when you started cosplaying?

    d. How much do you spend on average per costume?

    e. How frequently do you cosplay at public events (e.g. conventions)?

    f. How many different costumes have you made or worn?

2. **What is your favorite convention to attend? Why?**

Possible prompts:

    a. What do you like about this convention over others?

    b. How many people are usually there?

    c. What kind of shows or exhibitions are there?

    d. Roughly what percentage of people is in costume?

3. **What do you consider when choosing a cosplay?**

Possible prompts:

    a. Which is more important to you: the character's aesthetic design, or the character's personality?

    b. How do you try to project a character's personality into your cosplay?

    c. Do you feel compelled to act like the character that you're portraying when you cosplay?

    d. What has been your favorite costume that you've made and/or worn? Why?

    e. Have you ever regretted a cosplay that you've worn? Why?

4. **What is cosplay to you?**

Possible prompts:

a. Do you have to make your own costume for it to be considered cosplay, or can you simply buy a costume?

b. What is the most fun part about making your own costume?

c. What is the least fun part about making your own costume?

d. What is the most difficult part about making your own costume?

e. What resources do you use to find materials for your costumes?

f. What is your favorite type of media to cosplay from (e.g. anime, TV, comics, etc.)?

g. Is there a performance aspect to cosplay?

h. Do you think your view of cosplay is common? Why or why not?

5. **How do you feel about the cosplay community at large?**

Possible prompts:

a. Have you ever done a group cosplay?

b. Do you prefer to cosplay solo or in a group? Why?

c. Are you a part of any cosplay groups online? If so, do you interact with other members often?

d. Have you ever seen online harassment towards cosplayers (insults, threats, etc.)?

e. Do you follow any professional cosplayers on social media? What draws you to them?

f. Do you ever go to conventions specifically to meet a professional cosplayer that you admire?

g. How do you think people outside the cosplay community feel about cosplay (judgmental, accepting, confused, etc.)?

h. How do people who don't know much about cosplay react when you talk about it with them?

i. Do you think the majority of the cosplay community is inclusive and accepting of people with various demographics? Why or why not?

6. **What social rules regarding cosplay guide convention attendees?**

Possible prompts:

a. Do you think that cosplayers are obligated to pose for pictures when asked?

b. Have you ever done something uncomfortable while cosplaying because you felt obligated to?

    c. How do you feel when someone asks for a picture or wants to pose with you while cosplaying?

    d. How do you typically approach people when you want to take a picture of their cosplay or pose with them?

    e. Have you ever had someone ask you for pictures or poses in a way that made you uncomfortable? If so, what made it uncomfortable?

    f. Do you ever feel uncomfortable asking someone for pictures or poses of their cosplay?

    g. Do you think people need to ask permission to take pictures of cosplayers?

    h. Do you think it is ok for people to ask cosplayers for potentially risqué or sexually-charged poses or actions? Why or why not?

7. <u>Harassment towards cosplayers is common. Talk to me about any times that you've experienced or observed harassment while cosplaying.</u>

<u>Possible prompts:</u>

    a. What would you consider cosplay harassment?

    b. Have you or someone you know ever been harassed while cosplaying?

    c. What's the weirdest thing you've ever been asked to do while cosplaying? Did you do it?

    d. What do you think convention coordinators can do to minimize cosplay harassment?

    e. If you've ever been harassed while cosplaying, how did that make you feel?

7. <u>Any other thoughts about cosplay that you want to say? Something we've talked about or something we haven't?</u>

Communicative Management of Cosplay Performance

Focus Group Moderator Guide

Principal Investigator: Isaac Price

Aims or Goals:

To observe the connection between the public act of cosplay and the cosplayer's private identity
To compose a common understanding of cosplay expectations and etiquette.

Guidelines:

X focus (Cosplay). We are focusing today primarily on cosplay as it relates to personal identity and the social expectations in cosplay culture. I'll be asking you to share your personal experiences with and opinions on cosplay.

Participation. We will make every effort to involve everyone.

- Confidentiality: We will be sharing our names and personal experiences today. Please keep everything you hear here completely confidential. Please do not share anything said here with anyone outside this group.
- No one will interrupt another participant while they are speaking. If the moderator feels that the conversation needs to move on to another subject, they will interject.
- Participants are free to pass on any questions that they feel uncomfortable answering.
- If you disagree with another participant's opinion, please be respectful in your counter-argument. Participants that are aggressive or unruly will be asked to leave the group.
- Keep in mind that we are discussing personal opinions in a group setting. Try to engage all members of the focus group when forming your responses.

Not about evaluation. The purpose of this focus group is to hear personal opinions and experiences. There are no correct or incorrect answers to the questions provided.

Time. This focus group is estimated to last 1 ½ hour, although it may run shorter depending on how quickly the participants respond to the questions and one another.

Bathroom/Food. The moderator may interrupt the conversation for a short bathroom/snack break if the participants need one.

Cell phones. Please silence and put away all cell phones during the duration of the focus group. The moderator will keep track of time.

Follow-up interviews and field observations. You will be asked to provide contact information in the event that the moderator wants to set up a follow-up interview. Participation in follow-up interviews is entirely voluntary.

Additionally, the principal investigator will be conducting field observation at pop culture conventions in the local area. There is a possibility that you may attend one of these conventions during one of these observations. If you are used as a subject of field observation, you will NOT be identified as a member of this focus group, and no identifiable information (name, contact info, etc.) will be collected or presented in the study. The PI will unobtrusively observe cosplayers at a public convention or conventions as a participant observer, taking notes on general communication phenomena emerging from interactions among convention goers and following no pre-determined data collection guide.

When We Write about Your Experiences:

This focus group will be audio-recorded.

Only the moderator, his research team, and members of ETSU's Institutional Review Board have access to the recorded audio files.

The audio recordings will be transcribed by the study's principal investigator in order to maintain accuracy to the participants' responses.

Focus Group Discussion Questions

What is your history with cosplay?

Possible prompts:

- Who or what got you into cosplay?

- How long have you been cosplaying?

- How old were you when you started cosplaying?

- How much do you spend on average per costume?

- How frequently do you cosplay at public events (e.g. conventions)?

- How many different costumes have you made or worn?

What is your favorite convention to attend? Why?

Possible prompts:

- What do you like about this convention over others?

- How many people are usually there?

- What kind of shows or exhibitions are there?

- Roughly what percentage of people is in costume?

What do you consider when choosing a cosplay?

Possible prompts:

- Which is more important to you: the character's aesthetic design, or the character's personality?

- How do you try to project a character's personality into your cosplay?

- Do you feel compelled to act like the character that you're portraying when you cosplay?

- What has been your favorite costume that you've made and/or worn? Why?

- Have you ever regretted a cosplay that you've worn? Why?

What is cosplay to you?

Possible prompts:

- Do you have to make your own costume for it to be considered cosplay, or can you simply buy a costume?

- What is the most fun part about making your own costume?

- What is the least fun part about making your own costume?

- What is the most difficult part about making your own costume?

- What resources do you use to find materials for your costumes?

- What is your favorite type of media to cosplay from (e.g. anime, TV, comics, etc.)?

- Is there a performance aspect to cosplay?

- Do you think your view of cosplay is common? Why or why not?

What social rules regarding cosplay guide convention attendees?

Possible prompts:

- Do you think that cosplayers are obligated to pose for pictures when asked?

- Have you ever done something uncomfortable while cosplaying because you felt obligated to?

- How do you feel when someone asks for a picture or wants to pose with you while cosplaying?

- How do you typically approach people when you want to take a picture of their cosplay or pose with them?

- Have you ever had someone ask you for pictures or poses in a way that made you uncomfortable? If so, what made it uncomfortable?

- Do you ever feel uncomfortable asking someone for pictures or poses of their cosplay?

- Do you think people need to ask permission to take pictures of cosplayers?

- Do you think it is ok for people to ask cosplayers for potentially risqué or sexually-charged poses or actions? Why or why not?

Harassment towards cosplayers is common. Talk to me about any times that you've experienced or observed harassment while cosplaying.

Possible prompts:

- What would you consider cosplay harassment?

- Have you or someone you know ever been harassed while cosplaying?

- What's the weirdest thing you've ever been asked to do while cosplaying? Did you do it?

- What do you think convention coordinators can do to minimize cosplay harassment?

- If you've ever been harassed while cosplaying, how did that make you feel?

7. **Any other thoughts about cosplay that you want to say? Something we've talked about or something we haven't?**

Appendix E: Final Study Recruitment Email Template

My name is Isaac Price. I am a graduate student in the Department of Communication and Performance at East Tennessee State University. I am doing a study that analyzes roleplaying behaviors within the cosplay community. This study aims to minimize cosplay harassment at conventions and other public venues. I am looking for people who regularly cosplay and are 18 years or older. This study involves a 1-on-1 interview which should take about 1 hour. The time and location of the interview will be determined based on participant convenience. Participation is voluntary. If you have any questions please contact me at pricei@etsu.edu or 423-367-2687.

Sincerely,

Isaac Price

Appendix F: Final Study Recruitment Email Template for Preliminary Study Participants

Hello [PARTICIPANT NAME],

Thank you for participating in the study about cosplay performance that I conducted last fall. I have modified this study to focus more on the act of roleplay and the social etiquette surrounding roleplay interactions in the cosplay community. I was hoping that you would be willing to participate in another interview that more accurately reflects the new focus of my study. The interview would last roughly 1 hour, and the time and location of the interview will be determined based on your convenience. Participation is entirely voluntary. If you have any questions please contact me at pricei@etsu.edu or 423-367-2687.

Sincerely,

Isaac Price

COSPLAYERS NEEDED

Participants needed for graduate research study

If you are a cosplayer who is 18 years or older, you can help fight against cosplay harassment by participating in a study investigating the roleplay aspects of cosplay performance. Participants will engage in a 1 hour interview. Date and location TBD.

For more information, contact Isaac Price, ETSU graduate student in the Department of Communication and Performance, at 423-367-2687 or pricei@etsu.edu.

Approved by ETSU Campus IRB / Approval Date: February 28, 2019 / Expiration Date: October 15, 2019

Appendix H: Final Study Business Cards

COSPLAYERS NEEDED FOR RESEARCH STUDY

Isaac Price
ETSU Department of Communication and
Storytelling Studies

Mobile: 423-367-2687
Email: pricei@etsu.edu
Chairperson of ETSU Institutional Review
Board: 423-439-6054
ETSU IRB Coordinator: 423-439-6055 or 423-
439-6002

Communicative Management of Cosplay Performance

Interview Schedule

Principal Investigator: Isaac Price

Aims or Goals:

1. To find common roleplay expectations within the cosplay community
2. To discover what social cues initiate and terminate roleplay interactions between cosplayers and spectators
3. To uncover what roleplay behaviors, conducted by both cosplayers and spectators, are considered harassment by the cosplay community
4. To understand how roleplaying behaviors reflect the core values of cosplayers and their community

Guidelines:

8. **X focus (Cosplay).** We are focusing today on the use of roleplay within the cosplay community. I'll be asking you to share your personal experiences with and opinions on cosplay.
9. **Participation.** Participants are free to pass on any questions that they feel uncomfortable answering.
10. **Not about evaluation.** The purpose of this interview is to hear personal opinions and experiences. There are no correct or incorrect answers to the questions provided.
11. **Time.** This interview is estimated to last 1 hour, although it may run shorter depending on how quickly the participant responds to the questions.
12. **Bathroom/Food.** The interviewer may interrupt the conversation for a short bathroom/snack break if needed.
13. **Cell phones.** Please silence and put away all cell phones during the duration of the interview. The interview will keep track of time.
14. **Follow-up interviews and field observations.** You will be asked to provide contact information in the event that the interviewer wants to set up a follow-up interview. Participation in follow-up interviews is entirely voluntary.
15. Additionally, the principal investigator will be conducting field observation at conventions in the local area. There is a possibility that you may attend one of these conventions during one of these observations. If you are used as a subject of field observation, you will NOT be identified as an interview participant, and no identifiable information (name, contact info, etc.) will be collected or presented in the study. The PI will unobtrusively observe cosplayers at conventions as a participant observer, taking notes on general communication phenomena emerging from interactions among convention goers and following no pre-determined data collection guide.

When We Write about Your Experiences:

4. This interview will be audio-recorded.

5. Only the interviewer, his research team, and members of ETSU's Institutional Review Board have access to the recorded audio files.
6. The audio recordings will be transcribed verbatim by the study's principal investigator (Isaac Price) in order to maintain accuracy to the participants' responses.

Interview Questions

1. **What is your history with cosplay?**

   Possible prompts:

   a. Who or what got you into cosplay?

   b. How long have you been cosplaying?

   c. How frequently do you cosplay at public events (e.g. conventions)?

   d. How many different costumes have you worn? What was your favorite?

2. **How important is roleplaying to you?**

   Possible prompts:

   a. Do you feel compelled to act like the character that you're portraying when you cosplay? Why or why not?

   b. Do you expect other cosplayers to act like the character they're dressed as? Why or why not?

   c. Aside from posing for pictures, what do you do or say to project a character's personality into your cosplay?

   d. How do you approach other cosplayers when you want to talk to them about their costume?

   e. Have you ever gotten stuck in an uncomfortable conversation with another cosplayer or convention attendee? If so, how did you exit the conversation?

   f. Have you ever done a group cosplay, where all cosplayers are dressed as characters from the same source? If so, did cosplaying from a common source change the way you interacted with each other or other people at the convention?

   g. Do you think the cosplay community at large values roleplaying, or is roleplaying considered unusual? Why?

3. **What social rules regarding pictures guide convention attendees?**

   Possible prompts:

   a. Do you think that cosplayers are obligated to pose for pictures when asked?

b. Have you ever done something uncomfortable while cosplaying because you felt obligated to?

c. How do you feel when someone asks for a picture or wants to pose with you while cosplaying?

d. How do you typically approach people when you want to take a picture of their cosplay or pose with them?

e. Have you ever had someone ask you for pictures or poses in a way that made you uncomfortable? If so, what made it uncomfortable?

f. Do you ever feel uncomfortable asking someone for pictures or poses of their cosplay? If so, why?

4. **Harassment towards cosplayers is common. Talk to me about any times that you've experienced or observed harassment while cosplaying.**

Possible prompts:

a. What would you consider cosplay harassment?

b. Have you or someone you know ever been harassed while cosplaying? What happened? How did you or the person you know feel?

c. Have you ever had someone press you to act like the character you were cosplaying? If so, what happened? How did you feel?

d. Have you ever observed or interacted with a cosplayer who refused to stop acting in-character? If so, what happened? How did you feel?

e. What's the weirdest thing you've ever been asked to do while cosplaying? Did you do it? What happened?

f. Do you think women or men face more harassment within the cosplay community? Why and how so?

g. Do you think racial minorities face more harassment than white cosplayers within the cosplay community? If so, why and how so?

h. Do you think crossplayers, cosplayers who dress as the opposite sex, face more harassment than cosplayers who dress as their own sex? If so, do you think that men dressed as women or women dressed as men face more harassment? Why?

5. **Any other thoughts about cosplay that you want to say? Something we've talked about or something we haven't?**

Appendix J: Final Study Interview Schedule, Onsite

Communicative Management of Cosplay Performance

Onsite Interview Schedule

Principal Investigator: Isaac Price

- Who or what got you into cosplay?

- Why did you choose to cosplay this character?

- Do you like to roleplay as your character while in costume?

- Do you think people expect cosplayers to roleplay at conventions?

- What would you consider cosplay harassment?

- Any other thoughts about cosplay that you want to say?

ISAAC PRICE

Education:	M. A. Communication and Storytelling Studies, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee, 2020
	B.A. English, Lincoln Memorial University, Harrogate, Tennessee, 2017
Professional Experience:	Graduate Assistant, Department of Communication & Performance, ETSU, 2018-2020
	Assistant Manager, NCG Cinemas; Kingsport, TN, 2018.
	Front End Manager/Cashier, Food City #657, Kingsport, TN, 2012-2018
	Intern, "Arts in the Gap," Lincoln Memorial University, Harrogate TN, 2016-2017
	English Tutor, Lincoln Memorial University, Harrogate, TN, 2015-2017.
Publications:	Price, I. (2016). When Life Gives You Lemons. In Lisa Soland (Ed.), 30 Short Plays for Passionate Actors (pp. 63-69). All Original Play Publishing,
Honors and Awards:	Outstanding Contribution Graduate Student, Dept. of Communication & Performance, ETSU, 2019
	James H. Quillen Scholarship, 2019
	James H. Quillen Scholarship, 2018

Outstanding Student in Senior English, Lincoln Memorial

University 2017

Charles E. Bull Creative Writing Award in Fiction, Lincoln

Memorial University 2016

Ross Carter Achievement Award in Literature, Lincoln Memorial

University 2016

Quaker Oats Scholarship, 2016

Outstanding Student in Sophomore English, Lincoln Memorial

University 2015

Quaker Oats Scholarship, 2015

Quaker Oats Scholarship, 2014

GenCorp National Merit Scholarship, 2013