The academic study of comic books - especially superhero comic books - has predominantly focused on the analysis of these books as texts, as teaching and learning resources, or on children as comic book readers. Very little has been written about adult superhero comic fans and their responses to superhero comics. This thesis explores how adult comic book readers in New Zealand engage with superhero comics. Individual interviews and group conversations, both online and face-to-face, provide insights into their responses to the comics and the characters as well as the relationships among fans. Analysis of fans' talk about superhero comics includes their reflections on how masculinities are represented in these comics and the complex ways in which they identify with superheroes, including their alter egos. The thesis examines how superhero comic book readers present themselves in their interactions with other readers. Comics 'geekdom', fans' interactions with one another and their negotiation of gendered norms of masculinity are discussed. The contrast between the fan body and the superhero body is an important theme. Readers' discursive constitution and management of superheroes' bodies, and their engagement with representations of superheroes are related to analyses of multiplicity in individual identities and current theories of audience reception and identification.

Subjects
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Alter-ego
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gender
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The concept of the superhero alter-ego is one that has sparked debates for the ages. The idea that these super-characters use other identities to keep their heroic exploits under wraps adds layer upon layer to the psychology of the superhero, as well as giving rise to drama, comedy and, above all, plot twists. Which aspect of the character is truly the real character – the superhero or the alter-ego? Perhaps the most legendary superhero alter-ego is Clark Kent – the famously mild-mannered journalist that allows Superman to hide in plain sight, simply by slipping on a pair of glasses. Discussion has raged for decades as to whether the real identity of this character is Kent, or Superman, with many believing that the answer lies in a third name – Kal-El. Dick Grayson is also the alter ego of Nightwing, Renegade (while he worked in disguise to Deathstroke), Burn (while in secret mission on "New Rogues" a group of vilains that include Penguin), he even was Batman for a period of time, in fact when Damian Wayne became Robin for the 1st time the Batman was Dick Grayson (because Bruce Wayne was supposedly). 27 Wally West / The Flash Wally West is a fictional superhero that appears in American comic books published by DC Comics. He is the first Kid Flash and the third Flash. 28 Cissie King-Jones / Arrowette.