

# It's a bird, it's a plane, it's super hero sexism

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As parents do their final holiday shopping, comic books, and their related superhero-themed toys and children's gear, continue to be popular. From Batman rain boots and Legos, to paperback books about Wonder Woman, many stores are filled with superhero-inspired toys. New research shows that a reboot this year of DC Comics super heroes, however, put a little something extra into the characters – a mega dose of sexual objectification.

In an effort to reverse slumping sales figures and attract the attention of a new generation of readers to their brands, DC Comics re-launched all of its comic book series earlier this year – some 52 separate titles in total. The "New 52" features Catwoman having sex with Batman on the roof of a building and a super heroine named Starfire (appearing in Red Hood and the Outlaws #1) "drawn like a centerfold from the swimsuit issue of Sports Illustrated [who] has become a promiscuous amnesiac." The research appears in an article by Casey Brienza, a doctoral student in sociology at the University of Cambridge and one of the most well-known manga experts in the U.S. (Her ongoing project is a sociological account of the rise of manga in the United States and its implications for the globalization of culture.)

DC Comics produces comics featuring many well-known characters, including Superman, [Batman](#), Wonder Woman, Aquaman and the Green Lantern. Brienza says most superhero comics talk about women, not to them, and asks why U.S. superhero comics are so masculine. After all, Brienza points out, "other comic book-loving countries such as Japan and France do not manifest the same trends, and the self-same superhero

characters, when presented in another medium—such as Hollywood film— have truly mass appeal."

She finds that "American superhero comics, and the sexual objectification of their heroines, reflect the conditions of their production and consumption: they are made almost exclusively by and for men." By way of example, Brienza cites research that the number of men versus women credited in the production of the new DC (and competitor Marvel) superhero comics is extremely unbalanced; on average women account for less than 10 percent of the production staff and are concentrated in less prestigious roles.

The bottom line: [Parents](#) out shopping for gifts this year might want to look at the new comics before giving them -- or their spin-off [toys](#) -- to their children.

Provided by Sociologists for Women in Society

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