

The tomboy in manga for teens: Kaleidoscopic bodily styles

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Ylva Sommerland, from the University of Gothenburg, Sweden, has studied the tomboy in manga, a girl manoeuvring in masculine situations. The study concerns sports manga and fantasy manga for teens – genres that offer plenty of tomboy stories.

The study focuses on a tomboy found in Mitsuru Adachi's [sports](#) manga Cross Game. Sports manga is immensely popular in Japan, and Mitsuru Adachi is one of the most well-known artists in this genre. He has been active since the 1970s.

"My analyses for example show that his character Aoba uses her entire female body when playing baseball, which contradicts the stereotype of "throwing like a girl". Depicting a girl as stronger than all the boys in a male-dominated sport such as baseball is also in a way humorous," says Ylva Sommerland.

She also discusses the tomboy motif using examples from fantasy manga. Princess Utena in Revolutionary Girl Utena decides to become a prince, and therefore represents, as implied by the title, a revolt against conventions.

"Here the tomboy is depicted as a girl who takes on the role of a prince and thereby mocks the conventional masculinities and femininities linked to the prince and princess motif."

Sommerland's results also show that there are variations on the tomboy

theme. She describes one as an inverted superhero. The main character Sena in *Eyeshield 21*, a sports manga with an American football theme, flees from a couple of boys who are both larger and stronger than him. When they see that he can run extremely fast, he is recruited to their school's football team against his will.

"Instead of attacking his tormentors like the stereotypical male superhero would, he runs away from them. But he's nevertheless the hero of the story since he becomes a football star against all odds."

The thesis also includes an introduction to the history of manga, which reveals that it has developed through the interaction of different cultures both in Japan and abroad.

"I hope that my thesis will lead to a more nuanced view of what manga is and that it will spark an interest in more studies on the topic. It would for example be interesting to find out who the readers of manga are," says Ylva Sommerland.

More information: Link to the thesis: hdl.handle.net/2077/29319

Provided by University of Gothenburg

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