

Love What You Love Podcast

Episode 38: Cosplay with Pros and Cons Cosplay

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Welcome to *Love What You Love*; I'm Julie Rose. I'm insatiably curious about people and the world around us, and I'm absolutely in love with passion and unselfconscious enthusiasm. Every other week, I geek out with someone about the thing that they love, and then I share it with you.

Welcome back! Or, Welcome! I'm sure you won't be surprised to learn that *Love What You Love* guest alumni are doing some amazing things. You might recall Episode 20 guest Brittany App talking about the making of her documentary film. Well, it is now out in the world! Check out WhereThereOnceWasWater.com for more details on where you can see her work.

Episode 6 guest Stephani Candelaria and her band La Mera Candelaria just released their latest EP and a collaboration with LA's Violence Intervention Program, which includes a video and a fundraiser. You can learn more on their Instagram, [@La.Mera.Candelaeria](https://www.instagram.com/La.Mera.Candelaeria).

I just love to share the wonderful things that *Love What You Love* guests get up to. If you want regular updates, you can follow me on my Instagram, [@JulieKRoseAuthor](https://www.instagram.com/JulieKRoseAuthor).

Speaking of wonderful, let's meet this week's guests. Tamarah and Tiphani are identical twin sisters who cosplay under the names Pro and Con, and they are a delight. I had so much fun chatting with them about embodying a character, the intersection of craft and performance, making realistic armor out of foam, the challenges of being a person of color in the cosplay world, eight-foot-tall costumes, articulating wings, and so much more. So find out why Pro and Con love cosplay, and why you might learn to love it too.

Tamarah: My name is Tamarah and my pronouns are she/her/hers.

Tiphani: My name is Tiphani and my pronouns are also she/her/hers.

Julie: Hello, ladies! Thank you so much for joining me today.

Tamarah: Hi, thank you so much for having us! We're so excited!

Tiphani: Yeah, thank you!

Julie: I'm so fascinated by cosplay, and I really don't know much about it. But I'm just fascinated that people do it. So I want to find out, maybe for folks who are listening who don't really know what cosplay is, maybe we could start with: What is cosplay and how did you guys get into it?

Tiphani: Sure. So, cosplay is basically the act of putting costumes on your body, usually to represent a fandom that you're interested in, be that anime, movies, games, music, any of that kind of thing, and it's even if you create your own characters. So it's just basically the art of putting costumes on your body to celebrate characters that you really enjoy, or I guess, you would hate. [laughs] It's to celebrate characters.

It actually started here in the United States in the 1930s at a science fiction convention, and I wish I had pulled up the info because I'm blanking on names. But this woman and her boyfriend at the time were the first people to ever cosplay at this science fiction convention, and then it just took off worldwide, and then a while later the term cosplay itself was actually coined in Japan. So yeah, it's just taken off as this global

phenomenon. There are people who do it for money; there are people who do it for fun. It's truly a choose-your-own-adventure type of thing.

And the two of us got into it, actually... gosh, like 2005 or 2006 or so.

Tamarah: We went to a convention... A friend had told us, "Hey, there are these things called conventions where it's a place you can go and buy merchandise from your favorite stuff, or you know, dress up. And we were thinking about going, you guys should come too." And we thought that you'd look really weird if you *weren't* in cosplay, so we went thinking we actually had to. So, we put together these really, really busted costumes. If anyone's familiar with the series *Rurouni Kenshin*, it's an anime/manga from Japan, obviously. There was a character called Kaoru Kamiya, and we were her, and we wore these yukata that we purchased from Epcot Center a couple of years prior when we went on vacation, and it was just a mess. But we had such a great time, and they were pretty well received, despite how busted they were. And it's been a love ever since.

Julie: Oh my gosh, so many questions! [laughs] Now, did you like to dress up when you were kids? Did it come out of a desire to craft and make things? Did you always like to dress up, or was it more like making costumes or crafty things?

Tamarah: That's a good question. We've always been relatively artsy people. We had dolls and, you know, things like that growing up. We always enjoyed a good costumey moment, and my mom is a really strong artist. But we were, growing up at least, relatively shy people as well, so the whole theatrical performance thing of it didn't really connect with us until much later in life. But yeah, I think the opportunity to, like, "Oh this is another way to express ourselves," painting, markers, that other physical media is one really great way of expressing ourselves, but this fashion designy, sewing piece is another. So, we really connected, I think, in that way.

Tiphani: Yeah, and we played dress-up as kids a lot. I remember our mom would give us, like, old clothes, and our grandma would too, and we'd put on earrings and pretend to be different characters. It was fun to do that at home, but never, like, in a group like that until we got older. And our grandma taught us how to sew by hand. And I think I took, like, one Home Ec class in middle school. But after that, yeah, it was so much fun getting to, like... And we were nerds, too, growing up. We liked anime, and video games, and that kind of thing. So, it was a natural marrying of all those things that we liked to do to get together in cosplay.

Julie: What was your, kind of, entrée into anime and nerd culture?

Tiphani: Probably Pokémon, don't you think?

Tamarah: Yeah.

Tiphani: Yeah. Pokémon was... Maybe when I could actually name what it was. I think we watched a lot of cartoons growing up, but Pokémon was, like, the first anime we watched, and I remember being super obsessed with it in, like, the third grade. I was *obsessed*. Every Saturday morning I would get up and watch Pokémon.

When we were back in school, it came on at, like, four o'clock, so I'd set the tape recorder to record it when it came out so I wouldn't miss it. Toonami was really big back then, so we watched *Dragon Ball Z* and *Gundam Wing*.

Tamarah: *Gundam Wing*. All the Gundam series, my gosh.

Tiphani: *Zoids*, and... Then we got game systems as we got older, in middle school maybe?

Tamarah: Yeah.

Tiphani: I think in middle school or early high school we got our first system, which was, like, an N64, so we were really excited to play that. And ever since, we've just been giant nerds.
[laughs]

Tamarah: [laughs]

Julie: I love it! So, are there different categories of cosplay? And is anime the biggest category? And what drives the different categories in popularity?

Tamarah: Good question. Cosplay's one of those, kind of, "you make your own adventure" kind of things. There's some overarching, I guess, themes with cosplay and how folks can cosplay, but you can really do whatever you want to with it. It started, obviously, in that pop-culture comic book era, but then it definitely expanded and it's very popular in the anime arena. There's a couple of different types of conventions. You've got the comic cons, you've got the anime conventions, you've got steampunk conventions, more Ren Faire types of events, the horror shows, all those sorts of different types of media genres have their own types of conventions and their own types of costuming.

But I think in the cosplay world, you can kind of choose to be in one, or all, or however you want to do it. And I think it breaks down even further to how people cosplay. We both really like the craftsmanship element, so we're big on making our own wearable art out of raw materials. Other folks like to buy their costumes, which is totally great too. There's a lot of really good makers and vendors out there that sell costume supplies. Other folks are really into modeling or being social media personalities. There's no real wrong way... And all of those sorts of things fit into the anime group, the comic con group, the horror group. All those sorts of ways.

Tiphani: Yeah, there's a lot of different ways you can get involved with cosplay too. So, not only do you just get to wear it to conventions, but as we said, you can wear them to different events like Ren Faire. There's cosplay contests that we both really like to participate in, so you can show off your skill and hopefully win some prizes here and there. There's so many different ways of getting involved. I don't think you have to really like one particular thing in order to jump into it. I think that's the good thing about cosplay too, that there's so many different types of media, but there's also so many different types of ways of enjoying cosplay itself.

Julie: So the contests, are those at the cons? Are those, like... You take pictures and show your process? How do the contests work?

Tiphani: It kind of depends... I think it started out at conventions. That was the main place to enter a contest, was at cons, but it's expanded more, especially since Covid-19, there's been more ways of engaging. But the nuts and bolts of it is... There's a couple of different types of contests. You have your performance-based contests and you have your craftsman-based contests, and you've got your contests that, kind of, marry the two.

For performance-based contests, usually you can make or buy your costume, show up, do some kind of skit or stage walk that represents your character really well, that oohs and ahs the audience and the judges. So that's based on your representation, physical body acts of, you know, manifesting this character on stage.

The craftsmanship-oriented contests are showing off the different types of skills you have in terms of making. So that could be sewing, it could be using foam... EVA foam

and foam materials are really popular for making armor as well as, like, other kinds of hard props. So whatever it is you do to put your costume together using a bunch of raw materials, you get judged with other people in your class. There's different classes for cosplay contests based on experience, the number of awards you've won.

The classes generally fall into beginner/novice, where you haven't won too many awards or none at all. Then you've got your intermediate or journeyman level where maybe you've won a couple of awards. And then you've got your master class who've won, you know, multiple, three, four, five awards up until... And professional cosplayers tend to fall into this category as well, if you make money off your costumes. So, they kind of place you loosely into those classes, and then you can compete for different prizes based off of that.

Tamarah: And it's an international industry as well. There's costume contests right here in the United States, there's contests hosted at libraries, there's contests that are multi-continentals, so each country has its own qualifier and they compete in some kind of international contest; there's several of those. So, it's its own, sort of, co-culture within cosplay, I think, as well.

Julie: What compels you to want to embody a character?

Tiphani: That's a good question. Sometimes we do it for the nature of the contest. If that's what it requires, we'll do it. But I think a lot of people like to tap into that 'play' part of cosplay. For example, if you super love Batman, you just love Batman's origin story, you love him as a character, being able to act out that character on stage and really showcase your love, I think, is a special passion project for a lot of folks. So, they'll go through the lengths of finding appropriate background music, perfecting their stage walk to really emulate Batman and make that audience believe that *that is* Batman walking across the stage.

I think the cosplay community is home to a lot of theater people, or theater transplants, people that like to be in the theater and act as well, so it's really fun that they get to marry those things together and walk the stage and work it. It's all about celebration of fandom. So you know, a lot of people enjoy the fandom based off of what they see on TV, so getting to mimic that and replicate that, I think is what drives a lot of people.

Tamarah: Yeah, and people really get into it, too. You get people who do this, sort of, standard three-point walk on the stage - step-pose, step-pose, step-pose, but each of those poses are really representative of the character - all the way to people who build these elaborate, you know, moving, transformative backdrops, and stages, and props. It's almost like a miniature, minute-to-two-and-a-half-minute movie, if you will, or stage performance, a true theatrical situation, to really sell that character to the judges and the audience.

And I think a lot of folks really get drawn into that, just really creating a sense of connection between the audience and that character, even if the audience has never seen that character before, right? Like, really selling "I'm Batman." You may never have seen a single Batman story in your life, but you're gonna know who Batman is or be interested in Batman by the end of that performance.

Julie: You guys do a lot of... You're focused on the craft as well. So, why an anime character versus, like, recreating an 1830s gown? Is it just the pure love of character and wanting to be close to, or feel like you're part of, that world?

Tamarah: That's a good question...

Tiphani: I think for us personally, we just kind of pick whatever strikes our fancy. Whatever we like doing.

Tamarah: Yeah, I think anime... I have a closer connection, I think, to pop culture things than I do specific historical costume. I enjoy historical costuming elements for sure, but I think what's nice with cosplay is that it is a lot about that specific character representation. You're taking an individual media source that exists in real time that other people have seen, as opposed to creating, you know, a random character in history. I think there's a different way of thinking about it that really appeals to people.

Now, there are certainly people... I know quite a few folks who love historical costuming in general and they are really drawn to, like, "Okay, how can I make an 1830s Angelica Pickles from *Rugrats*?" or something like that, or...

Julie: [laughs] Oh, sure. Like a mashup kind of thing.

Tamarah: Yeah, exactly. So, it just kind of depends. But I think for us, there's a lot of fun... We tend to do recreations of existing characters, but I think it's just a lot of fun. Because if you look at a media source, like, these characters are largely cartoons, so the proportions are exaggerated, or there's no zipper, so how are you going to get in and out of this costume? Or like, "Okay, this skirt is 200 inches in diameter. How are we going to make this work? How are we going to fit through a door?"

So, just trying to figure out how to transpose a cartoon or a media source onto a human body is an interesting and fun challenge, I think. Especially when it comes to video games. We tend to cosplay from, like, the *Final Fantasy* series, so all the costumes have just...

Tiphani: A stupid number of details.

Tamarah: Stupid! I'm like, "What is happening?" There's belts, there's buckles... If you look really closely at this buckle, it's not actually a functional buckle; there's no hole it actually goes through but you have to look at hours of reference images to figure that out. I find that kind of stuff really interesting and fun. So...

Tiphani: We had problems. [laughs]

Tamarah: Yeah. [laughs]

Tiphani: But yeah, I agree. It's like a puzzle to figure out how to get this weird thing to fit onto your body that doesn't match these proportions from whatever it is. And sometimes it's fun to, like you said earlier, Tamarah, taking a... You could even do a costume like Angelica Pickles and then try and make that into, like, an 1830s dress. The logistics of making it look right is a lot of fun too in a lot of ways. There's a lot of ways you can tackle it.

Julie: So, you say, like, whatever catches your fancy at that moment. But what is that moment of inspiration like where you're like, "Yeah, I love this particular character" or whatever, "I have to spend the next 40 hours working on this costume," or however long it takes?

Tamarah: So many hours! I love that question because, at least for us in particular, we're drawn to really gaudy, obnoxious, lots and lots of detail. Like, if it is going to take 100 hours of beading, we're in. And I think most of the time, too... We joke, but all of our cosplay

projects start out as, like, a 3 a.m. conversation, like, "You know what would be funny? If we did X..." And then we're like, "Nah, we can't do that." And then we do it.

So, I think in particular we were... One piece that we look at too is, what are we doing it for? If it's for a contest, we want to make sure that the pieces represent a lot of technicality and a lot of different skills that we have, so we both are pretty apt at sewing work and foam craft so we try and incorporate both of those things so there's more for judges to look at. We also like resin casting, or smocking, or painting.

Tiphani: Wig styling.

Tamarah: All of these sorts of different mediums. Making shoes. Anything we can do to incorporate into the overall piece. We also think about, what is the stage performance going to look like? Do these characters go together? Is there something we can work with that's within our own ability level to translate to an audience?

If it's for fun, then we also think, like, if we're judging a cosplay contest, "Can I judge in a ballgown? Probably not." So, we've got to figure out something that's going to fit in a standard doorway.

Tiphani: And if we're hanging out... We're identical twins, so sometimes we like to pick costumes and characters that mimic that. We were Phil and Lil from the *Rugrats* a while ago, and then we were ThunderCats for...

Tamarah: WilyKit and WilyKat, yeah.

Tiphani: That was fun. So yeah, sometimes we like to play off of that too. Especially if we're just hanging out and having a good time, it's fun to just pick those, maybe, simpler silhouette costumes just because they're funny, or we can... I like to try out new techniques, personally. That's my driving force for finding a new cosplay. I love, like, tinkering and watching tutorials for how to do, you know, weird things I'd never thought of doing before. So, that's a big driver for me. If I can figure out doing something weird, absolutely.

Tamarah: "It's weird. Let's do it!"

Julie: Yeah! So what's been the most challenging skill you've had to learn?

Tamarah: So many... I think what's great about cosplay is that there's so many people who are self-taught, and I think, you know... There's lots of different ways to go into it, but I mean, for sewing, sewing's great. We're both mostly self-taught. Tiphani mentioned she had done, like, one sewing class in the seventh grade and we got, like, taught how to hand sew from our grandma, so the rest of it, like how to do French seams, how to make corsets, whatever, it's largely like, "We'll figure this out as we go." So that's been really challenging.

Foam work is one of the areas of cosplay that I love. It's kind of taking this EVA foam... If you're not familiar with what that is, if you think about craft foam letters that you can buy at the craft store that has, like, letter A, or little stars that have glitter or whatever on them. It's that, and that's how folks make armor. That's an entirely self-taught arena of costuming and it's become such a huge portion of cosplay. So, trying to figure those pieces out.

I think we've done enough now, which is nice, to where we're at the point, like, "I could probably figure it out," you know what I mean? But I think that initial, like, "Okay, we

should dabble in a whole bunch of things and really work through these skills to hone them," was super challenging.

Tiphani: If I had to pick one specific project where the learning curve was super, super steep, was probably the first time I built a suit of armor because I used... If you're not familiar with the character Rasler from *Final Fantasy XII*, he's this really gaudy white and gold mess. And I'd worked with foam before, but I'd never worked with a thermoplastic called Worbla. It's a material that you can heat up and it usually makes your material... like, you can put it over foam and it makes it rigid, and it won't move around too much, and it won't bend and things.

So, it was my first time working with that. It's both expensive and fiddly. And I'd never built a suit of armor before, and I was like, "Oh my god." So, I had to learn so many new things at once putting that costume together. There was a lot of frustration. [laughs] A lot I learned the hard way. Worbla tends to melt if you heat it up, and I left it in my car on a warm day...

Tamarah: [laughs] I remember that! Eugh!

Tiphani: Yeah, melted my roll. So, I was pretty mad. But I did learn not to do that anymore. [laughs] It's just a whole different... Unlike sewing. Sewing has its own... it's also difficult, but there's not... Like Tamarah was saying, there's no school for foam work. Since the dawn of time, people have been sewing. That's not the case for EVA foam, so you kind of have to just read tutorials, and guess, and play around with it a little bit until you can get it right. And there's more tutorials now than there were at the time that I made that costume. But you know, the learning curve was pretty steep.

Julie: Now, are you guys like this in the rest of your life, where you're like, "Oh, that's a challenge. That's really an interesting puzzle. I have to figure that out."?

Tamarah: I think there's definitely areas of my real life that's like that, but probably not as much. I'm a very anxious person by nature. I don't like risk. I do not like... But I'm also the kind of person who will needle something to death of, like, "I've got to figure this out. I've got to understand this in its full completion or else it won't work." Or "I just can't sleep until I figure out how this is supposed to work!" So, I've had a lot of jobs that reflect that, like right now I'm an investigator. Prior to that I did conduct work, student conduct and things like that. So, those kinds of things fit well to me, of problem solving.

But I think what's nice about cosplay is that, one, it's this nice, artistic exploration that you can do, so it kind of relaxes me in that way. Like, "Okay, I can figure this out, but it's for fun. I don't have to figure this out for someone's life." It doesn't really matter at the end of the day if it doesn't work out because it's for fun. Also a lesson I had to learn.

And you know, I think cosplay's also, at least for me... I'm a relatively introverted person, so to get to go and be on a stage and perform, or to represent this character and do fun spins and twirls, or singing on stage, which is something I never would've done in another life, I think is a cool way of contrasting those two identities.

Tiphani: Yeah, I would say Tamarah's definitely more of the nervous duck. I'm a little bit anxious too about that kind of thing, but I'm a little bit more adventurous. I'll try different stuff. I studied abroad when I was in undergrad, a couple times actually, and I'm usually... If I think it's interesting, I'll probably go and see if I can do it. So, cosplay, obviously the risk is way less than my real job. There's no life-or-death situation with cosplay really, unless you make a stupid, stupid mistake. You've really messed up if it's life or death.

But usually, it's not the case for cosplay like it is in real life. So, while I'm a little bit more okay with taking some calculated risks in real life, I'm much more interested in, you know, "I can buy this interesting chemical I've never worked with before or try this new product I've never worked with before. It's probably not going to blow anything up, so let's try it."

Julie: [laughs] Probably not.

Tiphani: Probably not. Most likely. There's only been a few, like, expensive damages to things. So yeah... [laughs]

Julie: That's hilarious. Now, do you guys ever cosplay individually, or is it always as a team?

Tiphani: We started out actually... Well, we did it together, but then we broke apart and did kind of our own thing for a minute, and then we got back together. Most of our cosplaying is usually as a duo for competitions. We usually just do it together. But it is nice... Pre-quarantine we decided to take on individual projects just to, like, give ourselves some space so we don't have to, like, compromise on anything. We can just do whatever it is that we want.

But before... I guess, the first two contests that we competed at, we both competed separately, and then we were like, "We're going from the same series, we might as well compete together," and realized that was a possibility. But most of the time it's nice to have somebody to bounce ideas off of, or to act as an, I don't know...

Tamarah: Bane-boon.

Tiphani: Bane *and* a boon to your cosplay projects.

Julie: Now, what has been the costume that has absolutely challenged you the most?

Tamarah: Oh my god, right now I think... Most recently has been... I'll do the Sakizo one.

Tiphani: Really?

Tamarah: I don't know.

Tiphani: I would say it's that Moltres and Articuno costume. I'm sorry, you can pick your own, Tamarah.

Tamarah: Oh yeah, that's right. No, you go first because I've got to think about it.

Tiphani: For me, it was definitely the Moltres and Articuno cosplay we did. Uh! I forget what year, 2017 maybe? 2018? I don't remember. A couple years ago. I have a little bit of an Icarus complex in that I like to try things, and they don't always work out. But these costumes involved making a set of articulating wings that open and close with the press of a garage door opener button.

Julie: [gasps] Oh my god!

Tiphani: I was like, "Oh, I'll figure it out. It'll be fun." I found some tutorials online for how to do it, or at least pieced some tutorials together for how to do it. Our dad's an electronic technician. I was like, "We'll figure it out." But you know that saying, like, the children of shoemakers go without shoes? None of that knowledge ever really connected. My dad and I say in the basement trying to wire these actuators together for hours, and I'm just like, "I don't get it!" Eventually, it kind of came together, but it was a much-needed failure, because it was a slice of humble pie knowing that not everything's

going to work out the way you want it to, and sometimes you bite off a little bit more than you should chew.

But that was a really, major project well outside of my skill level. I learned a lot about electronics. Only caused one spark, some smoke, a little bit. Nobody died. No fires, but some sparks. You know, it was kind of an expensive mistake. [laughs] But yeah, that was definitely one of the most challenging, I think.

Tamarah: Yeah. Oh god, that was a rough year. [laughs] Those actuators were so expensive. But they weren't good ones either. I think that was the problem.

Tiphani: Yeah, I bought cheap ones. I was trying to save money. It still ended up being kind of expensive but I bought some cheapo actuators that were, like, refurbished. And because of that, I think they weren't wired properly, and the garage door opener device things I had used were also kind of cheap, so...

Tamarah: We learned that when you pressed one, the other one activated. It was wild. Anyway, that was like, "Oh my god."

I think for me, the most challenging one I've done was this Sakizo Juliet dress that I just... That was my most recent contest piece. That was last year. Only because there were so many elements on it, and as per who we are as people, we never plan with enough time, I think. We're like, "This'll take, like, four months. It'll be fine." And really it would need to take six or more. And I think we also had a lot of other stuff going on at the time, so just a poor plan to begin with.

And Juliet has a lot of different, intricate pieces. Like, that thing had five skirts, the sleeves were 72 parts together. It had, like, advanced smocking, which is an advanced historical decorative spandex-making. I cast a bunch of resin gems for it. I had two different corsets I was wearing. It was a hot disaster. And I think I stressed out so much over that costume because there were so many details that were, one, not even going to be seen, so I was so annoyed. I was like, "They're not even going to see this! It's underneath all these skirts!" I had all this decorative goldwork they're not even going to see.

But it was just so much going on, and we were taking it to a convention out of town. It ended up being good. We won best in our class, which was great. But just the stress level of getting there, I was like, "This is not worth it. I do not like the idea of crying over a freaking ballgown." Like, who do I look like, crying over a dress, you know? But I did, and I was like, "This is just not worth it." So it really kind of forced me to step back and think, "We need to learn when to set boundaries for ourselves of when's time to stop," whatever. So, yeah.

Julie: Do you have multiple projects on the go at the same time?

Tamarah: See, that's the problem. We don't do a good job of that. I think it's essential to take a break. But usually we have, like, a million things going on at once. I mean, we both compete, we also run several contests that are relatively high level. We're involved in so many areas of the cosplay community, and running groups, and running organizations, and you know, just so much is happening all the time with us. So, I think Covid has also been a good moment of, like, "We didn't really build much this entire year." I think we built one costume, kind of, and that was a moment for us to be like, "Okay, we've gotta take a step back and really assess what our time looks like."

Tiphani: And for me personally, I'm really bad about stopping to smell the flowers. I get super energized right after a contest. Actually, that same contest she was just talking about, I was like, "Okay, I'm done competing for a while, I want a break." But as soon as we were in the car on the way back home, I was like, "You know what we should do? Let's build a different costume." So, I get really energized by, like, post contests, so I'm ready to go. It's bad. It's really bad. [laughs]

Tamarah: Yeah, so I don't... Anyone thinking about cosplay, do not do that. It's terrible. We are trying to not. I think we both have relatively perfectionist, obsessive personalities, so that's kind of just par for the course. But it should be fun, you should take breaks, you shouldn't really, like, push yourself to do more than you're capable of doing financially, energy-wise, timewise, any of it.

Julie: It's hard when you get excited, though. You're like, "Yeah! Let's make things!"

Tamarah: Exactly. Like, "Oh I could do a shiny thing!"

Tiphani: "A shiny thing! That looks cool." I love spending hours online looking at tutorials, and the shopping for supplies is my favorite part. Finding things, you're just like, "Oh, this is such a cool thing. I can't wait to buy it and play with it." So, that's the best part.

Tamarah: So good. Yeah.

Julie: Now, what's your Holy Grail costume? Like, what's the one that you're like, "Ah, I'm going to make that someday, but I'm not ready yet."?

Tiphani: Okay, Tamarah refuses to let me do this because we don't have space, but I really want to build a Gundam, specifically the Deathscythe Gundam from *Gundam Wing*. It is huge.

Julie: Sorry, can you explain what Gundam is?

Tiphani: Yeah. I'll let Tamarah take it over because it's her favorite.

Tamarah: *Gundam* is my favorite anime series. It's basically these, sort of, giant mega units that - depending on what series - are piloted by people, and it's sort of military-esque anime. It's great. But they're massive, and they're very blocky and huge, and the only way to get it to look right, if proportioned, is to make them *gigantic*. I mean, we're talking eight feet, six feet, that kind of thing, of just blocky robot body with, like... We're talking gun cannons... It's a mess. So, no we do not have the room for that.

Tiphani: [laughs] We need a storage unit. I'll see if I can get a storage unit. It's got these giant bat wings and a huge size... This thing is probably eight or nine feet tall. So, I'd like to build it eight or nine feet, thanks.

Tamarah: Oh my god...

Tiphani: So, it would be really cool. I just picture walking into a convention, you know, the first day going as the pilot so, you know, unsuspecting. And the second day, bam! Eight-foot-tall robot walking in the door.

Tamarah: Can't wait for the staff to have to remove the T-bar in the doorway to get you through. They'll be so mad. I can't. [laughs]

Tiphani: I'll go through those first. But that's my goal costume, a Gundam.

Tamarah: I don't know that I have one, to be honest. I'm also, like... I'll be on Pinterest and be like, "Oh, that'd be cool." Or this anime, or this video game that I really enjoy, like,

"That'd be fun one day." Usually when contest season comes around I'm like, "Ooh! I really want to make that costume!" I'm a big fan of Sakizo work. She's an illustrator out of Japan who makes these really amazing and detailed costumes and dresses. They're usually ballgowns, which, for whatever reason, I just have a thing for these days. So, probably something from that.

But I also... I don't know, I really enjoyed making armor recently. I've been making, like, some magical weapons and staves, which has been fun. So, something like that, like a giant warrior princess of some kind with a giant ballgown and a giant weapon. That'd be cool.

Julie: When you go to a con... So, when you're not actually performing in the contest, you're walking around the show floor, going to panels... What's a day in the life of a con?

Tiphani: Ooh, we haven't gone to a con for fun in a long time. Usually we work them, so... But I would say, most people go, they identify what panels they want to see. So, usually they'll have, like, voice actor panels, or meet different celebrities, or there's fan panels that are put on by other people that like certain series, and there'll just be, like, discussions, or games, or things like that.

We often run a lot of panels, so we've done some panels based off of cosplay. We do a cosplay horror stories panel that we just walk about all the really interesting things that have happened to us over the past, like, 15 years we've been doing cosplay. And some gameshows too. I do one on Japanese culture.

So, you just walk around, there's a vendor hall where you can buy different merchandise and cool action figures, or trinkets, or...

Tamarah: Collector's items.

Tiphani: Yeah, all sorts of fun stuff. It's a great place to hang out with your friends, so if you haven't seen them in a while you get to get together. When we go out of town, like Chicago or Denver, we meet our group of friends over there, so it's really fun to hang out with them. You know, and just to be around other people that celebrate the thing that you like to celebrate.

Sometimes we get stuck in picture traps, which is when you're in a costume and people just kind of flood you asking for pictures. We got held up at C2E2 a while ago for, like, two hours. Just taking pictures. It was awesome. It was really cool to be in that environment. The energy was great, but we were supposed to be at a photo shoot at the very end of the hallway, and we could see it but we were stuck in that one spot for two hours and totally missed it. It was funny. But yeah, you can go and get your picture taken, go do group shoots together. Yeah.

Tamarah: There's also a lot of events sometimes that the conventions will put on, parades that go throughout. Sometimes they put, like... What's the word? It's not scavenger hunt. What am I thinking of? They do... They hide stuff... I guess it's a scavenger hunt. There are scavenger hunts that you can participate in. Some places do, like, fandom-related tasting, so like saké tastings at anime conventions or different food panels. One convention we love, they do a pancake panel, so they make, like... If you've seen Dancakes, that's the kind of thing they do. It's awesome.

Panel viewings, you can watch shows of people and do, like, talkbacks of like, "Okay, let's really pull our full nerd hats on and really dissect this specific media source from a socio-cultural lens," that kind of thing. So yeah, it's also kind of what you make it.

Some shows are so big that there's different tracks. Maybe you're an anime fan, so you go through this track of programming that's been outlined for you. Or maybe you're super into sci-fi; well, here's this track. Maybe you're super into literature or sci-fi writing, so these are the panels and the people that you'll want to meet. So yeah...

And there's parties too. I think a lot of folks go there to, kind of, let loose a little bit, get a little wild. So, I don't know, I think I'm getting old, but it's fun. It can be a lot of fun to party with your friends from out of state and other countries. So yeah, it's a good time. A really good time.

Julie: Yeah. So, obviously, during covid, that's not possible, but I know you guys put on, kind of, a virtual mini-con back in October. Can you talk a little bit about what that was about?

Tamarah: Yeah. We've done a couple. Some of the conventions that we work with most frequently, we did some sort of online programming or online shows. We did online cosplay contests and panels. But then the two of us together kind of had this brainchild, again, sitting in Tiphani's car, of like, "You know, this pandemic has been such a horrible situation, and I think it's been so bad on the creator community, particularly for folks of color, just losing that community and the creators..."

So we launched POC Creati-Con, which was this cool, sort of, conference if you will of creators from all different walks of life coming together to do host panels, to network, to share, to just build that sense of community back. It was totally free, we did it through Zoom, and we're going to be doing it again this coming October, so stay tuned for that. But yeah...

Tiphani: Yeah, I think it's a different animal. You have to think about... People's attention spans are usually pretty short anyway, and doing it from your computer, especially after we've all been in lockdown for a while, you have to really make the content as engaging as possible. Some of the shows we worked for, a lot of the shows are in financial strains because of the impact of not being able to host a show, so that's been a great way to either, you know, post fundraising links, or to crowdfund, and do those kinds of things to promote the event itself and connect with people that you haven't seen in, you know, two years. So, it is a different animal, managing technology.

I think that this did force us to learn how to use technology in meaningful ways, how to create paneling and programming we hope was interesting, while at the same time, tying back into the roots of why we all do this in the first place, because we like celebrating different forms of media: anime, video games, literature, sci-fi, all that good stuff.

Julie: You run a website for people of color in cosplay. What are the unique challenges for people of color, and especially women of color, in cosplay? And then how does your website address that?

Tiphani: Yeah, so it's one of those things... First of all, a lot of people don't realize that people of color, women of color, cosplay. Frankly, it is... Most of the articles and big media sources that you see representing cosplay tend to represent only white women that are a certain size. So, it is nice to have representation... I'm one of the admins of the POC Cosplayers group on Facebook, and it's kind of important to showcase that we're out here doing things that are just as good as our white counterparts are. We're just

as involved in cosplay, community, outreach, building, making, all those things. We're out here.

Sometimes we get overlooked because of the same racist themes that take place in regular life, it still extends into the cosplay community. Alongside the negative comments about cosplaying as, like, the "Black version" of whatever and whatever slurs you get along with that. You get the additional comments of being a woman in cosplay, and you get the same comments of whatever gender identity you might hold, or being a member of the LGBTQIA community, or having abilities or disabilities, all that same stuff impacts us the same way that it does in the white communities, it's just mixed in there with race.

So, it's all those things combined together as well as access and opportunity. So you know, I think it is a big challenge for people to realize that... I should say, it's a big challenge for people of color cosplayers to get known, and get noticed, and get their work represented out there just because, you know, the nature of the beast. A lot of these big media outlets are only after a certain type of cosplayer, and we're pushing to get that changed, get some people to recognize that this is not okay and that we're out here doing things.

Tamarah: And I think, you know, weirdly... I shouldn't say weirdly... One of the things that we've talked about quite a bit in the cosplay community, especially with some of those larger media sources... I mean, blackface is really huge in the community. It's become very... It's weird to think, like, "Okay, we're well past these minstrel shows..." Most people know... You kind of expect to see that kind of thing on Halloween, but that's really a big part of something that we've been trying to work against in cosplay, people doing blackface and then getting, you know, money and paid advertisements and promotions from large-scale corporations for blackfacing, effectively, right?

Julie: Augh!!

Tamarah: I know, right? You tell people this and they're like, "What are you talking about?" I'm like, "No, a white cosplayer usually will darken their skin tone or tape their eyes to appear more Asian..." all these sorts of just ridiculous things that we all know are problematic, but you know, the excuse is, "It's for cosplay. It's just for fun. I want to be accurate." No. No, that's not what we're doing. This is hugely offensive.

People never really take that time to step back and ask the community of color their opinions of what this representation looks like and what it does. So, that's been a huge part of our work, too, just kind of trying to... One of the things we do particularly is writing policy of the shows we run, that blackface is not acceptable, neither is mimicking national tragedies or other, sort of, racial slurs, or things like that in shows to help combat some of those issues.

Julie: And how about the experience at the con itself? Do you work with them on making a safer space?

Tamarah: Yeah.

Tiphani: Yeah, and a lot of that's in the policy work that we do. Tamarah's done some trainings for, like, bystander intervention. So if you see something, do something; don't let that person just sit there and suffer in silence. Or there's other ways you can do that other than just actively intervening. Tamarah's done some training for that. I think a lot of what we do is we try and create spaces that are zero-tolerance for that kind of thing,

both in what we say during the convention... When we're in panels and things like that, "This is a zero-tolerance area for discrimination of any kind. Won't handle it. Will not tolerate it."

Working with the access control, the convention security to get those people on the same page of, like, "If you see this, they get kicked out. Take their badge. Done." Yeah, so we also do a lot of work online with... We've written some statements and written some ideas and suggestions for trainings, all that kind of stuff. All of it goes into trying to create a safe space. I think it's holistic. You can't just start in one spot. You've got to, kind of, attack all of it.

Tamarah: Yeah, and what's nice too is, like, the cosplay community, as big and vast as it is, is relatively small, so we were able to also create some community with other cosplay contest runners, other convention showrunners, to really talk about, "Okay, how can we make our conventions that are built on this idea of being inclusive and celebrating nerd culture - which is already looked down upon in society, right? How can we create a more inclusive environment for our already marginalized identities?"

And what's been nice is, I'd say, by and large, people are on board for that. You get the occasional person who chooses not to engage in that way, but for the most part, I think... It's definitely a work in progress for sure, but I think it's nice that this is a more willing community to address some of those things, which is good.

Julie: I'm still just gobsmacked about the blackface thing. That's really just...

Tamarah: Oh my gosh, it's so bad.

Tiphani: We're just like, "What are you doing??"

Julie: "What is wrong with you!"

Tamarah: You know, people don't think. If you remember the movie that came out a long time... Like, *Cloud Atlas*, and no one batted an eye at the aggressive amount of blackface in there. No one even said anything, and I was like, "Eugh!!" So, it's that kind of mindset of like, "It's just art. It's just a movie. It's just media." But there's so much harm done by things like that.

Tiphani: I think people forget that just because you're in costume, that doesn't take you out of the social environment that you're in. You're still... We don't live in a vacuum. The impacts of our social environment impact us in cosplay even when we're in the convention center.

Tamarah: We're still Black walking into the convention!

Tiphani: Right, we're still Black. [laughs]

Julie: Well, I'm sure for some people, they're like, "Well, this is just a chance for me to, kind of, live out..." I don't know... I don't know what to think.

Tamarah: Yeah, absolutely. I mean, they really think, "This is my chance." It's really based on this idea of being shocking, is really all it is, you know, if it comes down to it. Because a lot of times... I wouldn't say all, but a lot of times people are like, "I just want to have this accuracy moment of having my skin tone look this way." Okay, well, your costume doesn't fit. There's so many other... You didn't paint this. You know? You were only worried about the blackface but none of the rest of the costume, so it can't be about accuracy. It's got to be for shock value, so I just... I don't get it.

Tiphani: It's never a good thing, either. They think people forget that not all press is good press. That's just not... We've seen people lose contracts because they have blackfaced in an event, and lost sponsorships, and lost deals. So, it's a real issue. I always say, "Hell hath no fury like the POC cosplay community scorned," and they will come after you. Just don't do it.

Julie: Now, you guys have mentioned a couple times, like, contracts, and deals, and professional cosplayers. Who's making these deals? Who are they making contracts with?

Tamarah: There's a couple of really big-name cosplayers that people know of, like they have hundreds of thousands of followers online, they're really well established, and they get sponsorship with, like, PlayStation, or some of the really big, important brand companies that produce media, and that's awesome. That's a very small percentage of the cosplay community though, so if you're looking to make a hundred grand a year off of costuming, it's not an easy thing to... It's a full-time job. It's a lot harder than people think.

But what's been nice, too, in the last couple of years, micro-influencing has become really big. So, if you have a decent social media following or are a good member of the community, companies and brands will reach out to you to be like, "Hey, can you use our product? We'll send it to you for free if you would be willing to do a couple posts a month about it," this paint, or this adhesive, or this prop or whatever, and just kind of talk about it. That's been really nice too. There's a lot more access, I think, to working with brands in that way recently, which has been pretty cool.

Tiphani: And you can also work with different conventions too. So, sometimes we show up as guests at places. So, you'll write up a contract being like, "We'll agree to pay you X amount for an appearance fee," if you get an appearance fee. "We'll pay you a per diem, your hotel, in exchange for you judging the cosplay contest and doing several hours of programming." So, it's a lot of work, which, I think people are like, "Ooh, free ride to get to a convention." No, we're working the whole time. It takes preparing; it's work.

But it's a great way... You know, so you write up contracts, you kind of negotiate sometimes about what your asks are and what you're willing to provide, and what they're willing to provide you, and you have a good dialogue about it. It is something that I think is coming up more and more for cosplayers. In the past, maybe, five or six years, I think, convention contracts and guest contracts have been a lot more commonplace, so it's really nice to see it becoming a little bit more professionalized, I suppose.

Julie: So, what has been the most surprising thing for you about being involved in cosplay?

Tamarah: I guess I didn't realize how much of my life it was going to take over, you know what I mean? I think it's one of those things where, like, you show up to a convention to have a good time, it's a weekend, you know, you spend like... At the time when we first started, like, "Oh you know, three days putting together a costume. Whatever," you go and it's, kind of, done, over, and you geek out about it for the next year. But I mean, then there for a while we were going to six or seven conventions a year, like competing. And then we started working with shows to make them, we started doing consultation, we started doing brand ambassadorship, we started just, kind of, really

getting into the community. And it has taken... I mean, it's almost as much work as my full-time job.

Tiphani: Probably more.

Tamarah: It's probably more, actually, because I mean, as soon as I get off work I'm like, "All right cosplay thing!" So, I love that element of it. I think it's just so much more than, kind of, putting on a costume and wearing it. Granted, it doesn't have to be that; that's just kind of what we've made it to be. But it's such a great depth of community, there's so many great opportunities. I had done some event planning back in a former job and, "Oh, I can apply those skills to my cosplay life! Putting on large, 1,500-attendee events. This is great!" So...

Tiphani: Yeah- Sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt.

Tamarah: No, you're good.

Tiphani: I was going to say, I totally agree with you on the transferability of the skills that you do. You're like, "I'm just at home sewing a dress." No, you could really do some cool stuff. Particularly with the pandemic, I was just feeling really down, but I realized, "Oh, wait, we can make masks. I know how to sew. I can be useful!" So, that was, like, a neat thing to, like, "Okay, well..." There's some transferable skills here that you can showcase.

And like Tamarah said, you know, we've both done event planning in our professional lives, but that really helped when we started doing convention planning, and running large-scale events, and moving massive amounts of people, things to think about that you wouldn't think you would need to worry about. You're like, "Oh, we need to have waivers for this, we need contracts for this," just having experience in those areas has transferred over really nicely to both in-person jobs or other endeavors.

So, it's not just hanging out and geeking out with your friends all the time. Like Tamarah said. It can be, but there's a lot of things you can get involved with that really improve other elements of your life. I think I'm a little more handy around the house. I'm still lazy, but like, you know, "I know what this tool is for besides, you know, bolting my wings to my back brace. I could fix a faucet if I wanted to." So that's good.

Tamarah: *If we wanted to.* [laughs]

Tiphani: Yeah. [laughs] I don't want to, really.

Tamarah: I would say even the people skills too. Both of us, in former jobs, have had to have, like, crisis management skills, or how to de-escalate situations, or just general empathetic listening or whatever. There's no greater moment of tension than, like, two minutes before you walk on stage and your costume falls apart, and this person's bawling on the floor and you've got to go help that person get it together, right? So, I think that's also been kind of interesting.

You think outside looking in, like, it's just a dress. Well, no, you spent like a thousand hours on this, right? You're breaking down backstage. Who's going to help get it together? And it's been nice because I think both of us at least are empathetic in that way and can, kind of, help our fellow person in the green room to get that stuff together. So, it's just wild, the connection of life skills that get applied to cosplay.

Julie: I'm sure there's a lot, but what are the big misconceptions about cosplay that just drive you insane?

Tiphani: I think maybe number one is that the cosplay community is sometimes branded as being more catty than any other community, catty or petty...

Tamarah: Bullying.

Tiphani: It's really not any worse than any of the other ones out there. It's the same people that you deal with in day-to-day life, you all just happen to like the same TV show. So, I think sometimes people get the perception that we are a lot worse than other communities sometimes. That's not the case. We're just as *bad*. [laughs] Not necessarily worse.

Tamarah: Yes, if this person's a jerk in cosplay, they're also a jerk out of cosplay. That's just a consistent life... It's fine.

Tiphani: Or you know, maybe it's not a serious thing. I think sometimes people think that cosplay... And it can be. There's nothing wrong with, like, throwing on a costume and being like, "Yay!" for the next couple hours. But I think some people don't... When you do put a lot of effort and energy into a costume, I think some people do brush that off as being a 'no big deal', or "Whatever, I could do that in my sleep." It's like, "Well, could you?" [laughs] I think some people downplay some of the effort that does go into cosplay a lot.

Tamarah: Yeah. I would agree with that. Yeah, that's probably about it. I think everyone thinks that because cosplay can be such a choose-your-own-adventure that everybody's level of effort is the same, and that's not the case. Any type of modeling, or... what's the word... creator media takes so much effort, especially with the social media game. Trying to manage your social media accounts to grow your following, that takes so much... You probably know, right? Working with Instagram and your own work, it takes so much work to maintain that stuff.

Tiphani: That's why there's marketing jobs.

Tamarah: Exactly. But you know, as a cosplayer, you're your own agent, and marketer, and you know, artist, and builder. So, it's kind of a lot. I think I'd agree with you.

Tiphani: Those are probably the two biggest ones.

Julie: So if someone listening got really fired up about this conversation and they wanted to get into cosplay, where would you suggest they get started?

Tamarah: First of all, Yay! That's awesome! Please do! Yes! It can be overwhelming, I think, because there's so much detail, but I always tell people: it's important to learn the game before you learn the strategy. You can learn the bells and whistles, and all the fancy stuff that you can do later on.

We're the kind of people who like to just jump in and do things at breakneck speed, but I think that can be very intimidating for people. So, I say, like, if there's a character that you really like, go for it. Just start from the ground up of, like, "Do I want to build this? Do I want to make this? What do I want my experience to be? Am I choosing to cosplay because it just sounds like it would be fun?" Great. You can buy a costume offline and wear it at a convention or take a photo and post it online. Are you interested in, like, "I feel like I really want to learn how to sew. I want to try and make this thing.?" Awesome. What's your budget? How can you think about how much time it's going to take you to learn this skill?

There's a lot of really great online communities that you can join, to ask questions. Sometimes... I'm touch-and-go with some of those for beginners because you have to

know what it is that you need to ask in order to be able to do it, you know what I mean? But Kamui Cosplay has this great line of cosplaying for beginners books that you can buy as well, and they kind of talk you through, like, "Here's the basics of crafting and how to start." But yeah, I think a lot of people get stuck on, like, "How do I do it? How do I get involved? What do I do?" And truly, just do it. Put on a costume.

Tiphani: I would say, start with what it is that you want. Pick a character. That's my first thing. If they're like, "I want to start cosplay, how do I get started?" What character do you like? Who do you see yourself being able to do? And when you're doing that, think about, what are your skills? Do you want to make it yourself? Do you have the money to buy your own? Do you want to go to a convention and hang out with people or do you just want to take pictures for social media? So just starting off with deciding what it is that you actually want to do will help guide a lot of the other stuff.

Personally, I don't see the point in taking an entire course on sewing if you just need to learn... I like to learn the skill for the costume or the project, rather than, like, taking an entire course to learn 15,000 things I don't need to know. Which is maybe a bane or a boon, depending on the thing. Sometimes you miss some stuff. But personally, I pay more attention when I'm doing it because I need to know it.

So, if you don't need to know how to sew and you're making a suit of armor, don't take a sewing class. Watch tutorials on how to make armor. So, you don't have to start on a skill just because everybody else is doing it. Just start with what makes sense for whatever costume it is that you want to bring to life and then think about when you want to debut it and where you want to wear it.

And don't get into the weeds too much until you've, kind of, settled on that part. It can get overwhelming quickly, especially when you see all the fancy stuff people are doing. But you need to decide if you like it first before you spend all the money, time, and energy, and stress.

Julie: Ladies, thank you so much for taking so much time and having just a lovely conversation. I had so much fun.

Tamarah: Us too. Thank you so much for having us. This was awesome.

If you'd like to learn more about Pro and Con, or cosplay in general, you can find them on [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#) @ProsandConsCosplay. I'll include links in the show notes as well as links to other cosplay resources, and a list of their favorite nonprofits, as well as my own.

Just a reminder that you can find this podcast on Instagram [@LoveWhatYouLovePod](#), and on Twitter, [@WhatYouLovePod](#), and the website is [LoveWhatYouLovePod.com](#).

All of the transcripts for *Love What You Love* are available for everyone on the website. Thanks to Emily White, transcription virtuoso and proprietress of The Wordary. The music for *Love What You Love* is called "Inspiring Hope" by Pink-Sounds. A link to that artist is included in the show notes.

As always, thank you so, so much for listening. Let's hang out again soon.

Links:

Find Pros and Cons Cosplay on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [Ko-Fi.com](#) or reach out to them at ProsandConsCosplay@gmail.com

Websites for Cosplay Community:

[POC Cosplayers on Facebook](#)

[SheProp on Facebook](#)

[Cosplay Contest Support Group on Facebook](#)

[Instagram @BlackCosplayBoosters](#)

Info for Beginners:

[Kamui's Cosplay Community on Facebook](#)

[Cosplay Help and Advice on Facebook](#)

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[Black Lives Matter Survival Fund](#)

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My Favorite Nonprofits:

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