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**Superheroes\***

in

Play Therapy and  
Counseling

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# A Point in Space

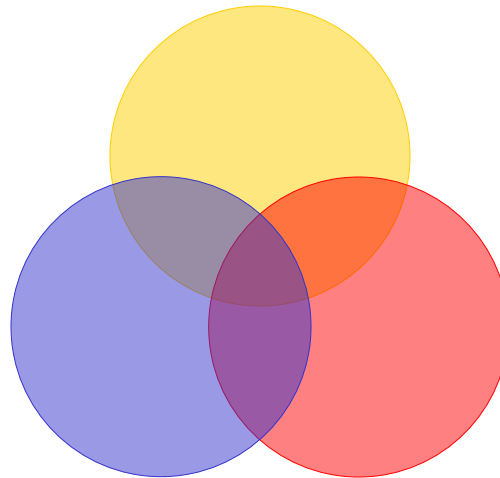


**Academia**

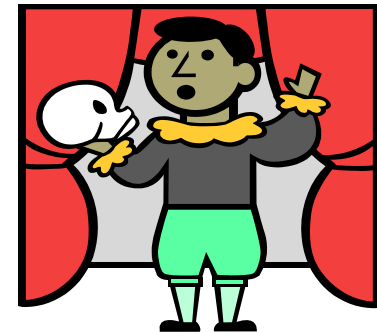
**Superherodom**



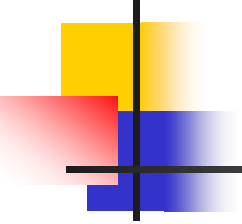
**childhood**



**Play therapy**



**[www.a4pt.org](http://www.a4pt.org)**



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If reality is measured in part by the effect something has on the world, then Superman [and superheroes by association] is real.

Oropeza, B.J. (2005, p. 44)



# Superhero Free Association

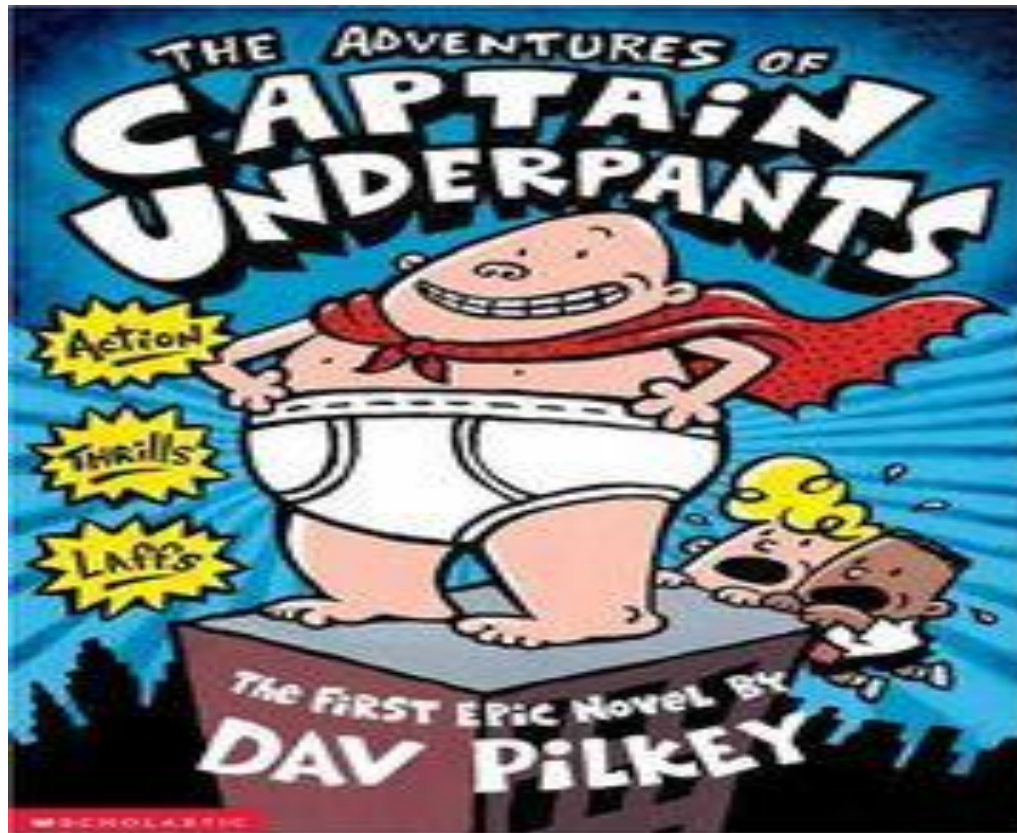
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Write down whatever  
comes to mind!

# Aranya Corazon



# Captain Underpants



# Luke Skywalker





# Storm





# La Supernina Del Cilantro



# Power Rangers



# Super Barrio

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# Spiderman



# Incredible Hulk





# Superman



# Wonder Woman





# Naruto



# Batman



# Powerpuff Girls



# The Thing





# Ben 10



# Dora the Explorer



# Underdog





# She Hulk





# Superhero Play Pre-requisites

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- A good imagination
- Fun-loving, or at least appreciating
- Openness and flexibility
- An interest in superheroes
- Valuation/respect of superheroes
- Access
  - Comics, Wikipedia, TV, Movies....





# Fantasy & Imagination

"I dwell in possibility" -emily dickinson



- Alter/experiment with reality-body limits, time, space (Erikson)
- Zone of proximal development, collaborative learning, scaffolding (Vygotsky)
- Understanding and mastery (Piaget)
- Social problem solving-possible worlds (Bruner)
- Repetition/working through (Freud)
- Safely express conflicts, needs, joys, anticipation (Landreth, bettelheim)
- Tap into primary process (Freud, A & S)
- Protective, defensive, distracting (Ethological)
- The Mind's eye (ear, nose, tongue, body)

# Fantasy Exercise

- What would you do if you could
  - Fly and move at super speed
  - Travel through time
  - Change shape
  - Run fast
  - Have super strength
  - Be invisible
  - Commit crimes without detection





# The Use of Metaphor

---

- Simply defined
  - one thing for another via symbols
- A unit of a larger narrative
  - self as victim, self as hero, self as traveler
- Offers insights and solutions
- Superhero metaphors
  - efficacy, competence, youth, vitality
  - adolescent/young adult conflicts
  - patriotism, isolationism, democracy
  - freedom to act and defy
  - Common person doing the uncommon



# The Cry for Myth (May)

---

- Mythology
  - Integrates history & worldview
  - Inspires
  - Carries (oral/written) tradition
- Disappearance
  - Science/technology as (pseudo-truths)
  - Based on passivity, weakness, primitive
  - Presumes faith in mystical & fantastic
  - Past-oriented, not progressive and future pointing

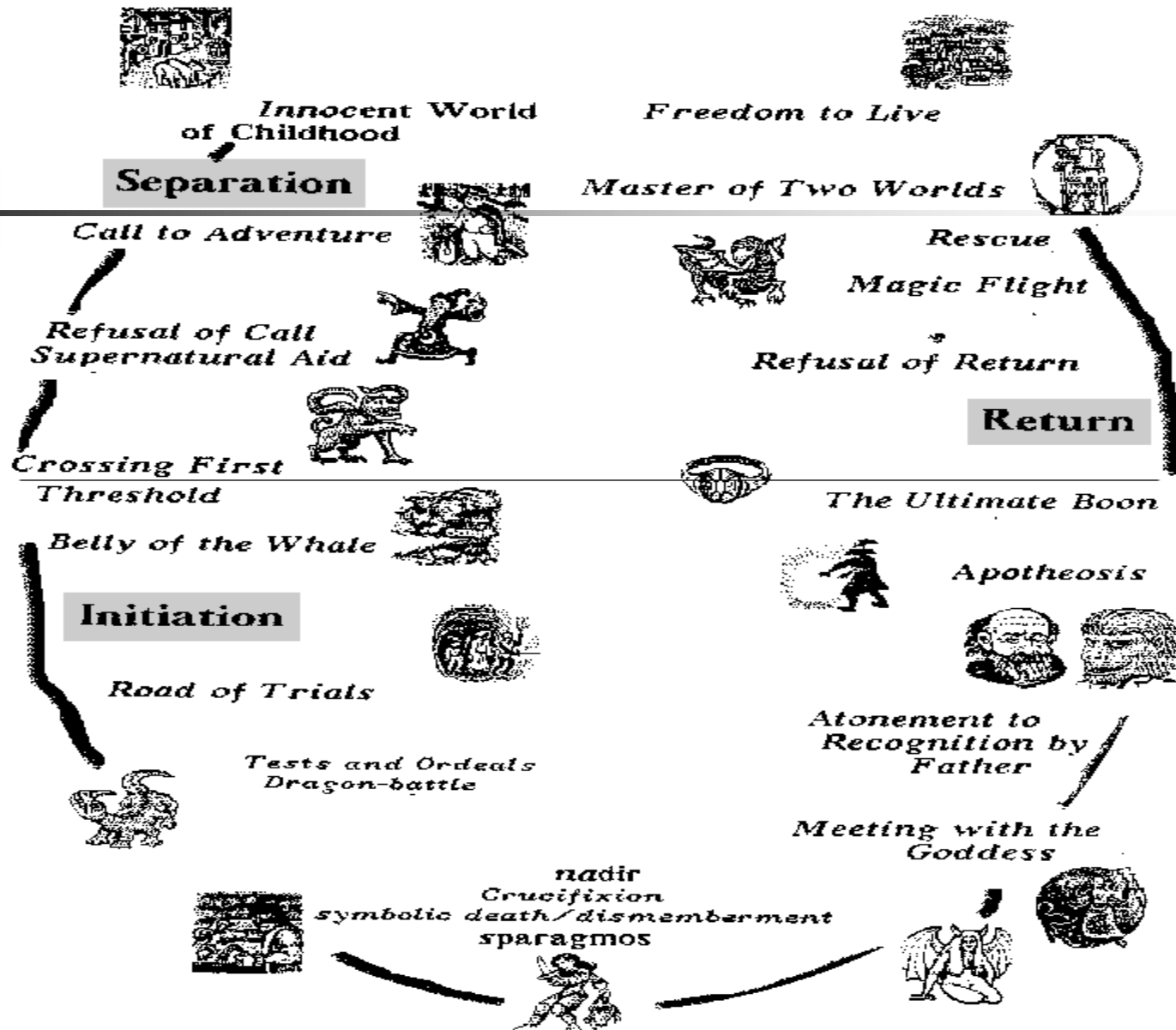
# The Monomyth

- Classical (Hercules, Lancelot, Luke)
  - Hero ventures forth, enters supernatural realm, overcomes forces (initiation), returns to and assimilates into society
- American (Superman, Batman)
  - Harmonious community threatened, selfless hero emerges, redemptive task performed, tranquility restored, hero recedes into obscurity





# THE HERO'S JOURNEY





# Contemporary Hero Genres

---

- Frontier West- Buffalo Bill, Custer, Flagler
- Futuristic Spacepeople- Flash Gordon, John Glenn, Captain Kirk, Christa McAuliffe
- Military- Washington, Ike, Patton
- Immigrants-Wiesel, Kissinger, Ma, Claiborne
- Politics- Obama, Lincoln, Thurgood Marshall
- Entrepreneur- Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, Perot
- Scientist- Einstein, Dyson
- Technomythology- evolving technology and mythic themes



# Create your own Mythology

---

- Iconography (symbols)
- Challenges-internal
- Obstacles-external
- Sidekicks (animals or humans)
- Nemeses (natural or un)
- Theme
- Supernatural aids



# Myth & Superheroes

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- Myth
  - Collective dream (Campbell)
  - Archetypal expression (Jung)
  - Complex set of narratives that (Slotkin)
    - dramatize the world vision of a people
    - recapitulate history
    - are prescriptions for action
    - reduce centuries of experience to metaphor

# The Superhero Monomyth

Lawrence & Jewett, 1992

- Disguised origins
- Redemptive task
- Pure motivations
- Outsider and a loner
- Selfless and self-sacrificing
- Moral infallibility
- Zealous vigilantism
- Superhuman powers
- Above the law
- Secret identity

# Superhero Appeal to Children

- Colorful and sensorily engaging
- Complex and mysterious
- Simple and uni-dimensional
- Begs engagement/identification
- Powerful and clever
- Unique and identifiable stories
- Morality and passion plays
  - Family, love, betrayal, racism, terrorism, relations
- Superheroes grow with the child



# Mr. Rogers and Superheroes

<http://www.fci.org/index.asp>



- Set rules, like: When children want to stop the play because it's getting scary or not safe, they need to say "stop" — and their play partners must stop.
- Children need to know you will keep them safe, even when they play.
- Help them think of rules about ways they can safely play about superheroes. Because this kind of play often involves running, they might be able to play in a certain area of the playground -- away from other children so no one gets hurt.
- Redirect the play into using cardboard boxes or blocks to make places for the superheroes to eat or sleep
- Tell children how you feel about their superhero play and your concerns about it -- and listen carefully to hear how they feel. When their play makes you feel uncomfortable, let them know and set limits.
- Talk with the children about how TV or movies use costumes, make-up, and special effects to make superheroes look like they're doing violent things, but that's just pretend.
- talk with children about things that real people (children and adults) can do when they get angry -- things that don't hurt people or ruin things





# Piaget/Vygotsky/Fowler

---

- Cognitive Constructionism
  - Assimilation and accommodation
  - Sensorimotor- color, motion, sound
  - Pre-operational-symbolism, egocentrism, animism, centration, constancy (gender, object)
  - Concrete operations- conservation, classification (good and bad)
  - Formal operations- abstractions, hypothetical-deductive reasoning
- Social Constructivism
  - Zone of proximal development
  - Scaffolding
  - Collaborative learning
- Fowler's Theory of Religious Development
  - Young children-fantasy=reality...angels, spirits, consequences
  - Older children- mythical/literal faith- good, bad, punishment
  - Young teens- right, wrong and relational impact...combining ideas/ideals
  - Young adults- questioning other's beliefs and choosing a life course

# Superhero Appeal to Teens



- Capacity for symbolic/abstract thought
  - truth, power/vulnerability, fragility, conflict
  - Facilitates divergent thinking/defy logic
- Developmental issues
  - autonomy, identity, relationship, sexuality
- Search for models, mentors & heroes
- Ideological issues
  - Morality, justice, punishment (with and without Miranda rights, chains of evidence and warrants)
- Machine Teen, The Intimates, Runaways, Hero Camp



# Superhero Appeal to Adults

---

- Brings us back to childhood
- A means of connecting with children
- Long-hidden fantasies of power
- Connect with deeper metaphors & myths
- Rises above (or around) societal and legal convention
- Fights bigotry, racism & crime
- Patriotic and nationalistic
- Irrational reality as opposed to science fiction



# Superhero Appeal to Society

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- A lack of positive emulable heroes
- It's a mad, mad, mad, mad world
  - domestic/ international terrorism
  - disasters-natural & unnatural
- Our role models' fall from grace
  - teachers, preachers, politicians & parents
- Revitalizing national mythology
- Fights institutions and legal red tape



# My Favorite Superhero

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- Who
- Why
- When



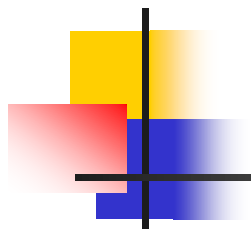


# Bender & Wertham

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- Laretta Bender- for superheroes
  - powerlessness, physical limits, good/evil
  - help girls with passivity/ subordination
  - 4 cases in psychoanalysis (1941)
- Fredric Wertham- against superheroes
  - Comics-corrupt, pervert, promote race hatred and pathologize
  - Batman and Robin homosexuals
- 1954 Kefauver Congressional Hearings





# Therapeutic Elements

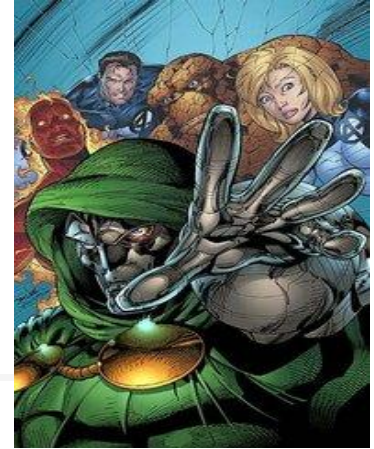
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- Origin story
- Secret / dual identity
- Transformation
- Family or lack of
- Superpowers and fatal flaws
- Science and magic
- Colorful costumes
- The ever-present villain
- The ever-loyal sidekick
- The Mission
- The Lair or Hideaway- Batcave, Fortress



# The Villain (antihero)

- Hell-bent on destroying the superhero
- Megalomaniacal
- Self-serving and self-absorbed
- Creative genius
- Ultimately self-destructive
- Failure to learn from failure
- A bungling and inept sidekick
- Insatiable
- Proactive- stirs it up



# Real-life Villains

- Osama Bin Laden
- Clebold & Harris
- Phillip Morris
- Hitler
- Schoolyard bully



# Villain Types

- 
- Monster-inverse physically & morally
    - Lizard, Grendel
  - Enemy Commander-authorized
    - Darth Vader, Dr. Doom
  - Mad Scientist- idealism & lust, playing God
    - Baron Frankenstein, Dexter (Dexter's laboratory)
  - Criminal Mastermind-perverted/amoral
    - Joker, Lex Luthor
  - Inverted superhero-can go either way
    - Hawkeye, Sandman, Black Widow

# Villain Elements

Coogan



- A receptacle for our impulses
- Mission-selfish, hate-based
- Privileged- wealth, intelligence, power
- Flawed power- strength & science
- Artistry- crime as medium of expression
- Mania-blind and single-purpose
- Wounded-narcissistic, org. inf., licking
- Monologues & soliloquies-exhibitionistic
- Attention-seeking-narcissistic
- **Our Shadow- inner struggle/ conversation**



# The Origin Story

- Orphaned or abandoned
- Violent early experiences
- Disconnected from F.O.O.
- Scientific experiment or magic
- Call to adventure
- Adolescent transformation

Lawrence C.



[CapedWonder.com](http://CapedWonder.com)



# Superpowers

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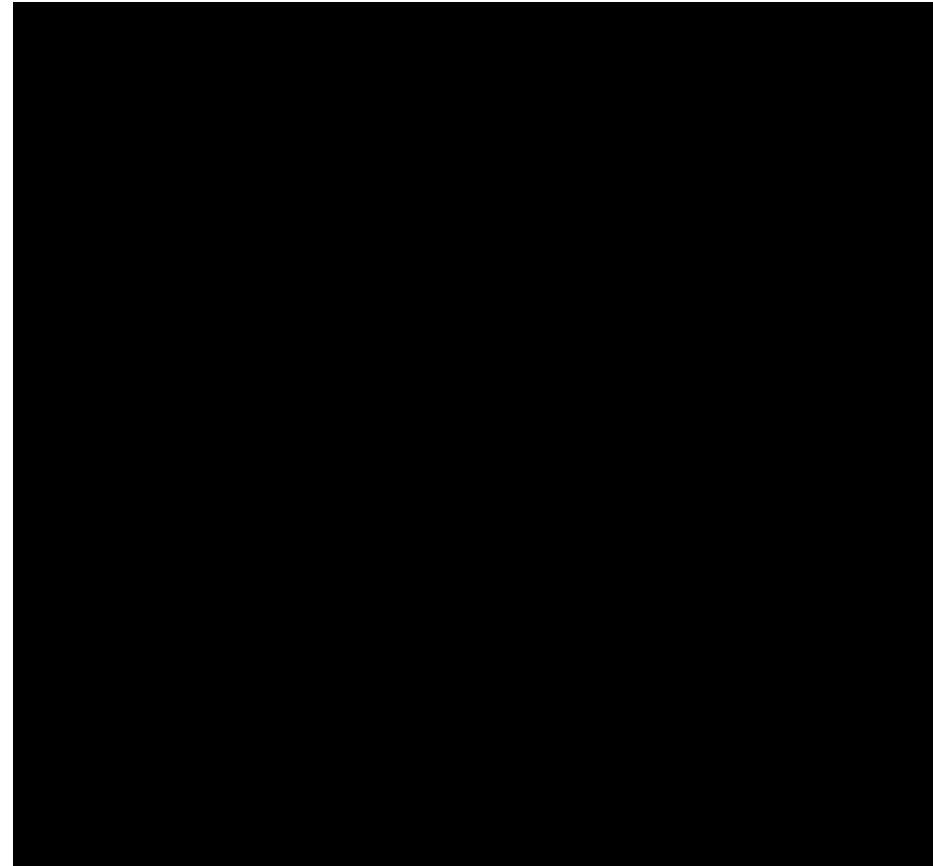
- Flight and speed
- Shape shifting
- Strength
- Healing
- Control the weather
- Intelligence
- Time travel
- Sensory acuity
- Energy manipulation
- Density control
- Invisibility
- Armor & weapons
- Immortality
- Omni-bilingualism
- Telepathy
- Animal connection



# Fatal Flaws



- Imposes a de-reifying limit
- Mortal threats-bullets, illness, anger & booze
- Super threats-kryptonite
- Balances hubris with humility





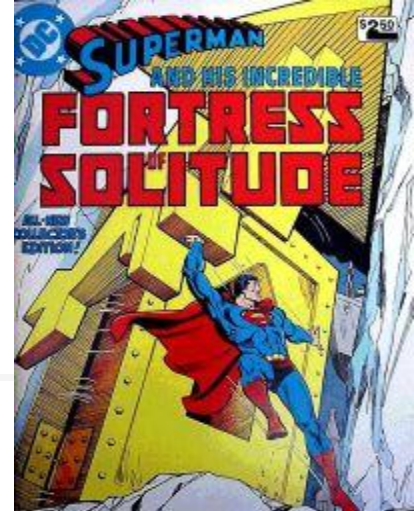
# Science and magic



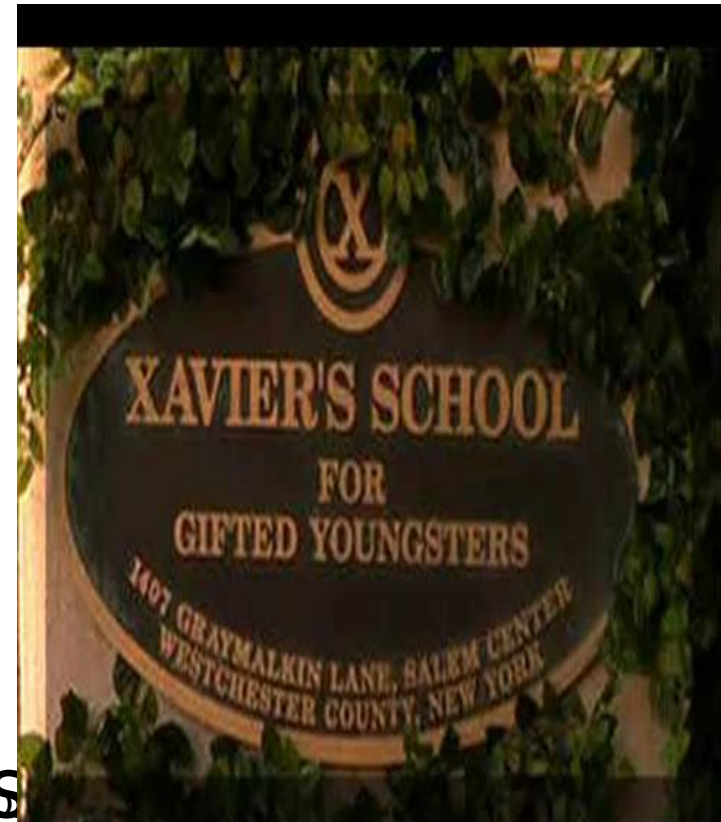
- Science as alibi for magic
  - Mutagenic radiation, thinking robots, worm holes and cosmic warps
- Technomythology (L & J, 2002)
  - Today's realities=yesterday's dreams
  - Suspension of belief is mandatory
- Clay exercise- your amulet, power object



# Secret Headquarters



- Safe house for retreat and regrouping
- Armory for weapons
- Laboratory for experimentation
- Meeting ground for camaraderie
- Trophy room for mementos





# Some Favorite Superhangouts

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- Baxter building- Fantastic Four
- Fortress of Solitude- Superman
- Sanctum Sanctorum- Dr. Strange
- Lexcorp Towers- Lex Luthor
- Titans Tower- Teen Titans
- Xavier Institute for Higher Learning- X- Men
- Guided imagery exercise



# Costumes

External signifier/  
recognizable **icon**

Establishes core/ theme of  
identity

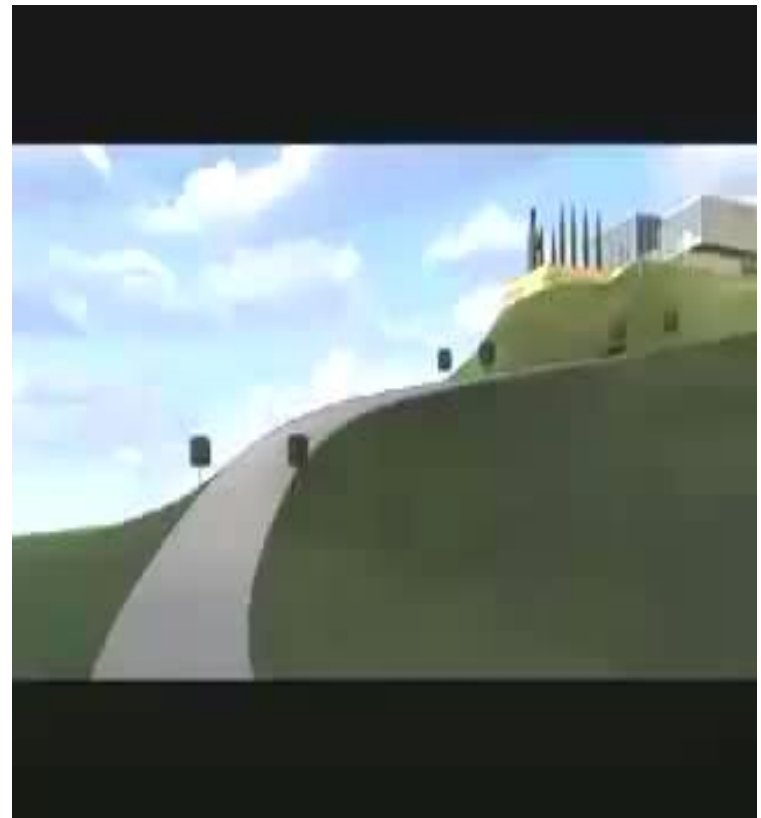
Expresses duality/ conflict

Accentuates/conceals  
gender/sexuality

Isolates hero (mask)

Functional utility (gadgets &  
tools)

- Amplification thru  
simplification
- **Design your own**

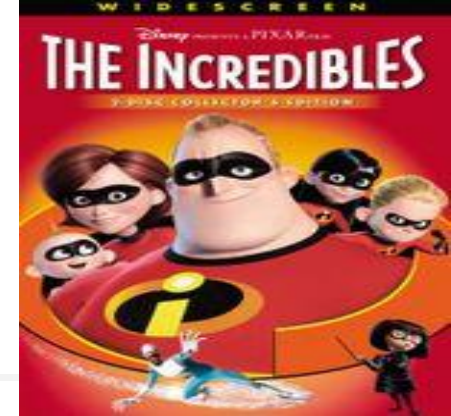


# Transformative Journeys

- The classical hero-Hercules, Luke SW
  - calling, journey from the familiar, facing perils, return, redemptive act, assimilation
- American Batman, Elektra
  - originates outside, secret identity, vigilantism
- Scientific/ natural accident
- Inner-outer transformation



# Families-ties that bind



- The Incredibles
  - dinner at home v. saving the world
- Fantastic Four
  - rivalry, jealousy, pulling together
- X-Men
  - loyalty, shared alienation, containment
- Harry Potter
  - teen camaraderie





# Secret / dual identity

- Reflects underlying duality-
  - strong-weak/ outsider-insider
- Conceal/ rise above vulnerabilities
- Overcome artificial societal limits
  - good-evil/ male-female/ just-unjust/  
human-divine/ alone-together
- Desire to be both super and common
- Build your own





# The Sidekick



- Mentor/ apprentice relationship
- Importance of teamwork
- Limits of pure ability-forced reliance
- Asks questions audience might ask
- Rescues the hero at times
- The initiate or fledgling





# Superheroes Expressions

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- Up, up and away!
- With great power, there must also come great responsibility!
- You wouldn't like me when I'm angry!
- My spider-sense is tingling!
- It's clobbering time!
- Excelsior
- Create an iconic self expression/mantra



# Superheroes & Play Therapies

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- Directive, non-directive, responsive
- Adlerian
  - birth order, inferiority, worldview, social
- Gestalt
  - integration and wholeness
- Client Centered
  - self-directed fantasy/expression
- Family
  - roles, boundaries, communication
- Cognitive Behavioral (The boy with the 'reverse-o-ray'-lies & mistakes)
  - solution-oriented, reframing, altering behavior
- Filial
  - Parents express/ nurture fantasies
- Jungian Archetypes- Self, Shadow, Anima, Animus, Trickster, Hero
- Analytic
  - Primary (Superman/Aquaman) and Secondary (Batman/Daredevil)



# Imagine Yourself a Superhero

---

- Powers

- How to use them
- How to make them real
- How might they backfire

- Weaknesses

- How to use them
- How to transform them
- How to overcome them



# Alex

---



- Adopted at birth
  - highly contested and publicized
- Biological father involved early on
- Adoptive family
  - loving, physically different, secretive
- Alex's love for history, sci-fi & Star Wars
- Episode VII- *the Search for Luke*



# Frankie

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- An impressive resumé for a 7 year old
  - ADHD, ODD, LD, to name a few
- Lava lamps, bubbles and soothing sand
- Psycho-monster vanquishes all
- Wonder woman as goddess-mother
  - leads superheroes to slay and save
- Even a monster needs saving

# Charlie



- Mom and dad fall on hard times
  - alcoholic abduction, divorce, and sibs
  - life with dad-mom gone and back
- Superhero action figures divided
  - good/evil, strong/weak, dead/alive
- Life re-balances itself
  - Rigid lines soften



# Charlie's War





# Daniel

---



- Mom and dad- a war of the worlds
- Allegations of sexual abuse
  - guilt, blame, anger & vulnerability
- A battle in the sand
  - army men and villainous superheroes
  - graveyards, penetrable fences & death
- An unfinished tale- triangulation



# Daniel's Sandtray



# Spiderman Chained



- Case Background
  - 7 year old boy-parents divorced
  - assaultive towards mom
  - disruptive & anxious in school
- Spiderman's dilemma-a hero bound
  - Green silly-puttied, chained, submersed
- Powerlessness/ failed heroes,
- Controlling feelings, home life, parents

# A Boy Named Zach





# Your Case & Superheroes

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- Client dilemma \_\_\_\_\_
  - Family issues \_\_\_\_\_
  - Developmental issues \_\_\_\_\_
  - Role of superhero(es) \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_



# AASMT Anthropomorphic Animal Superheroes Matching Test



1. Mighty Mouse

2. T Rex

3. Penrod Pooch aka Hong Kong Phooey

4. Underdog

5. Yin Yang Yo

6. TMNT

a.



d.



b.



e.



c.



f.





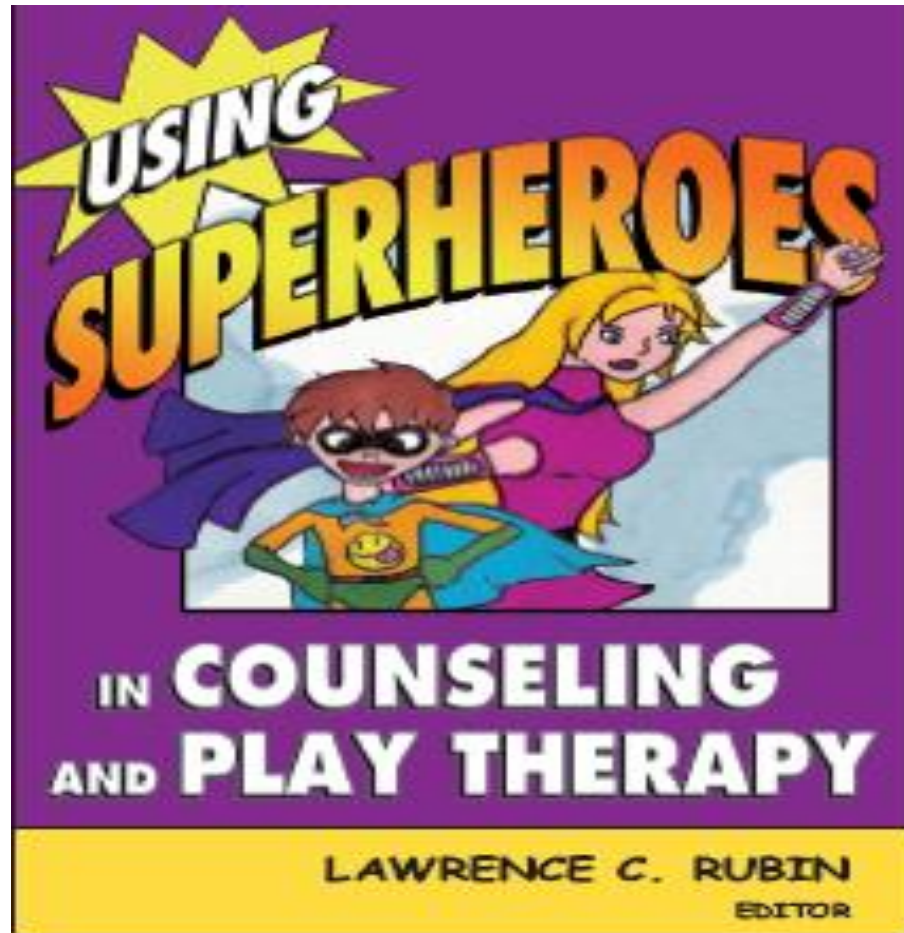


# Homework

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# Why Not a Book ?!

## (my own superteam)



Lawrence C. Rubin, Ph.D., RPT-S

# The Hulk Syndrome

Jennifer Mendoza Sayers



- Four types of anger
  - masked, explosive, chronic, healthy
- Emotional literacy
  - identify/express a range of emotions
- The Hulk Syndrome
  - you won't like me when I'm angry !!!
- Embrace the metaphor, breathing, role-play, and implement alternatives
  - clay, comics, action figures, filming, drawing

# Angry Boys

Harry Livesay

#@%!



- Pollock, real boys & the boy code
  - suppress weak, express strong
- Gerard Jones- 'killing monsters'
- The angry hero/ superhero
  - wronged, hurt and vengeful
  - apart from and a part of the team
- Bring in the angry (super) hero
  - Batman, Wolverine, The Hulk

# Batman & Psychic Trauma

Mike Brody

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- A little psychoanalysis
  - Superman=primary process
  - Batman=secondary process
- Working through trauma
  - Batman's struggles, victories & wounds
  - Survivor guilt
  - Non-integrated personality
  - Industry versus inferiority

# Role Playing Games

George Enfield



- Role playing games
  - virtual (MMORPG), face-to-face, groups
  - D&D, Hero Clicks, Warhammer
- Matching game to client
  - simple, complex, uni/multi-dimensional
- Applications
  - D&D group-coop., goal-setting, socialization

# Gender Identity

Roger Kaufman



- Traditional superheroes
  - gender scripted & hetero-philiac
- Gay individuation-a solitary journey
  - sensitization, confusion, comparison, tolerance, acceptance, pride, synthesis
- Fantasy, superhero and same-sex love
  - Alien- Ripley
  - Lord of the Rings- Sam and Frodo
  - Star Wars- Anakin and Obi-Wan
- Cinema-therapy, metaphor & understanding



# Autism Spectrum Issues

Patty Scanlon



- ASD- isolation, control, commun., emot.
- Echoplaylia
  - repetitive, asocial, non-reciprocal, rigid
- Superhero appeal
  - fixed stories and roles
  - a colorful bridge to another
  - role play and observation

# Star Trek Superheroes

**Jeff Pickens**



- Space, the final frontier (melting pot)
  - aliens, androids, hybrids
  - group missions & personal conflicts
- Powers and abilities
  - gadgets, strength, telepathy, wisdom
- Archetypes and dualities
  - strength/reason, evil/good, technical/human, male/female
- Children, teens and adults

# A Super Milieu

Karen Robertie, et al



- Onarga Academy- sexual offenders
  - abused, antisocial, impulsive, opportunistic
- Milieu treatment
  - cog-behav., social-experiential, play
- Superheroes & supervillains
  - hurt, hurting, and hurtful
- A super milieu- role play group, movies, drawing, comics, 'what-if' stories, group sand, posters, toys, handouts, costumes

# Superheroes in Hypnosis

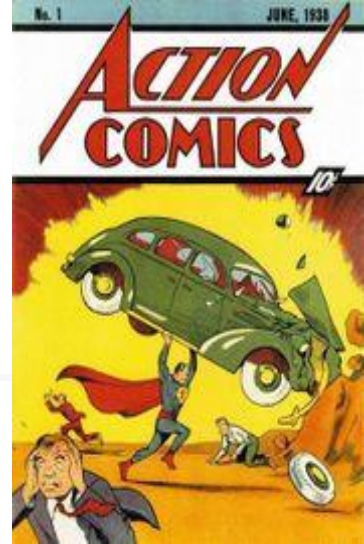
Jan Burte



- Pain management
  - Imagery He-Man fighting cancer cells
- Managing trauma- enuresis
  - Guided imagery- Luke staying the night
- Psychoneuroimmunology
  - PacMan digesting virus

# What Would Superman Do

Cory A Nelson



- What Would Jesus Do (WWJD)?
- Adler to the rescue!
  - Relationship, lifestyle, insight, reorientation
- What Would Superman Do (WWSD)
  - Heroes and antiheroes
  - Strengths and weaknesses
  - Costumes and gadgets
  - Role Playing



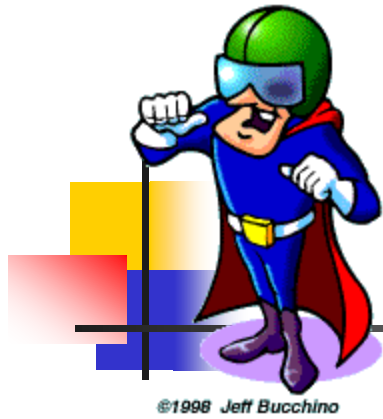
# What is a Superhero Group?

## Jessenia Rodriguez

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Through the use of superhero metaphors, stories, and drawings, children are able to identify with their favorite superhero and share their ideal powers and/or behaviors. Children are able to self encourage positive feelings, behaviors and elicit a positive self-image, through drawings and creative imagery.





# The Group Process

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**In a group setting, children are asked to draw their favorite superheroes or they may create one of their own. The children are then requested to give their chosen superhero powers and a name. Lastly, the children are asked to share their drawings and stories with the rest of the group, and explain how the drawing relates to their own situation.**



# *Superhero Drawings*

*The drawings to follow do not disclose the child's identity as their names have been removed from their drawings.*



*All group members participated in the Superhero group during their stay in an inpatient psychiatric facility. Admitting diagnoses included:*

- ☐ Aggression
- ☐ Suicidal ideation
- ☐ Homicidal ideation
- ☐ Depression
- ☐ Sexual Abuse
- ☐ Hallucinations
- ☐ Schizophrenia
- ☐ Eating disorder

# *(Not so) Super Girl*

12-year-old  
Hispanic  
female admitted  
for  
suicidal ideation.  
According to  
patient  
super girl has NO  
Powers.



# LORD OF BULLETS

**9-year-old Hispanic male admitted for suicidal ideation. Patient reported being a victim of sexual abuse. Villain powers include: worms, super strength, invisibility, and a neck full of Bullets.**





# *Flower Power Girl*

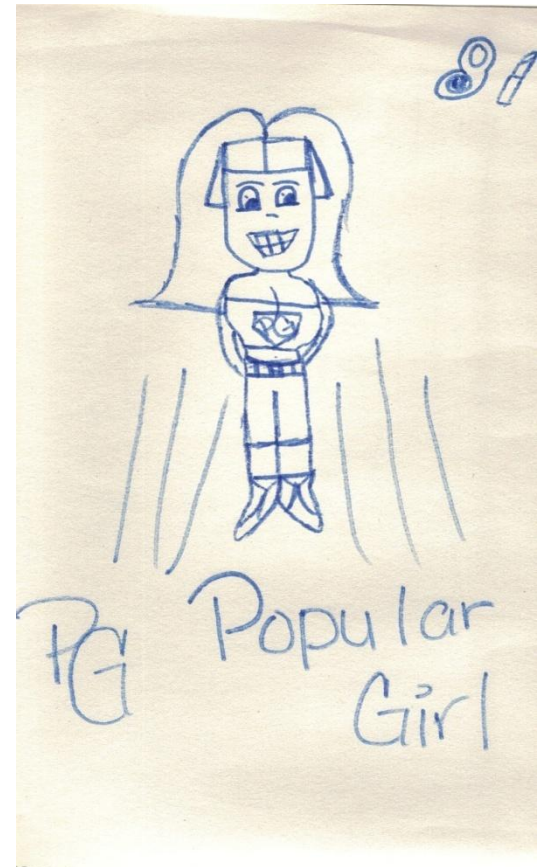
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9-year-old  
Hispanic  
female admitted  
for  
depression after  
ongoing bullying  
at  
school.



# POPULAR GIRL

11-year-old Hispanic female admitted for depression. Patient reported that she is bullied at school. Popular Girl has the power to fly around school and learn how to get popular.



# PEACE MAN

10-year-old Caucasian male admitted for aggression toward Mother. Patient witnessed domestic violence and alcohol abuse.

Super power is : "PEACE"  
(Parents were getting a divorce)





# RESCUE MAN

11-year old Hispanic male admitted for aggression. Patient drew the scene at home prior to a Baker Act. Rescue Man is killing the police who are trying to get to the patient in the bathroom.







# Superhero Group Activity

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# Japanese Anime

- Tied to 'manga'- unsanitized comic art
- Many genres of animated art
  - Horror- Wicked City
  - Shonen (young boy)- Pokemon
  - Robot- Mobile Suit Gandam
  - Magical Girl- Sailor Moon
- Embedded in Japanese culture
  - Big expressive eyes, hair color, stop action, exaggerated poses and gestures, scenery





# A Scintillating Range

Price, 2001; 153-4

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**w**renching dramas, cheesy romances, storybook adventures, spooky thrillers, historical fantasies, robot shows, gothic fairy tales, slapstick parodies, futuristic dystopias, sports dramas, sci-fi series, gimmicky sci-fi series, sexy cyberpunk technomythologies, misogynistic violent pornography, sword and sorcery stories, spoofs of sword and sorcery stories, epic environmental cautionary tales, Norse goddess romances, not to mention your normal, everyday life family soap operas.

# Anime Favorites



- **Pokemon-** pocket monsters including Picachu & Charmander protect Ash
- **Dragon Ball Z-** Goku, along with his companions defend Earth from villains
- **Mighty Morphin Power Rangers-** helmetted primary colored superheroes
- **Mobile Suit Gandam-** Zeon declares independence from Earth using secret weapon

# Therapeutic Power of Naruto

- Orphaned by and in search of parents
- Nine Tail Demon Fox sealed inside
- Shunned by village / outsider
- Team 7- Sasuke Uchiha/ Sakura Haruno
- Aspirations to Ninjahood
- Multiple Shadow Clone Technique
- Impulsive, attention-seeking trickster
- Elements of the hero- classical and superhero





# Case of Kiko

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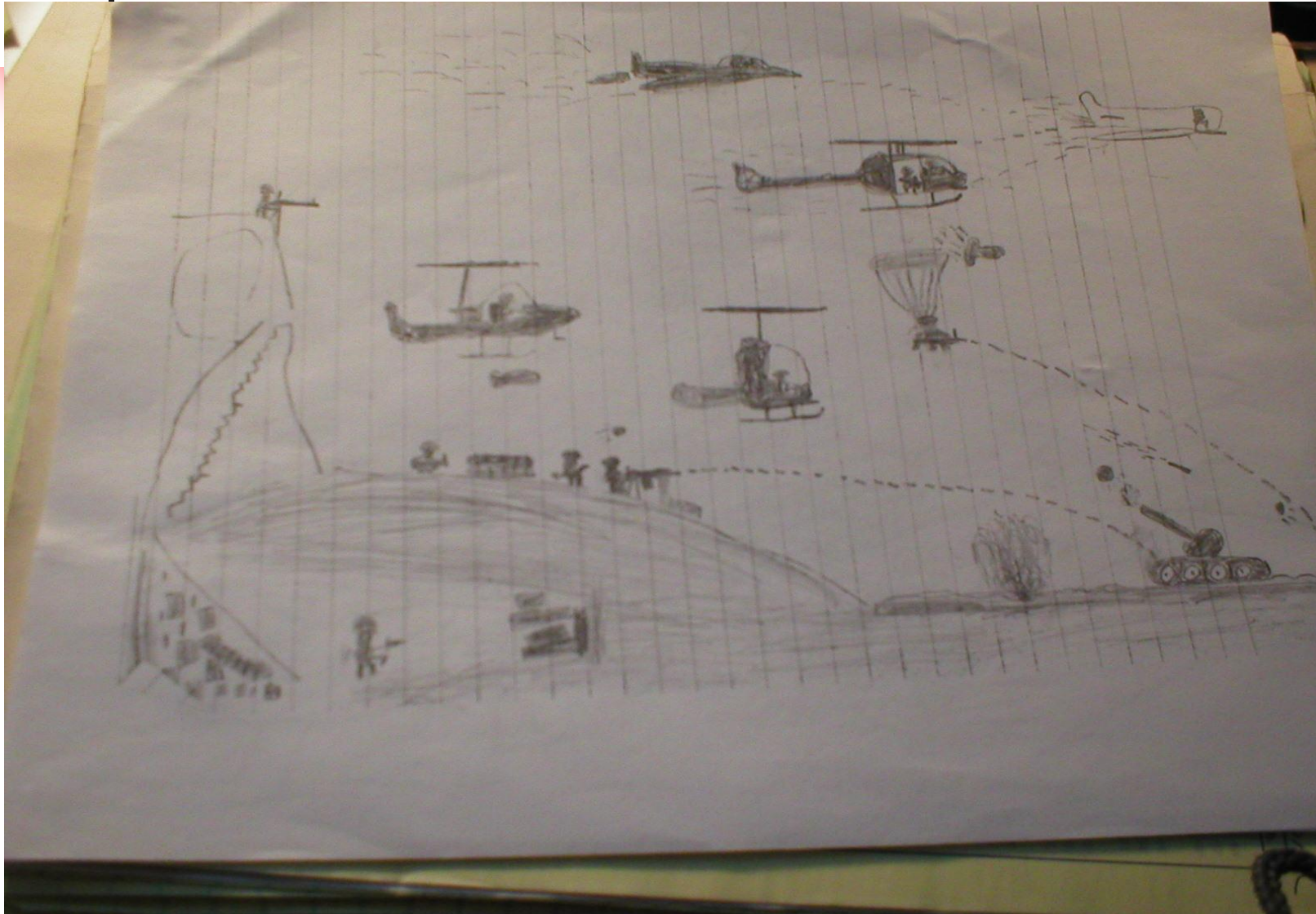
- Background
  - Referral for aggression/ impulsivity
  - Mysterious half-brother/ family secrets
  - Parents conflicting messages re: anger
- Assessment
  - Naruto Incomplete Sentence Test
  - Naruto free sand play
- Treatment
  - Self-regulation-taming the fox & lava lamps
  - Cognitive behavior play therapy

# Kiko's Chaos





# Kiko's Organized Chaos



# A Few Superhsheroes



- Fantomah- the first (Egyptian)
- Wonder Woman
  - Psychologist W.M. Marston 1942
  - Aprhrodite, Athena, Mercury, Hercules
  - Vulnerability- power bracelets
- Supergirl, Superwoman Fantomah
- Invisible Girl- the Fantastic Four
- She Hulk- Jennifer Walters, attorney
- Elektra- martial artist
- Storm



# Animated Supersheroes



- Dora the Explorer
- Kim Possible
- Violet of the Incredibles
- The Powerpuff Girls
  - Blossom, Bubbles & Buttercup
- Sailor Moon
- Dr. Aki Ross



# A Few More



- The Wasp
- Batgirl
- Aeon Flux
- Black Cat
- SpiderWoman
- XS
- Echo
- Jean Grey
- Ice
- Hellcat
- Mystique
- Aranya
- Black Widow
- Crimson



# Battling Hyperheterosexuality

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- Superman (1938) & Batman (1939) set a blistering male-dominated pace.
- Females were victims and subordinates
- Supersheroes were sexy and white until recently
- Monogamous heterosexual relationships seem out of bounds.
- What about rape, infertility, plight of domestic workers, sexual harassment?
- Super(s)hero choice follows gender lines



# The Case of Violet

Alan “Woody” Schwitzer



- An Incredible Family- Elastigirl, Mr. Incredible, Dash & Jack-Jack
- Developmental pathology- shy, insecure, uncertain, invisible
- Fails to protect mom when needed
- Rises to challenge during peak of emotion and threat to loved ones
- Talks to Tony Risenger- hair off eyes/ visible

## A photograph of a child's sandcastle in a wooden sandbox. The sandcastle is built with a large, colorful, multi-colored plastic dinosaur in the center, surrounded by a wooden picket fence. Various toys are scattered around, including a Superman action figure, a Wonder Woman action figure, a Spider-Man action figure, a small car, and several small figurines. A red string is draped over the dinosaur and extends towards the top left corner.





# Darren- A Case Unfolding

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- Six years old, diagnosed with bipolar disorder at 4; mother diagnosed with bipolar disorder; father clinically depressed
- Play therapy
- Family Counseling
- School Consultation



# Superhero Video and RPG's

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- *Blood of Heroes*
- *City of Heroes*
- *DC Heroes*
- *DC Universe RPG*
- *Double Cross*
- *Godlike*
- *Golden Heroes*
- *Heroes Unlimited*
- *Marvel Universe RPG*
- *Mutants and Masterminds*
- *Silver Age Sentinels*
- *Villains and Vigilantes*
- *Wild Talents*
- *Underground*



# Video and Role-playing Games

- Not as mind-numbing as you might think (Johnson)
  - Hand-eye coordination
  - Competence and efficacy
  - Social skill building (reciprocity, respect, interaction and cooperation)
  - Fantasy expression and conflict resolution
  - Intrinsic need for violent fantasy (Jones, 2003)



# Violent Video, RPG'S & Play

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- Associated in boys with increased
  - Physical aggression, physiological arousal, and aggressive cognition (Anderson, 2003)
- Kids have universal fascination with violent TV/media heroes
- Difference between hero/superhero imitative v. imaginative play
- Identification with aggressive/violent character/act increases violent fantasy
- Violent media may restrict creative and divergent problem solving
- Important to assess client's predisposition to violence and aggressive conflict resolution

# Beyond Tall, White & Hunky

- Black Superheroes
  - Green Lantern
  - Nick Cage
  - Storm (X-Men)
  - Static
  - Firestorm (abused by father)
- Latino(a) Superheroes
  - Blue Beetle
  - Aranya (Anya Corazon)
- Asian
  - The (new) Atom





# International Superheroes

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- Wolverine (Canadian)
- Storm (Kenyan)
- Nightcrawler (German)
- Colossus (Russian)
- Indian Spiderman
- Red Wolf (Native American)
- <http://www.internationalhero.co.uk/#Browse>

# Gay Superheroes

- Northstar (the first)
- The Authority
  - Apollo
  - Midnighter
- Obsidian



Northstar-X-Men

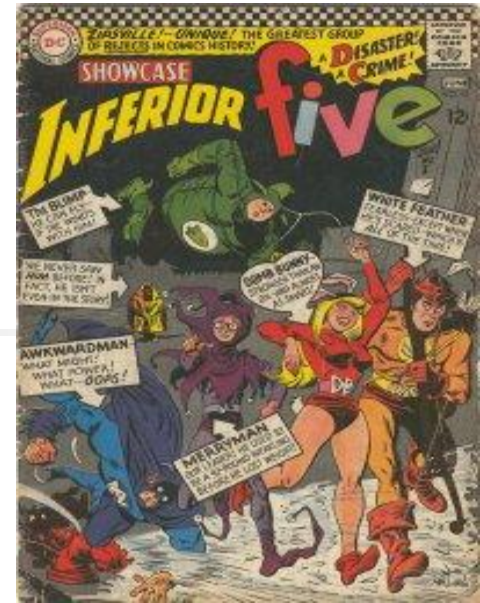


Todd Chase-Obsidian



Apollo





- The Inferior Five
- The Watchmen
- Council of American Superheroes(CASH)
  - Carpenter Bee
- Great Lakes Avengers (modeled after Avengers-Flat man, Big Bertha, Dina Soar, Mr. immortal)
- Clients struggling with disabilities

# Mythic Elements & Theological Subtexts

Little Christs in Tights-Peter Ross

- Binary oppositions in comics and the Bible
  - Salvation and damnation
  - Good and evil
  - Mortality and immortality
  - Earth and heaven (or outer space)
  - Justice and injustice
- Apocalyptic battles and Armageddon
- Saviors and salvation
- Connection to the eternal (Campbell)





# Biblical Messages of Superheroes

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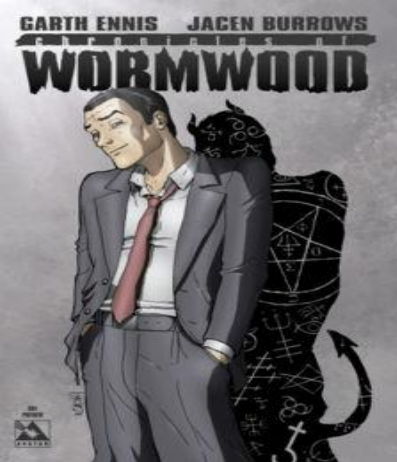
- Lessons to be learned
  - Good wins out, ordinary people doing extraordinary things, it's never too late for redemption, you can't run from yourself
- Superman (integrity), Batman (justice), Captain America (patriotism), Justice League (family values), Spiderman (responsibility & redemption), X-Men (anti-Semitism & reconciliation)
- Superheroes as secular messiahs



# Implicit Religiosity/Spirituality

- Implicit religiosity in superherodom
  - Silver Surfer-self sacrificing, heals others, saves humanity
  - X-Men- original sin (mutancy, children of the atom-hubris, persecuted)
  - Gotham city-hell on earth
  - Superman/Moses-cast off, rise to power, saviors
  - Fantastic Four-earth, air, fire and water
  - Batman-the avenging angel
  - The Hulk- persecuted/duality of good and evil





# Explicit Religiosity



- Wormwood and Jay- Sons of God & Satan
- Night Crawler of X-Men fame
- The Jewish Hero Corps (Weinstein)
  - Dreidel Maidel, Matzoh Woman, Menorah Man
  - <http://www.jewishsuperhero.com>
- Jarod Dale (Redemption) Action 848
- The Incredible Hulk and Sabra (256/38)





# More Explicit Religiosity

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- Benjamin Jacob Grimm/Thing-FF #56
- Web of Spiderman # 502-battles with skinheads (Ed Cross).
- X-Men Unlimited #3- Kitty Pryde, aka Shadowcat, lights Yarzheit candle
- Atom spends Hannukah with JLA (#188)-oxygen lasts in damaged space station
- Superman invited to Sabbath dinner (Action 835)
- Batman & Flash visit Wayne Manor for Xmas



# Contemporary Media Heroes and Anti Heroes

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- A few heroes
  - Indiana Jones
  - Harry Potter and friends
  - Rocky
  - Luke Skywalker
- A few anti heroes
  - George Bush
  - Brittny Spears
  - Osama in Laden



# Everyday Heroes & Heroism



- Qualities of everyday heroism
  - Showing up
  - Being responsible
  - Helping someone in need
  - Standing up for what is right
  - Telling the truth
  - Asking for help
  - Caring about self and others
  - Battling demons and monsters (inside & out)
  - Coping with challenges



# Looking Around for Heroes

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- Sports-local and national
- Religion and spirituality
- Medicine and the sciences
- Politics and government
- Entertainment-movies, stage, TV
- Business and industry
- Service professions- police, therapists, firefighters
- Exercise- who, what, when, where, why
  - Someone you know
  - Yourself



# The Hyper Hero (J.S. Lawrence, 2008)

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- Hero-metrics
  - Heroism, elite heroism (Angelina Jole, Bono, Gates), superheroism, hyperheroism (collective rather than individual)- ridding the world of evil
- Elements of the hyper-heroic narrative
  - Innocent and virtuous nation attacked
  - Great losses experienced
  - Identification of allies and enemies
  - Triumph regardless of the cost
  - Justification of triumph- restoration of paradise
- Exercise- how do kids create this narrative and how do we help them re-author it



# Sources of Resistance

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- Scripted and typecast figures in play
- Encouraging violence in life
  - too much fantasy is unhealthy (A. Freud)
- Gender & race bias
- Superhero Discomfort Disorder (SDD)
  - unfamiliarity/ supers are for kids



# Comic Stripping-Dan Fingeroth

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# Beyond the Playroom

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- Discuss non-super attributes as well
- Discuss 'real' heroes
- Differentiate media & real life
- Set limits on type/amount of SH play
- Seek out the lessons in the SH tale
- Monitor overly aggressive play
- Praise for real feats of heroism
- <http://www.magellanassist.com/mem/library/default.asp?TopicId=190&CategoryId=0&ArticleId=202>