Using Super Heroes as Metaphors in Counseling

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Science meets Fantasy

What would you do if you could …

- Fly in the air or outer space
- Travel in time or other dimensions
- Change shape or breathe underwater
- Run & move at super speed
- Have super strength & endurance
- Become invisible or combustible
- Manipulate the weather or energy
- Communicate telepathically
- Have super healing or resistance
- Use super senses or intelligence
- Have an arsenal of gadgets & weapons
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 & solutions
- Superhero metaphors
  - efficacy, competence, youth, vitality
  - adolescent/young adult conflicts
  - patriotism, isolationism, democracy
  - freedom to act & defy
  - common person doing the uncommon
Appeal to Children

- Colorful & sensory engaging
- Complex & mysterious or simple & one dimensional
- Begs engagement & identification
- Powerful & clever
- Unique & identifiable stories
- Morality & passion plays
- Family, love, betrayal, racism, terrorism, relations
- Superheroes grow with the child
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, Miranda rights, & warrants)
- Machine Teen, The Intimates, Runaways, Hero Camp
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 & legal convention
- Fights bigotry, racism & crime
- Patriotic & nationalistic
Therapeutic Elements

- Origin story
- Colorful costumes
- Secret / dual identity
- Superhero Families
- Superpowers & fatal flaws
- Transformation
- Science & magic
- The super villain
- The loyal sidekick
- Secret Lair or Headquarters
- Characteristics & the mission
Origin Story

- Orphaned or abandoned
- Violent early experiences
- Disconnected from Family of Origin
- Scientific experiment or magic
- Call to adventure
- Adolescent transformation
Colorful 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
Secret / Dual Identity

- Reflects underlying duality-Jung
- Strong-weak/ outsider-insider
- Conceal/ rise above vulnerabilities
- Overcome artificial societal limits
- Good-evil/ male-female/ just-unjust/ alone-together
- Desire to be both super & common
Superhero Families

- Strength in unity
- Serving the greater good
- Fending off super villains
- Unite against a world threat
- Saving all humanity
- Escape the demands of superhero callings

- Struggles, conflicts, arguments
- Competition & jealousy
- Boundaries & betrayals
- Love & anger
Superpowers & Fatal Flaws

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

- Accident or hubris
- Scientific experiment gone awry
- Inner depths of the psyche
- Perilous journey to distant lands
- Exposure to radioactivity
- Studying martial arts
- Magic or the supernatural
The Super Villain

- 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 & single-purpose
- Wounded-narcissistic, org. inf., licking
- Monologues & soliloquies-exhibitionistic
- Attention-seeking-narcissistic
- Our Shadow-inner struggle/ conversation
The Loyal 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
Secret Lair or Headquarters

- Safe house for retreat & regrouping
- Armory for weapons
- Laboratory for experimentation
- Meeting ground for camaraderie
- Trophy room for mementos
Superhero Films Announced

- **2016**
  - Avengers: Age of Ultron; Ant-Man; Fantastic Four; Deadpool; Batman v Superman;
  - Captain America 3; X-Men: Apocalypse; Dr. Strange; Suicide Squad; Sinister Six

- **2017**
  - Wolverine 3; Thor 3; Wonder Woman; Fantastic Four 2; Guardians of the Galaxy 2;
  - Justice League 1; Spider-Woman; Venom: Carnage; Lego Batman

- **2018**
  - The Flash; X-Force: Sequel; Aquaman; Amazing Spider-Man 3; Sandman

- **2019**
  - Shazam; Justice League 2; Gambit; Untitled Superman movie

- **2020**
  - Cyborg; Green Lantern; Untitled Batman movie
Characteristics & the Mission

- 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 & others
- Battling demons & monsters (inside & out)
- Coping with challenges
How Superheroes Help in Counseling

- Victims of trauma
- Survivor’s guilt
- Finding solutions
- Nonintegrated personality
- Anger & aggression
- Residential treatment
- Autism Spectrum disorders
- Attachment disorders
- Adoption or foster children
- Sexuality issues
- Combat Fatigue (PTSD)
Art Therapy
Sandtray
Narrative Therapy

- Re-authoring one’s story
- Externalizing the problem
- Investigating influences/causation
- Recalling conversations
- Clarifying alternate directions
- Reclaiming empowerment
- Searching for identity
- Appreciating creativity
- Finding exceptions to the problem
- Responding to success & failure
Therapeutic Film

- Live-action Movies
- Television Series
- Animated film
- Cartoon Shorts
- Youtube videos
CONGRATULATIONS!!!
ACC IS CELEBRATING ITS TENTH ANNIVERSARY THIS YEAR!!
MORE NEWS TO COME!

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Where Creativity and Counseling Connect
References

