1

Origin Stories

2

Origin Stories

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- "What I wouldn't give to be normal"
  - Mystique and Beast (First Class)

7

Post-Traumatic Growth

8

Superman: Clinical Application

- "I wanted to be Superman… I failed"

9

Superman: Clinical Application

- "I wanted to be Superman, I failed"
- Invincible

10

Superman: Clinical Application

- "I wanted to be Superman, I failed"
- Invincible

- Kryptonite

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What is Superhero Therapy?

Using popular culture (books, TV shows, movies, and video games examples) in evidence-based therapies (eg CBT, ACT, DBT) to help clients becom a Superhero IRL

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Most Important Rule:

- You don't have to be the expert in pop culture
- The client is the expert !

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Why Superhero Therapy?

- During most difficult times, people feel alone
- Might withdraw from others
- Shame is a common feature

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Shame: I am bad.
Guilt: I did something bad.

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Brene Brown's Research

- *"We deny our loneliness. We feel shame around being lonely even when it's caused by grief, loss, or heartbreak" Brené Brown*
- Many kids suffer from periodic shame
  - Shame is "under the radar", difficult to talk about
  - The less it's talked about, the more shame compounds
- Shame has negative effects on youth
  - May underlie low mood, low self esteem, alienation
  - Drives negative behavior, compensatory attention seeking

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Potential Triggers for Shame
Experiences of Not Fitting In related to:

- Appearance
- Body Image
- Money
- Mental health
- Physical health
- Addiction
- Homelessness

- Sex (including 'slut-shaming')
- Sexual identity
- Gender identity
- Religion/Cultural identity
- Surviving/experiencing trauma
- Race/ethnicity
- Divorce

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How shame shows up in mental health

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5/28/2019

Social Connection

- Getting connected with people and meaningful activities helps restore functioning
- *"It's not that misery loves company, it's that company is the antidote to misery"*
  - Kristin Neff

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Ant-Man Example

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RESEARCH

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Friendships & Fandoms
Parasocial relationships & social surrogates
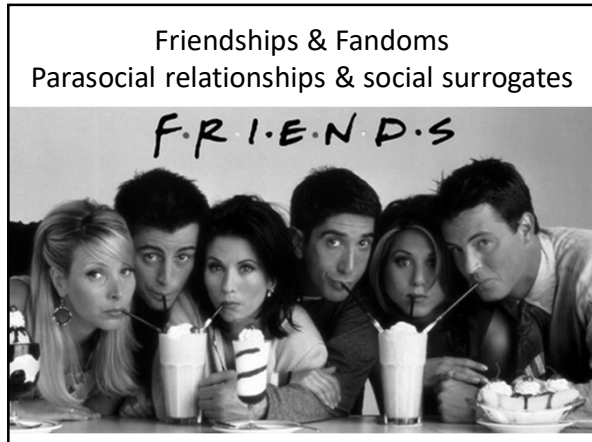
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Reduced Loneliness/Rejection Feelings

- When lonely, participants watched favorite TV show (eg FRIENDS) rather than "whatever was on TV"
  – Not escapism, but a need for connection

- Watching favorite TV show allowed for participants to feel significantly less lonely

Derrick, J. E., Gabriel, S., & Hugenberg, K. (2009).

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Reduced Loneliness/Rejection Feelings

- When recalling a fight with a loved one, felt *rejected* and *lonely*

- Significant reductions in these when writing about favorite TV show (FRIENDS) but not neutral show nor academic achievement

Derrick, J. E., Gabriel, S., & Hugenberg, K. (2009).

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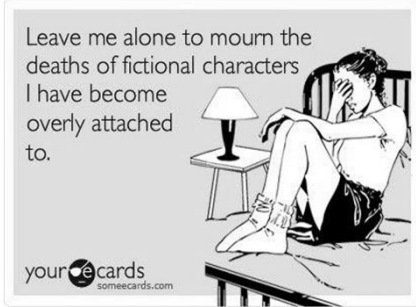Background Social Science Research:
Parasocial Relationships & Social Surrogacy

Leave me alone to mourn the deaths of fictional characters I have become overly attached to.

your ecards
someecards.com

25

25

Superhero Priming

- Superhero priming (e.g through pretending to be one or playing VR game) increases helping Bx (eg in pencil drop)
  - Rosenberg et al (2013)
- Superhero poses can increase helping Bx (Peña & Chen, 2017) & self-esteem (Cuddy et al, 2015)

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Healthier Food Choices

- Cornell University
- Children were asked to pick between apples and French fries
- Only 9% chose apples
- When primed with admirable heroes, like Batman, nearly 50% chose apples   Wansink et al. (2012)

- *Dressing up also helps maintain attention on task
  White & Carlson (2015)

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Sexual Assault Awareness for Children

- Marvel and National Committee for Prevention of Child Abuse (NCPCA)(1984 and 1985)
- Spider-Man discovers that a little boy was sexually abused by his babysitter
- Spider-Man shares with him his own story of being sexually abused by a young man
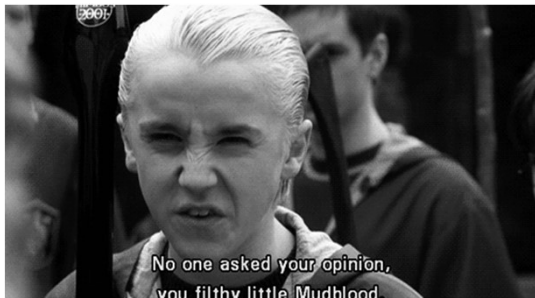- Boy is later able to report the incident to his parents with Spider-Man's help

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Research: HP Boosts Compassion

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Research: HP Boosts Compassion

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Harry Potter Neuroimaging Studies

- Reading about Harry Potter's struggles activated compassion and empathy centers of the brain (anterior insula and cingulate cortex)
  - – Hsu et al., 2014

- Reading Harry Potter also increased the activation in the left amygdala, related to conscious emotion processing and pleasure
  - -Hsu et al, 2015

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PTSD + Loneliness = Social Surrogacy

- College students filled out self-assessments
  - Trauma history, loneliness, social surrogacy via books, TV, etc. for connection
- Results: people w/trauma exposure more likely to turn to social surrogacy when lonely.

Gabriel et al. (2017)

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Clinical Applications

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Conceptual Model

- Origin Story
- Monsters
- Setbacks & hopelessmess
- Finding a hero role model
- Skills & training
- Defining purpose
- Becoming a Superhero IRL
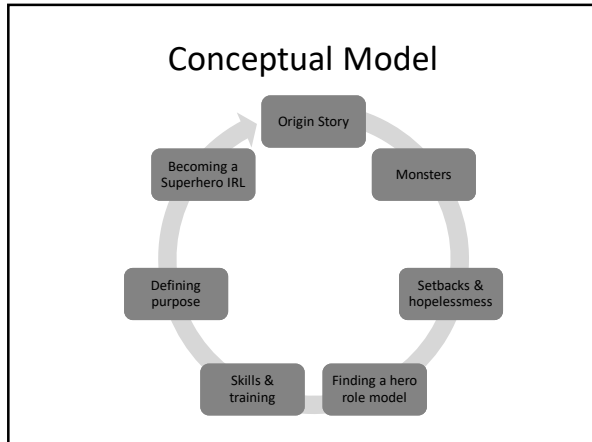
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Defining One's Own
Superhero Origin Story

Telling and retelling our
"origin story" can reduce PTSD symptoms

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Scripting One's Own Origin Story

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Who is Your (Super)Hero ?

- Can be real life or fictional
- Someone who is a figure of great strength and wisdom
- What do you admire about them ?

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Your Hero's Message

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From Origin Story to Core Values

39

What would Veronica do?

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What if my client likes a villain?

- Joker
- Harley Quinn
- Dexter
- Darth Vader
- Voldemort

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What is it that the client likes?

- Rarely do they like that the character is a killer, so not usually an indication of HI
- Usually, an unmet need:
  - feeling constrained by work and other obligations
  - *Example: Harley beating up people who didn't visit her client in the hospital*
- Often, wanting to play more, wanting to be free, and wanting to be ok with having more fun

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Villain Example:

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Let's Be Everyday Heroes

- YOU MATTER – YOU MAKE A DIFFERENCE !
- Keep Superheroing : Don't forget your cape !

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Case Example

- James is a 34-year-old, married, Caucasian male,
- Seeking therapy for anger at work.
- Easily irritated, he has low motivation, anhedonia, low mood, poor appetite and sleep, trouble concentrating, passive S/I, and practiced minimal self-care.
- His 8-month relationship with his wife, of Indian descent, was strained, and they were preparing for their wedding.
- Losses in childhood – parents divorced at 3, raised by his mother and stepfather, moved often, lost friends to drugs and accidents.
- He currently thinks about and has acted on extramarital thoughts.
- Guilt and shame.
- Drinks to cope.
- James has a managed, but contractable, STD eliciting further shame, and he does not always disclose this to partners.
- He has social anxiety, and compensates w/ overconfidence.
- *Avid* Star Wars fan. He owns 3 guitars.

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Course of Treatment

- IOP - met with 4 days/week, 2 hours/day
- Building rapport – Ahsoka to your Anakin
- Identifying James' origin story
- Identifying 'monsters' – memories, automatic thoughts
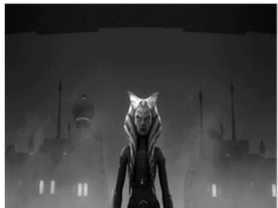- Discovering core values
- Value-driven action
- Becoming a #SuperheroIRL

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Course of Treatment (Guiding theme)

- Jedi vs. Sith vs. Bendu - finding balance
- Inner wisdom - "Within you, balance lies"

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Discovering the middle path

- Guiding the approach to treatment throughout

BENDU

SPECIES: UNKNOWN

Little is known of Bendu. Though he is a Force wielder, he does not subscribe to the philosophies of the Jedi or Sith, identifying himself as, "the one in the middle."

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Course of Treatment (cont.)

- Session 1 – Origin story - what do I know about myself?
  – HW of guitar playing and exercise. Finding "inner hero" Yoda
- Session 2 – Mindfulness practice, identifying 'monsters'
  – STD – shame, guilt, "I deserve this"
  – Relationship/Infidelity – shame, guilt, "I'll never be happy," "I can't be in a healthy relationship"
  – Alcohol – frustration, anger, "alcohol is gonna help", urges, shame
  – Anger – anger, "I deserve this", wife, interactions with his in-laws
  – Depression – hopeless, sad, "it'll never get better," "I'm not worth saving"
  – Social anxiety – "they're going to see me", physiological sensations

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Issues work

- Identifying with the villain (Anakin/Darth Vader) – desire for love

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Course of Treatment (cont.)

- Session 3 – Reducing experiential avoidance -> a painful memory (screaming in woods) and a pleasant memory (electricity - Anakin).
  – HW: "Inside Out" (contact with the present moment), "Star Wars: The Clone Wars" (mindfulness) , and reading "Old Man Logan" (self-as-context)
- Session 4 – First conversations about value based action – pursuing searching for a new job. Exploring nature of relationship with his wife, compared to others.
  – Identifying strengths/values – building the lightsaber (mindfulness/strengths)

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Identifying Values

- Independence
- Physical health/fitness
- Learning
- Leisure
- "Star Wars"
- Relationships

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Course of Treatment (cont.)

- Session 5 – Abandoned; "I leave before they can leave"; depression – lazy and tired. Value driven action of active listening to his wife.
  - Obi-wan Kenobi and empathy
  - HW: Loss timeline and "memento"
- Session 6 – Story about the "man on the bench" and empathy for self and others (self-compassion), anger – weak, "out of control".
  - HW: Mindful guitar, boxing(values driven action)

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Course of Treatment (cont.)

- Session 7 – Anger in relationship primary, at work secondary.
  - Reckless proposal, stupid going through with it (core beliefs).
  - Anakin and not being swayed by Darth Sidious; "I can't turn back now". Values of family, friends, community – not pursuing
  - HW: Active listening
- Session 8 – Blow up at home, 'the big question'
  - Conflict about ending it, breaking down, lack of confidence in knowing what to do – "be here, now".
  - "I'll feel like a fraud"
  - HW: Running and playing guitar, Star Wars to reduce experiential avoidance

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Course of Treatment (cont.)

- Session 9 – Role-play using all these skills for conversation about couples counseling.
  – Cultural issues from his wife's end.
  – Spoke to his father-in-law.
  – Saw his wife's phone - possible divorce upcoming?
  – HW: Begin DBT skills training group

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THE END OF JAMES' STORY

- Pursued couples counseling for several weeks
- James continues with individual sessions
- Jesse receives individual therapy as well
- Her drinking behaviors escalate as he becomes more grounded and dynamics shift.
- Wedding approaches rapidly.

- Never been happier

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Treatment Integration

- Sessions while jogging, discussing anger. Choosing a "different path from Anakin"
- 'Star Wars: The Clone Wars' nightly, journaling f/ tagline of each episode; following character arcs (Ahsoka, balance)
- 'Mr. Nobody'
- 'The Beauty'

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'The Force'

- Light side (Jedi) ⟷ Bendu ⟷ Dark side (Sith)
  - Challenging 'monsters'; increasing psychological flexibility
- Using the force to identify needs
- "Becoming Yoda"
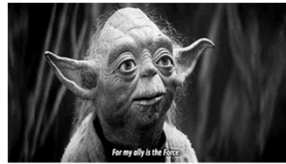
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Case Examples

Learning about a new thing –
- Peter – fictional world and creating "countries" for each conflict, and how they would handle things, not exploring the entire world.
- Mindfulness w/ favorite shows and tracking each time characters said a certain phrase; using cartoons to help with exposures and pleasant activity scheduling

Existing media –
- Sarah – "Castaway" to overcome stuck points related to loneliness and lack of connection with others, identifying goals of survival

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Case Examples (cont.)

- Social Anxiety exposures - comic book store and make conversation with employees, instead of purchasing and leaving.
  - Ask for specific issues, ask but don't purchase.
  - Places with some sensitivity to social isolation
- Gregory – struggles with alcohol addiction, avoidant, substance abuse, intrusive thoughts, lack of connection, chasing physical intimacy over connection.
  - Read 3 times in one weekend. Increased openness to addressing H-OCD thoughts

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Star Wars Experiential Meditation

- Come with me now, if you would, on a journey across space, to a galaxy far, far away.
- Create your own lightsaber

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DROP THE MIC I SHALL

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References

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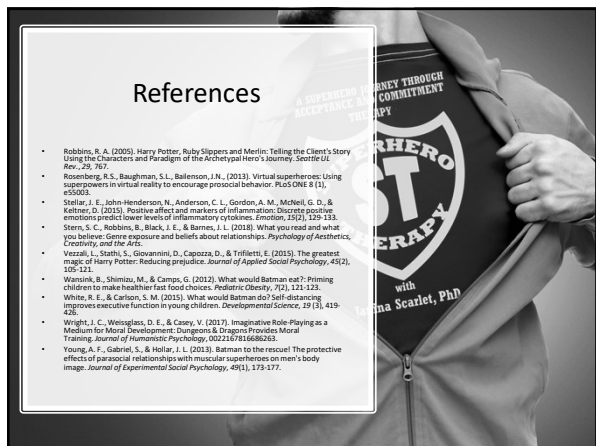

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