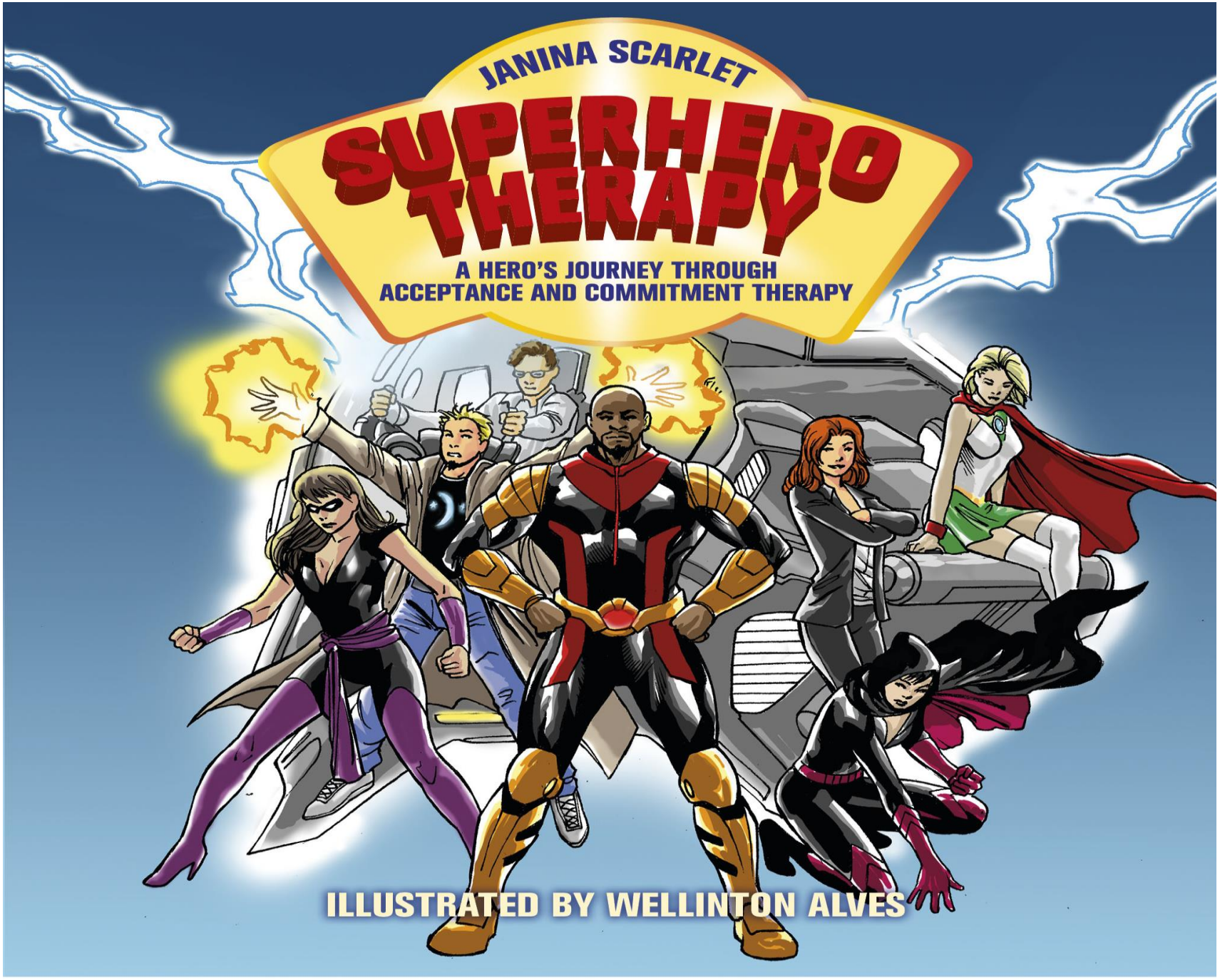

JANINA SCARLET
SUPERHERO THERAPY
A HERO'S JOURNEY THROUGH ACCEPTANCE AND COMMITMENT THERAPY
ILLUSTRATED BY WELLINTON ALVES

Spider-Man meditation

Small Group Discussion

- How did yesterday go for you?
- Did anything come up that you'd like to try with your clients?
- What came up for you in this meditation practice?

Large group discussion

Understanding bullying/exclusion in order to build emotional safety

- GamerGate (2014-)
  - Bullying in the gaming world
  - Anita Sarkeesian (Feminist Frequency – tropes & representation) & Zoe Quinn (Depression Quest)
    - Doxing, death threats, rape threats
    - Had to cancel events, leave housing, etc
    - First to be public about the extent of their bullying (Equivalent to first #MeToo)

Understanding bullying/exclusion in order to build emotional safety

- GamerGate (2014-)
  - Attacking women, POC, LGBTQ, etc.
    - “Ethics in journalism” – claiming that women received favorable reviews of games/channels due to sleeping with journalists
    - Zoe Quinn - Threats of beating her to death
    - Sarkeesian – Threats of violence of family members, threats of an attack “like Columbine” if she’s allowed to give a talk
  - Exclusion – Overwatch e-Sports

Understanding bullying/exclusion in order to build emotional safety

- ComicsGate (2018-)
  - Attacking writers – women, POC, LGBTQ, etc.
  - Response to Marvel (and other) inclusion efforts
  - Calls to boycott issues
  - Doxing, death threats, rape threats

Bullying happens to actors

Leslie Jones “Ghostbusters”

“Patty Tolan”

Kelly Marie Tran “Star Wars - The Last Jedi”

“Rose”

Building sidekicks

- Characters that represent our clients
  - Diversity, ability, appearance, mental health experience, etc.
- Real life or PSRs
  - #MeToo

Building sidekicks

- Real life or PSRs
  - #MeToo
  - Jessica Jones

Building sidekicks

- Real life or PSRs
- Fandom

Gal Gadot – “Wonder Woman” 2017

Building sidekicks

- PSRs
- Fandom
- Community
  - ‘Orphan Black’

Building sidekicks - HP

Building Sidekicks - Supernatural

Sam Dean Castiel

Always Keep Fighting

Conventions

Example

- “Kelly” – 16 yrs old
  - Adopted, was previously separated from her sister
  - Sibling bullying
  - OCD, MDD, SAD
  - Fear of change/disconnection
  - Social withdrawal

Example

Family

Building sidekicks/Social groups

- Social connection & resilience
  - B/c compassion toward PSRs is the same as toward real life individuals -> PSRs could lead to more oxytocin?
  - Oxytocin – bonding
    - Testosterone creates opposite effects of oxytocin

Crespi, 2015

Building sidekicks/Social groups

- Social connection & resilience
  - Testosterone creates opposite effects of oxytocin
  - Testosterone reduces empathy/perspective taking, reduces cooperative behavior (us vs. them), and increases aggression/violence
  - Oxytocin allows for mentalizing and willingness to help/social and altruistic behavior

Crespi, 2015

Vulnerabilities

- Acting out aggression

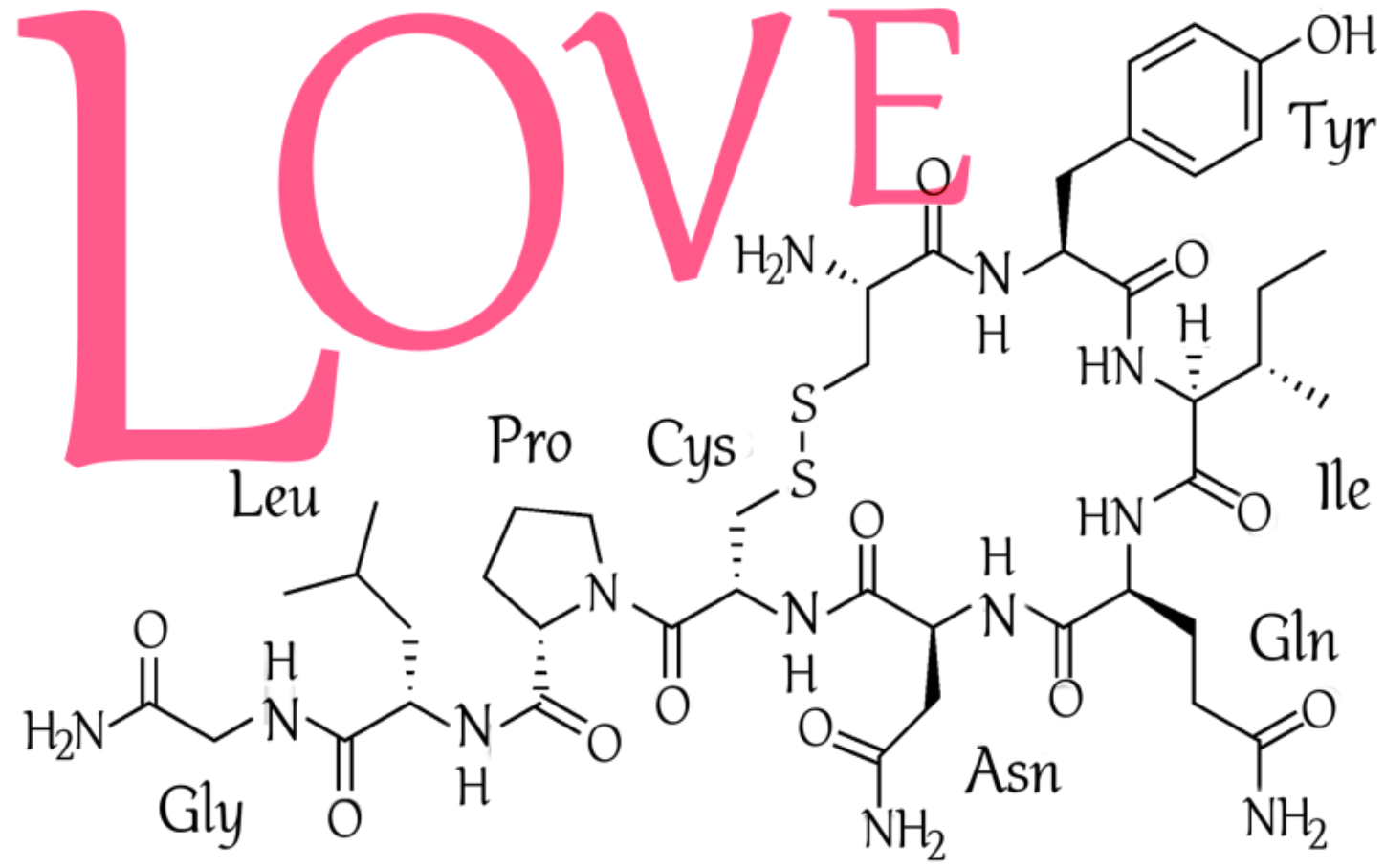
Vulnerabilities

- Antagonists/antiheroes as protectors
  - Deadpool
  - Ex-military
  - Cancer survivor
  - Mutant
  - Burn survivor
  - Sarcasm

- Another persona
  - Dissociation

    vs.
  - Functional

Oxytocin



CONNECTION

Oxytocin

- Produced in the hypothalamus
- Involved in:
  - Bonding
  - Recognition of kin (and preference twd people with similar values)
  - Affection/empathy/caretaking/altruistic behavior
  - Childbirth
  - Sex/orgasm
  - Breast feeding
  - Stress resilience/recovery/soothing
- Reward-system (for helping/soothing)
- Travis example

Crespi, 2015

Oxytocin

Oxytocin

Vulnerability = Oxytocin

Oxytocin

Oxytocin = love = vulnerability

- Vulnerability creates the need for connection and oxytocin reinforces that connection
- Oxytocin is involved in attachment formation
- Also involved in anxiety about social relationships (fear of losing attachment)
  - Less forgiveness
  - Reduced distress tolerance about attachment fears
- Fear of social ostracism
- Social anxiety
- Oxytocin is involved in **both** anxiety about losing social connections and in soothing that anxiety

Crespi, 2015

Building sidekicks/Social groups

- Stable social connection = resilience
  - Longevity
    - Stressful events (death, divorce, poverty, etc) can lead to shorter lifespan
    - Ability to experience positive affect reduces the risk of premature mortality
    - People with stronger social connections also have longer lifespan
- Kelly McGonigal:https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RcGyVTAoXEU&t=4s

Xu & Roberts, 2010

Building sidekicks/Social groups

- Social connection and resilience
  - Biomarkers of stress resilience and wellbeing
    - Inflammation
    - Telomere length
    - Gene expression
    - Necrosis (cell death) due to an injury or stress
  - Most can worsen with toxic stress, such as bullying or exclusion
  - Most can be remedied by stress resilience skills, esp. social connection

Eppel & Lithgow,2014

This means…

- When rejected, disconnected, heartbroken
- It feels like dying on the inside
- Not far from the truth
  - People can die from a “broken heart syndrome”
  - Dresden Files example – invisible wire of torture

Vulnerability

- The courage to be open
- Speaking from the heart

Vulnerability

- Research
  - Wholehearted
  - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iCvmsMzlF7o

Brown, (2015)

Vulnerability

- Research
  - Wholehearted
  - Cannot selectively numb some emotions and not others

Brown, (2015)

What's vulnerable

- Asking for help
- Expressing emotions
- Asking someone out
- Sharing a secret
- Initiating sex
- Weight/appearance
  - Seeing others when weight changed
- Money
- Physical Illness
  - Cancer, HIV, IBS, Autoimmune Disease, allergies
- Mental health disorders
- Having children
- Feeling disconnected
- Initiating connection
- Feeling unprotected/defenseless and misunderstood

Ordinary Heartbreak
(David Levine)

- She climbs easily on the box
  That seats her above the swivel chair at adult height
  Crosses her legs, left ankle over right
  Smoothes the plastic apron over her lap
  While the beautician lifts her pony tail and laughs,
  "This is coarse as a horse's tail"

  And then, as if that's all there is to say
  The woman, at once, whacks off and tosses
  Its foot and a half into the trash

  And the little girl, who didn't want her hair cut
  But long ago learned successfully
  How not to say what it is she wants

  Who, even in this minute,
  Cannot quite grasp her shock and grief
  Is getting her hair cut
  "For convenience," Her mother put it

- The long waves gone
  That had been evidence at night
  When loosened from their clasp
  She might be secretly a princess

  Rather than cry out
  She grips her own wrist
  And looks to her mother in the mirror
  But her mother is too polite
  Or too reserved or too indifferent
  To defend the girl

  So the girl, herself, takes up indifference
  While the pain follows a channel
  To a hidden place
  Almost unknown to her
  Convinced, as she is,
  That her own emotions are
  Not the ones her life depends on

  She shifts her gaze from her mother's face
  Back to the haircut, so steadily
  As if this short-haired child she sees
  Were someone else

Vulnerability Exercise

- Patronus Charm – happiest memory
  - Exercise
  - Discussion

Injured talk/vs. courageous talk

What if something happens to her?
Will he takes away my freedom?
You are grounded!
You're so mean!

Perspective taking – e.g. Potatoes

Discussion

Vulnerability as a superpower

What makes us feel really alive

- Opposite of just going through the day and meeting the reqs
- Meaning making
- The courage to be ourselves
- The courage to play instead of following a to-do list

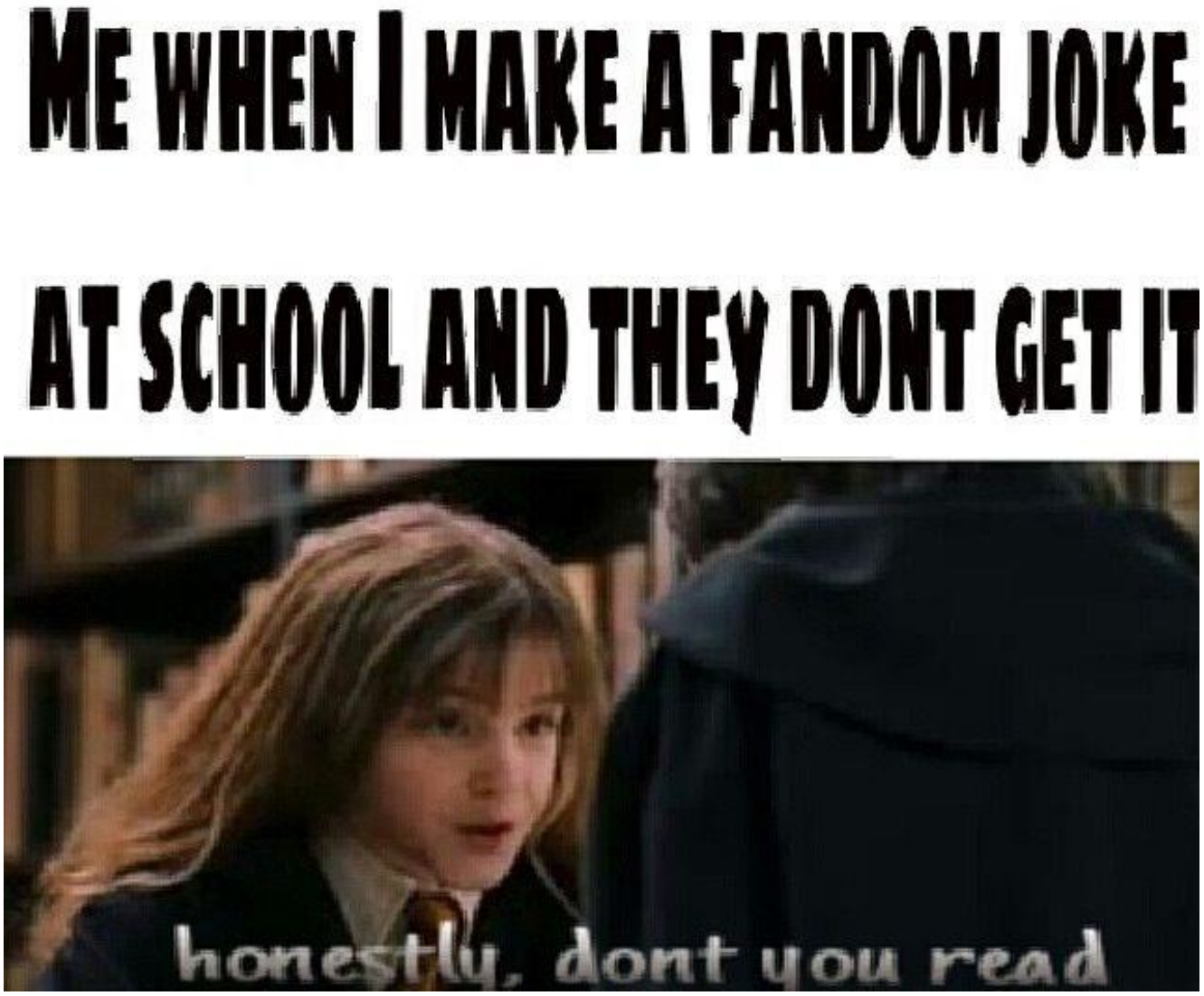
Blame vs. empathy

- Brene Brown on blame
  - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RZWf2_2L2v8
- Brene Brown on empathy
  - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Evwgu369Jw

Discussion

Break

Geek Vocab


ME WHEN I MAKE A FANDOM JOKE
AT SCHOOL AND THEY DONT GET IT
honestly, dont you read

Geek Vocab

- Geek vs. Nerd

Geek Vocab

- Geek vs. Nerd
  - Geek: special-interest oriented (e.g., ‘Star Wars’ Geek), may be a collector, may know a lot about the given subject
  - Nerd: academically or otherwise intellectual, achievement-based, deep knowledge of given topic (e.g., Physics Nerd, Comic Books Nerd – detailed knowledge of Hx, etc)

Geek/Nerd history

<u>20 years ago:</u>

- Used interchangeably
- Considered to be derogatory

Modern geeks

Geek Culture Stats

- Top grossing Hollywood movies are Superhero movies

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  - **Avengers Endgmae alone made over $2.7 billion worldwide**
  - Top selling merchandise (clothes, office supplies) have superheroes, sci-fi, or fantasy characters on them

Geek Culture Stats

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- Nerd Fitness

Modern geeks

- Pride

Modern geeks

- Pride
- Comic Con

Modern geeks

- Pride
- Comic Con
- Cosplay

Modern geeks

- Pride
- Comic Con
- Cosplay
- History of being bullied outside and inside their community

Modern geeks

- Pride
- Comic Con
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- History of being bullied outside and inside their community
- Hx of being misunderstood

Modern geeks

- Pride
- Comic Con
- Cosplay
- History of being bullied outside and inside their community
- Hx of being misunderstood
- Being a geek is not just a hobby, it’s a core value

Geek Vocab

- Cons
  - more social events
- Expo
  - more exhibits/demos

Geek Vocab

- Cosplay
  - Definition
  - Both noun and verb
  - Can be a profession
- Cosplayers
  - Rules & regulations

Cosplay research

- Identification with some aspect of the character or story
- Finding oneself/identity
- Social connection

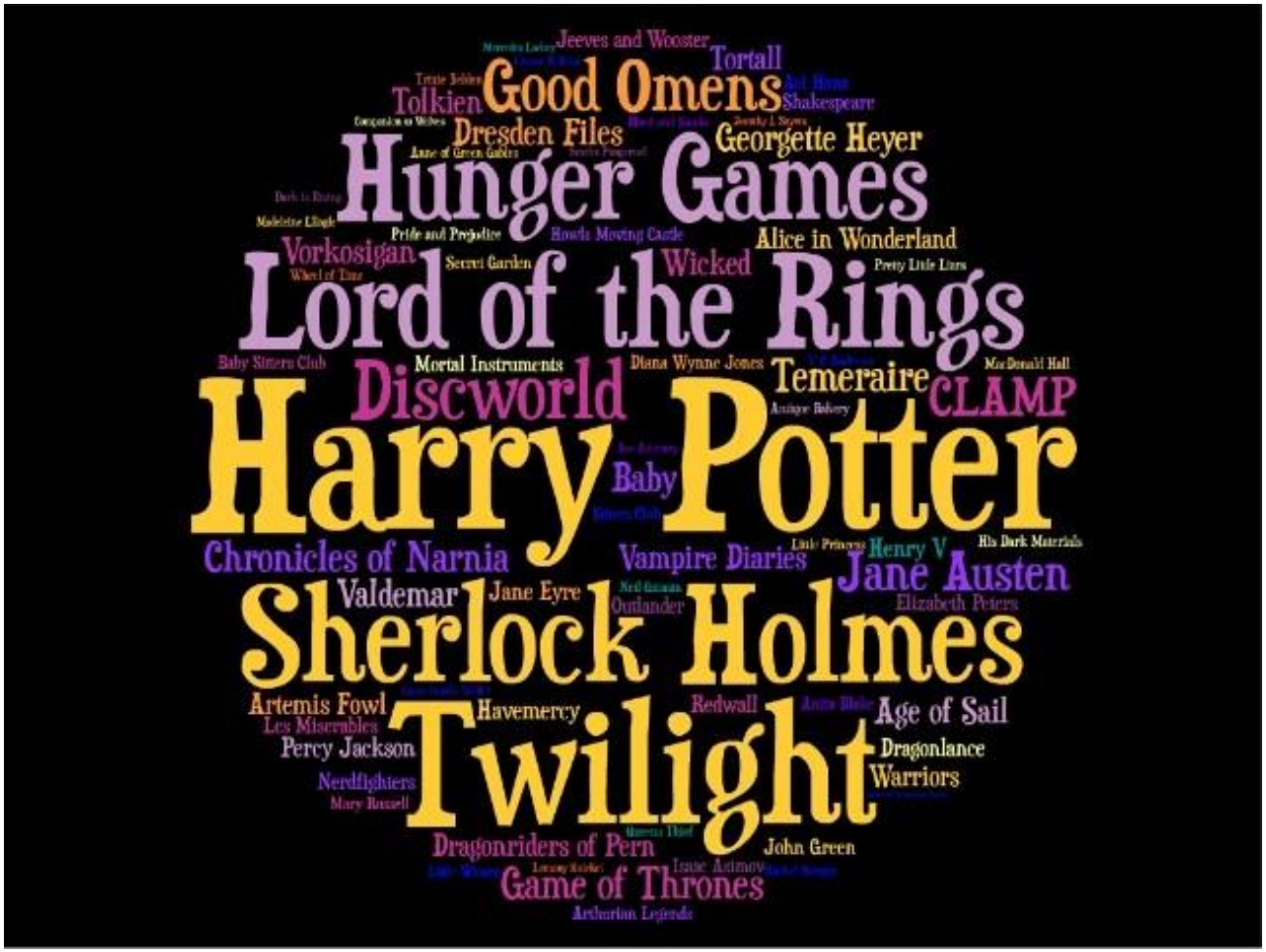
Rosenberg & Letamendi, (2013)

Being in Fandom

- Makes for better romantic partner (Stern, et al 2018)
  - Better at working through conflicts
  - More tolerant of disagreements
- Makes us more sensitive to the needs of others (Vezzali et al. 2015)
  - More compassionate toward stigmatized groups

Geek Vocab

- Fandom



Geek Vocab

- Memes
  - Humorous image, text, or video that is widely shared on the internet

LOTR - Boromir

LOTR Meme

ONE DOES NOT SIMPLY
LEAVE A MARVEL MOVIE BEFORE THE END OF THE CREDITS

Geek Vocab

- Fanboy & Fangirl
  - Both nouns and verbs

When having a fangirl moment in public

Fan-fiction

- Fanfic
  - Writing an original story within an existing fandom
  - E.g. Star Wars Fanfic (Leia becomes a Jedi)
- Archive of Our Own (AO3)
  - Hosts more than 4.5 *million* fanworks across 31,000 fandoms as of 2019
  - Nominated for Hugo Award
    - https://www.themarysue.com/ao3-hugo-award-nominations/

Fanfic Vocab

- Fanfic
  - Fiction about a specific character or universe written by a fan (e.g., Harry Potter fanfic or Hogwarts fanfic)
- Has been suggested to be similar to imaginary play
- Allow fans to interact with the characters and with one another
  - PSRs

Barnes, (2015); Vinney & Dill-Shackleford (2016)

Fanfic Vocab

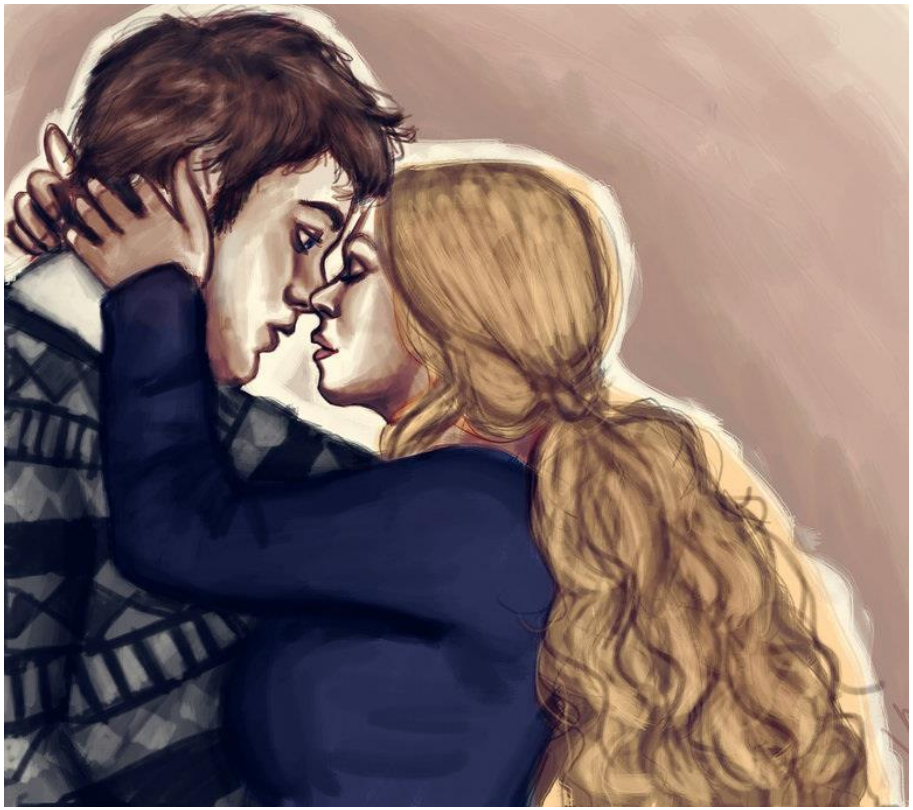
- **Canon**: truly in the official universe
  - E.g. Vader is Luke's father in Star Wars, this is canon
- **Fanon**: established by fans, sometimes to fill in the gaps in canon
  - E.g. Luke and Leia's upbringing before we meet them in 'A New Hope'

Fanfic Vocab

- Shipping

Fanfic Vocab

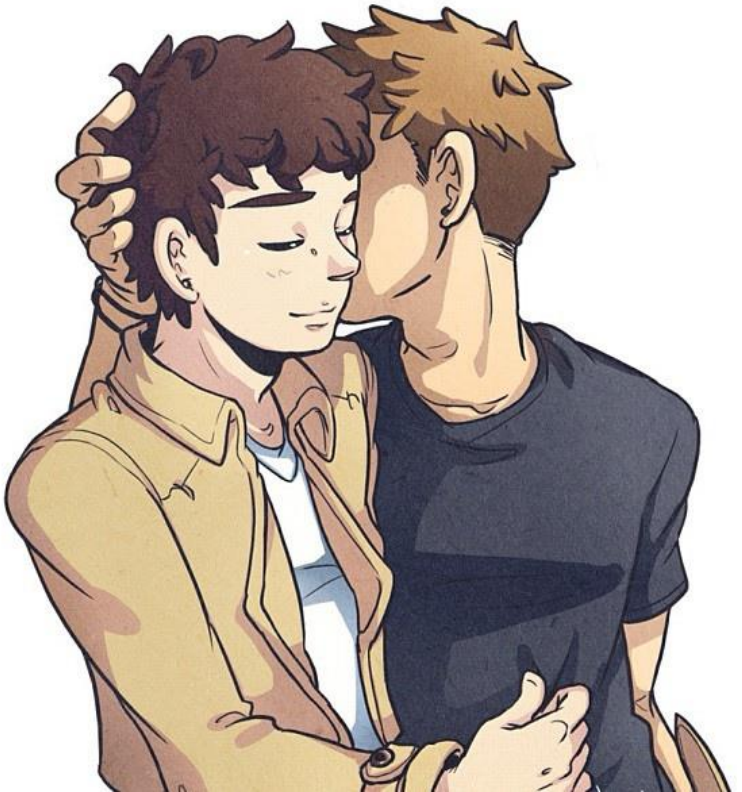
- Shipping
  - OT/OTP (One True Pair)



Fanfic Vocab

- Slash fanfic
  - same sex shipping in fanfic

‘Destiel’
Dean + Castiel
Supernatural



Fanfic Vocab

- **Crossover**
  - Multiple fandoms

Fanfic Vocab

- Alternative Universe

Geek Vocab

- Troll/trolling

Geek Vocab

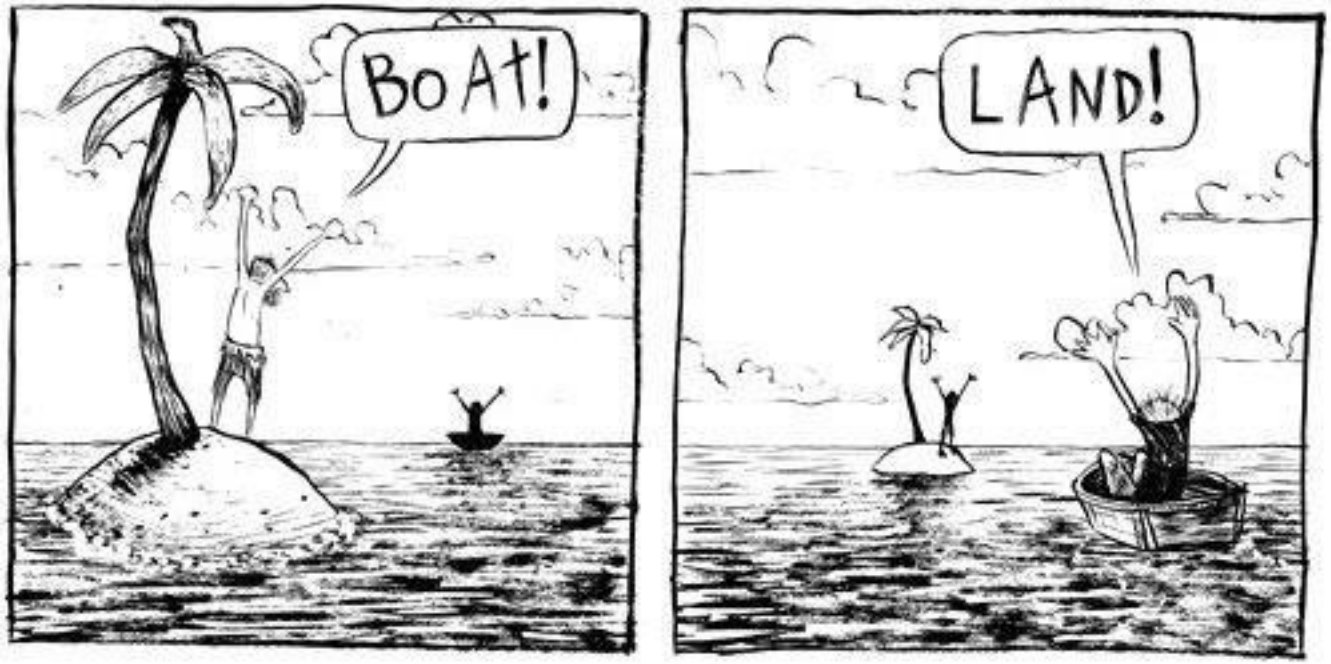
- Squee

Fanfic Vocab

- OC – original character

Fanfic Vocab

- POV – point of view



Fanfic Vocab

- SI – self-insertion into story

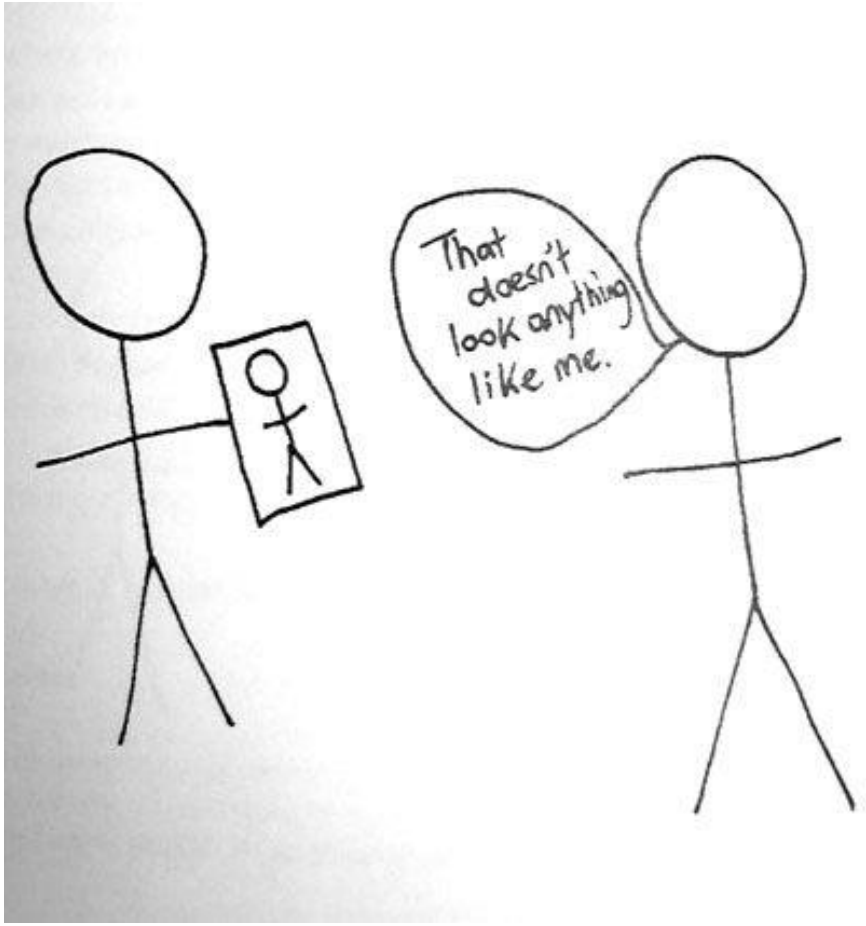
> Do you ever stop and realize that the average person doesn't know what a ship is or what canon means.

We probably just all sound like pirates.

FanArt

- Drawing instead of writing
- Can be stick figures

Westworld



Practice

- **<u>Part 1</u> (5 mins)**
  - Write a scene from your favorite book, movie, TV show , or comic book to the best of your memory
  - Emotional scene, maybe a death of a character, etc, a scene you've wanted to change
  - Write as many details as you can remember, what happened and was said
  - It doesn't have to be 100% accurate
  - Don't focus on getting it "right", just write it out

Practice

- **<u>Part 2 (5 mins)</u>**
  - Self-insertion
  - See if you can write yourself into that scene and change the story

Practice

- **<u>Part 3 (5 mins)</u>**
  - Now redo the same scene you've just written but in a comic book format
  - You can use stick figures and dialogue bubbles

Discussion

KEEP CALM AND ROLE PLAY

Role Play

- Choose a client who might benefit from from fanfic or fan art
- Practice introducing the concept and providing instructions for how to work on it
- Switch roles

Discussion

- How did it go?
- Q&A
- Optional: Case Consult

Superhero posture

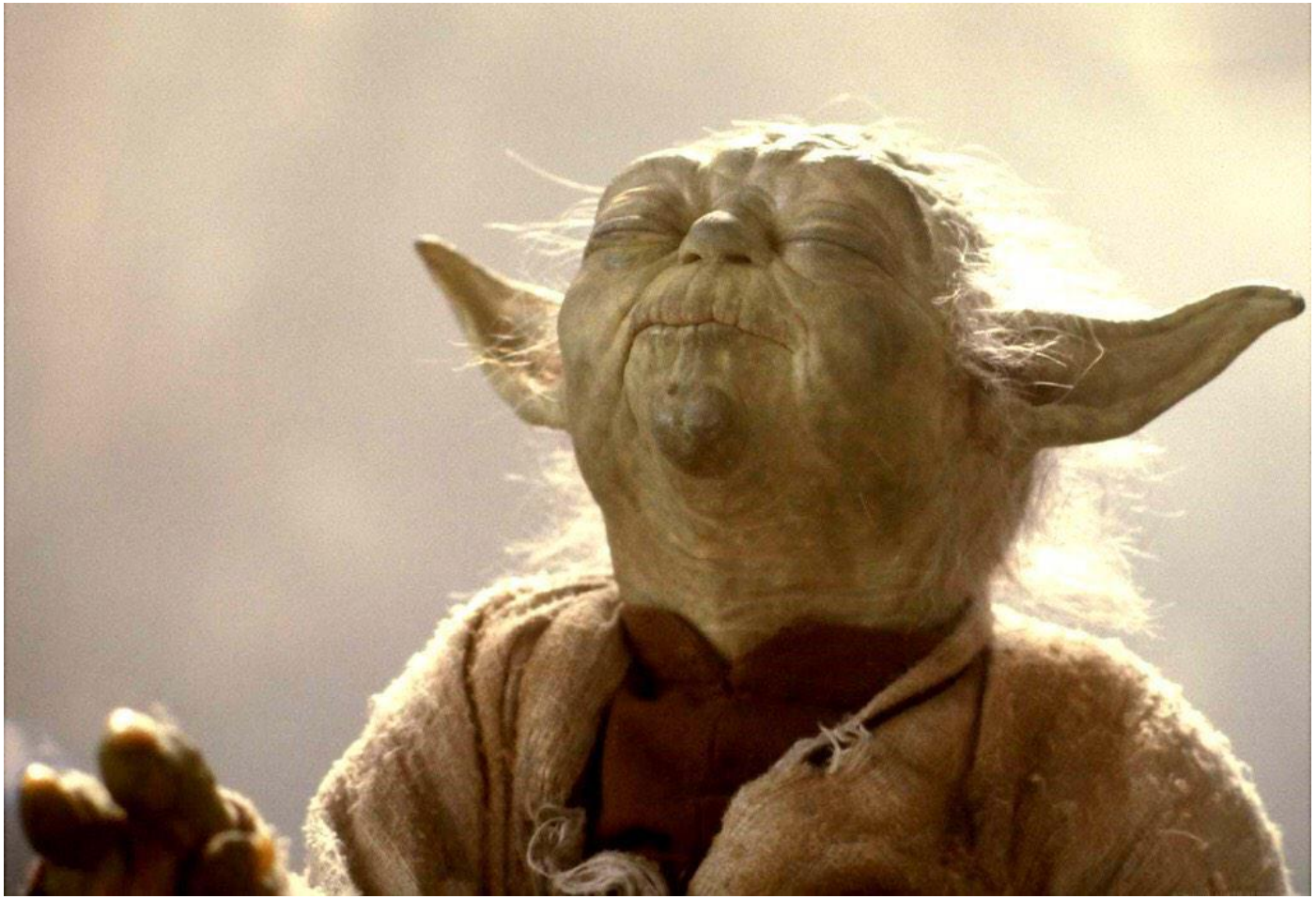
- Shame posture & Developmental Trauma

  Vs.

- Superhero posture
- Amy Cuddy
  - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ks-Mh1QhMc

Lunch Break

Star Wars meditation

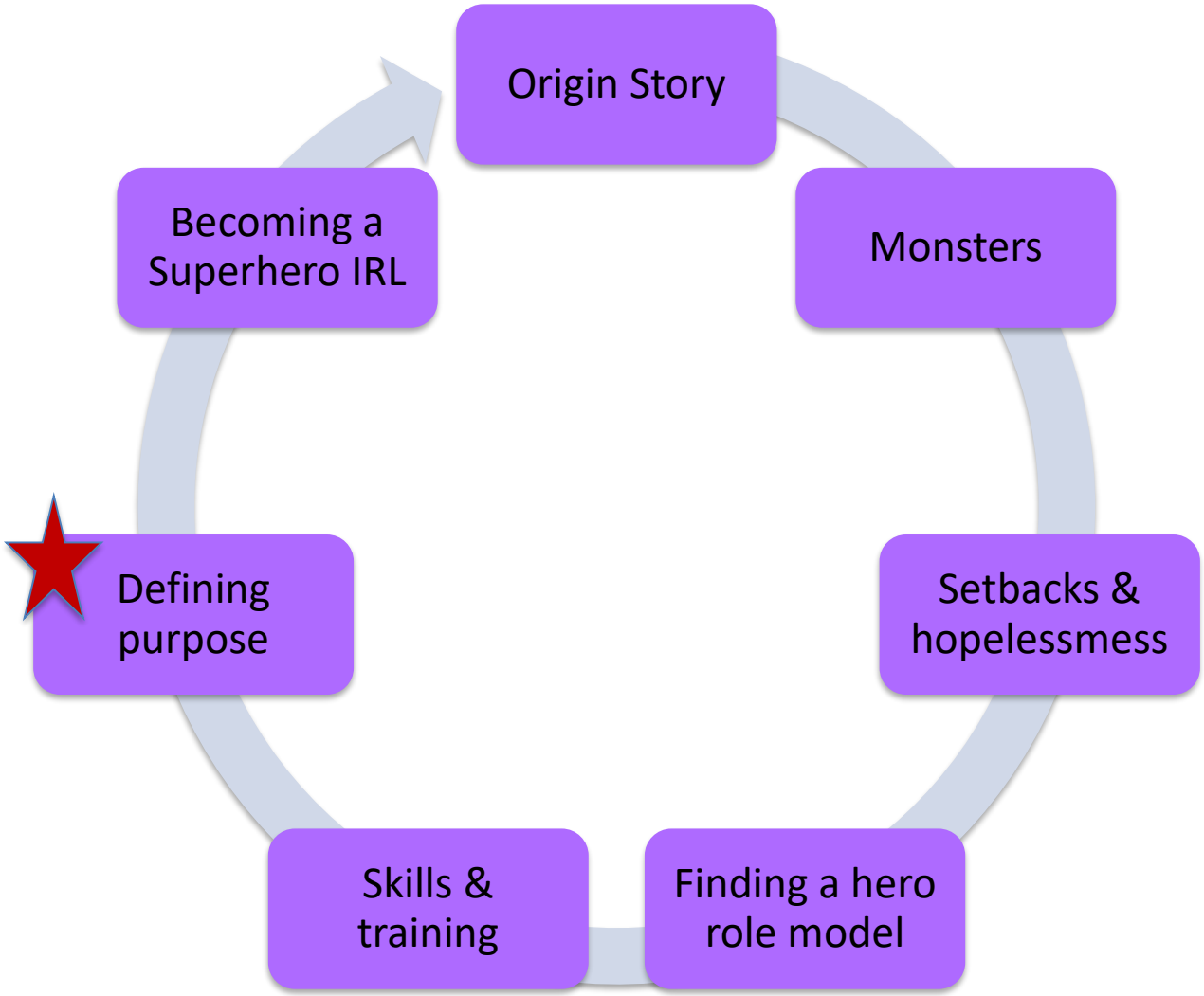


Small group discussion

- How is this course going for you?
- What are some things you want to take away?
- Did anything come up for you during this meditation?

Large group discussion

Superhero Therapy Narrative Model



Sense of purpose

- What is it?

- How do we find it?

Sense of purpose

Getting at the sense of purpose

- Eulogy exercise (ACT)

Regrets of the dying
(Bronnie Ware – palliative nurse)

Warren, 2012

Regrets of the dying

- 1. I wish I hadn't worked so hard

"Star Trek"

Worf & son, Alexander
Worf sent Alex away after his mother was killed
Missed his bday

Warren, 2012

Regrets of the dying

- 1. I wish I hadn't worked so hard

Worf was initially angry at Alexander for stealing, acting out, and lying

Until he realized that his son needed him

Warren, 2012

Regrets of the dying

- 2. I wish I stayed in touch with my friends

Logan/Wolverine
X-Men

Warren, 2012

Regrets of the dying

- 3. I wish I had the courage to express my true feelings

11th Doctor
"Doctor Who"

Warren, 2012

Regrets of the dying

- 4. I wish I had the courage to be myself, not what others expect of me

Jessica
"Fresh off the Boat"

Warren, 2012

Regrets of the dying

- 5. I wish I had let myself be happier

Batman

Warren, 2012

Life = Balancing act

What gets in the way?

- Worrying
- Self-shaming
- “Shoulds”
- Fusion

What makes us feel really alive

- Opposite of just going through the day and meeting the reqs
- Meaning making
- The courage to be ourselves
- The courage to play instead of following a to-do list

Overwhelm Zone
Connection
Safety Zone
Challenge

Safety Zone Issues

- Maintains problematic behavior
- Lowers accountability
- Increases blame
- Increases depression
- Reduces self-efficacy

Blame vs. empathy

- Brene Brown on blame
  - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RZWf2_2L2v8
- Brene Brown on empathy
  - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Evwgu369Jw

Stepping outside your comfort zone

- Circle up

Finding your inner superhero/sense of purpose

Mirror of Erised

Mirror of Erised

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ck4Bk6SKO7o

"It does not do to dwell on dreams and forget to live" – Professor Dumbledore

IDENTIFYING YOUR CORE VALUES

Writing/drawing exercise: Finding your inner Magic

- If you could be granted 3 superpowers or magical abilities, what would you wish for?

Magic

- If you could be granted 3 superpowers or magical abilities, what would you wish for?
- What would make you want those powers?

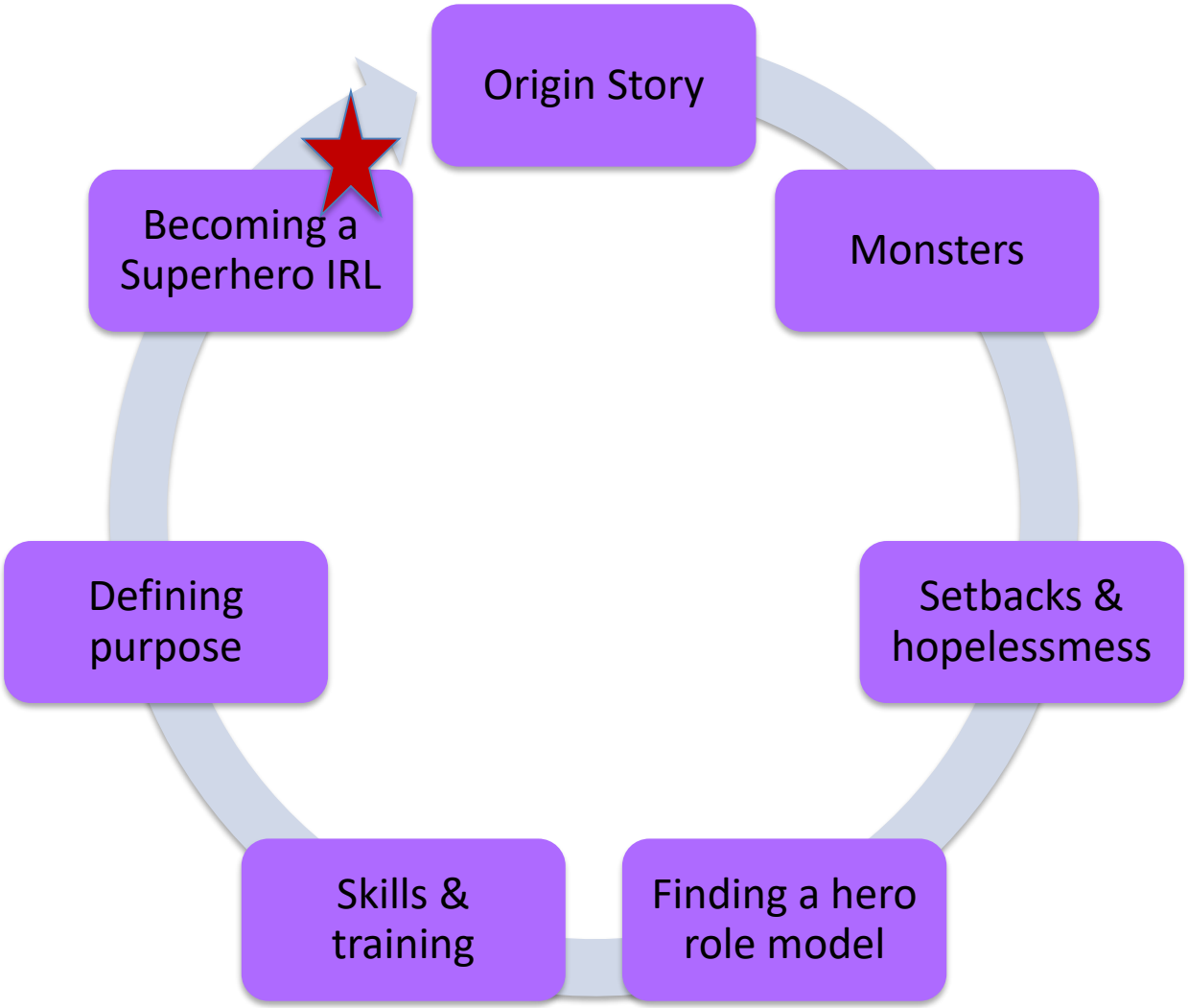
Magic

- If you could be granted 3 superpowers or magical abilities, what would you wish for?
- What would make you want those powers?
- What would you do with them?

Discussion

Break

Superhero Therapy Narrative Model

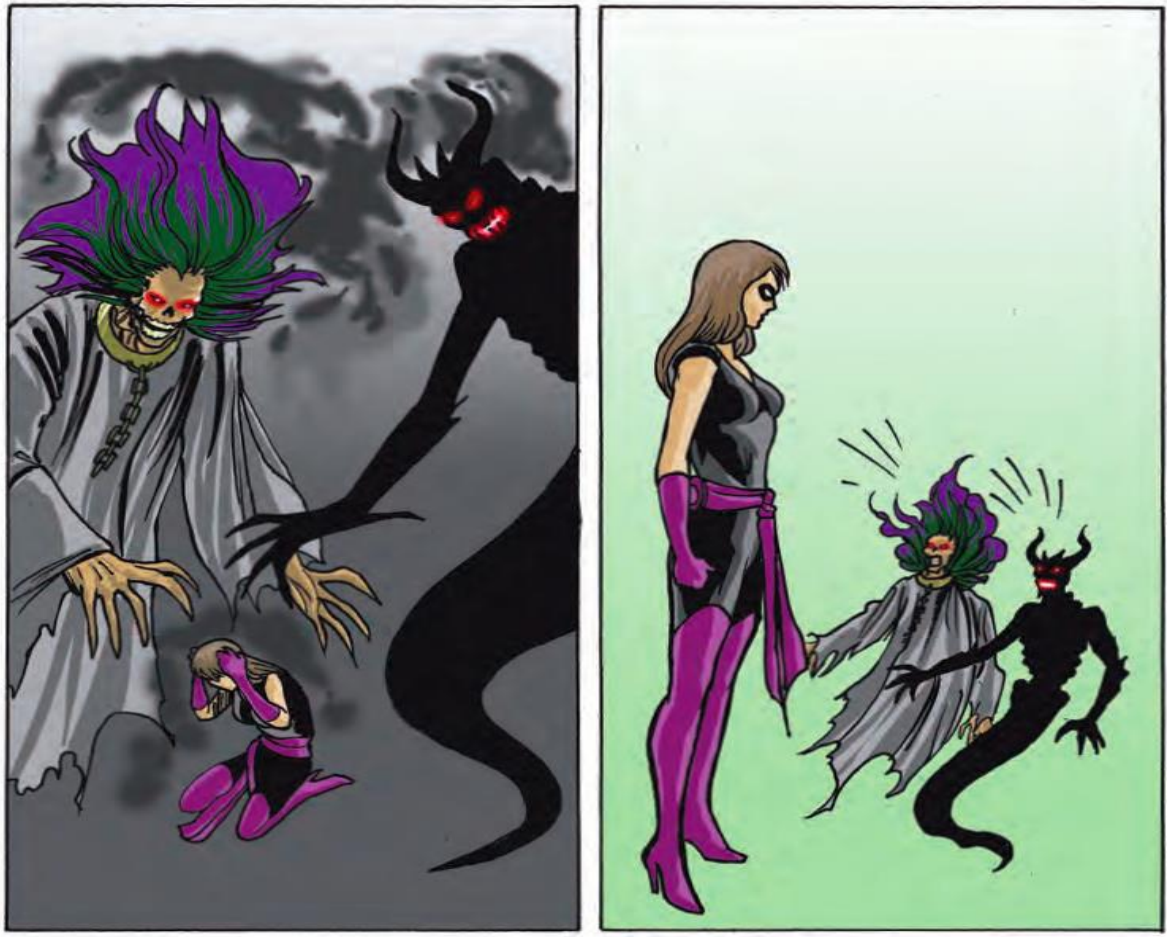


Becoming a Superhero

- Isn’t easy
- Daily intention-setting
- Connection with sense of purpose
- Pep Talk
  - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qR3rK0kZFkg

Becoming a Superhero IRL

- Courage to face difficult emotions



Case Study: “Jim”

Becoming a Superhero IRL

- Courage to be yourself and to see yourself

Becoming a Superhero IRL

- Courage to be yourself
- “You Are Who You've Been Looking For” (by Adam Roa)
  - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nt5_3cbo31I&feature=youtu.be

Cell phone “Mirror” exercise

- Screen-based eye contact LKM
  - Picture of loved one
  - Self (as a separate person)
- Group
- Discussion

Creating steps

- "Superhero training"
  - Hierarchical or goal-based
  - Tied to core values

Symbols

Symbols

Other symbols?

Gamifying HW/Goals

- SuperBetter
- Pokémon Go!

McGonigal, 2015

Gamifying HW/Goals

- Leveling up in Tx
  - Award/reward system
  - Recognition of progress as a game
- SuperBetter
  - Esp. for TBI, depression, anxiety, PSTD
  - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9zyNcov087U
- Pokémon Go!/ Wizards Unite!

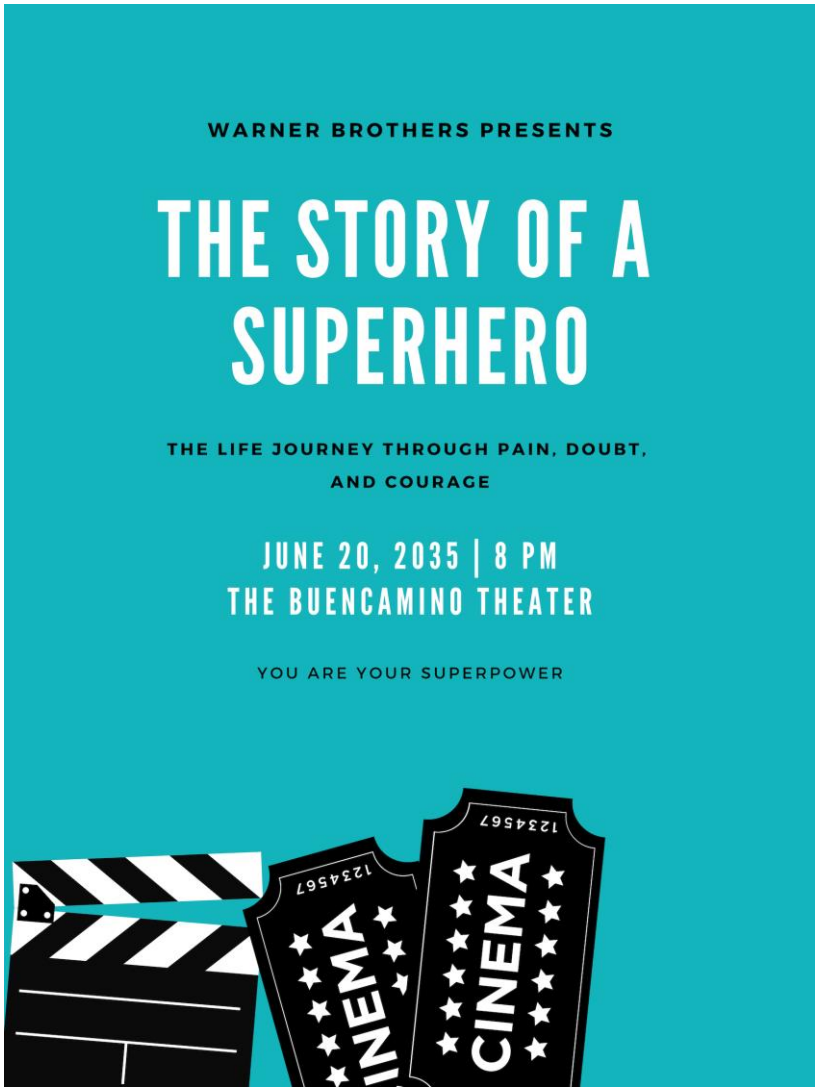
McGonigal, 2015

Exercise: rewriting the origin story

- From the point of view of a survivor
- Example – Jessica Jones

Exercise: rewriting the origin story

- What if there will be a movie made about you in the future to inspire others?
    - What would that movie be about?
    - If it did exactly what it is supposed to, how would you want this movie to inspire/affect others?
    - Discussion



Discussion

Veronica Mars EXAMPLE
“Lily”

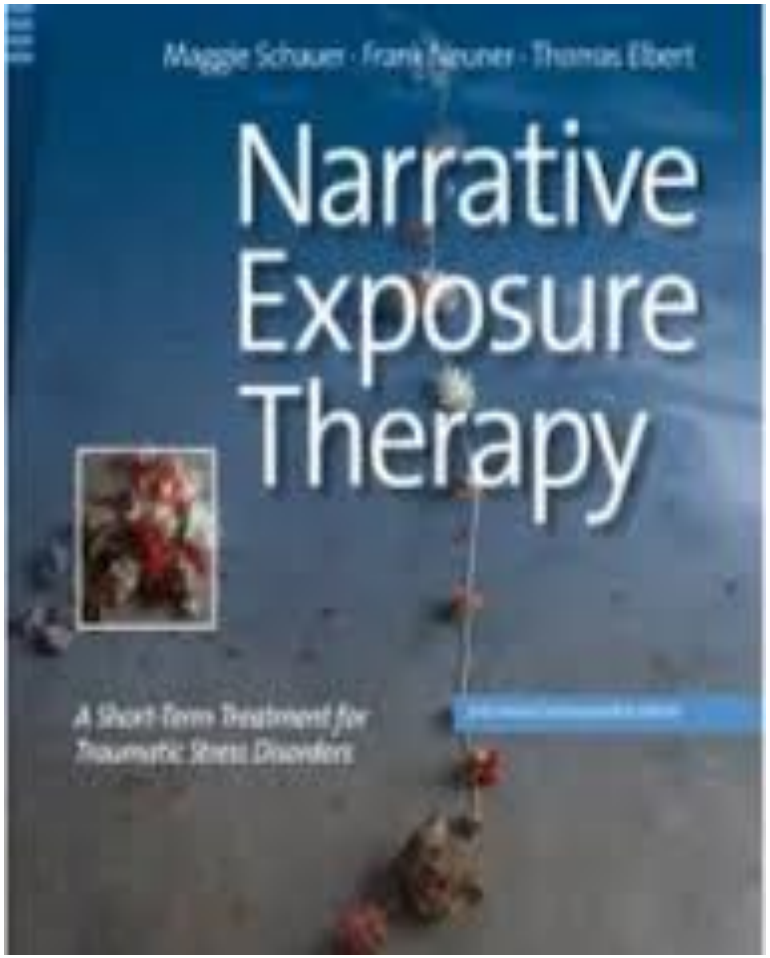
What would Veronica do?

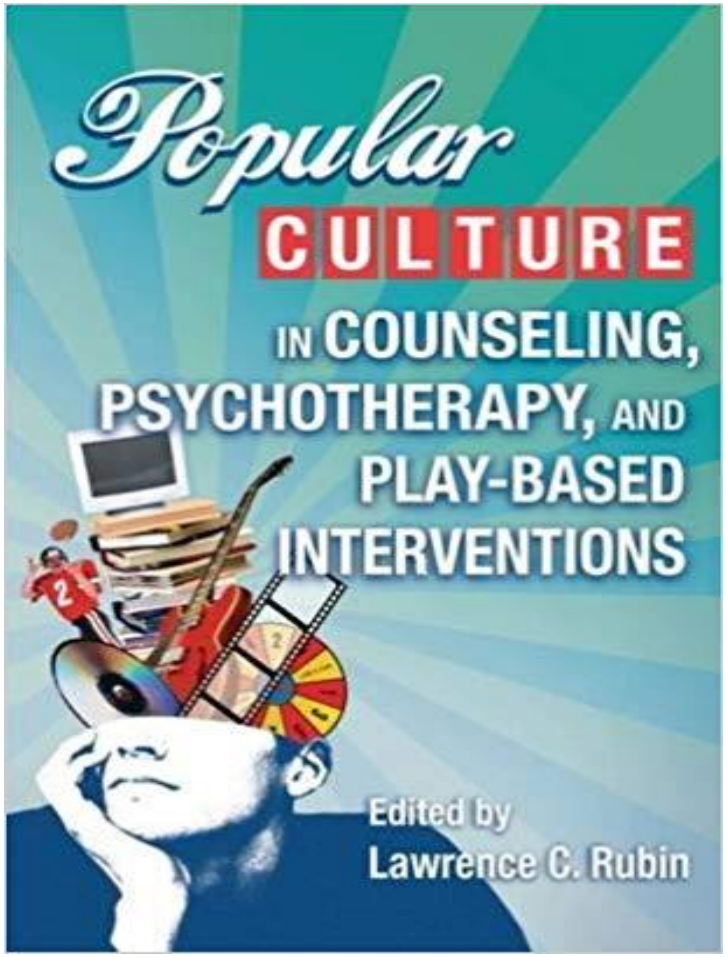
Practicum/Case Consult

Remember

- YOU are the Chosen One
- It has to be YOU
- YOU make a difference

Additional resources





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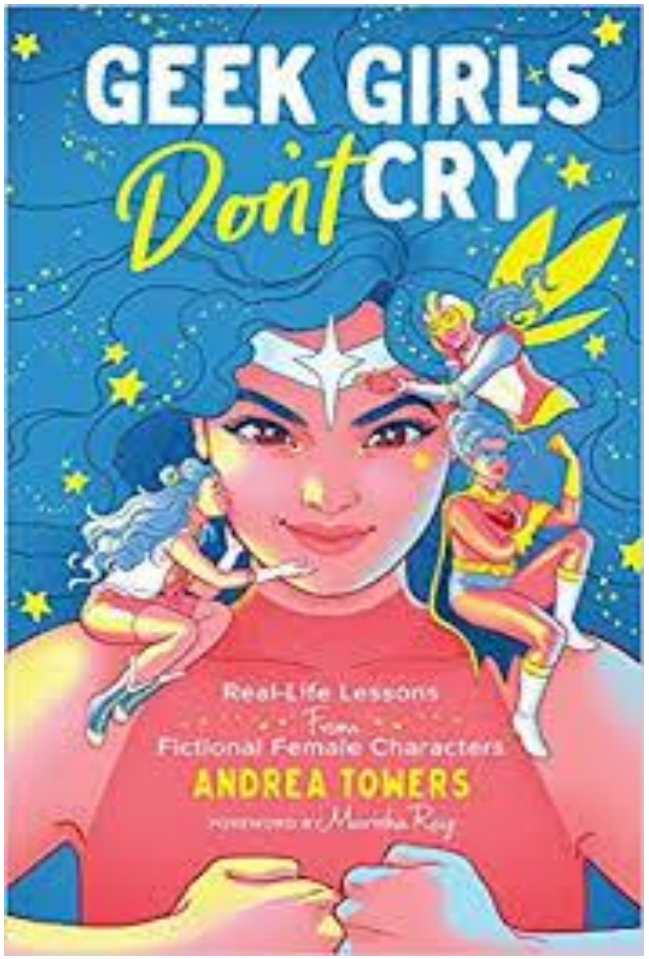

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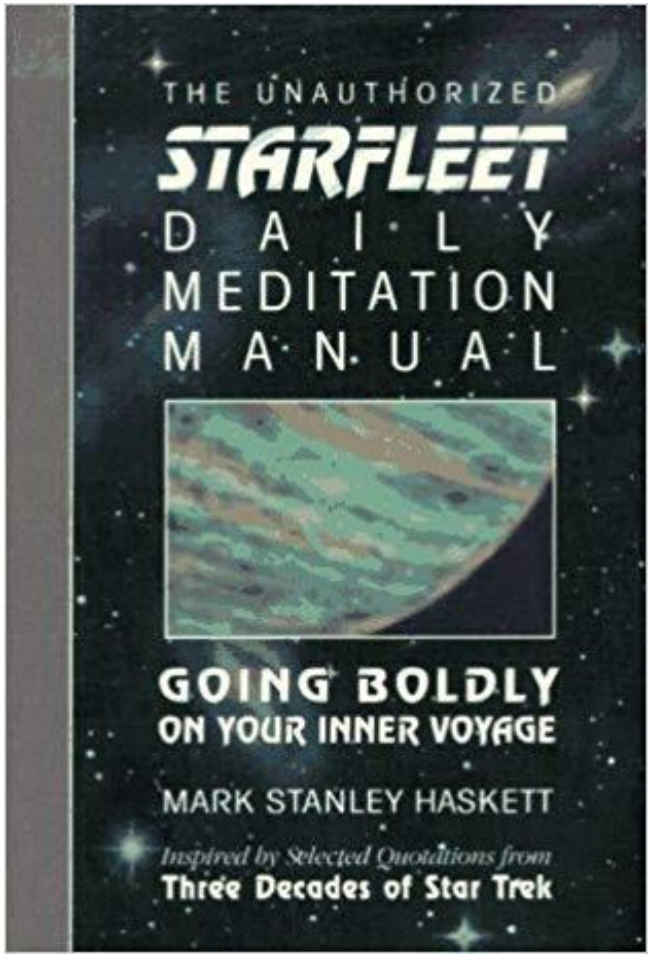
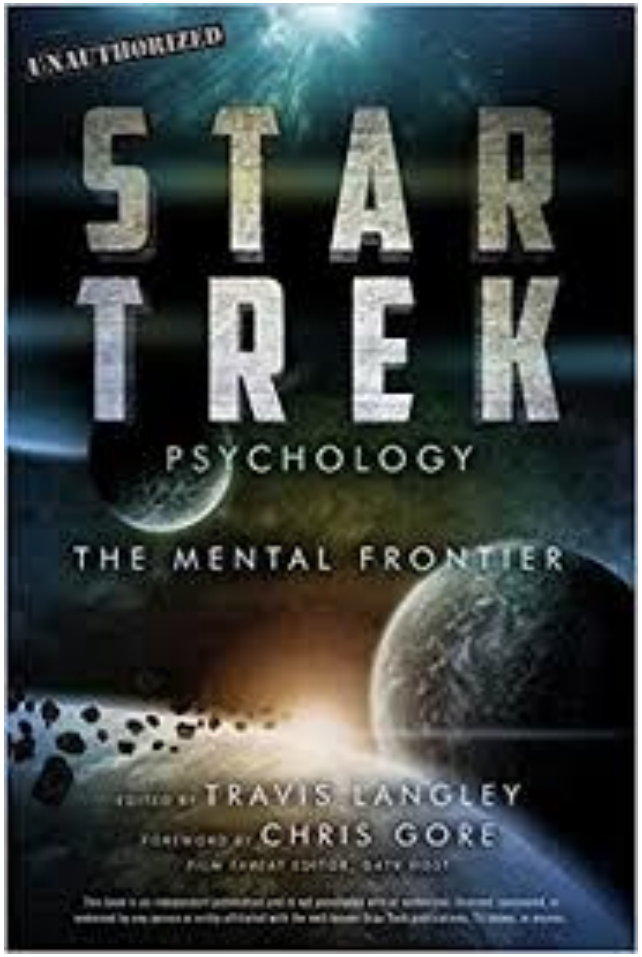
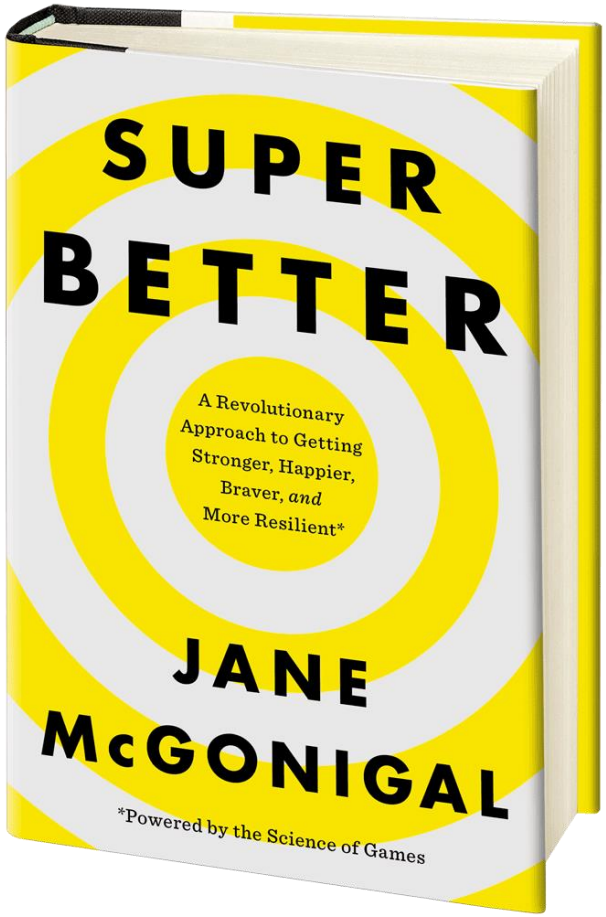
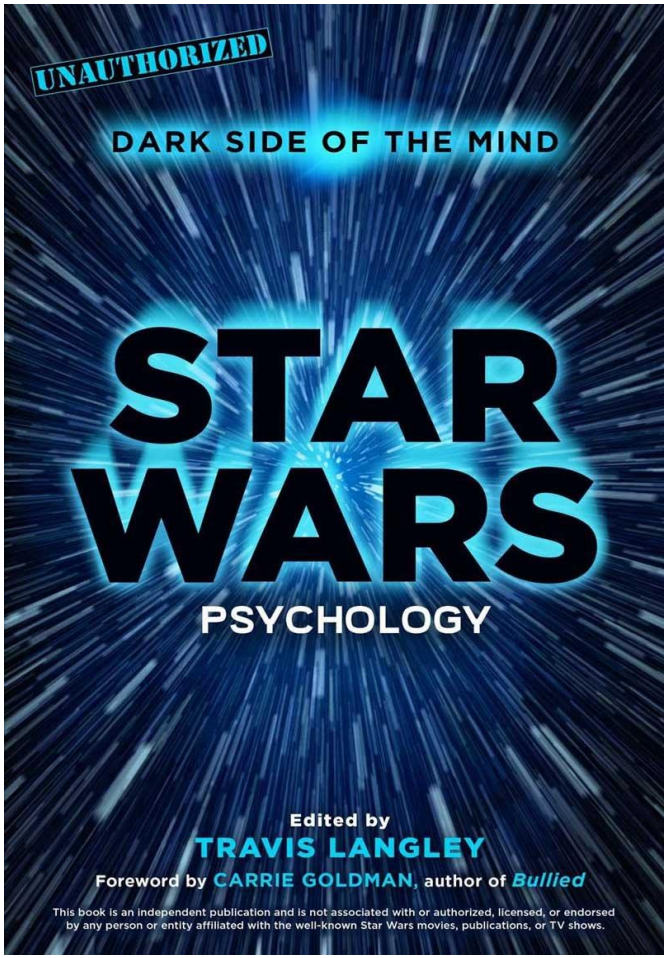




Additional resources





Additional resources

- https://www.syfy.com/syfywire/an-archive-of-our-own-how-ao3-built-a-nonprofit-fanfiction-empire-and-safe-haven

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