

Superhero Therapy Conference

Presenter Bio's

A1) The Power of Storytelling: Applying Superheroes and Supervillains in Therapy

A self-described geek, **Maria Laquerre-Diego** is a CEO and Owner who is committed to increasing access to mental health services and breaking down the stigma surrounding therapy services. As a therapist turned CEO, Maria has developed a unique perspective when it comes to mental health and the barriers surrounding mental health treatment. Influenced by her time at New Mexico State University in the Family and Consumer Science department, and University of New Hampshire's Marriage and Family Therapy department, Maria has turned her dedication to giving back and supporting future generations of therapists. In addition to supporting mental health providers, Maria takes an active role in addressing the continued stigma of mental health services through the use of pop culture – everything from movies and television shows to superheroes and Disney characters. Maria has spoken about mental health at several local events, has served as an officer on professional boards and has provided training to clinicians all over the country while maintaining her and her family's roots as New Mexico Aggies! Outside of the office, Maria can be found spending time with her family and loved ones, exploring the world through travel, and creating cosplays for herself, her husband and their two little ones. Maria is always happy to talk about Star Wars, Marvel and mental health and can be contacted through her practice website www.anewhopetc.org

Sophia Ansari, LPCC, RPT, is a Licensed Professional Clinical Counselor, Registered Play Therapist, author, educator, and owner of the Let's Play Therapy Institute. Sophia co-hosts Hero Nation, a podcast on the Geek Therapy Network, which celebrates diversity in the media and explores how to use geek culture in therapy. Sophia earned her Bachelor of Science degree in Biology from Wright State University and her Master of Arts in Mental Health Counseling from the University of Cincinnati. For more information on the Let's Play Therapy Institute visit: <https://letsplaytherapy.org>

A2) Why do we like to be scared? Mental health implications and uses of horror in treatment.

Shayna Gurvitz, LCSW, has worked in mental health over 3 years. She specializes in individual and group work with adolescents, and is passionate about integrating pop culture in treatment. She co-hosts Mental Mages, a podcast about pop culture and mental health.

Kathy Dickson, LCSW, has worked in mental health since the 90's, specializing in trauma. She also loves integrating pop culture in interventions. She currently runs an outpatient mental health clinic. She co-hosts Mental Mages, a podcast about pop culture and mental health.

A3) SuperKids: An Interactive Comic Book to Deliver Evidence-based Skills to Youth

Dr. Maria Alba is a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Eating Disorders Program at Montefiore (EDPM)/Adolescent Dialectical Behavior Therapy (A-DBT) Program at Montefiore Medical Center. She received her doctoral degree in Clinical Psychology from the Graduate School of Applied & Professional Psychology (GSAPP) at Rutgers University. Dr. Alba's areas of interest include Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), trauma, and increasing access to mental health care.

Sandra Pimentel, PhD is Chief of Child and Adolescent Psychology, Associate Director of Psychology Training, and Associate Professor of Clinical Psychology in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Medicine at Montefiore Medical Center and the Albert Einstein College of Medicine. She launched and is Director of the Anxiety and Mood Program (AMP), a specialty training program in the Child Outpatient Psychiatry Department, and co-Director of the Becoming an Emerging Adult at Montefiore (BEAM) Program.

From 2007 through 2015, Dr. Pimentel held the position of Assistant Professor of Clinical Psychology in the Division of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at the Columbia University Medical Center, where she served as Senior Psychologist and Associate Director of the Columbia University Clinic for Anxiety and Related Disorders. Dr. Pimentel specializes in cognitive behavioral treatments (CBT) for children, adolescents, and young adults with anxiety, mood, and behavioral difficulties.

In January 2008, actress **Chase Masterson** (Star Trek: DS9, The Flash, ER) began mentoring young men and women coming out of gangs at Homeboy Industries, the largest program for gang intervention and at-risk youth in the world. With an “in-the-trenches” mentoring approach, Chase has closely mentored Crips, Bloods, and other members of the world’s notorious gangs, dealing with issues of the most dangerous kinds of oppression.

With a mission to bring both transformation for offenders and healing for victims, Chase has gotten Homeboy’s young men and women into substance abuse treatment, college, job training, jobs, counseling, parenting classes and more.

In 2013, Chase founded Pop Culture Anti-Bullying Coalition with award-winning author Carrie Goldman, bringing together pop culture-fluent psychologists and educators to create mental health and social emotional learning programs for schools. The Coalition also brings mental health resources to pop culture conventions and is working to change societal norms and policies regarding bullying. Under Chase’s leadership as CEO, The Coalition’s Heroic Journey Curriculum has become the mental health program used by YMCA of the USA for children and parents, nationwide.

In 2019, Chase produced SuperKids!, the first interactive mental health comic book. Conceived and written by Dr. Janina Scarlet, SuperKids! helps children with cancer and other serious illness through loneliness, anxiety, depression, and fear.

Chase has spoken about the Coalition’s work at Google Headquarters, the United Nations, UNESCO, World Anti-Bullying Forum, International Bullying Prevention Association, TEDxVienna, the Association for Contextual Behavioral Science, and at pop culture conventions worldwide.

Abe Crawford is a geek and registered social worker who lives, works, and plays in the Treaty 7 land of Lethbridge Alberta Canada. Holding a Master of Clinical Social Work and specializing in infant, child, and adolescent mental health, Abe has spent over a decade working on the frontline with children and youth of various ages and abilities in both school and clinical settings. Abe's passion lies in combining his geeky love of Star Wars, D&D, and all things superhero, with his years of direct work with children and adolescents, to create experientially based therapeutic activities that make mental health treatment more relatable, understandable, accessible, and (most importantly) fun for people of all ages.

Janina Scarlet, PhD, is a Licensed Clinical Psychologist, a scientist, and a full-time geek. A Ukrainian-born refugee, she survived Chernobyl radiation and persecution. She immigrated to the United States at the

age of 12 with her family and later, inspired by the X-Men, developed Superhero Therapy to help patients with anxiety, depression, and PTSD. She currently works at the Center for Stress and Anxiety Management in San Diego. Janina Scarlet is the author of Superhero Therapy, Harry Potter Therapy, and Therapy Quest, as well as many contributions to the Psych Geeks Book.

K2) Self Processes as the Golden Key to the ACT Model

Kelly G. Wilson, Ph.D., is a Professor Emeritus of Psychology at the University at Mississippi and founder of OneLife Education & Training, LLC. He was the Founding President of the Association for Contextual Behavioral Science and was among the first cohort of ACBS Fellows. Dr. Wilson has devoted himself to the development and dissemination of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy and its underlying theory and philosophy for more than 30 years. He has published more than 100 articles and chapters, as well as 11 books including the *Acceptance and Commitment Therapy: The Process and Practice of Mindful Change*, *Mindfulness for Two*, and *Things Might Go Terribly, Horribly Wrong*. He has central interests in the application of behavioral principles to understanding topics such as purpose, meaning, values, and therapeutic alliance.

Dr. Wilson's love of teaching resulted in his winning multiple teaching awards at his home institution, including the Elsie M. Hood Award for Undergraduate Teaching and also the University of Mississippi Award for Excellence in Graduate Teaching and Mentoring. Dr. Wilson has presented workshops and provided consultancy in 33 countries

B1) Coping with death, grief, and loss with the aid of horror, fantasy, and superhero narratives

Christa Call, a lifelong nerd, enthusiastic Star Wars fan, and extrovert, has a PhD in Clinical Psychology with an emphasis in Forensics from Alliant International University where she completed her dissertation on the association between aggressive behavior in adults and heavy metal music; she is happy to assure fans of the genre that there is indeed no connection between the two. She is currently an Active Duty Army Officer and post-doctoral psychology resident at Tripler Army Medical Center in Honolulu, Hawaii. She has enjoyed answering many anecdotal personal research questions in her time in military psychology such as, "Can one put 'Sith' or 'Jedi' as their religion on their dog tags?" and "Is being called 'Ate-Up' a compliment?" (The answers to which are yes, and no, respectively).

Professionally, she has maintained a passion for the history of psychology, presenting several times as a guest speaker on the topic of Eugenics and Psychological Assessment, and conducted several years of research on the inter-rater reliability of the Rorschach performance assessment system. She is a member of The San Diego Psychiatric Hypnological Society, APA, and Divisions 52, 19, and 10. Her free time is spent day dreaming, reading, fiction writing, and doting on her beloved dog Scarlett, who often reminds her of the guilt of being a single working dog-mom.

Casey Jones is an author living in Los Angeles. In addition to the graphic novel All Fall Down, Casey has ghostwritten more than fifty screenplays and TV scripts, including award-winning animated features. In their spare time, they write and run immersive TTRPGs for teams spanning the globe. You can learn more at www.caseyjonescaseyjones.com.

Laura Vecchiolla, PsyD, is a clinical psychologist working in private practice based in Chicago. She is an active member of the Association for Death Education and Counseling (ADEC) and she has expertise in

working with individuals who've experienced grief, loss, and traumatic stress. Dr. Vecchiolla has always been fascinated by the mythopoetic nature of the psyche and the undeniable and enduring ways that myth and story can be incorporated into therapy and personal growth. Laura has conducted research connecting the archetypal pattern of the Hero's Journey to the experience of trauma recovery and she has published several chapter contributions that highlight how modern myths—such as Star Wars, Game of Thrones, Daredevil, and Wonder Woman—can offer paths of psychological insight and change. Currently, Dr. Vecchiolla is studying for her Certification in Thanatology (CT) with ADEC and hopes to continue to use to power of myth and storytelling to help guide people through their experiences of death, dying, and grief.

B2) Shazam: Foster Care, System Problems and Therapeutic Plans

Rachel Wethers (she/they) is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker in the states of Illinois, Michigan, and Missouri. Rachel provides virtual therapy, specializing in trauma, attachment, anxiety, and Neuro-Divergence needs and abilities. Rachel loves to be home with her family and fur friends, or searching the antique malls and garage sales for old-school games, toys, and comic books with her collector partner, David. www.thehopechest.co

B3) How I started to deal about OCD as a fearsome parasite, using ACT

Dr. Martina Migliore is a licensed psychologist with a master degree in Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT). I earned a PhD in Psychobiology and I worked for years with neuroscience. I have extensive training in evidence-based therapies, including Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT). I have over a decade of specialized training and experience treating adults and adolescents with anxiety, illness anxiety, obsessive-compulsive disorder, panic disorder, social anxiety, stress and personality disorders. I also define myself as a psychoNerd and I have always used strategies from filmography and fiction and generally pop culture to explore new dimensions of work. I am also a huge fan of tabletop role playing games, which I include in my experimental design of ever new and creative therapeutic strategies to help clients address problems that interfere with living a meaningful, enriching life.

C1) The Oreo, the King, and the Wakandan Salute: What Black Panther Shows Us About Why Representation Matters

Mercedes Samudio is a licensed clinical social worker, bestselling author, international speaker, and visionary entrepreneur. She works with parents around the world in developing a healthy parental identity with her revolutionary Parental Identity Development Model and incorporating her Shame-Proof Parenting philosophy to help reduce the shame parents experience as they raise healthy children. Mercedes is also trained in trauma-informed modalities which she uses in her work with parents to help them heal the past traumas that can influence the ways parents interact with themselves and their children. Outside of her professional life supporting parents, Mercedes is married to her best friend and soulmate and they live in sunny Sothern California with their 3 fur kids (2 cats and a dog). You can learn more about her work at <http://shameproofparenting.com>

C2) Navigating Complex Trauma and Human Trafficking with Super Powers

Brittany Greenbaum is a Trauma Specialist and the Founder and Director of A Trauma Healing Center. She strives to create a trauma-informed and compassionate environment for both her staff and clients. Brittany integrates different theories and philosophies into her services. Most central to her work is practicing compassion for self and others, while following these trauma-informed principles: creating safety, being trustworthy and transparent, collaborating and empowering the client's voice and choice, and respecting our individual and collective cultures and histories. Brittany actively engages clients in conversations around their identities and believes it is important to acknowledge our areas of privilege and oppression as they inform our lived experience. This kind of work requires a significant amount of trust and safety. Brittany seeks to earn this respect with her clients and feels honored to be able to support individuals in achieving their goals, within vulnerability and joy. Brittany earned her PhD in Clinical Psychology from Alliant International University: California School of Professional Psychology after her undergraduate work from the Johnston Center at the University of Redlands. She has trained and worked in a variety of mental health settings including: a residential program for individuals with acute mental health diagnoses, a nonprofit that provides services to adults who have experienced domestic violence and sexual assault, a private practice, and college counseling centers. Additionally, Brittany has been a group facilitator for a behavioral wellness study at a VA Medical Research Facility working with veterans from WWII to the present day. Brittany completed her dissertation on the psychological impact of sexual exploitation and is a proud former student of distinguished trauma expert Constance Dalenberg, PhD. Brittany provides one-on-one services such as coaching and mentoring, facilitates trauma-training workshops, psychoeducation webinars, and support programs. She is excited about all the different roles she occupies at ATHC.

Charlie Quinn Tebow, LMSW, is an alumnus of Washburn University with a clinical Masters in Social Work degree with certifications in Victim and Survivor services, Art Therapy, and Nonprofit Management. Charlie dedicates their life to serving others like them. Their day job as a Missing Youth Specialist provides them with opportunities to empower and engage runaway and exploited youth in foster care to overcome complex and compounded trauma, and find the path to who they want to be. Charlie is a dedicated advocate with specializations for persons who have experienced human sex trafficking, commercial sexual exploitation, childhood trauma, interpersonal violence, and other complex or compounded traumas. Charlie is part of the LGBTQ community as a nonbinary person (they/them), and a staunch leader and participant in social justice activism. They are an ally for all trans and/or persons of color, as well as dedicated activist for Black Lives Matter and Trans Lives Matter movements. Charlie has had the honor of serving as a delegate of the United Nations via the International Public Policy Institute, serving on the US Attorney's Office Kansas Working Group on Human Trafficking Task Force, and as a Victims Services Subcommittee Member for the Kansas Human Trafficking Advisory Board. Charlie has served the anti-trafficking community with both professional experiential expertise as a consultant with the US Department of Justice, US Office on Victims of Crime, Homeland Security Blue Campaign, CAST-LA, West Coast Children's Clinic, and Polaris Project. Charlie is a member of the National Survivor Network and Survivor Leaders Institute, and has delivered keynote and training sessions to professionals from around the country. Charlie is also an accomplished artist and expert in the healing arts for survivors of complex trauma.

C3) I have no clue what I'm doing!: Adulthood and the need to play to thrive

Matthew Rickmon, a seasoned storyteller with a background in psychology and counseling, has run in-person and live-streamed tabletop roleplaying games since 2019. With a Bachelor of Science in psychology and a Master of Divinity with a focus in pastoral counseling, Mr.

Rickmon is a keen, humble Certified Therapeutic Game Master, and Certified Geek Specialist through Geek Therapeutics. In further pursuit of empowering clients to grow, progress, and express their full potential, he added Certified Master Life Coach to his list of credentials in early 2022. Ultimately, where his interests, skills, and specialties intersect, Matthew, thrives in building, running, and facilitating small group, short-form campaigns centered around building and strengthening social skills.

Charlene MacPherson is a Licensed Certified Social Worker- Clinical and is the owner and director of Nerd Adventure Therapy 20 LLC. Charlene is a Certified Therapeutic Game Master through Game to Grow and Geek Therapeutics. In her private practice, she runs Therapeutically Applied Role Playing Games Social Skills groups which also include individual therapy to help process mental health and social skills goals. She has been running therapeutic games since 2019. Charlene loves helping people access mental health care through Role Playing games to help reduce stigma. Charlene's ultimate goal is to create a fun, unintimidating, supportive mental health community for gamers of all types.

Julia Stamman (she/her) owns a mental health private practice called Heart of the Realm in Austin, Texas. In her private practice, she specializes in running Dungeons and Dragons (D&D) therapy groups for adults. Julia started out working with individuals who self-identify as geeks, gamers, and misfits in 2017. She wanted to draw in folks in sub-cultures who often receive judgment or at least a lack of understanding from mental health professionals.

C4) Gamification Therapy in Wake, Sleep, Dreams, and Exposure

Dr. Isaac Taitz, Ph.D., is a licensed clinical psychologist, published author, researcher, and speaker specializing in sleep treatment and solution-focused therapy for patients of all ages. He earned his Doctorate and Masters in Clinical Psychology from Palo Alto University and his Bachelors in Human Development with honors from Cornell University.

Dr. Taitz's sleep specialties include Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Insomnia, Imagery Rehearsal Therapy for nightmares, as well as Lucid Dreaming Therapy for grief/loss and a variety of other conditions. In addition to treating specific sleep issues, he applies his behavioral sleep health expertise towards enhancing patients' abilities to recharge and deal with other mental health issues.

Dr. Taitz uses a solution-focused approach that builds on clients' strengths with empathy and occasional humor. For his child patients, he specializes in Parent-Child Interaction Therapy - an approach to improve overall behavior and responsiveness to parents. In addition, Dr. Taitz collaborates with schools (teachers, IEP & 504 committees, etc.), coaches, and doctors to find the best, integrated approach for individuals and families.

Dr. Taitz treats patients struggling with depression, anxiety, inattention, impulsivity, chronic pain, post-concussion syndrome, bereavement, relationships, and autism spectrum behaviors. He also conducts diagnostic assessments for Autism Spectrum Disorder, ADHD, learning disabilities, and other disorders.

Michael Herold helps people who struggle with confidence and low self-esteem to overcome their anxiety.

Living with a neuromuscular condition, he spent the first 30 years of his life feeling deeply insecure. Based on what he learned himself, he is now using fun exercises grounded in behavioral science to help others step outside their comfort zone and find their confidence.

In the past five years, he has worked with over 2,000 people, including entrepreneurs, special forces, actors, stuntmen, parents, and kids.

The Art of Charm podcast he co-produces has over 200 million downloads and features bestselling authors, the world's leading psychologists, successful entrepreneurs, and once, even himself.

He is also the Strategic Consultant for the Psychologists off the Clock Podcast, a show focused on mental health and hosted by three clinical psychologists. Michael has spoken about finding courage and chasing your dreams at TEDx, in front of members of parliament and once in a cinema with 500 kids high on sugary popcorn.

He is also presenting on psychological topics like social anxiety (ACBS World Conference), the Imposter Syndrome (Anxiety and Depression Association of America), values-based living (DGM), and conversation techniques (Wise Minds Summit).

In a previous life, he has been a character animator working on award-winning movies and TV shows like The Penguins of Madagascar and Kung Fu Panda. This was before he realized that helping people to live a meaningful life is much more rewarding than creating Saturday morning cartoons (even though the long nights in the studio allowed him to brew his own beer in the office closet).

Benjamin Taitz is a Registered Psychological Associate in CA working in both clinical and forensic psychology. Benjamin is a Psychology Doctoral Candidate at California Southern University, working on his dissertation examining the effectiveness of Geek Therapy and connecting with clients' pop culture interests in helping build rapport and engage clients in the therapeutic process. As a clinician, Benjamin specializes in incorporating superhero characters and other pop culture elements into therapy to help clients develop skills, identify strengths, and learn how to be a hero in real life. Benjamin also has an interest in the "messier" side of psychology, including forensic psychology and serious mental illness. Benjamin previously worked for 5 years as a social worker in psychiatric hospitals. He is an avid mental health advocate and the host of two new podcasts! My Hero Therapy: examining the psychology of the My Hero Academia anime and the lessons we can learn about being heroes IRL; and Mental Health Quest: demystifying therapy and mental health services to help destigmatize help-seeking behaviors. check them out wherever you listen to podcasts!

D1) The Use of superhero Therapy with our heroes (active duty, first responders): How has geek and hero therapy helped active-duty first responders open in treatment?

Sara Roldan has dedicated her career to support the Military Community, First Responder, and serving as an advocate for those with invisible disabilities. She has found her passion in helping individuals living with chronic pain, emotional or physical, to mitigate their symptoms and improve their quality of life. Mentor for students at CASA SDSU, speaker for inclusion and invisible disabilities awareness. Sara Roldan holds an M.S. in Homeland Security from SDSU, with the focus of her studies on inclusion and mental health and is completing her Doctoral program of Clinical Psychology.

Sara Roldan is a bilingual Clinician, Spanish/English, specializing in Behavioral Health and Neuropsychology a registered Psychological Associate with the California Board of Psychology with several years of experience working in hospitals, outpatient and community mental health programs, and private practice. She specializes in helping people recover from PTSD, anxiety, and depression disorders. She uses Superhero and Geek Therapy where she incorporates clients' favorite elements of pop culture into evidence-based therapy to help them to rewrite their redemption story and become their own version of hero. Her professional geek therapy interests include the Marvel Cinematic Universe, Star Trek, Anime, video games, and all Geeky things. Sara believes that therapy doesn't have to be boring and loves to use fun and innovative pop-culture based interventions in her work.

D2) Improving Mindfulness and Therapeutic Connection with LEGO

Dr. Hassler is a Licensed Clinical Psychologist hailing from Buffalo, NY. She is trained in multiple therapy modalities, specifically Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy. Dr. Hassler received her doctoral degree in Clinical Psychology from Medaille College in December of 2018; however, has been treating patients since 2013 in various settings such as schools, psychiatric hospitals, private practices, and state and private agencies for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Her focus is mainly on treating children and adolescents struggling with anxiety, depression, and trauma; however, does work with adults struggling with similar disorders as well as personality disorders. Dr. Hassler identifies herself as a full-time geek whose heart has been claimed by all things Batman. In addition, she enjoys all things Marvel and has a penchant for building LEGO. Dr. Hassler currently works in private practice incorporating all things geeky into her therapy. GO BILLS!!

Dr. Yoni Sobin (who also goes by the moniker 'The Nerd Therapist in NYC') is a licensed Clinical Psychologist trained in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT). He received his doctoral degree from the Ferkauf Graduate School of Psychology in June of 2016, and has been providing care for patients since 2012. His practice is located in the financial district of downtown Manhattan. Dr. Sobin is a generalist, with a specialty in treating Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), Tourette's/Tic Disorders, ADHD, and generalized anxiety and depression. In his spare time, Dr. Sobin is a lover of Lord of the Rings, a fan of LEGO building, and all things superhero.

D3) Behind the Mask: Exploring the Psychological Appeal of Cosplay

Dr. Serrano is a mental health clinician with over 16 years of varied clinical experiences in community mental health counseling centers, private practice, and inpatient facilities in rural, suburban, and urban areas within the Midwest. He has an emphasis in treating behavioral challenges, mood and anxiety disorders, and relational difficulties amongst individuals, families, and couples ranging from childhood to geriatrics. He is an avid comic book fan and has presented his research on the influence of comic books on moral development to various nationwide cities and audiences. Lastly, Dr. Serrano is also a founding member of team Psychocomicology, a group of mental health professionals that study and nationally present on the interconnectedness between comic books and their psychological significance to people and society.

Dr. Edgar A. Ramos is a Licensed Clinical Psychologist with over 20 years of varied clinical experience. He currently owns and operates a group practice within the Chicagoland area. Dr. Ramos is also the Assistant Dean of the Health, Science and Technology Department at Concordia University Chicago. He is an avid comic book collector since 1985 and has merged his passion and love

for psychology and comics by intertwining them both in the way he works with children and adolescents as well as presenting with team Psychocomicology on the integration of comic books on mental health.

Samantha Ramos is a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor in the state of Illinois. As a Certified Clinical Trauma Professional, she conducts therapy with all age groups. When working with young children she incorporates play therapy and art therapy with superhero culture. Samantha also works in conjunction with the VA, providing PTSD assessments with veterans. As an adjunct professor and clinical supervisor, she uses superhero and comic book culture as clinical examples in the classroom to help students grasp complex symptomatology and diagnosis. Samantha is also a member of team Psychocomicology, a group of mental health professionals that present nationally on the link between psychology and comic books.