

Motivation

- First, I wanted to provide some motivation for this presentation – why specifically superheroes?
- Recently, there's a trend in popular culture "main character energy" - where basically you try to affirm that you are the main character. There're endless examples of content related to this, so here we have "becoming the main character"

Prime Example

Guiding Qs

- Is it damaging to your happiness to think of yourself as the superhero or protagonist of your life? How does this change the way we tell a story about our lives?
- In this presentation, I want to argue that the main character energy symbolized by superheroes is problematic, and provide food for thought for some critical distance when you watch the next superhero movie

History

- Although the term 'superhero' was used as early as 1917 to describe a public figure of great talents or accomplishments, they really came to life during wartime
- Fun fact: In the very first Captain America comic book there's a scene where he's literally punching Adolf Hitler in the face, and then in the 1950s he was recast as "Captain America: Commie Smasher"
- The golden age of superheroes coincided with times of war and economic depression
- Two points I want to make with this history, focusing on the Golden Age and the Silver Age:
 - 1. Political depression that played a role in their formation imbued in superhero stories a form of politically problematic individualism and elitism
 - 2. Modern superheroes all have a sad backstory; pain and trauma somehow makes them better and more virtuous and deserving of greater things

Golden Age

- Segal then talks about an example of political depression: she writes about the sense of helplessness, failure, depression and anxiety experienced by people who tried to prevent the election of Bush and the military invasion. Political depression occurs when you are forced to recognize the limits of your power -- which is one individual during wartime.
- To bring in more of Haybron's theory. Haybron's three theory consists of three areas, attunement, engagement, endorsement. All of these three are nearly impossible during wartime. Taking attunement as an example, here is what Haybron writes :. The three components of attunement are tranquility, confidence and expansiveness. During war, there is the constant threat of unknown danger, uncertain victory,
- Two points I want to make with this:

- 1. Political depression during the golden age of superheroes; individualism -> politically problematic. Superheroes were born out of a desire to see good triumph over evil.
- 2. Psychological trauma during the silver age of superheroes: all superheroes have a sad backstory; pain and trauma somehow makes them better and more virtuous and deserving of greater things

Silver Age

- Rise of psychiatry and psychoanalysis, fantasy of happiness in the counterculture
- Many are coming to define...quote
- In Segal's analysis of Davis quote, she then goes on to say there are "diametrically opposed" methods of doing this – you can share find commonality with your people and transform this into a shared cause, or bear this alone
- What is the story that superheroes tell?
- Internalized depression or trauma makes you stronger; you are able to act and become powerful due to what you have suffered through
- where our identity is defined by our some core internalized trauma. "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger" – a way of legitimizing and justifying the bad things that happen to you as being good in the end

Batman and Tim

- Both fought for social justice at work? When the director Nolan created Batman, he said he wanted to emphasize, "[i]n America we take for granted a stability to our class and social structure that has never been sustained elsewhere in the world" – in other words, the struggle of society against injustice and chaos
- To be clear, Tim Black was not someone who saw themselves as a superhero or atypical in any sense (although I think he is in the best possible way). On page 7, he says "my story's typicalness is precisely where its value lies"

Call to action

- Batman's psyche – aimed at vengeance (Achilles). This is a quote from Joker, but ironically and intentionally it describes Batman as well.
- "We had paid our dues, worked hard, served our country in two world wars, built businesses, and provided the nation with some of its finest and best-loved entertainment. But the city and the schools were run by men who didn't like us, and in some instances despised us.." (p.99, *Sacred Ground*)
- Segal goes on to say – "what we love inspired in us a sense of ontological rootedness". Without love, "both your soul and your whole world might subsist forever in some desert-like state of ontological impoverishment", and the things we love confirm our existence and make

Relationships

- Batman has Alfred and Gordon (but Gordon died), Tim belongs to a community
- “Within the Black Belt, we created these parallel economic institutions – essentially we build a parallel economy”
- “With a sprawling extended family of aunts, uncles, and watchful neighbours”
- “There was always a neighbourhood identity and a feeling of neighbourliness”
- “Nor was there a psychological feeling of depression. It was the Depression but we were not depressed.”
- “Anyway, the whole black population of Champaign came out to see us play. We lost, but amongst the blacks we were heroes. That sense of community, of mutual support, was so important.” (23)
- On the other hand, whether Batman fails or triumphs, he is alone

Takeaway

- *When you win you don't know what to do*
- Tim's way of telling his story with the war v.s people who see war as the meaning of their lives (lost meaning if the triumph of his cause)