

Super Heros

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Since the early 90's, there has been talk of how media violence and aggressive behaviors have affected youth. Worried that violence was creeping into their children's lives, a group of child care centers in Melbourne have declared themselves "superhero-free zones", wherein children are prohibited from wearing any symbols or costuming of their favorite superheroes, as well as pretending to be or have any super powers. They claim that today's superheroes aren't suitable for today's children, and "cause their imaginations to be stretched in potentially harmful ways." Where will these daycare police draw the line? If a kid can't be Superman or Spiderman, can he be Buzz Light-year? Is Spongebob Square pants a threatening archetype?

At this rate, next, we'll be seeing our primary school teachers frown across the desk and pronounce, "I'm dreadfully sorry to have to inform you of this, but your little Benny is showing signs of an imagination. It's not the sort of thing we encourage here at the Modern Children's Facilitation Complex. Yesterday, we caught him wearing a cape, and we're fairly sure he was having fun". The whole notion is completely wrong. Sure, I have to admit, I still have scars from those oh-so-vicious "batgirl vs. cat woman" battles, but I'm not any more violent for them. If anything, we should be pleased that kids aren't trying to immitate such paragons as "Dubya", or worse, Brittany Spears. In my speech, I will show that superheroes, or at least 3 of them, are excellent role models for children and even adults. In looking at Spiderman, the Powerpuff girls, and Harry Potter, we will see that superheroes aren't the villains they're made out to be.

Lets look at my first example, one of the most well known superheroes of today, Spiderman. (1) As a role model, Spiderman spins an empowering web, both literally and figuratively. Why? Because he claims all his superhuman abilities are the results of "working out, getting plenty of rest, and you know, eating your green vegetables". Just what mum always told you, right? Now, don't get me wrong, he's by no means perfect, as critics are quick to point out. He "takes the law into his own hands" and gives readers the impression that force is the one quick fix for all of life's injustices. (2) Here we see Spiderman battling one villain, the Green Goblin, who wants nothing more than to kill Spiderman for standing in his way.

Undoubtedly, as one anonymous critic, believed by some to be a follower of Rev. Jerry Falwell, points out, "There is every reason to believe that Spiderman is the underlying reason for the outward expressions of hatred and intolerance that we see in our everyday world." Right- because we have so many primary school vigilantes. Aside from eating his veggies, Spiderman wakes up each day with a goal, a desire to give himself unselfishly and unconditionally to helping those in need. Spidey tells his archenemy, the Green Goblin, that he helps others simply "because it is right". Furthermore, he realizes the fact that "With great power comes great responsibility", a concept that is key in today's society as the youth become more empowered. Despite his own confusions, doubts, and hurts, Peter accepts the truth of the advice and chooses to sacrifice himself for the bigger Self by helping others, even if it means turning down that extra lovin' from the girl next door.

In the case of my second example (3), the Powerpuff girls, Bubbles, Blossom and Buttercup, it was sugar and spice and everything nice- and an accidental dash of Chemical X, that made perfect little girls into perfect little girls who's specialty is kicking major butt, and saving the world before bedtime. Indeed, these three girls are, despite their inherent power, and role as protectors of Townsville, still little girls who wear dresses and play with dolls. Bubbles is a sweet and loving little girl who likes to draw pictures and sleep with stuffed animals. Buttercup is the spitfire tomboy, fond of fighting monsters and teasing her sisters. Blossom, the leader of the group, is scholarly and intelligent, always respectful of her elders. (4)

However, there are those who are a little skeptical of this mysterious chemical-X. "Drugs I tell you! Chemical-X... ecstasy... don't you see the connection?!" exclaims one. Indeed, these three girls are little more than glorified drug addicts-Right. Or maybe they're "loose women cleverly cloaked in innocence!" as suggested by one Powerpuff hater, who seems to believe that "sugar and spice" is a much darker innuendo than we want to believe. But couldn't this "chemical-x" also be the extra X chromosome they have? After all, the Powerpuff girls are good role models for young girls, especially when we take into consideration the fact that they are strong female characters capable of rational thought and conflict resolution.

Together they are three young girls who have dedicated their lives to fighting crime and all forces of evil, (5) and usually win their battles against all manner of maniacal villains, like the evil-genious Mojo Jojo, seen here, with nothing more than their cunning and wit. In this

particular episode, Mojo Jojo steals some of the chemical X for himself, in hopes of developing superpowers of his own, however the girls are able to trick him into drinking the antidote serum, and then putting him in jail. In portraying three very different types of female as strong and capable, these super girls turn standard ideas of gender roles upside down. The Powerpuff Girl's showcases a world free of stereotypes and exhibit's the female role in such a world, where one can be both feminine and powerful at the same time. It goes without saying that this is key in a world where many young girls and women are driven to conform to certain stereotypes of what is desirable and what is required for power.

Not all superheros come out of comics and cartoons, however; some, like Harry Potter, can be found in the library. (6) Harry is a young wizard at Hogwarts school of Witchcraft and Wizardry, torn between a world he's grown up in, and the world of magic. Harry is a person, and a hero, with whom most people can identify, and find comfort in. Either that, or he just pisses them off- but I've always said that if you can manage to anger the right and the left equally, you must be doing something right.

He is kind, generous, sharing, confidant, and stands up for what is right, regardless of the potential repercussions for himself. He shows empathy towards those who are hurt, and respects not only his elder wizards, but his peers as well, muggle and wizard alike. In the midst of all this, he is also an ordinary boy: he has a rival, he pulls pranks, sneaks out, and even falls in love. (7) In one particular incident, Harry and Ron steal an enchanted car in order to return to Hogwarts on time, after the train leaves without them. Quite possibly the most important message that the character of Harry Potter conveys is that with enough will power, and a little help from our friends, we too can do just about anything we want to. Well, almost anything at least- (8) I think Quidditch, is a bit out of the question for those of us without flying broomsticks and the enchanted golden Snitch. Here we see Harry chasing the Snitch in the championship match, and eventually securing a win for his team, Gryffendor.

To those that claim that anything glorifying this world of magic will inevitably "fuel a fascination that leads to irreparable psychological and spiritual damage" need to take a step back and realize that more good will come of this than harm. After all, there are worse things Sally could be doing after school than burning love notes over candles in her room or concocting potions of kool-aid and vinegar for her latest crush to drink, right? In reading, or watching, as Harry

continues to grow and mature, we see a figure that younger children can look up to, as well as one who might have a thing or two to remind those of us who are a little bit older.

Superheroes are excellent role models. Children see in heroes what they yearn to see in themselves: the ability to overcome weaknesses, fear, or insecurity, and be brave, courageous, and kind. Children need superheroes, and what is more, so do adults. The word "superhero" implies somebody not normal; better in all aspects. It also implies someone who is genuinely good, someone to look up to- not necessarily someone who is perfect. Remember, all superheroes are humans, whether they can leap tall buildings or not, and that is what makes them all the more spectacular as well as inspiring. In the words of Peter Parkers's Aunt May, "There's a hero inside all of us, that keeps us honest, gives us strength, make us noble, and finally allows us to die with pride, even though sometimes we have to be steady and give up the things we thought we wanted the most. So wear your underpants on the outside, put on those radioactive lenses and let's save the world!

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