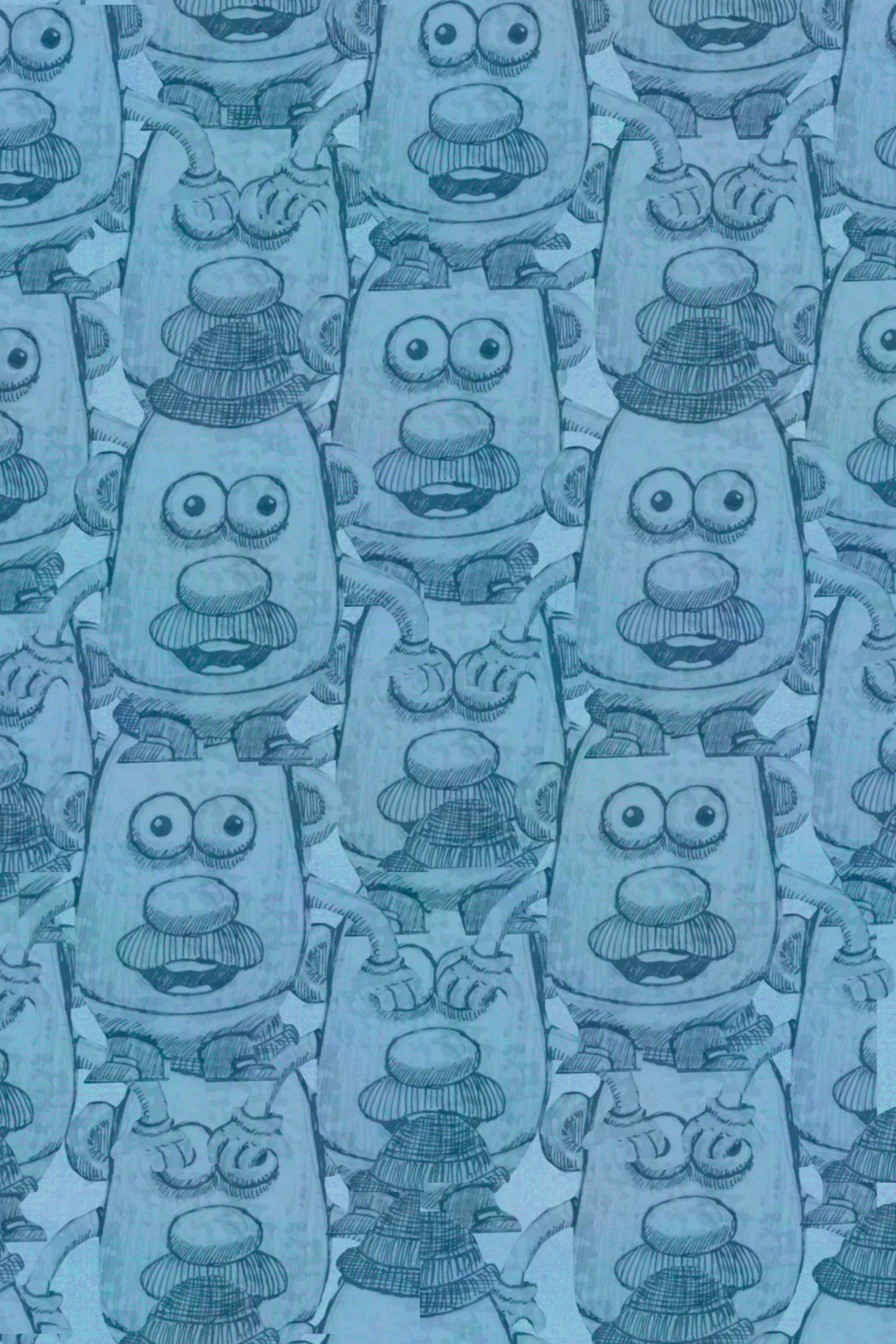


The background of the entire image is a textured, painterly gradient of red and orange, resembling a sunset or a fiery sky. In the center, there is a dark silhouette of a superhero figure, seen from the back. The figure has a broad, muscular back and a cape that flows down towards the bottom of the frame. The text is overlaid on the upper and lower portions of the silhouette.

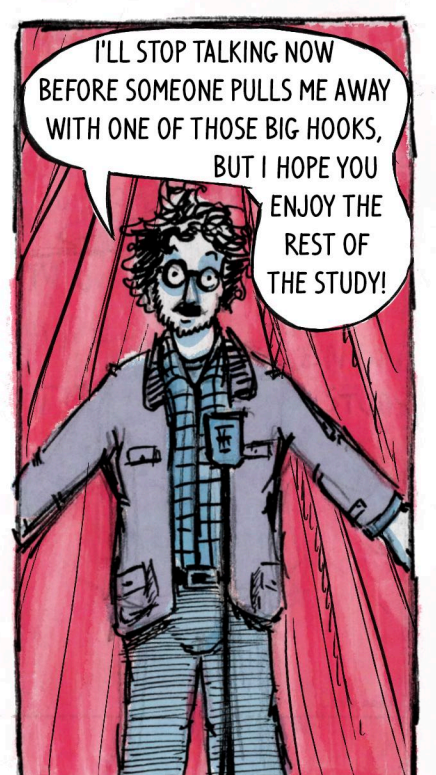
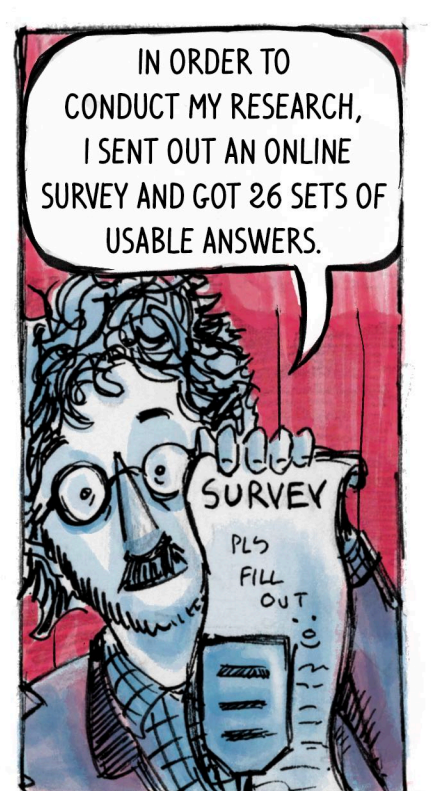
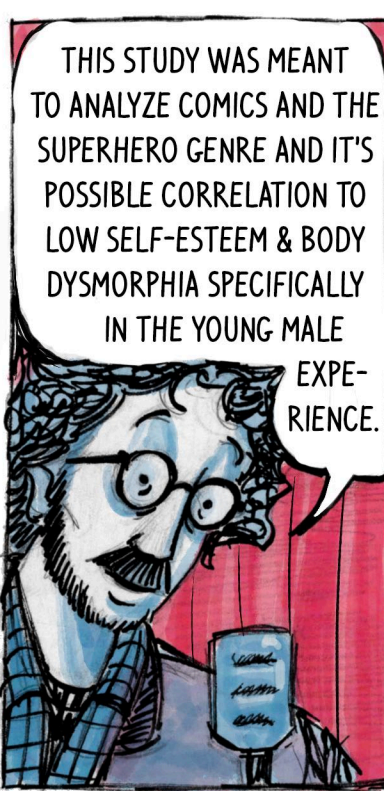
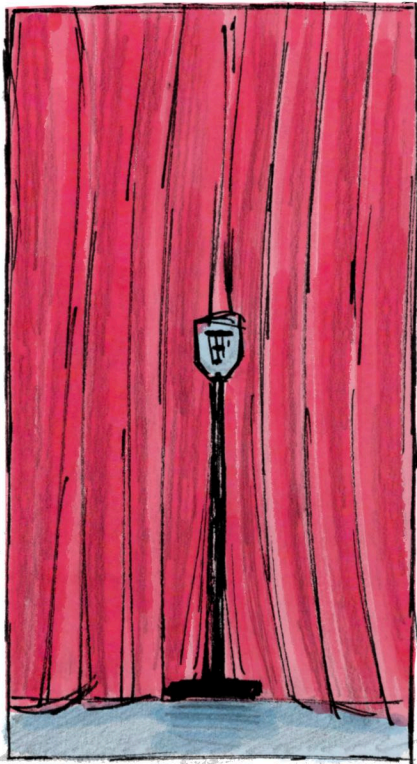
**"It's A BIRD!
It's A PLANE!
It HAS UNREALISTIC
B°DY PR°P°RTi°NS!":**

**A GRAPHIC STUDY OF THE
SUPERHERO GENRE AND ITS POSSIBLE
CORRELATION TO BODY DYSMORPHIA
IN THE TEENAGE MALE EXPERIENCE**

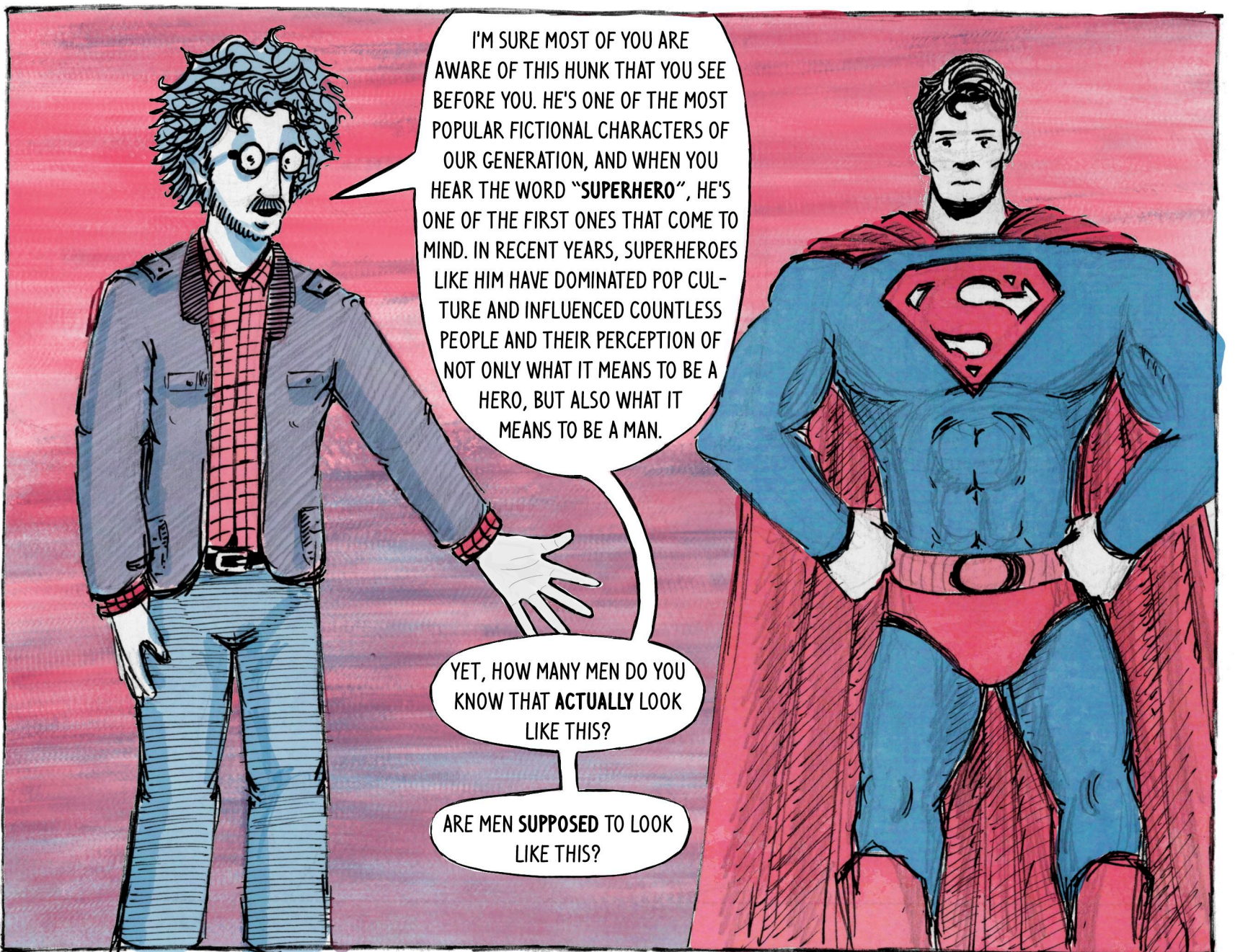
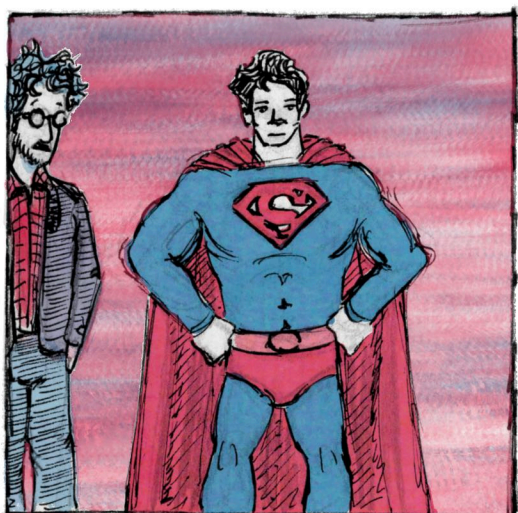
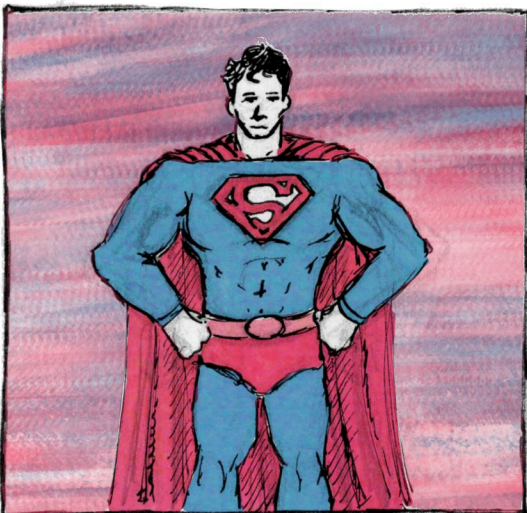
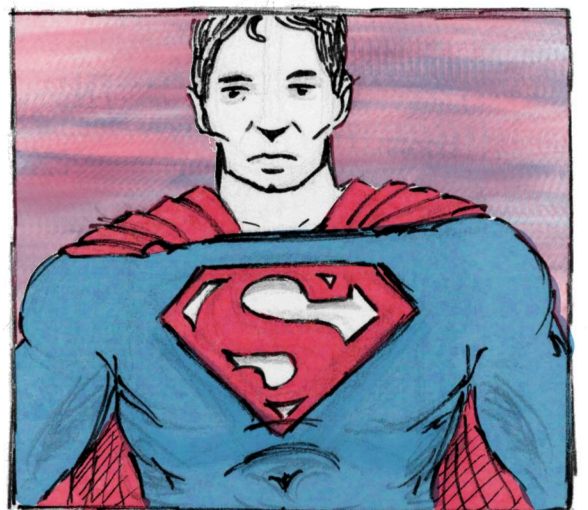
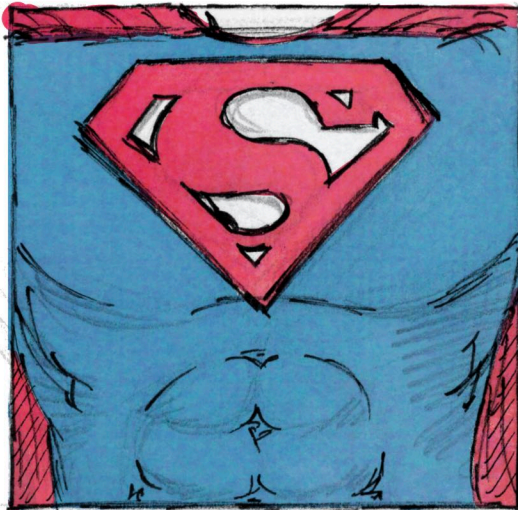
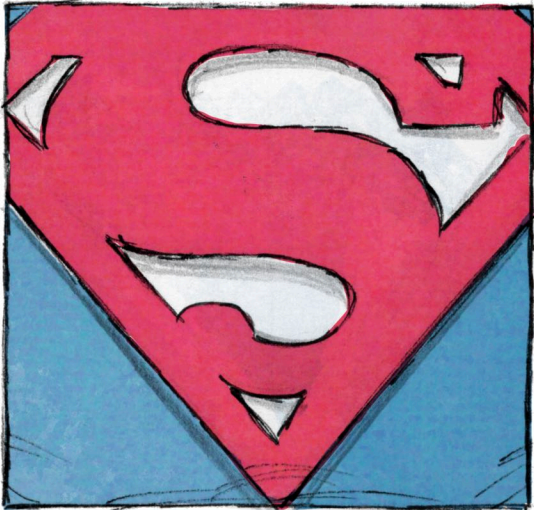
BY STEFAN VALENTI

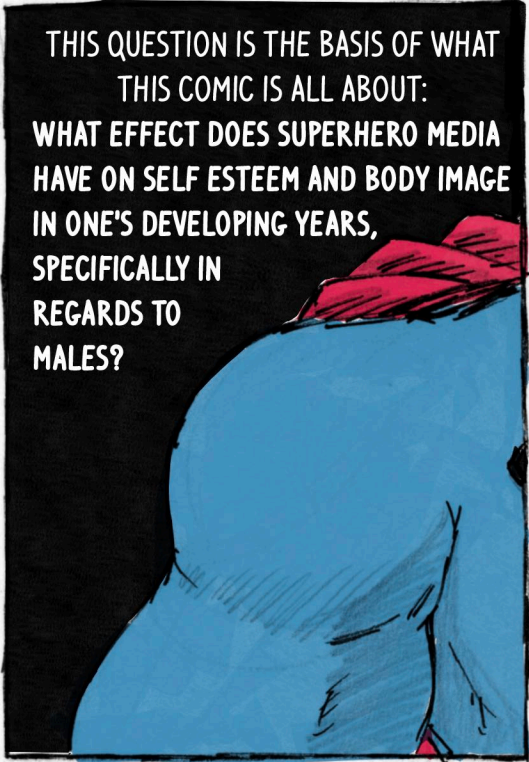


ABSTRACT

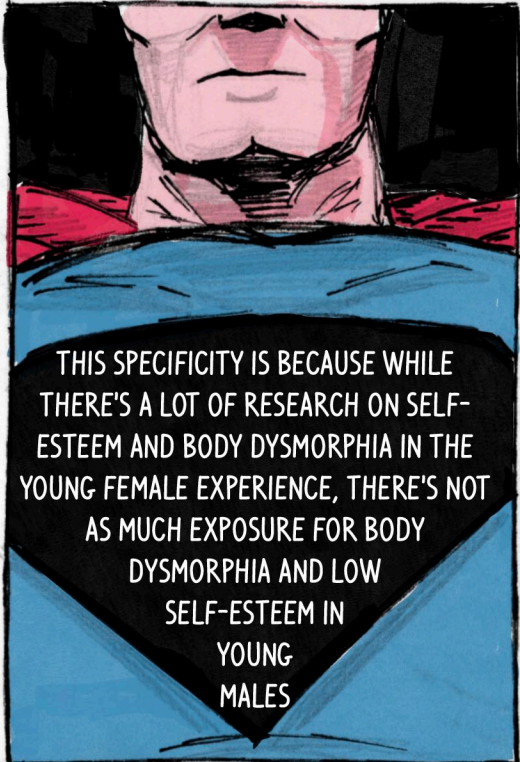


INTRODUCTION





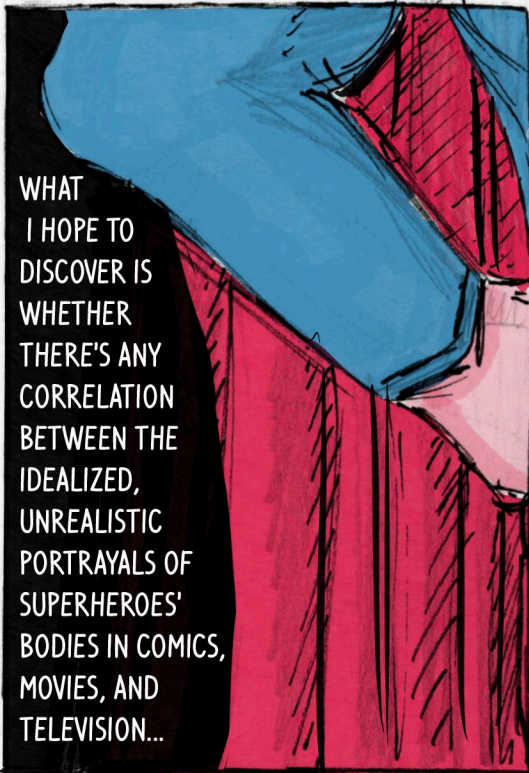
THIS QUESTION IS THE BASIS OF WHAT
THIS COMIC IS ALL ABOUT:
WHAT EFFECT DOES SUPERHERO MEDIA
HAVE ON SELF ESTEEM AND BODY IMAGE
IN ONE'S DEVELOPING YEARS,
SPECIFICALLY IN
REGARDS TO
MALES?



THIS SPECIFICITY IS BECAUSE WHILE
THERE'S A LOT OF RESEARCH ON SELF-
ESTEEM AND BODY DYSMORPHIA IN THE
YOUNG FEMALE EXPERIENCE, THERE'S NOT
AS MUCH EXPOSURE FOR BODY
DYSMORPHIA AND LOW
SELF-ESTEEM IN
YOUNG
MALES



THIS LACK OF EXPOSURE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF AN ISSUE THAT CAN EMOTIONALLY DISTRESS YOUNG MEN ARGUABLY CREATES A RELUCTANCE FOR THEM TO EXPRESS THEIR TRUE FEELINGS, THUS REINFORCING TOXICALLY MASCULINE BEHAVIOR WITHIN THESE YOUNG MEN.



WHAT
I HOPE TO
DISCOVER IS
WHETHER
THERE'S ANY
CORRELATION
BETWEEN THE
IDEALIZED,
UNREALISTIC
PORTRAYALS OF
SUPERHEROES'
BODIES IN COMICS,
MOVIES, AND
TELEVISION...



WITH SELF-ESTEEM
AND/OR BODY IMAGE IN THE TEENAGE
MALE EXPERIENCE.



LET'S LOOK AT THE HYPOTHESIS!

Hypothesis: There is a positive correlation between superhero media and both low self-esteem and body dysmorphia.



HUH...

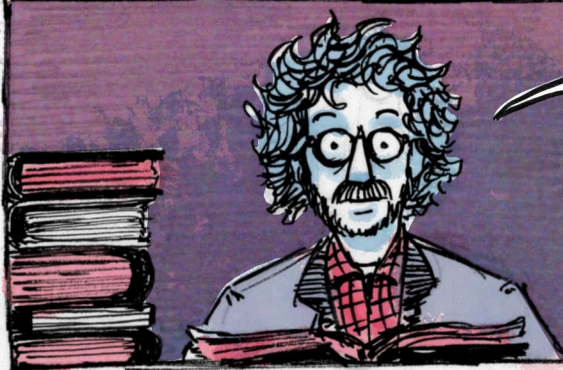


DEFINITELY
SOME
INTERESTING
IDEAS IN
HERE...



LET'S
PUT THEM
TO THE
TEST!

PRELIMINARY RESEARCH



BEFORE CREATING AND DISTRIBUTING A SURVEY, I WANTED TO DO SOME PRELIMINARY RESEARCH ON WHAT SOME OTHER SIMILAR STUDIES DID TO CONDUCT THEIR EXPERIMENTS IN REGARDS TO METHODOLOGY, AND WHAT RESULTS THEY ENDED UP WITH.

HERE'S SOME OF THE NOTABLE TAKEAWAYS:

Reference 1:
Rising dysmorphia among adolescents : A cause for concern.

Authors: Himanshu, Avneet Kaur, Ashishjot Kaur, & Gaurav Singla

This was a cross-sectional study where 186 students of a premedical preperation class took a questionnaire to meant to search for body dysmorphia. Results showed that, generally speaking, females were more disatisfied with their bodies than the males were.

However, they discovered that the males and females were mostly discontent about different things; men, according to the research, were mostly self-conscious about lacking muscular bodies, acne, height, weight, and hair thinning. From this, we can see that dysmorphia in men about their physiques does exist.

Reference 2:
Male Body Image Portrayals on Instagram

Authors: Gültzow, T. (1), Schneider, F. (1), Hoving, C. (1), & Guidry, J. P. D. (2). (n.d.)

This study focused on the negative effects of social media on males sense of body dissatisfaction by doing a quantitative analysis of 1000 instagram posts by men or depicting men, in order to understand how the male body is generally portrayed on the app.

They found that most posts depicted muscular/lean men and that posts that depicted this kind of man on average receieved more likes, comments, etc., than those that didn't. Most posts claimed to promote health/wellness instead of promoting apperence; however, the study notes that constantly seeing lean men can be harmful, since it doesn't necessarily motivate men to be more healthy.

Reference 3:
Media Exposure, Online Appearance Interaction, Internalization, Social Comparison and Male Body Dissatisfaction- An Integrated Examination from Sociocultural Perspective.
Author: N/A

This paper analyzed the effect of mass-media exposure on body dissatisfaction in young males by conducting a survey, which was taken by 791 undergraduate males from Northwest, Northeast and Southeast parts of China.

Results showed that new media exposure to the ideal male body was connected to body-fat dissatisfaction in young males. This paper noted that both body muscle and body fat disatfaction in young males after mass media exposure were met with internalization and social comparison. This finding implies that men are negatively influenced by media exposure, and often internalize feelings of body disatfaction due to societal expecatation.

Reference 4:
Superheroes and masculinity: Unmasking the gender performance of heroism

Authors: Parson, Sean, (Ed.), Schatz, J. L., (Ed).

This book that examined the forms of masculinity (i.e., restorative and toxic) that are promoted by superhero narratives in order to explore how gender expressions function in our society. It explores the **implicit hypermasculine nature of superhero naratives** while also looking at the **toxicity of popular geek culture that it directly results in.**

Hypermasculinity within superhero narratives, I'd argue, is represented by the abusrd anatomies of the heroes being portrayed; From this book, we can understand the intersectionality between hypermasculine values in society and men's sense of self.



AFTER READING THESE REFERENCES AS WELL AS OTHER STUDIES, HERE'S MY MAIN TAKEAWAY: MOST MEN NEED A HUG BUT AREN'T WILLING TO ADMIT IT.

BUT THAT'S ENOUGH READING! LET'S GET TO THE —...



I DECIDED TO BEGIN MY SURVEY IN A VERY CLASSIC FASHION; LIKE MOST GREAT SURVEYS, MY SURVEY BEGINS WITH SOME BASIC DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS.

THE POINT OF THIS WAS TO
A) GET AN ESTIMATE FOR THE AVERAGE AGE OF MY PARTICIPANT POOL, AND B) CONFIRM THAT THE ANSWERS I USED WERE FROM PEOPLE WHO IDENTIFIED AS MALE (BECAUSE THAT'S KIND OF THE POINT OF THIS STUDY).



DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

- AGE
- GENDER IDENTITY

NEXT UP, I ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THEIR LEVELS OF SUPERHERO MEDIA CONSUMPTION. SIMILARLY TO THE DEMOGRAPHICS QUESTIONS, THIS IS MEANT TO CATEGORIZE BY GIVING SOME LEVEL OF QUANTITATIVE DATA.

I ASKED THESE QUESTIONS THOUGH IN A WAY WHERE I ENCOURAGED PARTICIPANTS TO ELABORATE ON THEIR ANSWERS, SO I COULD GET SOME QUALITATIVE DATA AS WELL. I DIDN'T ONLY WANT TO SEE HOW ENGAGED THEY WERE WITH THE SUPERHERO GENRE; I WANTED TO SEE WHAT SPECIFICALLY ENGAGED THEM ABOUT THE GENRE IN BOTH THE PAST AND PRESENT.



SUPERHERO MEDIA CONSUMPTION

- AGE THEY STARTED CONSUMING SUPERHERO MEDIA & RATE OF CONSUMPTION AT THAT AGE
- IS IT STILL A BIG PART OF THEIR LIFE? ARE THEY MORE OR LESS ENGAGED COMPARED TO WHEN THEY WERE YOUNGER?
- FAVORITE COMIC CHARACTER NOW VS FAVORITE CHARACTER WHEN THEY WERE YOUNGER
- MOST APPEALING ASPECTS OF THEIR FAVORITE CHARACTER WHEN THEY WERE YOUNGER
- FIRST EXPOSURE TO SUPERHERO MEDIA

THESE NEXT COUPLE OF QUESTIONS WERE MEANT TO GAUGE THEIR LEVEL OF SELF-ESTEEM AND BODY IMAGE WITHOUT ASKING IF SUPERHEROES/ANYTHING ELSE HAD ANY SORT OF EFFECT ON THEM.

WITH THIS INFORMATION, I HOPED TO SEE WHAT THE AVERAGE SELF-ESTEEM/BODY IMAGE RATING WOULD BE, AND IF A LOWER RATING WOULD CORRELATE TO HIGHER SUPERHERO CONSUMPTION.



SELF-ESTEEM/BODY IMAGE

- HOW HIGH IS THEIR SELF-ESTEEM NOW ON A SCALE OF 1-7, & IS THIS IS BETTER OR WORSE THAN IT WAS IN HIGHSCHOOL?
- BODY IMAGE WAS ASKED ABOUT IN THIS SAME MANNER

THE REST OF THE QUESTIONS ON THE SURVEY WERE JUST MEANT TO GET FURTHER INSIGHT INTO ANY POSSIBLE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SELF-ESTEEM/BODY IMAGE AND SUPERHERO MEDIA CONSUMPTION.

THESE QUESTIONS WERE MOSTLY MEANT TO GAIN QUALITATIVE DATA, TO SEE WHAT PEOPLE THOUGHT ABOUT SUPERHEROES IN RELATION TO THEMSELVES AND WHY THEY THOUGHT IT.



- REPRESENTATION OF PHYSIQUE IN COMICS
- "WOULD YOU READ A COMIC OF A HERO WITH YOUR BODY TYPE, & WOULD IT SELL WELL?"
- DO HEROES MOTIVATE YOU TO BE MORE HEALTHY?
- "DO HEROES NEED TO BE IN SHAPE TO APPEAR HEROIC?" VS "DO REAL PEOPLE NEED TO APPEAR IN SHAPE TO APPEAR HEROIC?"
- COMPARISON OF SELF TO SUPERHEROES?
- HAVE HEROES HAD MORE OF A POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE IMPACT ON YOUR LIFE?
- WHAT THINGS OTHER THAN SUPERHEROES AFFECT HOW YOU SEE YOURSELF?

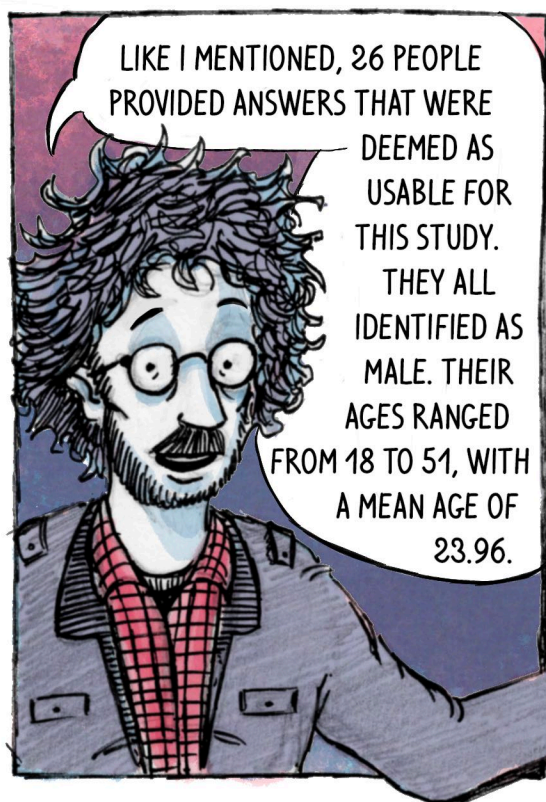
ONCE I CREATED A GOOGLE FORM WITH THESE QUESTIONS AND DISTRIBUTED IT THROUGH MY SOCIAL MEDIA, I WAS MET WITH 31 INDIVIDUALS WHO COMPLETED AND SUBMITTED THE SURVEY. OUT OF THESE 31 SETS OF ANSWERS, 26 WERE USABLE FOR THE PURPOSES OF THIS STUDY.

THE REASON THAT 5 OF THE ANSWER SETS WEREN'T USABLE WAS JUST BECAUSE THE PARTICIPANTS WHO FILLED THEM OUT DIDN'T IDENTIFY AS MALE; HOWEVER, OUT OF THOSE 5, THERE WAS ONE WISE-ALECK WHO CLAIMED THEIR GENDER IDENTITY WAS "POTATO," CLAIMED TO BE 99 YEARS OLD, AND ANSWERED EVERY QUESTION WITH SOME VARIATION OF THE WORD "FART."

THAT'S ENOUGH OF THAT THOUGH. LET'S LOOK AT THE RESULTS!



RESULTS!



LIKE I MENTIONED, 26 PEOPLE PROVIDED ANSWERS THAT WERE DEEMED AS USABLE FOR THIS STUDY. THEY ALL IDENTIFIED AS MALE. THEIR AGES RANGED FROM 18 TO 51, WITH A MEAN AGE OF 23.96.

THE AVERAGE AGE THAT PARTICIPANTS STARTED GETTING INTO COMICS WAS 7.73, WITH A 5.65 AVERAGE— ON A SCALE OF 1 TO 7— FOR HOW OFTEN THEY CONSUMED SUPERHERO MEDIA AT THAT AGE

SPIDERMAN WAS THE MOST POPULAR HERO, WITH A WHOPPING 23% OF PARTICIPANTS SAYING THAT HE WAS THEIR CURRENT FAVORITE SUPERHERO

— A WHOPPING 46.2% OF PARTICIPANTS SAID THAT SPIDERMAN WAS THEIR FAVORITE SUPERHERO AS A KID AS WELL



MORAL CODE, PERSONALITY, DESIGN/AESTHETIC, AND RELATABILITY WERE MOST OF THE PARTICIPANT'S FAVORITE ASPECTS OF THEIR FAVORITE HEROES.

50% OF PARTICIPANTS SAID THAT SUPERHERO MOVIES WERE THEIR FIRST EXPOSURE TO THE SUPERHERO GENRE.

ON A 1 TO 7 SCALE (I.E., 1 BEING AS LOW AS POSSIBLE AND 7 BEING AS HIGH AS POSSIBLE), THE AVERAGE RATING OF SELF-ESTEEM AMONG PARTICIPANTS WAS 4.5; THE AVERAGE RATING OF HOW HAPPY THEY WERE WITH THEIR BODY IMAGE WAS 4.69.

AN OVERWHELMING 19 PARTICIPANTS (73.1%) SAID THAT THEY WEREN'T WELL REPRESENTED IN COMICS; HOWEVER, MOST OF THESE PARTICIPANTS NOTED THAT THEY DIDN'T MIND BEING UNDERREPRESENTED

—THE MAJORITY OF PARTICIPANTS (I.E., 84.6% AND 64%, RESPECTIVELY) SAID THAT THEIR SELF-ESTEEM & BODY IMAGE RATINGS NOW ARE BETTER THAN THEY WOULD HAVE BEEN IN HIGH SCHOOL.

42.3% OF PARTICIPANTS SAID THAT A COMIC FEATURING THEIR BODY TYPE WOULDN'T SELL WELL, WITH 26.9% SAYING THAT IT WOULD AND 30.7% SAYING THAT THEY WERE UNSURE. MOST SAID THAT IT MOSTLY DEPENDED ON HOW THE CHARACTER WAS WRITTEN.

17 PARTICIPANTS (65.4%) SAID THAT COMICS DID NOT MOTIVATE THEM TO LIVE A HEALTHIER LIFESTYLE

15 PARTICIPANTS SAID THAT SUPERHEROES DO NOT NEED TO BE IN SHAPE IN ORDER TO APPEAR HEROIC, AND 20 PARTICIPANTS SAID THAT REAL LIFE PEOPLE DO NOT NEED TO BE IN SHAPE IN ORDER TO APPEAR HEROIC.

18 PARTICIPANTS (69.2%) SAID THAT THEY DID NOT COMPARE THEIR OWN APPEARANCE TO SUPERHEROES

12 PARTICIPANTS SAID THAT THE SUPERHERO GENRE HAS HAD MORE OF A POSITIVE IMPACT ON THEIR SELF-ESTEEM AND BODY IMAGE

THE MAIN FACTORS UNRELATED TO SUPERHERO MEDIA THAT AFFECTED PARTICIPANTS SELF-ESTEEM AND BODY IMAGE WERE: SOCIAL MEDIA, PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS, CELEBRITIES, ETC.



SORRY FOR ALL THAT BORING QUANTITATIVE DATA. BUT HEY, NOW WE GET TO READ SOME JUICY QUALITATIVE DATA BY LOOKING AT QUOTES!

Would you say that you're well represented in comics in regards to your body type/physique? (As in, there's a lot of comic characters that have body types similar to you?)



THERE'S NOT THAT MANY COMIC CHARACTERS THAT REPRESENT MY BODY TYPE. I AM DISREGARDING THE HEROES BECAUSE I DON'T EXPECT THEM TO LOOK LIKE ME. ALL THE OTHER MAIN/SIDE CHARACTERS ARE ALWAYS VERY SKINNY, COMICALLY BUFF, OR OVERWEIGHT.

I WOULD SAY THERE NEEDS TO BE MORE CHARACTERS THAT TRANSITION BETWEEN THESE THREE STAGES.

Do you think a hero with your body type would sell well? Why or why not?



MAYBE, DEPENDS ON HOW ITS MARKETING. COMICS ARE ABOUT FANTASIES FOR MOST PEOPLE; NOT REALITY, SO SAD FAT DUDES WANNA LIVE VICARIOUSLY THROUGH PLAYBOY BRUCE WAYNE OR THE MALE POWER FANTASIES OF THE PUNISHER

Would you say that the superhero genre has had more of a positive or negative impact on your self-esteem and/or body image? Why or why not?



PROBABLY JUST SLIGHTLY NEGATIVE BUT IT'S REALLY NEUTRAL TO ME, I FEEL LIKE IT'S MORE SO IN HEARING OTHER PEOPLE TALK ABOUT THESE CHARACTERS OR ACTORS, IT'S HARD NOT TO BE ENVIOUS.

Do you believe that real people need to be in shape in order to appear heroic? Why or why not?



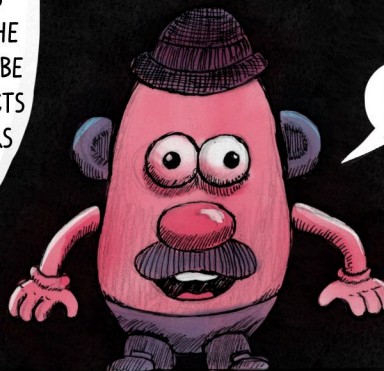
YES. I DON'T WANT NO COOKIE MONSTER CARRYING ME OUT OF A BUILDING.

Would you be interested in reading comics about a hero with your body type? Why or why not?

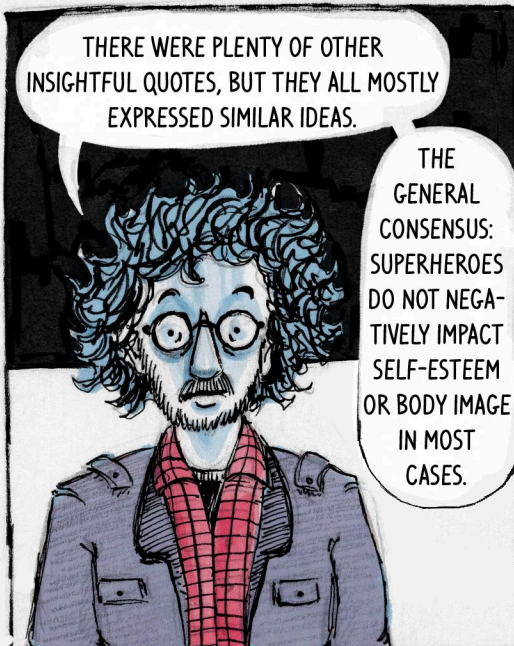
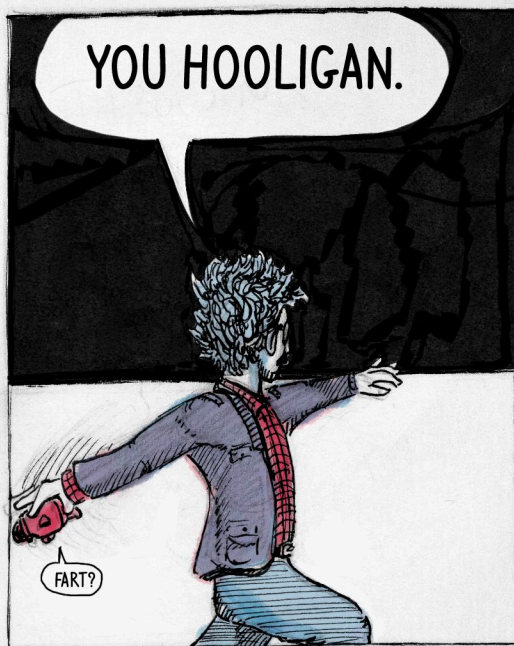


SURE, ALTHOUGH I WOULDN'T WANT IT TO BE FORCED OF COURSE. AUTHENTIC REPRESENTATION WITHOUT TOKENIZING IS IMPORTANT. I FEEL LIKE THE NARRATIVE ITSELF COULD BE FOCUSED ON OTHER ASPECTS SUCH AS THE CHARACTERS ACTUAL GOALS AND OBSTACLES.

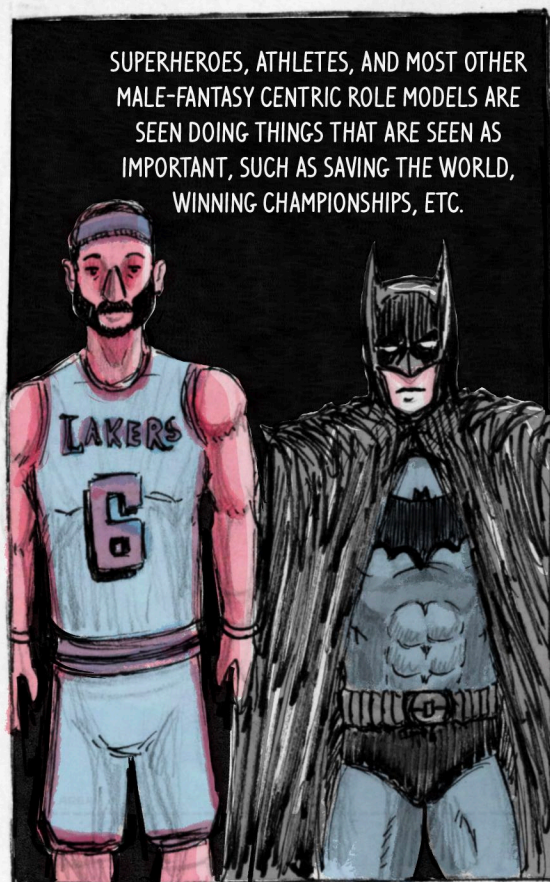
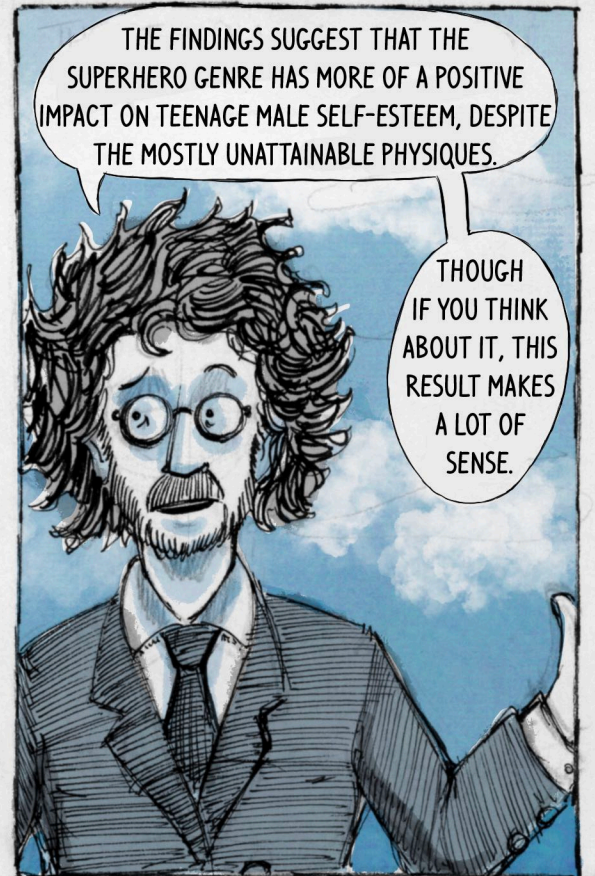
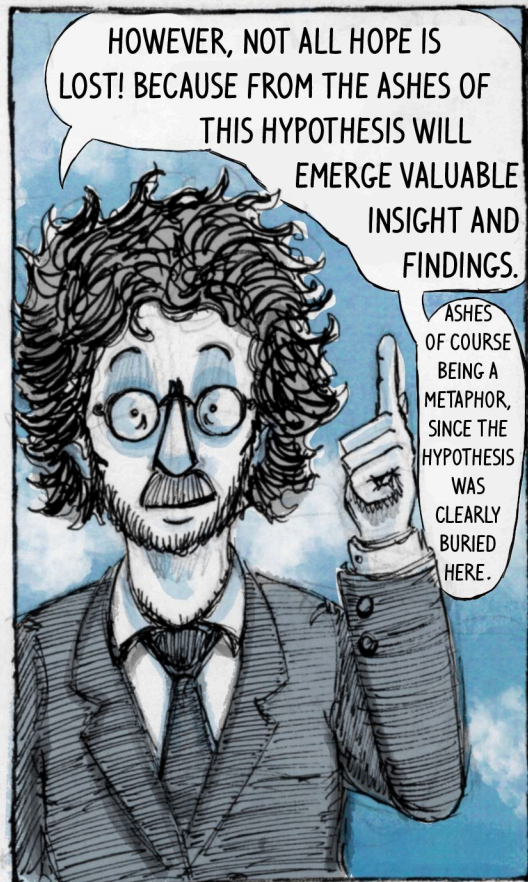
Do you fear God's judgement?

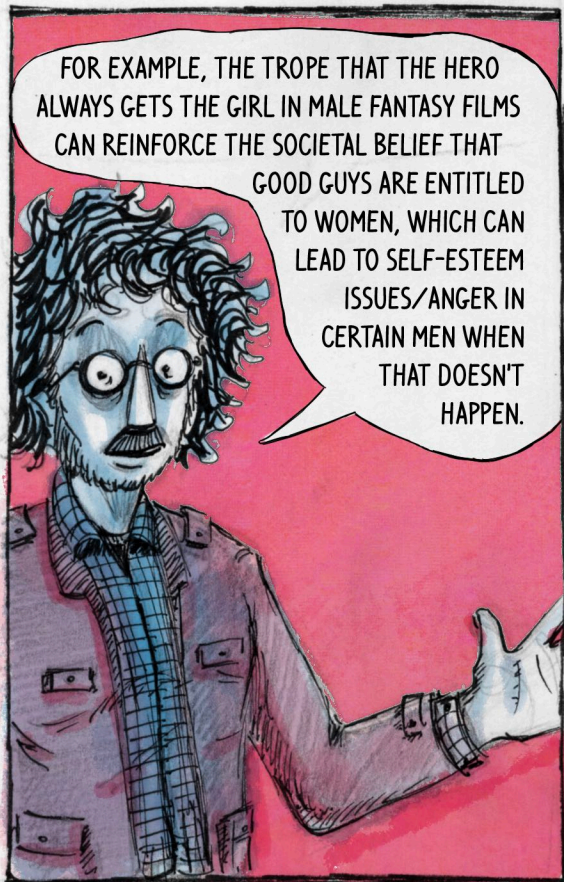


FART.



DISCUSSION





IN CONCLUSION, BODY IMAGE AND SELF ESTEEM DOESN'T SEEM TO BE NEGATIVELY AFFECTED BY SUPERHERO MEDIA DIRECTLY BASED ON MY STUDY.

HOWEVER, THERE'S STILL A LOT OF RESEARCH THAT CAN BE DONE ON MALE FANTASIES AND THEIR PROMOTION OF TOXICALLY MASCULINE IDEALS AND SOCIETAL BELIEFS, PARTICULARLY IN REGARDS TO WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A "REAL MAN" AND WHAT THAT LOOKS LIKE, AS WELL AS HOW THAT IDEAL MALE STANDARD AFFECTS THE MEN WHO DON'T FIT THAT MOLD.



REFERENCES

Chatzopoulou, E., Filieri, R., & Dogruyol, S. A. (2020). Instagram and body image: Motivation to conform to the “Instabod” and consequences on young male wellbeing. *Journal of Consumer Affairs*, 54(4), 1270–1297. <https://doi-org.avoserv2.library.fordham.edu/10.1111/joca.12329>

Gültzow, T. (1), Schneider, F. (1), Hoving, C. (1), & Guidry, J. P. D. (2). (n.d.). Male Body Image Portrayals on Instagram. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 23(5), 281–289. <https://doi-org.avoserv2.library.fordham.edu/10.1089/-cyber.2019.0368>

Himanshu, Avneet Kaur, Ashishjot Kaur, & Gaurav Singla. (2020). Rising dysmorphia among adolescents: A cause for concern. *Journal of Family Medicine and Primary Care*, 9(2), 567–570. https://doi-org.avoserv2.library.fordham.edu/10.4103/jfmpc.-jfmpc_738_19

Media Exposure, Online Appearance Interaction, Internalization, Social Comparison and Male Body Dissatisfaction-An Integrated Examination from Sociocultural Perspective. (2017). *Conference Papers – International Communication Association*, 1–23.

Superheroes and masculinity. [electronic resource]: unmasking the gender performance of heroism. (2020). Lexington Books.

Young, A. F., Gabriel, S., & Hollar, J. L. (n.d.). Batman to the rescue! The protective effects of parasocial relationships with muscular superheroes on men’s body image. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 49(1), 173–177. <https://doi-org.avoserv2.library.fordham.edu/10.1016/j.jesp.2012.08.003>

FONTS USED

SYNtHEmESC BY RAY LARABIE

VENTURA EDDING BY JOSEP PATAU BELLART

Another Typewriter by Johan Holmdahl

ATAMA SIMPLE BY GOMA SHIN

ROUND POP BY GOMA SHIN

American Typewriter by Joel Kaden and Tony Stan

BOVINE ROUND MVB BY MARK VAN BRONKHORST

Futura Condensed Medium by Paul Renner

