

CHEESE OR HAM?

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other everyday problems.' Marvel's heroes simultaneously inhabited the prosaic, everyday world in which they struggled to find a place, and also dwelled in mysterious, often mythical, worlds of imagination and colour.

In a political and cultural era of rampant othering, themes of difference were recurrent in the pages of Marvel. When not swinging across rooftops as Spider Man, the teenage Peter Parker wasn't the kind of guy who was captain of the football team, hung with the jocks, or won the girl. Peter was the unpopular kid, bullied and humiliated by his rival Flash Thompson. Marvel heroes were also outsiders. Even when saving the planet from annihilation, superheroes like Spider Man, X-Men, and particularly the Hulk, were regarded ambivalently by the public because of their strangeness. Their public acceptance was contingent on doing the 'acceptable' thing by serving the needs of the populace, and they would be turned-on immediately when they deviated from expectations or something went wrong. Hatfield (2012, p. 119) puts it well: 'Marvel, in short, empathized with the freaks.'

So in the Marvel 'Silver age', Jack Kirby and Stan Lee tapped into social and psychological themes of conformity and transgression, difference and othering. Similar concerns were also addressed in the work of Laing and his colleagues in the so-called 'anti-psychiatry' movement,² with their analysis of the processes whereby behaviour and experience that deviates from a repressive norm becomes characterized as illness. This was the sixties, of course, when a generational tussle was also being enacted - a broad shift in attitudes and values from forties and fifties conformity to greater permissiveness. Both Marvel and the anti-psychiatry folk were messengers for those kids who were longing to wake up one morning, look out over their parents' gardens, and discover that the world, at last, had gone dayglo. ■

References

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1. 'Mystification' can denote both an act (masking of the processes within a relationship) or a condition (being mystified). Mystification serves to maintain stability and stereotypical family roles by masking conflict. See: Howarth-Williams 1977.

2. A term Laing subsequently rejected (Mullan 1995).

This strip is one of the arts-based approaches we have used in teaching students in health and social care because they are powerful in addressing an emotional or affective level of learning that counterbalances the mechanistic and technical-rational teaching so prevalent in the professions.

Cheese or Ham? was reproduced as a comic-strip handout for students on the topic of communication in services for people with dementia. It has shown the potential for an effective and economic learning-aid in mental health and related issues. In fact, it was a simplification from one of a series of digital story films on that topic, following the idea that, for any subject, key concepts need first to be identified and simplified in order to communicate them.

Drawing a comic-strip has many parallels with storyboards in film-making and, in turn, the organization of teaching. Each requires an exercise in editing, in order to get the key issues of a narrative across. The key concepts are like metaphors that allow the learner to make interconnections and make sense of the topic, using their everyday skills.

The process can be understood by reference to theories in the arts, where metaphors are identified as a characteristic of communication. 'What artists, poets and novelists all have in common is their skill at forming metaphors, linking seemingly unrelated concepts in the brain.' (Ramachandran, 2003, p.83)

The skill of making connections between metaphors, therefore, is one of the characteristics of the brain that Ramachandran identifies as important in making sense of the environment that the individual is embodied in or engaged with. He notes that the brain seems to respond well to puzzles, and learning is stronger because the brain will work hard to make connections.

Simplification of concepts is another characteristic of the brain identified by Ramachandran. Of course, this has implications for the choice of images for comics, and it guided our comic-strip version of the digital story *Cheese or Ham?*: in order to engage the brain of the learner and leave room for interconnections to consolidate learning, incongruous elements that cannot be made sense of needed to be edited out. ■

Reference

- Ramachandran, V. (2003) *The Emerging Mind: the Reith Lectures 2003*. London: Profile Books.



Here's your sandwich love - you can have cheese or ham ...

CHEESE OR HAM?



... ham or cheese, cheese or ham ...



What'll it be? Ham or CHEEEESE ...

Come on, which one do you fancy?



Cheese or HAAAM?

'I'll have CRAB please!' she said ...

