



BE SUPER


Comic book heroes have done so much for my life, from being my rescue when I had no support, to giving me the courage to believe that everyone has the capability to be a hero, even myself. Comic books - and the characters that fill the pages - gave me the strength and courage to do my part within the realm of social justice and activism. They lead me to attend DePaul University and double major in Peace, Justice and Conflict Studies and Intercultural Communications. Comic books have shaped my entire life thus far, and they will continue to do so.

In recognizing this, I have seen the capacity these characters have to leave lasting, widespread change in the lives of people. Thus, I propose the non-profit initiative, Be Super. Similar to D.C. Comics' Be A Hero campaign or Zachary Levi's The Nerd Machine, this humanitarian organization would bring the core values of superheroes to life in a unique, interactive and meaningful way.

Superman was the first ever superhero. Created in 1933 by two small town midwestern teenagers, he's now arguably the most notable hero of all time. Most people today know Superman as the son of Krypton, someone who has superhuman powers, is in love with Lois Lane and grew up on a farm as Clark Kent. What most people don't know, however, are the ideas behind the creation of Superman. As Superman creators, Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster said, "Superman is the Champion of the oppressed, the physical marvel who had sworn to devote his existence to helping those in need. He fought corporate greed and crooked politicians, and preached for social reform at every turn." He was actually on posters in schools denouncing racism and racist rhetoric in the 60's.

In theory, Be Super has existed since the beginning of the superhero genre. Simply by existing, these characters are political. As Ramzi Fawaz writes in *The New Mutants: Superheroes and the Imagination of American Comics*, "In its commitment to protecting the political interests of these alienated social groups, the superhero had the potential to redefine the meaning of political freedom in America by recognizing the rights of those excluded from the national community."

This social stance became the foreground for comics in the sixties. They represented a just world and all the different people in it. The Fantastic Four destroys a nuclear family. Spider-Man is a bullied nerd turned into a wall-scaling hero. Black Panther is not only from a technologically advanced country in Africa, but he is also one of the strongest superheroes whose name reflects that of a political party. Be Super is in the fabric of comic culture.





In the sixties, Marvel and DC “reinvented the superhero as a biological misfit and social outcast whose refusal or failure to conform to the norms of social legibility provided the ground for a new kind of political community” (New Mutants). Comics have remained political, and, in fact, at times have inspired characters, and ideologies embodied by activists. For example, X-Men was released in 1963, in the middle of the civil rights movement. “Was it a coincidence that the nonviolence-preaching Professor Xavier and his arch-enemy (oldest friend) the by-any-means-necessary warrior Magneto, lined up so neatly as metaphors for Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X? That the x-men’s connection to the civil rights struggle was one of Marvel’s earliest acknowledgments of the fissures in American society.” The connections to social justice issues are intentionally clear on the pages through metaphors, and sometimes with candid, straightforward language.

With the popularity of comics books rising due to the successes of their recent movie interpretations, one would think that more people would be making these connections and talking about them. However, that is not the case. Be Super feels as if we, the audience, have stepped away from the acknowledgment of these social issues. Or perhaps we haven’t yet found a way to translate the feelings and emotions you get from reading the books into a movie-watching experience.

Well-established heroes, such as Captain America, Batman, Wonder Woman, Miles Morales, Kamala Khan, Hellboy, etc., already have the platform to spread powerful messages of compassion; multiple superhero universes have broken into the mainstream media by movie and television franchises. The comic book world can reach everyone, from die-hard comic fans to the Chris Pratt-loving moviegoers. Any and all of these audience members carry the potential to become superheroes themselves. Be Super is the medium through which they can actualize this dream.

The Be Super initiative can positively impact the progress of social justice spaces through empowerment and action. Representatives would team up with local schools, charities, and service communities in the areas where they film and write. By doing this, they could help with the educational aspects that go hand-in-hand with the comics and film franchises. They could discuss why these stories matter because these are events that happen to real individuals. They could further the compassion of others. They would be able to engage with communities and connect the social issues in the films to our everyday, lived reality.






On a larger level, for example, the head offices of these companies would be encouraged to further their engagement with activist communities. Such alignment with conscious and forward-moving steps not only affirms the comic book world's commitment to social progress, but it also contributes to heightened success of the project at hand. For example, Marvel has already shown their support to LGBTQA groups and people of color, in tandem with their promotion of X-Men. By giving back, the comic book industry would gain larger audiences and drive their public relations efforts into a more inclusive, empowering space, countering the constant flow of content that notes the exclusivity of the industry, movie franchises in particular.

Apart from actively increasing engagement with humanitarian communities, the press and promotions systems of the comic book industry would allow for other opportunities in volunteerism. For example, when Marvel conducts a press tour while promoting a new movie, they also have the chance to interact on a voluntary basis within the local communities they visit. These press tours could, for example, offer the actors, artists, directors, etc. to share their philanthropic endeavors via media coverage, meet-and-greets, social media, etc. Through engaging interactions with fans across the country, the comic book universe has the ability to encourage fans of all ages to participate in meaningful and charitable endeavors. Outside of the comic book universe's enhanced successes, the impact of such actions is truly invaluable for its community.

Be Super also has an educational component to it. Be Super would use these comic book characters – most of which are beloved – to help educate fans on different forms of oppression, injustice, and inequity that take place every day around the world. Along with education, the allocation and promotion of helpful resources would be exercised. If and when people seek more opportunities for engagement, or more general knowledge about social justice issues, links to different credible sources, and well-informed nonprofits would be cited, always directing people to worthwhile causes.

The Be Super initiative would be for everyone and would be highly family-oriented. Fans will want to “be super,” much like their favorite characters. Parents will be thrilled to see the good work the comic book industry does. Kids will want to participate in the meet-and-greets and volunteer initiatives hosted by Marvel, D.C., Dark Horse, etc. By having Be Super, the comic book industry will garner a larger fan base, generate more profit through ticket/merchandise/comic sales, and open up each franchise to previously-unreached audiences – particularly audiences in the social justice sphere.



If the comic book industry begins captivating the world of social justice in this way, people are going to reciprocate by engaging with the comic book industry in a new way. Ultimately, the Be Super initiative carries the opportunity to expand the comic book industry's audience and allow more people to interact with superheroes in the way that first inspired me. These comic books have helped me realize how I can Be Super for others, not through powers, but through compassion.

As the agent Phil Coulson says in Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D., "The world is full of evil and lies and pain and death, and you can't hide from it – you can only face it. The question is when you do, how do you respond? Who do you become?" Who will the comic book industry become? Will they become the superheroes that they have created for years? Will they assist in creating new ones in ordinary individuals? Will they Be Super?

About

Be Super strives to use comic book characters as educational tools to understand social justice issues. A movement calling for everyone to be the hero within.

Mission

To bring to life the heroism within people.

Vision

For everyone to get in touch with their empathy and compassion to be the heroes they were born to be.

Values

Inspiration
Heroism
Compassion
Education
Empathy

Objectives & Goals

1. Use beloved characters as a means to connect and educate individuals on compassion, empathy, oppression and privilege.
2. Train the Trainers.
3. NPO programming-partnership with other non-profits.
4. Be present at Comic Cons.
5. Partnership with a comic book company.
6. Strengthen the mission of philanthropy within the comic book industry.
7. Expand the comic book industry around the Globe.



besuperinitiative.tumblr.com/



[@besupertweets](https://twitter.com/besupertweets)



[@besuperiniative](https://www.instagram.com/besuperiniative)



facebook.com/besuperinitiative