



A multiverse of narratives: diversity in superheroes

Jieruei Chang, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

I'll be honest: I'm not much of a superhero fan. The recipes for most superhero movies today all seem pretty similar: take some guy with magical powers (and an ego to boot), throw him into some conundrum with the villain of the week, and have him fight his way through. Mix in some witty jokes, manufacture some sort of emotional moment to give an impression of sophistication, and wrap the whole thing with a special effects budget that could rival the GDP of a small nation. And then watch the box office money rain down from the sky.

Alright, that was far too harsh. Truth is, superhero movies are a form of escapism. They appeal to people for the same reason that I've found myself eating Chipotle in a foreign country instead of trying the local cuisine: familiarity. I can pull up "Iron Man" on a ten-hour flight and be reasonably sure that I'll be mindlessly entertained for an hour; however, that doesn't mean these movies all have to fit the same formulaic mold. When people ask how films like these could be made better, a common answer is to "make it more diverse." But why is a more diverse cast better? How should it be done? And what, exactly, do we mean by "diverse?"

Characters coming from different backgrounds means that their motivations, struggles, and triumphs become multifaceted and relatable to a wider audience. Shockingly, I am nothing like Superman. For starters, I can't fly. Secondly, I'm Asian. A few years ago (which I must say is far too recent) Marvel made its first Asian superhero, based on a virtually unknown comic book hero named Shang-Chi. To see myself reflected in such a film I surprisingly empowering and affirming, even for someone who doesn't usually watch superhero movies. Characters like Black Panther and Ms. Marvel can do the same — they give representation to groups often overlooked in media. For me, a superhero who looks like me can make the experience seem more intimate, and the escape from reality more real. For an impressionable child, it can show that rather than being a privilege reserved for one narrowly defined group, being a hero is a quality that lies within.

But diversity shouldn't just be a box on a businessman's checklist. Its incorporation should be intentional and thoughtfully planned — simply changing the character's demographic misses out on the creative potential of showing how their background influences their actions, while pigeonholing a character into a set of ethnic traits reinforces the very stereotypes that a diverse cast tries to break.

"Everything Everywhere All At Once" probably isn't the first thing that comes to mind when thinking of a superhero movie, but it shows how diversity can be seamlessly integrated into the fabric of a story. Michelle Yeoh and Ke Huy Quan are absolute martial arts masters in the film — seriously, the one-take fight choreography is insane — but they're not stereotypical kung fu artists wearing straw hats. Instead, Yeoh portrays Evelyn Wang, a laundromat owner, navigates the generational gulf dividing her from her father, and has a husband and teenage daughter (who aren't just around for comedic value). Even though she does plenty of extraordinary things, she is, at heart, an ordinary woman; that is what makes the story seem so relatable. And with its 139 minute runtime and a tenth of a standard blockbuster budget, it manages to weave a complex narrative that traverses universes, exploring themes of familial love, absurdism, and what it means to be a Chinese-American immigrant in a world where both nothing and everything seems to matter at the same time.

By incorporating different voices, backgrounds, and perspectives, we can make superhero films more relatable, inclusive, and powerful — not just in terms of CGI explosions, but also in emotional impact. "Diversity" isn't just sticking different faces on the same static characters; it is a nuanced process that makes for empowering storytelling. Done well, it makes superheroes seem more human — as individuals shaped by their experiences, but not defined by them.

Graphics
by Emily Kim

The everyday superhero

Aritra Ray, MULTIMEDIA EDITOR

Graphics: Emily Kim

WOW!

In a world full of homework assignments, extracurricular activities, family commitments, and social events, being a superhero may seem like a far-fetched obligation to tag on. But being a hero is much simpler than the capes and costumes that come to mind; in its essence, a hero is someone who uses their unique quality to achieve a task that would not ordinarily be possible.

Superheroes come in all forms and can be found in our everyday lives. In fact, some of the most powerful superheroes are the people we encounter regularly: nurses, doctors, teachers, and volunteers are some examples. Nurses and doctors help heal and save lives, teachers inspire and educate others, and volunteers selflessly help those in need. Their compassion and dedication make them superheroes in the eyes of many. With their superpowers, they leave a lasting impact on the lives of others.

So, what can you do to be a superhero in someone's life? Think about your unique superpower. It could be as simple as offering a listening ear to a friend in need, lending a helping hand to a stranger, or using your talents to uplift others. Small acts of kindness and empathy can have a profound impact on someone's life. It doesn't take x-ray vision or superhuman strength; all it takes is a compassionate heart and willingness to make a difference.

Embrace your unique superpower, no matter how small it may seem, and use it to create a ripple effect of goodness in the world. Recognizing your superpower and using it to bring meaningful change that benefits those around you is a step in the right direction — you may not be as quick as the Flash, but the change you bring can certainly travel across the world.

Remember, superheroes are not defined by their costumes or superhuman abilities, but by their actions and impact. Excelsior!

PHS answers: If you were a superhero, what would power would you have?

Chloe Zhao, OPINIONS CO-EDITOR

Jiatong Zhao '26



"My super power would be to make things magically come out of thin air. I would make ... lots of money and food. I wouldn't make too much [money to cause inflation]."

"My super power would be invisibility, because it's really cool to be able to go places without being seen."

"I would pause time, because then I can wake up really late ... pause time and then ... go to school ... a minute before school starts."

Ishaan Banerjee '24

Aishwarya Vedula '25



Yangwenbo Yao '24



"I want my mind to be able to read SD cards. So, everytime I want to learn, I just plug myself to the SD card and read all the knowledge."

Photos: Chloe Zhao

Jane Hu, Avantika Palayekar, and Yitian Xiong, CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Superhero Trivia

Asya Morozov, SPORTS CO-EDITOR

1. Who is the "Man of Steel?"

- a. Superman
- b. Batman
- c. Iron Man
- d. Captain America

3. What was a proposed name for one of the Ninja Turtles?

- a. Lippi
- b. Titian
- c. Bernini
- d. Botticelli

5. What is Captain America's shield made of?

- a. Strontium
- b. Bronze
- c. Steel
- d. Vibranium

2. What color was the Hulk originally going to be?

- a. Red
- b. Gray
- c. Blue
- d. Purple

4. What gives Black Panther his powers?

- a. A magical knife
- b. A mysterious precious metal
- c. A heart-shaped herb
- d. Nothing, he earns them through his own effort

6. What is the name of the villainous coalition that opposes SHIELD?

- a. ABYSS
- b. CROWN
- c. SWORD
- d. HYDRA

The heroes of PHS



Amid the rush of students in the hallways and corridors, Bill Urian stands firm as a security guard at Princeton High School. Urian works everyday from 7:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. asking students for their IDs before entering school. As for parents and other visitors, Urian asks them for a driver's license, runs it through the "Raptor" system, and gives them an orange hang tag that identifies them as visitors. Urian's goal is to make sure that no strangers enter the building to maintain school safety, and he encourages students to take initiative for their own safety, too.

"A lot of students are on social media ... so they can monitor that and let us know if things [seem] not right," said Urian. "Just be aware of your surroundings."

Prior to working as a security guard, Urian used to work for the town of Princeton as a firefighter, where he worked with the police department and directed traffic. He worked there for 31 years and received a service award from the fire department — he's now retired and has been working part-time at PHS for four and a half years.

"A couple years ago ... one of the workers [at PHS] asked me if I would want to come in and apply [as a security guard] ... [and] give it a shot," said Urian. "I like it here a lot ... especially the students. The students are the best."

Dr. Andrea Dinan works tirelessly to support the PHS community through her leadership. As the Ideas Center director, Dinan oversees community service and tutoring programs in which over 400 students participate. A normal day for Dinan consists of working with under-resourced students who are attempting to complete their college applications using the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Having been involved with AmeriCorps and helping homeless students get an opportunity for a better life, she gained a passion for service work.

"I wanted to devote my career to service, and when this ... program came up, I applied right away," Dinan said.

Through her leadership, Dinan believed she could allow students to run community service projects on their own, with little guidance from her. Dinan's system allows for students to overcome their obstacles and learn to improve their mistakes. "It helps people to follow their passions, lead projects, [and for] some of the quieter students [who] may not be ... interested in ... [joining] student council or even running another academic club, this is a perfect opportunity to try leadership skills and have [leadership] experience."



Despite the hustle and bustle of the school day, Margarida Cruz, one of Princeton High School's three nurses, manages to remain calm and collected wherever her work takes her. From administering treatments and first aid to physicals and even monitoring and tracking disease outbreaks, Cruz has worked as a nurse for PHS for over 19 years, and every day holds its own surprises.

"Every day is always different; there is never a dull moment," said Cruz. "It is always busy and we have a vast responsibility."

The central goal for the PHS nurses is to help students safely continue their education and to offer assistance in times of need.

"Keeping the students in school is the priority," Cruz said.

Initially, Cruz was a hospital nurse, but made the switch to become a school nurse for the convenience of the hours and to spend more time with her children. Now at PHS, Cruz believes that it is more than just a job.

"I love it!" said Cruz. "I love talking to the students, and everyone here gets along."

Photos: Emily Kim