

Using Superheroes and Villains in Counseling and Play Therapy: A Guide for Mental Health Professionals

Lawrence C. Rubin

New York, NY: 2020. Foreword, afterword, introduction, and index.

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In *Using Superheroes and Villains in Counseling and Play Therapy*, Lawrence C. Rubin provides his readers with a new and updated version of his previous text, *Using Superheroes in Counseling and Play Therapy* (2006), by expanding the superhero metaphor to include villains. In five parts and nineteen chapters, a variety of mental health professionals—including therapists, researchers, and educators—examine the benefits of applying the superhero and villain metaphors in their clinical work with children, adolescents, and families. These professionals draw on their rich clinical experiences to describe the creative methods with which they have integrated the superhero-villain mythology into well-known, evidence-based approaches like cognitive behavioral therapy, behavioral treatment, and positive psychology.

Each of the five parts of the book includes three or four chapters that follow a general pattern: an introduction with relevant clinical, empirical, and theoretical information, definitions, and background information on a particular aspect of the superhero-villain mythology; a discussion of a new technique, intervention, or idea that incorporates superhero-villain mythology and a description of how the professionals have applied it in their clinical practice; a conclusion; and a list

of questions that may be used for clinical discussion.

Part 1, entitled “Superheroes, Super Theories,” focuses on how familiar clinical and psychosocial theories and approaches (e.g., positive psychology, child-centered play therapy, experiential play therapy, bibliotherapy) can be used to incorporate superhero and villain metaphors into therapeutic applications.

Part 2, entitled “Using Heroes and Superheroes to Treat Specific Disorders,” explores how the metaphors can be applied to assist in treating disorders such as developmental coordination disorder, anxiety, autism, and substance-use disorder.

Part 3, entitled “Strength in Numbers: Superhero Teams,” examines how teams of superheroes or villains (e.g., Avengers, Justice League, Suicide Squad) can be incorporated into therapeutic work with both individuals and families.

Part 4, entitled “Villains Rise to the Challenge of Helping,” specifically addresses the utility of villain metaphors in therapeutic practice.

Finally, Part 5, entitled, “Superheroes at the Intersection,” discusses how superhero and villain metaphors can be beneficial in working with clients of diverse origins and identities.

Rubin’s book is a well-written and important collection of novel therapeutic interventions that incorporate superhero-villain mythology into their approach. With its accessible writing style coupled with both empirical and practical content, the book is likely versatile enough to be accessible for use by a variety of readers at different levels, including students, scholars, and practitioners. Although

more empirical work is needed to evaluate the overall outcome of incorporating superhero-villain mythology into counseling and play therapy interventions, it is clear from the case studies presented here just how profound and meaningful this approach might be for both young and older clients, as well as those from diverse backgrounds.

Theorists and researchers from non-clinical backgrounds have long hailed the importance of imagination and pretend play in childhood for positive social, cognitive, and emotional outcomes, and more recently, they have clamored for more rigorous testing to determine whether these relationships are causal. Emerging work thus far on novel pretend play interventions in these largely nonclinical populations is encouraging. The powerful findings from Rubin and his contributors wonderfully complement and extend this research and further underscore the potential healing power of fantasy and imagination in childhood and beyond.

—Melissa McInnis Brown, *Texas Woman's University, Denton, TX*

Rethinking Recess: Creating Safe and Inclusive Playtime for All Children in School

Rebecca A. London

Cambridge: Harvard Education Press, 2019. Introduction, appendixes, notes, acknowledgments, and index. 264 pp. \$34.00 paper. ISBN: 9781682534144

Rethinking Recess is really two books in one, and one of them is terrific, the other fair. Half of the book makes a fine case for

why recess is important for all children, synthesizing data from large-scale research studies related to policy and the inequalities present in American schooling. The amount of time and resources allocated to urban, working-class children of color as compared to their white, more affluent, and suburban peers clearly falls into the category of an urgent social-justice issue. The author makes a clear case that all children need access to recess and justifies it for emotional, physical, and social reasons.

The hidden story is a love letter to the program Playworks. I wish it were obvious in the title. A clarification is in order. There is the European concept of playwork and there is the American company Playworks; they are two different creatures. Playwork in Europe, and some parts of Asia, refers to supervised play in open-ended adventure playgrounds. Hired staff are called playworkers, and according to my esteemed colleagues in the United Kingdom, the children are in charge. In the United States, Playworks is a company, and schools pay tens of thousands of dollars to bring in “coaches” who lead children through specific activities, fun activities, led by the coaches or older, selected children. The two concepts are related, but not the same, and this distinction is not mentioned anywhere in the book.

Rethinking Recess offers some useful strategies for schools, but I am not convinced by the research on the Playworks program. To compare schools with Playworks and those without it is an unfair comparison methodologically. What aspects of this highly valued program actually are responsible for the positive shifts seen at recess? Is it the reduced number of children, the novel materials, the designa-