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KENT STATE UNIVERSITY

College of Education, Health and Human Services

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION DEFENSE
of
Rachel Turner Lindsey
For the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Counselor Education and Supervision

CHILDREN’S IDENTIFICATION WITH SUPERHEROES:
A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY DESIGN

May 10, 2024
1:00 p.m.
313 White Hall
Rachel Turner Lindsey  
M.Ed. Clinical Mental Health Counseling  
Kent State University  
B.A. Psychology  
Ohio State University  

Rachel is an independently licensed counselor with supervisory designation. She has been practicing in the field for the past six years with various populations, working with children, adolescents, and adults in a variety of settings. More recently, she has opened a private practice where she engages in counseling and supervision.

Additionally, Rachel has had the opportunity to participate in several organizations. She has been a part of the executive committee for the Association of Child and Adolescent Counseling- Ohio Chapter (ACAC-O), working as the Social Media Chair. She also had the honor of working as an Emerging Leader with North Central Association of Counselor Education and Supervision (NCACES).

Rachel’s enjoys sharing her knowledge and ideas with others in the form of presentation and writing. She has presented on topics related to counseling children who have experienced trauma, to provide opportunities for continuing education for other practitioners.

Children’s Identification with Superheroes:  
A Multiple Case Study Design

The purpose of this qualitative study is to better understand how children identify with superheroes to allow counselors to have a basis of understanding to inform their use of superheroes in therapeutic settings. The research questions are: 1) How do children ages 3-6 identify with their favorite superhero? and 2) how is children’s self-concept related to their identified superhero?

A multiple case study design was used to answer these research questions, focusing on five cases. Data were collected through child observation, interviews with the children, parents, and teachers, and drawings by the children. In Manuscript 1, four cases were analyzed, which produced the following themes: (a) fulfilling a need, (b) representing an ideal version of self, (c) transforming into superheroes through costumes, props, and play, and (d) blending reality and fiction. Results have implications for how clinical mental health and school counselors could use superheroes as a therapeutic intervention.

The last case was analyzed in Manuscript 2, which answered the questions of how the participants identified with her favorite superhero, and how this related to her self-concept. Four themes emerged: (a) representation of an ideal self; (b) contrast of good and evil, (c) connection with others, and (d) blending of reality and fantasy. The findings from both manuscripts have implications for clinical mental health and school counselors to use superheroes as a therapeutic intervention when working with children.