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Debra Herrick

UCSB psychologist contributes to DreamWorks' 'Mighty Monsterwheelies,' now on Netflix

When "Mighty Monsterwheelies" debuted on Netflix in 2024, audiences were introduced to the dynamic world of MotorVania, where half-monster, half-rescue vehicles use their special powers to protect their all-vehicle city. Behind the scenes, UC Santa Barbara professor Maryam Kia-Keating, Ph.D., played a critical role in shaping the show's themes of resilience, teamwork and restorative communication.

"'Mighty Monsterwheelies' is a preschool television series about a team of iconic monster characters reimagined as rescue vehicles," said Kia-Keating, a professor in the Department of Counseling, Clinical and School Psychology, who specializes in mental health, wellness and resilience. "They live in a town called Motorvania and are always ready to lend a helping hand and save the day. A major theme is that everyone can be a hero. The creators and writers for the show have done an incredible job creating a world for preschoolers to see what it's like when communities work in harmony to solve problems together."

"Mighty Monsterwheelies" is produced by DreamWorks Animation. As a consultant for the series, Kia-Keating worked with showrunners and executive producers Kyel White and Stephanie Simpson, and in collaboration with the UCLA Center for Scholars and Storytellers. Kia-Keating developed a curriculum guide for the writers and provided feedback on episode premises and scripts, ensuring that the show's

messages were developmentally appropriate for preschoolers.

As a licensed clinical psychologist with decades of experience, Kia-Keating's expertise in resilience and child development brought valuable insight to the writer's room. She co-created HEROES for Families, a mindfulness and restorative program for children and parents, and regularly consults on child development and mental health in children's media. Her guidance helped "Mighty Monsterwheelies" integrate restorative approaches into storytelling, modeling healthy conflict resolution for young audiences.

"For 'Mighty Monsterwheelies,' my focus was on helping center around restorative approaches and what those practices might look like and sound like in language and action that's developmentally on the mark for preschoolers," she said.

Kia-Keating emphasized the unique impact of consulting on children's media. "As a psychologist, I have a unique lens for children's media," she said. By offering research and clinical insights to support media creators Kia-Keating helps to ensure they are telling their stories with emotional impact and authenticity.

"I love collaborating with writers because magic happens when you engage audiences the way that only they can do," she said, adding: "and tell intentional stories to impact the next generation and beyond."

Through its storytelling and emphasis on teamwork, "Mighty Monsterwheelies" is not just another animated series — it's a show that encourages young viewers to embrace empathy, collaboration and problem-solving.

"It was really exciting and meaningful to work on a show with incredibly talented creators who are committed to portraying healthy conflict resolution and telling powerful stories that tap into children's imaginations," Kia-Keating added.

Kia-Keating's Hollywood career may be just getting started with "Mighty Monsterwheelies." She also recently served as a consultant on Roku's "The Spiderwick Chronicles." She'll join Aron Eli Coleite, showrunner and executive producer of the series, and Yalda T. Uhls, founder of UCLA's Center for Scholars & Storytellers, for a virtual webinar, "Psychologists and Hollywood," on April 10 at 1 p.m. EST.

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