

## Candidate 8 evidence



### Mental Illness in the Media



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## Introduction

Mental health and mental illness have been depicted, portrayed and exploited in numerous different ways in the media, most notably film and television representation and the presentation of mental illness in the media. Arguably these representations are far from the reality of what living and coping with mental illness truly is. Mental health and mental illness crept its way into one fifth of prime time television and is more often than not portrayed as extreme violence, displayed as failures or are victimised. These false representation and stereotypical ideas depict onto society what is a 'norm' regarding mental illness and creates myths and legends that over the past decade have began to merge with reality, leaving no clear barrier between fact and fiction (Ref 1.1). Within our reality we are unaware that we are drip fed ideas, portrayals and personification of mental illness from a very young age from television, literature and songs (Ref 1.5). An example of misrepresentation and portrayal in children's literature and television being the children's classic 'Winnie the Pooh' in which every character represents a different mental illness ranging from depression and OCD to schizophrenia.

It's estimated that 1 in every 10 children between the ages of 5 and 16 have a diagnosable condition, 1 in every 2 have mental health issues established by the age of 14 and 3 in every 4 of all mental illnesses are established by the age of 24. So where do they come from? Undeniably, the media play a large part in socialisation from a young age, influencing clothing and hairstyle choices to suit current trends, enforce opinions and bias through subliminal data from a very young age. This makes society susceptible and vulnerable to whatever is being published and presented to it. The mental illness's most commonly discussed in the media range from depression and anxiety to schizophrenia and can be caused by numerous different factors including poverty, body issues, hereditary and trauma. With an estimated 16 million people suffering from mental illness in the UK as of 2018, media must play a significant part in bringing it into our homes and influencing the vulnerable by depicting behaviours and ideals. An estimated 27% of men and 42% of women experience mental illness due to low income and poverty, 75% of youth not seeking help and 300,000 workers lose their jobs each year to mental illness (Ref 1.4). Mental health affects our state of mind, home life, employment and career. Taking into consideration the statistics we are presented with, the event of even a quarter of the sum total developing into a disabling level of illness could cause unemployment leading to personal issues such as finance which can lead to a poverty and unemployment epidemic.

Our perception of the world is subject to what we are presented with, this especially with stereotypes, biased news articles, biased opinions and new norms values and ideals those in power want us to have and know.

Hypothesis: The misconception of mental illness within our society is caused by mass media presentation.

## Research

Anat Klin's 2008 abstract "Mental Disorders Stigma in the Media: Review of Studies on Production, Content, and Influences" (Ref 1.2) discusses two decades worth of analysis of the mass medias role in shaping and reducing the stigma of mental illness within our society focusing on the 3 areas regarding the media: production, representation and audience. Klin states that the majority of the media resent the mentally ill as peculiar, different and dangerous. Klin also discusses the lack of research by the media as a whole into the inner workings of mental illness, the real attribute and re-evaluating the stereotypes the media has now presented society with. Klin's report also records the lack of inter-relationship between media portrayals and social perception, emphasising the lack of inside knowledge towards the cause and the affect the specific portrayal will have on the audience. Klin concludes his study with a request of further research into mass medias inter-relationships with mental illness.

Jorm's 2018 paper "Mental health literacy: Public knowledge and beliefs about mental disorders" (Ref 1.3) analyses the neglect of mental illness in society in terms of a true understanding from reliable sources. Jorm found a lack of knowledge within the wider society towards physical attributes and actions signalling towards psychological distress. There is no singular set of actions, behaviours of beliefs that signal or trigger mental illness and mental illness development, hence the lack of understanding and inability of being aware of signs in the general public aside from trained professionals. Jorm also discusses the false, misleading information presented to the public in numerous different forms including the media. Jorm concluded from his results that the public's mental health literacy has not improved regardless of many attempts of advancement which could hinder potential development of care for the mentally ill as well as acceptance of evidence-based health care. Jorm concludes his report by emphasising the importance of improvement of social understanding of mental health and mental illnesses, eliminate self-help in the forms of self-medicating and develop professional help and support systems within the community.

### Analysis / Evaluation

These pieces of research support the hypothesis by emphasising the miscommunication and misunderstanding of the media's portrayal of the mentally ill. The ill are often pitied because of the unrealistic traits and tendencies given to characters to provoke an emotional response from the audience, this goes to another extreme as newspapers demonise the mentally ill for the sake of shock headlines which is addressed in A.F. Jorm's study. Similarly, Anat Klin focuses on the exaggerated and pre-moulded characters. These pieces of research correlate clearly to weberianism, the theory that analyses society through class systems and opportunity. Both Jorm and Klin's studies reinforce weberianism as it emphasises the upper 'class', the media, pick and choose what is put out into our society via the news, newspapers, entertainment etc. This upper group takes control of what we are subject to hence the same generalised knowledge of stereotypes across the board, more advanced or accurate knowledge would only be achieved from seeking out evidence and receiving higher education such as psychologists. Our bland take on mental illness cannot be changed unless those in charge decide the images and norms we have wrongfully accepted must be changed, however morals and ethics are not part of the large scheme in the media. Mental Health can negatively affect our society in various ways, for example: chronic depression's main symptom is fatigue, this can negatively effect concentration and remove joy from activities including hobbies and work. With a minimal work effort and not enough help in the work this could lead to unemployment, which follows along with pressure of finding employment and potential poverty due to a lack of income. This scenario is not a one off and could spread from a lack of quality health care for depression and many other mental illnesses, with already three quarters of those with long-term mental illnesses unemployed (Ref 1.6) an increase of that statistic could destroy the economy from both unemployment and poverty affecting what is purchased and consumed. Our misconceptions also hinder other areas of society such as subcultures. Due to the stereotypes drip fed to us throughout our socialisation, a common image is perceived whenever we think of mental illness such as depression: uniquely coloured hair, dark clothing etc. this can often overlap with the style of subcultures such as 'Emo' and 'Goth' which led to the myth of all emo's and goth's having mental illnesses which is fictional due to the perceived image we have socially accepted over time. This is a hinderance and it often creates prejudice towards groups that could stereotypically be identified as 'mentally ill'. The media can also be blamed for explicit images, ideas and encouragement of extreme behaviours linked to mental illness such as self-harm and suicide which are often plastered over social media sites, with self-harm effecting 37 in 10,000 girls and 12.3 in 10,000 boys aged 10 -19, it is an undeniable influencer and glamorisation of what mental illness truly is (Ref 1.7). The sources used (Ref 1.2 & 1.3) are both reliable sources made eminent from the type of website used to display, both primarily to document citations and reports or from well-established university records, e.g. Cambridge University.

### Conclusion

In conclusion the results from Anat Klin and A.F. Jorm's studies both confirm the hypothesis of misconception due to media frenzy. This is clear as both reports referenced to misunderstood and exaggerated norms and ideas supposedly from socialisation. Although the stigma around mental illness has decreased over the past two decades, there is still a long way to go before it is no longer a taboo subject and receives the health care and support within society it requires. Research methods for this topic consisted of online research and selective book references, this allowed conclusions to be drawn quickly with easy access to materials and cross references.

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