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# The Effect Mental Health Portrayals in Television Shows Have on Viewers

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# The Effect Mental Health Portrayals in Television Shows Have on Viewers



## Abstract

Conducted by Cade Kinzel, Longwood University

## Results



## References

Hollner, C. A., & Cohen, E. L. (2014). Portrayal of Mental Illness on the TV Series *Brooklyn*: Presumed Influence and Consequences of Exposure. *Health Communication, 39*(10), 1046-1054. doi:10.1080/10410236.2014.917840

Maier, J. A., Gentile, D. A., Vogel, D. L., & Kamp, Kaplan, S. A. (2014). Media influences on self-stigma of seeking psychological services: The importance of media portrayals and person perception. *Psychology of Popular Media Culture, 3*(4), 239-256. doi:10.1037/a0034504

Rasmussen, E. E., & Ewoldsen, D. R. (2016). Treatment via Television: The Relation Between Watching Dr. Phil and Viewers' Intentions to Seek Mental Health Treatment. *Journal of Health Communication, 21*(6), 611-619. doi:10.1080/10810730.2015.1114054

Smith, S. L., Choueiri, M., Pieper, K., & Mousler, C. (2019). Mental Health Conditions in Film and TV: Portrayals That Dehumanize and Trivialize Characters. Retrieved October 31, 2020, from [http://assets.uscannetmember.org/docs/aj-study-mental-health-media\\_052019.pdf](http://assets.uscannetmember.org/docs/aj-study-mental-health-media_052019.pdf)

Zhao, D., Arpan, L., Raney, A., & Pettit, R. (2020). Examining the self- and others-oriented effects of exposure to a mental health narrative. *Psychology of Popular Media, 9*(1), 1-12. doi:10.1037/ppm0000274

The research studies provided through their findings that:

- Psychologists, those who seek therapy, and people with a mental illness in media influence real-life perceptions (Maier, et al., 2014).
- 7% of all TV characters experience a mental health condition compared to the 18.9% of Americans in real-life that experience a mental health condition (Smith, et al., 2019).
- Parasocial bonds with the TV character, "Monk" was associated with lower stereotypes and less social distance (Hoffner, Cohen, 2015).
- Frequent viewing of Dr. Phil was ultimately related to greater intentions to seek treatment for oneself and for one's child (Rasmussen, Ewoldsen, 2016).
- College students that watched a TV drama storyline portraying mental health reported higher intentions to seek mental health and greater vulnerability to symptoms for themselves and others (Zhao, et al., 2020).

## Conclusion

In conclusion, my estimations prior to conducting my research were not supported due to multiple sources finding cases that showed positive mental health effects on viewers. I found research showing the percentages of characters with a mental health condition shown in context with: disparagement (38%), humor (50%), and concealment (12%) (Smith, et al., 2019). However, three other sources showed the positive use of mental health portrayed in the media, which opposes my hypothesis. As a result of my research, I found that there is a wide margin of improvement needed for accurate portrayals of mental health in TV, which positively influence viewer mental health. The main takeaways from my research is to acknowledge the statistics of the low number of shows that do not accurately portray mental health. In addition, analyze every show to see the good mental health portrayals and how the show could also improve their portrayals more accurately.

## Methods

To conduct this study, a variety of resources were used that conducted studies revolved around mental health. Their analysis involved the type of content, characters, and how content was used among mental health struggles in TV shows and how they impacted viewer perception of mental health and motivation to seek help. Most of the sources included in this research study I conducted involved people that obtained a PhD in a field related to their credibility to speak on the topic of mental health, including psychology and communication. The sources also currently work in job positions, such as the department of psychology, communication, or counseling services at a university, as well as having conducted past research studies about mental health that provides corroboration to their research included in this study.

The goal of this study was to research the connections between portrayals in television shows and real-life people with mental health conditions. In addition, another purpose was to conclude whether my initial thoughts, which include believing a minimal numbers of TV shows contain any positive effect on viewer mental health, were supported. Misperceptions about mental health, including a justified feeling to hide mental conditions, judge others for theirs, or use it as a way for humor, are often given in television shows when mental health is included in the story (Smith, et al. 2019). I created a blog that revolved around the mental health depictions of a TV show and noticed there was difficulty among viewers to realize the mental health portrayals among the characters. My final hope for this study was to have a better understanding of viewer connection to the portrayals of mental health in shows and how it affects them.