An Analysis of Bipolar Disorder Stereotypes in 21st Century Television Programming

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Abstract

Television has recently received praise for portraying bipolar protagonists who defy stereotypes commonly associated with mental illness. Through a content analysis, the author coded one season of six television shows based on the presence of five stereotypes. The author sought to determine the prevalence, frequency, and accuracy of negative bipolar disorder stereotypes in contemporary TV dramas. Overall, the television programs portrayed violence and criminal behavior relatively inaccurately, while depicting professional competence, medical noncompliance, and the absence of instantaneous recovery more accurately. Despite recent progress, contemporary bipolar protagonists still have progress to make before depictions can be classified as wholly realistic.

I. Introduction

Since 1985, more than 150 prime-time television programs have featured mentally ill protagonists, secondary characters or antagonists (Wahl, 1995). Mainstream entertainment has long had difficulty depicting mental illness without falling into stereotypes and unflattering portrayals. With support from classic and contemporary crime dramas blaming mental disorders on the actions of murderers, molesters, ego-maniacs, and other obvious antagonists in films, such as *Halloween (1978)* and *Fatal Attraction (1987)*, these unflattering stereotypes have survived decades and permeated public opinion (Angermeyer & Dietrich, 2006). As recently as 2006, most people were unable to differentiate between drastically different mental disorders such as bipolar disorder, depression, and schizophrenia (Angermeyer & Dietrich, 2006). The truth is that mental disorders are not a one-size-fits-all illness. Different individuals with different mental makeups and different experiences express unique symptoms, behavioral tendencies, and diagnoses.

As society continues to progress and more information about disorders rises to the surface of public knowledge, today's society has seen a change in the way writers characterize the fictionalized mentally ill, especially through contemporary programming. Television dramas, such as *Homeland*, *Empire*, and *Shameless*, have all recently been praised for depicting bipolar protagonists who defy traditionally violent, dangerous, and socially inept characterizations.

In response to a recent surge in bipolar protagonists in television, this paper examined the accuracy

of bipolar characterizations, the prevalence of common bipolar disorder stereotypes, and whether or not recent shifts in public opinion have translated to the small screen. This paper investigated if recent television has truly achieved realistic portrayals of bipolar characters.

II. Literature Review

The literature below defined bipolar disorder, examined the symptoms, stereotypes, and misconceptions associated with bipolar disorder, and provided a history of the depiction of mental illness on television. This paper also reviewed literature on theories relevant to mental illness while examining the influence of entertainment on public opinion, especially regarding understanding bipolar sufferers.

Bipolar Disorder Defined

According to the National Institute of Public Health, bipolar disorder is a brain disorder that causes unusual shifts in mood, energy, activity levels, and the ability to carry out day-to-day tasks. Bipolar I affects approximately 1.5% of the population and is defined by a history of mania and depression (Mansell, Powell, Pedley, Thomas, & Jones, 2010). Symptoms associated with the disorder include manic, high, jumpy, impulsive, and unusually energetic episodes that last seven days, offset by episodes of intense depression. Stereotypes commonly associated with bipolar disorder include dangerous and violent behaviors directed toward strangers (Wahl, 1995), the tendency to commit crimes, anti-social behavior, poor socioeconomic status (Parrott & Parrott, 2015), professional incompetence, and an unwillingness to accept treatment (White, 2015). For this paper, the current author defined negative stereotypes as depicting actions unproductive to the growth and development of society.

A Brief History of Bipolar Disorder on the Small Screen

From *Guiding Light* to *Knots Landing* to *Lady Dynamite* and *Hill Street Blues*, mental illness in 20th and 21st century television hit every genre as the general public's fascination and awareness of mental illness increased. A 1979 study of daytime soaps even concluded that psychiatric illness was the "number one health-related problem in the soap opera world" (Wahl, 1995). As time progressed, mentally ill characters became especially prominent throughout U.S. crime dramas, encompassing 983 characters in three years, while, unfortunately, pushing violent and crime-related stereotypes (Parrott & Parrott, 2015).

While characters in 20th century television exhibited a range of mental health disorders, bipolar characters specifically weren't introduced to the small screen until the early 2000s. Since then, at least 16 television shows have incorporated bipolar characters, including 6 analyzed in this paper: *ER*, *Degrassi*, *Friday Night Lights*, *Homeland*, *Shameless,* and *Empire*. According to members of the general public, mental health sufferers, and trained professionals, these shows land on varying parts of the stereotypical spectrum.

Identifying Realistic Portrayals & Mental Health Misconceptions

What makes a depiction stereotypical? What's perceived as realistic according to public and professional opinions? While little is discussed about last century's portrayal of mentally ill television characters, individuals have analyzed modern television programming thoroughly, particularly *Homeland*, an hour-long drama featuring a female protagonist with bipolar disorder. One article lists realistic symptoms of the disorder exemplified in the series, including major depressive episodes, manic episodes, and professional competence, while listing stereotypical and unrealistic depictions largely absent from *Homeland*'s characterizations, including being only happy or sad at any given moment (Sifferlin, 2013). In contrast, some sources critique *Homeland*'s portrayal, believing Carrie's behavior to be unrealistic as she acts overtly manic and depressive even when taking prescribed medication (Sheff, 2013). Another example of breaking stereotypes is Andre Lyon's character throughout *Empire*, a protagonist shown managing his disorder through medication (Clarke, 2016), while maintaining a job and "functioning at a very high level" (White, 2015, para. 5). This comes as a stark contrast from the overplayed and often unrealistic depiction of bipolar patients as professionally incompetent, unable to maintain jobs, or experience work-related success.

Debunking the Stereotype

Stereotypes are more than just behavioral inaccuracies; they extend to gender roles and the expectations associated with male and female labels. Society expects men to exhibit stoicism, decisiveness, independence, and strength, regardless of any diagnosed mental health problem (Moss-Racusin & Miller, 2016). This differs from the reality of these disorders in which its sufferers, both male and female, have little control over mental faculties or emotional changes. Today's society also stereotypes people with mental illnesses as frequently exhibiting criminal behavior. In reality, less than 30% of bipolar patients self-reported criminal behavior over the last few years (Swann et al., 2011).

Another misconception is that patients frequently refuse treatment. Once that treatment is finally acquired, some also believe patients recover instantaneously. One patient analyzed his experience in a scientific journal, attributing his ability to manage symptoms through a long-term, ongoing relationship with a reliable and emotionally empathetic psychiatrist (Axer, 2014). This debunks any characterization of a bipolar character who takes a pill, or seeks some type of treatment, and recovers immediately. It's widely accepted by medical professionals that individuals with bipolar disorder may learn to cope, although it's unlikely individuals will recover completely (Chesanow, 2014). Additionally, it's been proven and supported by a number of anecdotal studies that patients experience the best results through a combination of factors, such as medication, routine, and social support (Mansell et al., 2010).

Bipolar sufferers are also more likely to succeed professionally than most classic films and horror flicks lead someone to believe. The majority of individuals suffering from a mental illness are professionally successful and happily employed (Stang, Frank, Yood, Wells, & Burch, 2007). Additionally, most who suffer from bipolar disorder tend to express themselves creatively, especially during a manic episode (Tremblay, Grosskopf, & Yang, 2010). Other stereotypes commonly depicted in media include hyper sexuality (Rodriguez, 2009), and difficulty with long-term relationships (Roberts, 2007).

The most common stereotype associated with mental disorders in general, bipolar disorder included, is that sufferers are dangerous and violent. According to psychologists who've studied the depiction of mental health on both the large and small screen, the vast majority of patients are neither violent nor dangerous (Vann, 2016), and when it does occur, violence is seldom directed toward strangers (Wahl, 1995). Were this concept widely understood, it's likely media depictions of the mentally ill would be far different.

Public Opinion: Now & Then

Society's outlook on mental health has progressed over the past decade, according to comparisons of research dating back to 2006. As previously discussed, in 2006 a large percentage of the general public sampled, albeit in Europe, could not differentiate between specific mental disorders. They viewed the mentally ill as dangerous and unpredictable. Studies also indicated that awareness of bipolar disorder in 2006 was significantly lower than awareness of depression, schizophrenia, and other mental health disorders (Ellison, Mason, & Scior, 2015). There's little research about contemporary attitudes toward bipolar disorder specifically, but in comparison to 2009, more individuals knew someone with a mental health disorder (5% increase) and more would be willing to work with someone who has a mental illness (5% increase), according to the Department of Health. Nevertheless, over a third of those questioned still associate mental health problems with violent tendencies.

Relevant theories

Normative theory seeks to define what is ethical, just, or correct (Ellison et al., 2015). Most health professionals, media experts, and individuals who've experienced mental problems firsthand agree that positive media depictions, or depictions that present bipolar characters as productive members of society, are more ethical than portrayals that paint bipolar sufferers as violent, dangerous, and unproductive. Television shows characterizing the mentally ill as the latter are defined as negative characterizations.

Pescosolido, Martin, Lang, and Olafsdottir (2008) sought to define the role of media based on Wahl's study, "establishing predominantly societal templates for responses to persons with mental illness" (p. 433). In other words, information surrounding mental health learned from a lifetime of media use and television programming is often the source of societal stereotypes. According to this theory, real-life experience aligned with television messaging significantly increases the message's impact on viewers. That applies to both positive and negative messaging.

Drawing on previous research, this paper sought to answer these questions:

RQ1: Does the contemporary television drama exaggerate stereotypes of bipolar disorder?

RQ2: Are television depictions of bipolar disorder considered accurate in comparison with research and testimonials from medical professionals?

RQ3: Has the depiction of bipolar disorder on television improved in accuracy and become increasingly positive since popular attitudes toward mental illness have changed over the past few years?

III. Methods

This content analysis was adopted to identify stereotypical portrayals of bipolar disorder throughout television dramas over the past decade. Content analysis is a type of research methods at the intersection of the qualitative and quantitative traditions (Duriau, Reger, & Pfarrer, 2007), an ideal method to study qualitative television program quantitatively. The method was adapted from studies by Pirkis, Blood, Francis, and McCallum (2006) and DeMare (2016).

Based on research regarding mental health and indicating a change in public opinion, the author was able to quantitatively measure how bipolar characters have been portrayed in 21st century television. Six television shows were chosen for this analysis, all depicting a bipolar protagonist or bipolar sub-character. These six were drawn from lists outlining the best and worst depictions of bipolar disorder and examples of bipolar disorder in contemporary television: *ER, Degrassi, Friday Night Lights*, *Homeland*, *Shameless*, and *Empire* (Clarke, 2016). These shows were the only programming available to the author at the time research was conducted. These six television shows also exist within the same genre and feature characters with similar minutes of screen time per season.

After recording the character's age, gender, and race, each television show was evaluated for five stereotypes: professional incompetence, violent behavior, criminal behavior, medical noncompliance, and instantaneous recovery after treatment. Some of these stereotypes came from literature directly outlining inaccuracies in the portrayal of bipolar disorder on television (Sheff, 2013). However, because academic research on media depictions of bipolar disorder is limited, and appearances of bipolar characters on television were less frequent than characters depicted as depressed or schizophrenic, these bipolar stereotypes fall under a broader category of general mental health stereotypes.

These stereotypes had to be defined for accurate categorization of television programming. *Professional incompetence* was defined by the author as a character's inability to maintain a steady job or successfully complete work-related tasks at a level comparable to co-workers. *Violence* occurred anytime the bipolar character acted to harm another character physically, or disrupted space and objects with his or her aggressive actions (DeMare, 2016, p. 28). *Criminal behavior* was defined as any behavior that broke the law or elicited police intervention. *Medical noncompliance* was defined as an instance where the character refused to accept or engage with the provided treatment either in the form of medicine or counseling services, and (Chesanow, 2014). Medical noncompliance occurs after more than one instance of refusing medicinal or therapeutic treatment, because it is realistic for most with a mental disorder to go through periods of medical noncompliance. *Instantaneous Recovery* is self-explanatory. Once the character began treatment, his or her symptoms disappeared, never to be seen again throughout the character's developmental arc (Mansell et al., 2010).

While coding the six television dramas, the author checked each character's age, gender, and race, and counted the instances of violence and criminal behavior. The author also determined whether or not an unwillingness to accept treatment and/or instantaneous recovery after treatment was present. This content analysis successfully answered RQ1. To answer RQ2, the author compared statistics and testimonials from medical professionals with television characterizations.

To answer RQ3, the author determined whether more "positive" behaviors were present throughout television premiering within the last few years, like even in 2009, when society has a greater understanding of mental illness and an increased willingness to accept those with a diagnosed mental disorder (Angermeyer & Dietrich, 2006). As discussed in the literature review, positive behavior is defined as behavior that allows for

productive contributions to society, such as professional success and clean criminal records.

The author also coded whether or not a given stereotype was included at all throughout a television show's season. The study analyzed the entire season of a television show in which a character's bipolar disorder was first introduced. If the disorder was formally introduced in the last episode of a season, the next three episodes of the following season were analyzed to accurately determine whether the character experienced instantaneous recovery or medical noncompliance. This study examined season seven of *ER*, season four of *Degrassi*, season one of *Friday Night Lights*, season one of *Homeland*, season four of *Shameless*, and season one of *Empire*.

IV. Findings

Violence and criminal behavior

Violence: Based on the analysis of the six television programs featuring a bipolar character, the author tallied the frequency of violence as well as the frequency of criminal behavior, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Violence and criminal behavior in six different television shows

Television show	Season's release year	Instances of violence	Instances of criminal behavior
ER	2000	3	2
Degrassi	2004-2005	4	1
Friday Night Lights	2007	0	0
Homeland	2011	1	4
Shameless	2014	4	3
Empire	2015	4	1
Average		2.7	1.8

Violent activity was depicted more frequently than criminal behavior in television shows with an average of almost three instances of violence per season. Five out of six characters acted violently in a given season while four out of six characters acted violently at least three times. Additionally, male characters represented in *Degrassi*, *Shameless*, and *Empire* acted violently an average of four times per season, while female characters, represented in *ER* and *Homeland,* acted violently three times and one time each per season, respectively. Most instances of violence throughout all of the television shows, save for *ER*, incorporated at least one instance in which bipolar characters provoked violence among themselves.

Criminal Behavior: It was presented less frequently than violence, with an average of barely two instances per season. Nevertheless, five out of six characters engaged in criminal activity, and half of the characters studied broke the law more than twice in his or her season. It should be noted that every character broke moral codes or was involved in petty crimes if not federal law. While Waverly from *Friday Night Lights* was technically engaged in criminal behavior zero times, in episode 16 she crept into her boyfriend's home and into his bedroom late at night, an action uncharacteristic of the good girl she was initially portrayed as, and an action that certainly broke the house rules of her boyfriend's strict mother. Following her impromptu break-in, she crept two people into a public pool after-hours, an action that likely broke community rules as well. On the criminally intense side of the spectrum, Maggie's character throughout *ER* attempted to steal twice; Craig's character from *Degrassi* stole his guardian's credit card; and Ian's character from *Shameless* stole his brother's identity to enlist in the military, attempted to steal government property, damaged an old boyfriend's apartment, and robbed a former client. The first two of Ian's actions were explained simultaneously and occurred off-screen, so they counted as one instance. Carrie from *Homeland* broke federal law by organizing an unauthorized surveillance of a suspected terrorist, failed to disclose her illness to employers, trespassed on private property, and pressured her sister into using her pharmaceutical license to provide

Carrie with samples of medication. Finally, Andre from *Empire* broke the law when he covered up a murder near the end of season one.

Professional Incompetence and Medical Treatment

Most characters experienced one or two instances of professional or academic incompetence, probably used by writers as a tool to further dramatic tension (Wahl, 1995). As shown in Table 2, three out of six characters were depicted as incompetent, either professionally or academically.

Table 2: Instances of five stereotypes in six television shows

Television show	Age	Gender	Race	Professional incompetence	Medical Noncompliance	Instantaneous Recovery
ER	60s	Female	Caucasian	Yes	Yes	No
Degrassi	Teens	Male	Caucasian	No	No	No
Friday Night Lights	Teens	Female	African American	No	No	No
Homeland	30s	Female	Caucasian	Yes	Yes	No
Shameless	20s	Male	Caucasian	Yes	Yes	No
Empire	30s	Male	African American	No	Yes	No

Some instances happened due to their bipolar disorder. Craig's character in *Degrassi* claimed to have written 14 songs in two days amid a manic episode. Waverly's character in *Friday Night Lights* recited an entire poem from memory amid a manic episode while Carrie's bipolar disorder in *Homeland* helped her crack open a case. Amid a manic episode, she stayed awake frantically charting a suspect's timeline using a meticulous, detail-oriented method. In one instance, her professional incompetence was portrayed when she entered a meeting and her boss announced, in front of the entire room, "Why are you the only one who can't get to a briefing on time?" This instance singled her character out as less competent than co-workers. Andre from *Empire* was the most intelligent of his musical family, having attended an Ivy League college with a spectacular business program. He also worked diligently to manage the financial deals of the family business, and his professional and academic competence was never explicitly linked to his mental illness. Among the characters in these six television programs, five out of six were considered either employed or full-time students.

Medical Noncompliance: It appeared frequently throughout all six television shows. Four out of six characters were depicted refusing treatment in the form of either medicine, counseling, hospitalization, or all three. Craig's character in Degrassi was not shown refusing treatment in the season, but he briefly went off his medication in the following season while his bipolar disorder was introduced. Only Maggie in *ER*, and Ian in *Shameless* faced either consistent problems with medical noncompliance, or, like Ian's case, refused to accept a diagnosis and consequently refused all forms of treatment.

Instantaneous Recovery: No television show depicted a bipolar character instantaneously recovered after receiving some form of treatment. All characters were shown experiencing mood improvement after beginning treatment or returning to treatment after a break from medication, but for each and every character their recovery process was shown in length and never appeared quick and easy.

Other Findings

Findings not listed in the current author's initial tables but found repeatedly upon coding included sexual promiscuity and a strain on important familial or romantic relationships. Every season tasked with characterizing a person with bipolar disorder, save for *ER*, incorporated an instance where the character felt frequently sexually aroused or used sex as a means of persuasion.

V. Discussion

This section compared the above findings with information from medical experts to determine how realistic these characterizations were. If the characterizations were congruent with cited statistics, circumstances, and personal anecdotes, the characterizations were considered accurate.

Instances of violence among bipolar characters were frequent, and viewers might perceive violent behavior as common among sufferers of bipolar disorder. In reality, only 11% to 16% of bipolar patients actually experience violent episodes (Vann, 2010). Additionally, those who experience violent episodes typically abuse drugs and alcohol which, coupled with extreme mood swings, does realistically prompt violent behavior (Wahl, 1995). Of the five characters presented acting violently, only two were seen abusing substances and neither abused the substance before their violent episodes, again decreasing the depiction's realism. Because violent episodes occurred so frequently, regardless of circumstances that prompted the character's violence, these negative depictions of violence were classified as inaccurate.

It's interesting that male characters were portrayed acting more violently than female characters. Men are often perceived as more violent but, in reality, both men and women are mild mannered when mentally well, but act aggressively, violently, and dangerously toward themselves and others when bipolar symptoms arise (Moss-Racusin & Miller, 2016).

Criminal behavior was presented frequently, more so in programming premiered in the last five years. According to a recent study examining the correlation between criminal behavior and bipolar disorder, Swann et al. (2011) found that just 29 out of 112 bipolar participants self-reported criminal behavior or conviction, a mere 25.6%. When compared with findings in this study revealing characters who frequently exhibited criminal behavior, Swann and others' study may suggest that television dramas use exaggeration in contemporary dramas. While this conclusion may not be entirely inaccurate, the author noted that criminal activity appeared frequently in *Homeland* because of the nature of protagonist Carrie's profession. Oftentimes, fulfilling her duties within national security while ignoring a superior officer who disregarded her often correct professional hunches, meant breaking the law. In the case of Carrie, her criminal activity actually hid another stereotype associated with bipolar disorder: professional incompetence.

In terms of professional and academic incompetence, the television shows depicted realistic images of bipolar sufferers. Five out of six characters were considered either employed or full-time students, which accurately reflects the 17% of bipolar patients who face unemployment due to their emotional disability (Stang et al., 2007). Those with bipolar illness also appear to be disproportionately concentrated in the most creative occupational category with a higher likelihood of engaging in creative activities on the job (Tremblay et al., 2010). Tremblay's analysis aligns with the depiction of Craig's musical competence, Waverly's attraction to creative poetry, and Carrie's colorful and creative method of solving the case.

Additionally, a large number of creatively successful people have been diagnosed with bipolar disorder, including Catherine Zeta-Jones, Sinead O'Connor, Jane Pauley, Patty Duke, and Amy Winehouse, again matching Degrassi's depiction of a bipolar musical success. Examples of successful corporate professionals with the disorder include Philip Graham; Ted Turner, founder of CNN; and Mark Whitacre. An emphasis on professionally driven bipolar protagonists supports the image of bipolar patients as potentially successful despite mental inhibitions.

This category wasn't coded quantitatively, but it's clear most programming strayed from the negative stereotype of depicting bipolar sufferers as unemployed and professionally unsuccessful. The two shows depicting academically and professionally unstable sufferers appeared in both 2000 and 2014, preventing any solid conclusion about the difference between dramas premiering in the early 2000s and dramas premiering in more recently.

One of the last categories was coded for a character's willingness to accept treatment. Realistically, three-quarters of patients prescribed psychotropic medications will discontinue over the course of a year, meaning medical noncompliance is common and the presence of said noncompliance on television isn't always inaccurate (Arauz, 2014). But this study examined negative stereotypes; and a negative stereotype present in society is that mentally ill people frequently refuse treatment. In reality, people with bipolar disorder want their mental health to improve, and although limited options and the disorder itself sometimes deter patients from traditional forms of treatment, it doesn't mean that most avoid treatment altogether. In other words, more in-depth analysis would tell the whole story. For instance, on both *Empire* and *Shameless*,

characters refused full treatment options for the sake of their professional lives. Carrie was hesitant to inform her superiors about her medical diagnosis for fear of termination while, *Empire's* Andre stopped forms of treatment because his focus on work pushed everything else, including mental health, family values, and interpersonal relationships, lower on his priority list. In a way, these two examples reinforced a positive stereotype about bipolar disorder and a strong work ethic.

Surprisingly, no television show depicted instantaneous recovery, which indicates that programming, since the introduction of openly bipolar protagonists, has rarely succumbed to this particular misconception. Each show lets the character's symptoms unfold throughout the course of a season, an improvement from any plotline forcing a character's diagnosis to act as a solution to a crime, mystery, or unanswered and muddled narrative plot points.

In terms of the realism of sexual promiscuity and a strain on familial or romantic relationships, hyper sexuality affects between 25% and 80% of all patients with mania, so this representation, while not necessarily considered a positive depiction, is fairly accurate (Rodriguez, 2009). Regarding strained relationships, it's normal for relationships to suffer when a mental illness, or any illness for that matter, is introduced. Given that 90% of marriages involving someone with bipolar disorder reportedly fail, this representation is also accurate (Roberts, 2007).

To improve the accuracy of this study, the sample of television programs would need to increase. This study incorporated only six programs because television shows has rarely depicted a bipolar character over the last 20 years. Future researchers may expand the content examined and limit the stereotypes to one to learn more about each individual. The context of a character's actions, aside from their mental illness as a characterization, plays a large role in explaining why a character does what he or she does, something that quantitative analyses might overlook.

VI. Conclusion

This study sought to identify the prevalence of negative bipolar disorder stereotypes in the contemporary television drama. This study also aimed to discern whether depictions of bipolar disorder and the stereotypes differ as programming has progressed through time within the 21st century.

The analysis showed that television shows depicting bipolar characters have somewhat exaggerated stereotypes commonly associated with bipolar disorder. All shows collectively hit on almost every stereotype at least once and, in general, television depicted violent and criminal behavior far too often. Combined with contexts that frequently failed to support the reasoning behind both behaviors, these portrayals were considered inaccurate. On the flip side, professional incompetence, an unwillingness to accept treatment, and instantaneous recovery were all portrayed more accurately. Aligning with professional opinions and understandings of bipolar disorder, the majority of characters were either employed or academically successful students. Also, no character recovered immediately upon beginning treatment of some sort. While medical noncompliance was classified as a negative stereotype for the purposes of this study, it's accurate that most patients will go off a prescribed psychotropic medication at least once in their lifetime (Arauz, 2014).

Aside from more recent programming incorporating a slightly higher frequency of negative stereotypes, the depictions among all television shows generally appeared similar. The number of instances of negative stereotyping wasn't dramatically different and, aside from *Friday Night Lights*, no television show appeared drastically different throughout, as shown by data in tables 1 and 2. In general, a television show incorporated more instances of violent behavior than criminal activities, except for *Homeland*.

Although the size of data isn't large, it indicates that programming is not as stereotypical, under-researched or inaccurate, given the number of both accurate and positive behaviors presented. Nevertheless, as public opinion of mental health has become increasingly positive, television programming has not necessarily improved in its removal of negative behaviors and incorporation of positive behaviors. It should be noted, however, that positive attitudes toward those with mental illnesses have not increased by a significant percentage over the past 20 years (Ellison et al., 2015). Therefore, it may take several more years and a greater understanding of mental illness before a positive and well-educated attitude is thoroughly reflected on screen.

People naturally desire to be understood, treated with respect, and provided equal opportunity both personally and professionally (Pescosolido et al., 2008). As time continues to progress and the media

continues to alter society's perception of mental illness, these portrayals must continue to improve in accuracy for the sake of both sufferers and society at large.

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