Mass Media and Mental Illness:
A Literature Review

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January 2004

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Table of Contents

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Introduction

Over the past 30 years, a substantial amount of research has been conducted to determine the effect of the mass media on the public's belief systems. These studies have concluded that the media's power to influence public perception and the degree to which people are exposed to media representations combine to make the mass media one of the most significant influences in developed societies.

In 2001, the Australian government published a large-scale literature review examining portrayals of mental health in the media (Francis, Pirkis, Dunt, & Blood, 2001). After considering dozens of studies that had analyzed news and entertainment media from around the globe (see Appendix A and Appendix B for tables summarizing the results of those studies), the review determined that media representations of mental illness promote negative images and stereotypes—in particular, the false connection between mental illness and violence. Many other studies have found a definite connection between negative media portrayals of mental illness and the public's negative attitudes toward people with mental health issues (Coverdale, Nairn, & Claasen, 2002; Cutcliffe & Hannigan, 2001; Diefenbach, 1997; Olstead, 2002; Rose, 1998; Wahl, 1995; Wahl & Roth, 1982; Wilson, Nairn, Coverdale, & Panapa, 1999).

There have been fewer studies on the impact that negative public perceptions of mental illness may have on government policies. But sufficient evidence exists to indicate that if the public considers people with mental illnesses to be violent and/or unable to care for themselves, government policies and resulting legislation will look more toward containment and control than toward recovery and community living. If public perception of mental illness is based on negative and false images perpetuated by the media, there is a danger that government responses to systems and people in the mental health field will also be based on these false realities, rather than on the true needs and issues of people suffering from mental illness (Cutcliffe & Hannigan, 2001; Rose, 1998).

This paper highlights studies that provide evidence to support the following five hypotheses:

- the mass media are a primary source of public information about mental illness;
- media representations of mental illness promote false and negative images and stereotypes;
- there is a connection between negative media portrayals of mental illness and the public's negative attitudes toward people with mental health issues;
- negative media portrayals have a direct impact on individuals living with mental illness; and
- there is a connection between negative media portrayals of mental illness and government responses to mental health issues.

Specific negative portrayals of mental illness and stereotypical negative characteristics of people with mental illnesses will also be explored.

For the purpose of this paper, the terms "media" and "mass media" include newspapers, radio, television, and film. Various studies cited focus on one or another of these media, and others examine some combination of media. Where the specific source is not mentioned, the reader can understand the terms "media" and "mass media" to include all of the above, although the important distinction between news and entertainment media will be made throughout.

The Mass Media as a Primary Source of Public Information on Mental Illness

Considerable research has concluded that the media are the public's most significant source of information about mental illness (Coverdale et al., 2002 [citing Borinstein, 1992; Kalafatelis & Dowden, 1997; Philo, 1994]). Fiske (1987, cited in Rose, 1998) argues that television is the most powerful medium for framing public consciousness. Cutcliffe and Hannigan (2001) further state that rarely does a week go by without a reference to mental illness in the mass media. One study found that media representations of mental illness are so powerful that they can override people's own personal experiences in relation to how they view mental illness (Philo, 1996, cited in Rose, 1998).

In 1997, the National Mental Health Association in the United States published a study titled "Stigma Matters: Assessing the Media's Impact on Public Perceptions of Mental Illness." Hottentot (2000) cites the following results from that study, showing where—within various media classifications—the researchers found that the public gathers its information about mentally ill people and about mental illness.

Popular Sources of Information about Mental Illness	
TV newsmagazine shows	70%
Newspapers	58%
TV news	51%
News magazines	34%
TV talk shows	31%
Radio news	26%
Other magazines	26%
Internet	25%
Non-fiction books	25%
Talk shows on radio	18%
Women's magazines	18%

Media Representations of Mental Illness Promote False and Negative Images and Stereotypes

The media play an influential role in shaping people's attitudes about the world they live in and about the individuals who inhabit the world with them. Stories about or references to people with mental health issues are rarely out of the headlines in news stories or plotlines in film and television, yet research indicates that media portrayals of mental illness are often both false and negative (Diefenbach, 1997 [citing Berlin & Malin, 1991; Gerbner, 1980; Nunnally, 1957; Wahl & Harman, 1989]).

Negative Images and Stereotypes in News Media
Researchers at George Mason University in Virginia conducted a study of 300 articles containing references to mental illness that were taken from six different 1999 U.S. newspapers. Few of these

stories presented positive images of people with mental illness or depicted people with mental illness as productive. This study and others like it have led researchers to conclude that the public, based on what they see in the news media, are likely to presume that people with mental illnesses are primarily burdens to society and incapable of contributing in positive ways to their communities (Wahl, 2001).

Cutcliffe and Hannigan (2001) cite a 1993 Glasgow University study that conducted a content analysis of 562 newspaper items containing representations of mental health and illness identified within local and national media over the course of one month. The study concluded that 62% of those stories focused on violence toward others in relation to a person with a mental illness. Stories that garner the most media attention appear to be those that make a link between mental illness, crime, and violence. Yet according to Monahan (1996), only 3–5% of violence in the United States is actually committed by someone with a mental illness.

The George Mason University Media Group Study mentioned above found that only 7% of all stories about mental illness included mental health consumers' viewpoints (Wahl, 2001). A similar newspaper study conducted in Alberta over a three-month period found that the voice of a person with a mental illness was present in only one of the 72 articles evaluated (Hottentot, 2000). The scarcity of first-person accounts by people with mental illnesses in these stories limits the perspectives available to readers and conveys the false impression that people with mental illnesses are incapable of developing opinions and speaking on their own behalf.

Negative Images and Stereotypes in Entertainment Media

According to Diefenbach's 1997 content analysis of television programming, depictions of people with inferred psychiatric conditions or stated psychiatric diagnoses were highly correlated with the portrayal of violent crime. Signorielli (1989, cited in Diefenbach, 1997) found that 72.1% of adult characters depicted as mentally ill in prime-time television drama injured or killed others. Characters with a mental illness were almost 10 times more violent than the general population of other television characters, and 10 to 20 times more violent during a two-week programming sample than real individuals with psychiatric diagnoses in the U.S. population were over an entire year.

Yet in reality, people suffering from a mental illness who do not have a concurrent substance abuse disorder are no more likely to commit a violent crime than anyone else (Steadman et al., 1998). In fact, one study found that 95–97% of violent episodes in the United States are committed by people with *no* mental illness (Monahan, 1996). Despite what is portrayed in the mass media, there is simply no reliable evidence to support the claim that mental illness alone (without substance abuse) is a significant risk factor for violence (Arboleda-Flórez, Holley, & Crisanti, 1996).

Commonly Depicted Stereotypes and Images of Mental Illness

According to Schneider (2003), some of the stereotypical depictions of people with mental illness include the following: rebellious free spirit; violent seductress; narcissistic parasite; mad scientist; sly manipulator; helpless and depressed female; and comedic relief. (See Appendix C for a list of films that fall into one or more of these categories. See also Appendix D and Appendix E for representations of mental illness in television and advertising, respectively.) Such characters have no identity outside of their stereotypical "crazy" behaviour, and are primarily identified by an inferred mental illness. When mental illness or behaviours commonly associated with mental illness are presented as a character's main personality traits, to the exclusion of any other characteristics, the illness or behaviour becomes the only way of defining that person and the main point of the story (Day & Page, 1986, cited in Olstead,

2002). In such a one-dimensional depiction, people with mental illness become less than fully human: the mental illness becomes an enveloping identity.

Violence and Criminality in Entertainment Media
Over the past four decades, the most common depictions of mental illness in the popular media have involved mentally ill people who are violent and criminal (Cutcliffe & Hannigan, 2001; Olstead, 2002 [citing Day & Page, 1986; Nunnally, 1961]; Wahl & Roth, 1982; Wilson et al., 1999). Rose (1998) argues that psychosis is portrayed on television, as well as generally in the media, as an unclassifiable experience, and one that poses a threat. Mental illness is depicted as resisting clear meaning, and thus as incomprehensible, unpredictable, and unstable. Simultaneously, the recurring theme of extreme violence at the hands of mentally ill characters is the norm in mass media portrayals. Thus, asserts Rose, mental illness threatens common assumptions and behaviours in that people with psychiatric diagnoses (or those assumed to be mentally ill) are generally portrayed as unsafe, dangerous, and violent.

Violence and Criminality in News Media
Rose (1998) found that nearly two-thirds of all news stories examined involving those with psychiatric diagnoses could be classified as "crime news." Yet when news on the whole was examined, only 10% of stories were "crime news," with the other 90% of stories revolving around issues unrelated to crime or violence, such as politics, entertainment, and health. Thus it is not that news overall is dominated by stories about crime (as indicated by the fact that the majority of news stories focus on other topics), but rather that news stories featuring people with mental health problems are overwhelmingly given this specific and negative focus.

Simple-Minded and Childlike Portrayals in Entertainment Media
In an analysis of prime-time TV drama, Wilson et al. (1999) found that 43% of mentally ill characters lacked comprehension of everyday adult roles and appeared lost and confused. Characters typically spoke with grammatically simple language, in a childish voice, and were depicted as helpless and dishevelled. They were almost always poor and/or homeless and were being held by police for a crime about which they had little recall or understanding of having committed.

Social Outcast and Drain on Society in Entertainment Media
On television and in film, as well as in news reporting, there is an emphasis on people with mental illness as separate from the general fabric of society. They are often portrayed as unemployed, homeless, and without family or friends, roots or history. Olstead (2002) describes this as "lacking in markers of social identity" (p. 625), and argues that representing people with mental illness in this one-dimensional light supports a depiction of such individuals as subhuman. When mental illness is presented as an individual's only characteristic, that person becomes defined by the illness in totality, thus becoming inherently different from others. The common association of mental illness and homelessness, without a broader discussion of the systemic issues that lead to homelessness, perpetuates the impression that most people with mental illness are dependent on others. This view maintains the idea that individuals with a psychiatric diagnosis are incapable of being productive members of society and are a drain on community resources (Day & Page, 1986, cited in Olstead, 2002).

In their previously mentioned analysis of prime-time TV dramas, Wilson et al. (1999) concluded that 67% of mentally ill characters depicted were seen to be unproductive failures. The point was illustrated by a lack of employment, ineffective or nonexistent interactions with family and friends, and by living alone in either dilapidated apartments, or on the streets. Fifty-five per cent of these characters

were also portrayed as being totally asocial, lacking close relatives or friends and without any positive relationships within the community. They were, in fact, seen to live on the fringe of the community—at best, an inconvenience to those living nearby and at worst, a danger to them.

Victim to Victimizer in Entertainment Media
Wilson et al. (1999) found in their analysis of prime-time TV dramas that 55% of characters with mental illness were portrayed as helpless, unable to control their lives, and dictated to by the will of others. These characters were commonly subjected to harassment, false accusations, manipulation, or exclusion due to their mental illness. Although originally shown as victims of verbal and/or physical abuse, when pushed "too far," they became dangerously aggressive and even violent, thus shifting from the victim to the victimizer.

Depictions of Practitioners, Treatments, and Facilities
Entrenched prejudices against those with mental illnesses are often aided by negative and stereotypical images of psychiatrists, psychologists, mental health treatments, and mental health facilities. Guimón (cited in Freeman et al., 2001) asserts that the media present inaccurate and unflattering stereotypes of the psychiatric profession that misinform the public and undermine the credibility of mental health care practitioners.

Citing Glen Gabbard, author of *Psychiatry and the Cinema*, Grinfeld (1998) adds that since the mid-1960s, only three films portrayed therapists sympathetically (*Good Will Hunting*, 1997; *Ordinary People*, 1980; and *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden*, 1977). In every other instance, mental health practitioners were portrayed in one or more of the following ways: neurotic, unable to maintain professional boundaries, drug- or alcohol-addicted, rigid, controlling, ineffectual, mentally ill themselves, comically inept, uncaring, self-absorbed, having ulterior motives, easily tricked and manipulated, foolish, and idiotic. Such portrayals reinforce the idea that helping others is an unworthy vocation requiring little skill or expertise.

In the United States, fewer than 50% of those who experience mental disorders seek treatment (U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, 1999); in Canada, this figure is less than 33% (Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, 2002). Depictions of mental health practitioners as exploitative, mentally unstable, and unethical may do irreparable harm to people who are already hesitant to seek treatment, by making the prospect of getting help appear frightening and the help itself appear likely to be ineffective (Freeman et al., 2001; *Healthweek*, 2003).

Sympathetic but Inaccurate Representations
Negative and inaccurate stereotypes do the most damage. But positive, yet inaccurate depictions can also be harmful. In such cases, although the character may be presented in a sympathetic way, the inaccurate depiction does nothing to further the public's education. Instead, it hinders their understanding of mental illness and of people living with psychiatric diagnoses.

In his book *Media Madness: Public Images of Mental Illness*, Wahl (1995) states that inaccurate information in the media about mental illness (even if the portrayal of the character is positive) results in misunderstandings regarding various mental illnesses and can have considerable practical consequences. Inaccurate depictions of, for example, schizophrenia (which is often confused in the media with multiple personality disorder) can lead to false beliefs, confusion, conflict, and a delay in receiving treatment. Family members whose relative does not exhibit symptoms similar to what they've seen portrayed in the media (symptoms that they believe to be a true representation of schizophrenia) may be confused and may lose confidence in the diagnosing clinician. The ability of family members and of the ill individual

to recognize the onset of schizophrenia may be hindered by their misunderstanding of the true symptoms. Frustration and discord can result in a false perception that behaviours due to schizophrenia are in fact unrelated to the illness, and therefore without a reasonable cause (Wahl, 1995).

Class Differences in News Media Reporting

Olstead (2002) examined Canadian newspaper stories and analyzed representations of mental illness as they relate to violence and class. He found that when the subject was a middle-class person, only 14% of the stories reported details of the behaviours of the person with the mental illness. Rather, the focus was on their high-status occupations, their affiliations with prominent and/or influential families, and their socio-economic privilege. This is in contrast to the reporting style when the subject is poor and has a mental illness. In such cases, 62% of the articles emphasized poverty as a significant factor both in the mental illness and in the behaviours of the mentally ill individual. Of these articles, 89% went into detail describing the behaviours of the person with the mental illness, highlighting in particular incidents of criminality, violence, and dangerousness, as well as focusing on homelessness, panhandling, and the use of soup kitchens and shelters. These more common ways of reporting about mental illness leave the reader to surmise a link between mental illness, violence, criminality, and poverty, thus creating distance between the reader and the person with mental illness. By emphasizing what poor people do (behaviours) versus what middle-class people feel (emotions), such reporting encourages readers to identify and therefore sympathize with only a certain segment of the population.

This differentiation is furthered by the reporting of and emphasis on specific diagnoses as they are connected to people based on their income level. In 77% of the articles studied by Olstead featuring middle-class persons, the diagnosis named was depression. These stories depicted depression as a disease that imposed itself on the ill person. Conversely, 48% of the articles about poor people highlighted a diagnosis of schizophrenia. In these stories, the illness (also seen to be related to poverty) was portrayed as imposing itself not on the person, but on the larger society. This manner of framing mental illness and class distinctions is a way of establishing a context in which the mentally ill person can be seen as either *part of*, or *apart from*, society. Consequently, those people whose experiences are not understood or empathized with (poor people) are more likely to be seen as "other," and thus to be isolated and ridiculed (Olstead, 2002). This stance further contributes to a sense that mental illness happens to *other* people. Consequently, if people in power understand mental illness to be an illness that strikes only disenfranchised peoples, it will continue to be viewed as something that affects only a small minority of *other* people, and that therefore is not noteworthy enough to warrant appropriate levels of funding for research, treatment facilities, and community resources (Wahl, 1995).

General Classifications of Mental Illnesses

Specific diagnoses of mental illness are commonly omitted when the media present a description of an individual or fictional character. Rather, people are described in broad strokes as being a "psychiatric patient," "mentally ill," or just "crazy." It has been argued that in the absence of a clear diagnosis, audiences are left to generalize from one particular description of behaviours to all people with mental illness (Coverdale et al., 2002; Wilson et al., 1999). The likelihood of such generalization is high, based on the general public's pre-existing views on mental illness and the ways in which the media usually depict people with mental illness. Coverdale et al. (2002) claim that such generalizations, and subsequent stigmatization, can be diminished through an illustration of specific psychiatric diagnoses, as well as by ensuring the relevance of such diagnoses to a reported incident. If a clear and specific diagnosis is not available, journalists and reporters should limit themselves to describing behaviours *without* implying that mental illness is the cause. There are a number of reasons why a person might be

acting in a bizarre manner that do not include mental illness: for example, someone with a substance abuse problem or someone who is suffering from extremely low blood sugar may exhibit behaviours that are erratic and unpredictable—and yet neither necessarily has a mental illness. One cannot presume that unusual behaviour is an indicator of mental illness. Most importantly, if a person does indeed have a mental illness, this should be reported in an accurate fashion and only when directly relevant to the story.

Negative Media Portrayals and the Public's Negative Attitudes

The few acts of violence committed by people with a mental illness are generally directed at family members, not strangers (Arboleda-Flórez et al., 1996). But media depictions of persons with a mental illness attacking a stranger shape public opinion. The saliency of such high-profile crimes, despite their infrequency, makes it appear as though violent crimes committed by individuals with a psychiatric diagnosis are common and that the general public has reason to fear people with mental illness.

In the United Kingdom, a 1996 Department of Health study found that news and entertainment media representations of mental illness have a negative effect on public perception (Rose, 1998). Another study, by the Glasgow University Media Group, confirmed the belief that people who saw a strong link between mental illness and violence derived their beliefs largely from the media (Philo, 1993). Research from around the world has found that the way in which news media cover a story and the way in which entertainment media tell a story in effect *become* the story. In other words, the actual events take a back seat to the underlying messages about mental illness, and in particular, messages about violence and unpredictability.

The media's representation of people with mental illness as violent, dangerous, and unpredictable has resulted in the "mentally ill suffering societal scorn and discrimination" (Corrigan, 1998, p. 201, cited in Hottentot, 2000). Mistaken and negative depictions perpetuate the public's damning image of people with mental illness and sustain continued intolerance and oppression. Such erroneous and negative associations are woven so thoroughly into the fabric of the public consciousness that sensationalism need no longer occur for the public to equate mental illness with dangerousness (Allen & Nairn, 1997, cited in Hottentot, 2000).

The Impact of Negative Media Portrayals on People with Mental Illness

A report by Mind, a U.K. mental health charity, asserts that negative media coverage has a direct and harmful impact on the lives of people with mental illness. Mind surveyed 515 people suffering from a range of disorders about their feelings regarding media coverage of mental illness. Half of the respondents said that the media coverage had a negative effect on their own mental health, and 34% said this led directly to an increase in their depression and anxiety. A total of 22% of the participants said they felt more withdrawn and isolated as a result of negative media coverage, and 8% said that such press coverage made them feel suicidal. Almost 25% of respondents said that they noticed hostile behaviour from their neighbours due to negative newspaper and television reports. A further 11% said they required additional support from mental health services due to negative press coverage, and almost 25% of all respondents said that they had changed their minds about applying for jobs or volunteer positions due to negative media coverage (BBC News Online: Health, 2000).

Wahl argues that the stigma due to negative media coverage impedes recovery, triggers discrimination, and creates barriers to seeking and finding decent housing, employment, and education (cited in NAMI, Oct. 2001). "People with mental illness are also readers and viewers of those [negative]

images; they are shamed by them and they're embarrassed by them," said Wahl in an interview in *Psychiatric Times*. "They're aware that they are depicted in negative ways and it damages their self-esteem, it damages their confidence, and it increases their likelihood that they won't tell anyone about their illnesses. So they're not going to seek treatment" (Grinfeld, 1998).

Wahl (1995) states that negative images in the mass media influence not only the general public, but also health care professionals. He points out that although practitioners are trained, they are subjected to and influenced by the same misconceptions and negative imagery as the public. This influence can lead health care practitioners to approach, and thus potentially treat, mentally ill patients with the same negative attitudes portrayed by the media and accepted by the general public.

Negative Media Portrayals and Government Responses

A 1996 U.K. Department of Health study (cited in Rose, 1998) concluded that a link exists between negative media representations of mental illness and related social policies. If the public believes that those with a psychiatric diagnosis are either violent or victimized—and in either case, unable to care for themselves—government policies will reflect this attitude. Consequently, policy-makers will look more toward containment and control than toward recovery and community living. If public perception of mental illness is based on negative and false imagery perpetuated by the media, governments will react to these false realities rather than to the true needs of people with mental illnesses.

In addition, a world view that upholds false and negative stereotypes of people with mental illness leads to an increased level of fear in the community, which in turn translates to less support for community care and for individual human rights. This can result in increased legislation allowing, and social support for, forced treatment and hospitalization, as well as increased police power, as the public has been frightened into believing that they are at risk of violence from those with mental illness living in the community (Rose, 1998). Rather than supporting and welcoming diversity in the community, "it [is] not an exaggeration to say that mental health policy is now motivated by the desire to deal with risky individuals and to assuage the public disquiet" (Rose, 1998, p. 225).

Cutcliffe and Hannigan (2001) report that since the mid-1990s in the United Kingdom, mental health policy has taken on an "increasingly coercive appearance" (p. 315). They point to recent government proposals to tighten the English and Welsh Mental Health Act. They claim that there is an implicit relationship between negative and inaccurate representations of mental illness in the mass media and the development of current mental health policies and law in the United Kingdom. Holloway (1996, cited in Cutcliffe & Hannigan, 2001) also found that a more controlling mental health policy framework emerged in the 1990s due, in part, to a media-fuelled "moral panic")—a public feeling of fright and a belief that people with mental illness are morally deficient and thus a danger to society. Cutcliffe and Hannigan (2001) state that "the shift towards a coercive policy has, in part at least, much to do with the Government's attempts to pander to inaccurate public perceptions, reactions, and intolerance. Furthermore…the public may have been 'whipped up' into this position of intolerance as a result of misleading, inaccurate mass representations of mental illness and mental health issues" (p. 318).

In a study of Canadian newspapers, Olstead (2002) concluded that in the current climate of cuts to health care, a belief that the mentally ill are inherently violent dictates that scarce resources should be used to safeguard the public, as opposed to filling the gaps in psychiatric and community mental health services.

Examples of Positive Portrayals

The National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI) produces an Internet newsletter titled *StigmaBusters* that reports on the mass media's portrayals of mental illness. When positive depictions of mental illness are noticed, they are highlighted. One example was the September 2001 issue of *Rosie* magazine, which focused on depression. Rosie O'Donnell openly discussed her personal struggle, and other prominent people who have successfully battled depression were also featured, including Rosemary Clooney and Mary Wallace (wife of CBS correspondent Mike Wallace, who himself has suffered from depression—NARSAD, 2003). The story accurately informed the public and discussed the importance of ending stigma and discrimination (NAMI, Aug. 2001).

According to Wahl (cited in *Healthweek*, 2003), another example of a positive portrayal is the 1997 film *As Good as It Gets*, starring Jack Nicholson. In this film, Nicholson plays a romantic lead who has obsessive-compulsive disorder. The film accurately portrays the symptoms of this disorder and, even more encouragingly, shows the character, with the assistance of therapy and medication, winning the woman of his dreams and learning to live with and control his illness.

A third example is the television series *Monk*, which debuted in 2002. Its main character, a private detective named Adrian Monk, played by Tony Shalhoub, struggles with severe anxiety and obsessive-compulsive symptoms triggered by the unsolved murder of his wife. Because of his mental illness, Monk has been laid off from the San Francisco police department. But due to his skill as a detective, he remains several steps ahead of his former colleagues and continues to solve cases. NAMI reports that Shalhoub's "portrayal of obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) is realistic and respectful" (NAMI, July 2002).

Conclusion

There is a complex relationship between mass media depictions of mental illness and the public's understanding. McKeown and Clancy (1995, cited in Cutcliffe & Hannigan, 2001) state that this link is circular: negative media images promote negative attitudes, and ensuing media coverage feeds off an already negative public perception. The media must play a role in changing such negative perceptions.

In the past, people with physical disabilities were depicted in the media only when the story was about their disability. Today, it is becoming more common to see television characters whose physical disability has nothing to do with the storyline (for example, Dr. Weaver in *ER* and Doris in *The Young and the Restless*): they are characters like any other, and their disability is not significant to the story. This is far from the case with mental illness. In popular media, mental illness is most commonly portrayed as deviant and dangerous, and is also frequently the only noteworthy trait about the character.

For change to occur, accurate and positive messages and stories about mental illness and people living with psychiatric diagnoses must become more commonplace. Thornton and Wahl (1996) found that the influence of newspaper articles on people's attitudes toward mental illness was more positive when study participants had received accurate supplementary information, indicating that change in the mass media's depictions can produce change in public perceptions.

NAMI's *StigmaBusters* newsletter has been responsible, through public letter-writing campaigns, for successfully removing offensive ads from television and radio, and more importantly, for educating media advertisers, producers, and writers about the impact of their negative and inaccurate depictions on people with mental illness (for several examples, see NAMI, June 2001, #2, and March 2002). It is essential that people working in the mental health field combat negative media portrayals and encourage public education programs. The myth regarding the inherent connection between violence and mental

illness must be revealed, and accurate information must be disseminated to the public through the media. It is vital to highlight stories of successful recovery. Such stories of resilience and hope, if presented properly, can both educate and entertain audiences. Ultimately, the struggle of advocates for more accurate and positive representation of mental illness and of the mentally ill in the mass media is analogous to the struggles of other minority and disenfranchised groups. Wahl (1995) sums it up best when he says, "the civil rights movement offers one big lesson, speak up."

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Appendix A
The Portrayal of Mental Health and Illness in the Media: Table of Key Studies
(Source: Francis, Pirkis, Dunt, and Blood, 2001, pp. 24–27)

Investigators	Content Type	Study Type	Country	Method	Key Findings
Ward (1997)	News media: newspapers	Descriptive	United Kingdom	Content analysis of all mental health-related items from the UK print media throughout 1996 (1035 items in total)	- Almost half of the coverage related to violence and crime, and the majority of this was negative. - Negative items were given greater prominence than positive items.
Philo et al (1996)	News media and entertainment media: newspapers, periodicals and television	Descriptive	United Kingdom	Content analysis of a one-month sample (April 1993) of UK print and television items related to mental health	- The majority of items related to violence, and this was generally presented using negative and inaccurate images. - Very few positive themes were presented. - Negative items were given greater prominence than positive items.
Day and Page (1986)	News media: newspapers	Descriptive	Canada	Content analysis of 103 newspaper articles selected randomly from Canadian print media from 1977 to 1984	- The tone of items was negative overall. - Very few statements (18 per cent) were positive. - Negative items were given greater prominence than positive items.
Matas et al (1986)	News media: newspapers	Descriptive	Canada	Content analysis of 90 randomly selected articles from two Canadian newspapers from 1961 to 1981	- Most of the coverage was average or less than average on the rating scale. - There were few differences in coverage over time. - Items relating to criminal issues were generally rated as positive.

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Investigators	Content Type	Study Type	Country	Method	Key Findings
Wahl (1996)	News media: newspapers	Descriptive	United States	Quantitative analysis of all items relating to schizophrenia from three newspapers from 1989 to 1994 (101 items in total)	- Coverage of schizophrenia was uncommon. - One-quarter of all items were related to controversial issues. - Ten per cent of items were related to criminal issues.
Hazelton (1997)	News media: newspapers	Descriptive	Australia	Discourse analysis of mental health-related items from two Australian newspapers throughout 1994 (490 items in total)	- The negative theme of disorder, crisis and risk was predominant.
Allen and Nairn (1997)	News media: newspapers	Descriptive	New Zealand	Discourse analysis of 12 newspaper items from a special report on mental illness from one New Zealand newspaper. Analysis focused on the category of dangerousness.	- Mental illness was portrayed negatively, as a danger and a threat to the community.
Nairn (1999)	News media: newspapers	Descriptive	New Zealand	Follow-up study involving discourse analysis of seven items from previous study of one New Zealand newspaper	- Depiction of mental illness promoted negative stereotypes.
Meagher et al. (1995)	News media: newspapers	Descriptive	Ireland	Content analysis of 380 mental health-related items from selected Irish newspapers from July to December 1993	- Portrayal of mental illness was neutral or positive overall. - More than one-third of items related to criminal issues.
Wahl and Kaye (1992)	News media: periodicals	Descriptive	United States	Quantitative analysis of all mental health-related articles from popular periodicals from 1965, 1970, 1980 and 1988	- There was an increase in the number of mental health-related items over time. - There were indications of positive changes in the portrayal of mental health issues over time.

Investigators	Content Type	Study Type	Country	Method	Key Findings
Wahl et al. (1995)	News media: periodicals	Descriptive	United States	Content analysis of all articles related to schizophrenia from popular periodicals from 1964 to 1992 (even-numbered years only, 137 items in total).	- Very few items related to schizophrenia, with no increase over time. - The presentation of information was generally accurate.
Wahl (2000)	News media: periodicals	Descriptive	United States	Content analysis of all articles related to OCD in popular periodicals from 1983 to 1997 (107 items in total)	- Very few items related to OCD. - The presentation of information was generally accurate. - Many articles about violence and crime were inaccurately classified as relating to OCD.
Wilson et al. (1999b)	Entertainment media: television	Descriptive	New Zealand	Discourse analysis of 14 television drama programs relating to mental illness	- The depiction of mental illness was negative overall. - Mental illness was generally associated with crime.
Wilson et al. (1999a)	Entertainment media: television	Descriptive	New Zealand	Case study of one television drama program using discourse analysis	- Mental illness was strongly associated with violence and dangerousness in this example.
Wilson et al. (2000)	Entertainment media: television	Descriptive	New Zealand	Discourse analysis of a one-week sample of 128 children's television programs	- Almost half the programs portrayed mental illness. - Portrayal of mental illness was generally negative.
Diefenbach (1997)	Entertainment media: television	Descriptive	United States	Content analysis of all prime-time programs from four television networks over a two-week period (184 programs in total).	- Almost one-third of programs portrayed mental illness. - Thirty per cent of characters with mental illness were associated with violence and negative images.
Signorielli (1989)	Entertainment media: television	Descriptive	United States	Content analysis of 1215 prime-time drama programs selected from week-long samples from 1969 to 1985	- The portrayal of mental illness was generally negative. - Mental illness was associated with violence.

Investigators	Content Type	Study Type	Country	Method	Key Findings
Rose (1998)	Entertainment media and news media: television	Descriptive	United Kingdom	Content analysis of prime-time programs from two television networks over an eight-week period in 1992 (147 hours in total)	- Only four per cent of programs portrayed mental illness. - The most frequent themes relating to mental illness were danger and violence.
Hyler et al. (1991)	Entertainment media: film	Descriptive	United States	Description of selected films related to mental health issues	- A number of stereotypes of mental illness were presented in many different films.
Beveridge (1996)	Entertainment media: film	Descriptive	United States	Description of selected Walt Disney films	- Mental illness was depicted as unusual behaviour, and associated with dangerousness.
Rosen et al. (1997)	Entertainment media: film	Descriptive	Australia	Description of 21 mental health-related films from Australia and New Zealand	- Recent films depicted mental illness more positively. - Negative stereotypes of mental illness persist in certain films.
Rosen and Walter (2000)	Entertainment media: film	Descriptive	Australia	Case study of the Australian film *Shine*.	- Negative stereotypes of mental illness were depicted in the film.
Bokey et al. (2000)	Entertainment media: literature	Descriptive	Australia	Quantitative analysis of 94 books selected from contemporary Australian adolescent literature.	- The majority of texts (69 per cent) referred to mental illness. - The portrayal of mental health issues was generally negative.

Appendix B: The Impact of Media Portrayal on Community Attitudes to Mental Illness: Table of Key Studies
(Source: Francis, Pirkis, Dunt, and Blood, 2001, pp. 41–43)

Investigators	Content Type	Study Type	Country	Method	Key Findings
Nunnally (1957)	Sources of community attitudes	Cross-sectional survey	United States	Survey of 1000 participants, including the general public and mental health professionals, about attitudes to mental illness, and comparison with content of mental health-related media items	- Media portrayal of mental illness was different from both public and expert attitudes to mental illness.
Granello et al. (1999)	Sources of community attitudes	Cross-sectional survey	United States	Survey of 102 university students using CAMI questionnaire	- The media were an important source of information about mental health issues. - Individuals citing the electronic media as their primary source of information had less tolerant attitudes towards people with mental illness.
Granello et al. (2000)	Sources of community attitudes	Cross-sectional survey	United States	Survey of 183 university students on sources of information about mental health issues, and analysis of CAMI questionnaires scores for 53 participants citing television as their primary information source	- Greater levels of television viewing were associated with less tolerant attitudes towards people with mental illness.
Lopez (1991)	Sources of community attitudes	Cross-sectional survey	United States	Survey of 92 high-school students using the OMI and VMHP questionnaires	- The mass media were the most important source of information about mental illness. - Education about mental illness was associated with more positive attitudes towards people with mental illness.

Investigators	Content Type	Study Type	Country	Method	Key Findings
Steadman and Cocozza (1977)	Sources of community attitudes	Cross-sectional survey	United States	Survey of 447 randomly selected households about attitudes towards the criminally insane and mental patients	- Public attitudes towards the criminally insane were more negative than those towards mental patients. - The criminally insane were equated with depictions of murderers reported by media.
Benkert et al. (1997)	Sources of community attitudes	Cross-sectional survey	Germany	Survey of 2176 participants about knowledge of psychotropic drugs and information sources for mental health issues	- The media were the most important source of information about mental illness. - Negative media reports were more commonly recalled than positive reports.
Angermeyer and Matschinger (1996)	Sources of community attitudes	Longitudinal survey	Germany	Six population surveys carried out from 1990 to 1992, during which period two violent attacks by people with a mental illness were reported by the media	- Levels of rejection of people with schizophrenia were found to increase immediately following the two widely reported attacks. - Scheff's hypothesis that selective media reporting reinforces stereotypes of mental illness was found to be supported.
Philo (1996)	Sources of community attitudes	Focus group	United Kingdom	Six focus groups of randomly selected participants discussed beliefs about mental illness and sources of beliefs.	- The media were an important influence on attitudes to mental illness. - Negative media images of mental illness may overcome positive personal experiences.

Investigators	Content Type	Study Type	Country	Method	Key Findings
Domino (1983)	Impact of media messages	Prospective	United States	146 participants self-selected into intervention and control groups. Intervention group chose to view the film *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*. Randomly selected participants shown explanatory documentary film.	- Participants who viewed the intervention film developed less positive attitudes to mental illness. - Viewing the more positive, explanatory film did not alter attitudes.
Wahl and Lefkowits (1989)	Impact of media messages	Prospective	United States	Three groups of participants viewed either intervention film with negative depiction of mental illness, intervention film and explanatory trailer, or control film.	- Participants who viewed the intervention film developed less positive attitudes to mental illness. - Viewing the explanatory trailer did not alter the development of negative attitudes.
Thornton and Wahl (1996)	Impact of media messages	Prospective	United States	Three groups of participants given a stigmatising newspaper article with or without an explanatory article about mental illness. Separate control group given control newspaper articles.	- Participants receiving the intervention newspaper article developed more negative attitudes to mental illness. - Receiving explanatory information reduced the effects of the intervention article.
Sancho-Aldridge and Gunter (1994)	Impact of media messages	Retrospective	United Kingdom	Survey of 2815 participants on response to nationwide screening of television drama series about psychiatry	- The study did not find evidence of negative effects on community beliefs about mental illness as a result of the television program.

Appendix C: Representations of Mental Illness in Film

Schneider (2003) developed the categories used here. Examples have been gathered from that source and several others: Byrne, 2001; Grinfeld, 1998; *Healthweek*, 2003; NAMI, Dec. 21, 2001; NAMI., Oct. 31, 2001; Wahl, 1995.

      ☑   Positive and accurate representation
      ✓   Positive but inaccurate representation
      ×   Negative and inaccurate representation

Rebellious free spirit
- ✓ *K-Pax* (2001)
- ✓ *Shine* (1996)
- × *Lunatics: A Love Story* (1992)
- × *The Dream Team* (1989)
- × *Nuts* (1987)
- × *Down and Out in Beverly Hills* (1986)
- × *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1975)

Homicidal maniac: most slasher/horror films, including the following examples
- × *Hannibal* (2001)
- × *Dark Asylum* (2001)
- × *American Psycho* (2000)
- × *Freak* (1999)
- × *Kiss the Girls* (1997)
- × *Seven* (1995)
- × *Silence of the Lambs* (1991)
- × *Psycho* (1960)

Seductress (most often violent as well)
- × *Swimfan* (2002)
- × *Poison Ivy* I, II, and III (1992, 1995, 1997)
- × *The Hand That Rocks the Cradle* (1992)
- × *Fatal Attraction* (1987)
- × *Dressed to Kill* (1980)
- × *Lilith* (1964)
- × *The Three Faces of Eve* (1957)

Enlightened member of society
- ✓ *A Beautiful Mind* (2001)
- ✓ *Shine* (1996)
- ✓ *A Fine Madness* (1966)

Narcissistic parasite
- × *Analyze That* (2002) and *Analyze This* (1999)
- × *What About Bob?* (1991)
- × *Down and Out in Beverly Hills* (1986)

Comedic relief
- × *Analyze That* (2002) and *Analyze This* (1999)
- × *Bandits* (2001)
- × *Me, Myself and Irene* (2000)
- × *Something about Mary* (1998)
- × *What About Bob?* (1991)
- × *Down and Out in Beverly Hills* (1986)

Mad scientist
- × *The Animal* (2001)
- × *Back to the Future* I, II, III (1985, 1989, 1990)
- × *Young Frankenstein* (1974)

Sly manipulator
- × *The Cable Guy* (2001)
- × *The Deceiver* (1998)

Victimized/helpless/depressed female
- × *Crazy/Beautiful* (2001)
- × *Don't Say a Word* (2001)
- × *Girl, Interrupted* (1999)
- × *Sybil* (1977)

Portrayals of mental health practitioners/facilities/treatments
- × *Anger Management* (2003)
- × *Analyze That* (2002) and *Analyze This* (1999)
- ✓ *Good Will Hunting* (1997)
- × *Asylum* (1996)
- × *What About Bob?* (1991)
- × *Disturbed* (1990)
- × *The Couch Trip* (1988)
- ☑ *Ordinary People*(1980)
- ☑ *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden* (1977)
- × *High Anxiety* (1977)
- × *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1975)
- × *A Fine Madness* (1966)

Appendix D: Representations of Mental Illness in Television

☑   Positive and accurate representation
×   Negative and inaccurate representation

The Practice, ABC, 2003
☑   A realistic story about a woman with schizophrenia whose plea of not guilty by reason of insanity (NGRI) fails, and who is ordered to be medicated so she will be "competent" for execution (NAMI, April–May, 2003).

The Practice, ABC, April 7, 2003
×   A woman with bipolar disorder kidnaps the CBS-TV network president and holds him hostage, threatening to kill him on national television. This episode reinforces the worst stereotypes of people with mental illnesses and mocks the justice of NGRI verdicts (NAMI, April–May, 2003).

CSI, CBS, January 9, 2003
×   A father sedates his adult daughter, who has refused to take lithium for her bipolar disorder. He cuts her wrist to stage a suicide attempt so he can have her committed; however, she bleeds to death. The episode is full of inaccuracies about bipolar disorder, stigmatizing language, and negative and false representations of bipolar disorder (NAMI, Jan. 2003).

As Told by Ginger, "Lunatic Lake," Nickelodeon, November 2002
×   The opening minutes of this cartoon refer to a character with bipolar disorder as being "on the loose," "a lunatic," and "emotionally unstable." Throughout the episode, this "crazy" character is shown barking like a dog, with rolling "crazy eyes" and talking incoherently (NAMI, March 2003).

ER, 2001
☑   Sally Field realistically portrayed Maggie Wycenski, a woman and mother struggling with bipolar disorder in six episodes (NAMI, June 14, 2001).

Car Talk, NPR, Dec. 15, 2001
×   Episode begins with a parody of Christmas carols trivializing and mocking symptoms of mental illness (NAMI, Dec. 21, 2001).

Drew Carey Show, Season Finale, May 2001
×   Episode shows Drew Carey locked up in a mental institute, heavily drugged and in a straitjacket (NAMI, Aug. 2001).

Once and Again, 2000
☑   Excellent portrayal of a man with schizophrenia in an episode of this show (NAMI, Aug. 2001).

Following are a few examples of episodes from prime-time television series that aired between 1980 and 1989. Each involved mental illness. Episode descriptions appeared originally in the television-guide section of the *Washington Post*, and were reprinted verbatim in Otto Wahl's 1995 book, *Media Madness: Public Images of Mental Illness*. Specific air dates are not listed in Wahl.

×   *The A-Team*: Following the crash of their plane in the Appalachians, the team members are stalked by a crazed band of mountain men.

×   *Baywatch:* A psychopathic murderer who has escaped from prison takes Stephanie and Summer hostage in a lifeguard tower.

×   *Cheers*: Diane fears she is being followed by a deranged actor.

☑   *Coach*: Despite his team's important victory, Hayden remains depressed over his breakup with Christine.

☑   *Dear John*: Club members help Mary Beth overcome depression after she loses her job.

×   *Doogie Howser, M.D.:* On Christmas Eve, Doogie gets sidetracked by a schizoid patient who thinks he's Santa Claus.

×   *Hart to Hart*: An insanely jealous woman murders those she believes stand between her and her obsession—Jonathan.

×   *The Jeffersons*: A comedy of errors lands George in a mental hospital where he almost goes crazy trying to convince the staff he is sane.

×   *Miami Vice*: A stripper with a dual personality goes on a killing spree.

×   *Night Court*: A paralyzing snowstorm leaves Harry stranded in the courthouse with a group of lunatics.

×   *Quantum Leap* (season finale): In a mental institution, Sam undergoes electroshock therapy which results in his having multiple personalities—from past leaps—and Al loses contact.

×   *Taxi*: Latka's girlfriend from the old country is bombarded by romantic overtures from both sides of Latka's split personality.

×   *Three's Company*: Jack and Janet mistake Terri's co-worker for an escaped patient from the psycho ward.

☑   *20/20:* Patty Duke talks about her fight to recover from manic depression, her suicide attempts, her family, and the drug lithium.

Appendix E: Representations of Mental Illness in Advertising

× Negative, inaccurate and/or insensitive representation

Dairy Queen, TV commercial, 2003
    × A recent Dairy Queen television commercial featured talking cakes proclaiming "I hear voices" about the words decorated on them.
SUCCESSFUL NAMI FOLLOW-UP: After Dairy Queen's communications director spoke to a NAMI representative by phone, he acknowledged that other complaints regarding this commercial had been received. The commercial was withdrawn, with a promise to keep a closer watch on advertisements developed by their ad agency (NAMI, March 2003).

Wendy's, TV commercial, 2002
    × Wendy's has recently re-aired its television commercial depicting a small support group session with the leader calling on the members to report. The last person announces that he bought Wendy's Classic Double with Cheese and says: "Call me crazy but it felt great!" (NAMI, Nov. 2002).

Smith & Wollensky Restaurant Group (SWRG), Newspaper ad, May-June 2002
    × The Smith & Wollensky Restaurant Group (SWRG) ran full-page ads in the *New York Times* for the Park Avenue Café (located in New York and Chicago), portraying executive chef, David Burke, wearing a straightjacket over the slogan: "There's a fine line between genius and madness."
SUCCESSFUL NAMI FOLLOW-UP: The ads ultimately were discontinued in response to protests and the newspaper's assessment that the ad violated its own standards. (NAMI, Aug. 2002).

Nissan, magazine ad, 2002
    × A recent ad for the Nissan Altima had the slogan "Known to Cause Obsessive Compulsive Behavior." This ad appeared in numerous magazines including, *Fitness* and *Oprah*.
SUCCESSFUL NAMI FOLLOW-UP: After NAMI contact, Nissan pulled the ad and promised it will not be seen again in the future (NAMI, March 2002).

Sunny Delight, TV commercial, 2002
    × A commercial for Sunny Delight aimed at children, depicted a bottle of Sunny Delight in a straight jacket.
SUCCESSFUL NAMI FOLLOW-UP: After a phone conversation with NAMI, Proctor and Gamble agreed to withdraw the commercial six months earlier than scheduled (NAMI, March 2002).

Sit n' Sleep (U.S. mattress company), radio commercial, 2001
    × A commercial featured someone selling a "used straightjacket" upon discharge from the "nuthouse" (NAMI, Oct. 15, 2001).

Toshiba*,* TV commercial, 2001
   × Commercial was set in a hospital ward, with a patient attempting to make photocopies in a cardboard box, using a slot to send out paper (NAMI, Oct. 15, 2001).

Sprint PCS Phone, TV commercial, 2001
   × Based on a scene from *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, where patients line up to receive their medication at a nurses' station. In this commercial, instead of medication, the nurses hand patients a Sprint PCS phone, and a Sprint spokesman runs in and announces "You are free!" Then the patients, as a chorus, wave their Sprint phones and sing "Freedom!"
   SUCCESSFUL NAMI FOLLOW-UP: Within two weeks of NAMI phone and email contact, Sprint wrote NAMI a letter apologizing for any offence, and assuring the discontinuation of this TV commercial just as soon as possible. This commercial was quickly taken off the air (NAMI, June 2001, #2).

Star 94 FM (leading Atlanta radio station), billboard ad, 2001
   × Billboard campaign spotlighting the radio show's "morning-ride-talent", who are all depicted in strait jackets with the slogan, "We are committed to having fun."
   SUCCESSFUL FOLLOW-UP: A group of Georgia consumers organized campaign and were successful in convincing the Vice President/General Manager of the radio station to remove the billboards (NAMI, June 2001, #2).

Eastman Kodak, magazine ad, June 2001
   × The ad depicts a camera tied up and in a padded cell, alongside the quotations, "I'm a video camera," "No, I'm a digital camera," "No, an MP3 Player." "Shut up, I'm a video camera." Underneath the picture a slogan reads: "Introducing the multiple-personality mc3. One minute, it's a normal, full-featured MP3 player. But, flip its switch, and you have one hip digital video camera in your hand." and "The new Kodak mc3. It's crazy!"
   SUCCESSFUL NAMI FOLLOW-UP: After being contacted by NAMI, Eastman Kodak apologized for any insult the advertisement caused, and vowed not to run the ad after July 2001 (NAMI, June 2001, #2).

Frasier, NBC promotional ad, 1999
   × Picture of actor Kelsey Grammer tightly bound in a straightjacket, with the tagline, "You don't have to be crazy to be crazy about Frasier." (Matisoff-Li, 1999).