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Mental Illness Stigma in the Media

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to explore mental illness stigma and one of its primary causes, the media. Essentially the paper looks at various forms of media (e.g., prime time television, children's programming, news media) and how they create negative perceptions of both mentally ill individuals, and those who help treat them. Previous research has shown that those with a mental illness are often depicted as violent and socially undesirable by the media. Other previous research has shown that those who treat mental illness are often depicted as unprofessional and untrustworthy by the media, creating a strong negative stigma surrounding treatment seeking. The previous research focused on treatment seeking has shown that those with high levels of self-stigma often feel less inclined to seek help from a professional. This concept has been explored by previous research, which has examined the role that the media plays in creating this sense of self-stigma. A small amount of research has shown that the media can directly impact negative views of mental health professionals and create a sense of self-stigma. Future studies need to expand on this concept to further validate the idea that the media can influence help seeking behaviors. Future research should explore the ways in which the media impacts mental illness, with the ultimate goal of reducing stigma in mind.

Keywords

Mental Illness, Mental Illness Stigma, Media

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Brian P. Smith

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to explore mental illness stigma and one of its primary causes, the media. Essentially the paper looks at various forms of media (e.g., prime time television, children's programming, news media) and how they create negative perceptions of both mentally ill individuals, and those who help treat them. Previous research has shown that those with a mental illness are often depicted as violent and socially undesirable by the media. Other previous research has shown that those who treat mental illness are often depicted as unprofessional and untrustworthy by the media, creating a strong negative stigma surrounding treatment seeking. The previous research focused on treatment seeking has shown that those with high levels of self-stigma often feel less inclined to seek help from a professional. This concept has been explored by previous research, which has examined the role that the media plays in creating this sense of self-stigma. A small amount of research has shown that the media can directly impact negative views of mental health professionals and create a sense of self-stigma. Future studies need to expand on this concept to further validate the idea that the media can influence help seeking behaviors. Future research should explore the ways in which the media impacts mental illness, with the ultimate goal of reducing stigma in mind.

Stigma

According to Link & Phelan (2001), "stigma exists when elements of labeling, stereotyping, separation, status loss, and discrimination occur together in a power situation that allows them" (p. 377). Groups

that commonly receive stigmas include homosexuals, certain ethnicities, those with physical illness, as well as those with a mental illness. The stigmatization of mentally ill individuals has been considered one of the most important issues facing the mental health community today. It is estimated that 1 in 5 people will suffer from a mental illness each year, with 6% suffering from extreme cases (World Health Organization, 2001). With mental illness being so prominent, it becomes crucial to study why there are so many negative views directed toward those who are suffering from an illness. These negative views often include the idea that they are violent, incompetent, and at fault for their illness (Corrigan, 2004). Not only do the individuals suffer from the actual illness, but they are also forced to suffer from these unwarranted stereotypes. These views that society holds, in conjunction with the labels given to those with a mental illness, often make their condition exponentially worse. The stigmas they are subject to often impede their road to recovery, as well as create additional stress for those who help to care for them (World Health Organization, 2001). Even though public awareness of mental illness has increased, stigma has not been reduced. In fact, stigmatized attitudes toward mentally ill individuals have increased, rather than decreased, despite these clear gains in public knowledge of mental illness (Link, Phelan, Bresnahan, Stueve, & Pescosolido, 1999).

The aim of this review is to explore mental illness stigma and focus on a primary means by which it is perpetuated, that is, the media. The paper intends to expand on the idea that media is a powerful tool that informs society's views of mental illness. A

primary aim is to review research that shows that various forms of media (e.g., prime time television, children's television, news media) help to create negative images of those with a mental illness, and to reinforce stigmatized beliefs. These negative images portrayed in the media, as previous research shows, tend to be extremely damaging and incorrect. It is believed that the media, if used properly, could help to create a more positive image of mentally ill individuals and help to reduce stigma.

Stigma and the Media

Over the last few decades a large amount of research has shown that the power the media holds, combined with the frequency in which it is used, makes it one of the most significant influences on society (Edney, 2004). What people see and hear in the media influences their daily lives. It encourages them to buy something they saw on a commercial, informs them of the latest fad, and also tells them how they 'should act.' The media has become so powerful, because people tend to trust messages delivered by the media. Additionally, most people are unable to critically evaluate this information received from the media, and therefore do not seek to refute it. This becomes alarming because the power of the media is easy accessible. In 2006, the average American household had three working televisions, which were watched approximately four and a half hours per day (Center for Screen-time Awareness, 2008). Aside from television, we can access media through the use of cellphones, iPads, and laptops. Essentially, the media is always with us, constantly giving us information. The media thus plays a vital role in shaping people's attitudes about the world they live in, as well as the people they interact with on a daily basis. What happens when the media sends a consistent message that helps to create negative attitudes toward a group

of people? This can be seen by the portrayal of mentally ill individuals in the media. In the case of mental illness, considerable research has shown that the media is the public's most significant source of information regarding mental illness (Edney, 2004). A review conducted by The National Mental Health Association in the United States (1997), cited by Hottentot (2004), examined which media sources people use most frequently to obtain information regarding mental illness. The results showed that the public gathers its information regarding mentally ill individuals from television (70%), newspapers (58%), television news (51%), news magazines (34%), and the internet (25%). This information seen in the media is often extremely negative, and it paints damaging and often false pictures of those with a mental illness. Media representations of mental illness promote negative images and stereotypes that provide the false connection between mental illness and violence (Francis et al., 2001). Many other studies have found similar results showing that those with a mental illness are depicted as extremely violent in the media (Coverdale, Nairn, & Claasen, 2002; Cutcliffe and Hannigan, 2001; Diefenbach, 1997; Olstead, 2002; Rose, 1998; Wahl, 1995; Wahl & Roth, 1982; Wilson, Nairn, Coverdale, & Panapa, 1999). Contrary to these findings, empirical evidence strongly suggests that this view is incorrect (Monahan, 1996). The consensus among previous research, showing the connection with mental illness in the media and violence, becomes more alarming when looking at other previous research by Philo (1996). Philo (1996) states that representations of mentally ill individuals in the media can override peoples own personal experiences in relation to how they view mental illness. Essentially, these negative images of mentally ill individuals

in the media are shown often enough, and are powerful enough, to create an extremely negative stigma towards those with a mental illness.

Stigma in Prime Time Television

Previous research has explored the role that prime-time television has on mental illness stigma. In the United States, one-fifth of prime-time programs depict some aspect of mental health, where 2-3% of adult characters have some sort of mental illness (Stuart, 2006). A study conducted by Singorielli (1989) examined 17 weekly broadcast prime time television shows, for a total of 1215 episodes. Singorielli (1989) found that 20% of the primetime programs in their sample referenced mental illness, with 3% of main characters having a mental illness. The study also found that 72% of these characters with a mental illness were portrayed as violent. Other significant findings from Singorielli (1989) showed that one in four mentally ill characters killed another character, and half were shown as hurting others. A similar study was conducted by Diefenbach in 1997, who found comparable results. Diefenbach examined 184 prime time programs from the four major networks (ABC, NBC, CBS, and FOX) for a total of 168 hours of programming. The results of this study showed that mentally ill characters were significantly more violent than other characters, as well as more violent than real people with a mental illness. The statistics from this study showed that out of the 127 characters with a mental illness, 33.9% were depicted as violent. This number can be compared to 3.4% of other characters being portrayed as violent, as well as 1.7% to 3.4% of those with a mental illness actually being violent in real life (Diefenbach, 1997). A similar study was conducted by Diefenbach & West (2007), just 10 years later. The study also viewed prime time

programs from the four major networks, viewing 84 hours of programming. The results of their study were similar to the results from Diefenbach (1997), showing that mentally ill characters on television were ten times more likely to be violent criminals than those without a mental illness. They also found that out of the 29 characters classified as “mentally disordered,” 37% were violent criminals. The follow up study by Diefenbach & West (2007) showed similar results to the same experiment done by Diefenbach (1997), showing that mental illness stigma has been prevalent in different decades. Other research was conducted using a similar experiment, but only focused on the popular crime show, *Law and Order* (Gans-Boriskin & Wardle, 2005). Focusing specifically on this program is significant, because like other crime shows, such as *CSI* and *Criminal Minds*, *Law and Order* draws inspiration from real-life stories, and thus is considered a reflection of real-life events. This is important, because this concept encourages people to trust the information they obtain from the show. The results from Gans-Boriskin & Wardle (2005) showed that there were main themes surrounding those with mental illness in the show. The main themes included the use of mental illness to explain violent behavior, and the performance of a crime due to such an illness. These depictions of violence in television are not limited to the United States, as other research in New Zealand yielded similar results (Wilson et al., 1999). They found that mentally ill individuals were also portrayed as violent, dangerous, and unpredictable. This shows that not only have stereotypes not changed over time, but they are also similarly represented in different countries. Overall, previous research has found a link between mental illness on television and violence. These results are puzzling when looking at real

crime data, which shows that mentally ill individuals are no more likely to commit a crime than another person. In fact, 95-97% of violent episodes committed in the United States are committed by people with no mental illness (Monahan, 1996).

Aside from violence, there is another strong stereotype in television that depicts mentally ill individuals in a negative way. On television, it appears that those with a mental illness cannot become productive members of society. Mentally ill characters are portrayed as alienated with no family ties, no occupation, and no social identity (Wahl, 1982). A study conducted by Rose (1998) examined this concept, and found that the manipulation of the camera angle on television can exemplify the feeling that mentally ill individuals are alone. Rose (1998) found that mentally ill characters are filmed alone with close-up shots, reinforcing the idea that they are supposed to be isolated. This sense of isolation creates the stigma that mentally ill individuals are solely defined by their illness. According to Olstead (2002), this concept of mentally ill individuals “lacking markers of social identity” creates the perception that individuals with mental illness are inferior, and not important. This could create a public view that mental ill individuals are failures. Additionally, mentally ill individuals may come to acquire self-defeating views over time. This could create a ‘self-fulfilling prophecy,’ in which those with a mental illness think they are supposed to be a failure, and thus give up on themselves and their goals. Research conducted by Wilson et al. (1999) support this idea in their findings which state that 67% of mentally ill characters on television were seen as unproductive failures, 55% had no positive relationship with the community, and 43% lacked comprehension of everyday adult roles. It appears that the media has a role in isolating those with a mental illness,

portraying the idea that they are not supposed to be a member of society. This could be an important factor in how people treat those with mental illness, as they may be less accepting of them. This could also impact how those with a mental illness feel about themselves, creating a strong sense of self-stigma, as they may feel like they are outcasts.

Stigma in Children’s Programming

The majority of previous research has focused on the stigmatizing views held by adults, and stigma in adult programming however, other research has explored the idea that stigmatized attitudes may start to manifest earlier in life. It can be argued that children rely heavily on the media, as well as the beliefs and attitudes of their parents, to obtain information. The media is important, because it helps to shape attitudes in children that will be carried with them in to adulthood (Hinshaw & Cicchetti, 2000).

A study conducted by Lawson & Fouts (2004) examined how mental illness stigma is reflected in Disney films. They chose Disney films such as *Dumbo* and *Alice in Wonderland*, because Disney is the major world producer of animated films viewed by children, and the movies are known to be ‘timeless,’ impacting several different generations of children. Lawson & Fouts (2004) examined 34 films, and found that 85% of Disney films in their sample referenced mental illness. They discovered that verbal references to mental illness in the films were greater than the references that children may experience in real life. The average number of verbal references in the films was 4.6, and these references often had negative connotations. A prime example given by Lawson & Fouts (2004) was Maurice from *Beauty and the Beast*. Maurice is known as “crazy” and a “lunatic” by the town, and in one scene he is even hauled away in a lunacy wagon. This scene

falsely shows children that mentally ill individuals are dangerous, and they need to be removed from society. A similar study was conducted by Wahl, Wood, Zaveri, Drapalski, & Mann, (2003), in which researchers examined 49 films rated G and PG. The results of the study found that 24% of the films in the sample contained a character associated with a mental illness. The characters shared several similarities such as they were Caucasian, male, single, and they tended to frighten other characters. Two-thirds of mentally ill individual's characters in the study were violent or aggressive, and 64% of other characters were afraid of them. Similar to the study conducted by Lawson & Fouts (2004), Wahl et al. (2003) found that many negative labels were given to mentally ill individuals in the films. These labels also included phrases such as "crazy," "psycho," and "lunatic." Both studies show how children's movies paint a similar picture of mentally ill individuals. The movies teach children that mentally ill individuals are "crazy" and that they are not normal members of society, as they are often outcasts in the films. These negative messages, especially coming from popular movies, could stick with children as they grow up and impact their levels of stigmatization as they grow older.

Aside from movies, several other studies have examined mental illness stigma in children's television programming. A study conducted by Gerber (1995) looked at a sample of 394 Saturday morning cartoons and found that they also cast mentally ill individuals in a negative light. Gerber (1995) found that mentally ill characters failed more than they succeeded, and they were more likely to be injured, killed, or exploited by other characters. A similar study was conducted by Wahl, Hanrahan, Karl, Lasher, & Swaye (2007), where researchers conducted an analysis of 269 hours of 527 television programs. The

programs were from popular children's networks such as ABC, NBC, PBS, Cartoon Network, and Nickelodeon. Another previous study by Wahl et al. (2003) found that the majority of the characters identified as mentally ill were Caucasian, male, and single or without any family. The results also showed that 67% of the characters were violent or aggressive, and the majority was likely to be the villain of the show. The violence often included the use of a weapon, thus causing other characters to try to avoid mentally ill individuals all together. Other previous research by Wilson, Nairn, Coverdale, & Panapa (2000) showed similar results to the aforementioned studies. The study examined 128 episodes of television shows, targeted for children ages 10 and younger, with 81.5% being cartoons. The results showed that 46% of the episodes in the sample referenced mental illness, the majority being negative references. Some of the characters had a comedic role, behaving irrationally or odd. Other characters had a villainous role, obsessed with harming others. The most significant finding was that there were no mentions of positive attributes with mental illness.

It is clear that negative portrayals of mentally ill individuals are consistent in children's programming. Both movies and television shows showcase the idea that mentally ill individuals are violent, and they should be avoided. They also showcase the idea that all mentally ill people are white males, which is highly inaccurate. False beliefs about mental illness being introduced at a young age have become a serious problem. What children pick up at this young of an age may stick with them forever. It is entirely possible that the stigma children learn when they are younger is only reinforced as they are subjected to more negative images in the media as adults. Perhaps by changing what children view, and showing more positive images of

mentally ill individuals, “the root” of stigma could be removed. In fact, several studies have used interventions to try and reduce stigma in children and adolescents (Schachter et al., 2000; Pinfold, 2003; Kennedy & Belgamwar, 2014). The results of these studies indicate that early interventions help to reduce mental illness stigma, but future research is needed to further validate the findings.

Stigma in News Media

The previous sections solely focused on television and movies as forms of media, as they are the most commonly used among people today, but there are other sources that are still significant. One of these sources is news media, which can be categorized as newspapers, magazines, television news, online news, etc. News media sources may not be as commonly used among younger generations, but they still reach a big enough demographic to be significant. According to a study conducted by The American Press Institute (2014), 61% of people surveyed used print media as source of their news. This ranks print media behind television (87%), but ahead of sources such as cellphones (56%). In terms of mental illness stigma, it appears that news media is used widely enough to make an impact on people’s attitudes. Research by Wahl, Wood, and Richards (2002) examined mental illness references in print media in 1999. They examined 300 articles from major newspapers such as *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Boston Globe*. One of the most common themes in the articles was “dangerousness,” with 26% involving crime or violence being committed by someone with a mental illness. They also found extremely negative headlines in reference to mental illness such as “History of Schizophrenia Detailed for Man Held in Subway Attack.” Headlining an article in this manner portrays the idea

that mental illness was the only reason the individual committed the crime, linking mental illness with violence. When negative, the headlines fail to give readers a perspective in which factors other than mental illness can contribute to the crime, or that mental illness is merely incidental to the crime. The research in the United States in this area is limited, however there are several other studies that took place in different countries with significant results.

One of the earliest studies conducted by Day & Paige (1986) in Canada examined 103 items related to mental illness in newspapers from 1977 to 1984. They reported that dangerousness and unpredictability were the most commonly used references to mental illness. Philo, Secker, Platt, Henderson, McLaughlin, & Burnside (1994) conducted a similar study in the United Kingdom, examining 562 newspaper items. The study showed that two-thirds of the items, roughly 67%, found that mental illness and violence were linked. Research conducted by Coverdale, Nairn & Claasen (2002) in New Zealand found several limitations in these samples used in previous research, and thus created a much more extensive database when searching for examples of mental illness in print media. They looked for phrases such as “mad,” “insane,” “go completely bananas,” and so on. They also looked at the nature of the paper where the reference appeared, page number, type of article, size of the item, and whether mentally ill individuals were quoted. The research compiled 562 sources that included letters, photos, and newspapers. The results showed that the references in the print media were predominately negative, with 61.3% referring to mentally ill individuals as dangerous. The references to gender were also significant, as males were mentioned by 54.7% and females only by 7.2% of the articles. Perhaps the most significant

finding was that only 4.8% of references involved mentally ill individuals being quoted at all, either by themselves or by someone else, such as a family member or lawyer. In a follow up study by Coverdale et al. (2002), they expanded on this concept by showing that 0.8% (out of 600 articles) of these mentally ill individuals were quoted directly, with the use of their own words. This further shows that mentally ill individuals are not given enough say, and this could be a problem. Perhaps if they were given a voice, stigma could be reduced by allowing the general public to see that people with mental illness are not as dangerous as the media makes them out to be. Another study conducted by Roberts, Bourne & Basden (2013) shows that these results are seen in different countries. Conducted in Bermuda, their study analyzed newspapers for a twenty year period from 1991-2011. They examined a sample of 277 newspaper articles, coding for mentions of mental illness. They found that 40% overall carried a negative tone toward mentally ill individuals, with 42% being negative in 2011. Their most significant finding was that references of education about mentally ill individuals dropped from 40% to 18% over the time period, as well as references to violent crime rising from 12% to 18%.

The aforementioned studies, despite different countries or decades, all share similar results. The studies all link mental illness references in print media with dangerousness and violence. These findings, similar to those of television media, show how mental illness stigma is prominent in many forms of media. Print media is another outlet that helps to paint a negative picture towards mental illness. Although news media may not be as popular as television media, is it still an area that needs to be studied.

Mental Health Professionals in the Media

Stigma in popular television shows and movies not only impacts those with a mental illness, but also those who treat them. A substantial amount of research has been conducted to determine how the media impacts the public's views of mental health professionals, especially psychiatrists. This previous research has discovered that in the media, mental health professionals are displayed inaccurately and in a negative manner. Gabbard & Gabbard (1999) looked at films before 1950, and created three categories used to stereotype psychotherapists. These stereotypes, all negative, were "the alienist" (a psychiatrist who is only seen in a legal setting), "the quack" (a professional who lacks skill), and "the oracle" (a psychiatrist who appears to be "all-knowing"). Similar research conducted by Schneider (1987) developed similar stereotypes of mental health professionals when examining films: "Dr. Dippy, Dr. Evil, and Dr. Wonderful." Dr. Dippy refers to someone being idiotic, incompetent, or confused. This stereotype was drawn from such films as *Dr. Dippy's Sanitarium*, various cartoons, and the popular show *Frasier*. *Frasier*, a comedy series, revolved around people calling in to a radio show to get help, with the protagonist often making light of their problems.

Dr. Evil refers to someone who is charming but malevolent, manipulative, and un-trustworthy. This stigma comes from films, such as *Dressed to Kill* (1980), where the protagonist is described as a deranged psychiatrist with gender identity issues who violently attacks women, and *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1975). The later film, a very popular film, shows a very negative image of mental health professionals. The 'treatment' in the film revolved around electroconvulsive shock therapy or psychiatric drugs that heavily sedated the patient's. There was little positive

interaction between patients and professionals. One of the nurses in the film, Nurse Ratched, abuses her power and makes a patient get a lobotomy in order to gain back control of her other patients.

The last stereotype according to Schneider (1987), was Dr. Wonderful. Dr. Wonderful refers to someone who is attractive, selfless, dedicated, always available, extremely skillful, and often has no life outside of work. These qualities may cause the professionals to cross boundaries, and create the stereotype that they are unprofessional. An example of Dr. Wonderful would be Dr. Davenport, played by Denzel Washington in *Antwone Fisher* (2002). The character goes out of his way to help the patient, on his own time, by adding extra sessions. This is detrimental because it falsely shows that mental health professionals will favor one client over another, and invest all their time with them. Another example of Dr. Wonderful would be Dr. Melfi from the popular show, *The Sopranos*. Dr. Melfi helps a client who is a mob boss, and she continues to do so even though it is causing her problems. This client compromises the ethics of her job, threatens her career, impacts her family, and even puts her life in danger. She stays with the client for over four years, mostly because she develops an affinity for him and begins to romanticize over him. Dr. Melfi can also fall under another category, Dr. Sexy (Pirkis, Blood, Francis, & McCallum, 2005). Dr. Sexy can be referred to as a seductive female therapist, who is extremely un-professional. Her sexuality is presented as the key to the relationship, where the patient outcomes rely more on that than her actual strength as a mental health professional (Pirkis et al., 2005). This is backed by research conducted by Bischoff & Reiter (1999) who found female psychotherapists to be more likely to be sexualized in movies than males, especially

when in a main role. They also found another difference in males and females, where male psychotherapists (61%) were more likely to be seen as incompetent than females (30%). The categories created by Schneider (1987) are the most widely used, but other researchers have also added to that list. Wedding & Niemiec (2003) expanded these categories into eight primary themes: Arrogant and Ineffectual; Cold-Hearted and Authoritarian; Dangerous and Omniscient; Learned and Authoritative; Motivating and Well-Intentioned; Passive and Apathetic; Seductive and Unethical; and, Shrewd and Manipulative. Schultz (2005) added two more categories, Dr. Rigid and Dr. Line-Crosser. An example of Dr. Line-Crosser could be Dr. Sean Maguire in the popular film, *Good Will Hunting* (1997).

Research by Grinfeld (1998) found that *Good Will Hunting* (1997), along with *Ordinary People* (1980) and *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden* (1977), were the only films since the mid-1960s to show positive portrayals of mental health professionals. This leads to the question of why there are so many more negative portrayals than positive ones. Research by Gabbard & Gabbard (1999) indicates that negative stereotypes may be used to simply advance plotlines, which essentially means that negative images are more entertaining. Showing more negative, entertaining images of mental health professionals may improve ratings, but it also tarnishes the reputations of real-life professionals. These negative images seen on screen could impact how those with a mental illness view professionals, and impact their relationships with them.

Public Reactions to Stigma

The previous sections of this paper all share a common idea; stigma is perpetuated in the media. This stigma, present in different forms of media, creates

an extremely negative picture of mentally ill individuals. Previous research has discovered that representations of mental illness in fictional media can negatively influence public images of mental illness, which can perpetuate stigma (Pirkis et al., 2005). Previous research by Granello, Pauley, & Carmichael (1999) examined what type of media had the most significant impact on attitudes surrounding mental illness. Granello et al. (1999) found that those who received the majority of their information from electronic media were less tolerant of mentally ill individuals, and had higher levels of stigma. The results showed that those who favored electronic media were more likely to favor authoritarian and socially restrictive views towards mental illness, and were less likely to view mental illness treatment positively in the community. These results were similar to those found by Lopez, Melendez, Sauer, Berger, & Wyssmann (1991), who found that adolescents were less accepting of mentally ill individuals, and desired more social distance, when mass media was a source of their information about mentally ill individuals. The concept of 'social distance' has been used in other studies, such as those done by Link et al. (1999), who found that the strong desire for social distance represents undesirable attitudes, and feelings of fear. This suggests that social distance is an exaggerated fear, likely influenced by someone's perception of mentally ill individuals. Granello & Pauley (2000) also examined how much media exposure impacts attitudes towards mentally ill individuals. The study asked subjects, who cited that television was their primary source of information regarding mental illness, to complete a scale measuring stigma. Results showed that subjects who watched between 11 and 20 hours of television per week had higher levels of intolerance and authoritarian views toward

mentally ill individuals. Overall, the study found that even moderate television viewing was related to intolerant attitudes toward mentally ill individuals. The study did not specify the type of programming, which indicates that any exposure to different types of media may cause mental illness stigma. Not only can television impact the public's views of mental illness, but other research has shown that movies also have a significant impact. Domino (1983) administered a questionnaire about mental illness to college students before viewing *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1981) as well as after. The results showed that attitudes toward mental illness became significantly negative after viewing the film. The study also showed an educational documentary after the film which was designed to eliminate some of the negative attitudes, but the attitudes remained the same.

Other previous research has found that the media impacts attitudes toward mental illness in different ways. Several of these studies simply show that the media provides inaccurate information about mental illness. Different from portrayals in the media that evoke fear of mentally ill individuals, this type of stigma can lead to misconceptions that change how people view mental illness. Research conducted by Lauber, Nordt, Falcato, & Rossler (2003) found that an interest in the media was predictive of participants being unable to recognize a person with schizophrenia. Instead, participants identified the person as 'in crisis.' These findings are significant because they show that people do not know how to recognize mental illness, which is an overall problem that can lead to stigma. Other research by Philo (1993) found something similar in their study, which found that people base their ideologies of mental illness on movies and not real life information. The study found that the group

that had greater negative beliefs made significant references to films such as *The Silence of The Lambs* (1991), *Psycho* (1960), and *Fatal Attraction* (1987) as the sources of these beliefs. The idea of individuals basing their information of mental illness on false perceptions in the media even extends to the medical field. A study by Clothier, Freeman & Snow (2001) found that medical students, who would normally have more accurate information on mental illness, still based their negative beliefs of ECT on what they saw in films. This relates back to the idea that representations of mentally ill individuals in the media can override peoples own personal experiences in relation to how they view mental illness (Philo, 1996).

Conclusion

Overall, the current review has shown that mental illness stigma is extremely prominent in the media. This stigma occurs in many different forms of media including television, children's programming, movies, and news media. The current review has shown that this stigma showcases an extremely negative picture of both those with a mental illness, as well as those who help treat mental illness. The media portrays the idea that those with a mental illness are dangerous, unpredictable, and socially undesirable. Similarly, the media also emphasizes the idea that mental health professionals are unethical and unconventional. These negative beliefs help to generally portray mental illness in a negative light. Previous research has assessed the attitudes of the public in terms of mental illness, and found that those who use media more frequently have more negative attitudes towards mental illness. Future research needs to expand on this concept by experimentally examining how the public perceives mental illness.

My current study intends to explore public reactions to stigmatized images of mental illness in the media. The majority of previous research has found a causal relationship between mental illness stigma and the media, by suggesting that the media is highly likely to cause more stigmatized beliefs. My current research intends to go beyond the causal relationship by experimentally looking at how the media can impact public views of stigma. The current study also addresses a new form of media, social media. Previous research has solely focused on television, movies, and news media, leaving a need for other types of media to be examined. The goal of the current study is to show that images seen in social media can directly influence reactions to mental illness.

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