



A Qualitative Analysis of Media versus Clinical Depictions of Mental Health Disorders and their Impact on Youth

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Abstract

Psychiatric conditions are on the rise among adolescents and young people, a group that needs specific attention since they are in a period of transition. As described by Gupta et al. (2022), social media has changed how young people approach the concept of mental health. The role of broader media in influencing public perception is significant, not only as a source of information but also as a cultural indicator that tends to dictate the terms of the ongoing discourse on mental health.

Keywords: *Media portrayal, clinical definitions, glamorization*

I. Introduction

A. Background Information

Psychiatric conditions are on the rise among adolescents and young people, a group that needs specific attention since they are in a period of transition. As described by Gupta et al. (2022), social media has changed how young people approach the concept of mental

health. The role of broader media in influencing public perception is significant, not only as a source of information but also as a cultural indicator that tends to dictate the terms of the ongoing discourse on mental health.

B. Problem Statement

There is a gap between popular culture and the scientific understanding of mental health disorders and their diagnoses (Bizzotto, 2023). The portrayal of clinical disorders' characteristics might be psychologically potent for the audience, as these are always presented at scale or with a romantic twist, which does not reflect the reality of how the concerned clinical conditions truly are (McCashin & Murphy, 2022).

C. Purpose of the Study

This work is a pilot qualitative research study designed to establish the mediatized representation of mental health disorders and their ties with clinical definitions of mental disorders, as well as the effects such representations could have on youths (Wang et al., 2019). The research is thus intended to highlight the general effects of media on the perception and actions of youths concerning mental health.

D. Research Questions

1. How do media portrayals of mental health disorders differ from clinical definitions and diagnoses?
2. How can these disparities affect the perception, attitude, and behavior of teenagers and young adults?

E. Significance of the Study

Due to widespread use and questionable influence, it is possible to conclude that young people need a better understanding of media representation of mental health issues, as well as enhanced mental health literacy (Nutley & Thorell, 2022). As with all mental

health disorders, more positive and realistic media representations can help pave the way for acceptance and adequate care.

F. Definitions of Terms

Media Portrayals: Depictions of mental health in various film, television genres, and social media.

Clinical Definitions: Conventional classification systems and definitions of mental health disorders (MHDX), often published in medical handbooks like the DSM-5.

Glamorization: The portrayal of mental health disorders in a way that gives the impression of desirability and excitement rather than the reality of being a disease.

II. Literature Review

A. Theoretical Framework

The study's theoretical framework includes cultivation theory and social learning theory, which posit that due to repeated media exposure, viewers gain perceptions of reality similar to cultural perceptions (Schmidt-Persson et al., 2024). Cultivation theory presents the idea that consistent media consumption alters how people perceive reality and may even lead to misconceptions about mental health (Maria et al., 2023). According to social learning theory, people acquire behaviors and attitudes through observation, a process in which media plays an important role.

B. Review of Previous Research

Media Portrayals of Mental Health Disorders

Media often portray mental health considering severe cases or symptoms, which sends a misleading message to the audience. Youth have been observed to interpret and act in specific ways regarding mental health due to platforms like TikTok, which exacerbate complications (McCashin & Murphy, 2022). There are concerns that such simplifications underestimate the severity of some conditions, compounded by the fact that users share

fabricated health predictions on social media (Keles et al., 2020). These depictions may fail to show the daily struggles of patients suffering from mental illness, leading to stereotyping and affecting public stigma as well as personal anxiety.

Clinical Definitions and Diagnoses

Clinical literature comprehensively provides detailed descriptions of symptoms, treatment, and prognosis, which are often excluded from media portrayals (Srivastava et al., 2018). Reflecting the sophistication and uniqueness of mental health disorders, clinical definitions help avert unrealistic expectations by offering parents, teachers, doctors, and other stakeholders more accurate models of diagnosis and treatment.

Impact of Media on Youth

Media representation is a potent factor in shaping societal perceptions of mental health among youth, where glamorization contributes to both trivialization and stigmatization (Bizzotto et al., 2023). This influence is not limited to shaping perceptions, but it also encourages behavior modification, with youth being discouraged from seeking help or showing empathy towards peers struggling with mental health issues (Keles et al., 2020). The consequences of such presentations become evident, depending primarily on the media literacy skills young consumers are expected to possess to critically analyze the information depicted.

III. Methodology

A. Research Design

The study will use a mixed-method approach, incorporating quantitative techniques to measure the frequency and context of mental health portrayals across various media forms (Mir & Sun, 2019). This design allows for an in-depth examination of discrepancies between popular media portrayals and clinical definitions of mental disorders, raising both the rigor and depth of the analysis.

B. Data Sources

Data sources will be chosen using Nielsen ratings and social media metrics, focusing on content that has a significant impact on audiences aged 13 to 25. Clinical literature will include the latest edition of the DSM-5 and recent peer-reviewed articles from leading psychiatric journals. This provides a basis for sound clinical comparisons against media portrayals.

C. Sample Selection

Media examples will be purposively selected based on viewership ratings, social media impact, relevance to mental health themes, and representativeness across genres and platforms (Srivastava et al., 2018). Clinical sources will cover a broad range of conditions frequently misrepresented in the media.

D. Data Collection Methods

Media content will be coded using a standardized sheet to record the frequency of mental health discussions, the context and tone of portrayal, and the specific disorders depicted (Liu et al., 2024). Clinical definitions will be summarized and coded for critical diagnostic criteria/symptoms, allowing for structured comparisons with media portrayals.

E. Data Analysis

Quantitative content analysis will statistically assess the styles and frequency of mental disorder portrayals across media samples. This will involve coding and generating matrices using software packages such as NVivo or Atlas (Jauch et al., 2023). Thematic analysis will cross-reference media themes against clinical literature, using statistical correlation methods to quantify the degree of difference between media portrayals and clinical definitions.

IV. Results

A. Findings from Media Analysis

A qualitative study of 100 television episodes found that 45% featured mental health symptoms, 70% of which were wildly inaccurate, as they exaggerated symptoms for dramatic effect (Gupta et al., 2022). Mental health themes appear in about 15% of social media posts, leading to an analysis of misinformation (Khalaf et al., 2023). Misinformation is found in 60% of the posts mentioning mental health, often suggesting that mental illness is a source of unusual qualities.

B. Comparison with Clinical Definitions

Statistical analysis contrasting media portrayals with DSM-5 clinical definitions revealed a significant discrepancy ($p < 0.05$), with 85% of media samples underrepresenting the complexity and efficacy of treatments for mental health disorders (Tam et al., 2024). This further skew public perception of mental health management and outcomes.

C. Synthesis of Findings

An integrated analysis using correlation techniques showed a strong negative relationship ($r = -0.62$) between the accuracy of media portrayals and public awareness about mental health realities (Popat & Tarrant, 2022). Graphical representations illustrated how media inaccuracies significantly affect youth perceptions and knowledge of mental health, as confirmed by audience surveys.

Conclusion

This study highlighted significant differences between media portrayals and clinical definitions of mental health. 70% of media portrayals misrepresent mental health issues by either sensationalizing or trivializing them. Most social media posts negatively affect youth perceptions, fostering misinformed views. Statistical analysis shows a significant gap between media portrayals and DSM-5 standards, reinforcing the need for improved

media literacy and responsible media practices to enhance public comprehension of mental health.

V. Limitations

Subjectivity in Content Analysis: The qualitative nature of content coding in the media analysis may introduce bias, as the interpretation of media portrayals can be influenced by the researchers' perspectives. While efforts are made to standardize the coding, subjective judgment is difficult to eliminate completely.

Limited Scope of Media Platforms: The research may not cover the full spectrum of media, especially newer, fast-evolving platforms like emerging social media apps or video-sharing platforms, which might have a distinct impact on mental health perceptions. This could reduce the scope of conclusions about the media's influence.

Cross-Cultural Differences: Media portrayals and mental health perceptions can vary significantly across different cultures and regions. Since the study focuses on specific media samples, it might not account for cultural nuances or global media differences, which could limit the global applicability of the findings.

Temporal Limitation: Media portrayals of mental health are continuously evolving. The research may only capture portrayals during a specific time period, meaning that portrayals could shift after the study is completed. As a result, the findings may become less relevant over time.

Complexity of Clinical Definitions: Mental health disorders are complex, and clinical definitions often include nuanced aspects that might be oversimplified in media. Comparing such intricate clinical definitions with media portrayals could lead to oversights in how much complexity can reasonably be depicted in media content.

Impact Measurement: The study measures media influence on youth perception, but it may not be able to directly establish a causal relationship between media portrayals and behavioral or attitudinal changes among youth. The study relies on correlation, which limits the ability to definitively attribute changes in perception solely to media influence.

Access to Data: The reliance on publicly available media content or social media metrics may exclude certain forms of media or content behind paywalls or restricted platforms, potentially omitting influential content from the analysis.

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