

Representation of mental health in the media: Educating our youth about the messages to which they are exposed

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The stigma associated with mental illnesses can be debilitating to individuals with these conditions. The public stigma results from the social endorsement of stereotypes about these conditions which can perpetuate the self-stigma of their internalization. The media is an important source of information about mental health; we see images on TV shows and movies, we hear about it in songs, we read about it in newspapers or news websites but perhaps as important, in our current technological age, is the information being presented on social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Tumblr, to name a few. The information being presented via all these media may be accurate or not, but may also present the mental health condition in a negative light, with negative tone or connotation, thus informing public perceptions and further perpetuating the stereotypes. We have been investigating the depiction of several mental health conditions in various media. This work has been conducted with University Students in the Faculty of Health Sciences, in order to help sensitize them to how their perceptions may be influenced by information presented via a variety of media sources. I will present some data pertaining to the representation mental health conditions in a mixture of media and speak

to the educational opportunity this has presented to our youth undertaking this work. By researching media types, students become more aware of sources of information to which they are exposed on a daily basis. Students found that information is constantly being fed to us, even when it is not sought out, via advertisements in all types of media. There is often a disconnection between the media representation and the scientific literature. Educating our youth about the information to which they are exposed is a positive step toward ending the stigma surrounding mental health.

Speaker Biography

Anne T M Konkle is an Assistant Professor in the Interdisciplinary School of Health Sciences at the University of Ottawa since 2009. She is interested in sex differences in brain development, behavior and disorder/disease. A multidisciplinary approach finds her investigating the media representation of mental health in order to better understand the information typically available to the lay person and how these might impact their perceptions and behaviors. With a focus on youth, she is attempting to help them understand mental health first is by helping to sensitize them to how their perceptions may be influenced by information presented via a variety of media sources and secondly, to formulate an educational program that would allow students, from a young age, to be critical of the information to which they are exposed, especially as it pertains to mental health.

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