

THAT'S INSANE! PORTRAYALS OF MENTAL ILLNESS ON TELEVISION (2011-2016)

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Past research has shown that television has a powerful influence on the beliefs, attitudes and behaviors of both adults and children. This study explores the incidence of mental illness in television programs, how those portrayals vary by program type, and how they have changed over time. The current content analysis is an extension and replication of an earlier study by Gomez & Hochberger (2015) using a larger sample of 550 television programs videotaped from 2011-2016 for the Center for Research on the Effects of Television (CRETV) archive. The programs included fiction (soap operas, dramas, crime/action, sitcoms, children's shows, and teen shows), nonfiction (news, talk shows, and magazine shows) and reality/re-enactment shows. Programs were initially assessed by a single coder to determine whether there was any mental illness content, and if so, the program was then analyzed by a pair of trained coders to describe the type of incident, context (humorous/serious, positive/negative/neutral), and reactions by characters in the incident. Results of the data analysis showed that more than half of all programs contained some content related to mental illness, which was especially prevalent in talk shows, sitcoms, dramas, and humorous children's shows. Mental illness content often consisted of derogatory language, jokes or off-hand references using euphemisms for mental illness (e.g., *crazy*, *insane*, *nuts* or *looney*).