

HOW ABOUT A FRIENDLY SHRINK? PORTRAYALS OF MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS AND TREATMENT ON TELEVISION

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Television continues to be a very powerful medium that influences how we perceive reality and form expectations for groups of people or social roles. While messages about mental illness appear frequently on television, treatment for the mental illness is rarely portrayed - and when it is, many times those portrayals are negative and inaccurate. In a study done on the influences of portrayals of therapists in television, Robinson (2013) found that fictional televised depictions of psychotherapy have the potential to influence viewers' concerns and attitudes on seeking psychotherapy treatment. The current study is a replication and expansion of an earlier descriptive content analysis by Jones and Calhoun (2017) with a larger sample of 689 television shows videotaped over a six-year period (2011-2016) for the Center of Research on the Effects of Television archive at Ithaca College, including 14 different program types (7 fiction, 7 nonfiction). Trained pairs coded portrayals of mental health professionals and forms treatment related to incidents involving mental illness (including addiction). Results showed that while there were more than 1,450 incidents involving mental illness, less than 20% included any reference to treatment and only 47 incidents involved therapists or therapy, most shown in a negative or stereotypical fashion.