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For a long time, mental illness has been considered as somewhat of a taboo and threatening to an individual's status in society. For the most part, such beliefs are heavily reinforced in inaccurate television portrayals unnecessarily degrading those suffering from mental disorders. What drew me to the subject matter of this investigation was the significant shift in my beliefs towards my perception of mental illness and treatment. Five years ago, I had begun experiencing pressing physical symptoms of anxiety, and to my initial horror, resulted in my mother recommending my seeing a psychologist. My first thought was of an image of a deranged individual being forced into a straitjacket by menacing men in white coats. It was only until after I became aware of the genuinely positive impact therapy had upon my life that I realised that the image had been placed there by erroneous depictions of mental illness on television.

Before commencing the investigation, my initial hypothesis was that television played a toxic role in perpetuating the stigma surrounding mental health, thereby hindering the mental recovery of sufferers. This hypothesis was swiftly altered upon hearing the professional opinions of several psychologists I had interviewed for my primary research, who felt that television didn't hinder mental recovery, however it did negatively skew public attitudes towards mental illness.

Extensive secondary research was conducted, allowing for a thorough understanding for the topic. This included an array of scholarly journals providing material on the nature of both inaccurate and accurate television depictions of mental illness and treatment, complementing my primary research. Primary research was undertaken in order to glean personal opinions as well as specific data on dated and contemporary stances towards the mentally ill. A questionnaire⁷ consisting of 7 closed and 3 open-ended questions was distributed via the internet to 135 participants, providing both quantitative and qualitative data on social attitudes towards mental illness depictions on television. Issuing the questionnaire through the internet was efficient and allowed for a widespread variety of opinions from various age groups. Demographic bias, and the participant's inability to ask for clarification, however, restricted the questionnaire's validity and further research had to be used.

⁷ Appendix A - Questionnaire

A content analysis⁸ of the hit American drama series, *Pretty Little Liars* was used to gather quantitative and qualitative data on the behaviours of mentally ill antagonists as well as the discriminatory attitudes of main characters towards mental illness. This method relied on the researcher's judgement and as a result, the overall validity of the research was weakened.

The conduction of several interviews⁹ with Clinical Psychologist; Michele Jackson, Dr Coralie Wilson, Psychologist; Salgi Shirzad and Dr Lawrence Rubin provided several academic perspectives on television's stigma surrounding mental illness. Since these qualitative interviews were conducted by email, there was difficulty in assessing how the respondents were interpreting questions. However, the broad range of professional perspectives complimented my research increasingly and avoided biasing my investigation.

I found the lengthy process of research, while arduous at times, greatly rewarding upon the completion of this PIP. At a micro level, this investigation has consolidated my prior beliefs of the inaccuracies of both television portrayals and the general public approach to mental illness.

⁸ Appendix B – Content Analysis of *Pretty Little Liars*

⁹ Appendix C – Interviews 1,2,3 and 4.