

Drawing Depression: A Look at Mental Health Themes in Visual Media

Objectives

Recognize the widespread popularity and impact factor that visual media provides to the general public and, therefore, their own patients

Identify the representation of mental health illness in examples of visual media

Identify specific resources that use illustration and animation to talk about mental health symptoms such as comics, animation and illustrated books

Recognize how visual media resources can provide patients with relatable characters that display common symptoms of mental illnesses such as depression and anxiety

Choose one appropriate example of popular comics, cartoons or illustrated books that they themselves would recommend to patients and families dealing with specific mental health diagnoses

Abstract

With the ever-growing popularity of visually based media, many artists are using animation and illustration as an outlet to portray serious themes in mental health in a simple and relatable fashion. Some artists use these themes to depict their own private struggles with mental illness, whereas others use them bring mental health issues to the forefront of public awareness and reduce public stigma. Along with comic strips and animated series, mental health themes are popping up in such places as doodle blogs, New York Times op ed cartoons and even children's storybooks. Some of the specific mental health themes that can be found in these outlets are loss, depression, social anxiety, PTSD, sexuality and eating disorders. If mental health professionals knew more about these resources, they could be used as tools that would give patients valuable insight and relatable information regarding common symptoms and outcomes of these mental health disorders. Our session will introduce participants to themes of mental illness in all of the previously mentioned visual media sources by showing them examples of each. We will provide information regarding common mental health themes within specific comics and illustrations and when they could provide positive mental health education, as well as when they could have negative impact on patients and insight. We will also discuss specific examples of how comics and visual media could be used to help patients who are challenged with learning disorders, limited literacy and limited intellectual functioning. During our session, we will provide participants with audio and video statements from visual media artists and include discussion of a recent ComicCon panel dedicated to mental health in which forensic psychiatrists and comic book artists discussed the portrayal of mental health themes in comics. We will also showcase video commentary by the managing editor of Panels.net, an internet website dedicated to comic readership, regarding the demographics and interests of the modern-day comic audience.

Agenda

0:00 Introduction

Commented [p1]: Title clearly defines the intent and focus of the session.

Commented [p2]: Objectives encourage active engagement with the session content.

Commented [p3]: Abstract includes a call to action and expected future outcomes.

Commented [p4]: Abstract describes how participants will be engaged by the general session.

0:05 Overview of mental health in comics and film

0:20 Small group activity: discuss the mental health implications of specific examples of visual media

0:50 Full group discussion/debrief of activity

1:00 How to use visual media in your practice

1:15 Final Q&A

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