The Link Between Mental Illness and Television and News Media: The Criminal Justice Consequences

By

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to those suffering from mental illness; to those who are labeled by media and the criminal justice system because of something they did not ask for.

Always know there is help. There are people with love and compassion for you.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

"Mental health deinstitutionalization was driven by both a desire to maximize effectiveness of resources and a hope to make the process of treating the mentally ill more humane."

Frazier, Sung, Gideon, & Alfaro (2015, p.3)

Wakefield and First (2013) define a mental disorder as a condition that must include “harm in the form of distress or impairment of social functioning ... due to a dysfunction inside the person” (p. 653). On the other hand, mental illness is defined by the DSM V as,

“a syndrome characterized by clinically significant disturbance in an individual’s cognition, emotion regulation, or behavior that reflects a dysfunction in the psychological, biological, or developmental processes underlying mental functioning. Mental disorders are usually associated with significant distress or disability in social, occupational, or other important activities. An expectable or culturally approved response to a common stressor or loss, such as the death of a loved one, is not a mental disorder. Socially deviant behavior (e.g., political, religious, or sexual) and conflicts that are primarily between the individual and society are not mental disorders unless the deviance or conflict results from a dysfunction in the individual, as described above” (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p. 22-23).
According to Knifton (2012), Lurigio (2011), and Sieff (2003), the mentally ill population is at a significantly higher risk of being perceived as criminal despite actual criminal behavior. Ringhoff, Rapp, and Robst (2012) explain that the criminalization of the mentally ill is a significant factor in the overrepresentation of this population in the criminal justice system. There is only a minimal link between crime and mental illness; therefore, treatment and intervention should not focus on crime and mental illness, but on mental illness alone. Knifton (2012) and Morse (2011) state that the perceptions of the mentally ill are based upon the values held by society. Likewise, responding to mental illness from a criminological perspective is not effective. The ways in which the criminal justice system responds to the mentally ill have overwhelmingly resulted in incarceration.

Deinstitutionalization has also created a society where the mentally ill are systematically criminalized by media. Those with mental illness no longer placed in state hospitals or asylums since around 1955 when deinstitutionalization was implemented have been labeled as violent and have been increasingly arrested and placed in prisons and jails; essentially the new form of institutionalization. According to Frazier, Sung, Gideon, and Alfaro (2015), deinstitutionalization includes three different factors: releasing individuals to the community, the diversion, and the alternative community services which take the place of the institution. It is important to have all three parts to deinstitutionalization in order for it to work. While emphasis of deinstitutionalization was to help those with mental illness, more and more of the mentally ill ended up in prisons and jails rather than getting treatment in the community (Frazier, Sung, Gideon, & Alfaro, 2015).
As a result of deinstitutionalization, the mentally ill were instead placed in prisons and jails due to the non-coordination of community resources and responses. The consequences of deinstitutionalization were unintended, but severe. Perez, Leifman, and Estrada (2003) note that numerous individuals with mental illness who are not given acceptable treatment, including medication and therapeutic techniques, ended up and will continue to land in the criminal justice system. This is considered to be the criminalization of the mentally ill. An unintended outcome of this criminalization process has been the media creating a fear in the general public. In American society, Stout, Villegas, and Jennings (2004) agree that fear leads to the belief that a certain group is criminal or deviant and the only logical solution is prison or jail.

Perez, Leifman, and Estrada (2003) reported the dominant law enforcement belief is that deviant behavior can be better treated in the criminal justice system than the mental health system. The training of officers and the implementation of that training have only recently included the mentally ill as a public health problem rather than a criminal justice problem. Markowitz (2006) concluded that behavior that could otherwise be treated by medical means has been dealt with by the criminal justice system as criminal or deviant behavior. Therefore, the mentally ill are more likely to be arrested than those who do not have a mental illness (Markowitz, 2006). Results of these arrests have further contributed to the criminalization of the mentally ill.

In lieu of the response of law enforcement to the mentally ill, programs and initiatives for the treatment of the mentally ill within the community have only recently been revisited and implemented. Of these created, one specific initiative is the Crisis Intervention Team Policing which was first introduced in Memphis, Tennessee.
According to Perez, Leifman, and Estrada (2003), the object of this diversion program is to avert those with mental illness away from the criminal justice system. The reason for this program was learning that “police officers were not properly trained to handle crisis calls involving these individuals” (Perez, Leifman, & Estrada, 2003, p. 67). While the need for this type of training is necessary and has been recognized, very few departments have actually implemented training to respond to the mentally ill into their preparation process.

Other fairly new responses by law enforcement have been post arrest diversion programs where the mentally ill are sent to community mental health facilities upon arrest, coordination between the criminal justice system and the mental health system for treatment, and programs for the mentally ill while incarcerated. While these first steps have been taken to help those with mental illness receive treatment, there are gaps in training and programs for law enforcement, courts, and corrections. Media play a crucial role in the public perception of the mentally ill and the programs implemented to serve the mentally ill. Funding will not be directed at programs for a population still feared by society due to media images and portrayals (Holland, 2012) as described in detail in Chapter 4.

It is important to note the use of media in the analysis that follows. While the use of television and news media is a significant source of information for perceptions of the mentally ill, media as a concept are a social construct; it is not real. According to Chesebro (1984), the “configuration of media employed by a cultural unit affects the selective perception, mental patterns, worldviews, and ultimately the valuation system itself defining the essence of a cultural unit” (p. 116). Thus, the reality of media depend
on the culture creating it and the audiences viewing it. Chesebro (1984) mentioned the media selected by a culture creates a perception of reality. Therefore, a reality is created around media. Media become reality for those who watch, read, hear, or experience it. However, media create distinct world views for the massive amounts of people who consume it. It is because of this construct or created reality that media are able to define mental illness and whether those who are mentally ill should be feared or accepted.

Criminal justice and media theories can be used to determine connections between mental illness, media, and the criminal justice system. Labeling theory and the theory of the true and original people aid in the analysis of mental illness. As the criminal justice system is an agent of those in power, labeling theory is effective in explaining how media are linked to mental illness and the criminal justice system. Additionally, the theory of the pure and original people aids in this analysis in that the function of media are to preserve the dominant ideology or to preserve the ideals of the pure and original people.

The goal of this paper is to analyze media and criminal justice responses to the mentally ill in regards to violence as a means of shedding light on an under researched topic. The focus of this research is placed on documenting empirical examples of the type of mental illness that is commonly linked by media with violence and how the criminal justice system responds to criminal acts committed by the mentally ill. The research includes literature on television shows, instances where the criminal justice system has interacted with the mentally ill, and studies of violent behavior committed by those suffering from a mental illness.
As of yet, there has been little research revealing violent behavior as a result of mental illness without other factors influencing the behavior. In order to evaluate the research, the research question for this study was: what are the consequences in the criminal justice system of media portraying the mentally ill as violent? This paper seeks to analyze the media influence on mental illness as suggestive of criminal behavior due to a mental illness. Additionally, this paper will address the consequences for those with mental illness of media perceptions and the current policy implications of law enforcement encounters, responses, and training. Finally, the paper will document possible techniques and strategies which may be more successful in the response to the mentally ill, whether engaging in criminal behavior or not.
CHAPTER 2
BACKGROUND

"Terms such as mad, crazy, lunatic, and the like can certainly be deployed in a derisive manner to undermine the views of those with whom we do not agree, but it is clear that they can have different effects depending on the contexts in which they are used."

Holland (2012, p. 230)

The effects of deinstitutionalization and the responses of law enforcement towards the mentally ill do not exist in a vacuum; media have a significant impact on the way in which the mentally ill are perceived, treated, and influenced. Perceptions towards the mentally ill by media, the public, and the criminal justice system are more often than not, negative. Stout, Villegas, and Jennings (2004) and Stuart (2006) have pointed out that media presents the mentally ill as violent and dangerous through repetitive messages that perpetuate stereotypes which are then internalized and acted upon.

Opinions of the mentally ill, by the general public, seem to reflect the statistics of the mentally ill associated with criminal behavior. Stout, Villegas, and Jennings (2004) illustrate the idea that media’s use of the mentally ill as serial killers and murderers creates a negative initial perception of the mentally ill; however, once individuals obtain more information on mental illness, those perceptions decline. Media are the primary source of information and seeking out additional research may be scarce.

Much literature written about mental illness and the link to media specifically uses language that defines the mentally ill as violent or aggressive. Fennell and Boyd
(2014) state that media representations are prone to depicting the mentally ill as violent, unpredictable, and untrustworthy, among other things. "Margaret Mary Ray was a woman with schizophrenia who became known to the general public as the stalker of David Letterman. When she killed herself in October 1998 by kneeling in front of a train, her obituary stressed only her illness" (Wahl, 2003, p. 1597). In a statement made Kellerman in 1999 he reiterates: "Lock up the psychopaths for as long as possible and the streets will be safer. Keep the psychopaths away from the rest of us as completely as possible, and the quality of life will soar. The sad truth is that there are bad people" (as cited in Potter, 2014, p. 164). Other scholars mention the fixed meaning mental illness is given by society: "The situated meaning of mental illness becomes a semiotic stand-in for punishment where harms of repression (fear) and reduction (laughter), as intertextually communicated, support and make possible the status renunciation ceremony...She now is recognized for the violent and laughable (i.e. stranger) figure that she was all along" (Chong Ho Shon & Arrigo, 2006, p. 74-75). Examples such as these create fear in the general public about the mentally ill.

Discussions about mental illness are also classified based on social identities and demographics. Media use these gendered illnesses to depict people as monsters or villains who should be feared. As mentioned by Clarke and Gawley (2009), certain mental illnesses are gendered; depression is seen in women almost twice or three times as much as men. Additionally, media descriptions of medication for depression are significantly gendered. The discussions surrounding anti-depressants are directed at women and how they need to be able to be productive and flexible in the economy (Clarke & Gawley,
While this article discusses the medical gendering of mental illness, media genders mental illness in an opposite way.

Television shows and movies usually have a villain with some sort of deformity or identifier that makes them stand out as the villain. Some of these mediums include any movie or show based on a comic book where there is a villain, crime shows and movies using mental illness to portray the perpetrator, and even film directed at a character known to have a mental illness. In the majority of these cases in media, the villain or in reality, the mentally ill individual is casted by a male actor. The only time a female is a “villain” is when her character is someone who has either endangered children or is insane on a higher level, making the female character feared even more (Chouinard, 2009). It is intentional that these characters are male as males are perceived as more violent than females even without a mental illness. However, give the character a mental illness and they become a villain.

Media also portray certain myths about the mentally ill in addition to the depiction that they are violent and aggressive. These characteristics include the idea that the mentally ill are all noticeable in their appearance, the mentally ill are silly or childish, mental illnesses are all alike and are all severe, and that people with mental illnesses can’t recover (Fennell & Boyd, 2014). By creating these labels for a certain group of people, media are able to twist the reality of a person with mental illness from a person who is suffering to a person who is causing suffering to those around them. The use of the mentally ill as villains in media and violent or aggressive members of society has developed a need for policy aimed at this population.
Labeling theory can be used to explain these myths or stereotypes about mental illness. Link, Cullen, Struening, Shrout, and Dohrenwend (1989) state that labeling theory is how individuals internalize what it means to be mentally ill in regards to societal portrayals. A label is created by society and is placed on a group as a whole in order to define what it means to belong to that group. In this case, the mentally ill are a homogeneous group. The labels including crazy, psycho, aggressive, criminal, and deviant are all labels placed on the mentally ill by society. Once that label has been placed, those with mental illness society in general will “devalue and discriminate against” (Link, Cullen, Struening, Shrout, & Dohrenwend, 1989) someone with a mental illness. At this point, media uses those labels to create a group that is feared. Once that group is feared, the criminal justice system can react, especially if crimes are committed.

Additionally, the theory of what is beautiful is good aids in this labeling process. Dion, Bersheid and Walster (1972) found that a person’s physical appearance correlates with what is considered good; anyone whose appearance does not match their character is considered bad or evil. Additionally, the physical appearance is what is noticed first about a person and creates an identity through social interactions (Dion, Bersheid & Walster, 1972). This can be applied to mental illness in that if a label is already placed upon that person, it seems to define his or her character. Mental illness presented in media is negative and places that “physical” characteristic on a person. In doing so, the person with a mental illness is instantly viewed as bad. They are then considered less socially acceptable.

The ideals of society are to preserve dominant ideologies that a person must fit into a set of constrictions deemed socially acceptable. The theory of what is beautiful is
good can be linked to the theory of the pure and original people in that what is considered beautiful comes from cultural identities. Hall (1996) studied different cultures and the privilege and oppression induced by those cultures. Due to colonialism, the pure and original people have become those who are white, middle to upper class, able bodied individuals, and anything outside those identities is considered “other” (Hall, 1996). The mentally ill have been labeled and deemed as something that does not fit these dominant ideologies and are placed in the “other” category. In doing so, there is an avenue to fear and ostracize those with mental illness because they do not fit the specifications necessary to sustain a culture.

Many public policies addressing crime and the criminal justice system focus on the crimes committed by offenders; however, a significant amount of the correctional population has or will have a mental illness at some point during their sentence. The public perception of criminals presently, is to “lock them up and throw away the key.” With this in mind, the issue of mental health policy within the criminal justice system has been but a figment in the back of policy makers minds. Creating mental health policy must begin with an assessment of the reasons the mentally ill find themselves in the criminal justice system. White, Goldkamp, and Campbell (2006) report that approximately 238,000 mentally ill offenders are housed in United States prisons and jails in 1998; these inmates represent about sixteen percent of state prisons and local jails and about seven percent of federal inmates. Additionally, James and Glaze (2006) include reports indicating that approximately one-fourth of those in prison and jail who had a mental health problem had served three or more prior sentences. With the rising numbers
of inmates entering the criminal justice system who have or will obtain a mental illness, crime policy must be developed to address these issues.

According to White, Goldkamp, and Campbell (2006), while the bulk of those with mental illness are not among the criminal population, media portray the violent crimes committed by those with mental illness as a significant majority. However, among those criminals with mental illness, increasing rates of this population also have substance abuse problems. Many individuals with mental illness use illegal substances to self-medicate or to decrease the severity of their symptoms. Additionally, Hartwell (2003) suggests that, according to the Community Mental Health Centers Construction Act of 1963, those with mental illness are better served in the community rather than in the correctional system, which, according to the incarceration rate, this is not the present viewpoint of policy makers and voters.

Those with mental illness have a decreased ability to make rational decisions because they are more compromised by their illness (Hartwell, 2004). A specific policy attempting to reduce the numbers of mentally ill in corrections is the Criminal Justice/Mental Health Consensus. The Counsel of State Governments partnered with the Police Executive Research Forum, Pretrial Services Resource Center, the Association of State Correctional Administrators, the National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors, the Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law and the Center for Behavioral Health, Justice and Public Policy to develop this initiative (Thompson, Reuland, & Souweine, 2003). According to Thompson, Reuland, and Souweine (2003), the objective of the consensus is to develop policy recommendations to improve the
response to people with mental illness who are involved or at risk to become involved with the criminal justice system.

The creation of this consensus raised the issue of mental illness in the criminal justice system, which then forced policy makers to recognize and impact the community by addressing this problem using practitioners and advocates who can shape the community response (Thompson, Reuland, & Souweine, 2003). Thompson, Reuland, and Souweine (2003) state that the “report provides nearly 50 policy statements, each which guide or prompt an initiative to improve the criminal justice system’s response to people with mental illness” (p. 35). Within each policy statement, there is an explanation of elements or programs that can be implemented to increase the effectiveness of mental health policy. Even with these progressive advancements, the fact that they are still so new proves that they have yet to be implemented and researched for effectiveness.

With the introduction of the Criminal Justice/Mental Health Consensus, the goal of rehabilitation takes on new meaning. Rehabilitation is the idea that there is something wrong with the offender and this person needs treatment (Morris, 2013). This goal also indicates that there is treatment for the offender that can help transform him/her into a law abiding citizen. This goal includes the medical model of the criminal justice system which adds to the liberal ideology of criminal justice that crime is the product of social misfortunes. This ties into the notion that the criminal justice system cannot just lock offenders up and leave them there; those with mental illness who find themselves in the criminal justice system need treatment and rehabilitation due to the lack of community centered on the mentally ill.
The Criminal Justice/Mental Health Consensus suggests that from the moment a person first becomes involved with the mental health system to initial contact with law enforcement though the criminal justice system, there are various opportunities for an advocate to focus on improving the response to people with mental illness who come in interaction with the system (Thompson, Reuland, & Souweine, 2003). This type of policy requires the response of law enforcement, courts and corrections to improve the experience of those with mental illness. As law enforcement is usually the first to encounter those with mental illness, whether as an offender, victim, or witness, it is critical that they have the training to interact with these individuals (Thompson, Reuland, & Souweine, 2003). Moreover, Thompson Reuland, and Souweine (2003) reported that the courts must also have special training when it comes to those with mental illness. Policies or responses to mental illness often stem from a moral panic (i.e. shooting) where an individual was believed/diagnosed with a mental illness. This is driven by media coverage which reinforces the stereotype and may largely contribute to the ability to incarcerate the mentally ill and the belief this is acceptable by the general public.

An extension of this initiative, implemented to help those with mental illness who find themselves involved in the criminal justice system, is the Mentally Ill Offender and Treatment Crime Reduction Act of 2004. The implementation of this act was in response to the ever increasing rates of those with mental illness who are incarcerated. Litschge and Vaughn (2008) report that those with mental illness incarcerated have rates about two to four times higher than those in society. The mentally ill had been incarcerated in increasing numbers beginning in the 1970's after deinstitutionalization because there was a lack of access to treatment.
Thus, the Mentally Ill Offender and Treatment Crime Reduction Act sought to implement the use of jail diversion programs, prisoner re-entry programs, and mental health courts to decrease the prevalence of the mentally ill in the criminal justice system (Litschge & Vaughn, 2008). While this act seems effective in theory, there is still a lack of empirical data on the benefits of mental health courts; however, some studies suggest that the results are positive according to Litschge and Vaughn (2008). Furthermore, access to mental health services is limited and the general consensus does not seem to be in favor of providing mental health care.

Redlich, Steadman, Monahan, Robbins, and Petrila (2006) suggest that the development of mental health courts is necessary for the court system to address the needs of the mentally ill community. The mental health courts are essentially a response to the significant numbers of people with mental illness who are incarcerated, their needs during incarceration, the difficulties the courts face in addressing these issues, and the strains that the criminal justice system places on those with mental illness (Redlich et al., 2006). In these specialty courts, the needs of the offender are addressed as the major problem so as to provide necessary treatment rather than locking the offender up. The major goal of these courts is to keep offenders with mental illness in the community rather than incarcerated.

With the creation of policies such as the Criminal Justice/Mental Health Consensus, there will be challenges and conflicts. Pustilnik (2005) proposes the idea that responding to those with mental illness within the criminal justice system inflicts billions of dollars on the public that may create additional problems for the mentally ill. However, understanding the social meanings of mental illness and their intersection with the norms
of criminal laws can lead to reform which would free economic and human value
(Pustilnik, 2005). With this reform, the funding would become a minute issue because
housing those with mental illness in correctional facilities costs extraordinary amounts of
money as it is. The current social construction of mental illness places these individuals
in high risk facilities because law makers, voters, and the public do not question this
response; in fact, they even embrace it.

Presently, the punitive model of criminal justice is dominant rather than the
therapeutic model as it is "easier" and more economical to lock people up for committing
crimes no matter the seriousness. However, with the introduction of the Criminal
Justice/Mental Health Consensus, social stigma on mental illness may not only be
challenged in society, but in the criminal justice system as well. This consensus will
continue to face conflict because the will of the people is different from the will of policy
makers and politicians. Even so, once a problem is identified, then the process to create
policy can begin; the Criminal Justice/Mental Health consensus is only at the policy
implementation stages, which means it has yet to be evaluated and altered to create more
benefits for the mentally ill and the public in general.

Mental health policy for the overall public has been left out of policy decisions all
together for many years and introductions of mental health policy have only recently
become known to voters and lawmakers. With this fairly new implementation, society
still holds certain ideals about what mental illness constitutes and the realities of mental
illness versus the media representation. Furthermore, there is a cultural lag in creating
laws when the ideas of society change; even though mental health policy has been
introduced, laws have yet to follow with newly addressed societal designs. The consensus
is a prominent example of a policy which has been implemented but is still progressing and creating awareness about mental illness within the criminal justice system; change will soon follow in public perception and the law.
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

"These studies revealed that the public's beliefs are, in fact, highly dynamic. They reflect the dominant treatment for mental illness, the changing nature of media portrayals, and the prevailing wisdom of science and medicine”

Schnittker (2008, p. 1370)

3.1 Data Collection

Articles and research were used from a variety of sources in an effort to collect the most representative sample of current literature available. Research was drawn from search engines such as Proquest Criminal Justice, Sociological Abstracts, and PsychINFO. This paper consists of peer reviewed literature along with multiple perspectives and media through which information was gathered to develop the objective analysis.

Key words in research included: “mental illness,” “mental health,” “media,” “media portrayals,” “news media,” “television media,” “criminal justice system,” “law enforcement,” “consequences,” “violence,” and “aggression.” In order to find more literature that would yield more relatable results, similar keywords were researched replacing “media” with “non-fiction news.” Articles were found through the above mentioned search engines and were reviewed in order to obtain the most effective material to aid in the research.
In using these key terms to identify qualitative research, certain terms from the strategy were found to have a higher specificity, producing fewer irrelevant articles. By only searching for mental illness and criminal justice system, results included the consequences of imprisonment on mental health which was not necessary for the research study. However, adding terms such as violence and news or television media, the results were narrowed down to produce studies fitting the criteria.

3.2 Selection Criteria

To be included, the selected research was required to differentiate between the types of media used to portray the mentally ill. It was also necessary for the research to address the portrayal of the mentally ill and the criminal justice consequences of viewing the mentally ill as violent or aggressive. Research was limited to peer reviewed articles, however, single case studies in non-fictional media were also considered for information that was presented throughout the paper, but not in the analysis tables. In order to be included in the present study, the articles must have been published between the years of 2000 and 2015 (See Table 1). Even though the Columbine shooting, the catalyst for large scale mental health research, occurred in 1999, the years 2000-2015 were chosen because the conversations about mental health and Columbine began to happen when further investigation occurred. It wasn’t until 2000 when further information was garnished about the link between mental health and mass shootings.

Table 1:

*Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria*
<table>
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<th>Parameters</th>
<th>Inclusion Criteria</th>
<th>Exclusion Criteria</th>
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<td><strong>Location</strong></td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>Non-United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Population</strong></td>
<td>Studies written in English</td>
<td>Studies not written in English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time Frame</strong></td>
<td>Studies published from 2000-2015</td>
<td>Studies published before 2000 and after 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outcome</strong></td>
<td>Studies concerned with the mentally ill, the criminal justice system, and news and television media portrayals</td>
<td>Studies not including the mentally ill but including media and/or the criminal justice system; studies including film media or broadcast media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Studies examining the criminal justice consequences of media portrayals of mental illness, including public policy</td>
<td>Studies concerning public policy and the mentally ill in general</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Study Types</strong></td>
<td>Primary research and literature reviews</td>
<td>Book reviews, opinion articles, policy documents</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Studies which include qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection and analysis</td>
<td>Studies not including qualitative or quantitative methods of data collection and analysis</td>
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</table>

### 3.3 Articles Included

Table 2 below lists the articles that were included in the review in the next chapter. The table is organized by year to highlight the growing interest the researchers took in the portrayals of the mentally ill in news and television media and the outcomes of those depictions after the year 2000. This may have been due to the increased interest and visibility of mental illness in the media in general. As more light had been shed on crimes involving school shootings, theater shootings, and other mass killings, mental illness became more of a discussed issue as well. A total of 19 articles were found that directly related to analyzing the effect of the portrayals of the mentally ill in news media and television media frames and how the criminal justice system reacted to this media influence. The approach of each individual articles is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.
Table 2:  

Articles Included

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<th>Article Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Year</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>News Media Portrayal of Mental Illness: Implications for Public Policy</td>
<td>Wahl</td>
<td>American Behavioral Scientist</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examining Two Aspects of Contact on The Stigma of Mental Illness</td>
<td>Reinke, Corrigan, Leonhard, Lundin, &amp; Kubiak</td>
<td>Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology</td>
<td>2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mad or Bad? Negotiating the Boundaries of Mental Illness on Law &amp; Order</td>
<td>Gans-Boriskin &amp; Wardle</td>
<td>Journal of Criminal Justice and Popular Culture</td>
<td>2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health Problems of Prison and Jail Inmates</td>
<td>Glaze &amp; James</td>
<td>Bureau of Justice Statistics</td>
<td>2006</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reality-Based Television and Police-Citizen Encounters</td>
<td>Chong Ho Shon &amp; Arrigo</td>
<td>Punishment &amp; Society</td>
<td>2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence of Newspaper Reporting on Adolescents' Attitudes Toward People with Mental Illness</td>
<td>Dietrich, Heider, Matschinger, &amp; Angermeyer</td>
<td>Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology</td>
<td>2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media Portrayal of Mental Illness and Its Treatments: What Effect Does It Have on People with Mental Illness?</td>
<td>Stuart</td>
<td>CNS Drugs</td>
<td>2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An Uncertain Revolution: Why the Rise of a Genetic Model of Mental Illness has not Increased Tolerance</td>
<td>Schnittker</td>
<td>Social Science &amp; Medicine</td>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
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<td>The Triumph of Pharmaceuticals: The Portrayal of Depression from 1980 to 2005</td>
<td>Clarke &amp; Gawley</td>
<td>Administrative Policy &amp; Mental Health</td>
<td>2009</td>
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<td>Race, Gender, and the Social Construction of Mental Illness in the Criminal Justice System</td>
<td>Thompson</td>
<td>Sociological Perspectives</td>
<td>2010</td>
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<td>Community Interventions in Bipolar Disorder - When the System Fails</td>
<td>Flaer &amp; Younis</td>
<td>Applied Psychology in Criminal Justice</td>
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<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Author(s)</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Unintended Consequences of Campaigns Designed to Challenge Stigmatising Representations of Mental Illness in the Media</td>
<td>Holland</td>
<td>Social Semiotics</td>
<td>2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder in the Media</td>
<td>Fennell &amp; Boyd</td>
<td>Deviant Behavior</td>
<td>2014</td>
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<td>Acting Up and Acting Out: Conduct Disorder and Competing Media Frames</td>
<td>Potter</td>
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<td>2014</td>
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<tr>
<td>Missing the Mark: Gun Control is not the Cure for What Ails the U.S. Mental Health System</td>
<td>Wolf &amp; Rosen</td>
<td>The Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology</td>
<td>2015</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.4 Articles Excluded

Literature was also found that did not meet criteria to be included in this thesis. In total, there were six (6) articles that were not included in the analysis. Of those articles, two were excluded due to the medium in which they discussed; film was a medium not analyzed in this research. Additionally, three other articles were excluded because they were not written in the United States, which was part of the criteria listed for the research. The last article was not included due to further reading of the article not producing pertinent information on the link between mental illness and news and television media.
and the criminal justice responses. These articles did not meet the intended research question and were therefore excluded from the research.
CHAPTER 4
RESULTS

"Across genres, media output disproportionately focuses on a relationship between mental illness and violence. Viewers do not witness each week's murder being committed on *Law & Order*, as the show always opens with the discovery of the body. However, when the defendant is portrayed as mentally ill, the relationship between violence and mental illness is triggered."

Gans-Boriskin & Wardle (2005, p. 30)

4.1 Introduction

As media portrayals of mental illness have increased, there has been a corresponding increase in the interest researchers have paid to mental health in non-fiction as well as fictional media. Much of the research pertaining to modern portrayals of the mentally ill in news and television media has been published since 2000 and has an emphasis on how the criminal justice system reacts to incidents of violence in the mentally ill population; however, only recently has the research been focused on the negative effects the criminal justice system may have on the mentally ill. This may be due to the link often framed between mental illness, gun violence, and mass shootings or the significant amount of attention being placed on the mentally ill populations in jails and prisons. The rise in those with mental illness being arrested and incarcerated has created a growing interest in the area of violence and mental illness. Holland (2012) reports that studies of mental illness and the link to media have been of concern for a
long time; however, media depictions of mental illness used for the present study have been found to be conducted only recently to determine if there is a direct correlation between portrayals of the mentally ill in any type of media and violence rates.

As a direct result of this, an increased amount of research has been conducted to determine the link between media portrayals of mental illness, specifically in television and news media. Additional attention has been placed on understanding the rates at which the mentally ill are viewed as violent and the consequences of such views by the criminal justice system. The present study indicates that media portrayals of the link between mental illness and violence indicates that the mentally ill are depicted in two distinct ways. First, they are considered incapable of functioning in society and should be pitied or ridiculed. Second, they are violent or aggressive and should be feared, thus incurring consequences by the criminal justice system. While the literature is multi-faceted, the distinction of the mentally ill as a homogeneous group to be feared, whether the response is pity or detainment, remains consistent.

Table 3:

*Articles Used for Each Theme*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Number of Articles</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Violence in the Mentally Ill</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News Media and Mental Illness</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television and Mental Illness</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal Justice Response</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.2 Violence in the Mentally Ill

As a significantly stigmatized concept, mental illness and news portrayals of mental illness have been increasingly negative. Eight (8) articles highlighted the perception of dangerousness among the mentally ill. Dangerousness was indicated using terms such as fear, violence, aggression, psycho, unpredictability, mad, and danger. Four out of the twelve articles specifically mentioned violence or a synonym of violence in the title of the article. In the examples that follow, mental illness is depicted as a wholly negative disease that creates criminals. Terms generally used to describe the mentally ill were violent, psychopaths, and crazy. A frequent mental illness discussed was Schizophrenia; a commonly misunderstood and misappropriated illness. Schizophrenia has been attributed to criminals who commit mass murders, school shootings, and murder. The articles all mentioned severe crimes such as these when finding research on mental illness, even when the individual was not mentally ill. These terms were repeatedly identified in the research on mental illness and violence.

Fennell and Boyd (2014) state that media representations are prone to depicting the mentally ill as violent, unpredictable, and untrustworthy. “Margaret Mary Ray was a woman with schizophrenia who became known to the general public as the stalker of David Letterman. When she killed herself in October 1998 by kneeling in front of a train, her obituary stressed only her illness” (Wahl, 2003, p. 1597). In a statement made by Kellerman (1999) reiterates this representation:

“Lock up the psychopaths for as long as possible and the streets will be safer.
Keep the psychopaths away from the rest of us as completely as possible, and the
quality of life will soar. The sad truth is that there are bad people (as cited in Potter, 2014, p. 164).

Other scholars mention the fixed meaning mental illness is given by society:

“The situated meaning of mental illness becomes a semiotic stand-in for punishment where harms of repression (fear) and reduction (laughter), as intertextually communicated, support and make possible the status renunciation ceremony...She now is recognized for the violent and laughable (i.e. stranger) figure that she was all along” (Chong Ho Shon & Arrigo, 2006, p. 74-75).

Mental illness is a general term encompassing vast amounts of disorders an individual can suffer from. Certain mental illnesses are viewed as more violent than others. A particularly popular illness, Schizophrenia, is linked with violence even though a small proportion of individuals within the mentally ill population develop this illness. According to Schnittker (2008), alcohol abuse is more prevalent in the United States than Schizophrenia and even with increased support for treatment of this mental illness, there is still a large fraction of Americans who link Schizophrenia with dangerousness.

In their research conducted on mental illness and violence, Lidz, Banks, Simon, Schubert, and Mulvey (2007) report that studies show those with mental illness are more likely to engage in violence when also substantially involved in substance abuse leading to the determination that when reporting other factors, violence may be higher in those with mental illness. In other reports, the same researchers found that there was no difference in violence among the mentally ill who used substances from those who didn’t. Lidz, Banks, Simon, Schubert, and Mulvey (2007) concluded that without the co-morbid substance abuse, the link between mental illness and violence is generally weak.
Research conducted on violence and mental illness may also lead to discussions on gun violence as the current gun violence controversy has been linked to those with mental illness. In response to the gun violence disagreement, Wolf and Rosen (2015) argue that there is a problem linking gun violence to mental illness in that the assumption then becomes that those with mental illness are more likely to commit violence than those without. In their research, they noted that “mental illness is not a major risk factor when it comes to potential for violence” (Wolf & Rosen, 2015, p. 867). Additionally, if there is a tendency for violence in an individual with a mental illness, treatment such as medication and outpatient therapy and groups, will greatly decrease the violence or aggression in that individual (Wolf & Rosen, 2015).

Holland (2012) discusses the stigmatization process of mental illness where labels are given to the mentally ill which distinguish them from others, creating the “us” versus “them” language. This is then turned into discrimination and hatred toward a group of individuals which creates stereotypes that link mental illness with being evil (Holland, 2012). By using this language, other words begin to describe the mentally ill such as lunatic and crazy, causing a fear amongst the population in regards to the mentally ill. News and television media have used this language in order to distort the meaning of mental illness.

4.3 News Media and Mental Illness

Public information about mental illness is overwhelmingly depicted in non-fiction, news media. While multiple articles discussed media in a general sense, five (5) articles focused on how news media alters perceptions of the mentally ill. The first
conclusion each article presented was the fact that news media is one of the biggest sources of information to the public which in turn, is one of the biggest sources of information available on mental illness. A major theme in each article was the language used in news reports; the use of words such as dangerous and violent to describe crimes. Moreover, the crimes involving the mentally ill broadcasted in news media are some of the most heinous crimes committed. Even when these crimes are significantly rare, news media presents them in a way that conveys to the public that these crimes occur quite often. This then gives audiences the idea that the mentally ill are violent and commit a majority of crime in the United States.

Wahl (2003) studied over 1,300 respondents with 74% stating news media was the major source of knowledge about mental illness. In his research, Wahl (2003) used 300 articles from major newspapers about mental illness and found that the dominating theme of all these articles was dangerousness. In addition to mentioning crime or violence committed by a person with a mental illness, much of the articles had a title announcing the violence. Much of what Wahl (2003) found in his research focused on violence and crime and used language such as “stalker,” “dysfunction,” and “psycho.”

Stuart (2006) also researched mental illness in news media and found that a reporter’s job is to attract attention and sell the news, emphasis on violence, delusions, and irrational behavior of individuals with mental illness created the ability to inaccurately portray the mentally ill through stereotypes and stigma. In turn, this gave the entertainment media the ability to reinforce and amplify those stereotypes. According to Stuart (2006), the assumed factual evidence provided by the news media can show incidents including more violence, vivid scenes, and memorable settings, which will
reinforce the public’s tendency to believe the reports to be true representations of mental illness. Similarly, bias and negative stereotypes are brought into news media as much as possible, therefore, limiting the perspectives on mental illness. Moreover, according to Stuart (2006), less than 15% of articles portraying mental illness include the perspective of psychiatric professionals.

News media has largely focused on gun violence in recent years, specifically gun violence and the relationship to those with mental illness. This media coverage focuses on mass shootings and the issues contributing to this violence including serious mental illness. The most recent shootings at Virginia Tech, in Tucson, and in Aurora have brought the link between gun violence and mental illness into light. Even with these shootings being in a significant portion of news media, the majority of people with mental illness are not violent and an even smaller proportion of gun violence is committed by people with mental illness (McGinty, Webster, Jarlenski, & Barry, 2014). A significant finding of McGinty, Webster, Jarlenski, and Barry (2014) is that when news media portrayals show violent individuals with mental illness, public attitudes become increasingly negative and there is a higher perceived dangerousness from the public about mental illness. In only two articles was the portrayal of mental illness portrayed in a positive light. Clarke and Gawley (2009) and Reinke, Corrigan, Leonhard, Lundin, and Kubiak (2004) proposed the idea that the increase in awareness of mental illness and the actual contact with a person who is mentally ill will create a more positive outlook on mental illness in general.

The conclusion that news media portrayals of those with mental illness cause negative public perceptions towards mental illness has also decreased social acceptability
of mental illnesses such as depression, which leads the public to be less likely to support policies for the mentally ill (McGinty, Webster, Jarlenski, & Barry, 2014). Dietrich, Heider, Matschinger, and Angermeyer (2006) propose that media stop depicting inaccurate representations of the mentally ill so as to reduce the fear and significant rates of mentally ill in the criminal justice system. Reporting of mental illness must be altered to not reflect fear, but acceptance.

4.4 Television Media and Mental Illness

Of the literature analyzed, television media was a significant source of mental illness and violence. In the same way that several articles discuss media as a general concept, five (5) articles focused on the perceptions of the mentally ill from television as a medium. Television media portraying mental illness uses a similar theme across shows; the perpetrator is mentally ill and commits an atrocious crime only to be given the harshest punishment possible. The articles on television media include depictions similar to these when discussing the specific television shows researched. Each article presents an analysis of television media that depicts the mentally ill as something to be feared; even when the mental illness is at the other end of the spectrum and is laughed at, the laughter comes from a fear of the unknown.

*COPS, Law and Order, Criminal Minds, Monk,* and other United States crime shows were analyzed for television media portrayal of the mentally ill as violent and the responses to the portrayals. A seemingly common story line of crime dramas is depicted in an episode of *Criminal Minds.* A young man, with his dead sister in the passenger seat, drives through the Eastern United States while hanging strangers from branches, bridges,
and roof beams, only to later find out that this man had paranoia and delusions that lead the team to conclude he had Schizophrenia (Parrott & Parrott, 2015). This portrayal of mental illness reinforces the notion that the mentally ill are violent and criminal.

Television media includes portrayals of mental illness either at one end of the mental illness spectrum or the other; either the individual is laughable due to their illness, or they are violent, dangerous, and psychopathic. According to Parrott and Parrott (2015), one of the most popular genres of television in America is fictional crime television that involves police, courts, and criminals. In an analysis of crime-based television between 2010 and 2013, Parrott and Parrott (2015) found that these crime shows “endorsed stereotypes linking mental illness with violence and criminal behavior. Mentally ill characters were more likely than other characters to commit crimes and violent acts” (p. 651).

Chong Ho Shon and Arrigo (2006) looked at the link between reality-based television and police-citizen encounters using the show COPS and how the mentally ill are portrayed throughout 20 vignettes of the show. In only one of those selections was the mentally illness of a woman explicitly identified; the encounter resulted in her being arrested and taken into custody by the police (Chong Ho Shon & Arrigo, 2006). The portrayal of this woman as mentally ill and therefore needing to be taken into custody renders the societal belief that the mentally ill are dangerous. This depiction is constantly reinforced by media as evidenced by the other sources examined in the literature.

Law and Order is another television show which interprets the mentally ill as perpetrators of violence. The conclusion of the portrayals of the mentally ill in this show is that crime is overwhelmingly committed by the mentally ill. According to Gans-
Boriskin and Wardle (2005), these interpretations of the mentally ill greatly sway the public about psychiatric disorders and the realities of the illnesses, giving the impression that the mentally ill are violent.

Even disorders that are viewed as not serious or even comical have significant impacts on the way in which society contextualizes mental illness. While *Monk* seems to set a positive example of the way in which Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) is portrayed by media, other depictions are not so successful (Fennell & Boyd, 2014). OCD can cause an individual to have unwanted thoughts that may be violent; however, that individual is more likely to find them repulsive than to act on those obsessions.

In the United States, of the one-fifth of primetime shows depicting mental illness and the 2-3% of adult characters portrayed with a mental illness, 1 in 4 mentally ill characters commit murder and half are portrayed as hurting someone else (Stuart, 2006). In addition to the violent depictions of the mentally ill in television media, these portrayals do not attempt to show that mental illness can be treated, overcome, or the mentally ill can function in society. Stuart (2006) also notes that the ways in which the mentally ill are filmed distinctly contrast other characters; they are filmed “alone with close-up or extreme shots, reinforcing their isolation and dislocation from the other characters and from the community” (p. 100).

### 4.5 Criminal Justice Responses

In the same way that portrayals of the mentally ill are increasingly negative, responses by the criminal justice system as portrayed by news and television media have been negative as well. Four (4) articles discussed the criminal justice responses to the
mentally ill. Each article mentioned a negative response by the criminal justice system to
the mentally ill, whether a crime was committed or the rates at which the mentally ill are
arrested or incarcerated. These statistics and vignettes clearly depict what television
media portrays as perpetrators of crime. This is then reflected in the popular stories in
news media.

A man with Bipolar Disorder refused to take his medication and broke a window
at his girlfriend’s house and threatened officers with a piece of glass (Flaer & Younis,
2011). This man was experiencing a manic episode from his Bipolar Disorder. Flaer and
Younis (2011) state that “instead of a medical or community intervention, he got deadly
force from officers…and a system untrained to distinguish between a medical condition
and criminal behavior” (p. 2). Flaer and Younis (2011) also found that those with Bipolar
Disorders are more likely to be arrested and incarcerated than the general population. The
criminal justice system has not received training which effectively aids them in
responding to calls involving a person with a mental illness. James and Glaze (2006)
found that about forty percent of those in jail and thirty percent of those incarcerated in
state and federal facilities had suffered from a mental illness.

A form of existing “treatment” for the mentally ill is the use of Secure Housing
Units or administrative segregation. With the recent push for deinstitutionalization, the
resources available to those with mental illness has decreased. Those deemed abnormal
even within criminal justice institutions are feared and may be placed in Secure Housing
Units under the justification that it will keep them safe. Placing the mentally ill offenders
in Secure Housing Units has also become necessary due to the lack of resources for this
vulnerable population. However, Johnston (2013) explains that those with mental illness
who are incarcerated are more likely to experience harm from other prisoners in the context of physical and sexual violence. Moreover, those who do not have the capacity to adapt to the prison or jail may violate rules of the institution and may be housed in Administrative Segregation (Johnston, 2013). The justification for safety and the lack of resources has greatly contributed to the high prevalence of mentally ill offenders in Secure Housing Units, which has been used as a form of “treatment” in a sense, among the criminal justice system.

In general, those who have a mental illness in a state prison is 61% compared to 56% of those without a mental illness and 44% of those housed in a local jail with mental illness compared to 36% of those without a mental illness (James & Glaze, 2006). Those who were homeless in the year before their arrest in a state prison were 13% for those with mental illness compared to 6% of those without mental illness who were homeless; those placed in a local jail were 17% with mental illness versus 9% without (James & Glaze, 2006). Moreover, James and Glaze (2006) state that those with at least three prior convictions housed in a state prison was 25% with mental illness versus 19% without, and of those housed in a local jail, 26% had a mental illness and 20% did not. These general statistics are high, but the breakdown of females versus males and minority communities is even higher.

Female offenders more so than male offenders are considered to be mentally ill whereas males are considered more likely to be rational and responsible for their actions; males are also more likely to receive mental health screenings while females are just considered mentally ill (Thompson, 2010). Additionally, female offenders have higher rates of mental illness in state prison (73.1%), federal prison (61.2%), and local jails
(75.4%) than males (state prison; 55%, federal prison; 43.6%, and local jails; 62.8%) (James & Glaze, 2006). It is important to note, though, that these are significantly high rates of mental illness regardless of gender. Moreover, James & Glaze (2006) found that among whites, blacks, and Hispanics, whites did have the highest rates of mental illness in the criminal justice system at 62.2% in state prison, 49.6% in federal prison, and 71.2% in local jails but because of the disproportionate rates of minority groups incarcerated, there are more minorities with mental illness than whites.

News and television media have had a significant impact on the way in which the public perceives the mentally ill in regards to violence and the criminal justice system. However, the statistics used to describe the demographics of the mentally ill in the criminal justice system reflect consequences that may be due in part by how the criminal justice system views the mentally ill but could also be an indicator of the influence news and television media have on how the mentally ill are treated.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

"As a result of these misguided attempts to reduce violence, the focus on improving our nation's mental health is weakening. Categorical restrictions such as those based on mental illness fail to protect the public and infringe upon individual rights."

Wolf & Rosen (2015, p. 877-878)

5.1 Conclusion

While research on mental illness and violence has been prevalent for many years, in recent years, research on mental illness and the influence of television and news media has been quite lacking. However, as described in the analysis, news and television media have a significant effect on the perception of the mentally ill by the general public and the criminal justice system. Deinstitutionalization has created a society where the mentally ill are feared and labeled as “other.” This label developed into a way for news media to influence the public into believing the mentally ill are violent and aggressive. As stated before, 61% of those in state prisons are mentally ill and 44% in local jails are mentally ill. Deinstitutionalization has given the mentally ill the freedom from mental institutions but has diverted them to other facilities.

Research on mental illness and the criminal justice responses to violence as depicted in news and television media has generally been minimal. The majority of research on mental illness and the media does not include the criminal justice system and
how the mentally ill are affected in relation to the law. The analysis of the link between the mentally ill, the portrayals of the mentally ill by news and television media, and the criminal justice responses reveals several important factors. Firstly, news media has a distinct impact on the development of television media in response to the reactions from the general public. News media has the ability to focus on crimes which create the most panic in the general public. This in turn, creates better television due to the need for audiences to watch what they fear in a controlled environment (Parrott & Parrott, 2015).

Additionally, the current gun controversy has been used by news media to further the panic about the mentally ill. James Holmes, the Columbine shooting, school shootings, and more recently, the Planned Parenthood shooting in Colorado Springs has utilized mental illness including using the insanity defense, mental illness as the reason for committing a crime, or mental illness in order to alleviate the consequences of the crime. While these individuals may have had a mental illness, this does not necessarily explain the entire picture. Moreover, to counter the gun debate, instead of talking about gun restrictions we talk about the need to address mental illness, thus detracting from another major issue.

Secondly, news and television media depict the mentally ill as overwhelmingly violent and criminal. The news media’s ability to influence what gets put on television is also relevant when discussing mental illness. The analysis shows that with more news shedding light on mass shootings where the perpetrator is claimed to be mentally ill, television media will produce shows that reflect what society fears or what is important to society in that time period. Once news media is able to create fear in the general public about mental illness, television media makes money by reinforcing those stereotypes by
making crime dramas including a mentally ill perpetrator. Additionally, the mentally ill
have not been advocated for in news media and are reflected similarly in television
media. This is reinforced by White, Goldkamp, and Campbell’s (2006) research which
found that the majority of those with mental illness are not among the criminal population
and those who are also have other factors in their lives that contribute to criminality.

Lastly, criminal justice responses to the mentally ill have been greatly influenced
by the portrayals of the mentally ill by news and television media. Increasing rates of
those with mental illness have been ending up in the criminal justice system since
deinstitutionalization and even more so recently. News media has been overwhelmingly
focusing on crimes where mental illness is claimed to be the cause, the driving factor, or
the excuse has pushed the criminal justice system to seek out the mentally ill as violent
and send them to correctional facilities rather than inpatient psychiatric hospitals or
outpatient treatment.

Labeling theory is illustrated throughout the analysis in that news and television
media place a certain label on those with mental illness in order to further an agenda. The
mentally ill are given labels such as “crazy,” “psycho,” and “criminal” which are
reflected through news and television media. These labels are reflected in research by
Wolf and Rosen (2015) who found that the mentally ill are viewed as more likely to
commit a crime than those without mental illness. Furthermore, according to Stuart
(2006), news media uses these labels in order to limit perspectives on mental illness.
Labels placed on the mentally ill are portrayed even further in television media where the
perpetrator is depicted with a mental illness.
The results additionally prove that the theory of the pure and original people and what is beautiful is good relate to how the mentally ill are portrayed by news and television media and how the criminal justice system responds. In portraying the mentally ill as criminals, media is able to enforce the idea that those who are different from what is considered “normal,” are considered “other.” News and television media are able to preserve dominant ideologies by separating the mentally ill from the rest of the population. This is evidenced by the significantly high rates of those with mental illness in the criminal justice system.

The results of this analysis proved that increasing rates of those with mental illness have ended up in the criminal justice system. James and Glaze (2006) found that 61% of those in state prisons have a mental illness compared to 56% without and 44% of those in local jails have a mental illness whereas 36% do not have a mental illness. Furthermore, as Flaer and Younis (2011) found, those with Bipolar Disorder are more likely to be arrested and incarcerated than those without mental illness. This can be linked to media reflections of mental illness that the mentally ill are to be feared as can be seen in shows such as COPS, Law and Order, Criminal Minds, and other crime dramas. As media are a significant source of information for society, the news media focus on severe crimes that are in fact, significantly rare, and television shows including mentally ill perpetrators reinforces this idea.

5.2 Limitations

As research on news and television media influence on the violence in the mentally ill and the responses by the criminal justice system is fairly new, there are
inherent limitations. The majority of research on mental illness and media in any form, does not include the effects on how the criminal justice system perceives the mentally ill. Research was found to either include mental illness and media in all forms or mental illness and the criminal justice system. Therefore, this thesis developed the link between the criminal justice system, news and television media, and mental illness by combining the research to determine the link between the three.

Furthermore, the limited research on all three factors of this analysis combines research that are based on the ability of media to influence the public and the increasing numbers of the mentally ill in prisons and jails. Only one article was found to measure the relationship between those who suffer from a mental illness and how the general public views the mentally ill in relation to distance from an individual with mental illness. However, this article did not include the media component. Therefore, this article was not included in the analysis but was included in the discussion to reinforce that the mentally ill are not violent or criminal and those who are, are among a very small population.

Lastly, the research used in the present study was not from primary sources but from what other people think about media. As such, the definition of media are different from one article to the next. By not using primary sources, the use of media to link mental illness and crime may vary as well; this can cause conflict between articles that show relationships between similar mediums, mental illness, and the criminal justice system. In the same way, the way in which mental illness is defined can vary by articles as well. The links between mental illness, media, and the criminal justice system are not as strong when using articles that do not originate from primary sources.
Research on mental illness, media, and the criminal justice system is lacking as a whole, making it difficult to know for sure if there is a true link between how media depict the mentally ill and how the criminal justice system responds. More research must be conducted to bridge the gap between media portrayals of the mentally ill as violent and the reasons there are so many individuals with mental illness entering the criminal justice system when there are other avenues for treatment and rehabilitation.

5.3 Policy Implications

Multiple policies have been enacted to aid the mentally ill in the transition from deinstitutionalization to the present; however, most policies do not reflect the media’s ability to influence the general public. More research must be conducted on the link between media’s ability to distort mental illness and the effects that has on the criminal justice system in order to develop policy. Current policy focuses on the suffering of the mentally ill and the likelihood of ending up in the criminal justice system but fails to acknowledge the ability of media to greatly distort the rates of violence among the mentally ill. It is important to remember that the rates of violence in those with mental illness are significantly small.

Action must be taken to alter the way in which media illustrate mental illness in order to deter the public from fearing the mentally ill. The fear or moral panic surrounding violence in the mentally ill is significantly based on media as they are the major source for information. Once research has begun to show this link, whether direct or indirect, policy can be created to aid in the treatment of the mentally ill and the stigma surrounding mental illness.
5.4 Future Research

In order to further research on the link between the media depictions of the mentally ill as violent and aggressive and the criminal justice system responses, studies must be conducted to determine if there is a direct link or, if the link is indirect, what the factors are that influence either media depictions or the violence and aggression in the mentally ill. Future studies must determine the additional factors that cause those with mental illness who are violent to commit crime; however small a number. Due to the indications that the mentally ill are, for the most part, not violent or aggressive, research must be specifically conducted on crimes already committed by those with mental illness to conclude the reasoning. Additionally, separate research must determine how the media is able to reinforce negative attitudes of the mentally ill and how that directly relates to the criminal justice system.

If this research were to continue, a content analysis must first be conducted on the specific news media and television media that influences the mentally ill and those news stories and television shows which involved mental illness in relation to the criminal justice system and the significant numbers of those with mental illness arrested, in correctional institutions, and other facilities of the criminal justice system. Then, further research would be included using the mentally ill populations in the criminal justice system to research further the relationship between media, the criminal justice system, and mental illness.
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