Bowling Green State University

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# Exploring how Media Portrayals of Mental Health Affect Public Perceptions through Devised Theatre

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"Exploring how Media Portrayals of Mental Health Affect Public Perceptions through Devised Theatre."

By: Lauren Lash

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# Introduction

My name is Lauren Lash, I am a third year theatre major and honors student. A performance piece and this corresponding paper serve as my honors project, which has two main foci: devised theatre and how the media affects perceptions of mental health.

In devised theatre, the ensemble created the concept upon which the performance was built. While I was the leader for this project, each group member (undergraduate theatre students: Shannon Bingham, Alyx Fisher, Allison Kulbago, Jacob Stoliker) participated in the decision making process. I was interested in using this form of theatre because I have experienced devising in several different contexts throughout my time at this university. For this project, the group allotted six hours for rehearsal, because of our group schedule. This may seem like quite a bit of time, but the discussions and experimentation with different ideas typically took more time. This piece was nowhere near finished, but we presented the outline of the piece combining the devising exercises with the qualities of movement we discussed during our rehearsal period.

The second focus was how media portrayals affect mental health (specifically depression and anxiety). I focused on mental health because it is an important topic to discuss on a college campus where many students navigate stress, depression, anxiety, and other mental health problems. I researched the stigma surrounding mental health because of how the media portrayed people struggling with mental health as violent or crazy.

These two foci worked well together because the five of us were able to discuss our own perceptions of mental health and how stigmatized representations of mental health affect our perceptions of that work.

The following link leads to a YouTube playlist that includes the two songs that were used in the performance as well as the performance piece. The piece was meant to be viewed while listening to either "Hurt" by Nine Inch Nails or "I'm Fine" by Anthony Amorim. However, the piece was also viewed in silence which created a different effect for the viewer. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=prDoGmY5kj8&list=PLtoBArcIv8BsDMZY5dDCtnG1SPVQ9Djaq

This packet is a documentation of the rehearsal process and sources that influenced the piece. Documenting the rehearsal process included a list of songs, rehearsal plans, rehearsal schedules, and my reflections on the process. Helpful sources included a photo release form, which allowed me to include a recording in this packet, and my annotated bibliography with

sources about devising, portraying mental health in theatre, and how media portrayals effect public perceptions of mental health.

# Song List

I wanted to add music to the piece because music can be very powerful and can add another personal association to the material based on the song. I asked each of my team members to suggest a few songs that reminded them about anxiety or depression. I compiled each of these songs into a playlist and we did a series of exercises with each song. After these exercises, we set out to put the songs into three categories: anxiety, depression, and everything will be fine. Then we would choose one song from each of these categories. Another category was added throughout this process which was a mixture of several categories. This will show each of the suggested songs, what category they are in, and a brief summary of the group's discussion about that song.

**Anxiety:**

"I'm Fine" - Anthony Amorim

  This is the song we chose for the presentation. We liked the constant movement in the melody and the chorus. We also particularly liked the use of the words "I'm fine" because that is a phrase that is often used to deny the effects of anxiety.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RIHfdZzj6VU

"Just Another Day" - *Next to Normal*

  The group had a very strong reaction to this song. Everyone was very hectic and moving around more than most of the other songs. While we had a strong reaction to this song, we agreed that this song may be confusing. This song comes from the musical *Next to Normal* that is about a woman struggling with bipolar disorder. Since we are focusing on anxiety and depression, we did not want to confuse anxiety with bipolar disorder.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yFt5ggJgrfI

**Depression:**

"Hurt" - Nine Inch Nails

  This is the song we used for the presentation. We loved the distortion of the music and how long it took for the music to begin. This song stays slow and the distortion adds to the majority of moving through everyday life with the weight. The lyrics "I wear this crown of shit"

also speaks to people blaming themselves for their depression and what is making their lives harder. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=prDoGmY5kj8

"The Night That We Met" - Lord Huron

This song is often associated with the television show *13 Reasons Why*. This show has been criticized for glorifying suicide. While the song came out before the show, we were worried that the audience would have a more negative response to this song because of its connection to the show. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wGF7PswOENQ

**Everything will be Fine:**

"You Will Be Found" - *Dear Evan Hansen*

This is the song we chose for the presentation. This was the song that the group connected with the most in this category. Each member of the group knew this song before we began this exercise. This song is from the musical *Dear Evan Hansen* that has been criticized for being disingenuous because the main character is lying during most of the production. We were curious to see if this criticism affected the audience's perceptions of our peace.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mSfH2AuhXfw

"Light" - *Next to Normal*

This song is upbeat and speaks to a better future. This song comes from the musical *Next to Normal* that is about a woman with bipolar disorder. Since we were focusing on generalized anxiety and depression, we did not want to add a song whose source material was based on bipolar. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oUHlx119Cv4

"After the Storm" - Mumford and Sons

This song has lyrics that are very calming and positive. However, the music is slower and can sound more like the depression category if the listener is not tuned into the lyrics of this song. We wanted a song that was more upbeat to take the audience out of the depressive/anxious state of the first part of the presentation. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SWYG7lZBc6U

**Mixture:**

"Logic 1-800-273-8255" - Alessia Cara & Khalid

This song begins talking about suicidal ideation and losing the will to live that we attributed to the depression category. However, the song switches from "I don't want to be alive" to "I want you to be alive", to "I finally want to be alive" which lends itself to the "everything will be fine" category. Since there is a progression throughout this song, we worried that the message may be confusing, so we chose not to use this song for the presentation. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2ZKTru331_I

"Be Ok" - Ingrid Michaelson

We liked that this song was upbeat and sounds happy. We originally put this song in the "everything will be fine" category because of the happy music. However, the song often talks about wanting to be ok rather than being ok which lends itself to the anxiety category. Since this cannot be defined as one category, we chose not to use it in the presentation.

"EASE" (Lontalius Remix) - Troye Sivan

This was the first song in the playlist. We were still getting used to the exercises and were not connected with this song. Overall, the song teeters between the loneliness of depression and seeking for help that is associated with the "everything will be fine" category. Since we did not have a strong connection with the song, and it did not fit into one category we did not use it for the presentation. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y3GSRzXtAmU

# Rehearsal Plan One
**2/15/2020**

1. Meet individually with each person to discuss parameters for physical touch and limits to mental health discussion. Dr. Braden suggests asking the questions about mental health with this phrasing: "The project centers around mental health issues like anxiety and depressions, what concerns, if any, do you have about acting in this role? Some people experience discomfort because of their own personal mental health experiences or those of friends/family; so if you have any reservations, please let me know." Cody and I will both be present for these conversations so that these concerns can be documented and maintained throughout the rehearsal process. I will write these concerns in my notebook for future reference and Cody can interject if one of these concerns surfaces during the rehearsal process. When a person is not meeting with us, they will be encouraged to stretch to prepare for the activities.

2. Discuss the basic parameters found in our individual meetings as a group. We will clarify that if anyone feels uncomfortable throughout the process, whether for reasons already discussed in individual meeting or moving forward, that they are able to voice their discomfort and we can adapt accordingly.

3. Use Your Loaf: Create different objects using a loaf of bread. I am using tortillas instead of a loaf of bread because they are easier to clean up. You can hold the tortilla in both hands and mime a steering wheel. You can stick your wrist through the tortilla and it is a bracelet. You could kick the tortilla and it is a ball etc.…This activity will help lighten the mood, encourage creativity relating to objects, and allow the group to work together (Practical Guide to Ensemble Devising).

4. Marble: Use an object (ball of yarn) for its intended use. Then use your body to imitate the object. Then use your body to imitate how the object makes you feel or what the object could symbolize. This challenges the group to begin thinking outside of literal definitions of objects/concepts. This also encourages the group to use physicality to describe things.

5. Flocking: One person is the leader and moves their bodies while the other people in the group imitate the leader. The leader shifts as the group moves around the room. This

helps create a common physical vocabulary with the group. (Dr. Chamber's Devising Class)

6. Brainstorm: I will ask each person to brainstorm what they think about in relation to anxiety and depression. There will be five separate stations: Sight, sound, emotions, touch, taste/smell. This brainstorm will happen similarly to musical chairs, once the music stops, they will begin writing. This encourages quick thinking.

7. Watch the video "Complex Problems with Writing Mental Illness." This is a large inspiration for my piece. This will help explain the ideas and provide more structure to our conversations.

8. Brainstorm: How did watching the "Complex Problems with Writing Mental Illness" change perceptions?

9. Discuss brainstorms

10. Sequences: 1 person creates a string of 8 moves using an object then teaches it to another person. The movement should not intend to mean anything. This is just a means of generating physicality. (Drama Games for Devising).

11. Play: This is time to explore physical ideas from our brainstorm. One idea I would like to experiment with is the image of yarn. (Redefinition).

12. Musical Brainstorm: Brainstorm songs and media that showcase mental health. I would like to incorporate music because it will help the audience interact with the piece and is easily identifiable.

13. Physical Monologue: Act out a movie or scene  that discusses topics relating to anxiety or depression without any dialogue. This will help generate more material. (Practical Guide to Devising).

14. Hymn Hands: You can move your hand or another person's hand. Start in groups (one group of two, one group of three) then try as a whole group. (Frantic Assembly)

15. Round by through: You can stand next to your partner (by), you can move around your partner (round), or you can go through your partners legs or under their arm (through). Partners take turns cycling through these different movements without talking. We will start with two groups to get the basic structure of the exercise. Then I would like everyone to move together as a group. (Frantic Assembly)

16. Moment Work: explain the concept. I start, I do something, I end. Try to put it into context. For example I would say "I start" I physically tie my shoe (do something), then I will say "I end." Tying my shoe is its own standalone moment that can be built upon with different movements like "I start" I physically stand up "I end." I would like us to explore different moments related to anxiety and depression. Things like I wake up, I try to brush my teeth, etc. Each thing is a standalone moment that can work as building blocks for other moments.  (Tectonic Theatre Project).

17. Checkout: play a game like the floor is lava, tag, etc. This will help the group leave with a good headspace.

# Rehearsal Report One

**2/15/2020**

12:00-12:10 Intimacy/Safety Conversations

12:10-12:40 Warm up/Group Building Exercises (Use your loaf and Marbles)

12:40-1:05 Flocking

1:05-1:10 break

1:10-2:00 Anxiety Brainstorm/Discussion

2:00-2:05 Break

2:05-2:50 Depression Brainstorm/Discussion

2:50-3:00 Tag and assign tasks for preparation

# Rehearsal Reflection One

**2/15/2020**

Everything took much longer than expected. I went into this rehearsal with a long list of activities because I thought I would need to fill the time. The initial meetings and group building exercises took about an hour. This was important because I wanted to set the tone for how this process would proceed. The most surprising exercise in that section was flocking. Facilitating while participating in an activity can lead to a loss of time. The exercise was very helpful in establishing a group connection and building a physical vocabulary. The entire group was shocked to look up at the clock and see that twenty-five minutes had passed while we were engaging in this activity.

The brainstorm sessions took far longer than I had anticipated. I had assumed that collectively they would take a half hour. This turned into almost an hour long discussion centered on depression and one hour on anxiety. This discussion sparked images like "ice cubes on flaming skin, weight, demon sitting on your chest" and other strong qualities that can be explored in our next session. I wish I had time to have an activity between the two brainstorms. While the brainstorms were valuable, they took a lot of thought and the focus during the second brainstorm began to waiver. If there was an activity in between these two brainstorms, maybe the second brainstorm would have been more focused.

Overall, I am happy with where the group is at the current moment. Devising is very process oriented, so I am not surprised that the day went almost totally different from how I planned it. I plan on adjusting my plan for the next rehearsal to be more time efficient. I will plan less exercises as a whole and allow for longer explorations of a few exercises that I think will work best for the group.

# **Rehearsal Plan Two**

**2/22/2020**

1. Round By Through: A person can stand next to their partner, walk around their partner, or go through them like under their arm or through their legs. (Frantic Assembly)

2. Hymn Hands: A person can move their own hand or their partner's hand to a different place on their body or on their partner's body. (Frantic Assembly)

3. Choose music to use in the piece

4. Shape the piece

Extra exercises if time permits:

Sequences Someone creates a string of movements using an object. (Drama Games for Devising)

Experiment with the yarn (Redefinition)

# Rehearsal Report Two

**2/22/2020**

12:00-12:10 Stretch and Sign Photo Release

12:10-12:30 Introduce Round By Through and Hymn Hands

12:30-1:15 Use Hymn Hands and Round By Through while listening to suggest songs

1:15-1:20 Break

1:20-2:00 Discuss which songs we want to use

2:00-2:30 Break into anxiety and depression groups to discuss qualities we want to use

2:30-3:00 Discuss and practice transitions

# Rehearsal Reflection Two
**2/22/2020**

This rehearsal focused on the physical embodiment of the concepts we discussed during our last rehearsal. I started by introducing two movement exercises from Frantic Assembly. Round By Through was difficult because this exercise only requires two people. A person can stand next to their partner, walk around their partner, or go through them like under their arm or through their legs. Our group had to be split into one group of two and one group of three. This exercise did not work well in our groups of three, but it worked well in conjunction with Hymn Hands. Hymn Hands was easier to use in the group of three because it was just moving your hand or your partners' hands.

After I introduced both exercises all five of us worked together using Hymn Hands to the music, we had selected that reminded us of anxiety or depression. After a few songs one person began shifting positions in the circle and we began implementing Round By Through with Hymn Hands.

Once we went through parts of all the songs, we discussed which songs we wanted to use for the piece. We broke the songs into three categories: anxiety, depression, and everything is fine. I had not considered using the "everything is fine" songs, so I was pleasantly surprised to see that category. We decided we only wanted to focus on one song from each category. We settled on "I'm Fine" by Anthony Amorim for anxiety because it is a common phrase people with mental illness use and we liked the sound of the song. We chose "Hurt" by Nine Inch Nails for depression because we liked the slow and distorted nature of the song. We chose "You Will Be Found" from *Dear Evan Hansen* because we thought it would be an interesting point of conversation because the source material has been accused of being disingenuous.

I had not considered the influence of music on society. My focus had been mainly on television and movies, but music also could affect a person's perception on mental health. Overall, this process resulted in a piece that I could not have conjured on my own, because the conversations and ideas of each group member helped to take the piece down a completely different path.

# Talkback Reflection

During the talkback, I asked the audience questions about the piece, the music they listened too, and what they think the piece was about. There were two options for songs: "I'm Fine" and "Hurt." Most people chose "I'm Fine" and I assume this is because it was the first song in the playlist.

I asked how the audience interpreted the story behind the piece. This question spurred many different answers because the piece is a rather broad representation of anxiety and depression. Many people focused first on the anxiety group and then moved to watching the depression group when one person moved between the groups. This caused people to create a story that connects both anxiety and depression. One person said it seemed like the anxiety caused the depression. Another person had a completely different approach and said she thought the anxiety group was the exterior of a person. That person is telling their friends that they are fine while they are not able to move on the inside. Our group did not intend for there to be a progression in the story. Our plan was to showcase different qualities of anxiety and depression. One person would move between the groups because it is common to experience anxiety and depression together. I believe the main reason for the shift in focus is because the anxiety group was standing and moving while the depression group was sitting still. The higher elevation and stronger movement drew focus and when one group member moved to the depression group, focus shifted to the floor.

I asked if people knew the controversy surrounding *Dear Evan Hansen* and if that affected their perceptions of our piece. [1]Not many people knew of the controversy and only one person said it changed the tone of the story for them. I then talked about using a song associated with *13 Reasons Why* and people had a much stronger reaction to that song. One person said that they would not have associated the song with the show unless a picture from that show was associated with it. Moving forward, I would be interested to try two different presentations using the song from *13 Reasons Why* using a photo from the show and the normal album cover to see the different reactions.

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[1] *Dear Evan Hansen,* follows teenager, Evan Hansen, as he pretends to be friends with a boy who recently committed suicide. The musical has been criticized for being disingenuous because Evan Hansen lies about this friendship for most of the show.

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# Annotated Bibliography

Badham, Van " 'Is it OK for me to touch me here?': the people making rehearsal rooms safe" *The Guardian,* 12 Nov. 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/nov/13/is-it-ok-for-me-to-touch-you-here-the-people-making-rehearsal-rooms-safe Accessed 10 Feb. 2020.

Badham discusses the work of director/choreographer Ita O'Brien. O'Brien works as an intimacy choreographer staging scene in movies and in theatrical productions. Intimacy choreography is specifying movements in scenes that contain kissing or sex. This type of choreography is newer than fight choreography and other common practices. Before the "Me Too" movement, actors were expected to figure out intimate scenes without any help. Intimacy choreography helps to keep the rehearsal room safe by introducing consent into each aspect of rehearsal. O'Brien suggests that the most powerful exercise an actor can engage with is the power to say no. If something is not comfortable then it does not need to happen. This source is helpful because it is applicable to any rehearsal room. While I will not incorporate intimacy into this piece, I think it is important to introduce the concept of consent into the rehearsal room. I would like to meet with each participant individually and discuss their limitations in terms of touch and subjects discussed during rehearsals.

Beiter, R., et al. "The Prevalence and Correlates of Depression, Anxiety, and Stress in a Sample of College Students." Journal of Affective Disorders, vol. 173, 2014;2015;, pp. 90-96.

Beiter et al. examines "The Prevalence and Correlates of Depression, Anxiety, and Stress in a Sample of College Students" using a convenience sample at Franciscan University. College students ages 18 to 24 answer questions on the "Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale" to determine the severity of their symptoms. These questions determine the level of stress related to ten subjects: academics, success, post-graduation plans, finances (the top four concerns), sleep, friends, family, overall health, body image, and self-esteem. The study found the students off campus scored higher in categories related to anxiety because these students have the added financial stress of an apartment. Upperclassmen also have higher levels of stress and anxiety. Beiter suggests that Juniors may experience higher levels of stress because universities do not usually have programs to help juniors. Many universities have programs helping freshmen adjust to college and programs helping seniors prepare for life outside of college, while they do not have

programs for sophomores or juniors. Overall, this source is helpful because it examines external
factors that increase depression, stress, and anxiety as well as how demographics respond to
these factors differently.

Chambers, Jonathan. THFM 4350: Acting Topics and Applications Devising. 26 Aug. 2019 to 7 Dec.
2019, Bowling Green State University, Heskett. Class lecture.
Fifteen students engage in devising methods throughout the semester to create a piece of theatre.
Dr. Chambers pulls methods from different devising companies like Frantic Assembly and Goat
Island. Most exercises contain physical explorations of devising which results in a theatrical
piece of about twenty minutes in length. Students determine the order and structure of the piece
then reflect on their work. Students engage in the different roles in a devising process including
performer, director, and editor. While Dr. Chambers acts as a mediator and instructor, the
students decide the basic structure of the piece. This process helps my project because it is an
efficient means of working. Also, most of the group contains a similar knowledge base from this
class. Overall this class informs this project because it gives me experience in devising,
directing, and deciding things as a group.

Drouin, Michelle, et al. "College Students in Distress: Can Social Media Be a Source of Social
Support?" *College Student Journal*, vol. 52, no. 4, Winter 2018, pp. 494–504. *EBSCOhost*,
search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eft&AN=134341758&site=ehost-
live&scope=site.m
This study examines the relationship between depression/anxiety and social media use for college
students. The study surveys 662 people from two midwestern colleges. Surveys screen these
students for depression and anxiety as well as examining support systems for these students.
The study found that social media is both a source of support and a stress inducer. Female and
white students are more likely to report social media as a stress inducer than their male and
nonwhite counterparts. The main source of support for students with low depression/anxiety
scores tends to be parents or friends. Few people, regardless of the score, seek out help from
teachers or counseling services. This source is useful because it examines the different support
systems commonly found in midwestern college campuses.

Graham, Scott. *The Frantic Assembly Book of Devising Theatre.* New York, Routledge, 2009.

This book presents devising strategies in relation to Frantic Assembly productions and includes practical exercises. The first section focuses on the Frantic Assembly method including happy accidents, rehearsal process, and inspirations for different scenes. Scene specific ideas showcase the different approaches to developing and cleaning movement-based pieces. The second section focuses on techniques and games that the reader can implement in their own rehearsals. Each exercise offers a simple way to generate basic material that can be built upon later in the process. One exercise I find particularly helpful is "round, by, through." Frantic Assembly creates videos in conjunction with the National Theatre that convey the exact intent of some exercises. Overall this source will be useful for my piece because I will use the exercises from the second section of the book to generate basic movement string. Then I can use the examples from the first section to clean and further develop the movement strings.

Hello Future Me. "The Complex Problems with Mental Illness in Fiction | a Video Essay." *Youtube*, commentary by Tim Hickson, 12 Oct. 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6c8o68ghGBM

Tim Hickson analyses different mediums of entertainment and how these mediums present mental illness. Each story about mental illness resonates with one of two separate audiences: an audience that is unaware of mental illness and an audience affected by mental illness in their own lives. This video discusses the effect of either instructing the first audience or relating to the second audience using examples from popular movies, television shows, and video games. *Saving Private Ryan* depicts PTSD accurately and functions as a successful teaching tool for raising awareness about PTSD. However, this movie contains triggers for those suffering from PTSD. Therefore, this educates the first audience by potentially triggering the second audience. *13 Reasons Why* is a controversial series that relates to those with mental illness in relation to one character which is not the main character of the show. Hannah Baker creates a series of tapes detailing why she killed herself. Many people criticize the revenge plot that seemingly glorifies suicide. Many people with depression do not connect with Hannah, but they do connect

with Skye who has one of the most controversial lines of the series. This line refers to self-harm as something to do instead of killing yourself because "suicide is for the weak." While this can be a damaging mentality, Hickson suggests this can be relatable to an audience that self-harms. Hickson's experience as a crisis line counselor provides a unique perspective to popular movies and shows that involve character's struggling with mental illness. This source will be helpful because I am interested in examining the effects of media on mental health. I particularly like the idea of thinking about both audiences: one that needs education and one that needs representation.

*Inside Bitch.* Conceived by Stacey Gregg and Deborah Pearson, devised and performed by Lucy Edkins, Jennifer Joseph, TerriAnn Oudjar and Jade Small, Clean Break Theatre Company, 22 March 2019, Royal Court Theatre, London.

Clean Break Theatre shares the stories of women who have been incarcerated through devising. *Inside Bitch* follows four women who discuss the depiction of women in prison. This performance spans personal anecdotes about prison life to pop culture references from *Shawshank Redemption*, *Orange is the New Black,* etc. The performance pokes fun at the ridiculous portrayal of incarceration in pop culture by creating a pitch for their own television show. While the overall tone of the piece is comical, the performance also highlights the stigma surrounding women in prison. The jokes are cut with real stories about children watching their mother go to prison and asking the audience hard questions like "would you hire me?". While the performance lacked refinement, the piece conveys a strong message. This source is helpful because it shows that even new devisers can create powerful pieces. I also like the idea of examining pop culture's depiction of certain things.

Kaufman, Moisès. *Moment Work*. New York, Vintage Books, 2018.

*Moment Work* discusses the process of The Tectonic Theatre Project. This group is known for devising *The Laramie Project* which is a series of interviews surrounding the death of Mathew Shepard. This book contributes to the definition of devising, outlines the Tectonic Theatre process, and provides examples from the company's devised works. This source is particularly helpful from pages 30-54. These pages outline the specific process of "moment work." Any person on the team may suggest a moment whether they are a director, designer, actor, etc. A person suggests

a moment using this framework: I begin, something happens, I end. For example, I would say "I begin," then I would tie my shoe, and then I say "I end." This process of defining moments makes each moment have a clear beginning and ending. This process can build using two or more people completing their moments and responding to moments. The process starts with one moment and builds to an entire piece. The section from pages 30-54 will be helpful because it outlines this process, the rest of the book provides examples for props, costumes, etc. that I am unable to use while creating my piece.

Macmillan, Duncan. *Every Brilliant Thing*. New York, Dramatists Play Service, 2016.

Macmillan cleverly uses audience interaction to convey a powerful message. The narrator, originally played by Jonny Donahue, writes a list of every brilliant thing to give his mother the will to live. The list starts small, just a few things that make a seven-year-old happy, and grows to become a huge list, compiled over many years with many different authors. Macmillan uses audience interaction spanning from audience members reading a thing from the list or playing the main characters in the story. The most powerful audience interaction is when Dad and the narrator have a conversation in the car. The audience member only says why as the actor explains how his mother attempted suicide. This script showcases different audience interactions which includes giving audience members lines, making audience members characters in the story, attempting to high-five the entire audience, and asking audience members for a book or a pen. Overall, this source is helpful because I would like to use audience participation in my piece and this source showcases many ways to accomplish that goal.

Quintero Johnson, Jessie M., and Julius Riles. ""He Acted Like a Crazy Person": Exploring the Influence of College Students' Recall of Stereotypic Media Representations of Mental Illness." *Psychology of Popular Media Culture*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2018, pp. 146-163.

Johnson et al. explore how "stereotypic media representations of mental illness" impact college students. "Nearly half of all U.S. adults will be diagnosed with a mental illness at some point in their developmental trajectory, and college students may be particularly vulnerable to experience mental distress." There is still a stigma attached to mental illness even though almost everyone interacts with mental illness, through having it themselves or knowing a person with mental illness. This study asks participants to identify characters from movies and television

that are associated with mental illness and then describe the attributes of these characters. Traits like hallucinations, violence, and erratic moods were among the top attributes participants described for the characters. These traits relate to schizophrenia and bipolar disorder that are not as common as anxiety or depression. Media outlets often choose to focus on the more severe symptoms to create something that is more dramatically interesting. Characters with mental illness are often portrayed as "other", violent, and are nearly ten times more likely to harm another character. This negatively affects public perception of mental illness. This source is helpful because it examines the prevalence of incorrect portrayals of mental illness in the media.

*Redefinition,* by Alli Kulbago, directed by Libby Zamiska, Bowling Green State University, 9 Feb. 2020, Heskett Studio, Bowling Green.

This production is a work in progress that examines six different areas of mental health: anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder, OCD, eating disorders, and PTSD. This piece is a combination of movements and Alli's thoughts about staging/lighting conventions that could help represent these different mental illnesses. The movement attached to OCD is particularly interesting because it is a methodical repetition of movement replicated by several actors. There are only three actors for this performance, however, Alli wants seven actors to represent each day of the week. The section on anxiety combines pictures representing anxiety and a monologue detailing intruding thought a person with anxiety may have on any given day. These images include a person falling, the feeling of falling when a person is asleep, but they cannot jolt awake. An image of a sweater being unraveled, perhaps using a ball of yarn. Since Alli will be assisting me in the development of my piece, we will be experimenting with some of these images, especially the ball of yarn unraveling. Another concept I would like to explore is the cyclical nature of anxiety that is mentioned several times in this piece.

Robinson, Davis. *Practical Guide to Ensemble Devising*. London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

Robinson provides information specifically about ensemble devising. The book discusses the definition of devising, exercises to build ensemble and generate material, and prompts for full length works. Definitions include the author's opinions on devised theatre and the companies that influence the games later in the book. None of the definition or concepts in this first section is drastically different from other sources, so this section is not particularly helpful. The section

with prompts relates to full length works that take years to develop. While this is interesting, these particular prompts are not going to be helpful because I do not have the time to develop a full-length piece. The most helpful section that I will draw from moving forward is the exercises. The book lists exercises to create a sense of ensemble and different ways to generate material. I can use these exercises when first meeting with my team to help us become a more coherent ensemble.

Swale, Jessica. *Drama Games for Devising*. London, Nick Hern Books, 2012.

*Drama Games for Devising* offers simple games that fall under five different categories. Preparation focuses on building the ensemble, warming up, and fostering creative energy. Generation focuses on creating characters and improvising different scenarios with these characters. Exploration focuses on consolidating ideas into a firmer ground plan and specificity. Distillation focuses on editing and framing the scenes to be closer to the performance material. Performance focuses on group warmup and techniques to perform devised work to an audience. The first three sections were particularly helpful because these games explore physical storytelling. These sections also illustrate how to build the ensemble and generate material. The last two sections are not as helpful because they focus on more script-based works. I am planning on creating a mostly physical piece, so I do not need to focus on the specifics of script editing. Overall, the games presented in the first three sections like four square, sequences, use your loaf, etc. will help me generate material and build a more coherent ensemble.

Till, Benedikt, et al. "Suicide in Films: The Impact of Suicide Portrayals on Nonsuicidal Viewers' Well-Being and the Effectiveness of Censorship." *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, vol. 40, no. 4, Aug. 2010, pp. 319–327. *EBSCOhost*, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ897288&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

This study examines "the impact of suicide portrayals on nonsuicidal viewers" and "the effectiveness of censorship." Participants are in one of five groups: two groups watch a film explicitly depicting suicide, two groups watch a movie where the suicide is not shown but implied, and the control is a drama that includes a death, but not suicide. There is not a significant difference in responses between censored and uncensored versions of the suicide. Both groups have

negative emotions after watching the film, but they also tend to feel better about their personal situation. Nonsuicidal viewers may compare their situation with the suicidal character and feel comfort knowing they have fewer hardships than this character. The results may be different when examining suicidal viewers because they may be able to relate to the struggles the character faces and potentially cause copycat suicides. The notion of using sad, depressing, or grim things to make a person feel better may be helpful for the project.

# Overall Reflection

This project has allowed me to improve my research skills, my awareness of different mediums that influence perceptions of mental health, my leadership skills, and my knowledge of devised theatre.

While researching this project, I pulled sources from a variety of places including live performance, scripts, documentaries, books about devised theatre, books about script analysis, theatre journals, psychological journals, and video essays. This experience taught me that valuable information can come from many different places. I never thought that my project would find influence from a video essay about writing mental illness. I also learned that not all sources will influence the project, but each source contributes to my overall knowledge on the topic if I wish to pursue it further.

The biggest surprise during the project was my realization that music is a medium itself. My focus in research and practice was movies and television. However, I always wanted to use music from these movies or television shows because I knew that music might connect itself to the film or show in question. My group members suggested songs that did not connect to any television show or movie. I found that these songs were also powerful because music can also affect perceptions of mental health. These song suggestions changed the original thought process behind the piece by utilizing individual songs that spoke to the group and potentially the audience.

I have had experience directing a cabaret and coaching high school students during a camp. However, I have never led a devised project before. This experience differs from my previous leadership experiences because I was both leader and participant. I learned that facilitating gets easier as I do it more often because I felt more confident in the second rehearsal opposed to the first rehearsal. I learned to adapt in the moment because certain elements required more discussion or time than I had anticipated. The most important thing I learned, in terms of leadership, was to encourage other opinions. I liked working in a collaborative environment and would like to create a space where people feel comfortable contributing their ideas.

Devised theatre has shaped the way I think about being an artist. Each book, script, and performance has informed me as a director, a writer, a mover, an actor, and a creator. I have used exercises from the directing books in rehearsals for a production I began directing. I used

methods of collection and editing to create a script for a class. I applied the movement qualities and exercises to dance and other movement pieces. I have incorporated more movement into my explorations of character as an actor. I have used all these different facets of theatre to become a well-rounded creator of theatre.

I look forward to continuing to build my skills in research, exploration of mental health, leadership, and devised theatre. I want to take these skills and apply them to future projects whether that is in the classroom, at a job, or for a personal project I want to develop.