

In the popular press, he was referred to as “psycho Trevor” (*Daily Star*, 19 April 1993) and in our group interviews, he was spontaneously referred to as being “what a mentally ill person was like”. As one female interviewee commented:

“... in *Brookside*, that man who is the child-abuser and the wife-beater, he looks like a schizophrenic – he’s like a split personality, like two different people.”

One of the key issues explored in this research was whether serious mental illness was believed to be associated with violence. Forty per cent of the people in the general sample believed this to be so, while giving the media as the source of their beliefs. The depth of anxiety is so great in this area, that some media accounts can apparently exert great power. In other research programmes, we have studied many different areas of media content. We have normally found that personal experience is a much stronger influence on belief than the messages which are given by media. But in this research we found cases where this pattern was reversed.

We found a number of cases (21% of the general sample) where people had non-violent experience which was apparently ‘overlaid’ by media influences. These people traced their beliefs mostly to violent portrayals in fiction or to news reporting. A further example of this was given by a young woman who lived near Woodilee Hospital just outside Glasgow. She wrote that she had worked there at a jumble sale and mixed with patients. Yet she associated mental illness with violence and wrote of “split/double personalities, one side violent”. She then went on to say:

“The actual people I met weren’t violent – that I think they are violent, that comes from television,

from plays and things. That’s the strange thing – the people were mainly geriatric – it wasn’t the people you hear of on television. Not all of them were old, some of them were younger. None of them were violent – but I remember being scared of them, because it was a mental hospital – it’s not a very good attitude to have but it is the way things come across on TV, and films – you know, mental axe murders and plays and things – the people I met weren’t like that, but that is what I associated them with”.

We also found clear links between media representations and public attitudes to policies such as community care. An interviewee related her own beliefs about violence and mental illness to “Hollywood film and television drama”. She then commented that “I feel that government policies in Britain of putting mentally ill people in the ‘care of the community’, is dangerous”.

Another area of crucial importance is how media images may affect the beliefs and self-definitions of users of the mental health service, and the responses of their families and other carers. For example, if the association of schizophrenia with violence is so widespread in popular belief, then what does this say to the families of people with such an illness? There are very few ‘positive’ images in the media in the sense that people can recover, achieve or be active in their own right. This is an area which we intend to research further and on which mental health professionals might wish to focus. If it is thought that media representations can be harmful to patients then it is perhaps time to draw this very forcibly to the attention of journalists, broadcasters and all those in the communications industry who make the images.

Greg Philo, *Research Director, Glasgow University Media Unit, 61 South Park Avenue, Glasgow G12 8LF*

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## Corrigendum

In the article ‘Otto Dix: Appearance and the Unconscious’ by Ismond Rosen (*Psychiatric Bulletin*, 1993, 17, 727–732), the first sentence should have read: “Otto Dix (1891–1969) was a

leading German Expressionist painter whose major work was associated with the Weimar Republic period, although his art extended from before to after both world wars”.