Tahoe Expedition Academy

Mental Health in the Entertainment Industry

An Analysis of Faults and Solutions

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Abstract:

The status of mental health diagnostics and access to treatment in the entertainment industry are dangerous at best. Every year many professionals succumb to suicide, overdoses, and mental health issues. By analyzing why mental health issues are going undiagnosed and untreated in the entertainment industry, solutions become feasible and attainable. Mental health is an important concept not just from a humanitarian perspective, but also from a public health one; it is the responsibility of society, not the individual, to address this issue. An analysis shows that untreated mental health issues run rampant within the entertainment industry and substance abuse is also increased due to increased pressure to perform, manipulation to increase profits and productivity, and extreme public scrutiny. Judy Garland and Marilyn Monroe are both tragic examples of how the pressures and demands of the entertainment industry can destroy a person's mental health. To combat this pervasive issue, legislation is the best course of action. Specifically, legislation that requires employers to provide mental health insurance in addition to other required benefits (i.e. health, dental, and vision insurance) and provide these benefits to independent contractors whose contract lasts longer than two months.

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Introduction:

In the 21st century, society has made leaps and bounds in the world of mental health, yet it can still push further. Suicide is one of the leading causes of death globally killing more than 1 million people every year. The entertainment industry specifically has been notorious for poor mental health and substance abuse issues throughout history. There are countless examples of this, such as Judy Garland, Marilyn Monroe, Michael Jackson, Drew Barrymore, and others who have fallen victim to the entertainment industry's extreme pressures. By requiring further mental health care coverage by employers, those in the music and entertainment industries and those working in any industry can access mental health treatment and care more affordably and easily. Access to care and support are the first steps toward suicide prevention and solving the mental health crisis society is facing. Mental-health issues, specifically those that result in suicide, are at unacceptably high rates within the music and entertainment industries; this is a result of a toxic environment that exerts unreasonable demands, stigmatizes care, and lacks proper support for professionals. It is imperative that these issues be analyzed and remedied immediately so that the American people and the world may continue to practice their fundamental right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Purpose for Paper:

This paper analyzes the intense need for mental-health support systems within the entertainment industry and how to best create those support systems so they are accessible and affordable for all. There currently exists no comprehensive analysis of the entertainment industry on these topics. Due to the need demonstrated by high suicide rates and poor access to mental health treatment, commentary and solutions are required to rectify the situation.

Guiding Questions:

The following questions guided the research and conclusions of this paper.

1. What are mental health and suicide statistics throughout the world?

2. Are there significant differences between mental health statistics globally versus in the entertainment industry?

3. What could explain these differences?

4. What mental health services do people in the entertainment industry have access to?

5. What cultural differences and geographical differences could affect my data and analysis?

6. Is there increased pressure in the entertainment industry to engage in illicit drug use and alcohol abuse?

7. If so, why is there increased pressure in the music industry to engage in illicit drug use and alcohol abuse?

8. What connections and links exist between illicit drug use and alcohol abuse and mental health?

9. Are people in the entertainment industry struggling with mental health issues because of the pressures of the entertainment world?

10. How can we prevent suicide in the entertainment industry and throughout the world?

Methodology:

The primary methodology of the research presented in this paper was fieldwork, conducted over seven-days in Los Angeles, California and the surrounding area. The secondary research methodologies were observational statistical analysis and observational psychological analysis of a variety of previously published sources.

Why Mental Health Must Be Prioritized:

Mental health is not simply a matter of the occasional individual's well-being. One in five adults in the United States lives with a mental illness (both temporary and chronic). Mental-health concerns are both a public health issue and a human rights issue. From the public health perspective, untreated mental illnesses can lead to spikes in homelessness, crime, poverty, and poor performance in school for youth and the workplace for adults. For example, the expulsion rate for youth with mental illness is 64% nationally, leaving youth disadvantaged in getting the education that is their constitutional right (Tulane University). Additionally, without access to proper care and treatment, mentally ill people may turn to substance abuse to cope or manage their illness which fuels drug trades and homelessness as well as overdose death rates. According to Article 25 §1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,

> Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control

The "medical care" and "necessary social services" listed in this section include the right to mental health treatment to avoid "unemployment, sickness, [or] disability…" Mental-health treatment and diagnostic services that are accessible to everyone is a fundamental human right as outlined by the United Nations. Therefore, it is imperative that the United States and nations across the world implement these services immediately. Mental health policy is public policy and it must be implemented to create complete public health systems and to fulfill the human rights set forth by the United Nations.

Psychology of the Entertainment Industry:

"But I felt very violated and I didn't like it or understand it, and that felt very weird, because I was a young girl and they were grown men. I didn't like that feeling" (Selena Gomez). As seen time and time again, the industry is constantly pushing the limits of how poorly they can treat public figures, how much they can control their lives, invade their privacy, and ridicule them constantly before they break. The entertainment industry is built on people so that no other industry is. It does not rely on equipment or factories or the availability of certain resources. It relies on the approval of the public and the marketability of people. This leads to an often flawed management of "talent" and an extreme focus on manipulating public opinion to increase profitability. While the layman struggles with discrimination such as racism and sexism, there is a new level of discrimination within the entertainment industry, where there are no protected classes and discrimination is freely taken to new heights. This is because workplace safety and rights organizations are dedicated to traditional employees and not independent contractors, which make up the majority of the entertainment industry workforce. While there are unions to protect the rights and safety of workers, there is much room for manipulation that prevents people from getting the support they need. Studies show that discrimination and pressure to stay favorable in the public eye is associated with and may cause mental-health issues that worsen when left untreated (The 73% Report).

> The unique pressures associated with their job may place additional strain on one's coping skills. As an example take the character in the movie Monster, which was based on a true story. When the actor integrated the character (Aileen) into her own personality, it may have been possible for her to be overwhelmed, not able to rid her psyche of the character's traits. (Amaral et. al.)

Amaral et. al. comments on an interesting facet of an actor's work, and how it can seriously affect their mental health. Many actors "become" the person or character they are portraying so completely that they struggle to leave that persona behind after filming is complete. The entertainment industry has the third highest suicide rate, with artists, actors, and musicians making up nearly 90% of that statistic out of the 17 separate career categories included in the entertainment industry section of the CDC report (CDC). Multiple reports across various organizations within the music industry have come to the same basic conclusion: extreme pressure and a lack of access to care has created a toxic environment for mental health.

Substance Abuse and Mental Health:

Nearly 9 million people have what is called a co-occurring condition, where they struggle with both mental illness and substance abuse. Both mental illness and addiction are considered chronic brain disorders, and the same changes in brain function caused by substance abuse are seen in individuals with schizophrenia, depression, anxiety, and bipolar disorder. The rate of these co-occurring conditions or comorbidity is extremely high as certain mental illnesses can lead to a higher likelihood of developing a substance abuse disorder. Especially if they find that a substance can lessen or relieve symptoms of a mental illness. For example, "the nicotine in tobacco products sometimes lessen certain symptoms of schizophrenia and may improve cognition" (Gordon). Alternatively, substance abuse can lead to symptoms of mental illness such as increased risk of psychosis in habitual marijuana users (Gordon). Research is still being conducted to fully understand the link between mental illness and substance abuse disorders, however, it is certain that there is a correlation and a clear need for specialized treatment in cases with comorbidity.

Substance Abuse in the Entertainment Industry:

In a 2016 study, musicians were found to have the highest rates of celebrity death by overdose at 38% of all cases analyzed between 1970 and 2015. Additionally, approximately 13% of entertainment industry professionals reported having some form of substance abuse disorder in 2015 (Stein). While family history of addiction accounts for nearly 50% of a predisposition to addiction, the second highest factor is lifestyle. For example, the intense stress and desensitization to substances creates an environment that contributes to high addiction rates in the entertainment industry (Kaliszewski). Substance abuse runs rampant throughout the entertainment industry and leads to a dark end if not properly treated.

Case Study of Judy Garland:

Judy Garland was a beloved actress of Hollywood's Golden Era and the star of many famous movies such as "The Wizard of Oz," "Meet Me in St. Louis," and "A Star is Born." She rose to fame at the age of 16 with her role as Dorothy Gale in "The Wizard of Oz". Early on, her talent was recognized. However, her fame as a virginal, "good girl" celebrity cost her a child. Garland's first marriage to David Rose in 1941 (when she was just 19 years old) resulted in her becoming pregnant just a year later. Both David and her management company, MGM, pressured her to have an abortion to upkeep her image. Garland later said that she regretted this choice for the rest of her life, as she was thrilled to be having a child (IMDB). A posthumous analysis by Pamela Marte has shown that as Garland's mental health worsened after her abortion, she began to show signs of multiple mental disorders. Garland met the criteria for three DSM diagnoses, including Major Depressive Disorder, Multiple Substance Dependence, and Borderline Personality Disorder. Additionally, she was found to have substance-induced hepatitis and problems with primary support systems due to multiple consecutive tragedies in her life: the

death of her father in 1935, her drug addiction at the hands of producers in 1936, and her abortion in 1942. The people closest to her in life, those who were meant to support her, protect her, and foster her growth either died or manipulated her for their own gain. In June of 1969, Garland died of a barbiturate overdose, a drug that dominated much of her life for over thirty years. While she remains an icon in many communities, Garland was failed by the entertainment industry, who only sought to take advantage of her talent and fame at the expense of her soul.

Case Study of Marilyn Monroe:

Marilyn Monroe was the picture of elegance, arguably the most famous woman in Hollywood during her prime. After slowly working her way through the Hollywood ranks, she found stardom, beginning with minor uncredited roles before eventually moving on to her famous roles in movies like "The Seven Year Itch."

> Her early image as a dumb and seductive blonde gave way in later years to the
> tragic figure of a sensitive and insecure woman unable to escape the pressures of
> Hollywood. Her vulnerability and sensuousness combined with her needless death
> eventually raised her to the status of an American cultural icon. (Britannica)

Marilyn Monroe, born Norma Jean Baker, had a familial history of mental illness which was likely heightened by a traumatic childhood where she lost her grandmother to suicide, was repeatedly sexually assaulted and suffered neglect in the foster system. She was diagnosed with borderline paranoid schizophrenia, now called borderline personality disorder, by Dr. Ralph Greenson. Dr. Greenson referred to her personality disorder as though "she had two people inside her" (Saari). It is due to her consistent struggles with depression, BPD, and endometriosis that Monroe began using barbiturates to cope with the physical and emotional pain. Although originally prescribed to her, Monroe soon began taking barbiturates in larger doses as she

became addicted. She died as a result of a barbiturate overdose (ruled a likely suicide) in 1962 when she was just 36 years old (Psychreel). After her death, Marilyn's image shifted from a cultural icon and sex symbol to a Hollywood tragedy, a testament to the importance of mental health awareness within the entertainment industry and the world.

Conclusion:

Mental health issues, specifically those that result in suicide, are at outrageously high rates within the entertainment industry; this is a result of a toxic environment that exerts unreasonable demands, stigmatizes care, and lacks proper support for professionals. It is imperative that these issues be analyzed and remedied immediately so that the American people and the world may continue to practice their fundamental right of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. There is an immediate need for action to create accountability and protections within the entertainment industry to prevent professionals from being taken advantage of and suffering needlessly. If the entertainment industry refuses to treat professionals with dignity and respect, then it must crumble under its own actions.

Recommendations:

As outlined in the paragraph discussing the psychology of the entertainment industry, there is a fundamental conflict of interest within the entertainment industry regarding a professional accessing mental health resources. It is the financial desire of all involved with any given professional to keep them working at top capacity and often seeking mental health treatment or diagnostic services actively diminishes that top capacity for long periods of time. Therefore professionals, especially those in public-facing positions, are often being pushed to absolute breaking points all in the name of profit. Legislation beginning with the state level is the best way to combat this issue. As said by President Theodore Roosevelt, "Ours is a government

of liberty, by, through and under the law. No man is above it, and no man is below it."

Legislation works because it is a concrete set of requirements that can be enforced and, if

properly written, lacks room for manipulation. Obviously, legislation already exists that requires

health, vision, and dental insurance to be provided for those employed by companies in a

"full-time" capacity. However, by extending these requirements to contract workers and

requiring mental health coverage (both diagnostic and treatment) significant change can be

enacted within the entertainment industry in terms of accountability and transparency.

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