Happy Days, Star Trek and Mental Illness

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What do *Happy Days* star Tom Bosley, *Star Trek*'s Leonard Nimoy, and the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) have in common? They all collaborated on a new set of videos about the brain and mental illness geared toward high school students.

The two videos--the first featuring narration by Nimoy, and the second by Bosley--are aimed to 9th through 12th graders. They're supposed to help younger people understand some of the inner workings of the brain's structure, chemicals and processes: a sort of "what's under the hood" of the mind.

I encourage you to watch the videos and would love to have you comment and let me know what you think about them. On the one hand, I'm glad that the government is trying to communicate in more innovative ways, but for all the fancy animation, I think they fall short on several counts.

The first thing I thought while listening to Mr. Spock explain the wonders of synapses and neurotransmitters was, "Did they actually go over the script with any high school students or teachers when they created it? If they did, I'd be curious to know whether the students were science prodigies.

The way they referred to people with mental illness raised wasn't much better. Maybe I'm overly sensitive, but when they talk about people with schizophrenia or depression, I get the sense that the producers think of people with psychological disorders as tragic victims, objects that must be fixed. If their aim, at least partially, was to reduce stigma toward people with mental illness, I'd give them a C at best. Watch the vids and ask yourself the following question while viewing them: if you were a high school student who'd been diagnosed with depression, anxiety or bipolar disorder, and your science teacher showed this video, how would it make you feel?

Our country has grown so skeptical of science and mental health research in particular over the last couple of decades, so I completely applaud the government doing everything it can to stimulate excitement about psych research among school kids. I hope that these videos help in that process, but I fear that they'll be more likely to turn teens off than to encourage them to "like" the videos on Facebook. If the NIHM wants to know how to do it better next time around I'd

be glad to help.

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