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### Mass media campaigns as signals of social movements : Response to the commentaries on the paper, 'Evaluation of a campaign to improve awareness and attitudes of young people towards mental health issues' (Livingston et al., 2012)

The thoughtful commentaries, provided in this issue of *Education and Health* outlined numerous technical ways in which the *In One Voice* campaign would have had greater consistency with an evidence-informed approach. To summarize, the campaign could have: depicted greater socio-cultural diversity (Lavis, 2013; Yamaguchi, Uddin, Mino, & Thornicroft, 2013); run for a longer duration (Campos, 2013; Yamaguchi et al., 2013); used more targeted messages to reach specific populations (Campos, 2013; Rickwood, 2013); been supplemented with specific contact- and school-based interventions (Campos, 2013); and focused more strongly on personal stories of youth (Rickwood, 2013). These are important and useful lessons. However, the degree to which making this combination of changes would have produced larger effects is an empirical uncertainty. As Rickwood (2013) states, there is much to be learned in this field (p. 39). Given the immature state of the research in this area, are we really in a position to proclaim a formula for creating reliable and meaningful change? One of the commentaries suggests that interventions should focus on fostering empathy rather than "one-off, brief interventions based on cognition-focused outcomes like knowledge, attitudes and stereotypes" (Rickwood, 2013, p. 39). Although there is an intuitive logic to the theoretical linkage between empathy and inclusiveness, such an approach lacks robust evidence. Recommending this approach over others

requires making assumptions and drawing conclusions about something which we still know very little.

#### Inspired opportunities

The idea of mass media campaigns that are carefully-planned, evidence-based, and rigorously evaluated (Rickwood, 2013) sounds brilliant. Social scientists dream about being intricately involved in planning, creating, implementing, and evaluating interventions. Unfortunately, this does not always reflect reality. More often than not, media campaigns are developed by people who are not scientists, but who offer inspirational stories, genuine intentions, short timelines, and an abundance of passion and enthusiasm. In this version of reality, considerations about whether or not a campaign is acceptable to social scientists falls fairly low on—or may be omitted from—the priority list. Evaluations sometimes occur only after a researcher receives a last-minute tip about a soon-to-be-implemented intervention or campaign. Such situations present two options for researchers: to refuse to be part of it, or to try to learn from it.

The *In One Voice* campaign offered an exceptional naturalistic learning opportunity. As was articulated in our original article, the principal goal of this brief, social media intervention was to increase awareness and use of [mindcheck.ca](http://mindcheck.ca), a youth-focused website (Livingston, Tugwell, Korf-Uzan, Cianfrone, & Coniglio, 2012). All other admirable goals, such

as changing the attitudes and behaviours of youth and young adults, were secondary for this particular initiative. The unique power of the campaign was that it was initiated by professional male hockey players—Canadian cultural icons—challenging the stereotypical moulds of masculinity by talking about mental health issues and promoting acceptance of people who live with such conditions. The significance of this should not be lost, as it signifies a dramatic and fundamental shift in the social discourse and collective conscience surrounding mental illness in Canada. A so-called social movement!

### Worthwhileness

Our evaluation revealed that the *In One Voice* campaign increased awareness and use of an educational mental health website. Other than this, very few changes were observed (Livingston et al., 2012). One author ponders whether increasing website awareness is a worthwhile goal (Rickwood, 2013, p. 36). In answering this question, the author makes an intriguing argument that increasing access to mental health information may, in fact, be harmful. We concur that evaluating how people use and responded to the mindcheck.ca website would have generated valuable information about the effects of the campaign. But, we were struck by the author's use of the term "worthwhile," which conveys that some things are insufficiently valuable to be worth one's time, effort, or interest. How do we measure the worthwhile-ness of an intervention or outcome?

Many social scientists would agree with Rickwood's (2013) framework for determining an intervention's worth, which includes the following criteria: (a) carefully planned; (b) appropriately targeted or tailored; (c) based on a sound conceptual framework and current empirical evidence; (d) clear about the type of stigma and level of intervention; and (e) uses a thorough evaluation process instigated at the outset comprising a rigorous design with appropriate measures (p. 39). If mass media campaigns fail to meet these criteria, are they worthless? Or even worse: harmful? Should we discourage people and organizations from embarking on activities that are not aligned with a positivist conceptualization of utility and value? The collateral consequence of

suppressing grassroots enthusiasm (in the interest of science) may be that social movements lose traction and momentum. We risk inhibiting efforts that symbolize and stimulate broader social change. In addition to being an independent variable (the cause), perhaps these types of campaigns also represent the dependent variable (the effect) of socio-cultural change. They signal that it is happening.

### Social context

Mass media campaigns, like *In One Voice*, do not occur in a vacuum. This fact creates significant problems for evaluations which must treat these "interventions" as though they are isolated events removed from the broader social context. For research, applying a reductionist approach to understand these campaigns (e.g., reducing them to goals, messages, components, costs, start and end dates, and outcomes) is necessary, but undermines their complexity and promise. After our evaluation was completed, we learned that *In One Voice* inspired the creation of a large-scale follow-up initiative called *Hockey Talks* (Vancouver Canucks, 2013). Seven Canadian National Hockey League teams were involved in this month-long initiative (February, 2013), which used a variety of novel methods (e.g., in-arena messaging, online storytelling, sharing information and experiences at one of their home games) to increase dialogue and awareness about mental health. Like the original campaign, social media and online educational materials were integral. Our original evaluation did not account for this growth in enthusiasm for mental health awareness. Now, seven male professional hockey teams, not just one, in Canada are talking about mental health and helping to raise funds to support local mental health agencies. Of course, it would be terrific if these novel initiatives used evidence-based approaches so as to maximize their potential to achieve certain goals. But even if they do not, should such activities be disparaged and discouraged? Would progress be made if they disappeared forever?

### Future evaluations

The commentaries in this issue of *Education and Health* provide excellent suggestions for

improving future evaluations of mass media campaigns, including: (a) carefully tracking the campaign messages and ensuring that they align with outcome measures (Yamaguchi et al., 2013); (b) using multiple indicators to assess market penetration (Yamaguchi et al., 2013); (c) investigating the dose-response relationship of mental health websites on different groups of people (Rickwood, 2013); and (d) using different methods (e.g., independent samples plus repeated sample designs) to examine different elements of a campaign (Lavis, 2013; Rickwood, 2013). Adding these elements would increase the precision with which an intervention and its effects are measured. We would also suggest that this field would benefit from research that uses less mechanistic and more sociological or anthropological approaches to understand the connection between mass media campaigns and the larger socio-cultural systems within which they are embedded.

Our evaluation of the *In One Voice* campaign (Livingston et al., 2012) was guided by frameworks used in similar studies (Corrigan, 2012; Dumesnil & Verger, 2009; Griffiths, Christensen, Jorm, Evans, & Groves, 2004; Reavley & Jorm, 2011; Stuart, 2006; Yamaguchi, Mino, & Uddin, 2011). As was suggested by Yamaguchi et al. (2013), evaluating the effects of mass media campaigns is an imperfect science. The broader goal of our evaluation was to scrutinize the range of effects that a brief, social media campaign, like *In One Voice*, should reasonably expect to achieve. This guided our selection of measures. However, Rickwood (2013) repeatedly implies that our measures and findings are suggestive of our values and beliefs. In one instance, she indicates the following: "Livingston et al. maintain that increased awareness of the website is a valuable outcome" (p. 36). In actuality, what we indicated was that the goals of this specific campaign were to increase awareness and use of the website, without opining as to the "value" of this particular variable. In other words, we measured awareness of mindcheck.ca because it was the principal goal of the campaign, not because we placed significant value on it. Similarly, the conclusion of our study was framed as follows: "Livingston et al. make the points, however, that increased market penetration is a worthwhile outcome

and that improving mental health literacy, rather than reducing stigma, should be the goal of such media campaigns" (Rickwood, 2013, p. 36). This misrepresents our message in two ways. First, we do not posit an opinion as to whether market penetration is a reasonable or "worthwhile" outcome. It is a standard metric for evaluating mass media campaigns (Corrigan, 2012). Second, we do not indicate what should or should not be the goals of media campaigns. Rather, we argue that the available evidence, including the findings of our study, suggests that such campaigns are more likely to impact mental health literacy outcomes as opposed to stigma-related outcomes.

We believe that, despite their limits, mass media campaigns have a role in accomplishing circumscribed goals (e.g., increasing awareness) and objectives that defy measurement. How do you assess whether something has contributed toward the advancement of a social movement? It is wonderful to see that our article has stimulated such rich dialogue among renowned mental health experts. Since mass media campaigns do not appear to be on the decline, there will be plenty of opportunities to dissect them, refine our methods, and test new approaches.

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