>> Tatiana Lee: Hello hello hello! Thank you for joining us today. This is mental health action day: raising awareness and promoting change through authentic mental health representation in media. Thank you for taking the time today to join us for this panel discussion. My name is Tatiana Lee. I am a black woman with brown curly hair and a gray backdrop behind me. I'm wearing earrings and glasses and I have on a black t-shirt that says "stop apologizing for existing" that was sent to me from the organization To Write Love On Her Arms. I am the Senior Associate of Entertainment Media here at RespectAbility, a non-profit fighting stigmas and advancing opportunities so that people with disabilities can fully participate in all aspects of community. As an individual with both visible and non-visible disabilities, including mental health, I've had the privilege of conducting trainings and consulting on the why and how to improve to be more inclusive and accessible. If you would like to view the ASL interpreter in a larger screen, we invite you to pin their video which will spotlight the video throughout the entire panel. In addition, we have the live captioning done by a real live person that is available in the Zoom app by clicking on the CC button as well as via your web browser. We have posted the link in the chat box. This panel is live! We will be taking questions from you during the second half of the panel. Please add your questions in the Q&A box if you want to do so. If you are watching us on Facebook during the live airing, we'll be monitoring the questions there too. This panel is being recorded and will be available on RespectAbility's Facebook page and website after the event concludes. A higher resolution recording with open captions and ASL interpreter will be posted and sent to everyone who registered next week. If you want to stay connected to RespectAbility we invite you to sign up for our weekly newsletter on disability inclusion and equity in the entertainment industry. Check out the link in the chat box. Today is the first ever mental health action day and RespectAbility is proud to be a founding partner in the movement, spearheaded by MTV entertainment group alongside nearly 200 other brands, non-profits, influencers and cultural leaders. RespectAbility's entertainment and media team also consulted on the disability inclusion section of the mental health storytelling guide. Please see the chat box for a link to learn more. The goal of mental health action day is to provide tangible tools that will help us all take an action for ourselves, for our loved ones and for our community as we strive for a better and more equitable mental health awareness and resources for all. Please take a look at the link in the chat box. Mental health action day comes at a critical time. The COVID-19 pandemic has taken a disproportionate toll on the mental health and well-being of people of color, young people and the LGBTQ+ communities. Studies have found 4 in 10 adults have reported symptoms of anxiety or depressive disorders, compared to 1 in 10 before the pandemic. 56 percent of young adults ages 18 to 24 have reported symptoms of anxiety and or depression during the pandemic. And 84 percent of black people reported symptoms of anxiety or depressive disorders during the pandemic, versus 42 percent of all adults and 40 percent of white people. Communities of color have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 and the ongoing trauma of systemic racism, from police brutality to anti-asian violence, also are also facing greater mental health challenges than ever before. But we continue to face challenges accessing mental health care. Today we will discuss the importance of portraying mental health accurately and authentically in TV, film and other forms of media, especially as a means to create awareness and serve as a first step to systemic change. Before we dive in, I'd like to formally introduce each of our expert panelists. First we have Nikki Bailey - comedian, actress, author and producer who lives with a non-visible disability. We have Ali MacLean - playwright, TV writer as well as an alumni of RespectAbility's summer lab for entertainment professionals with disabilities. Diego Kusnir - licensed psychologist and writer who is also blind. Amanda Burdine -screenwriter and also alumna of the RespectAbility summer lab for entertainment professionals with disabilities. Thank you all for being here and sharing your experiences with us today! To start off I'd like to talk to Amanda. Amanda -- and also before you answer your question please describe yourself for the audience. As someone with borderline personality disorder, can you share a little bit about how certain negative and or inaccurate representation in media have ultimately affected your experiences in real life?

>> Amanda Burdine: There we go, sorry. I am a white female with blue hair and blue glasses. I'm wearing a red dress. My backdrop is just a tan wall. I go by she/her pronouns. I'm living with borderline personality disorder. A lot of people aren't always aware of what it is, so they tend to look to media to try and piece it together when I tell them that I have it. And that isn't always the best thing to do, because there are a lot of things out there that don't paint the best picture. Even in the world of psychology, a lot of psychologists and psychiatrists don't want to deal with people with borderline personality disorder, so that even skews it in a more negative light. And from what little media representation in television and film -- it's not anywhere close to accurate. They're just using it as like this weird plot point to kind of bend and move to what they think it is, versus what it actually is. So it's oftentimes sensationalized in a very inaccurate manner.

>> Tatiana Lee: Awesome -- well, not awesome, but thank you for that response. So what are some main takeaways that you hope people will get from listening to this panel today in terms of more accurate representation of borderline personality disorder?

>> Amanda Burdine: Hope that they'll understand it's really important to give it a voice and to portray it accurately. It is not necessarily the easiest thing to live with in the world, but it does create a very different viewpoint than what we normally get to see in media, which I think would be a fantastic avenue to explore mental health with. A lot of times we don't get those stories and hopefully this will pique people's interests in it and want to make it more authentic in the future.

>> Tatiana Lee: I love that. I love that. Yeah, because to your point they do it in this completely different way that's just all wrong, you're like, wish you could just do it just right! [Laughs] So my next question will be for Ali. Ali, in your experiences as a TV writer, what barriers currently exist for people with mental illness in the writers room?

>> Ali MacLean: I'm Ali. I have blonde hair and I'm wearing a blue dress and my backdrop is a bookshelf and my pronouns are she/her. As far as barrier, well I'd first say that it's an invisible disability, so unless you disclose to your employers, they won't know what you are going through. And I don't think that many people do, especially -- well, in my experience writing for comedy shows, you wouldn't necessarily want to do that, because it's like throwing chum in the water around a bunch of sharks, at least in my experience in past years, before entertainment has sort of begun to portray depression in different ways. You would never show any weakness in the writer's room, or you'd just get destroyed. I remember working on a comedy show a few years ago and I was going through a really hard time. You know, I had a cat die, I was going through this whole thing with a boyfriend, I was going through a medication change, which had me like head in the toilet sick. But I just kind of kept it all under wraps. I would go to the bathroom during breaks and cry, then wash my face and like practice smiling in the mirror, and then go back into the room. And my boss would be like "okay Ali, we need like 20 dick jokes now." And I'd be like "great!" And it was like -- that's what made me crazy, like, pretending to be fine. And I think that the added pressure of going through mental illness and having a disability, but having to shine it on and pretend that everything's fine for fear of losing your job is an added pressure, because I don't think that many employers will make concessions for you just because you're sad. And I think that's what many of them think that it is. "Oh, you're just -- you're just in a bad mood, or you're sad. Get over it. Suck it up" I think that because there's not a lot of information about it still, that's what it's seen as. And so I think many people just -- push through it instead of disclosing, and saying "this is a real thing and -- I need you to be either patient with me or I need some time" or what have you. So that's a major barrier. I was actually on on a clubhouse session, or whatever you call them, for writers and mental illness and I was talking about that issue. And it kind of lit up, and there's all these people that were like whatever they do that go or whatever -- and there was a psychiatrist, I think, on -- like an expert. And he said "do you really think you're the only writer that's had depression before? Especially comedians, because they tend to be depressed or something." And I said "yeah but --" and all these writers jumped on and said "oh it's the same thing for me." And then some show-runners even said "well I feel that way too, but I'm the leader so I can't show any signs of weakness or any signs of being sick or ill or not in control, so I can't disclose that I have this either because I have to run a tight ship." So everybody's pretending to be strong or fine or what have you, so nobody feels that they can be vulnerable or be truthful.

>> Tatiana Lee: Yeah. And I think that's the part that ends up becoming unhealthy, of people looking at it like it's a weakness, looking at it as something that you have to hide, that you can't share, when actually just going through it is being strong, and being open about it is being strong. I don't know, I was like "let's talk to the expert" so I'll go to Diego. Diego, I wanted to ask you, as a mental health professional, what are some of the most important aspects you feel that media needs to get right in terms of accurate representation of people with mental illness?

>> Diego Kusnir: Well I -- just to first say -- go by he/him and have brown facial hair and a short haircut. And I'm a white looking latino and have a white background. So you know -- I would say there is some degree of knowledge that I've gained from my experience being blind, working with people who are needing to have some type of mental health support, and just by my personal writing, reflecting. But in no way do I feel like anyone is an expert on these things. These are -- I feel like -- a group of people that are passionate and trying to create a better world here today. And so what I feel like are some of the things that I would love for the media to get right is, first and foremost, get away from what we get wrong, which is -- I think that there are two big tropes that -- affecting lots of folks who are struggling with mental health issues and also people with disabilities. And that's either the trope that you see in the media of someone who's just got obstacle after obstacle after obstacle, and they're just drowning in it. And there's a feeling of "we could never imagine being in their shoes," basically, "I would want to kill myself if I was ever blind, borderline personality, had an invisible disability, whatever it might be." And you see it in the way that they kind of struggle. Also, in a different way, Precious was a movie that kind of painted this in a way for the experience of Black folks. And then another one that you see is this idea, kind of like what Ali -- if I got your name right -- was just saying that's so powerful, which is the way you make it is by a toxic masculinity, where we man up and we just work through it, don't show any weakness and basically stomp down our mental illness because it's not real, or stomp down our disability because it's not real, and we fight. We make it through, and we become someone who appears to make it like normal people. And in that way it's a desire to assimilate and a burden to assimilate. And so I think these two tropes are things that we need to absolutely try to move away from. And one of the reasons why is because it's so freaking real, the burdens and obstacles that we do go through, in a way that, honestly Ali was just saying, there is a pressure to assimilate, and it's powerful. Like that movie of seeing that show-runner room is so important to see in media, in the real way that it appears, not in this kind of reduced down way where it's like "looks like the right answer is to show no weakness" In one way, it shows how messed up it is that we impose this circle onto whatever shape you naturally are. And on the other side, we're here in part because of suicidal feelings and suicidal attempts that have happened. And I've suffered at times from suicidal feelings, and lots of people in their life have. Struggling with a disability and struggling with mental illness is something that is so hard at times, and we shouldn't make light of that. We should have a conversation with people who really struggle with that, so we can bring the nuanced narrative of that out, so that these things can be out there, and people can reach on to them, and actually use them, who are struggling, to be able to feel light at the end of the tunnel, because other people are struggling with it. And by seeing those, they feel less alone and other positive effects that might come.

>> Tatiana Lee: Yes, no, that was so perfectly put. Thank you so much for that. So next my question is for Nikki. Nikki, as a black woman who also identifies as having a form of mental illness, how did the intersection of multiple identities help you to understand and accept yourself?

>> Nikki Bailey: Hi I'm Nikki. My pronouns are she/her. About my appearance, I'm a black woman with bright pink neon hair in an afro, and I'm sitting in front of a bookshelf and some knickknacks on my desk. In terms of how the intersections of my multiple identities helped me understand and accept myself, in 2003 I was in a major depression, was suicidal, and I was online looking for resources, and talking about how the racism that I was experiencing was making my depression worse. And I said it on a message board -- just a general message board -- and people told me "depression has nothing to do with race. You shouldn't be talking about race with your depression. They're separate issues." And it led me to feel really isolated and really alone. And so I decided to find out if there were other black women with mental health issues. So I started an online support group for black women with depression in 2003. I'm proud to say that we are still -- we are still going strong. I'm sad to say that we still are needed, because there's just not enough resources for people of color in mental health wellness. But that group -- starting that group really helped me understand and accept myself, because I got to talk to other black women who were experiencing depression, experiencing anxiety, bipolar, schizophrenia, we -- have a wide range of people with different kinds of disorders. And one of the things that we discovered is that black women experience mental health challenges a little differently than our white counterparts do. And so there are things that we need to do, ways that we need to take care of ourselves that perhaps our white counterparts don't have to do. And just through that process of validating each other's experiences, talking about meds, talking about the taboo of being in therapy, which is still -- you know, it's getting better, that stigma, but it's still there -- the stigma around being in therapy, being on medication. But having an opportunity to talk to women who look like me helped me accept that I have bipolar II, that having bipolar II doesn't make me less than. It doesn't make me less capable. It doesn't make me less powerful. It's just a thing that I have to live with. It's a thing that I -- weave into the fabric of my life, just like you weave any other thing that you experience into the fabric of your life.

>> Tatiana Lee: I love that. I love that. Thank you so much. Yeah, just on a note of what you were saying, I was like -- I've personally also experienced those things of -- you know -- in the black community, oh we don't do -- therapy, we don't go tell other people our problems. And so it's like this idea of -- being black and going to therapy is so far-fetched, and it's like no and yes -- my therapist is black, and -- even that was a struggle to even find actually a black therapist. And then for me personally, with also having a visible disability -- even having people saying, "oh no, you can't also deal with mental illness, you got enough going on on the outside." It's like what does that mean? What does that mean? I can't have all these different things going on at once, and they can't contribute to the other? And I think people just cannot wrap their mind around that, and that's why these conversations are so important. So thank you for sharing what you said. And as a follow-up, really really quick before I go on next, what are some changes that you would like to see in terms of how black women with mental illness are portrayed on screen?

>> Nikki Bailey: Sure! Often we see mental health and mental illness only through the lens of like anti-social behavior, only through the lens of -- there's a serial killer or a drug addict, or we only see homeless people as mentally ill. I would love it if we got to see some stories of like just regular stuff, just regular dealing with your mental health issues. I'm a person who has a day job. I -- work in an office and I -- take medication and I go to therapy and I have to figure out how to get all of those things into my week. And I'd love to see just the reality of treatment, what does treatment look like, and what are some of the ways that people meet the challenge of having a mental health illness or a mental illness. So I'd love to see more of the treatment, I'd love to see people overcoming the barriers, but overcoming the barriers not making you like a superhero, you're just the person doing your thing. And I'd like to see more realistic representation of what mental health, mental illness looks like for just everyday people. And there's enough TV shows, there's enough movies where we get to see everyday people, where the people don't have superpowers. Just an episode of "This Is Us" could -- change the world if the way that they handled mental illness was a way that was relatable and showed people in the true light of what it means to deal with and live with a mental health challenge.

>> Tatiana Lee: I love that. Thank you. Thank you so much. So if you heard that, those are some suggestions. Me, one of the things I want to see is more healthy normal coping skills -- well it's not normal, but it's normal to us and that's okay too. I take my weekends for my self-care, and let's make self-care normal and not feeling bad for it. So we're gonna go back to Amanda. Amanda, I think one thing we can all agree on from this conversation we've already had is that there needs to be more nuance and complexity reflected in the way that mental health is shown in TV and film and other forms of media. What are some specific ways that people with mental illness can advocate for themselves as an employee within the entertainment industry and beyond?

>> Amanda Burdine: Yeah, I mean -- last year when I was a part of RespectAbility, we talked a lot about how change can all happen and needs to happen from the top down. Like, the people in power have responsibility to make it a more comfortable place for people to even begin to talk about it. Also, having places like RespectAbility who -- make it their mission to go out and talk to, consult with people on -- different disabilities that they're writing about, different mental illnesses that they're writing about, to make sure it's portrayed accurately instead of just hoping for the best. And I think a lot of like -- the old school mentality of a writer is just like well -- "I'll research it and I'll write about it" and you can only learn so much in research. And everyone's experience can be so different that it's often important to see not just one person's viewpoint but multiple people's viewpoints on living with their mental illness.

>> Tatiana Lee: Thank you. Thank you so much. And on the flip side of that -- you touched it a little bit -- but how can people in hiring positions create more accessible hiring process for people with mental illness and other disabilities?

>> Amanda Burdine: I mean, you get into some weird stuff with HIPPA about -- asking particulars about mental illnesses, but even just saying w"e're looking for somebody to join this writer's room who has an intimate knowledge of mental illness," or like, this specific mental illness, being willing to say "this is what we're looking for, this is the perspective that we're coming from, and this is what we want to portray authentically" is going to not only cultivate trust in the writers but ultimately the audience as well.

>> Tatiana Lee: Awesome, thank you. So my next question is for Ali. Ali, when it comes to representation of mental health in media, would you say that there's a double standard in the way men with mental illness are portrayed versus the way women and or non-binary folks are portrayed with mental illness, and what are some ways that you think these representations could improve to be more accurate?

>> Ali MacLean: Yes, I think Diego was saying earlier that -- mental illness is still seen as a weakness, and it doesn't get past me that men who are in media and film, TV -- men who are mentally ill are usually seen as -- killers, serial killers. You know, Dexter, Hannibal, Joe on You, Mr. Mercedes -- there's a component of violence behind it because they can't be seen as weak, so they're mentally ill but they're strong, or they're -- killers. Whereas women are normally seen as -- a mess or they can't get over a guy or -- they're -- the crazy ex-girlfriend, because a woman who can't get over a relationship is crazy, but a man who can't get over a relationship is the leading man on a rom-com holding a boombox over his head, he's just persistent. So there's definitely a double standard. We don't really see a lot of men who are mentally ill portrayed in a softer way. I mean, one of the best portrayals is actually a cartoon horse so -- and that's fantasy -- and that's done extremely well. I think BoJack Horseman's a really good depiction. But you know, again, that's an alternate universe. And as Amanda was saying too, I mean, that's an example of a comedic writer's room where they really do need to say we're looking for people who have -- this -- depression or what have you, and you need to be open about it, and that's a good space for it. You know, not many comedy rooms are going to ask for that or be looking for it. You know, dramas, maybe "This is Us" or some other of those shows -- would feel more comfortable talking about that type of stuff. But there's not many comedies there doing that. "Crazy Ex-Girlfriend" maybe "Enlightened" back in the day, "BoJack Horseman..." But yeah, I think that there's definitely a double standard, I just didn't grow up with a lot of examples when I was really young. I mean, I think the first time I remember seeing a man with depression was probably Cameron in "Ferris Bueler's Day Off." I remember I was like I wanted to be Ferris. He was fun and exciting and smart. I wanted to look like Sloane, and she had cool clothes with that cool jacket. But I felt like Cameron. He couldn't get out of bed, and that's how I felt. And that's one thing that you don't really see a lot on TV. The small things like having your meds changed and not feeling well, not being able to get out of bed or wanting to go party -- isolating, not being on time for things -- not being able to get it together or keeping a job or not being able to manage your money right --

>> Tatiana Lee: Mm-hmm.

>> Ali MacLean: -- or having it interfere with relationships. I wrote a play about how depression or mental illness can interfere with the relationship, because you get involved with someone and they don't know what they're getting when they first get involved with you. And it's like -- there's a third party, the third party is -- the mental illness. And so they have to kind of date both of those things, and it's something that really has to be adjusted to. So those are a lot of different things that aren't really tackled. There's a few shows that do it really well, and -- some shows that I think do tackle those issues in mental illness, like meds for instance, like Homeland, Claire Danes's character in Homeland, they do the whole meds thing really well, but it's really not rooted in reality because she's a spy. She's not working in an office.

>> Tatiana Lee: Juggling kids and other things [laughs]

>> Ali MacLean: Right, she's not working at Dunder Mifflin, so you know, there's some things that they get right, but it's always heightened. So yeah, I think that they can do a better job in a lot of different places. I think that as far as what Nikki was saying with the racism or with bullying, for instance, I think "13 Reasons Why" did an excellent job showing depression and bullying and suicide. But then they went and they erased it because people complained, which -- my feeling about that was like "I'm sure people complained about Romeo and Juliet, but Shakespeare didn't change the ending to that." You know it's about -- there's so many examples -- you could call rough depictions, but -- if you don't tell the truth of what it's really like, then nobody's going to learn what it's really like.

>> Tatiana Lee: Exactly. Exactly. I can't agree more. So next, Diego, we talked about some harmful stereotypes that tend to fall in framing mental illness when we see film and TV like overcoming or being cured in order for a person to be successful. Based on your experience as a licensed psychologist, what does success look like for someone who identifies as having a form of mental illness?

>> Diego Kusnir: Well, I think in so many ways success looks like the kind of stories that Nikki and Ali are yearning for - these everyday stories. And I think -- the way I would define, in terms of, like, success in the media is -- it's a really painful process that, like, I would encourage people with disabilities and people who have mental health issues to allow for themselves to see scattered representations that are humanizing and real, where people are really trying to live with their mental illness or their disability. The reason why I say it in that way is I feel like living with these things are -- they're not only dynamic in themselves but they really are a whole process where we kind of start being ashamed by the societal shame that is just drenching us in the beginning. And then later we undo some of that shame. But maybe we've never loved before, and in the process of having our first vulnerable relationship, all new kinds of shame come up. And so it's a really dynamic process where, showing in a movie where you can only show a little bit of someone's life oftentimes, it might be icky representations, or it might be -- kind of, a lot better word, like cheery representation, but as long as it's real, where they're really trying to negotiate and navigate their disability to the best of their ability, and you can see that realness, I think it has so many chances to be what we're ultimately looking for. Hopefully over time you'll see people's progression, because we do need to undo so much of the shame that's thrown onto us over time. But in understanding and respecting everyone's process, some people are going to be at the beginning of the process and some people are going to be -- later on in the process. In terms of media representatives, they're all good, as long as they're really having these depictions that people are truly trying to live with the disability, or doing a really good job of showing how the person is struggling to live with it, and not just on these tropes.

>> Tatiana Lee: Awesome, thank you. So next my question is for Nikki. Nikki, oftentimes characters with BIPOC identities in film and TV are depicted as having a form of mental -- that are depicted as having a form of mental illness are typically seen as societal failures -- We talked a little bit about this -- homeless, in jail, on drugs, etc, and are far more likely to experience barriers in receiving the support and mental health resources that are needed. What are some ways that you feel representation can be improved to combat some of those additional layers of stigma surrounding mental illness that currently exists within the black communities?

>> Nikki Bailey: One thing that we should think about is -- mental wellness requires us to be social, it requires us to be in community with each other. And so I think that it would be really important to see more stories of people who are in community and dealing with their mental health challenges, and in communities where they're being supported, you know, like, in communities where going to therapy is encouraged and taking medication is encouraged. And so another thing is we all know in reality that it is really difficult to find culturally competent therapists. It's difficult to find therapists of color. It's difficult specifically to find --black male therapists are really hard to find. And so I think it would be -- I would love to see a TV show in treatment with -- with a black male therapist or a black female therapist. I would love to see a show like that have patients that are as diverse as we come, as people with mental illnesses are. And so I think to sort of raise the level of what we think -- what we should settle for in terms of mental health representation. And I specifically think among black folks it would make a huge difference if someone like Tyler Perry was talking about depression in his films in a way that was really grounded in reality. And like Diego said, authentic real stories, you know, that are telling the truth about what the reality is.

>> Tatiana Lee: Exactly, I love that. And that show, I do -- I actually would really like -- I was like, I would watch that. If I was a black male or female therapist and seeing the people that they [laughs] work with, and I would love to be a fly on a wall to hear some of those conversations and just really understand where people are coming from, because I think oftentimes we -- you know, people say oh yeah, I have -- I deal with this, I have depression. And people are like well, "what do you have to be depressed about?" And it's like "you have no idea." So that would be quite interesting. So I'm gonna take this time to all of our viewers and participants - if you are watching and you have questions for our amazing panel of experts with their lived experience, as well as being in in the entertainment industry, or anything -- they just have a wealth of knowledge and experience. So if you have any questions you would like to raise, please put them in the chat box. This would be the time to do it, and we will make sure that your question is answered. Thank you, and I love that the chat box is like going off. Awesome, glad you guys are having great conversations. So while we wait for questions to come into the chat box -- and I'm going to pose this question to all of you, and we talked about this a little bit, but I want to hear individually from each of you. So what are some things that you would like to see more of in mental health representation in media? So maybe some examples, or some other things you would like to see. I know Nikki touched on it a little bit, Diego did, so sound off. Who wants to go first?

>> Nikki Bailey: I'll go first -- this is Nikki. I would love to see a story with someone who looks like me managing their mental illness. And I've actually written a pilot because because I wanted that to see that so much so -- but I think it would be really great to just sort of see mental health and mental wellness and the things that we do to achieve mental wellness. I'd like to just see those -- amplified more -- and I -- yeah, and just more grounded in reality, like we said before.

>> Tatiana Lee: Nice. So if anybody out there is looking to pick up a script from somebody, hit up Nikki. She has the black girl mental wellness pilot you need. So hit her up or hit up RespectAbility, we can put you in touch with her. Anybody else has anything they want to add?

>> Amanda Burdine: Yeah, I mean, I think that it'd be really beneficial to everyone to depict more than just depression and anxiety. Those -- like, those are definitely more prevalently talked about, but having a wider assortment of mental illnesses, because there's more than just those two. And especially in a way that is not like they're the villain or they're a murderer or anything like that. Having it as just a normal thing would be huge and really big step forward.

>> Tatiana Lee: Awesome, thank you so much.

>> Ali MacLean: I can go through what I was saying before, the things I was listing off -- it seems like it's mundane but -- and it is, it's the minutia of life, it's the things that other people don't think about. But you know, being able to get dressed and go out to a party, and being excited and having fun when everyone else is. And you know you're supposed to be having fun but you're not. And there's the things that -- like a high functioning depressive does in order to cope that people may not realize. Like, I'm covering with humor or pretending to be happy for someone, or covering your feelings, not sleeping, not taking your meds, not paying your bills, relationships -- I think that's really important. I think "You're the Worst" did a great job dealing with mental illness in relationships. But a lot of shows don't, or they either shy away or they don't really tackle it well. And it can blow a relationship apart, or it can really strengthen it and show that you're in the right one. And I think that shows can really deal with that better, or start dealing with it. But there's a lot of little things, because there's a lot of different variations of mental illnesses and the level in which you're dealing with it, so -- and whether you are covering it up by dealing with it, or you're open about it.

>> Tatiana Lee: Yeah, awesome. Thank you. Anyone else has anything they want to add, and then we have some questions in the chat box.

>> Diego Kusnir: I mean, I'm a sucker for all marginalized communities being represented -- I mean, it's mostly what I watch, the more the better. But one thing I find, and I find it maybe happens a lot with people with disabilities, but I actually think it happens with so many marginalized communities, which is there are moments that for the quote-unquote "normal" arc of a story feels like just a little moment before the climax happens and the resolution of that climax, right? But for us, like, at times it is finding the party, or it's prepping for the party, or it's a little interaction in the party that is actually our climax, or at least a valuable enough climax to really spend much more time on. And so for me, it's part of the reason why I sometimes would write about these little moments that would happen to me. But it's why I sometimes open up so much when I see those, because I know how big those little moments are. I know how like not little they are. And so I would love to kind of break away from that normal story arc and just hear some of those really micro moments are really big to us and do a lot for us when we see them.

>> Tatiana Lee: I love that. I love that. Actually when you said that, I thought of an example of something I saw -- these series of short series and this girl -- it was called quarter life something, I can't remember. But I think FX ended up picking it up but she showed these little --

>> Nikki Bailey: Quarter Life Crisis.

>> Tatiana Lee: Yes. And they were like different moments of climaxing of -- her preparing to go out and her preparing to send this email and all these other things, and it's those nuanced things, just like you said, that are our climaxes. But other people, they just see them as just regular things to get to the climax. But I think people don't realize it makes for such much more interesting stories, Ali.

>> Diego Kusnir: That too.

>> Tatiana Lee: Awesome. So let's get to some of these questions, because now they're piling up. So Ty says "was there a moment where you disclosed your mental illness and it affected your career in a positive way?" Anyone? [Crosstalk] Go ahead Ali.

>> Ali MacLean: I think -- I wrote a -- sort of autobiographical play about my depression, whereas I never told anybody and I hid it because I wanted to get jobs. And I finally wrote this play about my depression and how it affected my relationships and how I felt suicidal. And I was extremely scared to put it out there but I did. And it actually won some awards, and we put it up, we did some readings of it. And I had so many people come up to me afterwards and say "this is how I feel. This is what I'm going through. I never felt like I could say anything." And it was so overwhelming that afterwards, we did subsequent readings, we had to have somebody from Didi Hirsch Mental Health Services come and do a talkback, because I felt overwhelmed and couldn't answer all their questions. But it just made me realize that there's so many people sitting around in silence, going through the same things that I am. So I felt -- I was happy that I didn't feel so alone, but also sad that so many other people were going through it. So it was such a wonderful feeling knowing that I could connect with people this way, and I was so glad I did it, because I felt like I could also be of service through something, through a creative outlet. And I was so glad that I kind of finally took the plunge, as it were, and disclosed. Because I've been carrying that around with me for years and didn't tell anyone because I was ashamed, and I was embarrassed, and I thought it was a weakness and something was wrong with me. And it turns out everybody feels that way. So that was a really positive thing.

>> Tatiana Lee: I love that. Thank you so much Ali. Yeah, I love when our art can help others, and isn't that what truly art is supposed to be about? So Nikki, you had something you wanted to add?

>> Nikki Bailey: Yeah, mine is not as amazing as that. Mine is just a really mundane thing -- like a really mundane thing I --

>> Tatiana Lee: It's all good, it's all worth it.

>> Nikki Bailey: Yeah it's worth it and that's why I'm talking about it. I was in a severe depression and I was having a hard time getting to work on time or at all. And I finally decided to disclose to my bosses that I have bipolar II. And not only did they make reasonable accommodations, they made accommodations that allowed me to advance my career, because I was not working the hours that -- the original hours, the eight to four or the eight to -- I was working later in the day. It allowed my brain to work better, it allowed my talent to shine through more, and I ended up getting promoted because I decided to disclose, and they took it seriously and made accommodations that allowed me to flourish. And like, that's the ideal scenario when you disclose your mental health illness, your mental health challenge to other people. Like, that's the ideal scenario. I've had the exact opposite happen where I disclosed to a boss who then used that on my evaluation for the year to give me a lower grade, and I didn't get a raise, I didn't get a promotion. And so I've had the negative happen, but having the positive happen made me feel empowered to disclose more often and more regularly to employers and also to co-workers, because it made such a huge difference. And so I found that asking around the issue before I disclose is a really great way to being able to -- asking what would happen if someone had this happen, or what would happen if this came up, and you know once I got -- I could measure responses based on those questions and find out if it was safe for me to disclose. And generally speaking I've had really good experiences, I've had one really bad one, but most people, most employers have been really great. [crosstalk] Yeah, like Ali said in the chat, "asking for a friend."

>> Tatiana Lee: See, that's why we got to shift the culture. I was like, every situation should be a positive situation of when you have the opportunity to disclose. Like, that is just ridiculous for someone to hold that against you. I was like, I'm trying to keep it PG, but I was like -- [crosstalk] this is why we got to do the work, go ahead Ali.

>> Ali MacLean: [crosstalk] This is a question I don't have the answer to, but you know, when it comes to discrimination, certain employers can be in trouble for that. Would that even be considered discrimination because it's a -- mental illness is a disability, so are they discriminating against you?

>> Tatiana Lee: Yep. Yep. Exactly.

>> Nikki Bailey: At the time I didn't know that mental illness was considered a disability so I didn't know that I had legal rights in that situation. But I think if I were going through the same thing now, I know I would go to HR and report that.

>> Tatiana Lee: Yeah, good point. Diego, you look like you had something to add. Did you have something --

>> Diego Kusnir: Oh no, I was just hearing what she was saying.

>> Tatiana Lee: Oh okay, cool. I just want to make sure. When it comes -- so next is from Juliet, hey Juliet. "When it comes to authenticity in media, aside from consulting, do you feel that it's important for the actor portraying the character to have mental illness as well?" So what are your all thoughts?

>> Nikki Bailey: As an actor I want -- there's this part of me that wants to reserve the right to play all kinds of things. Like, I want to be able to say "well I don't have dissociative identity disorder, I don't have that, but I want to reserve the right to play that role." That said, I'm sure there's a brilliant actress with DID who could play that role somewhere. So I don't have to play that role because I'm sure there's somebody who has it who can do that. So I don't know -- all of that to say I have mixed feelings about it. You know, on the one hand I think it's really important for authentic representation to be there in film and television, and for us to see -- if the character is meant to be asian it should be played by an asian person, you know, I think that's really important. On the other hand, as an actor I want to play all the parts. I want to get to play everybody. I want to play Hamlet, I want to play Juliet, I want to play all of the parts. So I have mixed feelings about that.

>> Tatiana Lee: But to your point, I was like , et's get to the point of the fact that when other actors don't get the opportunity to play those positions. Because I've --I completely understand what you're saying, but even myself, as an actor with a visible disability it's like, you know, you see these actors play wheelchair users who -- where I don't even get a chance to be in the room to audition. So think about it in terms of that, so I love your point of what you said of -- yes, if a person that has that mental illness can do the job, why not? But if it doesn't, then then yes, consider -- but at least consider people with that mental illness or disability first and prioritize that first.

>> Ali MacLean: I agree. I feel the same. As an actor as well, I feel the same as Nikki, like yeah, I want to play Hamlet, who doesn't,

>> Tatiana Lee: But yeah, I also want to play -- I also want to play Rihanna one day too!

>> Ali MacLean: Well sure, who doesn't? I want to be her! But the thing is like, it's acting, it's like, I play people and I'm in love with the person on stage but I'm not --I've played alcoholics, I'm not an alcoholic, it's a juicy thing to play and -- if you're a good actor you research it and you're able to get into the skin of the part. So that's one of the joys of acting is being able to really find something that isn't part of your world, and master it and become it. That being said I completely understand that someone who has that disorder would want to be the first in the queue to be able to play it. But then it gets into a situation where it's like, well, are alcoholics only going to play alcoholics? You know, it's like where does that start to go to?

>> Tatiana Lee: Yeah.

>> Diego Kusnir: I mean my only thought on that is just that I think the directors and the casting folks have a burden to kind of hold a flexibility and a creativity with the story and some just might not have a flexibility. But I think more scripts than what we think actually have more room than we imagine. And when we bring people in, it changes the script and that's okay. And so if someone comes in, let's say a wheelchair user, and the person who's writing the script just didn't imagine that, that would take some adjustment but that doesn't actually need to mean "oh no we didn't imagine someone in a wheelchair, we can't have you participate." Only someone maybe -- who uses a wheelchair, is like, no, maybe you can just chill, relax and think could it all still work, or maybe shift in some ways and still be as good or better of a movie working with these different identities that come in to audition for these roles.

>> Tatiana Lee: Yeah, I like that -- I think that is a good point. So we have a few more minutes and have some more questions. Someone says any suggestions on how to present mental health situations and topics in animation more geared towards kids and teens? Anybody, any suggestions?

>> Tatiana Lee: Nikki you look like you had something.

>> Nikki Bailey: Yeah, I think -- animation is such a rich -- there's so much rich opportunities involved in how you could portray mental illness and mental health in animation, because you could have -- just like they did in Inside Out - was that the movie, the Pixar movie where you could have characters that -- embody certain psychiatric challenges, and they could be -- you could have a giraffe that has depression and -- a panda that has BPD or whatever, and I think it would be -- a way to make it more accessible, just like Ali was saying with BoJack Horseman, like, it's an alternate reality but it also makes it really accessible for us to be able to watch this character go through what he's going through even though he's a horse. So I think it could work for kids too.

>> Tatiana Lee: Awesome, I like that. One thing that I really like, too, is just showing kids dealing with great coping skills. I have ADHD and sometimes I just have a little fidgety thing or different things like that, and just show a kid just being them. So, my little fidget toy. So we have a couple more minutes and we have another question, but I thought this would be a great question to end it off. Each of you, I'm gonna ask "what are some of the ways each of you practice self-care?"

>> Amanda Burdine: I try to take a walk every day with my dogs, and I journal and I meditate. And those are really helpful.

>> Tatiana Lee: I love those.

>> Nikki Bailey: For me I have an expression. ABC - always be crafting. I craft and crochet and latch hook and embroider, and I just can get lost in that for hours, and it's so relaxing. So I do that. And I also meditate, I pray, go for walks, things like that. Sometimes the best self-care is to just do nothing, and sometimes I just do nothing. I just stare at a wall, and that's some good self-loving right there -- wall stare. And if you don't do it, get on that. It's good for you.

>> Tatiana Lee: Yes, I love that. Ali or Diego, what do you do for self-care?

>> Ali MacLean: Well I make sure that I exercise. I love getting on my spin bike and using my peloton app. It combines getting out my anxiety and listening to music, usually 80s music. [Laughs] I make sure that I eat because I forget to eat during the day when I'm busy, so I definitely make sure that I'm eating properly. I watch baseball, or if it's not on, then football, because it has nothing to do with anything that I do for a living, so sometimes watching TV or movies is hard for me because I start analyzing it, or I'm like "I would have made a different choice," or whatever. So it's just completely not in my world, so it's kind of like -- gets my mind off things. What else... One thing I've learned is every day make your bed, so you don't get back in it [laughs] which actually comes in handy, because you know, I'll wake up, I'll get up and I'm like "I just want to go back in," it's my friend, my bed. So making it just is like neat, won't see you till later. Yeah, and then just trying to be social every day and not get in the isolation mode, especially during the pandemic which was very difficult.

>> Tatiana Lee: Yeah, definitely. Well, thank you all so much for joining us, I really enjoyed this conversation. Thank you all for bringing your lived experience, your knowledge, your beautiful faces and gracing us to have this amazing conversation -- oh, Diego, you didn't share your self-care. Did you want to add that really quick before we sign off?

>> Diego Kusnir: Well everyone's was amazing. I like the sound of the ocean. I think that eating way too much food, it can feel very self-caring [Tatiana laughs] at least in that moment and afterwards a lot of things happen, but binge eating and ocean sounds.

>> Tatiana Lee: I love that, I love that. And really quick, mine is bubble baths. Bubble baths, I love. So thank you again for sharing your beautiful faces and just sharing your knowledge and sharing your experience and being open and vulnerable. And you know, so much going on in the world. I want to thank all of our viewers for watching, everyone in the chat box going off, I love it. Thank you so much. This will be available later on, fully captioned and everything. And please reach out to RespectAbility if you ever have any questions. In the chat box we also have a list of resources if you yourself are dealing with mental health struggles and just need some form of support. There are various options in the chat box so check it out. And thank you so much for joining us for this panel, and I hope you have a great afternoon. Thanks!