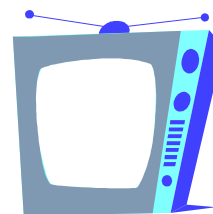


# Stigmabusters



## BRITNEY SPEARS

### What can WE do?

(Excerpts from Stigmabusters Alert,  
Jan. 23, 2008)

NAMI purposely has not spoken out about the Britney Spears ordeal in recent weeks, in part because we do not presume to diagnose anyone's illness and we try to respect a person's privacy—even when it's being violated by others. We also have not wanted to feed the media circus...

Many StigmaBusters have been appalled by sensationalized media coverage of the story, particularly supermarket tabloids like The Star, which ran the headline "Britney's insane; her spiral into madness." However, a few persons have praised PEOPLE magazine, which ran a cover story on "Britney's Mental Illness," while providing a relatively balanced discussion about "likely bipolar disorder," that focused on symptoms and the need for treatment.

Roy Peter Clark, vice-president of the Poynter Institute, a leading center of journalism training and ethics, wrote in an on-line column. <http://poynter.org/column.asp?id=78&aid=135728> "One of the terrible side effects of America's celebrity and media culture is a pervasive cynicism about addiction and mental illness...We are all complicit...I'm no Puritan when it comes to gossip, and I've grown up reading the tabloids, but there is clearly a danger zone, when life and health are at stake, when the best thing the press can do is back off. That time for Spears is probably now."

"Avoiding the daily soap opera does not require journalists to abstain from critical and analytical pieces on celebrity, addiction, gender and mental illness," Clark continued.

"Perhaps the troubles of a particular celebrity might be an occasion to turn the camera away to the less intriguing but more important cases of mental illness in our own communities."

### What You Can Do

\* Use the Britney Spears story as an opportunity to talk with friends, neighbors or co-workers about stigma, the nature of mental illnesses, and the fact that treatment works—if a person gets it.

\* Write letters to broadcasters or editors whose coverage you think is excessive, sensationalized or uses stigmatizing language.

\* Enclose a copy of Roy Peter Clark's column—asking them to seek a higher ethical standard and to publish stories about mental illness in your own community.

\* If you see offensive language on the cover of a magazine in stores, tell the managers. Ask them politely to remove it—or at least pass the message on to the owners or regional managers.

\* You can comment on-line to BP Magazine about "Britney, bipolar and the media."

<http://www.bphope.com/newsletter.php>

\* Send Stigmabusters your comments also. [smarch@nami.org](mailto:smarch@nami.org) Has there been coverage by media sources that you believe was especially awful or especially responsible?

Stella March, National Coordinator  
NAMI StigmaBusters

\*\*\*\*\*

NAMI StigmaBuster Alerts With more than 1,100 state and local affiliates, NAMI is the nation's largest grassroots organization dedicated to improving the lives of people with severe mental illnesses... Contributions to support our work can be made online at <http://www.nami.org/donate> If you have any questions, concerns, or comments, please send an email to [smarch@nami.org](mailto:smarch@nami.org)

*Every sixty seconds you spend upset, is a minute of happiness you will never get back.*

*Life may not be the party we hoped for, but while we are here, we should Dance!*