The Media’s Portrayal of Disability: Influence on Public View

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The Media’s Portrayal of Disability: Influence on Public View

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A PROFESSIONAL PROJECT PRESENTED TO THE SCHOOL OF COMMUNICATION + JOURNALISM OF FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF SCIENCE

FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

People with disabilities continue to be discriminated against and misconceptions about them are spread. The purpose of this study is to research how forms of media have influenced society’s depiction of people with disabilities. Secondary research will be conducted to analyze others’ findings about how misleading beliefs originated and continue to exist in the media. Primary research will be conducted through a survey to find out what the public view is and how they have seen people with disabilities portrayed in the media. These results will help understand media’s effects on societal opinion. It will be analyzed and help determine possible actions on what can be done to prevent misconception of people with disabilities in the media.

*Keywords:* people with disabilities, the media, misconceptions, discrimination, representation
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The Media’s Portrayal on Disability: Influence on Public View

Introduction

Society’s views on what qualifies as a person with a disability are influenced by the way the media depicts them. The framing theory ties into this by demonstrating how the media focuses attention on certain words and images when speaking about people with disabilities, placing it within a field of meaning. The public’s view is influenced by the visual and verbal portrayal of disability that has led to misleading stereotypes about disabled people. There is a communication challenge in informing the public on what is considered a disability/disabled person. Understanding people with disabilities will contribute to their inclusion in society and better quality of life for everyone. This paper will focus on researching the historical context, how the media has impacted public opinion on disability, and proposals to best address the issue.

Literature Review

Historical Context

Throughout history and among different cultures, from early civilization to present day, individuals with disabilities have been treated differently from those who appear to fit societal norms due to negative perceptions that have been spread about them. They have suffered horrific acts of discrimination, such as being killed, isolated, and excluded from society. “Despite the 1991 United Nations adoption of Principles for the Protection of Persons with Mental Illness, as well as the 2006 United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, people with mental illness throughout the world are still treated inhumanely and are living under deplorable conditions, including in prisons, on the streets, and in asylum-type settings” (Marini, 2017).
Early Civilization

There is archeological evidence that there have been people with disabilities since early civilizations, but due to lack of medical understanding and technology, their life spans were short. During the 5th to the 4th century BCE/CE, the ancient Greeks had a religious belief that the body and soul were connected. Thus, it was believed that a disability to the body would affect the soul or meant that they were punished for having sinned. Since some of them suffered from mental illnesses, people thought they were possessed by a demon. They saw anybody that was sick as inferior and this led to “infanticide of infants with physical disabilities [which] was practiced for eugenic reasons as advocated by Plato, and economic reasons as sanctioned by Aristotle,” but some people, such as Greek physician Hippocrates, rejected this reasoning and believed the mental illness was due to environmental or brain impairment reasons (Marini, 2017). Hippocrates established the first sanitarium built for people with mental illnesses, but only the wealthy could benefit from it. If a person with a disability was born to a poor family, they faced inhumane conditions or were killed. “In the military city of Sparta, the abandonment of “deformed and sickly’ infants was a legal requirement” (The Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities, *Parallels in time: a history of developmental disabilities*). During ancient Rome (1500 B.C.-475 A.D.), Romans had similar beliefs to the Greeks. If a person became disabled later in life or had mental illnesses, they would become beggars or would be used by wealthy Romans for amusement. Some children were thrown in the Tiber River by their parents, left in the woods to die bounding their feet together so they would not be adopted. There were some cultures that accepted people with disabilities and saw their disabilities in a positive light, but these were isolated events, and most of the people at the time were not accepting of them.
Middle Ages

During the Middle Ages, the Roman Catholic Church provided refuge to people in need and established facilities for them, such as orphanages, hospitals, and homes. The first asylum for abandoned children was founded in 787 A.D. by archbishop of Milan, Datheus (The Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities, *Parallels in time: a history of developmental disabilities*). Despite more acceptance of people with disabilities, there was still great scorn. Sometimes, even religious people and churches would be cruel towards them claiming that the Bible references people with disabilities as being able to be healed if they have faith in God and repent their sins. This created the wrong message about their conditions. “Idiot cages” became popular with the supposed purpose of keeping people with disabilities out of trouble and “ships of fools” were used to take the individuals away so they would not be a bother, but mostly served as entertainment for people and a way to keep them away (see Appendix A). Drawings during the Medieval and Renaissance periods show them getting ridiculed and dressed up as jesters for entertainment. This form of early media created a negative portrayal of people with disabilities.

The Renaissance

In 1494, Melleus Maleficarum which translates to “Hammer of the Witches,” was written by “two Dominican Friars with the authority of the Pope” as a witch-hunting manual (Museum of Disability, *Society Timeline Exhibit*). People with disabilities suffered due to this manual since seizures were seen as a characteristic of witches. Later, due to the growing interest in culture, art, politics, and economy, people became more educated about people with disabilities. Attitudes towards them started shifting from seeing people with disabilities as having sinned or being possessed to sick or ill. Many scientists, such as Leonardo da Vinci, became interested in
studying anatomy and how the body and brain work. This led to better care and understanding, but many still suffered unfair conditions. For instance, there were a series of laws that were passed by Queen Elizabeth to take care of the poor and disadvantaged, yet the conditions in the facilities that were built were grim (The Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities, *Parallels in time: a history of developmental disabilities*). Towards the end of this period, people with disabilities were being educated more, they were taught to communicate by forming letters, speak, and write depending on the disability.

Modern Era (1800s—Present)

Following Charles Darwin’s publication *Origin of Species* in 1859, there was an increasement in the study of eugenics, “the study of hereditary improvements of the human race by controlled selective breeding,” and this led many people in society to view people with disabilities as weak and inferior (Marini, 2017). “Between the 1900s and 1950s, an estimated half a million boys and girls had disabilities often caused by diseases such as polio and tuberculosis” (The Historic England Blog, n.d.). In the United States, the polio epidemic had the highest number of reported cases in 1952, “of 57,628 reported cases, 3,145 died and 21,269 were left struggling with mild to disabling paralysis” (Harvard University, 2013). Despite the growing population of people with disabilities, many countries passed discriminatory laws (such as the U.S. and Germany sterilization laws in the 1920s). The media was influential in this “through films dealing with topics on euthanasia of people with disabilities, documentaries depicting people with severe mental retardation living in dismal conditions, and other types of propaganda” (Marini, 2017). They made it seem as if they had the best interest at hand for society and to end what they considered was “suffering” of people with disabilities. Adolf Hitler used this along with his army to exterminate Jews and “all persons who suffered from diseases
considered hereditary, such as mental illness, learning disabilities, physical deformity, epilepsy, blindness, deafness`, and severe alcoholism” as part of their plan to create a superior race (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, People with Disabilities). They spread propaganda through media labeling people with disabilities as a burden in society, unworthy of life, to influence the public’s view (see Appendix A). In the United States, there was a New York Times article about Nazi Germany’s belief claiming, “It shall be made possible for physicians to end the tortures of incurable patients, upon request, in the interests of true humanity” (Marini, 2017). Ultimately, around 275,000 individuals with disabilities were murdered by gas, injection, starvation, torture, experimentation, and shooting in Nazi Germany.

By the end of World War I, there were an estimated 20 million people injured and in Britain around 2 million came home with some disability including facial disfigurement, blindness, deafness, disease, lung damage due to poison gas, and 40,000 amputees (Home from the war: What happened to disabled first world war veterans, 2018). They also suffered psychiatric conditions as a result of the war, such as post-traumatic stress disorder. They found it difficult to find a job and many that found employment endured poor working conditions. In 1932, Franklin D Roosevelt was the first person with a disability elected as U.S. president and even though he tried hiding his disability, this was encouraging for many people with disabilities to see someone in a position of power that represents their community. In 1941, there was a shortage in workers due to the rising world war and employers started hiring more people with disabilities. The media assisted in encouraging employers to hire them. There was one newspaper headline that read, “Cripples Can Do Vital War Work,” which was demeaning because that is an offensive term and not everyone who has a disability has a physical disability.
After World War II, attitudes towards people with disabilities changed. There was more medical treatment, equal rights movements, and laws for them to not be excluded from society over the next years. For instance, The Civil Rights Act (1964), The Rehabilitation Act (1973), and The Americans with Disabilities Act (1990) were passed to fight for inclusion and prevent discrimination against people with disabilities. Although there were developments and more rights over time as countries became more industrialized, many people’s views on people with disabilities are still affected by the media and there is still discrimination against them today.

Misrepresentation in Media

The framing theory studies “how rhetorical devices can be used to convince people of the value of any given position,” through its composition and emphasis (Amis, 2022). How the media frames stories of people with disabilities influences the way that the public views them. Fifteen percent of the global population have disabilities and continue to be misrepresented by the media not covering stories about them often and when they do, they are negatively stereotyped, and “treated as objects of pity, charity or medical treatment that have to overcome a tragic and disabling condition” (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, People with Disabilities). The media can be a vital tool in normalizing people with disabilities and informing the audience about it; however, that is not the case most of the time.

Many people with disabilities feel misrepresented in the media. A 2009 British social attitudes survey found that “a majority of both disabled and non-disabled people feel that attitudes and barriers in society play some part in preventing disabled people living a full life” (Staniland, 2009). This is due to the influence that media has on society’s norms, perception, and assumptions about disabled people. “Stereotype assumptions about disabled people are based on superstition, myths and beliefs from earlier less enlightened times,” but they “are inherent to our
culture and persist partly because they are constantly reproduced through the communications media” (Barnes, 1992).

In the television industry, most actors that play characters with disabilities are non-disabled and some characters are portrayed in a negative light due to their disability (Woodburn & Kopic, 2016). In a 1991 study by disabled writer and activist Paul Hunt, he “established a list of ten common stereotypes of people with disabilities…: ‘an object of curiosity or violence,’ sinister or evil, the ‘super cripple’ (as if having a disability anoints them some sort of superpower), a way to establish atmosphere, laughable, their own worst enemy, a burden, “non-sexual”, or being unable to participate in daily life” (Reid, 2019). For instance, in the movie Me Before You, the male lead character gets paralyzed in an accident, is miserable with his life, and ends up dying by assisted suicide. He was portrayed as crippled, feeling like a burden that needed to be taken care of, and not being able to have a sexual life anymore. There are many cases in which people with disabilities are portrayed as helpless victims.

In addition, in many forms of media, evil characters are displayed with a physical or mental disability. For example, in the 1886 novella and 1931 film “Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde,” the good side (Dr. Jekyll) is attractive and successful, but the bad side (Mr. Hyde) has a deformity, is unattractive, and is evil. Stephen Hawking was an accomplished physicist, cosmologist, and author who had amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS). ALS is a progressive neurological disorder that affects voluntary muscle movement. He was portrayed many times in the media as being denied a better quality of life. Hawking saw his disability in a positive light. When he passed away, there were cartoons in the media that showed him as “finally free” from his wheelchair (see Appendix A).
Several similar studies provided insights on this topic. The British Council of Organisations of Disabled People reported that “society's misconceptions about disabled people are constantly being reinforced by disabling terms like 'cripple', 'spastic', and 'idiot' (Barnes, 1992). How people with disabilities are referred to and represented in the media is so important because it influences public perception. The words utilized add the positive/negative connotation to their portrayal. The Disabled People’s International Organization refers to a disability as “the loss or limitation of opportunities to take part in the normal life of the community on an equal level with others due to physical and social barriers.” However, many people have the wrong definition of disability objectifying them due to their disability, such as referring to them as the impaired, deaf, blind, handicapped, retard, etc. (Barnes, 1992). By calling someone by their disability, it takes away from the other characteristics of that person and the disability becomes their whole identity in the eyes of the public. A study of 788 news articles in the People’s Daily found that there was no positive change in news coverage of people with disabilities and that there was lack of sensitivity with the words used to refer to them (Ye & Zeldes, 2019). Prior to learning the results, it was hypothesized that due to the increasing quality of life for people with disabilities, there would be a positive increasing trend of news coverage. It was found that there should be more coverage of the disabled community, as well as proper and educated references on how to talk about them and refer to them. A study by Farnall and Smith (1999) showed that people exposed to positive images of people with disabilities were more likely to have a more positive perception of them and an increased perception of discrimination,” (Ippolito, n.d.).

The study conducted in this paper takes into consideration previous research but takes a different approach by questioning people’s definition of people with disabilities and inquiring about their perception/experience of seeing them represented in media.
Research Questions

RQ1: What is your age?

RQ2: Do you have a disability?

RQ3: Have you ever seen your disability depicted in any form of media (news, social media, films, shows)?

RQ4: Did you feel that your disability was accurately represented? If not, why?

RQ5: Describe a person with disabilities. What qualifies as a person with disabilities?

RQ6: Have you ever seen a news story about a person with disabilities?

RQ7: How was that person depicted? What was the story about? You can list as many examples as you would like.

RQ8: Do you recall movies in which people with disabilities were portrayed as: (Check all that apply)

RQ9: Do you feel that people with disabilities are misrepresented by the media? Why or why not?

RQ10: How can we make representation of people with disabilities better?

Methods

Participants

There were 57 participants. 39 of the participants were 18-30 years old. 13 of the participants were 30-45 years old. 4 of the participants were over 45 years old. 1 participant did not feel comfortable sharing their age. The
sample was selected at random. The survey was sent using an anonymous link so that their names and information would not be shared. The survey was sent to students on FIU WhatsApp group chats and spread on social media (Instagram and Facebook). Five participants said they had a disability.

Measures

Surveys are usually used in social and psychological research due to their ability to use different methods of instrumentation (quantitative and qualitative strategies) depending on the type of question (Ponto, 2015). For instance, the open-ended questions served as qualitative research to gather more insight on how the public has seen people with disabilities depicted in media. Written response questions prevented the responses from being limited to several multiple choices or a list since it is possible that the audience have seen people with disabilities depicted in other ways.

A survey was created using Qualtrics XM Software. It was distributed through social media and to FIU students in the class group chats. There were multiple choice, text entry, and list format questions. Most of the questions were open-ended to obtain more information about what the public’s experiences are. People were motivated to participate in the research because they were informed that it was easy for them to complete the study and took 10 minutes duration.

The message/social media post with the request to participate in the study briefly stated the intended outcome of the study so that people felt satisfied that they contributed to a study on people with disabilities in the media.

Procedure

First, the survey instrument was designed: a survey that included multiple-choice and open-ended questions to gather qualitative and quantitative data about the public’s perceptions of how
people with disabilities are depicted in the media. Next, the Qualtrics XM Software was used to collect the responses. It offered an anonymous link for the survey to be distributed. Prior to distributing it, the target population was identified. Then, it was sent to FIU students in class group chats and through social media. Other people spread the survey on social media. It helped to get more variety in responses and age. The participants were informed about the study’s objectives to motivate them to take the survey. Letting them know the survey would take no longer than 10 minutes also encouraged them to take it. The survey was left open for a few days until no responses were received. The Qualtrics XM Software generated different ways to see the responses. For the multiple-choice questions, the data was shown in a variety of ways, such as a table, pie chart, and bar graph. The organization helped to analyze the data. Lastly, the data was used to see societal misconceptions about people with disabilities and their representation in media to formulate recommendations for improving the representation of people with disabilities in media.

Results

Of the 5 participants that have a disability, 3 said they have seen their disability in some form of media, one said they had not seen their disability depicted, and one did not respond. When asked if they felt their disability was accurately represented, one participant said yes and the other said somewhat that their disability was romanticized sometimes, or they showed only one way in which it affects people.
When asked to describe a person with disabilities and what qualifies as a person with disabilities, some participants referred to physical disabilities, others mentioned physical and mental disabilities, and some defined it as unable to function to the capacity of the average human being. This question helped identify some common misconceptions that society has about people with disabilities. When asked whether they had seen a new story about a person with disabilities, 29 participants said “yes” and 9 said “no.” When asked about how that person was depicted, there were a variety in responses. The open-ended text entry responses will be further analyzed in the discussion to observe common trends and experiences. The most common misrepresentation according to the respondents, were being “made fun of” and “the victim.” For each of those, 25 participants stated that they had seen that form of portrayal in movies. In second place, 22 participants noted to have seen a person with disabilities characterized as “naïve/innocent” in movies. The least reported sighted portrayal was “the villain,” which only 10 participants stated they have noted in movies. In questions 9 and 10, most respondents shared that they think people with disabilities are misrepresented by the media and offered recommendations on how to improve their representation (see appendix B).

**Discussion**

In the research prior to the study, it was not found that sometimes people with disabilities are romanticized. One of the participants shared that this was their experience seeing their
disability in the media. Upon researching more, instances of this were found. In the show “The Good Doctor,” the main character is romanticized for his autistic behavior. It also only shows one side of it because the character has high-functioning autism and not everyone has the same experiences. Another example is the Korean show “Extraordinary Attorney Woo,” which also romanticizes the character’s high-functioning autism. In both shows, the characters are depicted as geniuses.

Some companies, such as Disney, are striving to work towards inclusivity. In the upcoming film, Peter Pan & Wendy, actor Noah Matthews, who has Down Syndrome, will play the leader of the lost boys from Neverland. Popular companies and shows tend to mislead and misinform people about autism and the different experiences people have living with it. There should be a more diverse representation of people with autism and, if used correctly, the media can serve as a tool to do so.

In the study, most participants with disabilities saw their disability displayed in some form of media, but overall, the participants shared that they feel that people with disabilities are misrepresented by the media. To learn about the public’s misconceptions, the participants were asked how they characterize a person with disabilities. Some participants did not consider mental disabilities. For instance, one participant said, “a person with a broken leg” and another described it as “finds it difficult to do day-to-day activities because of body restrictions.” Five participants mentioned that a person with disabilities is someone who cannot function like an average or “normal” human-beings. Another misconception is that people with disabilities were “born with a medical deficiency,” as one of the participants mentioned. There are many people that experience mental and physical disabilities later in life after they are born. According to the United Nations:
Persons with disabilities are seldom covered in the media, and when they are featured, they are often negatively stereotyped and not appropriately represented. It is not uncommon to see persons with disabilities treated as objects of pity, charity or medical treatment that have to overcome a tragic and disabling condition or conversely, presented as superheroes who have accomplished great feats, so as to inspire the non-disabled. (*Disability and the Media*, n.d.)

When the participants were asked how they remember the person with a disability being depicted in the news story, their responses supported this quote by the United Nations. 29 participants stated that they had seen a news story about a person with disabilities, while 9 stated they had not. Some of the responses expressed that the person was treated with pity or as suffering: “incapable of surviving on their own,” “in need of some financial assistance,” “[it showed] how people suffer with that disability,” “[was] written to elicit sympathy.” 2 participants said they saw news stories about how people with disabilities are discriminated against. A participant shared a recent example of discrimination around the Pennsylvania Senate race. Politician John Fetterman recently suffered a stroke. The participant shared how “Fox News and other outlets painted this disability as a reason why he shouldn’t be fit for office.”

Many respondents shared that they had seen people with disabilities depicted in the news as having accomplished great feats:

“they were paraplegic and an athlete,” “overcame extraordinary difficulties [example] a blind person passed the bar to become a lawyer,” “quadriplegic playing rocket league…depicted as someone amazing who was able to play rocket league better than 90% of people while not being able to use his hands or feet,” “triumphant despite their disability,” “overcoming challenge,” “an autistic person…depicted as sort of doing the
best they can despite their disability,” “usually the stories I see are related to how they did something heroic or if a group of people did something extra kind for them,” “[motivational] despite the fact that his legs were not working at all he won a medal in swimming.”

When the participants were asked if they could recall movies in which people with disabilities were portrayed by a certain stereotype, there were 10 entries for “villain,” 25 for “victim,” 22 for “naïve/innocent,” and 25 for “made fun.” Others mentioned that there was not enough representation or that they did not see them represented. A few participants shared that they do not feel that people with disabilities are misrepresented.

Limitations

The study was conducted under a short amount of time. The survey was open for 8 days from April 7 to April 15. There was a nonresponse error, some participants did not answer all the questions. There could have been bias reporting their responses. Sometimes there is a measurement error in which the questionnaires “do not evoke truthful answers” (Ponto, 2015). To reduce bias, the link and survey were anonymous. There could have been more diversity in demographic. Most of the participants did not have disabilities and were 18-30 years old. Also, most (if not all) the participants live in Florida, especially South Florida. The survey could have been distributed to more people with disabilities to see how they feel about their representation or lack of representation in the media. It would have helped to have a larger sample size and participants from other states or countries. Certain organizations could have been contacted to get more insight into their thoughts about the topic. For instance, FIU’s Disability Resource Center or The American Association of People with Disabilities could have been contacted to ask them about the topic and distribute the survey to the people in the organizations.
Recommendations

The findings help to propose new communication and media strategies for how to raise awareness on misleading views about disabled people and how to further improve this study. The study could be conducted again with more diversity and contacting organizations that are involved with people with disabilities. The United Nations recommends public events, international commemorations, and working with public figures as “opportunities to raise-awareness and conduct outreach to promote the disability perspective and highlight the concerns of persons with disabilities” (Disability and the Media, n.d.). They also suggest including people with disabilities in preparing for any media event and educating people to eliminate offensive terms.

Conclusion

Altogether, the study conducted supported the research findings that people with disabilities are misrepresented in the media. The media’s portrayal of people with disabilities influences society’s perceptions and beliefs. The study showed that most of the participants had seen and believed that people with disabilities are misrepresented in the media. It is important to take action in promoting awareness to create a better representation of people with disabilities in the media, which will improve society’s understanding and view of them, leading to a more inclusive society.
References


pandemics/#:~:text=The%201952%20polio%20epidemic%20was,with%20mild%20to%20disabling%20paralysis.


Appendix

Appendix A: Media Images of People with Disabilities Throughout History

Idiot Cages. – The Minnesota Governor’s Council on Developmental Disabilities

This picture shows how towns placed people with disabilities in cages. They claimed it was to keep them from trouble, but it became a public display of entertainment. They were ridiculed.

Ship of Fools. – The Minnesota Governor’s Council on Developmental Disabilities

This picture shows how they sent people with disabilities off in ships away from where they lived. They would charge people to see them as a form of entertainment and often abandon them.
Nazi propaganda against the disabled comparing the cost of an ill person to the cost of a healthy family. —US Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Roland Klemig

This picture shows propaganda that the Nazi created to spread discrimination of people with disabilities. A person with a disability is shown in contrast to a happy family.

Nazi Propaganda against people with disabilities –Deutsches Historisches Museum (Nr. 1988/1284).

This poster from around 1938 reads “60,000 Reichsmark is what this person suffering from a hereditary defect costs the national community during his lifetime. Fellow citizen, that is your
money too. Read ‘New People,’ the monthly magazine of the Bureau for Race Politics of the NSDAP” (Bailer-Galanda & Wetzel, 2019).

Unknown Title/Original Publication Source. Obtained from El País.

Nazi propaganda claiming, “that a patient suffering a hereditary disease costs an average of 50,000 Deutschmarks (DM) by the time they reach 60” (Blanco, 2021).

This media was used to influence people into believing that it was not worth it to keep people with disabilities alive and get them treatment. In the image the people with disabilities are depicted as significantly smaller than a regular German citizen yet taking advantage of him. The German citizen is portrayed as exhausted carrying their weight.

Stephen Hawking 1942-2018 by Milt Priggee — Cagle Cartoons

This cartoon shows Stephen Hawking as being set free from his wheelchair in the afterlife.
Stephen Hawking 1942-2018: Political Cartoons—The Sun Editorial Board

These cartoons show how Stephen Hawking was depicted after his death as being free from his disability. In the first image, he is seen walking away from the wheelchair. In the second image, he is seen flying as if he was finally free. In the third image, there are footsteps leading away from the wheelchair, suggesting he walked away from it and flew successfully into a higher being which is depicted by a shooting star. These cartoons undermine his successful life on Earth with his disability and it creates a negative public perception of his wheelchair having been a burden in his life.
Appendix B: The Survey

Introduction

Hello:

I am an FIU graduate student. You are invited to participate in this survey. This questionnaire is part of the requirement for the Global Strategic Communication Professional Project course. Its purpose is to examine how people with disabilities are portrayed in media. It will take approximately 10 minutes to complete.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. There are no foreseeable risks associated with this project. However, if you feel uncomfortable answering any questions, you can withdraw from the survey at any point. It is very important to learn your opinions.

Your responses will be anonymous and strictly confidential. Data from this research will only be used for academic purposes. I would be really grateful if you could devote a few minutes of your time to fill this questionnaire.

Question 1

What is your age?
Question 2

Do you have a disability?

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<th>Answer</th>
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<tr>
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</tr>
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</table>
Question 3

Have you ever seen your disability depicted in any form of media (news, social media, films, shows)?

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<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
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Question 4

Did you feel that your disability was accurately represented? If not, why?

Responses

Yes

Somewhat. My disability is sometimes romanticized or they show only one way in which it affects people.
Question 5

Describe a person with disabilities. What qualifies as a person with disabilities?

Responses

Describe a person with disabilities. What qualifies as a person with disabilities?

A person with a broken leg

A person who is unable to fully function (physically or mentally)

Someone with disabilities I believe is considered a person who has a mental or physical impediment that impacts their daily life.

Someone who is differently abled

An individual unable to perform at full capacity or utilize all their functions to the capacity of the average human being

Down syndrome

Someone who is unable to performing a reasonably normal task that most people are capable of doing at all or needs special assistance to do so. E.g. Walking

Stuttering and unmeaningful movements

Someone who is physically or mentally impaired in some capacity

Conditions that are defined under the US Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

A person who is not able to function at a level that meets a global standard for their age and gender

Someone with a physical or mental impairment preventing them from functioning as a normal person

Person with disabilities is a person that has problems to communicate with other people, people that has autism, people that are blind, people that can't walk, people that have a stroke, there is a lot of types of disabilities.

They need certain modifications to complete daily activities.

Person with cognitive, physical, health, emotional or behavioural, sensory challenge that affects their functioning

His particular disability

Skip

Something that prevents them from living an independent lifestyle, whether it be all or part of it.

I think a person with disabilities is a person who has a condition or circumstance that does not allow them to perform some tasks like the average person does and is expected to.

A person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activity.

A person with disabilities are persons that was born with a medical deficiency

Has a deficiency of some sort that makes day to day task difficult

An mental or physical inability

Anyone who deviates from a neurotypical or able-bodied ideal. Disability doesn’t necessarily mean a hindrance and they can take on many forms

A person that has a medical condition that affects their a certain regular capability

Someone who has physical and/or mental deformities or abnormalities that put restrictions on how they handle daily tasks.

Depends on the disability. A person that doesn’t have 100% of the capacity for something that another person does

A person with a disability is someone that has an inability to perform common functions given to humans

Someone who has special needs of some kind. Whether that is physical or mental

When something impedes them from caring out day to day to day activators independently

If they have any disability

A person who cannot do day to day tasks without impediment.

Someone who needs extra support doing every day things because of physical or mental limitations

Cognitive or motor dysfunctions

Finds it difficult to do day to day normal activities because of body restrictions.

Something that impacts day to day function

People who is having trouble of understanding or having a physical issue

Something that effects one’s way of life
Question 6

Have you ever seen a news story about a person with disabilities?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>76.32%</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>23.68%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Question 7**

How was that person depicted? What was the story about? You can list as many examples as you would like.

**Responses**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How was that person depicted? What was the story about? You can list as many examples as you would like.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They were paraplegic and an athlete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inability to see. The individual was basically described as someone who’s incapable of surviving on their own</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As if they overcame extraordinary difficulties. Eg. A blind person passed the bar to become a lawyer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They were depicted how people suffer with that disability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It was about a person who was quadriplegic playing rocket league. He was depicted as someone amazing who was able to play rocket league better than 90% of people while not being able to use his hands or feet. It was also about the technology he used to play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The stories that I can recall are inspirational highlighting the ability to live an incredible life despite their disabilities. For example, stories about Nick Vujicic, the man born with no arms or legs has never left me. I don’t recall the exact news story but I do remember that if he can have an incredible life with his disability, then I should be able to manage with life’s small challenges.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That they were triumphant despite their disability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primarily someone in need of some financial assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The story was about a person that has autism and how they are discriminate by other people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It usually has to do with a difficulty they faced.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some as resilient, overcoming challenge others in need of support eg financial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The story focused on the disability of the person, even if it wasn’t the main point of the story. This story was written to elicit sympathy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A woman that was over 1000lb who needed to be bathed and fed in the bed. She could not move from the bed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That person was depicted to be abnormal person, a that was different from the rest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There has been several but mostly in the quadriplegic or paraplegic space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One of the first that comes to mind is around the Pennsylvania Senate race. John Fetterman had recently suffered a stroke, so he wasn’t fully capable like he used to be. Fox News and other outlets painted this disability as a reason why he shouldn’t be fit for office.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handicapped or disabled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It was about an autistic person. They are depicted as sort of doing the best they can despite their disability. I think it was a story about a teenager working somewhere.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The person was describe as an “autistic child”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They gave lost their part of body due to an accident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usually the stories I see are related to how they did something heroic or if a group of people did something extra kind for them. The person is always depicted as someone who is helped by others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t remember</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It was motivational. Despite of the fact that his legs were not working at all he won a medal in swimming.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person who was limited in function who was discriminated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More like I can see many ads and in movies I have seen many</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Question 8
Do you recall movies in which people with disabilities were portrayed as: (Check all that apply)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The villain</td>
<td>12.20%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The victim</td>
<td>30.49%</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Naive / innocent</td>
<td>26.83%</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Made fun of</td>
<td>30.49%</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Question 9

Do you feel that people with disabilities are misrepresented by the media? Why or why not?

Responses

Do you feel that people with disabilities are misrepresented by the media? Why or why not?

Yes I think they could do a better job representing them.

Yes. On the range of disabilities limiting your ability from 1-100% they are often discribed or portrayed to be limited to the most extreme point of their individual inabilities.

Yes

I think the media has a fair representation of how some people treat disabled people.

Yes

No not really they aren't misrepresented just underrepresented in media

They are dehumanized in film.

Less than before. People have become more sensitive about portraying disabled as victims that should be pitied.

Movies or TV shows rarely show the severity of the disability. It's sometimes portrayed as a superpower used for good or bad

I feel that the people with disabilities are misrepresented by the media because they usually don't do stories about them.

Yes, they're usually not in a position of power and truly are depicted as innocent.

Not really, there's mixed representation but most depict them as functioning in society and overcoming adversities

Yes, their value as people is ignored. Doesn't matter if they are good in something, the focus will always be on what they cannot do.

Haven't seen

To some degree, because I have seen people with disabilities or handicaps where they understand life and have a great understanding of the world, compared to media representation being one of someone naive of the world.

A lot of times yes. The people creating the media often do not have the particular disabilities their speaking on so they cannot give an accurate representation.

It depends on the content. If it's a comedy or a news story, etc.

No because people with disabilities should be treated differently from the rest depending on his illness.

I don't believe so. They have new stories covered.

yes they are usually portrayed as weaker

Yes. While some people do fit into the stereotypes, there are many many people with disabilities that are perfectly capable and not any less of a person. The media makes people with disabilities feel like an other.

Yes, because most people with disabilities have regular lives, capabilities and aspirations

No, because in most cases it highlights the struggle that they go through, and shows that even with the short commings they still push forward.

Maybe to some extent they are represented as people who can't have a family or have a job. It also depends on the type of disability, but I've seen this in Media.

Yes, because they're looked down upon

I think in today's time not so much. You don't really see them too often in media.

Yes there are a lot of stereotypes and assumptions made

Yes

I believe that in the past people with disabilities were grossly misrepresented by the media but now, in movies and tv shows they're represented and they are now played by people who have said disabilities.

I think so. I think people with disabilities think and live normal lives like the rest of the us and able bodied people are always looking at them like they're victims. Also, media represents them as people who need saving, when realistically they do plenty for themselves and what needs saving is a society that does not take them into consideration when designing houses, cars, etc.

Yes

Sometimes yes but mostly no. Mostly they are shown as victims or shown as hero.

Yes - they have more ability than they are given credit doe

Not really

Yes, there is not enough representation
Question 10

How can we make representation of people with disabilities better?

Responses

How can we make representation of people with disabilities better?

I think people need to be more open with hiring actors with disabilities.

Communicate. Get to know them and see them as they are rather than what media has described for us.

Make them the hero in their own story.

By showing them in normal circumstances not just in extremes.

Showing the things they deal with.

By having more media that have people with different levels of disabilities included.

The media industry can make a better effort to normalize image of people with disabilities. Put them in roles that aren't comical in stories that are not focused on their disability.

By not approaching disabled people with a biased view that we are better than them.

Find some method to educate people on how bad the disability is and how to relate to someone who suffers from it.

The first thing is that people need to be educated about the people with disabilities.

Treat them as equal.

Inclusion eg. in advertisements.

creators, marketers, and advertisers may initiate projects that debunk myths and stereotypes by normalizing disability.

Hmm

Have these characters even with disabilities be seen as cool or with qualities seen in other characters seen as desirable.

We can show different ways in which disability can present and affect people. Having people with disabilities giving their input or writing for media would be ideal.

It's fine, if made fun of in a comedy, the disabled person agreed to play the role.

By being more informative.

Don't think it needs to be.

Showing how they can live a normal life.

Showcase people with disabilities as being present without having attention drawn to their disability. Put people with disabilities in leading roles that don't revolve around their disability. Show that people with disabilities are fully capable.

Be more inclusive. Give them job opportunities.

N/a

Just by having more disabled actors, producers etc. this should increase representation.

By showing them as equal individuals.

By including them more often and making sure they also depict their struggles and not just their triumphs.

Using the media to Create awareness.

Giving them better roles.

The actors depicting a character with a disability should have said disability.

Don't make representation an after thought or secondary, ask people with disabilities what/who they'd like to see.

Education.

No clue about this. Sorry.

Showing their capabilities instead of their incapabilities.

Having more strengths mentally and physically desire to achieve something in their life.

More representation.
End of Survey Message: Thank you for your time and participation! Your response has been recorded.