

0408

The Representation of Intellectual Disability in Mainstream American Films

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Introduction: Film influences, consciously and unconsciously, positively and negatively millions of viewers through modeling, enabling, or playing out consequences. This presentation, based on a formal film analysis of three films, discusses the portrayal of intellectual disability (ID) in American films and explores how the representation of ID perpetuates beliefs and attitudes that limit individuals' full participation in society.

Objective: The study's objective was to examine the portrayal of ID in mainstream American film that has an individual with an ID as the main character. As films reflect as well as inform attitudes, they can perpetuate attitudes that denied individuals full and rightful participation in society.

Description: Film analysis is an effective methodology for examining the prevalent social construct of a disability. Three films met the selection criteria of a leading character having an ID and national distribution since 1998. The films were *The Other Sister* (1999), *I Am Sam* (2001), and *Radio* (2003). The film analysis used addressed plot, lighting, use of camera techniques, and diagetic and non-diagetic sounds. A template based on these elements was used to ensure consistency of the review process.

Results: The analysis identified four themes. These were the portrayal of the adult main characters as childlike, the encouragement of the audiences' exploration and voyeurism of behaviors associated with ID, lack of identification with the main characters because of the denial of their point of view as valid and important to the audience, and the overall inconsistency and inaccuracy of portrayal of ID. These themes were consistent with general stereotypical views of people with ID, such as they deserve patronizing treatment, lack awareness of the stigma on them, lack the ability to be expressive and creative, and that they need sympathy and charity. This stereotypical social construction of ID was upheld in the films.

Conclusions: The representation of ID in these films highlighted the importance of the profession's role in advocacy for rights and access of individuals with disabilities and responsibility to ensure accurate representation of individuals with disabilities in the media.