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Film portrayals of People with Disabilities post 2000

By

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Human Services and Rehabilitation Studies

A Thesis Submitted to Fulfill the Requirements of the Honors Program at Assumption  
College

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## Table of Contents

<b>Abstract</b> _____	3
<b>Introduction</b> _____	4
<b>Literature Review</b> _____	9
<b>Methodology</b> _____	23
<b>Results: All Disabilities</b> _____	25
<b>Results: Physical Disabilities</b> _____	38
<b>Results: Psychiatric Disabilities</b> _____	43
<b>Results: Sensory Disabilities</b> _____	48
<b>Results: Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities</b> _____	52
<b>Conclusion</b> _____	58
<b>References</b> _____	67
<b>Appendix #1 Blank Film Review Rubric</b> _____	70
<b>Appendix #2 Physical Disabilities Review Rubric Compilation</b> _____	74
<b>Appendix #3 Psychiatric Disabilities Review Rubric Compilation</b> _____	79
<b>Appendix #4 Sensory Disabilities Review Rubric Compilation</b> _____	84
<b>Appendix #5 Developmental &amp; Intellectual Disabilities Review Rubric Compilation</b> _____	89
<b>Appendix #6 Master List of Films</b> _____	94

### **Abstract**

Film portrayals of people with disabilities have had a significant, but perhaps unnoticed, role in shaping the general public views individuals with disabilities. Research has documented the impact of films on creating and perpetuating misconceptions of a variety of disabilities and disability groups. Numerous stereotypes are portrayed in films depicting the lives of people with disabilities, which lead to barriers that keep people with disabilities in marginalized roles. Much research has been conducted on films produced prior to the year 2000. These studies have identified the themes and stereotypes portrayed that have been harmful to the lives and empowerment of individuals with disabilities. This current research attempted to study if and how the depictions of people with disabilities has changed after the year 2000 and after the passing of significant legislation prohibiting discrimination against people with disabilities. This study analyzed twenty films representing four disability categories (physical, psychiatric, sensory, and intellectual/developmental). This study attempted to determine if these laws or other social justice initiatives have had a positive impact on the portrayal of disabilities thus having a positive impact on the millions of Americans with disabilities. The review of a random sample of films depicting characters with disabilities has demonstrated improvement in the portrayal of disabilities but that there is still much room for more accurately representing characters with disabilities. Implications of this research include providing education and disability awareness to filmmakers on how people with disabilities can be more accurately portrayed.

## Introduction

What do Jake Sully of *Avatar* (2009), Sam Cahill of *Brothers* (2009), Produce of *Where Hope Grows* (2014), and Matt Murdock of *Daredevil* (2003) all have in common? All of these characters have some form of disability, such as a physical, psychiatric, developmental, intellectual, or sensory impairment. These four films, along with many others, and other forms of mass media, have a significant, but perhaps unnoticed, impact on how viewers experience the lives of people with disabilities. Most viewers today do not realize the impact that these movies and the media have on shaping their beliefs, attitudes and perspectives. The majority of people gain information about the world, and more specifically people with disabilities, from media and film (Stump, 2002). Even though film and the mass media help to keep viewers informed and entertained, thoughtless consumption can cultivate beliefs and perpetuate harmful stereotypes of people living with disabilities.

Movies portray numerous misrepresentations of all kinds of disabilities. Individuals with disabilities are often portrayed in film as the victim, hero, or villain. Jake Sully, an individual with paraplegia, a physical disability, is seen as a victim, and he is presented as a helpless object of sympathy in the film, *Avatar* (2009). Matt Murdock, who is blind, is depicted as a hero in the *Daredevil* (2003). Matt Murdock is a hero in the sense that he overcame his disability and became “normal.” This character type is known in the literature as the “Supercrip” and helps the viewer feel better about the character with a disability (Smedema, 2012). Sam Cahill, a character with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, is portrayed as a villain in *Brothers* (2009). A variety of disability types are often a common characteristic in villains in film, especially horror films. This depiction perpetuates negative

stereotypes that disability is dangerous, evil, and deviant (Reinhardt, 2014). As mentioned, there are negative portrayals along with positive and realistic portrayals. A negative portrayal depicts a person with a disability (PWD) in an undesirable or pessimistic light, as seen with the character Sam from *Brothers*. A positive portrayal depicts a PWD as overly optimistic and someone who overcomes their disability, as seen with Matt Murdock from *Daredevil*. A realistic portrayal of a PWD showcases them in an accurate way, including the struggles, the correct symptoms and treatment, and as human beings, as seen in *Where Hope Grows* (2014).

Inaccurate representations of people with disabilities are seen by millions of people and often go unnoticed or accepted as reality. They often have a negative impact on the lives of those with disabilities. Portraying people with disabilities as victims creates the belief that they are bitter, dependent, and unable to help themselves. As a result, they are objects of pity and sympathy. Even positive portrayals such as depicting people with disabilities as heroes create unrealistic expectations, which can make PWD feel defeated when they do not achieve what film characters do (Reinhardt, 2014). Portraying people with disabilities as villains promotes unwanted fear in people without disabilities and negative attitudes towards PWD (Safran, 1998). Such misrepresentations devalue PWDs. It also creates low expectations, a lack of true understanding, and fosters poor attitudes the achievements of PWD (Reinhardt, 2014). As a result, a huge social divide is created between people without disabilities and people with disabilities because differences are viewed as significant. It is the goal of disability advocates and people with disabilities to achieve inclusion in communities not segregation. This divide can negatively impact PWD

in virtually every aspect of their lives and can prohibit them from acquiring what they need to be fully functioning individuals in our communities (Stump, 2002).

Much of the research in this area investigates what will happen when films depict accurate and empowering portrayals of people with disabilities. Many researchers and authors believe that when this occurs, it will increase awareness of individual abilities and limit social barriers. Others, such as Safran and Reinhardt (1998, 2014), believe that accurate portrayals will generate discussion, make disability visible, increase public acceptance, and foster greater integration in society. It is also possible that accurate portrayals of disability when disability is not the focus of the film will exemplify the fact that PWDs are more like people without disabilities than most think. The viewer is slowly starting to see the existence of some films that portray people with disabilities in a realistic and non-romanticized light. As indicated by Safran (1998), recognition of the negative imagery can help the public understand societal misconceptions and fears. Through the promotion of awareness and education, the inaccuracies and stereotypes of people with disabilities developed by film can be challenged and subsequently eliminated. Once the inaccuracies and stereotypes are challenged, they can promote knowledge and accurate attitudes towards people with disabilities (Safran, 1998).

This current study will look at four disability groups and how characters with these disabilities are portrayed in film. These four groups are physical disabilities, psychiatric disabilities, developmental and intellectual disabilities, and sensory disabilities. It is important to define some disability literature such as limitation, disability, and handicapped. A limitation is “referred to conditions or diseases of the body or its organs.” A disability is referred as “any functional limitations or restrictions in the ability to carry out

activity resulting from an illness, injury, or birth defect.” Finally, handicap is “the interference experienced by a person with a disability in a restrictive environment” (Vash & Crewe, 2004). A disability is not a handicap unless the individual experience barriers in their educational, social, and vocational environments.

Physical disabilities are bodily impairments that interfere with an individual’s mobility, coordination, communication, learning, or personal adjustment (Safran, 1998). Psychiatric disabilities refer to a wide range of behavioral and/or psychological problems characterized by anxiety, mood changes, depression, and/or a compromised assessment of reality (Hopkins, 2014). Developmental and intellectual disabilities refer to disabilities that are life long and must be identified before the age of 18 during developmental growth. As defined by the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, Intellectual disabilities affect cognition and include disabilities such as Autism, and Down Syndrome. Developmental disabilities include, Cerebral Palsy, Epilepsy and other disabilities that restricts the individual’s functioning in several major life activities (Schalock, 2010). Sensory Disabilities is when one sense; sight, hearing, smell, touch, taste, and spatial awareness, is no longer functioning. Sensory disabilities are usually referred to hearing loss/deafness and/or visual impairment (Virginia Department of Education, 2012).

This study also considers a disability hierarchy researched by Tringo in 1970 (Tringo, 1970) through the process of analyzing films it may be possible to determine if the disability hierarchy is exemplified in films as it is in society. The disability hierarchy purports that specific disabilities are stigmatized more than others and that these disabilities cause people without disabilities to create more social distance from people with specific low ranking disabilities. This research found that at the top of the hierarchy



are physical disabilities, then sensory disabilities toward the middle of the hierarchy, then developmental disabilities and lastly psychiatric disabilities (Tringo, 1970). This hierarchy indicates is that physical disabilities tend to be the most accepted form of disability and therefore are the least stigmatized. Psychiatric disabilities are the least accepted form of disability and therefore the most stigmatized by people without disabilities. This trend is evidenced in films and in other mass media according to the literature (Apodaca, 2011). It will be interesting to understand why the hierarchy is this way by looking at how the portrayals of different stereotypes in the films support this theory. Specifically, this study will attempt to answer the following research questions: 1) Has the portrayal of the common stereotypes associated with people with disabilities seen in past literature review changed for the better in films post 2000? 2) Did laws such as the American Disabilities Act (1990) help bring awareness to filmmakers and create positive change in their portrayal of people with disabilities? 3) Does a disability hierarchy consistent with Tringo's (1970) research appear evident in films post 2000?

The methodology consists of a viewing of 20 films in total, 5 per disability group. All 5 films for each disability group will be chosen after the year of 2000 after the Americans with Disabilities Act was enacted in 1990. The Americans with Disabilities Act is a civil rights law that prohibits discrimination based on disabilities and offers protection to people with disabilities in all areas of life. Conducting the study using this methodology will provide some insight into the evolution and history of how filmmakers portray people with disabilities. It will also provide some evidence to determine if progress has been made in accurately portraying PWD post the ADA. Upon completion of film analysis a comparison of the four disability groups can be made to determine similarities and/or differences. The

results of this study can help determine if further efforts are needed to break down stereotypes and stigmatization by helping viewers realize how inaccurate the demeaning portrayals are as well as some empowering portrayals. This study can also give filmmakers insight into how their portrayals of a specific minority group can be harmful and hopefully provide a guide for future film development.

### **Literature Review**

Mass media, such as newspapers, television, and film, have a huge influence on societal attitudes and the way people perceive the world around them. Much of the public's knowledge stems from what we are exposed to in the mass media, especially film, and can cultivate inaccurate beliefs about reality, specifically about people with disabilities (PWD) (Reinhardt, Pennycott, & Fellinghauer, 2013). According to Norden and Wolfson (2000), "movies are powerful cultural tools that have helped perpetuate mainstream society's disregard for people with disabilities, and the images conveyed by those movies have often differed sharply from the realities of the disabled experience" (p. 289). The majority of films in general do not focus on portraying individuals with disabilities accurately but on making a profit. As a result, commercial films can have a huge negative impact on PWD and the public's attitude toward them. Such impacts can create barriers that prevent people with disabilities from gaining access to treatment and help and as well as creating conflicts of self-identity. However, there are films that do portray people with disabilities accurately due to awareness and recognition brought to this issue by disability advocates.

The majority of this literature review will focus on the historical overview for two major disability categories: physical disabilities and psychiatric disabilities. In each

disability section, the time periods have been broken up to 1900s to 1950, 1950s to 2000, and 2000 onward. This will give good insight in the evolution of film and its portrayal of certain categories of disabilities, as well as indicating what stereotypes are present over time. Also, conducting the review of the literature will shed light on whether or not certain disability laws (e.g., Individuals with Disabilities Education Act 1975 and American with Disability Act 1990) have made an impact on film portrayals. Lastly, this literature review will provide insight to similarities and differences between the two groups as well as seeing how they are accepted by society by looking at the disability hierarchy. The disability hierarchy measures the attitudes of the public towards certain disability groups and focuses on which group is most and, which is least preferred.

## HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

### Physical Disabilities

#### *Films from the 1900s to 1950:*

One of the earliest films involving any form of disability was a 50-second piece, *The Fake Beggar* (1898), featuring a character only pretending to have a physical disability (Norden, 1994). Disabilities in the early films were used often in slapstick comedies and melodramas. They were also used in films that promoted the stereotype of the victim or villain seeking revenge for their disability (Safran, 1998). In 1904, the first images of wheelchairs came out in movies. Wheelchairs have been used over the course of many years to present a wide range of images such as “humor, evil, helplessness, confinement, heroism and dehumanization” (Norden, 1990a, p. 187). In 1912, the first “curability” themes appeared, and physical disabilities were cured through the powers of medicine

(Safran, 1998). This theme is one that is still seen in today's films, along with the idea that people with disabilities are usually the victim and villain.

In the 1930s, horror films were popular. These films often adapted various disabling characteristics to provoke fear (Longmore, 1985). Using disabilities in horror films promotes the stereotypes of the victim and the villain. An example of this stereotype is the film *Freaks* (1932). *Freaks* tells the story of a beautiful trapeze artist named Cleopatra who discovers that Hans, who has dwarfism, has a sizeable inheritance and decides that she wants to get her hands on it. Hans falls under the enchantment of Cleopatra, who is conspiring with Hercules, the strong man, to kill Hans and get his inheritance. After the wedding, the rest of the "freaks" throw a welcoming ceremony for Cleopatra, who is filled with horror at the thought of becoming one of them and drunkenly mocks the freaks. Hans realizes that he has been played for a fool and then falls to poison. While bedridden, Hans pretends to apologize to Cleopatra and pretends to take the poison that she is giving him. However, Hans plots with the other freaks to get their revenge to make Cleopatra a freak like them. They attack Cleopatra, and she becomes the squawking human duck with the flesh melted off of her hands, legs cut off, and torso permanently tarred and feathered. Kidd (2014) states that the film also shows how the "freaks" are vengeful and sinister and can be the "stuff of horror movie nightmares" (p. 168). This point proves that the film *Freaks* was also one to promote the notion that PWD deviant and are associated with horror. This film also promotes the idea that PWD are resentful of their disabilities and desire to make others have a disability like them.

During the two World Wars, films involving veterans with physical disabilities along with psychiatric disabilities increased. A popular film that showcased this is *The Best*

*Years of Our Lives* (1946). In this film, three veterans returned home, and each one faces a period of adjustment along with personal turmoil (Reynolds, 2006). One of the actors, Harold Russell, was a real-life veteran who lost both of his hands in a demolition accident. He is the first person with a disability to win the Oscar for best supporting actor and an honorary Academy Award (Safran, 1998, p. 277). Russell is a rarity in film. He is one of the few actors and actresses with a disability during this time period to play a disabled character.

After World War II, there was a promotion of using greater sensitivity towards physical disabilities, especially veterans. Greater sensitivity was promoted by images of veterans “overcoming” obstacles and their disabilities (Norden, 1994). Continuing with the theme of veterans, Hollywood presented disability as an obstacle to overcome (Quart & Auster, 1982). Hollywood also presents veterans who are disabled as someone to be pitied, a victim, and tended to show that the veteran with the disability can only be saved by a woman (Longmore, 1985). Another, interesting dynamic portrayed is that of the woman who loves a man with a disability. The woman is seen as honorable, selfless, and that the man with the disability is so lucky to have her. However, films such as *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946) and *The Men* (1950) appropriately portrayed the shock of becoming disabled and the rehabilitation process (Safran, 1998). In the film, *The Best Years of Our Lives*, Homer, one of the veterans who come home, lost both of his hands due to burns he suffered from when his aircraft carrier was sunk. Homer and his family both have trouble dealing with his new disability. He also pushes away the love of his life, Wilma, away because he does not want to burden her with his disability, regardless that she still wants to marry him. He eventually marries Wilma at the end of this film. This film accurately portrays

Homer as an individual who is struggling with his disability and who learns to come to terms with it and eventually lives his life.

*Films from the 1950s to 2000:*

According to Safran (1998), during the 1950s, the notion of the “civilian superstar” rose in films. These films “emphasized traditional American values of self-determination and the support of family and friends in overcoming impairments” (p. 469). The pervasive theme of ridding oneself of the disability became popular in this time period. The “civilian superstar,” or the notion of the “supercrip,” became a common stereotype. This is when an individual with a disability “overcomes” her or his disability. In the media today, along with Lifetime movies, the consumer are constantly hearing stories of how certain individuals with disabilities have become becoming success stories. As a result, the non-disabled population becomes inspired by these certain kinds of films and news stories. The “supercrip” notion has become a cliché for PWD and makes them feel like they need to achieve those kinds of successes regardless of one’s own abilities. Once again, this is yet another stereotype and theme that still exists in film portrayal of PWD.

During the Civil Rights movement in 1960s, films with people with physical disabilities appeared in the mainstream, facing obstacles to live independently as seen in *Tell Me That You Love Me Junie Moon* (1970) (Safran, 1998). In this film, Junie Moon, whose face was disfigured by her boyfriend, along with Arthur, who has epilepsy, and Warren, who has paraplegia move in together and create a united front against the cold, harsh judgmental world. They earn for independence to find a house to live in and face prejudices from both the work force and their community. The late 1970s saw a return of the “supercrip as well as madman and villainous images, that are often coupled with physical

disabilities, as seen in *Elephant Man* (1980). Even though there will always be films like these, realistic portrayals of physical disabilities evolved. Such films are *Coming Home* (1978), *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989), and *My Left Foot The Story of Christie Brown* (1989).

The film *Coming Home* (1978) not only elevated people with disabilities as sexual human beings, but it also bridged the social and benefit issues. Sally Hyde, played by Jane Fonda, is married to a marine who is sent to Vietnam and falls in love with a veteran who has paraplegia. This movie makes a statement about human relationships and how individuals with disabilities are human as well (Reynolds, 2006). Another film, *My Left Foot - The Story of Christie Brown* (1989), broke many stereotypes. The film focuses on Christy Brown, who was born with cerebral palsy who learned to paint with his left foot. In this film, there is no "sugarcoating," as Reynolds puts it. Even though in the film Brown is a heavy drinker, very much related to societal attitudes towards with a physical disability, and is not a lovable character, the film still showcases accurately an individual with cerebral palsy (Reynolds, 2006) For example, the film shows the difficulty in buying expensive equipment, such as wheelchairs. Brown's mom saved money over many years to buy Christy a wheelchair. Buying medical equipment is an issue that still exists today.

#### Films from 2000 onward:

With the passage of landmark educational and Civil Rights laws, such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) from the late 1970s, and the American with Disabilities Act (1990), there has been a slow movement towards inclusion. It is expected that there would be a breakdown of this image in feature films regarding not only physical disabilities but all kinds of disabilities (Black, & Pretes, 2007). There is more focus

on fighting for social justice, sexually expressing oneself, and dealing with everyday life seen in films (Black, & Pretes, 2007).

Even though these laws passed, it does not mean that all films will always be accurate portrayals, which is evidenced by films such as *The Sea Inside* (2004) and *Million Dollar Baby* (2004) (Reynolds, 2006). These two films focus on having the right to die or having the simple wish of dying because of one's physical disability, which promotes the idea that all individuals with disabilities feel this way. The theme of being better off dead than living with a disability was abhorred by PWDs. In *Million Dollar Baby*, Maggie is boxer who falls on a stool during a match and breaks her neck. Maggie goes through rehabilitation and suffers from grief and, as a result, asks her trainer to help her die, which he does in the end. There are still films involving characters with disabilities that have the themes of pity or the victim as seen in *Avatar* (2009), that disability is something that needs to be cured as seen in *Catch That Kid* (2004), as the villain as seen in *Resident Evil: Apocalypse* (2004), the "supercrip" seen with *X-Men's* Professor X (2000), and overcoming adversity as seen in *Frida* (2002). However, Norton (1994) predicts that feature films will be made with greater accuracy and sensitivity, particularly as persons with physical disabilities appear in great numbers and are hired as film consultants.

This is already seen by the fact that several characters had strong personalities that were not overshadowed by their disability as seen in films *Door to Door* (2002), *The Waterdance* (1992) and *Go Now* (1995). To push this further, Black and Pretes (2007) believe "that filmmakers are making efforts to (a) portray characters with disabilities as having more 'depth,' (b) demonstrate heightened awareness of the internal feelings, motivations, and desires of individuals with disabilities, and (c) show that the 'human



qualities' of individuals with disabilities are not very different from those of the general viewing audience." If all filmmakers have this type of mindset, they can show the public that people with disabilities are human beings just like non-disabled people. Perhaps, the disability does not always have to be the focus or topic of the film but that a person with a disability is in the film.

### Psychiatric Disabilities

#### Films from the 1900s to 1950:

The most notable and one of the earliest films in regards to psychiatric disabilities is the German film, *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1919). In this film, a somnambulist, someone who sleepwalks, commits murder under the hypnotic influence of the mad psychiatrist Dr. Caligari. However, a plot twist shows that Dr. Caligari is actually the kind director of the mental hospital, whereas the narrator of the tale is a patient with a psychiatric disability and has been distorting the reality (Safran, 1998). According to Pickerman (2012), the early films reflected the general attitude of the time towards the "incarceration" and treatment towards people with psychiatric disorders, which was that they should be confined to institutions for their own good and for the protection of others. Also, the viewer sees the first films that portray psychiatrists as the mad scientist and as corrupt and evil as seen with *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*. These movies suggest that psychiatric disabilities are dangerous.

Towards the end of this time period, there was an explosion of films with characters with psychiatric disabilities. The visibility of psychiatric disabilities increased after World War II (1939 to 1945) and portrayals were described as "grossly simplified, naïve, and

inaccurate” (Schneider, 1977, p. 616). The films were simply reacting to the huge growth of interest in psychiatry due to the fact that the number of veterans caused the public to realize that mental illness was more widespread than had previously been thought (Pickerman, 2012). This growth of interest also led to the popularization of Freudian and other psychological theories. Also, this huge interest in psychiatric disabilities led to the realization and created scandals regarding the dehumanizing conditions of institutions that held patients with psychiatric disorders were being played out in the mass media.

The *film noir* period took place between 1940 and the late 1950s (Safran, 1998). Film noir is a style of black and white filmmaking that includes a lot of darkness and reflected the pessimism and disillusionment of the era, which included the Great Depression and WWII. These films were often crime dramas, thrillers, mysteries, and even some comedy dramas. Miller (1987) emphasized that film noir moviemakers often used psychopathology as central themes, while actually presenting numerous types of mental disorders. An example, Miller uses was that antisocial personality disorders created the mood of a “hostile and malevolent force at large in society, a symbol of potential doom, evil activities and unfortunate consequences” (p. 293). Both Miller (1987) and Safran (1998) stress that the filmmakers took an “artistic license” to the plots of the films and often created unrealistic and inaccurate portrayals. A lot of Alfred Hitchcock’s films fall under this category, such as *Spellbound* (1945) and *Rebecca* (1940) (Blesen, 2013).

#### *Films from the 1950s to 2000:*

Most films during this time period focused on the theme of deinstitutionalism. During this period, scandals surrounding the terrible state and conditions of institutions that held many patients with psychiatric disabilities were exposed by the mass media. This

promoted the action of deinstitutionalism, where less isolated communities and mental health services replaced long-term psychiatric hospitals. This concept was seen in films such as *The Snake Pit* (1948) and *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1975), which led to the "antipsychiatry" movement (Donaldson, 2005). *The Snake Pit* is a good example of showing how psychiatric patients are collected and kept away from normal life. In this film, the scenes demonstrate the terrible conditions and how the doctor tells Virginia, the main character, that she should participate less and not comment on the surrounding world (Semarne, 1994). These films, were a result of the deinstitutionalism movement, and exposed the abuses that were often found in psychiatric institutions.

A common genre that has always been present for most disability groups, but especially for psychiatric disabilities, is horror films, which was on the rise for the psychiatric group in this time period. Safran (1998) mentions that there are different themes in horror films. "Possession and madness" is seen in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1931) and in *The Exorcist* (1973). "Murder and madness" combined with temporary insanity and irrational causes of murder are seen in *Badlands* (1974) and *Psycho* (1960). "Eros, [sexual love or physical attraction], and madness," especially aggressive violence against women is seen in *Halloween* (1975) and *Silence of the Lambs* (1991). The most visible theme in horror films, according to Safran (1998), is "war and madness," which primarily focuses on the Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and is seen in *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930) and *The Deer Hunter* (1978). As a result of all of these horror films being associated with psychiatric disabilities, it created fear in the mainstream public against that disability group. The psychiatric disabilities are constantly used as the explanation in film to explain why characters are crazy, use violence, or why they exhibit madness. Filmmakers need to

provide an explanation to viewers, and it often comes down to the simple fact that the character has some sort of psychiatric disability.

Films from 2000 onward:

There is a trend that positive films about psychiatric disabilities have become skewed too far in the positive direction and reinforce the common stereotype of the “supercrip” or specially gifted. In an effort to be positive, films are portraying PWD as overcoming their disabilities, which is inaccurate oftentimes with a psychiatric disorder. One with a disability cannot overcome it or get rid of it. This stereotype is inaccurate. Individuals with disabilities learn how to handle their disabilities within the means of their abilities to go about living. Such films as *Shine* (1998) and *A Beautiful Mind* (2001) send out the message that psychiatric disabilities are curable, and one way they can be cured is by the love of a good woman (Middleton, 2013). For example, in the film, *A Beautiful Mind*, Nash, the main character who has schizophrenia, reads newspapers and magazines for secret codes. He then drops them off at a private drop off box during the night. Nash’s wife realizes that something is wrong and visits the drop-off point and finds an abandoned building instead of the mansion Nash believed it to be. As Donaldson (2005) states, “Nash’s deviant psychotic vision, which has earlier seemed nothing more than a reflection of a collective Cold War paranoia, is thereby corrected through the eyes of his ‘normal’ wife.” The wife’s realization leads to Nash being cured. Once again, overly positive portraying can have a negative impact on shaping one’s views of psychiatric disorders.

The strong theme of horror films and psychiatric disabilities is still evident today. Films like *Shutter Island* (2010) and *The Dark Knight* (2008) promote the negative stereotypes that psychiatric disabilities should be seen as scary and that they are the

villains. It does not help that recent shootings in the media, such as the Colorado theater shooting and the Sandy Hook Elementary school shooting, are associated with psychiatric disabilities. The mass media blew these two stories out of proportion, which created more mass hysteria. As a result, the public is even more terrified of individuals who have psychiatric disabilities (Middleton, 2013).

An interesting notion brought up by Bernard Beck (2013) is that films in regards to psychiatric disabilities have begun to celebrate “odd people” and that weirdness is something to be celebrated. He goes on to mention that the reason why films include people with disabilities, especially psychiatric disabilities, is because they are interesting to the public. They are interesting even though they may be inaccurate portrayals of those certain disabilities. Beck (2013) states,

[O]ur popular culture is replete with portrayals of such odd creatures, not only as tools to explore the oddness in real people but also as central figures who are interesting for their own sake in stories provoked by the internal logic of stories themselves. That is to say, if there were no odd people, we would be led to invent them for our amusement. (p. 243)

Two movies that celebrate oddness and have a good portrayal are *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (2012) and *Silver Linings Playbook* (2012). *Silver Linings Playbook* focuses on two patients who have psychiatric disabilities, and their oddness is an enrichment not only to themselves but for their families and community. For example, Tiffany and Pat, who both have psychiatric disabilities, meet each other families and they participate in a dance competition, which ultimately brings them together. The film also depicts that PWDs can

have relationships with one another, especially sexual ones. *Silver Linings Playbook* is a realistic portrayal of psychiatric disabilities.

### DISABILITY HIERARCHY

Tringo (1970) reports that the general public attitudes toward PWD can be measured and understood. Jaffe (1967) indicates that each disability label or description evokes its own set of attitudes and stereotypes. Before this study, “[A]ttitudes appear to vary with the disability but the extent of preference toward specific disability groups have not been determined” (Tringo, 1970). So it is the purpose of this study to figure out which disability group is the most accepted by society to the least accepted group to create a hierarchy. Tringo discovered that a hierarchy does exist; demographic variable affect the social distance expressed towards certain kinds of disabilities, and females express greater acceptance of PWD. As for the order of preference, physical disabilities were the most accepted followed by sensory disabilities and brain injury. The least preferred disability groups were alcoholism and mental illness.

Adrian Thomas (2000) looks at the hierarchy of disabilities thirty years later. She took into consideration recent legislation such as Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA – 1975) and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA – 1990) and wanted to see if the laws have altered the attitudes towards people with disabilities. It was discovered that the hierarchy has not changed at all except for attitudes towards individuals who have cancer. This hierarchy is important as it identifies the stigma associated with physical and psychiatric disabilities. This hierarchy may prove useful when evaluating films for the purpose of the study.

## LITERATURE REVIEW CONCLUSION

Filmmakers need to realize the influence they hold over the public's mind and start creating accurate portrayals of PWD because it has an impact in creating barriers against PWD and confusion of self-identity of PWD. It also does not help that the public does not focus on the accuracy of the portrayal but instead on the entertainment of the film, which encourages them to ignore the realities of the lives of PWD. That being said, there has been a noticeable progress in the portrayal, but there is still a long way to go due to the simple fact that filmmakers continue to use the same stereotypes over and over again but in different depictions. It poses the question, will people with disabilities be truly able to escape the common stereotypes? As Black (2007) mentioned some stereotypes associated with PWD is that they are "(a) pitiable and pathetic (b) supercrip (c) sinister, evil, and criminal, (d) better-off dead, (e) maladjusted, his or her own worst enemy, (f) a burden, and (g) unable to live a successful life." It is unfortunate that some filmmakers are still promoting these negative stereotypes. It is important to educate them on the harmful effects that come along with portraying PWD in a negative light. Also, it has been even seen that portraying PWD in a positive light can also have a harmful impact. This poses the question, are positive portrayals of PWD harmful as well?

The only way to answer these questions is to educate. Filmmakers need to have an education about how to not only accurately portray PWD as human beings who have depth and identities. The filmmakers also need help disability advocates make the public realize that what is seen on film is not always the truth. Teaching the public the true realities of the lives of PWD can possibly help break down barriers, such in education and especially in

gaining employment. If all filmmakers have this type of mindset, they can show the public that people with disabilities are not only human beings but individuals who feel.

### **Methodology**

The researcher examined 20 films in an effort to determine how each film portrayed individuals with disabilities. Specifically, films with characters depicting four disability groups; physical disabilities, psychiatric disabilities, sensory disabilities, and developmental and intellectual disabilities were analyzed. Upon reviewing the literature it was determined that much research has been conducted on films prior to the year 2000. Also, it was determined after looking at the literature review that having four disability groups instead of two would be beneficial for this study. The results demonstrate that the portrayals of PWD had a significant role in shaping modern views towards people with disabilities. The past research on older films helped pinpoint themes and stereotypes that are harmful to people with disabilities to include in the analysis of films post-2000. Reviewing the literature enabled the researcher to see whether or not depictions of people with disabilities has changed after 2000 and after the passage of significant disability rights legislation that helped minimize discrimination in the United States.

The first step in creating a movie list for the purpose of this study was to create a master list with as many films as possible, made between the years of 2000 and 2015 that included disability portrayals representing each of the four disability categories (See Appendix #6). This master list was split into four sections, one for each of the disability groups. Within the four sections, the films were organized by release date in chronological order. The master list also included information about the specific disability portrayed, the



movie genre, where the film was made, and the USA opening weekend box office profits.

The box office figures were noted as a determinant to how widely the films was viewed by the general public.

Once the master film list was completed, each of the four disability groups was split into five time periods: 2000-2003, 2003-2006, 2006-2009, 2009-2012, and 2012-2015. The five time periods helped the researcher get a wide selection of films for each group over the years. This enabled the researcher to see whether or not portrayals of the disability groups have changed over the course of the 15 years chosen for this study.

In order to select films for viewing, the films were put into a random generator site online. This process was utilized to attempt to eliminate bias in the selection of films for the study. Within each group, the five time periods were put into the generator one at a time to get an accurate representation of the overall time period. Once this was completed for each time period and each disability group, the researcher had the final movie list of the 20 films randomly selected for viewing and analysis.

After the selection of the 20 films, a rubric was developed to guide the viewing and analysis process (See Appendix #1). The rubric consisted of different components including sections on basic film information, character and disability information, analysis questions and themes, personal statements, and a rating score. The analysis sections included questions such as: Is the film an accurate portrayal of the disability portrayed or not? Is the portrayal of the disability empowering or demeaning? What stereotypes appear in the film regarding the disability - The disability group? These questions helped determine whether or not the portrayal of disabilities has changed over time. The analysis section also included a part labeled "Themes Depicted." These themes that were chosen came from past

research and helped the researcher determine whether or not films are still portraying people with disabilities in the same manner as films prior to 2000. The final section consisted of a rating score, which rates the effectiveness of the film in terms of promoting accurate awareness of the disability and equality for people with disabilities in the United States. The rating scale ranges from No Value (1) to Significant Value (5) in promoting awareness.

The 20 films were viewed over a 4 month period with rubrics completed with basic assessments of the films during viewing. After thoroughly completing rubrics for each film, information contained on rubrics was transferred onto one master rubric for each disability category. These master rubrics contained the same questions as the original rubrics used for analysis of each individual film. This system enabled the researcher to pinpoint common themes that appeared across the five films for each disability group and to compile all information for each disability category in one document. After this master disability group rubric was completed, the researcher went through the rubrics for each group again to identify information determined to be significant to the purpose of the study. Then one final rubric was made, following the same format that incorporated all disability groups. Once again, this compilation enabled the researcher to see connections across the four disability groups and to try to determine if have films begun to positively and accurately portray people with disabilities.

## **Results**

### **All Films and Disability Groups**

#### **Basic Film Information**

For the purpose of this study, 20 films were viewed and analyzed. Refer to Table #1 for the full list of the films viewed. Films were representative of four disability categories: Physical Disabilities, Psychiatric Disabilities, Sensory Disabilities, and Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. Refer to the Key for Disability Group Labels for the labels for each disability group.

The films viewed ranged in time from 2001 to 2015. This allowed the researcher to take into consideration laws such as the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 to determine whether these laws made an impact on the portrayal of people with disabilities in film.

Thirteen film genres were represented in the study: action, adventure, sci-fi, biography, drama, sport, fantasy, romance, comedy, mystery, thriller, war, and music. See Table #2 for the film genre representations.

The United States opening weekend box office ranged from \$2,592 to \$45,033,454. The gross box office of the films ranged from \$11,720 to \$760,505,847. Sixteen out of the 20 films won awards from small time citations to Academy Awards.

#### Key for Disability Group Labels

<b>Disability Group Labels</b>			
Physical Disability	Psychiatric Disability	Developmental/Intellectual	Sensory Disability
PH	PY	ID	SD

Table #1

<b>Title of Film</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Disability Group</b>
Frida	2002	Physical Disability
Canvas	2006	Psychiatric Disability
Adam	2009	Developmental/Intellectual
Music Within	2007	Sensory Disability
Million Dollar Baby	2004	Physical Disability
Perks of Being a Wallflower	2012	Psychiatric Disability
Soul Surfer	2011	Physical Disability
Daredevil	2003	Sensory Disability
Where Hope Grows	2014	Developmental/Intellectual
American Sniper	2014	Psychiatric Disability
Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close	2011	Developmental/Intellectual
Beastly	2011	Sensory Disability
Marie's Story	2014	Sensory Disability
Avatar	2009	Physical Disability
I am Sam	2001	Developmental/Intellectual
Brothers	2009	Psychiatric Disability
Mad Max: Fury Road	2015	Physical Disability
Copying Beethoven	2006	Sensory Disability
House of D	2004	Developmental/Intellectual
Donnie Darko	2001	Psychiatric Disability

Table #2

<b>Genre</b>	<b>Number of Representations</b>	<b>Disability Groups</b>
Action	4	PY, PH, & SD
Adventure	3	PH & ID
Sci-Fi	2	PY & PH
Biography	6	PY, PH, & SD
Drama	16	PY, PH, ID, & SD
Sport	2	PH
Fantasy	3	PH & SD
Romance	4	PY, PH, ID, & SD
Comedy	2	ID & SD
Mystery	1	ID
Thriller	1	PY
War	1	PY
Music	1	SD

### Character and Disability Information

Fifteen different specific disabilities, from the four disability groups, physical, psychiatric, sensory and developmental/intellectual, were portrayed in the 20 films. Refer to Table #3 for specific disability type and number of portrayals. Twelve of the characters with disabilities acquired their disabilities whereas the other eight characters had congenital disabilities.

The characters with the disabilities in the films played both main and supporting roles. Eighteen out of the 20 films had characters with disabilities as one of the main characters. The other two films had characters with disabilities in a supporting role. The majority of the characters with the disabilities were male rather than female. Fourteen of the characters were males and the other six characters were females. The ages of the characters ranged from age 8 (childhood) to mid-50s (adulthood). Nineteen out the 20 characters were white. These results revealed that the majority of people with disabilities in the 20 films were main characters, males, and white.

There were multiple time periods and cultures depicted in the twenty films. The earliest time period was 1800s and the latest time period was "present day." Two films took place in the future. Ten out of the 20 films are considered to take place in present day. The other time periods that were depicted are early 1900s, middle 1900s, the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the late 1900s. The majority of the films took place in the United States. Other locations include Australia, Mexico, Iraq and Afghanistan, Austria, and France. The remainder of the results section will follow the items on the film analysis rubrics.

Table #3

<b>Disability</b>	<b>Number of Portrayals</b>	<b>Disability Group</b>
Spina Bifida	1	PH
Quadriplegia	1	PH
Paraplegia	1	PH
Amputee	2	PH
Developmental Disability	1	ID
Intellectual Disability	1	ID
Asperger's Syndrome	1	ID
Autism	1	ID
Down Syndrome	1	ID
Schizophrenia	2	PY
PTSD	3	PY
Depression	1	PY
Blind	2	SD
Hearing Loss	2	SD
Deaf & Blind	1	SD

Are the films an accurate portrayal of the disability portrayed?

The researcher determined that 18 films had accurate depictions of individuals with disabilities and six films had inaccurate depictions of individuals with disabilities. Refer to Table #4 for a listing of films determined to be accurate and/or inaccurate.

Films that had accurate portrayals had a number of common themes. These films depicted the character with the disability with the accurate symptomology and characteristics corresponding to their specific impairment. The accurate films showed appropriate treatment and accommodations corresponding to the specific disability portrayed. The treatment and accommodations included such things as medication, hospitals, housing systems, technology, and specific adaptive equipment. The individuals with disabilities in the accurate portrayals were depicted as capable parents, individuals

with careers, strong relationships with others, and capable of having love and romance in their lives. They were also portrayed as being self-advocates and aware of when they needed the assistance of others. Accurate films also showed individuals with disabilities with healthy coping mechanisms for dealing with challenging circumstances/situations. They were depicted as independent, living on their own and functioning as valuable members of society. Other common themes that were depicted were the presence obstacles that the characters with the disabilities face, how they were challenged by these barriers and how they adapted to their limitations and the barriers imposed by society. These accurate films also demonstrated the many aspirations and life goals of PWD

The films that had inaccurate portrayals also had several themes. One of the more common themes portrayed one of self-loathing leading a character with a disability to contemplate suicide. Another theme was the desire to find a magic or unrealistic medical cure in order to become “normal” and rid oneself of the disabling condition. The inaccurate films also portrayed people with disabilities with almost a superhuman ability or strength to compensate for their disability and to make expedited recoveries from their disabling condition. These inaccurate films also had unrealistic accommodations that promoted misconceptions and negative stereotypes specific to disability. Inaccurate films took either a significant positive or a too negative attitude towards the individuals with disabilities. One last common theme portrayed was that the characters with the disabilities often engaged in extreme actions or behavior that was dangerous to themselves and others surrounding them.

Table #4

<b>Title of Film</b>	<b>Accurate or Inaccurate</b>	<b>Disability Group</b>
Frida	Accurate	PH
Million Dollar Baby	Accurate	PH
Avatar	Accurate & Inaccurate	PH
Soul Surfer	Accurate	PH
Mad Max: Fury Road	Accurate & Inaccurate	PH
Daredevil	Accurate & Inaccurate	SD
Copying Beethoven	Accurate	SD
Music Within	Accurate	SD
Beastly	Accurate & Inaccurate	SD
Marie's Story	Accurate	SD
Donnie Darko	Inaccurate	PY
Canvas	Accurate	PY
American Sniper	Accurate	PY
Brother	Inaccurate	PY
Perks of Being a Wallflower	Accurate	PY
I am Sam	Accurate	ID
House of D	Accurate	ID
Adam	Accurate	ID
Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close	Accurate	ID
Where Hope Grows	Accurate	ID

Is the portrayal of the disability empowering or demeaning?

It was determined through analysis that 16 films had empowering depictions of individuals with disabilities. An empowering film consists of a character with a disability as stronger, more confident, especially in controlling their life and claiming their rights. A demeaning film consists of a character with a disability has having lost their dignity and the respect of others. Five films had demeaning depictions of individuals with disabilities. Refer to Table #5 to see what films were empowering and/or demeaning.

Films that were empowering had a variety of common themes. They focused on depicting both the struggles and successes of the character with the disability. The films



showed accommodations, treatment strategies and therapeutic interventions in a manner that was not demeaning. The films were empowering when the individual with the disability was an independent, self-determined, strong, and when they come into acceptance of their disability. It is also empowering when the film portrays the disability as only one component of living one's life and not completely defining. Other empowering themes displayed were when the individual with the disability fights to prove their worth and then gain worth in the eyes of others. This is seen through struggles to be good parents, good leaders, and good citizens of society. They are often depicted as very responsible and having the admirable morals. Empowering films also showed how individuals with disabilities are successful and how they break away from boundaries that restrain them. The characters in empowering films often possess strong love and passion for others. One empowering theme was the notion that an individual with a disability displays comfort with who they are and demonstrate acceptance for using accommodations. Lastly, the disability often teaches the individual to appreciate life and their passions, advocate for themselves or others, and recognize how everyone has struggles and pains in life.

Demeaning films had numerous common themes seen within the 20 films. One common theme was that the films portray the character with the disability negatively by using film techniques to demean the character. Demeaning films often had negative attitudes and pejorative terminology surrounding the character and even from the character with the disability themselves often due to misunderstanding of the disability or internalized oppression. The characters with the disabilities often engaged in degrading behaviors as a way to cope with stressors in life caused by the disability. They were also blamed when people they associated with displayed inappropriate or problematic

behaviors. The films also had characters that receive a lack of support from others or portrayed them as alone in their personal struggle. Another theme that demeaning films portrayed was the false portrayals of people with disabilities. For example, the belief that people with disabilities cannot be parents, that they cannot be independent, that they want to get rid of their disabilities/fix themselves, or that they cannot stand up for themselves. Also, in demeaning films there was an emphasis on how people with disabilities turn to suicide or want to die as a result of their disability. Lastly, in demeaning films, people with disabilities were often portrayed in a scary or “crazy” manner to others, including their own family members.

Table #5

<b>Title of Film</b>	<b>Empowering or Demeaning</b>	<b>Disability Group</b>
Frida	Empowering	PH
Million Dollar Baby	Demeaning	PH
Avatar	Demeaning	PH
Soul Surfer	Empowering	PH
Mad Max: Fury Road	Empowering	PH
I am Sam	Empowering	ID
House Of D	Empowering	ID
Adam	Empowering	ID
Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close	Empowering	ID
Where Hope Grows	Empowering	ID
Donnie Darko	Demeaning	PY
Canvas	Empowering	PY
Perk of Being a Wallflower	Empowering	PY
Brother	Demeaning	PY
American Sniper	Empowering	PY
Daredevil	Empowering	SD
Copying Beethoven	Empowering	SD
Music Within	Empowering	SD
Beastly	Empowering/Demeaning	SD
Marie's Story	Empowering	SD

What stereotypes appear in the film regarding the disability?

In the analysis of the twenty films, numerous stereotypes appeared. Below is a bulleted point list of the overall stereotypes depicted in the films.

- That individuals with disabilities are not capable of being parents
- That individuals with disabilities are often saved by a member of the opposite sex
- That all individuals with disabilities have unsupportive family members
- That individuals with disabilities should be an inspiration to others
- That individuals with disabilities are incapable of having relationships, of love
- That individuals with disabilities are often seen as eccentric, odd, dangerous, or crazy
- That individuals with disabilities deserve pity or are often victims of tragedy
- That individuals with disabilities experience the same symptoms as one another
- That individuals with disabilities are dependent and always need help from others
- That individuals with disabilities often cope by using drugs/alcohol
- That individuals with disabilities cannot live a productive and meaningful life
- That individuals with disabilities should be treated as special or different from others
- That individuals with disabilities are defined by their disability

Themes Depicted

In the analysis of the films, nine themes were depicted: the “Supercrip” or Hero, the Victim, the Evil Villain, The Freak, The Bumbling Idiot, the Miraculous Cure, Substance

Abuse as a Coping Mechanism, Saved by a Woman or Man, and the Death Wish. Refer to Table #6 for number of films that depicted each theme mentioned above. These themes were identified in the literature review and were depicted in the films viewed for this study. Three of the themes, Substance Abuse as Coping, Saved by a Woman/Man, and Suicide/Death Wish, were added during the analysis and viewing of the films.

Table #6

<b>Themes Depicted</b>	<b>Number of Films</b>	<b>Disability Group</b>
“Supercrip” or Hero	7	SD, PH, & PY
The Victim	11	SD, ID, PH, & PY
The Evil Villian	3	PY
The Freak	6	SD, ID, & PY
The Bumbling Idiot	1	ID & PY
The Miraculous Cure	4	PH
Substance Abuse as Coping	2	SD & PH
Saved by a Woman/Man	6	SD, ID, & PH
Suicide/Death Wish	1	PH

#### Film recommend for education purposes?

It was determined through analysis that 11 of the films would be appropriate to be used for educational purposes. The other nine films were determined as inappropriate to be used in a classroom setting. Refer to Table #7 to see what films were deemed as appropriate versus inappropriate for educational purposes.

There were common themes that were seen across the disability groups that made a film appropriate or inappropriate to be shown for educational purposes. The films that were chosen as good examples to use for education did not have inaccurate or demeaning traits. Educational films are often based on real life stories, which usually incorporate many accurate and empowering elements that can be used to teach about disability equality. If

the film had accurate elements, then it usually portrayed the individual with the disability with the appropriate symptoms and characteristics unique to the specific disability. They also do a realistic job of representing how one's disability can impact the lives around them and the relationships they have with others. They all indicate that people with disabilities do not experience things in the same manner, showed their struggles and successes, that they each want to be treated with respect, seen simply as fellow humans and that they have something to contribute to society. They showed the struggles, accommodations made for those individuals, how others had to help them, and how the character themselves may have learned to accept their disability.

Films that were considered as not appropriate a choice for educational purposes had common elements. These films often had inaccurate or demeaning elements, which were determined through analysis. Genre played a big role in determining the appropriateness of the educational values of the films. If the genre of the film were of a fantasy, sci-fi, or mystery nature, the films were eliminated from the education group. The reasoning behind this is due the fact that these genres are unrealistic and would not be a common occurrence in today's setting. Other genres that were taken into consideration were thriller and war films. These films usually portrayed individuals with disabilities in a negative manner that promoted stereotypes that they all are dangerous, scary, and crazy and should not be an accepted member within our community. These common themes seen in the films helped categorize the films into educational and non-educational purposes.

Table #7

<b>Title of Film</b>	<b>Recommend for Education?</b>	<b>Disability Group</b>
Frida	No	PH
Daredevil	No	SD
Copying Beethoven	Yes	SD
Music Within	Yes	SD
Beastly	No	SD
Marie's Story	Yes	SD
I am Sam	Yes	ID
House of D	Yes	ID
Adam	Yes	ID
Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close	Yes	ID
Where Hope Grows	Yes	ID
Donnie Darko	No	PY
Brother	No	PY
Canvas	Yes	PY
Perks of Being a Wallflower	No	PY
American Sniper	Yes	PY
Million Dollar Baby	No	PH
Avatar	No	PH
Soul Surfer	Yes	PH
Mad Max: Road Fury	No	PH

**Films Overall Value Related to Promoting Accurate Awareness of Disability and EQUALITY for people with disabilities in the United States.**

All 20 films after completion of analysis were given a value rating to assign an effectiveness score. This effectiveness score was designed to be higher for films that promoted accurate awareness of disability and equality for people with disabilities in the United States. Refer to Table #8 to see the number of films there are per rating score. The ratings ranged from no value with a score of 1, minimal value with a score of 2, moderate value with a score of 3, good value with a score of 4, and significant value with a score of 5.

Those films with lower scores (1-2) were not effective promoting accurate awareness and equality for people with disabilities.

Table #8

	<b>No Value</b>	<b>Minimal Value</b>	<b>Moderate Value</b>	<b>Good Value</b>	<b>Significant Value</b>
<b>Value Score</b>	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Number of Films</b>	1 Film	3 Films	8 Films	7 Films	1 Film
<b>Disability Group</b>	PY	SD, ID, & PH	SD, PH, & PY	SD, ID, & PH	SD

### **Results: Physical Disabilities**

#### **Basic Film Information & Character and Disability Information**

Five films were chosen via random selection to represent the portrayal of people with physical disabilities in film for the years of 2000 to 2015. Refer to Table #1 to see what films were selected for this disability group for the purpose of this study. The films depicting the physical disabilities came from eight different genres: action, adventure, sci-fi, biography, drama, sport, fantasy, and romance. Refer to Table #2 to see the genres of the films that contained physical disabilities. The United States opening weekend box office for the physical disability group ranged from \$179,953 to \$44,440,000. The gross box office of the films ranged from \$25,776,996 to \$760,505,847.

The specific physical disabilities that were portrayed in the films are spina bifida, quadriplegia, paraplegia, and amputee. Refer to Table #3 to see the number of portrayals of each specific disability type. Also, all the characters acquired their physical disabilities over the course of their lives and were not congenital. All five characters were considered as main characters. Four of the characters are female and one is male. The developmental

stage of the characters with the disabilities ranged from age 16 to middle 30s. The characters with disabilities were white, with the exception for one character who was Mexican. The time period and culture represented in these films are: Mexico in the early 1900s; post-apocalyptic setting based in Australia; present day, and the future. The remainder of the results section will follow the items on the film analysis rubrics.

Are the films an accurate portrayal of the disability portrayed? Or Not?

It was deemed through analysis that all five films had accurate depictions of the disability being portrayed, while two of those films also had inaccurate portrayals. Refer to Table #4 to see the specific films and whether they had accurate or inaccurate portrayals of those with psychological disabilities.

Overlapping accurate common themes in the five films included how characteristics and symptoms of the specific physical disabilities were depicted. These films also showed the appropriate accommodations that are used to help individual participate in daily activities. They also showed examples of both the aspirations as well as the struggles that individuals with physical disabilities experience. The films portrayed the acceptance of their disabilities and how they have an impact on loved ones surrounding them. Lastly, the films portrayed how the disabilities themselves can create different opportunities to be successful in society such as gaining employment and having relationships with others.

The inaccurate themes in these films included a character wanting to commit suicide because of his or her disability and characters seeking magical or miracle cures to eliminate their disabilities. Within this disability group, the viewer sees increased strength and ability and quick recoveries. There are also attitudes seen in these films that are either



too positive or too negative. These inaccurate depictions often coexist with filming techniques, such as dim lighting, to bring out negativity and inaccuracy of the portrayals.

Are the portrayals of the disabilities empowering or demeaning?

Three of the portrayals of physical disabilities are empowering and the other two films were considered to be demeaning. Refer to Table #5 to see which physical disability film is deemed to be empowering or demeaning.

The films that contained empowering elements had overlapping themes. These themes included the focus on both the struggles and successes of the characters with the disabilities without making them too positive or too negative. The films also were empowering because they depicted the accommodations that helped the characters participate in society. The characters with the disabilities often became positive influences to others in their lives. One huge empowering element is when the disability was portrayed as only one element of the character's life and not portrayed as the sole dimension of one's life and identity.

The demeaning elements of the physical disabilities films included filming techniques that portrayed the disability in a negative and grotesque manner including dim lighting and dark coloring. There were often negative attitudes in the films in regards to the disability from both the character themselves and others surrounding them. A huge demeaning theme is the desire to suicide to end life as an alternative to living with a disability. Another demeaning theme is the desire to fix oneself by a magic or scientific cure in order to eliminate one's disability. Also, a theme is a member of the opposite sex who showed them that life is worth living often saves the character with the physical disability.

Lastly, the individual with the disability is portrayed in a manner that indicates that they are all alone in their journey of recovery and living one's life.

#### What stereotypes appear in the films regarding the disability group?

In the analysis of the five films portraying physical disabilities, there were common stereotypes that appeared regarding this particular disability group. Below is a bulleted list of the stereotypes depicted in the five films.

- The character with the physical disability often overcomes or recovers from their acquired disability in a fast manner
- The character often becomes successful and is seen as an inspiration because they overcame their disability
- The character is seen as a victim who does not want live and is often suicidal
- The character is often seen as weak, which creates pity towards the individual
- The character is saved by a member of the opposite sex (usually woman) and is shown that life is worth living
- That the character is seeking a magical or unrealistic scientific cure to get rid of their disability and regain optimal functioning

#### Themes Depicted

The physical disability group had six themes that were shown across the five films. These themes include: the "Supercrip," The Victim, The Miraculous Cure, Substance Abuse, Saved by a Woman, and the Death Wish. The theme of "the Supercrip" appeared in three films and the theme of "the Victim" appeared in three films. The "Miraculous Cure" was

portrayed in two films and so was the “Saved by a Woman” theme. Both the “Substance Abuse” theme and “Death Wish” theme was seen in one film.

#### Films recommend for educational purposes?

The physical disability group only had one film that would be an appropriate choice to be used as an educational film. The one film was based on a true story, which incorporated many accurate and positive elements that can be used to teach about disability equality. The other four films contained inaccurate or demeaning elements within the films. Also, to take into consideration was the fact that two of the films were of a sci-fi or fantasy genre, which poses the question of whether or not the films would be a good choice for educational purpose because of the unrealistic nature of these two genres.

#### Rate the films overall value related to promoting **Accurate Awareness of Disability and EQUALITY** for people with disabilities in the United States.

The physical disability group had one film with minimal value with a rating scale of 2 for promoting accurate awareness of disability and equality for people with disabilities in the United States. Two films in this category had a rating of 3, which means that they had moderate value for promoting accurate awareness and equality. The last two films had a value of 4, which meant that they had a good value for the purpose of promoting awareness.

## **Results: Psychiatric Disabilities**

### **Basic Film Information & Character and Disability Information**

Five films were chosen via random to represent the portrayal of psychiatric disabilities in film over the years of 2000 to 2015. Refer to Table #1 to see which films were selected for the purpose of this study. The films depicting the psychiatric disabilities came from seven different genres: sci-fi, drama, thriller, war, romance, action, and biography. Refer to Table #2 to see the genres of the films are that contained psychiatric disabilities. The United States opening weekend box office for the psychiatric disability group ranged from \$13,100 to \$9,527,848. The gross box office of the films ranged from \$35,525 to \$350,123,553.

The specific psychiatric disabilities that were portrayed in the films are schizophrenia, PTSD, and depression. Refer to Table #3 to see the number of portrayals of each specific disability type. The characters with the disabilities in the films are determined as all being main characters. Four of the characters are male and one is female. The developmental stage of the characters with the disabilities ranged from age 15 to middle 40s. The characters with the disabilities were all white. The time period and culture represented in these films are: present day, based in America, the early 1990s, or based overseas in Iraq or Afghanistan. The remainder of the results section will follow the items on the film analysis rubrics.

### **Are the films an accurate portrayal of the disability portrayed? Or Not?**

Through analysis, it was determined that three out of the five films were accurate and the other two films were inaccurate. Refer to Table #4 to see the specific films and

whether or not they had accurate or inaccurate portrayals of those with psychiatric disabilities.

The films that were accurate had several overlapping themes. These films depicted the characteristics and symptoms of the psychiatric disabilities with accuracy in terms of both the medical aspects as well as how each individual deals with the disability differently. These films showed the appropriate accommodations that are used to help those with psychiatric disabilities, such as therapy, medication, and the usage of hospitals in terms of recovery. They also portrayed the struggles and aspirations of the characters with the psychiatric disabilities. Another common theme is how each of the characters accepted their disabilities in different manners from one another to show the individualistic nature of having a disability. The film showed how the disabilities can have an impact on loved ones, especially on one's children and significant others.

The two films that portrayed the characters with the psychiatric disabilities inaccurately had an emphasis on depicting them as crazy, scary, and dangerous. These characters wanted to commit suicide as a result of their disabilities, engaged in dangerous activities, and were regarded negatively by others as well as by themselves. Different filming techniques were used to help promote these inaccurate themes such as dark lighting and having passersby give looks of disgust or horror. These films also showed this disability group receiving placebos in place of medication, which promotes the notion that they cannot be treated.

Are the portrayals of the disabilities empowering or demeaning?

Two out of the five psychiatric films were determined to be demeaning and the other three were seen as empowering. Refer to Table #5 to see the films labeled empowering or demeaning.

The films that were empowering had similar themes such as that they focused on both the struggles and successes of the character with the psychiatric disability. These films were also empowering because they had an emphasis on the characters building positive relationships with others as well as being positive models for others in similar situations. The characters' families were included in the process of recovery, and the films showed that the accommodations, such as therapy, are empowering for individuals with disabilities. They are often an inspiration for others because they have become successful and meaningful members of society. The films take into consideration that having a disability is one component of living one's life and there is an emphasis that everyone has their own struggles and pains as a part of life.

The demeaning themes of psychiatric films included how the films portrayed the character very negatively using film techniques such as dark lighting and loud noises to demean the character. In these films, negative attitudes were seen from both the main character and surrounding minor characters that degraded the disability. Another demeaning element is how the character is depicted as scary or crazy to others including family members. The desire to fix oneself in order to get rid of the disability is also a demeaning component. Lastly, a demeaning theme that was portrayed is that the members of this disability group are alone in their journey of recovery and receive no help from others.

### What stereotypes appear in the films regarding the disability group?

In the analysis of the five films portraying psychiatric disabilities, there are common stereotypes that appeared regarding this specific group. Below is a bulleted list of the stereotypes depicted in the five films.

- The character with the psychiatric disability is often viewed as victims, which creates pity towards them
- The character is often seen as a villain or as crazy or dangerous to others surrounding them, which promotes the notion that they can not be meaningful members of society
- Other people often give looks of disgust, fear, or pity towards the characters with the psychiatric disabilities
- The characters are often engaging in dangerous actions that put them and others in harms way
- The recovery process is barely shown for the characters. They are either very quick or barely touched upon in the film

### Themes Depicted

For the psychiatric disability group, five themes were shown across the five films. These themes include: the “Supercrip,” The Victim, The Evil Villain, The Freak, and the Bumbling Idiot. The theme of “the Supercrip” appeared in one film. The theme of “the Freak” appeared in one films. The theme of “the Victim” appeared in three films. The theme of “The Evil Villain” appeared in two films and the theme of “the Bumbling Idiot” appeared in one film.

Films recommend for educational purposes?

Two out of five films for the psychiatric disability group would be appropriate choices to be used in a classroom setting. The films that were chosen for educational purposes had a good representation of how psychiatric disabilities can have an impact on the family of the individual and their struggles with the disabilities. The films were both accurate and empowering, and included both the hardships and successes of the individual with the disability as well as portraying the accurate symptoms and characteristics of the disabilities. Also, there was an emphasis on the uniqueness of each individual and how they experience their psychiatric disability. Lastly, in one of the films there was a good representation of mental illness in war. The three films that were deemed as inappropriate for educational use were demeaning and portrayed the psychiatric disabilities with inaccuracies. A demeaning theme among these films was the choice to portray the disabilities in scary manner in order to create a sense of horror as well as craziness within the viewer. Also important to take into consideration is the simple fact that in one of these films, the psychiatric disability was never clearly stated even though it was evident.

Rate the films overall value related to promoting **Accurate Awareness of Disability and EQUALITY** for people with disabilities in the United States.

For the psychiatric disability films, it was determined that one of the films had no value with a rating scale of 1 for promoting accurate awareness of disability and equality for people with disabilities in the United States. The other four films in this category had a rating of 3, which means that they had moderate value for promoting accurate awareness and equality.



## **Results: Sensory Disabilities**

### **Basic Film Information & Character and Disability Information**

Five films were chosen via random selection to represent the portrayal of sensory disabilities in film over the years of 2000 to 2015. Refer to Table #1 to see what films were selected for this disability group for the purpose of this study. The films depicting the sensory disabilities came from seven different genres: biography, drama, romance, fantasy, comedy, music, and action. Refer to Table #2 to see the genres of the films are that contained sensory disabilities. The United States opening weekend box office for the sensory disability group ranged from \$2,592 to \$45,033,454. The gross box office of the films ranged from \$11,720 to \$102,543,519.

The specific sensory disabilities that were portrayed in the films were blindness, hearing loss, and both deafness and blindness. Refer to Table #3 to see the number of portrayals of each specific disability type. Also, four out of the five characters acquired their sensory disabilities over the course of their lives. Four out of five characters determined as main characters. The one that is not a main character is considered a supporting character in the film. Four of the characters are male and one is female. The developmental stage of the characters with the disabilities ranged from age 15 to middle 50s. The characters with the disabilities are all white. The time periods and cultures represented in these films are present day, 19<sup>th</sup> century France, the 1940s and 1960s United States, and 19<sup>th</sup> century Austria. The remainder of the results section will follow the items on the film analysis rubrics.

Are the films an accurate portrayal of the disability portrayed? Or Not?

All five films contained accurate portrayals and two out of the five films included inaccurate portrayals as well. Refer to Table #4 to see the specific films and whether or not they had accurate portrayals of those with sensory disabilities.

The films that contained accurate portrayals of sensory disabilities portrayed the disabilities with the appropriate symptoms and characteristics to the specific sensory disabilities. They also showed the accurate accommodations for this disability group. These films depicted the characters as independent functioning members of society. Also, these portrayals showed that characters have their own passions and follow their own dreams, and that they focus on their ability rather than limitations. The films also show how the characters have their own struggles with their disabilities while at the same time seeing how they can have a positive impact on their lives.

The films that had inaccurate portrayals of sensory disabilities included themes such as other senses are heightened or stronger due to lack of one sense or that a character even developed a superhuman ability. There were inaccurate accommodations that promote common misconceptions and stereotypes associated with specific sensory disabilities. Another common theme was that the characters desired a cure for their disabilities.

Are the portrayals of the disabilities empowering or demeaning?

Through analysis of the five sensory disability films, it was determined that all five films were empowering and one film was demeaning. Refer to Table #5 to see which sensory disability film is deemed to be empowering or demeaning.

One empowering theme that was portrayed in the sensory films was that people with disabilities can be independent and be successful. These films also depicted the individuals having supportive members in their lives who helped them in many aspects of living their life. An empowering theme that was seen was that the disability itself teaches the individual to better appreciate their life and their passions. The films had a good representation the struggles associated with the disabilities, which is empowering. Another empowering theme was that the individual with the disability became an advocate for others with disabilities, or learned to help others, or had a huge impact on policy. Lastly, the characters were able to make fun of themselves, which is a sign that they were able to be comfortable with their disabilities.

The one film that had demeaning elements portrayed the disability in an unrealistic manner such as the character having superhuman abilities. There was the notion that the character with the disability wanted a magic cure, which promotes that people with disabilities want be to cured of their disabilities. There were many of negative attitudes towards the disability from both others and from the characters themselves.

#### What stereotypes appear in the films regarding the disability group?

Through analysis of the five films portraying sensory disabilities, there are common stereotypes that appeared regarding this group. Below is a bulleted list of the stereotypes depicted in the five sensory disability films.

- The character often has a superhuman ability because of the lack of one sense, which results in the other senses being heightened

- The character often receives negative terms and attitudes towards them such as grumpy, alcoholics, miserable, beast, and fools, which promotes the notion that they are not meaningful members of society and are often the outsider within their communities
- The character wants a cure in order to gain their lost sense
- The character often makes a fool out of him/herself because of their disability
- That the character is lonely and cannot make or maintain relationships with others
- That the character is saved by a member of the opposite sex (a woman) who shows them that life is worth living

#### Themes Depicted

In the sensory disability group, only four themes appeared across the five films. These themes include: the “Supercrip,” The Victim, The Freak, the theme of Being Saved by a Woman and Drinking as a coping mechanism. The theme of “the Supercrip” appeared in three films. The theme of “the Freak” appeared in three films. The theme of “the Victim” appeared in one film. The theme of “Being Saved by a Woman” appeared in two films and “Drinking as a coping mechanism” appeared in one film.

#### Films recommend for educational purposes?

Three out of the five films in the sensory disability films would be useful for educational purposes. The films that would be good choice for educational purposes accurately portrayed the attitudes towards the disabilities and took into consideration the time periods the film was set in. The films also showed the struggles, the specific

accommodations, the ways others helped these individuals be successful, and how the characters themselves came to terms with their disability. For example, one film accurately showed the attitudes people had before certain laws came into existence and compared the attitudes to how they changed after the laws were passed. Lastly, the films also put an emphasis on how individuals with disabilities want to be treated with respect and be seen as a fellow human being. On the other hand, the films that would not be recommended for educational purposes included inaccurate portrayals and negative stereotypes in regards to the disabilities of the sensory disability group.

**Rate the films overall value related to promoting Accurate Awareness of Disability and EQUALITY for people with disabilities in the United States.**

After analysis of each sensory disability film, it was determined that one of the films had minimal value with a rating scale of 1 for promoting accurate awareness of disability and equality for people with disabilities in the United States. Two films were given a rating of 3 for moderate value. One film was given a rating of 4 for good value and the last film was given a rating of 5, which meant that it had significant value for promoting accurate awareness and equality.

**Results: Developmental/Intellectual Disabilities**

**Basic Film Information & Character and Disability Information**

Five films were chosen via random selection to represent the portrayal of developmental and intellectual disabilities in film over the years of 2001 to 2015. Refer to Table #1 to see what films were selected for this disability group for the purpose of this

study. The films depicting the developmental and intellectual disabilities came from five different genres: drama, comedy, romance, adventure, and mystery. Refer to Table #2 to see the genres of the films are that contained developmental and intellectual disabilities. The United States opening weekend box office for the developmental and intellectual disability group ranged from \$25,993 to \$110,775. The gross box office of the films ranged from \$371,081 to \$40,270,895.

The specific developmental and intellectual disabilities that were portrayed in the films were developmental, intellectual, Asperger's Syndrome, Autism, and Down Syndrome. Refer to Table #3 to see the number of portrayals of each specific disability type. Also, all the characters acquired their developmental and intellectual disabilities at birth and they are congenital. Four out of the five characters are main characters. The other one is considered to be a supporting character. All five of the characters are male. The developmental stage of the characters with the disabilities ranged from age 8 to middle 40s. The characters with the disabilities are all white. The time period and culture represented in these films are: United States in the 1900s, 1970s New York, 9/11 New York, and present day. The remainder of the results section will follow the items on the film analysis rubrics.

Are the films an accurate portrayal of the disability portrayed? Or Not?

All five films in the developmental and intellectual disability group had accurate portrayals of the disabilities depicted. Refer to Table #4 to see the specific films and whether or not they had accurate or inaccurate portrayals of those with developmental and intellectual disabilities.

Across the five films, there were themes that appeared that helped to determine the accuracy of the film. One theme was the accurate portrayal of the characteristics and symptoms of the specific disabilities within this disability group. Other themes included the individual having a supportive community as well as a loving family. There were accurate portrayals of the accommodations used to support this population, which includes housing systems for people with disabilities. These films showed that the characters are capable of being parents, holding jobs, having relationships with other people, and are capable of love and romance. Another accurate theme is that the characters became advocates for themselves and learned how to ask others for help when needed. The five films depicted the many different coping mechanisms of this disability group and portrayed the struggles and obstacles they faced. These characters were independent and lived on their own. Lastly, the films showed how the characters simply wanted to be accepted by their greater community. There were a few inaccurate themes that were seen in the films but they were subtle and did not detract from the overall accuracy of the films.

Are the portrayals of the disabilities empowering or demeaning?

All five films in this disability category, after analysis, are determined as empowering films. Refer to Table #5 to see which developmental and intellectual disability film is determined as empowering or demeaning.

The empowering themes in this disability group include: the characters are often responsible and have a moral compass, are capable of strong love and passion, and are independent. The films show the struggles these characters experience with expressing themselves and how they experience hardship and obstacles as a result of their disability.

They also show how the characters often have to struggle in order to prove their worth to the greater society, especially in the area of being a parent. The characters had strong communities that helped them, had people who helped advocate for the characters, helped them learn social cues and how to be independent. The films also were accurate by showing how the characters can be successful and break away from routine. Lastly, the films portrayed each character with an emphasis on the uniqueness of each individual and how they experience their disability.

There were some demeaning themes that were portrayed in the films. However, it is important to mention that most of these demeaning themes were part of the plot of the film and were refuted by the end of the film. There were negative words directed towards the characters as well as negative attitudes from others who did not understand the disabilities. These attitudes included the belief that the characters could not be parents, be involved in relationships, be independent, or stand up for themselves. Unfortunately, as a result of these negative attitudes, the character sometimes believed in these demeaning beliefs themselves. Another demeaning theme is that the characters engaged in negative behavior or actions, or they were blamed for the wrong doings in other people's lives. As mentioned earlier, by the end of each of these films, these demeaning themes were often proven to be wrong.

#### What stereotypes appear in the films regarding the disability group?

Through analysis of the five films portraying developmental and intellectual disabilities, there are common stereotypes that appeared regarding this disability group. Below is a



bulleted list of the stereotypes depicted in the five developmental and intellectual disability films.

- The characters are portrayed as not smart, dumb, and childlike
- The characters are often seen as too smart or intelligent to the point where they misunderstand social cues
- The characters are portrayed as or seen exhibiting eccentric, odd, weird, and/or crazy behaviors
- The characters are depicted as incapable of love, having relationships, romance, families, and being parents
- That the characters are easily taken advantage of because of their disabilities
- That they need to be saved by a woman in order to have a meaningful life

### Themes Depicted

For the Developmental and Intellectual Disability group, only four themes appeared across the five films. These themes include: the Victim, The Freak, The Bumbling Idiot, and the theme of Being Saved by a Woman. The theme of “the Victim” appeared in four films. The theme of “the Freak” appeared in two films. The theme of “the Bumbling Idiot” appeared in two films and the theme of “Being Saved by a Woman” appeared in two films.

### Films recommend for educational purposes?

All five films in the developmental and intellectual disability category would be a good recommendation to be used for educational purposes. The five films in this disability group did an effective job with accurately portraying the characteristics and symptoms of

the intellectual and developmental disabilities. These films also portrayed how one's disability can impact the lives around them and the relationships one has with others in a suitable manner. For example, one film shows the hardships that one can have when proving his worth that he can be a good parent to his child. The other films take into consideration how disability impacts the individual in having relationships, especially romantic relationships, and how grief can be experienced differently when the individual has a disability and how unique the coping mechanisms can be. Lastly, all films promote the notion that people with developmental and intellectual disabilities experience them differently from one another. These films also further the notion that people with disabilities in general want to be treated with respect and simply be seen as fellow human beings who have something to contribute to society as a whole.

Rate the films overall value related to promoting **Accurate Awareness of Disability and EQUALITY** for people with disabilities in the United States.

Taking into consideration all of the analysis conducted for each developmental and intellectual film, it was determined that one of the films had minimal value with a rating scale of 1 for promoting accurate awareness of disability and equality for people with disabilities in the United States. The other four films in this category had a rating of 4, which means that they had good value for promoting accurate awareness and equality.

### **Conclusion**

The researcher acknowledges that there are limitations to this study. One limitation includes the small sample size of films to accurately answer the study's research questions.

The small sample size makes it difficult to generalize results to a larger sample of films and therefore the influence on the viewer. It also makes it difficult to definitely determine the progress that has been made in portrayals of people with disabilities in film. Another limitation is the inherent bias of the researcher. The researcher has a level of sophistication with respect to knowledge of people with disabilities as that is her area of study in college. This means that the researcher may observe and interpret elements of the films differently than a viewer with no formal knowledge or experience in disability studies. For further research, it would be appropriate to include a representative population who does not have the knowledge or level of sophistication with the subject matter. This representation will show future researchers a sense of the population that needs targeting for the purpose of further education on people with disabilities and film.

Through the analysis of the 20 films viewed for the purpose of this study, I have determined that there has been a shift in the portrayal of those with disabilities in film. In comparison to the literature review and past research conducted on films prior to 2000, films have become more accurate and empowering in the portrayal of those with disabilities. Many of these characters are shown with accurate characteristics of their specific disabilities and the appropriate accommodations used to help them. This shift is evidenced by 18 out of 20 films that were determined as accurate portrayals. This is also evident in the result that 16 out of 20 films were determined to portray individuals with disabilities in an empowering manner.

The characters with the disabilities have strong personalities and are portrayed in the films as having more depth and feelings, and are depicted as human beings who have both struggles and personal successes. The films show that characters with disabilities

have more in common with people without disabilities than differences in terms of personal aspirations, desires, and overall lifetime goals. Another encouraging finding was that, some of the films portray the disability as only one, often times a small element of the character's life. This portrayal helps to convey that there is more to the individual's character than his or her disability; that disability does not define an individual.

Films also demonstrated an emphasis on the uniqueness of each individual and their disability. Every person with a disability experiences their disability in different ways. There are similar characteristics and symptoms associated with specific disabilities, but some of the films did an effective job at indicating the experience of living with a disability is very individualistic.

However, the researcher found that films still portray people with disabilities from the as having the same stereotypes that the early literature found. Referring to the themes section of the analysis, all six themes chosen from past literature reviews were depicted in at least one or more films. During the analysis, the researcher found three more themes were identified and added to the list of stereotypes. These themes conveyed to the researcher that, despite the change in the portrayal, there is still work to be done, especially with the themes of "The Supercrip" and "The Victim." The theme of "The Victim" was depicted in 11 out of 20 films, while the theme of "The Supercrip" was seen in seven films. "The Victim" theme portrays people with disabilities as unable to help themselves, bitter, and dependent on others. This stereotype creates unwanted pity and sympathy towards PWD in the general society simply because they have a disability. The belief that one's disability can impair them from living their lives to the fullest is inaccurate.

“The Supercrip” theme portrays the individual with the disability as being able to overcome their disability and achieving normalcy. This theme communicates to viewers that the PWD has overcome their disabilities when in reality, they have learned to live with it to the best of their capabilities. “The Supercrip” is seen as an inspiration to others. In society today, inspiring images of PWD are often seen and portrayed in all forms of media and social media platforms. These images promote the notion that the disability population should be inspiring; many times by just living their lives and doing tasks that the non-disabled population does. Many people with disabilities don’t want to inspire others, they just want to be able to reach their life goals without all the barriers and negative attitudes that exist in society. This inspiration and “The Supercrip” stereotype promotes the mentality of “I could have it worse.” PWD are not the non-disabled population’s inspiration; they are fellow human beings with their own struggles. The “Supercrip” stereotype also creates confusion for PWD themselves because they often feel that they have to live up to the successes of the portrayals. Each person with a disability has different capabilities and it is important to stress that they have different levels of achievements. As mentioned before, living with a disability is very individualistic.

Despite the consistency of the portrayals of the stereotypes within the 20 films, there were films disproved these inaccurate and demeaning stereotypes. These films portrayed the PWD in a situation involving the common stereotype only to dispute that stereotype in the end. Usually in the film, the PWD either proves the stereotype associated with their disability as inaccurate or breaks away from it showing the viewer that they are not the stereotype.

Some other trends seen in the 20 films were that 16 out of the 20 films were considered drama and six out of 20 films were biographies. A drama is intended to be serious in tone and focuses on the development of the characters who must deal with realistic emotional struggles (Drama). Dramas are associated with people with disabilities because having a disability creates different kinds of struggles in areas of self-acceptance, barriers in society such as employment and relationships, and having to prove one's worth. Dramas can also provide an explanation for how the majority of the disabilities in the films are acquired over the lifespan (12 out of 20 characters). Acquiring a disability during the course of one's life creates disruption to one's aspirations and goals. As a result, the individual has to learn how to live with their new disability and perhaps alter their aspirations to match their new level of functioning. This process can create a lot of inner turmoil, confusion, and emotional struggle, which is depicted in a drama.

Another genre of film was biographical. Biographies are true stories of a notable person's life (Kendall, 2000). Biographies of PWD are inspiring and they show how an individual with a disability has overcome many challenges over the course of their life. This genre portrays the individual with the disability as making a contribution to others and are seen as achieving life goals with a disability. Biographies tended to promote the stereotype "The Supercrip" and were meant to make the non-disabled viewer feel inspired. Further research should be conducted to determine how accurate biographies are and why the "Supercrip" stereotype is portrayed so often.

There are trends seen within the specific disability groups. Within the physical disability category, four out of the five characters were females. Out of the four disability groups, there were only six females represented as characters with disabilities. Males are

considered the power-holders in society whereas females are viewed as having less power and control. According to the disability hierarchy researched by John Tringo (1970), physical disabilities were determined to be the most accepted and least stigmatized in society. Since physical disabilities are considered to be the most accepted disability group by the general population, the portrayal of females with physical disabilities as victims and submissive is not questioned or challenged in films. Females with physical disabilities tend to be accepted by the viewer more often than females with other disabilities. For example, if the character with the disability is a female and has a psychiatric disability then it may create a stronger dissonance within the viewer. There should be further research on how gender impacts the viewers' perceptions in regards to the different disability groups. Another trend within the physical disability group is that the characters portrayed are commonly associated with the stereotype of "The Supercrip" by being an inspiration to others as mentioned earlier.

The psychiatric disability group, out of all four disability groups, is the most stereotyped category with the most inaccurate and demeaning themes associated. These stereotypes include the portrayals of the victim and the evil villain. Mental illness is stigmatized in our society and is one of the most misunderstood disability groups. This was found in Tringo's Disability Hierarchy, which found that psychiatric disabilities are one of the least accepted disabilities within society (Tringo, 1970). This may be because people with psychiatric disabilities are portrayed as individuals who are dependent on others and dangerous to themselves and others. They are often depicted as being engaged in demeaning behavior and are portrayed as scary. This disability group is the only group that includes the genres of thriller and war. The researcher feels that psychiatric disabilities are

associated with these genres because of the inaccurate belief that individuals with mental illnesses are dangerous. This perception of dangerousness justifies why the individual is engaging in these demeaning behaviors. This may create relief for the viewer as they believe that people without disabilities would never engage in these behaviors. These portrayals also create pity for PWD because, in the viewers' minds, they cannot control their behaviors or actions as a result of their psychiatric disability.

Despite the demeaning traits, there have been some positive changes in portrayal of people with psychiatric disabilities. The films associated with psychiatric disabilities have become more accepting of those with Post Traumatic Syndrome Disorder (PTSD) and the veteran population. There has been a push within society to better understand the impact of war on veterans, especially in regards to PTSD. There has been an effort to bring more sensitivity to the issue surrounding this specific group within the psychiatric disability category. More research should be conducted on the portrayal of the veteran population and mental illness. However, there needs to more awareness and education regarding this disability group in terms of promoting accurate, empowering film portrayals.

Films portraying sensory disabilities were, overall, more accurate and empowering. The one noted trend within this disability group was the common misconception of heightened or strengthened senses and/or ability due to the lack of one sense, which results in the other senses being heightened. This belief is promoted by the stereotype of "The Supercrip," which is presented in three out of the five films for the sensory disability group. Since the character with the sensory disability has heightened senses in the film, they are supposedly able to overcome their disability and be functional members of society. There was even an extreme example, in which one of the characters gained superhero



powers as a result of their sensory disability. However, this notion is inaccurate because the lack of one sense does not cause the other senses to become stronger. There should be further research on the portrayal of disabilities associated with superheroes and whether they are empowering or demeaning. The films comprising sensory disability group matched the findings of the disability hierarchy research and was one of the more accepted disability groups.

The developmental and intellectual disability group had the greatest improvement in portrayal in regards to the disability hierarchy. According to the results, all five films had accurate as well as empowering portrayals of the disabilities. Within these films, there was a significant emphasis that PWD are human beings and should be treated as such. These films made an effort to show the common stereotypes and disprove them. (“The Victim,” “The Freak,” or “The Bumbling Idiot.”) These portrayals made the characters appear as either unintelligent or too smart to the point that they misunderstand social cues, are eccentric, odd, or exhibiting weird behavior. Even though the films go on to show the how the stereotypes are inaccurate, they still are being portrayed in film. The simple act of including the stereotype can influence how society perceives this disability category.

There has been a noticeable improvement in the portrayal of PWD in being accurate and empowering in comparison to the history of films with PWD mentioned in the literature review. Laws such as the ADA and IDEA helped change societal beliefs and the general population is becoming more accepting of the lives of PWD. The stereotypes have been reduced in number of portrayals in the films, but they are still evident. Filmmakers continue to use the same stereotypes over and over again but in different depictions. It warrants the question, will PWD be ever able to escape the common disability stereotypes?

Are the stereotypes so ingrained within our society that it is impossible to eliminate them? Are these stereotypes necessary to include in a film so that they may be challenged and disproved? This researcher feels that even the inclusion of these stereotypes is harmful as they create attitudinal barriers to PWD in all aspects of life and may even contribute to internalized threats to positive self-identity.

Films are largely focused on entertainment and creating engaging storylines rather than promoting accuracy, equality, and awareness of disability. As a result, the viewers are taught to ignore the true realities of the lives of PWD. There needs to be more informed consumption of films and efforts by filmmakers not to sensationalize the disability experience. The answer is more education. Filmmakers have improved their portrayals of PWD in terms of accuracy and empowerment and have done a better job of showing that PWD are human beings with depth and personal identities. However, the filmmakers need more education in eliminating the stereotypes associated with PWD in their portrayals. One way is to use the films chosen for educational purposes in the study as examples for filmmakers to follow in their depiction of PWD. Once the filmmakers are educated, they then need to help disability advocates teach the public to question what they are being shown in regards to the portrayal of PWD. The viewer needs to realize that the depiction may include stereotypes that create barriers and that these depictions are inaccurate. There needs to be more education about the different stereotypes and actively questioning what is being portrayed not only in film but by all forms of media. It is the hope of the researcher that films will eventually help to eliminate stereotypes not only in film but within society as a whole.

There are several different areas of research needed. More research needs to be conducted on impacts of the portrayals of disabilities on the general population in regards to gender, the portrayal of the veteran population and psychiatric disabilities, the genres of drama and biographies pertaining to disabilities, superheroes and disability, and the best method of education in terms of raising awareness to the portrayals of PWD. More research needs to be conducted on the best ways to promote awareness of making a conscious effort to question what is being portrayed not only in film but media in general. One suggestion for further research is to have the general population of movie goers fill out a survey about their attitudes towards PWD after viewing, what is considered, an educationally worthy film. Also, guiding discussion questions for films may help to maximize the educational value of a film. The answers to these questions will help determine the best method for education on portrayals of PWD and to determine whether or not films have an impact on viewers' attitudes toward PWD.

Overall, while limited, this research has provided a starting point for understanding the powerful messages that films can portray and how false characterizations can be damaging to an already marginalized population. More research is needed to fully understand this issue and how to bring this sophisticated education to the general population.

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**Appendix #1: Black Film Review Rubric**

**Film Review Rubric**

**Basic Film Information:**

Title of Film: \_\_\_\_\_ Year of Film: \_\_\_\_\_

Genre of film: \_\_\_\_\_

USA Opening Weekend Box Office: \_\_\_\_\_

Gross Box Office: \_\_\_\_\_

Awards: \_\_\_\_\_

**Character and Disability Information:**

Disability Category: \_\_\_\_\_

Specific Disability: \_\_\_\_\_

Main Character: \_\_\_\_\_

Supporting Character: \_\_\_\_\_

Male: \_\_\_\_\_

Female: \_\_\_\_\_

Age or Developmental Stage of Character: \_\_\_\_\_

**Analysis:**

Is the film an accurate portrayal of the disability portrayed? Or not? Explain:

Is the portrayal of the disability empowering or demeaning? Explain:

What stereotypes appear in the film regarding the disability?

Does the film perpetuate stereotypes about the disability group? How so?



**Themes Depicted:**

**Explain:**

“ Supercrip” or Hero: \_\_\_\_\_

The Victim: \_\_\_\_\_

The Evil Villain: \_\_\_\_\_

The Freak: \_\_\_\_\_

The Bumbling Idiot: \_\_\_\_\_

The Miraculous Cure: \_\_\_\_\_

Other(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Final Thoughts on Film/Personal Statement

Film recommend for educational purposes?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_

No \_\_\_\_\_

Why or Why not?

Rate this film's overall value related to promoting **Accurate Awareness of Disability and EQUALITY** for people with disabilities in the United States.

<b>No Value</b>	<b>Minimal Value</b>	<b>Moderate Value</b>	<b>Good Value</b>	<b>Significant Value</b>
0	1	3	4	

## Appendix #2: Physical Disabilities Review Rubric Compilation

### **Basic Film Information**

#### **Titles of Films:**

- Frida
- Million Dollar Baby
- Avatar
- Soul Surfer
- Mad Max: Fury Road

**Year of Films:** 2002 - 2015

#### **Genre of Films**

- Action (2)
- Adventure (2)
- Sci-Fi (1)
- Biography (2)
- Drama (3)
- Sport (2)
- Fantasy (1)
- Romance (1)

**USA Opening Weekend Box Office Range of Films:** \$179,953 - \$44,440,000

**Gross Box Office Range of Films:** \$25,776,996 - \$760,505,847

**Awards:** All Films won Awards

### **Character and Disability Information**

#### **Specific Disabilities:**

- Are they acquired? (5)
- Spina Bifida
- Quadriplegia
- Paraplegia
- Amputee (2)

#### **Main or Supporting Character?**

- Main (5)
- Supporting (0)

#### **Male or Female:**

- Male (1)
- Female (4)

**Age or Developmental Stage of Characters:** Age 16 - 30s (all white except for one)

#### **Time period/Culture:**

- Mexican and early 1900s

- post-apocalyptic world, based in Australia
- Future
- present day (2)

**Analysis: Is the film an accurate portrayal of the disability portrayed? Or not?**

**Explain:**

Frida - Accurate

Million Dollar Baby - Accurate

Avatar – Accurate & Inaccurate

Soul Surfer - Accurate

Mad Max: Fury Road – Accurate & Inaccurate

**Accurate – 5**

**Inaccurate – 2**

Accurate Films Common Themes:

- They depict the characteristics and symptoms of the disabilities. (medically & personally)
- Show accurate accommodations that are used to help the character.
- Showed both the struggles and aspirations of the character with the disabilities.
- Acceptance of disability.
- How the disabilities have an impact on loved ones.
- How the disabilities create different opportunities for people with disabilities.

Inaccurate Film Common Themes:

- Character wants to commit suicide as result of disability.
- Magic or miracle cures for the disabilities.
- Increased strength, ability, and quick recoveries.
- Viewed with negative lighting/filming techniques.
- Or too positive/too negative attitudes.

**Analysis: Is the portrayal of the disability empowering or demeaning? Explain:**

Frida – Empowering

Million Dollar Baby - Demeaning

Avatar – Demeaning

Soul Surfer – Empowering

Mad Max: Fury Road – Empowering

Empowering – 3

Demeaning – 2

Empowering Common Themes:

- Focuses on both the struggles and successes of the character with the disability.
- Films show the accommodations made to help characters.
- Films show the ups and downs without making them too positive or negative.

- Becoming an inspiration for others when there is acceptance of disability.
- When disability is taken into account as one part of living one's life.

#### Demeaning Common Themes:

- Films portray the character too negatively using film techniques to demean the character.
- Negative attitudes in the film from both character and surrounding minor characters.
- Suicide.
- Wanting to fix oneself, to get rid of the disability.
- Being "saved" by a member of the opposite sex in order to see that life is worth living.
- No help from others, that the character is all alone in their journey.

### **Analysis: What stereotypes appear in the film regarding the disability?**

#### Frida – 2002 (Spina Bifida)

- Overcomes disability fast in the beginning of film
- Being asked to marry out of pity, which promotes a victim portrayal
- When ill, character drinks and smokes as a way to cope with disability

#### Million Dollar Baby – 2004 (Quadriplegia)

- That people with disabilities want to die.
- That people with disabilities should be taken pity on and seen as a victim.
- That negative attitudes toward disability is okay.

#### Avatar – 2009 (Paraplegia)

- Negative attitudes toward the disability.
- Seeking a cure for disability.
- Film portrays character as a weak within usage of lighting.
- Magic cure
- Saved by a woman
- Victim
- Having to prove one's worth.

#### Soul Surfer – 2011 (Amputee)

- Hero who overcomes their disability and becomes an inspiration for many others.

#### Mad Max: Fury Road – 2015 (Amputee)

- Superhero because of leadership skills.
- Saved by a man in the end.

### **Analysis: Does the film perpetuate stereotypes about the disability group? How so? (Physical D)**

- Overcomes Physical Disability really fast
- Becomes successful and is an inspiration
- Seen as victims – don't want to live/suicidal
- Seen as weak – creates pity

- Saved by a woman/man
- Magic cure

### Analysis: Themes Depicted & Explanation

THEMES DEPICTED:		Examples
"Supercrip" or Hero	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Character is able to overcome disability and is able to walk again "lived a courageous life"</li> <li>• Character is seen as an inspiration for becoming a pro surfer while having a disability</li> <li>• Character is seen as strong because all of hardships they experienced – becomes a leader</li> </ul>
The Victim	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Character asked to be married out of pity</li> <li>• When viewed in wheelchair, it was always a portrayed in a negative light, which created pity and made character appear weak.</li> <li>• The way doctors/family treated the character created pity</li> </ul>
The Evil Villain		
The Freak		
The Bumbling Idiot		
The Miraculous Cure	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Character regains ability to walk but it also shows the hardships as well</li> <li>• Unrealistic form of cure that enabled Character to be able to walk again</li> </ul>
Other(s)	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Substance abuse</b> to deal with issues</li> <li>• <b>Saved by a Woman/by a Man (2)</b></li> <li>• <b>Death wish</b> – because of one's disability</li> </ul>

### Analysis: Film recommend for educational purposes? Why? Why not?

Yes - 1

No - 4

If the film was either inaccurate or demeaning, then it did not make it into the educational pile. What makes up a film as inaccurate or demeaning is explained in previous questions. Two of the films were of a sci-fi/fantasy genre, therefore poses the question whether or not the films are a good choice to be used for educational purpose because of the unrealistic nature of these genres. The one yes film was based on a true story, which incorporated many accurate and positive elements that can be used to teach about disability equality.

**Rate this film's overall value related to promoting Accurate Awareness of Disability  
and EQUALITY for people with disabilities in the United States.**

All Films

No Value	Minimal Value	Moderate Value	Good Value	Significant Value
1	2	3	4	5
	1 Film	2 Films	2 Films	

## Appendix #3: Psychiatric Disabilities Review Rubric Compilation

### **Basic Film Information**

#### **Titles of Films:**

- Donnie Darko
- Canvas
- Brother
- Perks of Being a Wallflower
- American Sniper

**Year of Films:** 2001 – 2014

#### **Genre of Films**

- Sci-Fi (1)
- Drama (5)
- Thriller (1)
- War (1)
- Romance (1)
- Action (1)
- Biography (1)

**USA Opening Weekend Box Office Range of Films:** \$13,100 – \$9,527,848

**Gross Box Office Range of Films:** \$35,525 - \$350,123,553

**Awards:** All Films won Awards

### **Character and Disability Information**

#### **Specific Disabilities:**

- Schizophrenia (2)
- PTSD (3)
- Depression

#### **Main or Supporting Character?**

- Main (5)
- Supporting (0)

#### **Male or Female:**

- Male (4)
- Female (1)

**Age or Developmental Stage of Characters:** Age 15 – 40s (all white)

#### **Time period/Culture:**

- present day (4)
- Based in America (5)
- Early 1990s (1)



**Analysis: Is the film an accurate portrayal of the disability portrayed? Or not?**

**Explain:**

Donnie Darko - Inaccurate

Canvas - Accurate

American Sniper – Accurate

Brother - Inaccurate

Perks of Being a Wallflower – Accurate

Accurate – 3

Inaccurate – 2

Accurate Films Common Themes:

- They depict the characteristics and symptoms of the disabilities. (medically & personally)
  - How everyone is different with their symptoms
- Show accurate accommodations that are used to help the character.
- Showed both the struggles and aspirations of the character with the disabilities as well as the ups and downs of the characters.
- Acceptance of disability or in the process of acceptance/five stages of grief
- How the disabilities have an impact on loved ones esp. on children and significant others
- How the disabilities create different opportunities for people with disabilities.
- Usage of medication & hospitals

Inaccurate Film Common Themes:

- Character wants to commit suicide as result of disability.
- Engage in dangerous activities
- Create a scary image.
- How they can be viewed as crazy/unhuman
- More negative attitudes than positive towards this group of disabilities.
- Placebos & medication

**Analysis: Is the portrayal of the disability empowering or demeaning? Explain:**

Donnie Darko – Demeaning

Canvas - Empowering

Perk of Being a Wallflower – Empowering

Brother – Demeaning

American Sniper – Empowering

Empowering – 3

Demeaning – 2

Empowering Common Themes:

- Focuses on both the struggles and successes of the character with the disability.
- Building positive relationships with others.
- Characters find ways to help others.
- Family included in process of recovery.
- Films show the accommodations/therapy made to help characters.

- Films show the ups and downs without making them too positive or negative.
- Becoming an inspiration for others when there is acceptance of disability.
- When disability is taken into account as one part of living one's life.
- Emphasis on that everyone has their own struggles/pains

#### Demeaning Common Themes:

- Films portray the character too negatively using film techniques to demean the character. (dark lighting/loud noises)
- Negative attitudes in the film from both character and surrounding minor characters.
- Portrayed as scary/crazy to others including family members.
- Wanting to fix oneself, to get rid of the disability.
- Being "saved" by a member of the opposite sex in order to see that life is worth living.
- No help from others, that the character is all alone in their journey.

#### **Analysis: What stereotypes appear in the film regarding the disability?**

##### Donnie Darko - 2001 - Schizophrenia

- That they are crazy, wacko, creepy as exhibited by Donnie's behavior
- That people should be wary of those with mental health issues, that they are dangerous
- Painted as a villain/bad boy in film
- That people with mental illness are given placebos

##### Canvas - 2006 - Schizophrenia

- Others view Mary as crazy/receives looks of pity and dislike from others during psychotic state

##### Brother - 2009 (PTSD)

- That people with psychiatric disabilities/PTSD are viewed as crazy and dangerous
- Seen with character's mental breakdowns

##### Perks of Being a Wallflower - 2012 (PTSD)

- Barely showed the treatment process, was way to positive

##### American Sniper - 2014 (PTSD)

- That people with PTSD are dangerous
- Did not show a lot of the recovery process - appeared to recover very quickly

#### **Analysis: Does the film perpetuate stereotypes about the disability group? How so? (Psychiatric)**

- People with psychiatric disabilities are often viewed as victims, villains, crazy, bumbling idiots, and dangerous
- Others treat them with looks of disgust/fear/pity
- They are often engage in dangerous actions
- Recovery process is barely shown - often very quick or barely touched upon or seen as too positive and never focus on the negatives/hardships

**Analysis: Themes Depicted & Explanation**

<b>THEMES DEPICTED:</b>		<b>Examples</b>
“Supercrip” or Hero	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Character is superhuman due to their navy experience</li> </ul>
The Victim	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Character is seen as a weak individual who can’t stand up for themself.</li> <li>• Character does not want help from others, wants to kill himself because of his actions from war.</li> <li>• Character could not take care of herself, did not want to take medication</li> </ul>
The Evil Villain	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Character’s family members are afraid to be around said character. Character appears to be very dangerous and crazy.</li> <li>• Character engages in dangerous acts, such as burning down a house, flooding the school, and killing an individual, which promotes the scary ideal.</li> </ul>
The Freak	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Character often received weird looks from peers, teachers, friends when he would start talking nonsense.</li> </ul>
The Bumbling Idiot	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Character messes up socially in front of son’s peers, which led to the peers bullying and laughing.</li> </ul>
The Miraculous Cure		
Other(s)		

**Analysis: Film recommend for educational purposes? Why? Why not?**Yes - 2No - 3

The two films that were indicated as no were both demeaning and had some inaccuracies in its portrayal of the disabilities. In the manner that made the films demeaning were scary in order to create a sense of horror in the viewers. One no film, never came about with diagnosing the individual with a psychiatric disability. Another one of the no films is sci-fi based and the story line disputes the fact whether or not the character has the disability. One of the yes films had a good representation of how the psychiatric disability had an impact on the family and how the family struggles to deal with the disability. Accurate and empowering films included both the hardships/successes of the individual with the disability as well as portraying accurate symptoms/characteristics of the disabilities. In these films there is an emphasis on how every one

with a disability experiences them differently – that no one person experiences the same path. Another one of the yes films showed a good representation of how of mental illness impacts the military population and how they are often acquired by war.

**Rate this film's overall value related to promoting Accurate Awareness of Disability and EQUALITY for people with disabilities in the United States.**

All Films

No Value	Minimal Value	Moderate Value	Good Value	Significant Value
1	2	3	4	5
1 Film		4 Films		

## Appendix #4: Sensory Disabilities Review Rubric Compilation

### **Basic Film Information**

#### **Titles of Films:**

- Daredevil
- Copying Beethoven
- Music Within
- Beastly
- Marie's Story

**Year of Films:** 2003 – 2014

#### **Genre of Films**

- Biography (3)
- Drama (4)
- Romance (1)
- Fantasy (2)
- Comedy (1)
- Music (1)
- Action (1)

**USA Opening Weekend Box Office Range of Films:** \$2,592 – \$45,033,454

**Gross Box Office Range of Films:** \$11,720- \$102,543,519

**Awards:** 3 out of 5 films won awards

### **Character and Disability Information**

#### **Specific Disabilities:**

- Are they acquired? (4)
- Blind (2)
- Hearing Loss (2)
- Deaf & Blind (1)

#### **Main or Supporting Character?**

- Main (4)
- Supporting (1)

#### **Male or Female:**

- Male (4)
- Female (1)

**Age or Developmental Stage of Characters:** Age 15 – 50s (all white)

#### **Time period/Culture:**

- 19<sup>th</sup> century France

- present day (2)
- 1940s/1960s United States
- Austria 1800s

**Analysis: Is the film an accurate portrayal of the disability portrayed? Or not?**

**Explain:**

Daredevil - Accurate & Inaccurate

Copying Beethoven - Accurate

Music Within - Accurate

Beastly - Accurate & Inaccurate

Marie's Story - Accurate

Accurate - 5

Inaccurate - 2

Accurate Films Common Themes:

- Accurate symptoms/characteristics of the disabilities
- Accurate accommodations being made for the individuals with the disabilities
- Promotes the notion that they can be independent and be a functioning member of society
- Can have their own passions and can follow their own dreams, focus on their ability rather than limitations
- Shows how they have their own struggles with their disabilities but see how it can have a positive impact on their lives
- Sticks to accurate historical facts

Inaccurate Film Common Themes:

- Other senses are heightened or stronger due to lack of one sense
- Superhuman ability
- Inaccurate accommodations that promote common misconceptions and stereotypes
- Magic cure for disability

**Analysis: Is the portrayal of the disability empowering or demeaning? Explain:**

Daredevil - Empowering

Copying Beethoven - Empowering

Music Within - Empowering

Beastly - Empowering/Demeaning

Marie's Story - Empowering

Empowering - 5

Demeaning - 1

Empowering Common Themes:

- The notion that an individual with a disability can be a superhero and that even they use accommodations
- That people with disabilities can be very independent, be successful, and do not need supervision

- Have supportive individuals in their lives, that helped the individuals with disabilities come to terms with their disabilities and live a meaningful life
- That one's disability can teach the individual to better appreciate life/one's passions
- Good representation of struggles of acceptance
- Person with disability became an advocate for others with disabilities/learn to help others/huge impact in policy
- Able to make fun at themselves, able to be very comfortable in own skin

Demeaning Common Themes:

- Unrealistic in the sense of superhuman ability
- There is the notion of the magic cure and that all people with disabilities want to be cured
- Attitudes that others have and the individual have of themselves

**Analysis: What stereotypes appear in the film regarding the disability?**

Daredevil – 2003 – (Blindness)

- Saved by a girl who helps him find himself and accept who he is
- Superhero with heightened senses
- Dark sunglasses, which promotes the notion that all individuals with blindness wear them

Copying Beethoven – 2006 – (Hearing Loss)

- That his actions are very loud/others have to speak very loudly in order for him to hear them
- that people with disabilities are grumpy, alcoholics, miserable, a beast
- that they are lonely
- lack of respect due to disability
- can't enjoy music/live in silence
- saved by a woman

Music Within – 2007 - (Hearing Loss)

- Can hear really well on the phone
- Viewed with disgust at some points in the film by others

Beastly – 2011 – (Blindness)

- Superhuman abilities/heightened senses
- That they want a cure to see again/ magic cure

Marie's Story – 2014 – (Deaf/Blind)

- Can't be respectful members of society
- Can't be smart/can't communicate
- Bullied by others/negative attitudes towards the character
- Because of disability she can't escape, a prisoner, experiences silence

**Analysis: Does the film perpetuate stereotypes about the disability group? How so? (Sensory D)**

- Superhuman abilities because of lack of one sense or heightened senses

- Negative terms and attitudes towards the individuals with the disabilities such as grumpy, alcoholics, miserable, “beast,” “fools”
- All people with disabilities want a cure to become normal
- That they are seen as fools
- Lonely
- Saved by others (especially women)

### Analysis: Themes Depicted & Explanation

THEMES DEPICTED:		Examples
“Supercrip” or Hero	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Heightened sense enables character to have super powers and heightened abilities</li> <li>• A hero to many others with disabilities because he became an advocate as a result of his own disability</li> </ul>
The Victim	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pity for the character because of their disability</li> </ul>
The Evil Villain		
The Freak	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• wild behavior makes character viewed by others like he is crazy/ a beast</li> <li>• character was called a traveling freak show</li> <li>• wild/dirty/extreme behavior</li> </ul>
The Bumbling Idiot		
The Miraculous Cure		
Other(s)	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Saved by a Woman (2)</b> – helps character find true purpose in life, believe in their ability to be functioning</li> <li>• <b>Drinking as a coping mechanism</b></li> </ul>

### Analysis: Film recommend for educational purposes? Why? Why not?

Yes - 3

No - 2

The films that would not be recommended for educational purposes had inaccurate portrayals and negative stereotypes in regards to the specific disability and overall disability group. The films that would be a good choice for educational purposes accurately showed the attitudes towards the disabilities with regards to the time period. They showed the struggles,



accommodations made for those individuals, how others had to help them, and how the character themselves learned to accept their disability. One film accurately showed the attitudes people had before certain passages of laws came into existence and how they changed after the laws. These films also had an emphasis on how individuals with disabilities only wanted to be treated with respect and be seen as a fellow human being.

**Rate this film's overall value related to promoting Accurate Awareness of Disability and EQUALITY for people with disabilities in the United States.**

All Films

No Value	Minimal Value	Moderate Value	Good Value	Significant Value
1	2	3	4	5
	1 Film	2 Films	1 Film	1 Film

## **Appendix #5: Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities Review Rubric Compilation**

### **Basic Film Information**

#### **Titles of Films:**

- I am Sam
- House of D
- Adam
- Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close
- Where Hope Grows

**Year of Films:** 2001 – 2015

#### **Genre of Films**

- Drama (4)
- Comedy
- Romance
- Adventure
- Mystery

**USA Opening Weekend Box Office Range of Films:** \$25,993 – \$110,775

**Gross Box Office Range of Films:** \$371,081 - \$40,270,895

**Awards:** 3 out of 5 films won awards

### **Character and Disability Information**

#### **Specific Disabilities:**

- Are they acquired? (0)
- Developmental Disability
- Intellectual
- Asperger's Syndrome
- Autism
- Down Syndrome

#### **Main or Supporting Character?**

- Main (4)
- Supporting (1)

#### **Male or Female:**

- Male (5)
- Female (0)

**Age or Developmental Stage of Characters:** Age 8 – 40s (all white)

#### **Time period/Culture:**

- 1900s, United States
- New York, 1970s
- 9/11, New York

- present day (2)

**Analysis: Is the film an accurate portrayal of the disability portrayed? Or not?**

**Explain:**

I am Sam - Accurate

House of D - Accurate

Adam - Accurate

Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close - Accurate

Where Hope Grows - Accurate

Accurate - 5

Inaccurate - 0

Accurate Films Common Themes:

- Accurate characteristics/symptoms of the disabilities such as difficulty changing routine
- Supportive community/love of family
- Accommodations - such as housing systems for people with disabilities
- Capable of being parents
- Can hold jobs
- Big emphasis on relationships with others
- Capable of love and romance
- Becoming own advocates for themselves or learning when to ask others for help
- Shows how they have different coping mechanisms
- Can live on their own and be independent
- Obstacles that they face, their struggles because of disability
- A human being seeking to belong to a greater community

Inaccurate Film Common Themes:

- Sometimes seen engaging in extreme actions such as stealing, cleaning a window in an astronaut outfit, standing up for someone else which meant hitting them, etc
- There are stereotypes in the film against each character but they were often proved to be wrong in the end

**Analysis: Is the portrayal of the disability empowering or demeaning? Explain:**

I am Sam - Empowering

House Of D - Empowering

Adam - Empowering

Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close - Empowering

Where Hope Grows - Empowering

Empowering - 5

Demeaning - 0

Empowering Common Themes:

- That people with disabilities have to fight to prove their worth to be parents and that they can be good parents.
- Are often very responsible and have the right morals.
- Shows how they go through hardships/ struggle with lack of communication/ how they struggle to prove their worth
- They are often inspiration for others to get their own lives back on track.
- Strong communities behind the individuals with disabilities. There are people who advocate for them on their behalf, help them and teach them social cues.
- They are independent or making an effort to become independent
- Are successful and can break away from boundaries and routines
- Strong love and passion.

**Demeaning Common Themes:**

- Negative usage of words
- Negative attitudes from individuals who do not understand the disabilities.
- Belief that they can't be parents, can't be involved in relationships, can't be independent, or stand up for themselves, even sometimes lack of belief in themselves because of all the hardships they experience
- Engage in demeaning behavior and actions as a way to cope with stressors in life
- Often blamed for wrong doings in other people's lives (example: death of one's mother)
- Lack of support/family treats them badly

**Analysis: What stereotypes appear in the film regarding the disability?**

I am Sam – 2001 (Developmental Disability)

- Not capable of being parents
- That they are easily taken advantage of
- Usage of negative terms – “handicap” “retarded”
- Negative beliefs in oneself because of disability
- Saved by a Woman
- Often makes a fool of himself throughout the film – seen as a “idiot”

House of D – 2004 (Intellectual)

- Can't play sports
- Negative/bad supportive family
- Negative terms
- That they cause trouble for “normal” people
- Creates looks of pity and crazy from others
- Easily verbally abused by others

Adam – 2009 (Asperger's Syndrome)

- Not prime relationship material
- Saved by a Woman
- Are childlike, can't have families
- Can't love

Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close – 2011 (Autism)

- Eccentric/odd
- That they are all very smart and intelligent
- Character understands that he is different and believes that he should be normal

Where Hope Grows – 2015 (Down Syndrome)

- Others think character is stupid and there is the usage of negative terms, slow and not smart
- Others wanted to use character as a form of method to create pity and sympathy to promote his workplace

**Analysis: Does the film perpetuate stereotypes about the disability group? How so? (Developmental/Intellectual)**

- Not smart, dumb, often childlike
- Or too smart/intelligent to the point where they lack social cues
- Eccentric/odd/weird/crazy
- Usage of negative terms
- That they can't love, have relationships, romance, not good to have families, be a good parent
- Easily taken advantage of
- Saved by a woman

**Analysis: Themes Depicted & Explanation**

<b>THEMES DEPICTED:</b>		<b>Examples</b>
"Supercrip" or Hero		
The Victim	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Character tricked into believing that he can't be a good parent</li> <li>• Character stole bike in order as coping mechanism to keep his friend in his life</li> <li>• Character receives pity from the viewer when he loses his job, dad, and throughout film when he stumbles in his relationship</li> <li>• Character is a young boy who is struggling in dealing with the death of his father</li> </ul>
The Evil Villain		
The Freak	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Character often can't express himself to his girlfriends friends and family and as a result would receive looks, which indicate that they think he is weird.</li> <li>• Usage of r word against character</li> </ul>
The Bumbling Idiot	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Character makes a fool out of himself due to lack of social cues/skills – receive looks from others</li> <li>• Often says weird things</li> </ul>

The Miraculous Cure		
Other(s)	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Saved by a Woman (2)</b> – Character is able to be keep his right to be his daughter’s father with the help of three other women, Character’s girlfriend taught him many things which enabled him to become independent</li> </ul>

**Analysis: Film recommend for educational purposes? Why? Why not?**

Yes - 5

No - 0

All five films would be a good choice for educational purposes. All five films did a good job with accurately portraying the characteristics/symptoms of the disabilities. They also do a good job of representing how one’s disability can impact the lives around them and the relationships they have with others. One film shows the hardships that one has when proving his worth that he can be a good parent his daughter. Another film shows the romance side and how the disability can play a factor. Another film, shows the coping mechanism one has with grief and explains how everyone experiences it differently. Lastly, they all indicate that people with disabilities do not experience things in the same manner, that they each want to be treated with respect, seen simply as fellow humans and that they have something to contribute to society.

**Rate this film’s overall value related to promoting Accurate Awareness of Disability and EQUALITY for people with disabilities in the United States.**

All Films

No Value	Minimal Value	Moderate Value	Good Value	Significant Value
1	2	3	4	5
	1 Film		4 Films	

## Appendix #6: Master List of Films

### Movie List

#### Time Periods:

2000-2003

2003-2006

2006-2009

2009-2012

2012-2015

#### Psychiatric Disabilities

Name	Year	Type	Movie Type
What Lies Beneath	2000	lacunar amnesia	drama/horror/mystery
Me, Myself and Irene	2000	multiple personality anti-social personality	comedy
American Psycho	2000	disorder	drama/horror
Passion of Mind	2000	dissociative disorder	drama/mystery/romance
Prozac Nation	2001	depression	drama
Revolution No 9	2001	schizophrenia	thriller
Manic	2001	bipolar disorder	drama
A Beautiful Mind	2001	schizophrenia	biography/drama
* <b>Donnie Darko</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>schizophrenia</b>	<b>drama/sci-fi</b>
The Caveman's Valentine	2001	schizophrenia	crime/drama/music
About a Boy	2002	depression	comedy/drama/romance
Punch-Drunk Love	2002	schizophrenia	comedy/drama/romance
Spider	2002	schizophrenia	drama/mystery/thriller
The Hours	2002	depression/bipolar	drama
Matchstick Men	2003	OCD, anxiety disorder	comedy/crime/drama
Identity	2003	dissociative disorder	mystery/thriller
Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind	2004	lacunar amnesia	drama/romance/sci-fi
Secret Window	2004	dissociative disorder	mystery/thriller
Keane	2004	schizophrenia insomnia induced	drama/mystery/thriller
The Machinist	2004	psychogenic amnesia	drama/thriller
The Butterfly Effect	2004	depression	sci-fi/thriller
The Assassination of Richard Nixon	2004	depression	biography/drama
Stateside	2004	schizophrenia	drama/music/romance
The Village	2004	anxiety	drama/mystery/thriller

The Aviator	2004	OCD	biography/drama
Hide and Seek	2005	dissociative disorder	horror/mystery/ thriller
Wristcutters: A Love Story	2006	depression	comedy/drama/fantasy
* <b>Canvas</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>schizophrenia</b>	<b>drama</b>
Little Miss Sunshine	2006	depression	comedy/drama
Reign Over Me	2007	PTSD	drama
Savage Grace	2007	schizophrenia dissociative	drama
Numb	2007	disorder/depression	comedy/drama/romance
Michael Clayton	2007	bipolar disorder delusional psychotic	crime/drama/mystery
Lars and the Real Girl	2007	disorder	comedy/drama
The Uninvited	2009	dissociative disorder multiple personality	drama/horror/mystery
The Number 23	2007	disorder	drama/mystery/thriller
The Soloist	2009	schizophrenia	biography/drama/music
A Single Man	2009	depression	drama
* <b>Brothers</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>PTSD</b>	<b>drama/thriller/war</b>
Shrink	2009	depression	comedy/drama
Helen	2009	depression	drama
Precious	2009	PTSD	drama
The Informant!	2009	bipolar disorder	comedy/crime/drama
Mr. Nobody	2009	bipolar disorder	drama/fantasy/romance
Black Swan	2010	OCD, schizophrenia	drama/thriller
Peacock	2010	dissociative disorder	drama/thriller
Winter's Bone	2010	depression	drama
It's Kind of A Funny Story	2010	depression	comedy/drama/romance
Shutter Island	2010	psychogenic amnesia	mystery/thriller
The King's Speech	2010	social anxiety disorder	biography/drama
We Need to Talk about Kevin	2011	anti-social personality disorder	drama
The Beaver	2011	depression	drama
Melancholia	2011	depression	drama/sci-fi
The Roommate	2011	schizophrenia	drama/horror/thriller
Sucker Punch	2011	Sucker Punch	action/adventure/fantasy
Dream House	2011	dissociative disorder	drama/mystery/thriller
Silver Linings Playbook	2012	bipolar disorder	comedy/drama/romance
* <b>The Perks of Being a Wallflower</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>PTSD, depression</b>	<b>drama/romance</b>
Call Me Crazy: A Five film	2013	PTSD,	drama
Side Effects	2013	depression	crime/drama/thriller
* <b>American Sniper</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>PTSD</b>	<b>action/biography/drama</b>



Nightcrawler	2014	anti-social personality disorder	crime/thriller
Birdman	2014	dissociative disorder	comedy/drama
Cake	2014	depression	drama
The Voices	2014	schizophrenia	comedy/crime/horror
Gone Girl	2014	anti-social personality disorder	drama/mystery/thriller

Physical Disabilities	Year	Type	Movie Type
Miracle in Lane 2	2000	spina bifida and hydrocephalus	comedy/drama/family
Unbreakable	2000	osteogenesis imperfecta	drama/mystery/sci-fi
Men of Honor	2000	amputee	biography/drama
X-Men (series)	2000	paraplegia	action/adventure/sci-fi
How to Kill Your Neighbor's Dog	2000	Cerebral Palsy	comedy/drama
Pearl Harbor	2001	polio, mobility	action/drama/romance
Moulin Rouge!	2001	dwarfism, tuberculosis	drama/musical/romance
Door to Door	2002	Cerebral Palsy	drama
Oasis	2002	Cerebral Palsy/mental retardation	drama/romance
Open Hearts	2002	tetraplegia	drama/romance
* Frida	<b>2002</b>	<b>polio, spina bifida</b>	<b>biography/drama/romance</b>
Peter Pan	2003	amputee	adventure/family/fantasy
Finding Nemo	2003	physical, mental, PTSD	adventure/animation/comedy
The Station Agent	2003	Dwarfism	comedy/drama
Resident Evil: Apocalypse	2004	tetraplegia	action/horror/sci-fi
The Sea Inside	2004	quadriplegia	biography/drama/romance
Catch that Kid	2004	paraplegia	comedy/crime
Rory O'Shea Was Here	2004	cerebral palsy	comedy/drama
The Brooke Ellison Story	2004	quadriplegia	biography/drama
* Million Dollar Baby	<b>2004</b>	<b>quadriplegia</b>	<b>drama/sport</b>
Mindhunters	2004	paraplegia	crime/mystery/thriller
Murderball	2005	quadriplegia	documentary/sport
Warm Springs	2005	paraplegia, polio	biography/drama
The Diving Bell and the Butterfly	2007	quadriplegia	biography/drama
War Eagle, Arkansas	2007	cerebral palsy	drama
Quid Pro Quo	2008	paraplegia	drama/mystery/thriller
* Avatar	<b>2009</b>	<b>paraplegia</b>	<b>action/adventure/fantasy</b>

Beeswax	2009	paraplegia	comedy/drama
Love and Other Drugs	2010	Parkinson's disease	comedy/drama/romance
127 Hours	2010	amputee	adventure/biography/drama
Sympathy for Delicious	2010	paraplegia	drama
* <b>Soul Surfer</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>amputee</b>	<b>biography/drama/sport</b>
Musical Chairs	2011	paraplegia	drama/romance
The Intouchables	2011	quadriplegic	biography/comedy/drama
Rust and Bone	2012	amputee	drama/romance
The Sessions	2012	developmental	biography/comedy/drama
Morgan	2012	paraplegia	drama
The Crash Reel	2013	TBI	documentary/biography/sport
Sunlight Jr.	2013	paraplegia	drama
Margarita with a Straw	2014	cerebral palsy	drama
The Theory of Everything	2014	ALS	biography/drama/romance
* <b>Mad Max: Fury Road</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>amputee</b>	<b>action/adventure/sci-fi</b>
Enter the Faun	2015	cerebral palsy	documentary/drama

<b>Blind/Deaf/HOH</b> <b>(Sensory)</b>	Year	Type	Movie Type
Sound and Fury	2000	deaf	documentary
After Image	2001	deaf	drama/thriller
Read My Lips	2001	deaf	crime/drama/romance
* <b>Daredevil</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>blind</b>	<b>action/crime/fantasy</b>
Dear Frankie	2004	HOH	drama
Ray	2004	blind	biography/drama/music
Black	2005	deaf/blind	drama
The Family Stone	2005	deaf	comedy/drama/romance
The Quiet	2005	deaf-mute	drama/thriller
A Lot Like Love	2005	deaf (brother in film)	comedy/drama/romance
Fantastic Four	2005	blind	action/adventure/sci-fi
Babel	2006	deaf	drama
* <b>Copying Beethoven</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>HOH</b>	<b>biography/drama/music</b>
The Good Shepherd	2006	deaf (student he has affair with)	drama/history/thriller
* <b>Music Withn</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>hearing loss and tinnitus</b>	<b>biography/comedy/drama</b>
There Will Be Blood	2007	hearing loss	drama
Blindness	2008	blind	drama/mystery/sci-fi
Sweet Nothing in My Ear	2008	Deaf	drama
Bangkok Dangerous	2008	deaf	action/crime/thriller

Seven Pounds	2008	blind	drama
Orphan	2009	deaf	horror/mystery/thriller
Ice Castles	2010	blind	drama/romance/sport
Listen to Your Heart	2010	Deaf	drama/music/romance
The Hammer	2010	Deaf	biography/drama/sport
The Book of Eli	2010	blind	action/adventure/drama
Caroline of Virginia	2011	deaf	fantasy/romance
* <b>Beastly</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>blind</b>	<b>drama/fantasy/romance</b>
War Horse	2011	blind	drama/war
Blind Man	2012	blind	action/thriller
Salvo	2013	blind	crime/drama/romance
Lake Windfall	2013	deaf/hoh	comedy/drama/thriller
Avenged	2013	deaf	action/fantasy/horror
No Ordinary Hero: the SuperDeafy Movie	2013	deaf	comedy/drama/family
the Belier Family	2014	deaf	comedy/drama/music
Keep On Keepin On	2014	blind	documentary
* <b>Marie's Story</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>deaf/blind</b>	<b>biography</b>
The Fault in our Stars	2014	blind	drama/romance
Into the Woods	2014	blind (stepsisters)	adventure/fantasy/musical

### Developmental/Intellectual Disabilities

	Year	Type	Movie Type
Bless the Child	2000	Autism	crime/drama/horror
* <b>I Am Sam</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>developmental</b>	<b>drama</b>
Pumpkin	2002	developmental	comedy/drama/romance
Radio	2003	developmental conjoined	biography/drama/sport
Stuck on you	2003	twins/intellectual	comedy
Palindromes	2004	developmental	comedy/drama
* <b>House of D</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>intellectual disability</b>	<b>comedy/drama</b>
Mozart and the Whale	2005	Asperger's Syndrome	comedy/drama/romance
The Ringer	2005	developmental	comedy/sport
Snow Cake	2006	Autism	Drama/romance
My Brother	2006	developmental	drama
Notes on Scandal	2006	down syndrome	drama/thriller
Ben X	2007	Asperger's Syndrome	drama/thriller
Hot Fuzz	2007	intellectual disability	action/comedy
God's Ears	2008	Autism	drama
Killer Diller	2008	Autism	drama/music
Hanger	2009	down syndrome	comedy/horror

* <b>Adam</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>Asperger's Syndrome</b>	<b>Drama/romance</b>
Monica and David	2009	down syndrome	documentary
Temple Grandin	2010	Autism	biography/drama
The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo	2011	Asperger's Syndrome	crime/mystery/drama
Dear John	2010	autism (look at dad too)	drama/romance/drama
My Name Is Khan	2010	asperger's syndrome	drama/romance/thriller
OC87	2010	Asperger's Syndrome, OCD, depression	documentary/biography
Girlfriend	2010	down syndrome	drama
Dad's In Heaven with Nixon	2010	autism	documentary
Exodus Fall	2011	autism	drama
* <b>Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>Autism</b>	<b>adventure/drama/mystery</b>
Just Like U	2011	down syndrome	drama
The Importance of Tying Your Own Shoes	2011	intellectual disability	comedy/drama/music
Fly Away	2011	autism	drama
The Frog Princes	2011	down syndrome	documentary/drama
Café de Flore	2011	down syndrome	Drama/romance
the Story of Luke	2012	Autism	comedy/drama
White Frog	2012	asperger's syndrome	drama
A Mile in His Shoes	2012	autism	drama/family/sport
Any Day Now	2012	down syndrome	drama
Buddies	2012	down syndrome	adventure/comedy/drama
Stand Clear of the Closing Doors	2013	autism	drama
Gabrielle	2013	William's Syndrome	drama/romance/music
the Imitation Game	2014	asperger's syndrome	biography/drama/thriller
* <b>Where Hope Grows</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>down syndrome</b>	<b>drama</b>