

NAPCRG 52nd Annual Meeting — Abstracts of Completed Research 2024.

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Title

Film Representation and Stigma of Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities

Priority 1 (Research Category)

Social determinants and vulnerable populations

Presenters

Grace Bradford, Tyson Schwab, Sarah Hourston, MD, Alan Abbinanti, PharmD, BCACP, Kyle Jones, MD, FAAFP

Abstract

Context: Media representation of individuals with disabilities shapes public perception and understanding of disability. Use of diverse media, particularly film, largely contributes to societal stigma pertaining to different groups of people. Individuals with intellectual disability (ID) often experience negative stigma from society. This can have wide-ranging negative effects on both physical and mental health.

Objective: To evaluate the representation of characters with ID in film, and any changes over time.

Study Design: Cross-sectional analysis

Setting/Dataset: Cross-referenced the VideoHound and Iris Center film lists for main characters with ID. Sixteen films appeared on both lists. We used the standard rubric to evaluate these 16 films.

Population Studied: Individuals with ID in film

Intervention: Five reviewers used a standard rubric to evaluate demographics of, and attitudes toward, characters with ID.

Outcome Measures: Demographic characteristics, presence of abuse, use of actors with ID, change in the frequency of derogatory language like “retarded”, degree of character development, community development, relationship development, common stereotypes and archetypes, and perceived movie quality (based on IMBD ratings), before and after 1990.

Results: Analyzed 16 films produced between 1939 and 2019. All the characters with ID were white, non-Hispanic, 90.6% were male, and 75% experienced some form of abuse in their respective film. Films produced after 1990 were 2.27 times more likely to feature actors with ID ($p=0.31$). There was no

change in the frequency of the word “retarded” in movies before and after 1990, or in use of stereotypes or archetypes common to this population. There was no difference in the degree of development of the character, their community involvement, and their relationships in films before and after 1990. There was also no difference in perceived movie ratings from IMBD in the given timeframe.

Conclusion: The results from the rubric showed that there are not significant differences in the frequency of derogatory language, or the degree of character, community, or relationship development in newer versus older films featuring characters with ID. Additionally, it demonstrated a homogenous demographic profile among the characters represented. These patterns can shape public perception of, and stigma towards, individuals with ID, resulting in negative health outcomes.

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