The Misrepresentation of the Disability Media Narrative

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In today's culture, interactive media (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Blogs, and Vlogs) influence and communicate social norms and values, much more than traditional media like magazines, newspapers, television, and radio. PWDs (Persons with disabilities) use interactive media and interpersonal communication to explore as well as share their real personal narratives. Media can also reinforce ableism, stigma, and stereotypes, which those with disabilities endure. However,
the advent of interactive media has made it possible for those with disabilities to represent their narrative, rather than being a quiet minority represented by secondary sources. These secondary sources tend to have an ableist bias in terms of language, imagery, and characterization used to describe PWDs in a negative context. The context includes devaluation, misrepresentation, and under-representation of real disability narratives because media reinforces the social construction from an able-bodied perspective.

The effect is such that the disability narrative is often ignored and replaced by secondary narratives, which have negative stereotypes that misrepresent and underrepresent disability. For example, able-bodied actors impersonating a person with a disability may depict an inaccurate stereotype of that disability, rather than just having a PWD play the role. Movies and TV often present disability as being a defective part of society, such as victims, incompetent, violent, supercrip, inspirational porn, or not worthy of living. However, interactive media platforms have been slowly changing and revolutionizing how those with disabilities are portrayed as people, not deserving pity or remorse. Now, interactive media presents a platform for PWDs. There has also
been a push for more representation by actors with disabilities to play active roles in the film and TV industry.

Stigma and Ableism

Establishing how stigma and ableism affect PWDs is essential to understand how it also affects media through social constructs. Media tends to reinforce social norms, values, stigma, and labeling. What exactly is stigma, and how does it affect individuals with disabilities? Stigmatization of people with disabilities in society creates devaluation and ignorance, as well as social barriers for PWD. Stigma is described by Goffman (2013) as a discreditable attribute within a relationship. Attributes include abomination stigma (physical and visible body abnormalities), blemishes of character (i.e., drug or alcohol use, homosexuality, and suicidal attempts), behaviors deemed "deviant" by society, as well as tribal stigmatism (i.e., race, ethnicity, and religion) (p. 132). Disability is an attribute that "deviates" from the accepted norm of how an "able-body" (the dominant group of people) should look like and function. Functionality is based on the cultural norms and values of a
society. Stigma is a mark inherent to the person: a defective trait that marks the person as someone to be shunned or treated as inferior by "normals." The marked individual also accepts the mark of stigma. Goffman (2013) states that:

The central feature for the stigmatized individual's situation in life can now be stated. It is a question of what is often if vaguely, called 'acceptance.' Those who have dealings with him fail to accord him the respect and regard which the uncontaminated aspects of his social identity have led them to anticipate extending, and have led him to anticipate receiving; he echoes this denial by finding that some of his attributes warrant it. (p. 134)

Goffman (2013) asserts that stigmatization occurs when an individual accepts the inferiority that has been attributed to that individual. PWD do experience discrimination and are excluded and treated as inferior to able-bodied individuals. Ableism concedes this negativity related to disability. According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica (2013):
Ableism [is a] type of discrimination in which able-bodied individuals are viewed as normal and superior to those with a disability, resulting in prejudice toward the latter. The modern concept of ableism emerged in the 1960s and '70s when disability activists placed disability in a political context. Discrimination against disabled persons occurs in countries worldwide and may be reflected in individual, societal, institutional attitudes, norms, and the arrangement or dynamics of certain environments.

(paras. 1-2)

The exploration of ableism allows for a more focused, in-depth look at how perceived stereotypes and discrimination can devalue those with disabilities in society. Media plays a role in creating false narratives. People are greatly influenced by media and related disability stereotypes that are portrayed. According to Haller (2010), research shows that news media outlets have rarely offered any significant issues for the disability community. Social media has allowed freedom and control of media issues affecting disability through disability organizations, advocates,
and those with disabilities (p. 2). Traditional media is a secondary source for information that can provide misconceptions of disability, causing reinforcement of stigma. The person with a disability should have the freedom to express how to control their own life. Disability laws, such as the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the ADAAA of 2008, have increased accessibility opportunities. PWD now have more access to education and employment to stop ableism. Technology helps accommodate people with disabilities both for accessibility and for providing a voice for themselves. The internet allows all people, including those with disabilities, to create that voice, which had been missing in the mainstream media of the past. Disability is part of a person's identity. Misrepresentation of disability misrepresents a person's identity as well.

Models of Disability

There are many models of disability. The two main disability models discussed here are the medical model and the social model of disability. The medical and social models of disability are opposites of each other. The medical model is the biological
explanation of disability. Media often portray PWD as needing a cure to better their lives. According to the University of Leicester (n.d.), the "medical model of disability views disability as a 'problem' that belongs to the disabled individual. It is not seen as an issue to concern anyone other than the individual affected" (para. 2). Media has generally viewed disability as an obstacle to be overcome. Movies such as "Scent of a Woman" (Brest, 1992) or "Million Dollar Baby" (Eastwood, 2005) have depicted disability in a violent and devalued perspective where the PWD are powerless and should commit suicide because they are perceived as worthless to society due to their disability. There are television shows and sporting events like marathons that have portrayed people with disabilities as needing pity and a cure. Take, for instance, the Muscular Dystrophy Association (MDA) Labor Day Telethon. According to Clare (2001):

The charity model declares disability to be a tragedy, a misfortune that must be tempered or erased by generous giving...Jerry Lewis and his Labor Day telethon. He raises money by playing to pity and promising to find a cure. This money does not fund
wheelchairs, ramps, lift bars, or lawyers to file disability discrimination lawsuits, but research for a cure, for a repair of bodies seen as broken, for an end to disability. Lewis is strategically playing the cards of the medical model and the charity model. (360)

The charity and medical model are intertwined because disability is perceived as a weakness and creates a sense of burden that those with disabilities cannot participate in society. Jerry Lewis used pity to raise funds for a cure rather than provide accommodations for muscular dystrophy. People with disabilities do not need pity and patronization. These are just a couple of examples of a vast majority of media that has used the medical model of disability to perceive disability as the problem belonging to the PWD and not a concern for anyone else.

Conversely, the social model of disability views social constructs as barriers that cause disability. If a PWD has accommodations that provide accessibility, then those barriers are lifted, and the PWD can participate in society's activities. According to the University of Leicester (n.d.):
This model draws on the idea that it is a society that disables people, through designing everything to meet the needs of the majority of people who are not disabled. There is a recognition within the social model that there is a great deal that society can do to reduce, and ultimately remove, some of these disabling barriers, and that this task is the responsibility of society, rather than the disabled person. (para. 3)

For example, Closed Captioning on television shows allows those with hearing impairments an alternative option to receive communication. Misrepresentation can be minimized by having characters with disabilities, portrayed by actors with real disabilities. For instance, the show "Speechless" (Silveri, 2016-2019) included as part of the casting an actor with a real disability, Micah Fowler, who plays J.J. DiMeo. The actor portrays a teenager with non-verbal cerebral palsy (CP) and portrays a real person with a disability. Removing barriers and social attitudes allows actors, such as Micah Fowler, inclusivity, and accessibility to act as well as how a person lives with CP, rather than acting and simulating the role. Simulations can have stereotypical and false
representations of that given disability being played. Models of disability play essential roles with stigma, treatment, and representation of PWD in society.

Discrimination and Stereotypes of Incompetence in Media

Stigma can also affect how people perceive themselves to others, conforming to social norms to avoid exclusion. For example, a person with an "invisible disability" has the privilege of choosing whether to disclose their disability or not. For instance, a person with diabetes may choose not to disclose their disability to a potential employer in fear of being rejected for a job or position. Employers will try to find other ways of rejecting their application. PWDs are often patronized and looked upon as incompetent, without managing their lifestyles and health in media news topics. For instance, Bunker (2009) states that the FBI had discriminated against Jeff Kapche, who applied to become an FBI agent. Kapche was a detective in Texas who passed every test but was denied the job because of his diabetes and would need an insulin pump to work. Kapche filed a lawsuit for disability
discrimination in 2005. However, The FBI argued that Kapche did not have a disability because his blood sugar levels were well mitigated and therefore was not protected under the law. However, lawyers established that Kapche's claim under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 did protect him as a person with a disability. The FBI has appealed the decision, and it and is still waiting to be heard (paras. 1-6, 10). An outdated stereotype of disability further enhances ableism. Kapche is more than capable of doing the tasks at hand at the FBI with his disability. The first-person narrative is necessary to understand how the person feels and lives with a disability. In Kapche's case, his diabetes is well controlled using injections rather than an insulin pump. His story should be heard with the reason why he had filed a lawsuit with the FBI. The story would give a better understanding of him as an individual living with a disability and how he can do the job as well as anyone. Of course, secondary sources of information provided context to his professional experience, but the nuance and details of Kapche's story are missing.

False narratives of diabetes and stereotypes often occur. Other people may assume that they know your disability better than the person with the disability, causing an image of
incompetency for that person with the disability as they are being patronized. The FBI demeaned and patronized Kapche by telling him how to control his blood sugar levels. Again, there is a bar or expectation set for Kapche's disability for him to qualify for the position through the medical model of disability. Kapche is unable to serve under the FBI unless a specific treatment judged by the FBI hiring committee is used. If Kapche does not use their form of treatment for diabetes, he is "unfit" to serve the FBI. People are different and have developed a way to live with their disability with their care providers' help. Suggesting otherwise is ableist because the FBI suggests that their procedure and control of how Kapche takes his medication supersedes his experiences as a PWD. Kapche was stigmatized and excluded from being hired at the FBI because of his disability. Respecting the personal narratives of one's own life is extremely important in understanding that person, rather than judging a person as incompetent to live their life. Many negative stereotypes, such as those with diabetes being unhealthy, costly, and unproductive in the media, reinforce the negative stereotypes of those with diabetes, but these stereotypes are starting to change. A generalization about specific treatment for diabetes is one
example. Treatments for diabetes are specific for each person. Take, for instance, this scenario: Active people moving around may find problems with the pump because it is connected to them all the time to deliver insulin. A pump must always be worn and can be disengaged for a short while. Depending on the line of work being done, the pump may hinder your performance or even get damaged while you are working, causing a severe problem. There may be people like Kapche who can control their blood sugar levels perfectly without a pump. How can a government agency determine what type of treatment you should take on the job as though that person does not know how to control their own blood sugar levels? The article itself reflects on the case, but not so much on Kapche. That is where the self-narrative comes into play. Media broadcasts in society can have a substantial influence on the stigmatization of diabetes and other disabilities. The false narratives of disabilities create social barriers. There has been an increase in awareness of interactive social media that portrays different perceptions of diabetes. Disability is "intersectional" with other attributes, such as race and gender. According to Merriam-Webster (n.d.), intersectionality refers to the complex, cumulative way the effects
of multiple forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism, and classism) combine, overlap, and intersect, especially in the experiences of marginalized individuals or groups (para. 1). Different attributes that are stigmatized increase exclusion, especially for those with disabilities. Disability intertwines with all characteristics and can increase discrimination and exclusion for PWDs dependent upon those characteristics. The importance of disability self-narrative is more important than ever.

Interactive media, such as blogging, has broken the chain of misinformation and stigma based on third party sources that claim to represent media based on disability. According to Haller (2010), past research has shown that the news rarely presents any significant disability community issues. Blogging, microblogging, and social media (i.e., Blogger, Twitter, and Facebook) have allowed independence and control of media issues affecting disability through disability organizations, activists, and people with disabilities (p. 2). Traditional media can reinforce stigma among people with disabilities. Media, such as the news, is broadcast to everyone, and the "message" can have a significant impact on stigmatized labeling. Haller (2000b) states that media can influence the attitude of how disability is perceived. There is
a conflict of interest. A person with a disability may be pitied or deemed successful by "overcoming" a disability. Consequently, by overcoming a disability, expectations are established for a group of people (p. 283). Furthermore, as Haller (2000b) states:

The importance of the news media in defining people with disabilities in U.S. society cannot be overemphasized as news media images may create a societal barrier just as formidable as any of the educational, architectural, or communication barriers people with disabilities already face daily. (p. 284)

The news media and various outlets relaying the news give secondary information that may misinform the public about disabilities and those who have disabilities and the struggles that they go through in everyday life.
Portrayals of Disabilities in Media: Underrepresentation of Disability in Media

The underrepresentation and self-narratives of real people and actors with disabilities affect how they are also portrayed in traditional social media. For instance, according to GLAAD (2016), from 2015 to 2016, the percentage and number of series regulars with disabilities have dropped for the first time in two years. Less than 1% (0.9% or eight characters) will have a disability this season, compared to 1.4% of characters last year and 1% the year prior (p. 25). The average percentage from 2010-11 to 2015-16 came out to .95% based on the GLAAD diagram. People with disabilities represent the silent majority. The misrepresentation of disability may be attributed to the fact that there is an under-representation of PWDs on TV. Additionally, the actors who portray characters with disabilities do not have a disability. However, statistics gathered by GLAAD (2019) for 2019-2020, showed a slight increase of actors with disabilities obtaining roles in Hollywood. Disability lags far behind other attributes, such as race and gender represented on TV. In 2019, there was an increase to 2.1% (18 characters). In 2020 there was 3.1% (21
characters) of those with disabilities acting on television. (GLAAD, 2019, p. 7). Disability accounts for nearly 20% of the United States population. However, television programming has severely underrepresented the disability community in its programming. According to Robb (2019), there is little opportunity for actors with disabilities to obtain work in the industry and 95% of the actors playing a PWD were able-bodied. Historically in the Oscars, there were 61 nominations, 27 winners, and two actors with a disability (paras. 2, 6, 9). Media shares information and narratives, both real and fictional. If people have little exposure to the disability community, and if able-bodied actors play roles for those with disabilities, how can the public know how a person with a disability lives their life from someone who has no disability? There is severe under-representation and misrepresentation for PWDs portrayed in media that influences the public.

Despite the misrepresentation of disability in media, there are positive outlooks. There has been increasing awareness for positive and real representation for those with disabilities on TV and in film. According to Appelbaum (2020):
characters with disabilities in family films are depicted positively in the workplace. Characters with disabilities are twice as likely to be shown in management positions as other characters (20.0% compared with 10.7%). Also, these characters are more likely to be represented as hardworking, in STEM occupations, and as leaders than other characters. (para. 4)

It is not a problem if a person without a disability plays a role of a person who has a disability, as long as it is an accurate portrayal. However, only 5% of the actors have disabilities causing inequality for the disability community. Perceptions of disability in the media and its representation can impact how people feel and base their attitudes towards disability. A study by Farnall and Smith (1999) showed that people exposed to positive images of those with disabilities were more likely to have a more positive perception of people with disabilities and an increased perception of discrimination. The study showed that media content with disabilities could link to perceptions and beliefs about disabilities. The TV and film industry is changing. There are TV shows that are creating awareness and realism for different
types of disabilities. For example, Ambler (2020) explains that shows such as "Glee" with actress Lauren Potter who plays Becky Jackson, demonstrates that a person does not have to be defined by their disability. Lauren Potter has Down syndrome, but the show depicts her as doing everything that everyone else does. The disability is rarely spoken about in the show. "Breaking Bad" is another TV show with actor R.J. Mitte, who plays Walter White Jr. and has cerebral palsy (CP). Mitte is the celebrity ambassador for United Cerebral Palsy, and uses the show to create awareness for CP. He has also advocated for more actors with disabilities to star in television shows and films. In Coronation Street, Cherylee Houston, who plays Izzy Armstrong, depicts the reality of what it is like to live with Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome, a rare connective tissue disorder. While the show does not focus on her disability, it does bring attention to the chronic pain and problems assisting her in prison. Cherylee Houston is a wheelchair user who accurately portrays the role and has created awareness for this condition. She has also advocated for more accessibility in the United Kingdom for wheelchair users (Ambler, 2020, paras. 2-4). The more accurate portrayal of those with disabilities and the inclusiveness of actors with disabilities is creating more diversity
in TV and film. The audience will have a better understanding of people with disabilities and dispelling many myths of disability.

**Negative Portrayal of Disability in Media: Victimization, Violence, and Life Not Worth Living**

Depictions of false narratives that people with disabilities are portrayed as victims, suicidal and violent, and people not worth living have been in film and television history. Movies from the early 20th century, such as the "Black Stork," made in 1917, showed babies with disabilities as lives not worthy of living. During the eugenics era in the United States, many PWDs were sterilized, and babies having disabilities were killed. PWDs have been oppressed through violence and victims of violence. Black (2003) argues that eugenicists believed in the "painless killing" of people deemed unworthy of living. Dr. Haiseldan was the chief of staff at the German American Hospital in Chicago in 1915. He was also a believer that eugenics could help prevent suffering and passing on traits of unfit individuals by killing the newborn. For example, Anna Bollinger was pregnant, and Doctor Haiseldan was
her consulting physician. Doctor Haiselden and other doctors oversaw many patients who promoted the eugenics initiative. Anna Bollinger's newborn had suffered from deformations and other complications. Dr. Haiselden decided the baby was not worth saving and denied treatment, allowing the baby to die. The decision to deny treatment to Anne Bollinger's baby became a eugenics media spectacle, because shortly after, there was an editorial article by Davenport in *The Independent* that asked, "Was the Doctor right?" Eugenics supporters such as editor Davenport argued for and supported Dr. Haiselden's justification for the killings. (Black, 2003, p. 252) The eugenics era sought to sterilize and rid society of unwanted individuals, PWDs, which was reinforced by the media seeking to better society to stop suffering from disabilities. Not much is known afterward about Anne Bollinger. She requested an interview with the *Independent Magazine*, where she told her story. Hosman (2015) states that Dr. Haiselden was later dismissed from the Chicago Medical Society on March 14, 1916, for trade union issues. However, he continued to work at the German American Hospital. (Hosman, 2015). Eugenics was seen as the lesser of two evils. The choices were to allow a person to suffer because of the lack of treatments
available for those with disabilities or avoid the suffering by terminating the baby with a "foreseen" disability, which Dr. Haiselden used as an excuse to continue practicing eugenics. Black (2003) contends that Dr. Haiselden starred in a movie called "The Black Stork," written by Jack Lait in 1917. National propaganda surrounded the film. The movie was about a fictional story where Dr. Haiselden counsels a couple who were eugenically incompatible. However, the couple has a baby with a disability. The child ascends into Jesus Christ's arms. Propaganda for eugenics was socially acceptable and allowed advertisements such as those quoted by Swiss Auguste Forel stating that "The law of heredity winds like a red thread through the family history of every criminal, of every person with epilepsy, eccentric and insane person. Shall we sit still..., without applying the remedy?" Another advertisement stated in 1917 to "Kill Defectives, Save the Nation and See 'The Black Stork' played in theaters for another decade" (Black, 2003, pp. 257-258). The movie itself is a dark film where eugenics and a baby's death were acceptable based on pseudo-science. Babies were victims where disability determined whether they died, and the murder of innocent babies was allowed. Many mothers were sterilized soon after giving birth to
babies with disabilities to ensure that they would no longer reproduce. Disability was considered a strain on society that needed to be fixed.

Unfortunately, the narrative continues in the 21st century with the advent of assisted suicide with disabilities in the film industry. Depictions of people with mobile disabilities are perceived as a death sentence. In 2005, Eastwood’s "Million Dollar Baby" presented a message of euthanasia for people with disabilities. In "Million Dollar Baby," Maggie Fitzgerald, the protagonist in the film, grew up poor, and her mother is on welfare. Maggie becomes a successful boxer under manager Frankie, played by Clint Eastwood, lives her dream, and fights her way out of poverty. Then in a blink of an eye, during a boxing match, she becomes paralyzed. Maggie cannot live with the thought that she would never be able to travel or box again. The film presents death as a better alternative to disability. At the end of the film, Frankie injects medicine that puts Maggie to sleep and then turns off her ventilator, killing her. Frankie then leaves the hospital after assisted suicide.

The film reinforces the stereotypes of a life not worth living. Frankie is presented as a hero without any repercussions after he
committed assisted suicide. The movie represents the idea that it is okay to kill someone if a life-changing experience occurs. Perhaps, Frankie could have supported Maggie through her transition as a person with a disability. Her condition is amplified because she attempted to achieve society’s ideal body type to beat poverty by boxing. This movie supports ableism, and there is a medical model view on disability attributed to it. The image of a person’s life is over if they have a disability. It reinforces stereotypes of people with disabilities and reinforces the image of the ideal body persona. According to Schwartz, et al. (2005):

Images are very powerful and can help create and affirm a certain reality in the minds of perceivers. Where Maggie Fitzgerald was once an admirable and admired fighter, she is now impaired, broken, and unfixable. Not only do these images reaffirm existing stereotypes, but the theme of disability as worse than death also is never fully explored by the characters or Eastwood himself. In addition, the fact that many movie reviewers were reluctant to "spoil" the ending has also served to discourage rigorous dialogue about the negative way in
which disability is portrayed in this film. It's time Hollywood did better.

(para. 22)

In this movie, it is better to be dead than have a disability. It is an ableist perception in society that makes disability appear as a life-ending event without examining other possibilities that exist for that person. It is a tremendous life-altering experience for Maggie going from poverty to success. Ironically, her personal feelings, living in poverty, and the environment she lived in did not have the same extreme influence as having a disability. Maggie believed that her disability would cause an intersectional change between poverty and being female. PWDs are portrayed as weak and intolerable in society.

Women with disabilities are often portrayed as dependent and weak, while men are portrayed in a revived "masculinity." The film, "Scent of a Woman" also portrays a hyper-masculinity in males with disabilities. In "Scent of a Woman," the character Colonel Slade, played by Al Pacino, is blind and finds himself lost and without purpose. Subsequently, these traits affect the character and his personal identity. Colonel Slade is prone to
violence, aggressiveness, and hyper-masculinity. He contemplates committing suicide, but Charlie, played by Chris O'Donnell, saves his life. Colonel Slade can dance the tango, drive a car, and even defends Charlie during a school meeting where Charlie was about to be expelled for not "snitching." The Colonel becomes Charles's mentor with a sense of purpose, and his "manhood" is restored. Through an ableist lens, Colonel Slade reclaims his masculinity and self-worth through violence and aggressiveness but also has a purpose in helping Charlie become a "man."

The portrayal of those with disabilities is slowly changing, but some shows are still using an ableist lens for disability. The importance of self-narratives and pushing for Hollywood to hire more actors with disabilities to step forward and play positive roles is more important than ever towards diversity and inclusiveness. Filmmakers wishing to film about an actual disability must separate themselves from the media environment and film independently. Ironically, the disability community must segregate themselves from Hollywood's ableist lens to get the true message of disability across. PWDs should be represented by people with disabilities, not with a representative approach to
disability that gives a false image. As films evolve, they still carry the stigma of disability.

**Negative Portrayal of Disability in Media: Inspirational Porn and Hero Worship**

Ideal body image and disability are socially constructed. "Supercrip," as Haller (2000a) explains:

> Is false power. People with disabilities are put on pedestals because of their inspirational quality in doing ordinary things, which is a patronizing way to laud people imbued with charity. Presenting someone as inspirational is just another way of pitying them for the 'tragedy of their fate.' (para. 24)

The Supercrip image is exactly as the name applies a person in a society that has attempted to meet the ideal socially constructed image. Of course, this falls far short of the "norm" and deals further damage to people with disabilities' identity. The "supercrip" image reinforced by media, as Haller (2000a) states,
"creates a false -- and damaging -- sense of the "positive" (para. 6). The socially constructed image of disability sets the standard for PWDs. Giving an award for being exceptional when the person receiving that award does that same activity as many other people with or without a disability, is patronizing. Movies and TV shows such as "Daredevil" have displayed PWDs as superhuman, as in this case, with a superhero that is blind. Daredevil does martial arts and is also a lawyer. While this is very achievable for someone who is blind, it is socially constructed and perceived under the ableist lens in which the character is trying to overcome deficits. PWDs that do regular activities with no problem are seen as supercrips.

The supercrip ideal image of how a PWD should be perceived creates a diminishing effect for one PWD who is also judged as inferior to another PWD, which segregates the disability community and furthers stigma and discrimination. PWDs are objectified. As a result, objectification creates a devaluing effect on the disability community. In a TedTalk conference, Young (2014) explains that in our society, there are those without disabilities that see PWDs as having a bad thing, being special, inspirational, or being exceptional. A person with a
disability is no different from anyone else. People with disabilities adapt and live. Young (2014) defines the term inspirational porn as images of people with disabilities being objectified (bodies) who have disabilities to benefit non-disabled people to "inspire" them to do better. A person without a disability may view the life of a person with a disability as a life that is worse to live. Inspirational porn is analogous to porn, where people are objectified using sex and their bodies to generate money. Inspirational porn objectifies disability for inspiration and money as well. Consequently, PWDs are devalued in society. Take, for instance, Olympic athlete Oscar Pistorius. Oscar Pistorius can run faster than a human because of his prosthetics. A new ideal image is created about how a person with mobile disabilities is perceived through the supercrip phenomena. The same is true for the "Daredevil" film, where Matt Murdock, played by Ben Affleck, becomes blind at the age of 12. As previously mentioned, he becomes a martial arts expert and lawyer. He also develops superhuman senses and radar location detection. The movie creates a fictional character that must evolve with "powers" to gain strength to achieve his objectives. Daredevil is a 'supercrip.'
Recommendations

Social interactive media and technology have currently allowed people with disabilities to communicate their ideas and frustrations with society, creating an independent state of expression for those with disabilities. The internet and social media have become an ally against ignorance. Computers and tablets can transcribe, caption, convert speech to text, screen read, and even translate languages. Technology has advanced to the point where language and communication barriers are being broken down. Furthermore, the internet and interactive social media create an inclusive environment that is not available in the "real world." According to Krotoski (2011):

[People with disabilities] can interact in a place where there are no barriers to access that single them out. The disembodied nature of online interaction gave them a sense of control over how they were perceived and transformed the power dynamics that exist offline when a disability is overt...the web was described as an empowering platform, giving the participants the sense
that they were in charge of their own destinies. (paras. 5-6)

The internet allows for independent thinking and eradicates stigma. Online learning platforms for colleges such as Canvas and Blackboard allow for universal access for everyone, including PWDs. Facebook and Instagram provide social interaction online. People can share thoughts, engage in debates, and even become romantically involved with a person online without knowing if they are PWDs. According to Dobbs (2009), "Taking the PR [Public Relations] potential to its logical conclusion, Anderson thinks Facebook offers the whole disability community a chance to be seen more clearly by the larger culture. 'It allows a visibility that could have tremendous effects in terms of raising the status of people with disabilities,' she says. 'It makes us visible in a way that wasn't available before.'...Almost everyone describes Facebook as a way to mitigate isolation" (paras. 43-44). Facebook and online classrooms provide an inclusive environment for people with disabilities by offering various technologies at their disposal without leaving their homes to get an education or even office work.
Traditional media reinforces social stigma by using people's feeling to evoke sympathy upon those with disabilities, rather than creating an inclusive environment that eliminates oppression and opening opportunities for people with disabilities, creating a concrete ceiling for opportunities for people with disabilities. Language and how we address those with disabilities have importance on perception. According to Thoreau (2006), stereotypical views are encoded in our society from images and society. The medium in which language is processed is important as well. Audiences then use the information and may undermine the author's intended meaning. Language, culture, and understanding exist at the same time to create meaning (pp. 445-446). Considering PWDs have limited access to media, the message portrayed about disability is distorted. Nevertheless, there are ways to provide accessibility, starting with creating more accessible sites and social media use. According to Smith (2019), "No platform will be 100% accessible, but there are ways to improve accessibility. Use plain language that is easy for screen readers, people-first language, which is a respectful way to speak with those with disabilities, include descriptive captioning in videos and pictures, limit emoji use, use
Camel case for hashtags, don't imbed text in images, and shorten links" (paras. 3-10). Creating a universally designed setting with all these components will help to increase accessibility. Allow those with disabilities to speak for them and ask how they would like to be addressed. Blogs such as "That crazy crippled chick" are written by Cara Liebowitz, who has Cerebral Palsy. Liebowitz has a very outspoken and unapologetic approach to life as a PWD with mobile impairments. In one post, Liebowitz discusses her use of the word "crippled" to describe herself and justify why she uses the term to change the stigma related to that word. Liebowitz feels language is not controlled by the "privileged," hence the constant use of the word crippled to describe herself and change the negativity behind the word, so it will not be used as a derogatory term towards those with CP. Liebowitz (2014) states, "if you consider yourself an ally to me, to my community, you will not tell me what language I can use to refer to myself. If you consider yourself an ally, and if you police my language, you are not an ally. You are doing it wrong. For all those who try to tell me what I can call myself, remember that I wear my identity like a neon badge of honor" (para 5-6). Liebowitz has a no-nonsense approach to CP and other disabilities. She dispels
stereotypes and proudly shares her experiences as a person with CP.

Do not assume that a person with a cognitive or developmental disability cannot communicate or understand you. PWDs can advocate and represent themselves to have their voices heard. Awareness has just begun in Hollywood, but more needs to be done. More actors with disabilities need to fill the role of the disability community. PWDs live with a disability and understand disability better than anyone. Advocating for more representation in Hollywood for accurate disability representation is necessary to stop the stigmatization of disability. Awareness, participation, inclusiveness, and accurate representations of those with disabilities are essential in all media forms.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the media plays a vital role in shaping how society views PWDs. Ableism has distorted the perspective of disability in media due to both under-representation and misrepresentation of PWDs. Most able-bodied people are still
representing narratives of the disability community. The media examples I presented are a small fraction of what is out there in the social media world. However, there are libraries of media that have negative portrayals of PWDs, reinforcing negative stereotypes. Media reinforces and shapes the norms and values of society. There is a lack of direct representation of PWDs and there are many stereotypes of the disability community. Allowing direct and real narratives will allow those with disabilities to be better represented without violence, the not worth life living narrative, pity and charity, inspirational porn, the supercrip narrative, and hero worship that objectify the bodies of the disability. Bringing awareness and change can revolutionize the way media presents disability in society. The disability community’s inconsistency and diversity are essential in changing the way PWDs are portrayed in traditional media. Interactive social media has created a platform for PWDs to use their voice in the community, helping to quell false stereotypes and project the real narrative of disability. The increase of awareness, inclusiveness, understanding, and diversity in all media forms can provide social inclusion and acceptance into society. Social interactive platforms have allowed for self-
narratives to share with the public. Disability in the media must be reinvented with self-narratives to share everyday life experiences, have an accurate perspective, and eliminate further stereotypes. PWDs need to have direct interactions in the media and consulted when a disability narrative will be used. The media provides the tool people can use to change the ableist perspective in disability representation. PWDs can access the world and communicate their ideas freely through the disability perspective, rather than being dependent on mainstream media that distorts the image of PWDs through the medical model of disability perspective. Social interactive media helps to spread awareness to stop discrimination. Now it is time to change traditional media’s perspective to represent those with disabilities accurately in current and future media.

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