

An analysis of a cultural or media representation of disabled people disability

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When it comes to disability, society is often oblivious to the struggle many people face. Despite the progression and modernisation disabled people's private lives have undergone in the aftermath of political and medical progress, there has been no evolution of their public image (Riley, 2005). This is undoubtedly been a result of the misrepresentation of disability in the media, regardless of the fact as many as one in every five people in the world is disabled (Riley, 2005). There are few examples of disability being represented in various forms of media, using television as an example far too many productions promote stereotypes and myths that society contentedly accept, perhaps as a result of lack of education. It is a television programme that I am going to base my analysis on, looking at how disability becomes an object of pity and highlighting promotion of stereotyping.

Little House on the Prairie is an American television series based on the 1932 book of the same name by Laura Ingalls Wilder. I will be examining the 1974 episode Town Girl-Country Party. This Particular episode focuses on a young disabled girl, Olga, who struggles to "fit in" with the rest of the children because of her impairment; one leg is shorter than the other. Before the audience know exactly why Olga is excluded from the group, the director uses certain techniques to highlight that Olga is "different" and in doing so reinforces common stereotypes. In the scene where Olga is at home, the house is very dimly lit, this is a vast contrast to the scene prior, where another house is very brightly lit and colourful.

Dark lighting gives the audience a sense of depression, supporting the common impression that disabled people live sad and miserable lives, which we know is not the case. When focusing on Olga's family, the camera angle <https://assignbuster.com/an-analysis-of-a-cultural-or-media-representation-of-disabled-peopledisability/>

is different to that of the scenes of the other family. The other family scenes, as well as being set in a brightly lit and colourfully decorated room, are shot with a panned out camera angle, this way the whole family can be seen at once, creating the sense of warmth and a vision of a close loving family. In comparison, a similar scene shot in Olga's home is worlds apart from this vision. The camera focuses close up, only on the character that is speaking; this presents an image of individuality and not a sense of group unity.

Again this reinforces a common perception, disabled people are lonely and do not like being included. These techniques used by the director are an obvious attempt to present Olga as lonely and excluded, quiet and different from the rest of the children, Three of which in particular, lonely, excluded and different are the major, common stereotypes that people associate to disabled people. It is not necessary for the director to present Olga in this way. Maybe he does so because the majority of society recognises these stereotypes and can therefore identify Olga as being disabled. This still does not resolve the issue of why so many disabled people are stereotyped; this is just one more example of typecasting in a area of underrepresentation.

It is quite astonishing that a story set in the 1800's presents stereotypes that are still associated with today. Even though the models of disability, both medical and social, were not established at this period. It is clear by the thoughts and actions of the other characters that the medical model would very much be the one adopted at that period in time. The medical model is one rooted in an undue emphasis on clinical diagnosis, the very nature of which is destined to lead to a partial and inhibiting view of the disabled

individual (Shakespeare, 1998), much like Olga's father, who believes that her legs are the disability. We know this because he says it and as a result he actively discourages her from socialising. Social model thinking mandates barrier removal, independent living and other responses to social oppression, (Davis, 1997).

It is a neighbour that looks at Olga's impairment and believes that it is not the disabling factor, but society is; he therefore decides he is going to make her a platform shoe to help her. This is an early form of social model thinking, looking at how society should not be excluding people with impairment. This representation of disability is differs slightly from others in films and fiction stories because it touches on the struggle of the impaired person and looks at how adaptations can promote inclusion, other than that there is the typical, common stereotyping that occurs in most productions. Stereotyping in the media most likely occurs because the general public are not aware of the issues surrounding disability so might not recognise disability if presented in its " real" form. Bibliography Davis, L. (1997).

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