

Margaret Connolly

Dr. Vaughn and Dr. Crowell

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Shifting Disability Representation and Portrayal in Movies and Television

1. Introduction

Representation in the media is important. Most people would agree that watching a character one can relate to or seeing a character of one's ethnicity, sexual orientation or beliefs on screen can have positive effects on one's self-esteem. It can help someone feel seen and valued as a member of society. However, lack of representation, or accurate representation, can have the opposite effect; rarely seeing people who look like oneself in media can make someone feel unimportant or unaccepted in society. This is the experience of many Americans with disabilities. In this research paper, a detailed analysis of this societal issue will be conducted, and it will be explained why, based on several scholarly articles, movie and television producers need to make a reasonable effort to cast actors with disabilities for disabled roles.

Although disability representation needs improvement in all media platforms, this paper will be focusing specifically on television shows and movies, in order to keep the research focused. Furthermore, it will be taking a look at all types of disability. For the purposes of this paper, the Merriam Webster definition of disability will be used, which is "any physical, mental, cognitive, or developmental condition that impairs, interferes with, or limits a person's ability to engage in certain tasks or actions or participate in typical daily activities and interactions."

(Dictionary by Merriam-Webster) Although a specific type of disability could have been

explored, looking at all types of disability will allow for a greater range of film and TV productions to be analyzed.

When referring to individuals with disabilities, both person-first and identity-first or disability-first language will be used, as preferred language usage depends on the disability, situation, and person. Person-first language emphasizes the person being addressed or referred to before their disability. For example, “a girl on the autism spectrum.” On the other hand, identity first language puts the disability in front of the description. For example, “an autistic girl.” Person-first language may seem like the most respectful choice at first glance, because it implies that the disability someone has does not define their identity. However, many people with disabilities prefer disability-first language because they strongly identify with their disability, and feel it is an important part of them that should not be pushed to the side. It is important to note that many people don’t feel that their disability limits them in any way, and even choose to use words like neuroatypical, exceptional, or differently-abled. The reason behind this is that they see their difference as something positive, and feel that the words impaired, disabled, or special needs have negative connotations. At the end of the day, it is best to respectfully ask each individual what kind of language they prefer.

This paper will first take a look at the history of disability representation and portrayals in movies and television, and discuss the positive shift we are seeing in recent years. Next, it will explain why there needs to be a change in the way characters with disabilities are portrayed, and explain the most logical way to do this. Afterwards, it will explore the depiction of disability in recent television shows and movies, such as Atypical, The Last of Us, Sex Education, Dahmer-Monster: The Jeffrey Dahmer Story, and Sia’s film, Music. Following, it will address some possible objections to this claim, and explain why the argument that disabled actors should

be the ones playing characters with disabilities is the most moral conclusion for this issue. Finally, it will give some ways that readers can help to better disability representation and portrayals in movies and TV, and continue to become educated on this controversial topic.

2. History of Disability Representation in Television and Movies

Movies and television shows are an important aspect of pop culture because they have the unique ability to capture what is valued by society. Disability inclusion in this media is necessary in order to improve disability representation in general. Although movies and television have seen a positive shift recently in terms of disability inclusion, people with disabilities were excluded from these media platforms for too long. This is discussed in a study conducted in 2016 that looked at the impact of disability in advertising. The author, Alexandria Parsons, writes, “One of the most damaging factors related to prejudice is invisibility, perpetuated by the mass media through under-representation. Individuals with disability are largely ignored in mainstream advertising and other forms of media, which only serves to further isolate and stigmatize this group.” (Parsons) This author is expressing that people with disabilities should not feel isolated or unseen, as they are valuable members of society.

For years, even if characters with disabilities were included in TV and movies, they were not always represented in a positive light. For example, there is a long history of writers using disabled characters in horror movies. This phenomenon is looked at in an article by Melinda Hall that explores the negative effects of the use of disability in the horror genre. The author writes, “In horror, the threats that disability is thought to pose to able-bodied people, communities, and the future are dramatized and able-bodied viewers are soothed by way of narrative resolution and the justification of one’s prejudices.” (Hall) One of the biggest problems with this is that disabilities are only included as a source of invoking fear in other characters or viewers.

Similarly, disabled characters are often included in movies for the sole purpose of building other characters. By including a character with a disability, this gives the writers an opportunity to construct a character through the way that character reacts to disability. For example, a character that the writer wants the audience to like may show pity to a character with a disability. Although it is still good that disabled characters are being included in productions, people with disabilities have their own stories that should be told, and they should be included despite other characters.

In recent years, American society has seen a lot more productions that feature disabled people in leading roles. However, this comes with its own issues. These stories tend to portray these characters' disabilities as tragedies that ruin the characters' lives. Furthermore, many of these characters' stories follow their journey to "overcome" their disability. A 2020 article about positive representations of disabilities in recent media talks about this idea. Tim Basselin writes, "Hence, contrary to the medical/individual model, which makes people with disabilities desire to become nondisabled, focusing on the beneficial aspects of such a life." (Basselin) By having characters spend a whole movie or TV show trying to fight or overcome their disability rather than embrace it, this contributes to a negative narrative about what it's like living with a disability.

Disabilities should not just be pitied. Differences deserve to be seen and accepted, or even celebrated in certain situations. For example, many people on the autism spectrum see their autism as something positive in their life. Thankfully, it seems like there is a major turning point coming soon for disability representation in media. Many shows and movies are making better efforts to be inclusive, and those that aren't are receiving more criticism. The article discussed in the previous paragraph shares, "An affirmative view of disability has emerged, which puts a stress on the experience of people with disabilities and considers them in terms of their abilities

rather than their limitations.” (Basselin) It is so important that producers focus on what those with disabilities are capable of, and how they are similar to able-bodied people, because this will help shift the way society perceives disabilities.

3. Why should we improve disability Representation?

Following the completion of thorough research, it can be concluded that there is a need for change in terms of disability representation in films and television. Although society has seen some positive change in recent years, it needs to be happening quicker and on a larger scale. The first reason for this is that often, portrayals of disability further exacerbate harmful stereotypes and negative views surrounding people with disabilities. An article that describes how disability stereotypes are exacerbated by media looked at a study that was inspired because, “portrayals of disability have for long been entirely absent from all forms of media, and those that do exist are most likely to be heavily stereotyped.” (Sharma) Although it is great for characters with disabilities to be featured on screen, many of these characters are written poorly. It is clear these writers did not take the time to thoroughly research that particular disability, or consult with individuals living with that disability. Stereotypes can feed into a negative narrative about disabled people, and this is the exact thing producers need to be aiming to combat, rather than contribute to. Another reason it can be argued that disability representation in movies and television needs to see a change is that there are not enough characters written with disabilities. According to an article that describes how people with disabilities are extremely underrepresented in media, “people with disabilities are still among the most underrepresented groups in Hollywood.” (“People With Disabilities”) This is demonstrated by statistics from a few years ago: “in 2019 just 2.3% of all speaking characters in the 100 top-grossing US films were depicted with a disability.” (“People with Disabilities”) This is despite the fact that as of 2018,

12.6 % of the United States population was living with a disability (“People with Disabilities) It is sad that the number of characters with disabilities in popular media is not anywhere close to the amount of individuals who actually have those disabilities. Increasing the number of disabled characters in television and movies will make these portrayals more accurate and inclusive. One final reason why there needs to be a shift in disability representation is that people with disabilities should be able to watch characters they can relate to and connect with. There is a universal desire to feel represented in the media one consumes because it helps individuals to feel good about themselves. According to an article that explains that it is important to one’s confidence and mental well being to see characters that look like them on television, “growing up and never seeing yourself represented on television or in advertising can massively shape how you view yourself,” (Prudence) The point this article was making is that not being represented can have harmful impacts on a person’s self esteem. On the contrary, being represented can reinforce a positive self image. It is crucial that young people in this country who have disabilities are able to see themselves represented, especially in a positive light, on the big screen. This will ensure that these people feel capable and seen in American society.

4. What is the best way to improve disability representation?

Now that it has been established that there is a need for change in terms of disability representation, the best way to create this positive change will be discussed. Making a fair attempt to cast individuals with disabilities, rather than able-bodied actors, to play disabled people, is the best strategy to improve disability representation in film and television. The first reason for this is that if producers are including disability in their productions, people with these disabilities should benefit. One article written by Jay Dolmage helps to explain why people with disabilities are not benefiting by disability inclusion in media. A thought-provoking line from

this article reads, “Hollywood loves movies about disability. But neither Hollywood nor the Academy Awards seem to really like disabled people. Why else would disabled characters show up in Oscar nominations year after year, yet with no disabled people in these roles.” (Dolmage) It is unfair that people with these disabilities have to watch as actors are awarded for portraying *their* disability, as they receive nothing in return. The goal of disability inclusion in Hollywood should be to highlight disabled experiences and amplify the voices of those with disabilities.

The second reason producers should be making a reasonable effort to cast individuals with disabilities for these roles is that by hiring able-bodied actors, it is creating missed opportunities for disabled actors. Actors with disabilities are already so limited in terms of jobs, why should Hollywood give the few opportunities they have away to other actors? According to an article by Lynn Elber that discusses the limited acting opportunities for disabled actors, “more than a third of performers with disabilities reported facing discrimination in the workplace, either being refused an audition or not being cast for a role because of their disability.” (Elber) This article shows that actors who have disabilities struggle to find work as actors. We should save roles that portray disability for these actors.

Another reason that producers need to cast disabled actors for disabled roles is that having able-bodied actors portray disabilities can be inaccurate and insensitive. One article shares that there is actually a term for this, called “crippling up” (Stephens) Even if actors are “convincing” or “sympathetic,” many people in the disabled community are still offended because they do not want sympathy, they want equality. There can also be mocking undertones to some of these portrayals. Lastly, including more actors with disabilities will positively affect the way society views disabilities. Seeing characters on the big screen will show people that people with disabilities are capable of so much, and that they are simply people. They are not just freaks

or someone to be afraid of. Therefore, it can be concluded that producers need to make a reasonable effort to cast disabled actors for disabled roles.

6. Analysis of productions that have featured disabled characters:

One recent Netflix original show that features a disabled character is called Atypical. Created by Robia Rashid, Atypical follows the journey of Sam Gardner, an American teenager on the autism spectrum. This show is empowering for the disabled community because, as Tim Basselin shared in his article, “People with disabilities are the main characters and not only the object of others’ generosity or pity, nor simply the source of others’ inspiration” (Basselin) Having a main character with autism raises so much awareness for the disorder. The show allows the viewer to see the world through Sam’s perspective by using his narrative and drawings. This gives the viewer an opportunity to resonate with Sam. In addition, Sam goes through a self-discovery journey like in other coming of age stories without trying to “overcome” his disability. He does things that any other teenager would do, such as getting a girlfriend, having sexual experiences, dealing with friend drama, and attending college. This contributes to a more positive narrative of autism and focuses on Sam’s accomplishments and capabilities, rather than his limitations. This is a great thing because able-bodied people will be able to relate to a character with a disability.

Still, the show received criticism because the actor who plays Sam is not on the spectrum. In addition, there are some aspects of living with autism that the show did not capture accurately. For example, Sam’s character was often late to things because he got distracted. Yet, people with autism are known for being very punctual, as one of the general characteristics of autism is needing a strict routine or schedule. Although the show definitely missed in some areas and may not resonate with everyone, what it did do a really great job of is listening to the disabled

community. After receiving criticism from the Autism community following the airing of season one in 2017, the show made a clear effort to do better. They hired David Finch, who is on the spectrum, to consult for the show. In addition, according to Basselin, “nearly a dozen actors with autism were cast for the upcoming seasons.” (Basselin) Some of these actors were even cast to play neurotypicals. Listening to what the disability community has to offer is so important in being able to capture disabilities in an accurate and respectful way.

A recently released series that features a character with a physical disability is The Last of Us. This 2023 HBO adaptation of a popular video game follows the journey of two characters living in a post-apocalyptic world. On their journey, they meet Sam Burrell, a young boy who is deaf and communicates with his older brother through American Sign Language. Craig Mazin, the creator of the series, chose to make Sam’s character deaf in the television adaptation. In the show’s official podcast, he admits that finding the perfect actor for this role was not easy. He says, “he has to be deaf, and he has to be fluent in American Sign Language, which not all deaf kids necessarily are,” (Baker) I think this goes to show that even though it can be a challenge for producers to find actors with specific disabilities that also fit additional criteria, it is not impossible with the right amount of effort. Sam is played by Keivonn Woodard. During the “inside the episode” special following the episode, Woodard shares, “Sam is deaf and I am deaf. We both sign. Seeing how deaf people are and how they navigate the world and that they can, I think that is important.” (“The Last of Us”) The show also hired CJ Jones, as the Director of ASL and there were interpreters on set as well. Bella Ramsey, who plays Ellie, also shares in the “After the Episode Special” that having these people on set encouraged everyone to learn ASL to be able to communicate with Woodard. The Last of Us does a beautiful job highlighting the

positive impacts of hiring an actor with a specific disability to play a character with that disability.

Another modern series that features a disabled character is Sex Education, a Netflix original series first released in 2019. Actor George Robinson plays Isaac, a teenage boy who is a wheelchair user. George had a spinal cord injury during a rugby match when he was 17, so like his character, he also uses a wheelchair. Isaac is first introduced in the show's second season. Robinson says, "Everyone pretty much knows someone who has a disability and yet, the representation in media doesn't seem to be there in the same way, even though it's certainly changing. There's been the precedent in the past of having wheelchair characters not being played by people in wheelchairs. I just thought that was a refreshing thing when I got the call." (Bergado) He points out that movies like Me Before You and The Upside were not authentically cast. Other great things about this were that Robinson helped with writing scenes involving his character, and the character has sexual experiences within the show. (Nunn) Disabled characters are rarely depicted being intimate or having sexual experiences, so this is a great representation. It sends a message that people with disabilities are very much capable of having intimate and romantic experiences.

One last recent series that is receiving praise for its disability representation is Dahmer - Monster: The Jeffrey Dahmer Story, another Netflix Original Series, which tells the story of the famous serial killer. The show is unique because it is largely told from the points of view of his victims. One of the episodes is from the viewpoint of Tony Hughes, played by Rodney Burford Junior. The deaf actor's character is a black, gay, and deaf man who becomes a victim of Dahmer. (Dahmer) Tony is shown interacting with other deaf characters played by deaf actors. They use Black American Sign Language, which is a dialect of ASL that is rarely seen

represented in media. The series has received praise for making Tony confident in himself and his disability. He is not seen trying to overcome his disability or make himself different to fit into an able-bodied society. Much of the episode is practically silent, accompanied by a low buzz, to put the audience in Tony's point of view. The viewer must rely on subtitles to follow Tony's conversations with those around him. However, the show is also great because it doesn't turn a blind eye to the injustices that Tony faces due to being a minority in a world that is not accessible for him. He is shown being turned away from several jobs due to his disability.

It is also important to look at an example of a film that did a poor job with disability representation, and share the negative outcomes of its release in 2021. Music is a musical drama film directed by Sia, a well-known pop singer. In the film, dancer and actor, Maddie Ziegler, plays a girl with autism, named music. Many people have chosen not to support the film, as the majority of the autistic community is deeply offended by it. However, many of its viewers agree that Ziegler's over exaggerated facial expressions have a mocking undertone, and are simply inaccurate. Many people with autism were hurt by the way Sia went about the production of this film, and the way it turned out. Ziegler, who is not on the spectrum, was chosen for this role, despite the existence of so many neuroatypical women who could have been considered. "Music" is a perfect example of an opportunity that could have been offered to a disabled actor, but was not.

Some great movies and shows to check out are, Wonder, Everything's Gonna be Okay, Special, and Crip Camp. These productions feature accurate and positive portrayals of disabilities and are recommended by many disability activists. Wonder follows the story of Auggie, a young boy with a physical disability. It is recommended by disabled individuals because Auggie's differences are welcomed by other characters, rather than pitied. The movie

shows that disabilities can be seen and acknowledged in a kind and respectful way. Everything's Gonna be Okay is a comedy show that features a main character on the autism spectrum. Kayla Cromer, who plays Matilda, is on the spectrum herself. For this reason, the show is highly recommended by the Autistic community. Special is a Netflix comedy that follows a young man with cerebral palsy. Something the show is praised for is exploring sex and dating. This is directly combating the idea that people with disabilities are not sexual beings. Lastly, Crip Camp: A Disability Revolution is a 2020 documentary film that explores the disability rights movement. While these productions are not perfect, and have all faced criticisms, they are contributing in some way to a positive narrative about disabilities.

6. Objections

Some people would argue that it is not necessary or realistic for producers to seek disabled actors to play disabled roles in movie and tv shows. One reason someone may say this is that actors often play characters of a different social class, sexual orientation etc. By this logic, it can be argued that it should not be considered offensive or inappropriate for an able-bodied actor to portray an individual with a disability. While there are differing opinions on this matter, what matters most here is the opinions of the disabled community. Most people with disabilities agree that it can come across as a form of mockery. According to the article from Alexandria Parson's study, "It also suggests that a disability is an identity that can be temporarily assumed for entertainment purposes." (Parsons) Another reason some may argue against hiring disabled actors for disabled roles is that it can be very difficult to find actors that fit a certain look, as well as having a specific disability. While this is true, producers owe it to the disabled community to try! In addition, there is the argument that It can be costly to have to make production accessible

to actors with disabilities. While it is true, if shows include disability, they should make an effort to make production more accessible. This is not a reason for them to be left out. Lastly, some would argue that often, movies or shows about disability feature a sequence where the character is shown without that disability. By hiring an able-bodied actor, both parts can be easily portrayed. While this is true, in 2022 we have other options for this, such as stunt doubles and computer editing.

One last objection to the inclusion of disabled characters in media is that disability is not something to be celebrated. This subject can be controversial, because as previously discussed, people view their disabilities in different ways. Some largely identify with their disability and are proud to show it, while others want to separate themselves from their disability so as to not be defined by it. To help shed some light on this question of whether or not it is appropriate to celebrate disability, I sought out the opinion of a disability rights activist that I look up to, Emily Ladau. Ladau is a wheelchair user who is the author of a book called “Demystifying Disability” and the co-host of a podcast called *The Accessible Stall*. I messaged Ladau via Instagram and asked what she had to share about using the word “celebrate” when talking about disability. Here’s what she said, “Definitely not offensive! Choosing how you feel about having a disability is deeply personal, and many people do choose to celebrate it as part of who they are - an identity, a history, a culture, a community.” (Connolly) It is so important to be listening to the voices of people with disabilities and hear what they have to offer regarding these issues.

7. Conclusion

I believe the disabled community deserves to see a change in the way they are represented in movies and TV shows. In order to do this, these producers need to make a reasonable effort to hire actors with disabilities for disabled roles, and work on portraying

disabilities in a more accurate and positive light. There are several reasons why everyone should care about this matter. We should all care about disability representation in media because of the moral concerns behind it. My argument can be related to many simple moral rules, such as striving to treat others the way you would like to be treated, helping those in your community, and the importance of not being a bystander. Every person should fight for better disability representation because it is the right thing to do.

Everyone can understand the desire to feel seen. People should be able to watch characters that they can relate to and feel connected to, and this does not disclude those who have disabilities. By including disabled characters played by disabled actors in mainstream movies and TV, society is showing disabled individuals that their stories do matter. If people want to see characters that look and act like them in the media, then everyone should fight for those with disabilities to see this representation as well.

Another reason everyone reading should care about disability inclusion in media is that more people live with disabilities than we may think. According to the CDC, 61 million adults in the United States have a disability. This issue affects society as a community, not just a small number of people. It is very likely that everyone knows at least one person with a disability. Also, disability inclusion is part of a bigger movement for inclusion of all people. By including individuals with disabilities in popular movies and shows, they are given a platform to advocate for themselves.

Lastly, It is not right to allow any group of people to be excluded from or underrepresented in popular media such as movies and TV shows. Doing nothing to combat this issue can be argued to be just as impactful as directly contributing to it. By allowing things to continue the way they are, it is communicating to the world that it is acceptable and okay for

those with disabilities to continue to be represented inaccurately. We cannot be bystanders in this issue, and must come together as a country to combat it. The disabled community cannot solve this problem on their own, and need the help of anyone aware of this problem.

So, what can media consumers, once aware of this issue and its severity, do to help this cause? Something that anyone can do to contribute to this cause is supporting movies and shows that include stories of disability or actors with disabilities represented in a positive light. When movies or shows that feature disability are successful, that encourages the continued involvement of disabilities in mainstream media. On the other hand, if it is known that a show or movie may be offensive to some, one can choose to make a statement by refusing to support it. The next thing anyone can do to help is to simply be aware of this issue, and take a deeper look at the media one consumes or has consumed in the past. People should read about what their favorite shows or movies are doing to be more inclusive when it comes to disability. Additionally, when a show features a character with a disability, find out if that actor is disabled themselves. Furthermore, people can research new shows or movies to watch that celebrate disability.

In addition, it is crucial that society listens to and supports the disability community, as well as disability rights activists. This means listening to and amplifying disabled voices, rather than speaking over them or for them. An example of this would be reposting or sharing a movie review that was written by a person with a disability. Society needs to hear these individuals' opinions and help them spread awareness. It is easy to follow disability activists and influencers on social media platforms. This can help support these activists by helping them gain a bigger platform. Lastly, everyone spread their knowledge on this issue. Raising awareness is so important because many people are not familiar with the disability rights movement. Although

people with disabilities face many challenges in society today, underrepresentation should not be overlooked, as it directly affects the self esteem and mental health of these people.

Annotated Bibliography

Baker, Troy. "HBO's The Last of Us Podcast." Season 1, episode 5 - "Endure and Survive".

This is the official podcast for a series that I discuss in the paper. I use the show when I discuss recent examples of disability representation in television shows.

Basselin, Tim. "Imagining Anew: Positive Representations of Disability in Recent Media." *Journal of Disability and Religion*, 2020.

This paper explores how positive representations of disabilities in TV shows can contribute to a better societal understanding of disability. It is a reliable journal from the Sacred Heart Library website, and was published in 2020. I use this article to build my argument by showing that positive portrayals of disability contribute to a positive narrative surrounding disabilities.

Bergado, Gabe. "'Sex Education' Newcomer George Robinson on Isaac's Relationship with Maeve and Disability Representation." *British Vogue*, British Vogue, 20 Jan. 2020, <https://www.vogue.co.uk/miss-vogue/article/sex-education-george-robinson-isaac>.

This is an interview with George Robinson published by British Vogue. It is a source that contains direct quotes from the actor that I discuss. I use this interview to share why this character's inclusion in the show was important to the disabled community.

Connolly, Margaret A, and Emily Ladau. "Instagram Interview with Emily Ladau." 31 July 2022.

This is an interview I conducted over Instagram with Emily Laudu, a disability rights activist, public speaker, and author.

"'Crippling up' is just as unacceptable as blackface, says Sally Phillips; 'Crippling up' refers to an able-bodied actor playing a character who is disabled." Telegraph Online, 30 Aug. 2020, p. NA. Gale OneFile: Health and Medicine, link.gale.com/apps/doc/A633990992/HRCA?u=24034&sid=ebsco&xid=82646dca. Accessed 1 May 2022.

This article explains why able-bodied actors portraying disabled characters can be insensitive and harmful. It is a reliable source from the Sacred Heart Library website and was published recently, in 2020. I use this source to develop my argument that it can be offensive when able-bodied actors play disabled characters, and therefore producers need to hire actors with disabilities for these roles.

“Dahmer - Monster: The Jeffrey Dahmer Story .” Created by Ryan Murphy, and Ian Brennan.

This is a Netflix original series. I use this series as an example of a character with a physical disability played by an actor with that disability in 2022.

“Dictionary by Merriam-Webster: America's Most-Trusted Online Dictionary.” Merriam-Webster, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/>.

I used the Merriam-Webster dictionary to define disability. It is the most reliable dictionary source. I use this definition to clarify what I mean when I talk about disability throughout my paper.

Dolmage, Jay. "Hollywood Shuts out the Real-Life Disabled." *Waterloo Regional Record*, 2015.

This article helps to explain why people with disabilities are not benefiting by disability inclusion in media. It is a reliable source from the Sacred Heart library website and was published in 2015. I use this to develop my argument that people with disabilities should benefit from the inclusion of their disability in a show or movie, which will profit from that inclusion.

Elber, Lynn. "'Glee' Wheelchair Episode Hits Bump with Disabled Actors Fighting for TV Jobs." *Canadian Press*, 2009.

This article looks at the inclusion of a physically disabled character in the show Glee, and explains that by hiring able-bodied actors, it is creating missed opportunities for disabled actors. The source is from a reliable database found on the library website, and was published in 2009, while *Glee* was popular. I use this source to add to my argument that choosing to hire able-bodied actors for characters with disabilities is hurtful to actors with disabilities.

Hall, Melinda. "Horrible Heroes: Liberating Alternative Visions of Disability in Horror." By: Hall, Melinda, *Disability Studies Quarterly*, 10415718, January 1, 2016, Vol. 36, Issue 1."

This source explores the use of characters with disabilities in horror films. It is a reliable journal from the library website that was published in 2016. I use this source to add to my argument that for a long time, disability inclusion in films tended to be harmful and insensitive.

"The Last of Us." Created by Craig Mazin, and Neil Druckmann, season 1, episode "Endure and Survive"

This is an episode of a recent HBO series that features a deaf character. I use this specific episode to discuss the character of Sam, who is played by a young, deaf actor.

Nunn, Laurie. "Sex Education ." Season 2.

This is a Netflix Original Series that features a main character with a disability. I use this show as an example of one that does a fantastic job at shifting the way disabilities are portrayed in television shows.

Parsons , Alexandria L, et al. "Gendered Ableism: Media Representations and Gender Role Beliefs' Effect on Perceptions of Disability and Sexuality." Springer Science + Business Media New York, 2016.

This article explores disability inclusion in advertisements, and it's effects. It is a reliable source from the library website that was published in 2016. I use this source in my paper to further my argument that there are many positive impacts of including disabled characters in media.

"People with Disabilities Are Nearly Invisible in TV and Film. Industry Insiders Point to Authentic Portrayals of Disabled Characters as Models for Inclusion." *The Business Insider*, 30 June 2021.

This source explains that people with disabilities are extremely underrepresented in media, and also gives some eye opening statistics. It is a reliable source from the library website, and was published very recently. I use this source in my paper to emphasize that the number of characters with disabilities in recent media is nowhere near the number of people actually living with disabilities.

Sharma, Riya, and Sabreen Kaur. "Counter-Stereotypical Stories: A Strategy for Overcoming Disability Stereotypes?" *International Journal of Social Sciences Review*, 2020.

This article describes how disability stereotypes are exacerbated by media. It is a reliable source from the Sacred Heart Library website that was published recently, in 2020. I use this source to explain that including characters with disabilities is not enough if this inclusion is reinforcing negative stereotypes.

Wade, Prudence. *Giving Confidence to a Young Generation; Champion Fighter Ramla Ali Talks to Prudence Wade about Why It's so Important to See People Who Look like You on TV.*, 2019.

This article explains a woman's positive experience with seeing someone who had hair like her own on television. It is a reliable journal that was published in 2019, found on the library website. I use this source to explain that it is important to one's confidence and mental well being to see characters that look like oneself on television.