

By Alex Morris and Sidney Scott

Orange Is The New Black



There are multiple characters on OITNB that are portrayed to have disabilities. However, no one on the show is actually disabled. This raises an important question surrounding authenticity. Should disabled characters be played by disabled actors? Recent studies have shown that nearly all disabled characters are played by able-bodied actors. This emphasizes the idea of authenticity, because these actors have little to no life experiences with regard to the embodied condition they are portraying; meaning that their portrayal is unauthentic.

There are four main characters in Orange Is The New Black who have disabilities, however all of the characters are played by able-bodied individuals. The disabilities portrayed in OITNB range from mental/intellectual disabilities to an amputee who uses a prosthetic limb. OITNB is not the only show to have disabled characters played by able-bodied actors. Glee, Friday Night Lights, Degrassi, Theory of Everything, Grey's Anatomy, and Forrest Gump, along with many others, all highlight disabled characters, who are played by able-bodied actors. This causes each portrayal to lack authenticity.

Speechless



Mainstream media has increased the number of disabled individuals over the past, but progress still needs to be made. In 2013, out of the 796 characters appearing regularly on 109 scripted, prime-time shows on ABC, CBS, NBC, Fox and The CW, eight have disabilities. Which amounts to only 1%, discriminating against the 20% of the population who have embodied conditions. 95% of all disabled characters are played by able-bodied actors, meaning that a mere 5% of disabled characters are played by actors with embodied conditions.

However, in the television show *Speechless*, JJ is played by Micah Fowler who has cerebral palsy, but he has the ability to speak. In the show however, his character does not. Should this scenario also be labeled as unauthentic because Fowler is portraying a level of disability of which he himself does not have? Some may say no since he has an authentic portrayal of the disability, but some would say that it is unauthentic because he is still "pretending" to be something he is not.

Speechless, *Breaking Bad*, *Glee* (has both authentic actors who have Down Syndrome, and an actor who lacks authenticity while portraying a man in a wheelchair), *Weeds*, *CSI*, and *American Horror Story* all have characters played by disabled individuals.

“Alison Lapper Pregnant”

by Marc Quinn (2005)

Material: white marble

Size: 3.55 meters tall, 13 tons

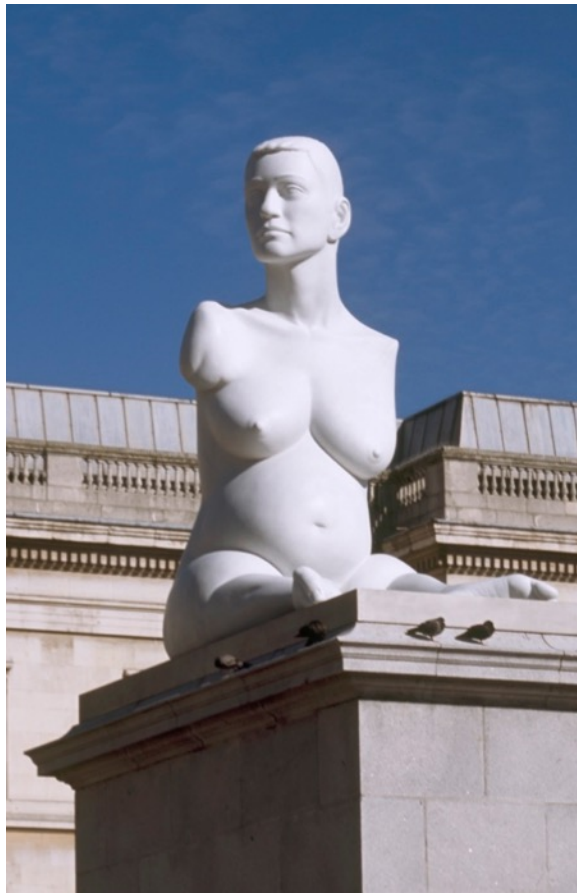
Location: Trafalgar Square, London [1]

Abstract

The purpose of this poster is to contribute to the understanding of disability representation and visibility in art via the example of the sculpture titled ‘Alison Lapper Pregnant’ by Marc Quinn. The sculpture of interest is a large-scale version of a previously made, life-size carving of artist Alison Lapper, also by Quinn, cast during her pregnancy. A main objective in thinking about the sculpture here is to determine its role in either contributing to or challenging negative visibility of disabled bodies in society at large, using the disjuncture model as a conceptual framework.

Background

Sculpture, especially of human figures, is a medium of fine art that spills into the public eye more than most others. ‘Alison Lapper Pregnant’, which remained in Trafalgar Square, London for 18 months [5], “celebrate[s] imperfection and the beauty of different kinds of bodies as well as the strength and vitality of the human spirit.” [4]. Quinn has commented on the piece saying, “Marble is the material used to commemorate heroes... Most monuments are commemorating past events; because Alison is pregnant it’s a sculpture about the future possibilities of humanity.” [2], and, “Most public sculpture... is triumphant male statuary. I felt that the Square could do with some femininity... Alison’s statue could represent a new model of female heroism.” [3]



References:

- [1] <http://marcquinn.com/exhibitions/solo-exhibitions/marc-quinn-fourth-plinth>
- [2] <http://marcquinn.com/artworks/single/alison-lapper-pregnant>
- [3] <http://marcquinn.com/exhibitions/solo-exhibitions/marc-quinn-fourth-plinth>
- [4] <http://marcquinn.com/studio/studio-diaries/the-making-of-alison-lapper-pregnant>
- [5] <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2005/sep/16/arts.artsnews>

Healing Disjuncture?

‘Alison Lapper Pregnant’ brings viewers face-to-face with not only a disabled bodied, unobstructed by clothing or equipment, but also a pregnant, disabled body. The sculpture is reminiscent of the age-old tradition of commemorating heroes with marble statues on pedestals in city centers. This figure, with its chin up and gaze set on something distant, first strikes the eye as something old and regal and demanding of your respect, before also commanding a second glance and further thought. The deviation from society’s normal body, here, I would argue, doesn’t displace this piece into an “other” category of fine art. I see this statue as simultaneously being a thought-provoking, statement piece and a public recognition of Alison Lapper and her identities and experience as *disabled* and *mother*, as well as of the disabled body as legitimate. In this way, it heals disjuncture by putting a body that society has deemed “less than” front and center and inviting viewership of that naked body. Further, it does so in a way that doesn’t give the viewer ownership of that body. The grandeur of the statue in size and its placement as high off the ground aids in maintaining the image’s ownership of itself, as opposed to examples of disabled visibility in film and other media in which the audience is invited to interpret the disabled character as they wish.



Image One shows a type of shirt created by Mr. Razdan to allow for easier access to PICC lines used for chemotherapy and extended antibiotic administration.



Image Two shows a designed by Lucy Jones that enables those who have physical impairments to open or close their sleeves in an easier way.

How is disability presented?

In these examples, fashion is allowing disability to be presented in a subtle, approachable, fashionable way. The refugees are able to carry around their shelter while looking trendy rather than tattered and worn. The shirt designed for those with physical impairments makes use of magnet buttons and allows those people to appear put together and neat. In fact, they might be useful for everyone! The nice shirt with the zip away section, allows people who depend on PICC lines for medication to look neat, to make there dependency on those lines less obvious, and allows more functional access. The shirt designed for those who are mostly wheelchair bound allows the person to look comfortable rather than bunched up and stiff in all the wrong places, while also allowing the person to look stylish. In all of these examples visual culture through the means of fashion design, is used to present disability in a less negative way.

Does this heal Disjuncture?

In all of the examples pictured, clothing items were specifically designed to heal disjuncture for people with disabilities while also keeping in mind the fashion standards of today. They are designed for comfort and usability, while taking into account short falls that everyday clothing presents for those who are disabled. They also conform to current trends, therefore healing disjuncture on a social level by making the wearer, caretaker, and everyone else more comfortable. Everyone should have the opportunity to feel good about what they wear and the appearance they project. Designs like this can not only make that possible, but do it in a functional way that works to heal some physical disjuncture as well. Fashion is an example of using visual culture to lessen stigma, increase comfort and confidence, while also making people more approachable.

Article Link:
https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/21/fashion/solution-based-design-disabled-refugees.html?_r=0



Image Three shows shirts designed by Lucy Jones to accommodate those who are always seated.



Image Four shows a design by Angela Luna for refugees. This item turns into a tent.

Disability in Fashion

Abstract:

Advertisement has the power to influence an individuals thinking, as well as cultural norms. However disability is often regarded with stereotype, and people with obvious impairments are frequently entirely removed from the realm of fashion. Yet this fashion ad campaign, Diesel Reboot, was created in an aim to create an artistic and cultural space that is inclusive to all individuals. This opens the door to create an environment within the fashion industry that is accepting of any body type, and ability.



Disability Model:

This ad campaign presents the social model of disability. The disability in the case of fashion involves the way that society is organized, rather than by a person's actual impairment. Thus this campaign conveys how disability is a matter of social construct, through creating a space that is inclusive and connected, regardless of ability.

Healing Disjuncture:

Through creating an ad campaign that highlights the fact that you do not have to look like a model to wear Diesel clothing, the company is working to heal disjuncture. Every photo within the campaign that was released features individuals of varying shapes, sizes, and abilities. As a result anyone can look at the photos and feel connected to the image and message, which ultimately heals disjuncture between fashion and the general public.

Definitions:

Social Model of Disability views disability as a consequence of social barriers that prevent individuals with disability from full participation within society.

Disjuncture is the view that disability is a product of the interaction between an individuals characteristics, and their environment; Natural, social, and cultural.

“Celebrating diversity and individuality. Acceptance of oneself and rejection of the status quo! Together we are building a worldwide collective. Now, help us define the link that unites us.”

Resources:

<http://www.elle.com/culture/celebrities/news/a18892/diesel-wheelchair-campaign-jillian-mercado/>

Disability in Television

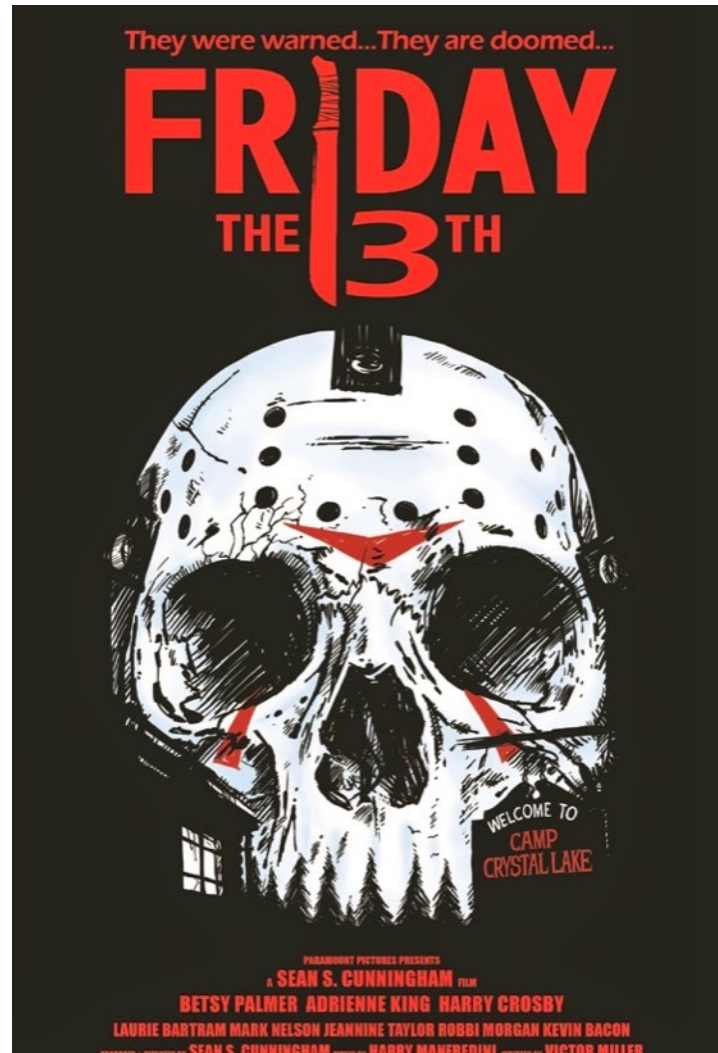
Kennedy Hubbard

History

Until recently, those with disabilities had either been

Often those with psychological disabilities were portrayed as monsters in horror films (e.g., Friday the 13th, Halloween)

In comedy typically characters with disability are used for comedic relief





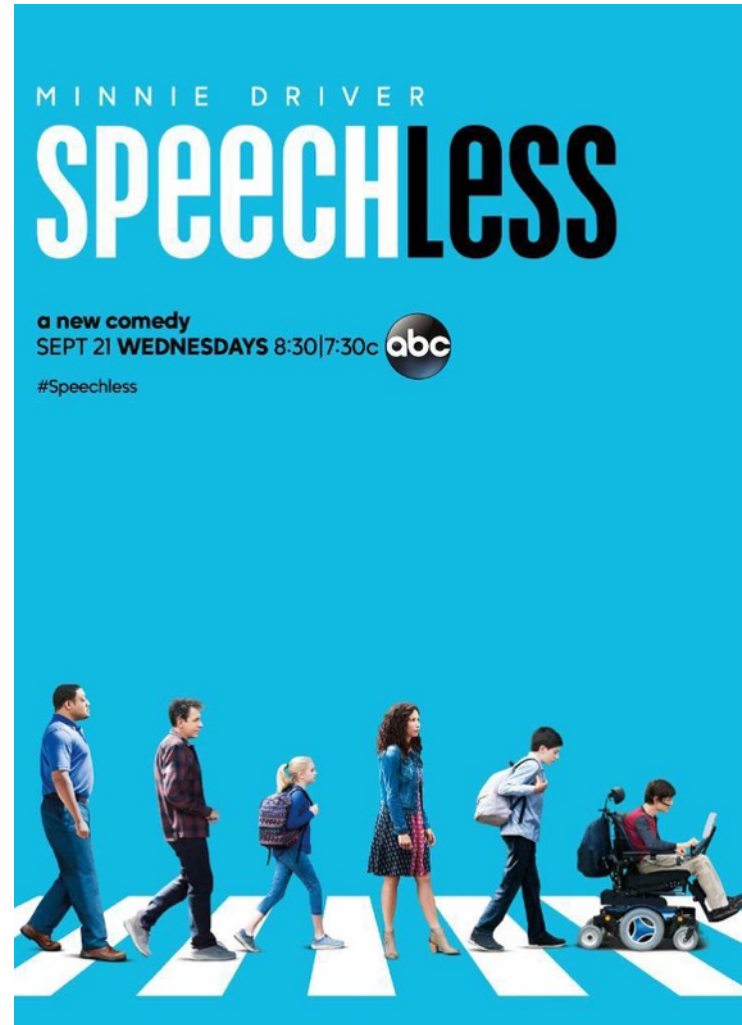
Authenticity and disability

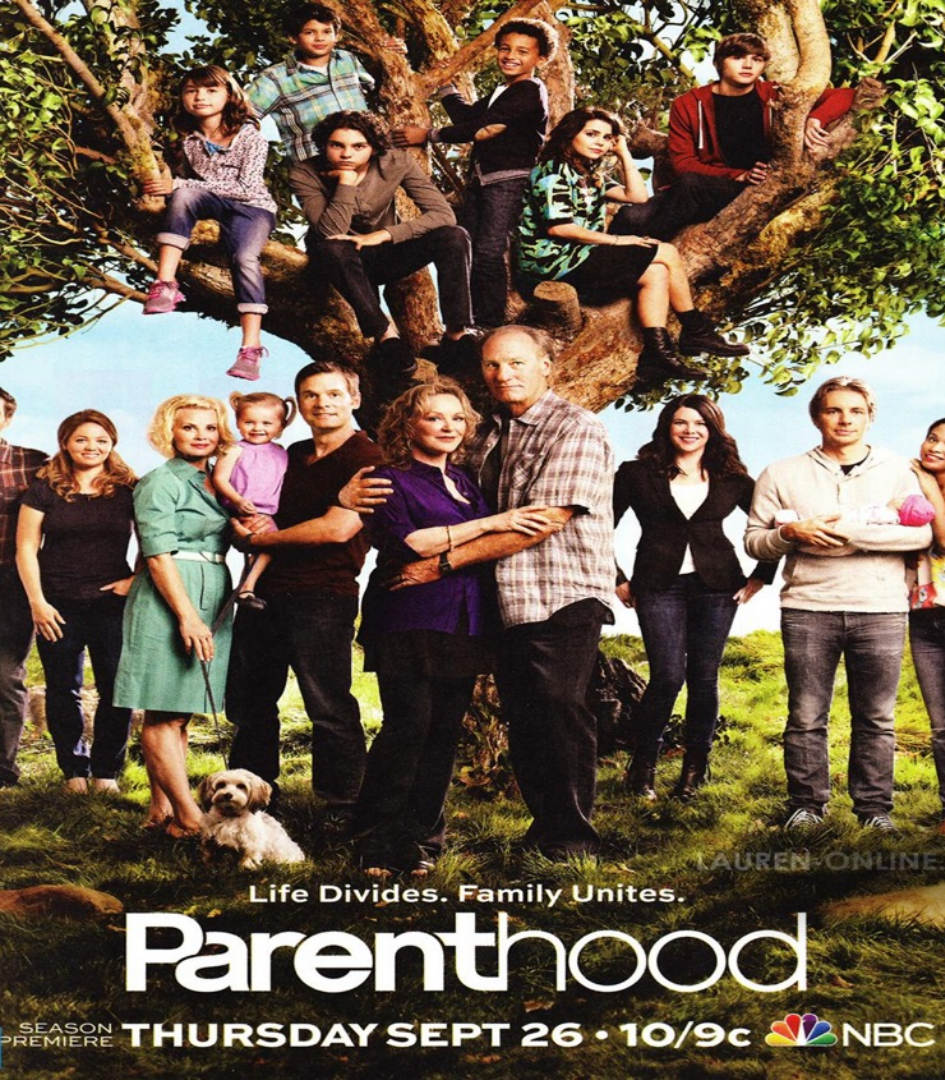
Ruderman White Paper study: 95% of characters in top 10 TV shows are played by able-bodied actors

Of 31 shows examined, only 2% of actors (4) had a disability

Speechless is an up-and-coming show that centrally features an actor with a disability (cerebral palsy)

JJ is a teenager with cerebral
palsy who can only
communicate non verbally





Parenthood

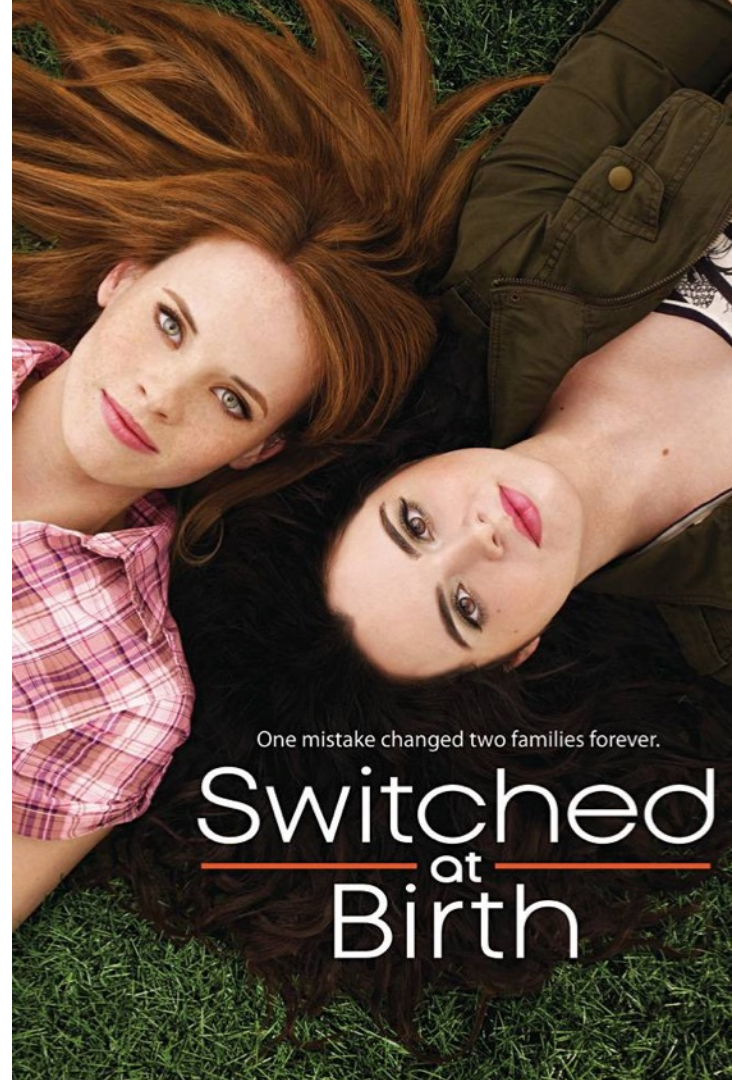
Max Braverman is
diagnosed with
Asperger's Syndrome
during the first season
of the show

switched at birth

Many of the reappearing
characters in the show are
deaf

During the 2015 season one of
the main characters has a
child with down syndrome

Actress Katie Leclerc (Daphne)
is not deaf but has suffered
from hearing loss





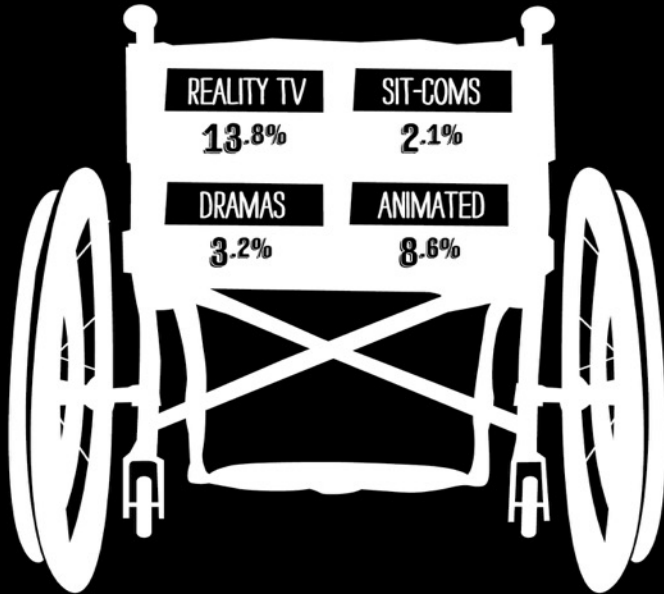
Glee

Controversy exists
among critics about
Glee's representations
of disabilities but it's
important to note even
poor representations of
disabled people on TV

DISABILITY

DEMOGRAPHICS BY

TV GENRE



Next steps

TV/film needs to begin to include disabilities at a prevalence rate similar to the actual prevalence rates across the nation

Change the way people with disabilities are represented in the media (e.g., not as villains or used for comedic relief)