

HANDBOOK ON MASS MEDIA IN THE UNITED STATES

The Industry and Its Audiences

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DISABLED AUDIENCES

Alice A. Tait

REDEFINING THEMSELVES

Controversy surrounds the appropriate terms for persons with disabilities. *Gifted*, *physically challenged*, and *exceptional* are generally considered positive terms. *Handicapped*, *mentally retarded*, *learning disabled*, *crippled*, and *emotionally disturbed* are viewed as negative terms.

Longmore (1987) accused movies, television, and print of frequently presenting images reinforcing prejudice against people with disabilities. He lists three common misconceptions about people with handicaps: They are being punished, they are embittered by their fate, and they resent the nondisabled.

PRINT

In 1976, there appeared to be an increased number of television programs and magazine and newspaper articles covering those with disabilities. Byrd, Byrd, and Allen (1980) categorized 256 programs.

In 1978, Wall cited a 1900–1959 survey of the *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature* that showed an increase in articles related to mental illness, psychology, psychiatry, and related subjects.

In 1977, Byrd selected ten magazines having the greatest circulation to determine the disabilities covered, including *Reader's Digest*, *National Geographic*, *Better Homes and Gardens*, *McCall's*, *Ladies' Home Journal*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Redbook*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *Senior Scholastic*. Magazines covered drug abuse more than any other disability, followed by alcoholism, heart disease, and mental illness. The two news magazines were leaders in the frequency of articles covering disability. Of 59 articles listed in the 15 magazines surveyed, a mean of 5.9 articles for each magazine covered disabilities.

Thompson (1980) noted a gradual change in coverage of people with disa-

bilities in the book publishing industry. Although books about the disabled increased, Thompson maintained the message was uniform: To succeed in the able-bodied world, a person had to be a genius.

Biklen (1986) described the narrow focus of newspapers in covering the Baby Jane Doe and Elizabeth Bouvia cases. Baby Jane Doe was an infant born with several disabling conditions, including hydrocephalus and spina bifida. Elizabeth Bouvia had severe cerebral palsy and required assistance in order to live. She asked a hospital to administer pain-killing drugs to help her endure her attempted suicide through starvation. In these and similar stories, Biklen accused newspapers of describing handicapped persons in traditional and debilitating terms, rather than focusing on discrimination, civil rights, and political organizing issues. Newspapers characterized both subjects with despair, pain, sorrow, desperation, and defeat. Reporters failed to cover both stories objectively and comprehensively. Disagreements among doctors as to whether Baby Jane Doe should be treated were unpublished. Newspapers incorrectly interpreted a doctor's prognosis and failed to report services available to both individuals and Bouvia's experience with the unavailability of competent aides. Newspapers have failed also to report on the development of national policies affecting severely handicapped persons.

In 1982, Bogdan et al. accused newspapers of subtly linking disability with violence when covering murders and other violent crimes. The researchers cited the following headline examples: "Crippled Man Charged in Bomb Attack," "Police Arrest Amputee in Slaying of Doctor," and "Suspect Has Low IQ, Two Psychologists Testify."

A five-year analysis of the *Des Moines Register* (Arnold, 1986) revealed only thirty-nine news stories about persons with disabilities or disability issues. The study failed to support agenda setting by the press in this area, during a time when key disability rights legislation was approved.

J. Johnson (1986) offered a list of terms journalists should know when referring to persons with disabilities. Orjasaeter (1986) praised the increase since 1976 in the number of picture books relating to handicapped children. Books are important for handicapped children and for the nondisabled to help them understand the problems and daily life of handicapped people. Especially interesting are picture books by authors or artists who are parents or siblings of handicapped children.

In 1988, M. Johnson applauded the print media for covering Gallaudet University's shutdown in Washington, D.C. She credited the reporters for covering the protest as straight news, omitting the common soft, human interest approach. However, she expressed little faith that the press would continue coverage of the national campaign to obtain more civil rights and opportunities for the nation's millions of deaf people. Newspapers also ignored presidential candidates who did not sign pledges to have the debates interpreted by sign-language interpreters. A report by the Commission on Education of the Deaf submitted to the Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee's subcommittee on the handicapped did make the news because of its timing with the Gallaudet protest.

Krossel (1988) reinforced Johnson's observation. The press coverage of Rick

Hansen who, injured in an automobile accident, used a wheelchair to circle the globe and Terry Fox, who attempted to run across the country on his one leg and an artificial limb, failed to transcend the hoopla. Some exceptions included a Canadian columnist who documented how little the federal government spent on medical research; the *Region Leader-Post* described the difficulties a person with impaired mobility would find getting into major buildings in that city and highlighted gaps in government services for disabled persons; and both the *Washington Post* and Toronto's *Globe and Mail* argued Hansen and Jim Dickerson, a blind man attempting to navigate the Atlantic, should abandon their heroic endeavors as their efforts would not benefit the disabled.

M. Johnson (1988) criticized the press for careless language usage. Most irritating was the description of an individual as a "victim" of a particular disability. She noted that even though the latest edition of the *Associated Press Stylebook* forbids the use of the term *wheelchair-bound*, she continued to notice repeated use of the term.

Keller et al. (1990) found that newspapers mention disabilities more often than critics have claimed, but not in a positive context. A content of twelve representative U.S. newspapers from one week in 1987 revealed 696 references (an average 8.3 per day) to persons with disabilities or their family members. Most references tended to occur in features, most were negative, and most emphasized the possibility for improvement of the person's condition (reinforcing the stereotype of helplessness and pity).

Yoshida, Wasilewski, and Friedman (1990) found that the traditional topics of budget expenditures, housing, and institutionalization were the most prevalent in five metropolitan newspapers. Keller et al. (1990) found that persons with disabilities were noted in feature stories rather than in hard news stories, and that these articles tended to present the negative impact of disability on people's lives. Clogston (1990) examined sixteen prestige and high circulation newspapers and found that while coverage was not overwhelmingly negative, neither was it positive or progressive.

Clogston (1992) analyzed entries in the *New York Times* Index from 1941 to 1991. Results from Clogston's research indicate a trend in the *New York Times* away from traditional coverage of individuals with disabilities as charity recipients and toward a more progressive, civil rights view of disability in news coverage over the last fifty years.

It shows a large decline in entries portraying disability in a traditional economic sense (particularly the image of people with disabilities as dependent on the generosity of charity organizations). The study also found a steady rise, particularly from 1976 to 1991, in entries showing stories portraying disability from a progressive civil rights perspective. With a few exceptions, story entries covering physical disability from a traditional medical viewpoint remained constant during the period.

The *Detroit Free Press* is one of a growing number of newspapers in North America with a regular column on disability. Jim Neubacker, who has multiple sclerosis and uses a wheelchair, writes the column.

Comics also fail the disability portraying test. Disability, physical deformity,

and criminal behavior are reflected in Dick Tracy's rogues as "Ugly Christine," "Mumbles," "Bee Bee Eyes," "Shakey," and "Mrs. Prune Face." Comic characters Batman and Robin are accused of the same disregards.

From 1976 to 1991, print media increased coverage of persons with disabilities. However, increased coverage portrayed those persons successful at dealing with disabilities as geniuses. Moreover, coverage of persons with disabilities tended to lack completeness, comprehensiveness, and broadness. The print media tended to use the soft, human interest approach and negate coverage of national campaigns to obtain more civil rights and opportunities for persons with disabilities. The *New York Times* was an exception to these trends.

FILM

Film is both criticized and praised for portraying persons with disabilities. Horror films have disturbed critics the most because they often portray disabled persons as freaks and associate disabilities with murder, violence, and danger.

Critics have credited war films as primary innovators in changing the depictions of disabled persons. Some recent war films are cited for realistically portraying disabled veterans' feelings, casting disabled persons, discussing sex, showing the relationship between the disabled and society, and describing the rehabilitative process. A few earlier war films failed to address social and economic issues. Other films generalized a variety of disabilities including mental illness, alcoholism, and drug addiction. One author criticized a film for denying the value of the lives of people with disabilities.

In 1932, MGM produced the film *Freaks*, using actual disabled characters from the Barnum and Bailey sideshow attractions. The tendency to associate mental disabilities with murder, violence, and danger is depicted in the several versions of the nineteenth-century tale *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and the twentieth-century version, *The Incredible Hulk*. *Phantom of the Opera*, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1923), *Frankenstein* (1931), and *The Bride of Frankenstein* (1935) also featured physical disabilities and violence.

Schwartz (1979) and Quart and Auster (1982) heralded the film *Coming Home* as a pivotal point in the movies, changing the portrayal of the handicapped.

Quart and Auster described post-World War II films as the first attempt to deal with the disabled veteran with some honesty. The 1945 *Pride of the Marines* was described as a film that failed to address social and economic issues. The film was praised for addressing realistically the feelings of anger and rage. *The Best Years of Our Lives*, which actually starred a disabled veteran, followed in 1946. Critics praised the film for not covering the trauma at the onset of the disability and the frustration and pain of rehabilitation. However, in 1950, *The Men* did address these stages.

Coming Home (1978) and *Born on the Fourth of July* (1987) initiated a realistic portrayal of Vietnam veterans. The film discussed a normally avoided issue—sex and the disabled. Because of post-World War II films like *Pride of*

the Marines, *The Best Years of Our Lives*, and *The Men*, audiences received a fuller, more sensitive appreciation of the experiences. The films portrayed injury, the rehabilitation process, and the relationship between the disabled persons and society. The post-Vietnam War film, despite its stereotyped veteran as victim or madman, deepened the disabled image to include sexuality, the tendency of rehabilitation to produce infantilism in the patient, and the intricate, symbiotic relationship that society has with disabled persons as well as their own capacity to use their handicaps to manipulate others.

The film *Whose Life Is It, Anyway?* (Maxson, 1982) portrayed a young sculptor who became a quadriplegic as a result of a car accident and decided that suicide was the only rational choice for a severely disabled man. Maxson criticized the film for openly denying the value of disabled persons' lives.

Harold Michael-Smith, president of the American Association on Mental Retardation, praised the film industry in 1987 for its continued positive portrayal of the disabled. *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946) was a breakthrough, he said, because it used a disabled person in the leading role. In addition, the film instilled an understanding of the anguish of disabled individuals and barriers created by nondisabled individuals. Smith described *Johnny Belinda* (1948) as perpetuating an old stereotype—deafness equals dumbness; however, he also praised the film for introducing the concept of educability. *The Miracle Worker* (1962) is heralded for emphasizing teachers' roles in helping individuals with severe disabilities. *The Elephant Man* (1980) demonstrated that prestigious advocates make a significant difference in how the world views and often treats the disabled. A radical film, *Mask* (1985) did not avoid confronting the dilemmas individuals with disabilities face. The boy's questioning his normalcy, his mother's possible coverings of his freakish appearance, and his problems with schoolmates were all part of the contributing drama reflected in some earlier film.

In general, Smith praised Hollywood for showing understanding, appreciation, and acceptance of disabled persons. Even though they were primarily made in the interest of box office receipts, these films enlightened people who otherwise might perpetuate negative stereotypes of disabled persons.

Longmore (1985) praised *Mask* for shifting the source of the problem from the disabled individual to society and for showing that disability is not primarily a medical condition but rather a stigmatized social identity. The 1988 film *Mac and Me* (about a twelve-year-old young man with spina bifida and scoliosis) showed that people who use wheelchairs can lead productive, active lives. Coles (1988) praised Frederick Wiseman's four film documentaries describing how the blind, the deaf, or those both blind and deaf managed the nationally known and respected Alabama Institute for the Deaf and Blind.

TELEVISION

A review of television films in 1954 indicated a sharp rise in the number of mental illness-related themes. Television contained proportionately more infor-

mation relevant to mental illness than any other media, averaging about 2.4 programs per day (Wall, 1978).

In 1968, television aired 149 programs covering disabilities, with NBC airing the most programs (Byrd, McDaniel, & Rhoden, 1980). Paraplegia was the most frequent disability portrayed, followed by mental illness, drug addiction, and emotional disability. Critics lambasted television, as they did film and newspapers, for their portrayal of persons with disabilities.

Unfortunately, the increased coverage was negative. In general, the causes, symptoms, methods of treatment, and social effects portrayed by the media were far removed from what the experts advocated. In particular, the media in their overall presentations emphasized the bizarre symptoms of the mentally ill. In television drama, for example, the afflicted person often entered the scene staring glassy-eyed, with his mouth widely open, mumbling incoherent phrases or laughing uncontrollably (Wall, 1978).

Byrd, Byrd, and Allen confirmed in 1977 that networks aired 256 disability-related programs. Most programs depicted mental illness. Fifty of the 64 programs depicting mental illness were presented by the commercial broadcasting networks. Fifty-one of the 64 programs depicting mental illness were police dramas, movies, drama specials, and situation comedies. The greatest portion of programming depicting mental illness involved dramatization, with minimal effort in educating the viewers. Television continued to portray mentally ill persons as strange and different, unemployed, erratic and unreliable, generally without friends and family, morally and psychologically weak and defective, and violent criminals. Television was singled out as the greatest offender in portraying violent mentally ill characters. These portrayals were more offensive as they inaccurately reflected what mental health professionals communicated about psychiatric patients. Research data showed that mental patients are, in fact, less likely to be involved in criminal or violent acts than are members of the general public (Byrd, 1979).

Results from a 1978 study indicated 256 programs were aired depicting disability, with the largest frequency occurring on public broadcasting. Mental illness was the most frequently aired, followed by alcoholism, emotional disability and the physically handicapped (Byrd, McDaniel, & Rhoden, 1980).

In 1979, Donaldson's study (1981) revealed that of all the characters in the sample 3.2 percent appearing in major roles were depicted as handicapped. Although handicapped characters are seen in major roles on television, this does not adequately represent the estimated 15 to 20 percent of the general population who have handicaps. It should be noted, however, that handicapped characters seldom appear in incidental roles. In the entire sample, in fact, not one handicapped character appeared in a minor role except in juxtaposition with other handicapped persons; none was visible in groups of shoppers, spectators, jurors, customers, or workers. Handicapped people were thus invisible among the thousands of people in the background. Their appearance in positive characterization emphasized the handicap as a condition central to the plot. In their negative roles, they were shown as threats to society, and their handicapping conditions were incidental to the plot.

Trinkaus (1984) studied television game shows to determine the number of

contestants who appeared to be disabled. Those displaying an inability to walk or stand and those exhibiting a loss of sight or hearing were judged to be handicapped. Over a six-month period, Trinkaus observed one disabled person.

The Silent Network in its fifth year of operation produced an exercise show, a talk show, a dance program, and teen sexuality discussion tailored to hearing-impaired and deaf people. The Silent Network uses sign language and open captions (Higgins, 1985).

Baltimore agency Smith, Burke and Azzam created and donated an advertisement featuring a nondisabled actor portraying a handicapped person to the Maryland Planning Council on Developmental Disabilities. Organizations representing the disabled disapproved of the advertisement despite the agency's 1986 Clio Award-winning spot called "John," starring a mentally retarded man (Erickson, 1988).

Lipman (1989) says advertisers have increased the casting of actors with disabilities. Nike employed Graig Bloochette, a 1988 Olympic bronze medalist. Levi Strauss was one of the first showing a blue jeans-clad paraplegic. McDonald's featured a deaf teenager and a paraplegic girl. Apple Computer aired a commercial showing disabled people using its computers. IBM, Citicorp, DuPont, and AT&T have featured disabled people in their ads. The increased appearance of people with disabilities in advertisements may perhaps be accounted for by marketers' awareness that about 37 million disabled people live in this country, and their estimated combined spending power is \$40 billion.

Viewing Behavior

Among five studies of the television viewing habits of the disabled, two were about mentally retarded (MR) children (one residential and one nonresidential), two reported on institutionalized emotionally disturbed (ED) children, and one compared the viewing habits of ED, learning disabled (LD), and educable mentally retarded (EMR) children with nonhandicapped children. Baran and Meyer (1975) interviewed seventy (forty-five males and twenty-five females) TMR (trainable mentally retarded) children (age: $X =$ fourteen years) from five non-residential schools about their television viewing habits. Almost three-fourths of the youngsters reported they watched "a lot of TV." The most popular viewing times were after school, on Saturday, and at night. About half of all favorite programs mentioned contained frequent instances of aggressive behavior. For example, the most popular series included "Gunsmoke," "The Three Stooges," and "Kung Fu." Clear sex differences were found in program favorites, with the violent programs being named by 70 percent of the males but by only 37 percent of the females. Parallel findings were reported for favorite character choices. The extent to which the youngsters identified with their favorite television characters was assessed with a conflict situation method in which each child was asked what he or she would do, what his or her favorite television character would do, what his or her parents would want each to do, what his or her best friend would do, and what the right thing is to do when faced with each of four potentially aggression-provoking situations (e.g., "Suppose you

were playing with your favorite toy, and a person you didn't like came up and took it away.''). The study results indicated that for both males and females the strongest relationships existed between the child's report of what he or she would do and what the favorite TV character would do and what the best friend would do. The identification with TV characters and best friends also was found with nonretarded first-, second-, and third-grade children given the same set of conflict situations (Meyer, 1973); however, for the nonretarded children, the relationship between self and what the parents would want done and what is right were both statistically significant, while neither was significant for the TMR children. This suggests that television may influence the social behavior of TMR children to a greater degree than their nonretarded peers because the alternative socializing forces seem to be less effective for the former group.

Ahrens (1977) examined the television viewing habits of 250 six- to eighteen-year-old children from a residential facility in New Zealand, most of whom were moderately or severely mentally retarded. Staff and parents reported most watched television from one to two hours daily, but about half the children under twelve watched from two to three hours daily. The most popular viewing times were between 5:30 P.M. and 7:30 P.M. About half the children were reported to talk about or act out some of the programs. Based on the children's reports, their favorite programs were the "Flintstones" and "Sing" (a locally produced song and dance show). It is interesting to note that a reliability check of the accuracy of caregivers' responses indicated that they were not accurate reporters of child program preferences. The adults thought that the children's favorite series was "Sesame Street."

Rubinstein et al. (1977) surveyed the television viewing habits of a sample of patients in a residential facility for ED children on Long Island, New York. The youngsters (age: $X =$ twelve years) included forty-eight boys and twelve girls. The televisions on the wards were reported to be operating an average of 9.5 hours daily (3.7 hours during the day and 5.8 hours at night), with the typical child actually watching about 1 hour during the day and 2.6 hours in the evening. The five most frequently selected program types included action/adventure shows (especially those with superheroes), cartoons, situation comedies, crime dramas, and monster movies. Ninety-six percent of the ward staff reported having observed behaviors engaged in by patients that seemed related to what they had viewed. The most frequently mentioned types of TV-linked imitation included aggressive acts, superhero behaviors, or dance steps.

Another survey (Donahue, 1978) of six- to ten-year-old institutionalized ED children (forty-seven boys and six girls) revealed even more television use than was reported by Rubinstein et al. (1977). Based on questions about how many hours they watched television, an average of 7.7 hours on weekdays and 4.2 on Saturday mornings was reported. Of all the favorite programs mentioned, 73 percent were violent. The two most popular program types were action/adventure and cartoon shows, and the two most frequently mentioned favorite characters were Bugs Bunny and Steve Austin ("Six Million Dollar Man"). Sixty-nine percent of their favorite characters engaged in aggressive behavior

either periodically or regularly. Donahue also administered the confrontive situation measure described earlier in the Baran and Meyer (1975) study. The children were asked to describe how they, their favorite television character, parents, best friend, and favorite adult at the institution would handle each of four conflict situations. These findings suggest that the ED children identify with aggressive television characters, who in turn may serve as role models.

Sprafkin and Gadow (1982) conducted an interview study to compare the television viewing habits of ED, LD, and EMR children with those of nonhandicapped peers. Tests revealed that the special education group watched significantly more television than each of the control groups, which did not significantly differ from one another. Descriptively, the ED group watched the most, followed by the LD group and then the EMR group. The special education group watched both situation comedies and soap operas significantly more than did the control group. Special education children also watched more crime and superhero programs and were more likely to report they frequently pretended to be their favorite television character.

Engstrom and Stricklin (1992) interviewed deaf Nebraskans to determine their mass media usage. Those interviewed were found to be active audience members who understood their communication needs and how to use mass media to meet those needs. Unfortunately, the deaf respondents also indicated that the mass media, especially local media, were not meeting their needs. On topics that they said were important to them, most reported using complex communication links that may or may not be satisfying. They said these links included both mass media and interpersonal communication. The respondents reported bundling their information by reading local newspapers, watching television and television news, and often, as part of the process, calling others using the TDD (Telecommunication Device for the Deaf), or by using telephone relay services for the deaf, or driving to another deaf person's home to pass along news and information gleaned from the media.

Respondents in both groups indicated that the local mass media were not taking care of their news information needs. They said that was one of the main reasons why deaf Nebraskans must depend so heavily upon newspapers.

One of the group respondents expressed "appreciation" for having newspapers and television that offered local news, while also enjoying them for their own purposes. More news and information about the deaf community would be appreciated by this group.

Those in the "improvement-oriented" group voiced strong opinions that deaf people should be interviewed and quoted in news stories about the deaf, interpreters should be present for such interviews, more local news of the deaf community should be published and broadcast, and employment opportunities for deaf people should be offered in both print and television news operations.

Children with disabilities were heavy consumers of television, liked aggressive programs, favored aggressive characters, imitated aggressive characters, comprehended television's visual aspect the most, and perceived television content as real.

Comprehension of Television Content

A study by Grieve and Williamson (1977) investigated the differences between the nondisabled and MR children's comprehension of auditory or visual content. They found that for both groups of children accuracy was greatest on the visual items, next best on the auditory-visual items, and least on the auditory items. The preschoolers performed significantly better than the MR children on the auditory and auditory-visual items, but the groups performed comparably on the visual items. These findings suggest that handicapped children (in this case, MR) comprehend visual television content better than auditory content.

Donahue and Donahue (1977) compared the responses of eleven- to sixteen-year-old ED and gifted children to questions about the reality of television portrayals. There was no significant difference found for the role stereotype items. Unfortunately, this study provided meager details about the characteristics and size of the two groups and failed to include a more typical comparison group; however, the findings seem to suggest that handicapped children perceive television content as more real than their nonhandicapped peers do.

Sprafkin, Gadow, and Grayson (1984) developed the Perception of Reality on Television (PORT) test to measure children's perceptions of television reality. They compared the performance of ED and nondisabled children. The ED children performed comparably to their nonhandicapped peers on the filler items; the students in regular classes outperformed the ED group on all of the items that pertained to reality of TV violence, discriminating the actor from the role played, and cartoon animation. These results strongly suggest that ED children have many more misconceptions than nonhandicapped children about important reality/fantasy aspects of television.

EFFECTS

Walters and Willows (1968) conducted a study in which institutionalized ED and nondisturbed children's aggressive behavior was compared following their exposure to a four-minute aggressive or nonaggressive videotape model. Exposure to the aggressive tape produced more aggressive behavior toward the toys shown in the videotape by both the disturbed and nondisturbed children. The amount of aggression did not differ between the ED and nondisturbed groups.

Mentally retarded children's reactions to an aggressive model was examined by Fechter (1971). Subjects (age: $X =$ eleven years; IQ [intelligence quotient]: $X = 36$) were exposed to a five-minute videotape of a twelve-year-old nonretarded female playing either in an aggressive or friendly manner with an inflatable Donald Duck doll. Based on observations of the children on the ward after the television presentation, Fechter found a significant media effect, with aggressive responses increasing after viewing the aggressive tape and decreasing following the friendly tape.

Talkington and Altman (1973) compared the subsequent playroom behavior of 144 MR males (age: $X =$ fourteen years; IQ: $X = 49$) after exposing them either to (1) a three-minute silent 16 mm film of a model hitting, kicking, and

throwing a Bobo doll; (2) an equivalent film of the same model kissing, cuddling, and petting the Bobo doll; or (3) no film. In the three-minute observation period following the film, the subjects who viewed the aggressive model exhibited significantly more aggressive behaviors and significantly less affectionate behaviors toward a Bobo doll than those who viewed either no film or the affectionate film model. The group that watched the affectionate model did not respond less aggressively or more affectionately than the no-film group. Hence, MR individuals are not likely to equally imitate aggressive and affectionate behaviors. Similarly, with normal children it is far easier to demonstrate media-induced aggression than prosocial or caring behaviors.

Hartmann (1969) conducted a laboratory study that examined reactions to filmed aggression in juvenile delinquents (age: median = 15.5 years). Subjects ($N =$ seventy-two) were shown one of three, two-minute 16 mm films, each of which started with a one-minute scene of two boys shooting baskets. For the remaining minute, the subjects in the control film condition saw the two boys play an active but cooperative basketball game, whereas those in the other two conditions watched the boys engaged in a violent fistfight. The latter film focused on the victim's pain as his opponent repeatedly hit and kicked him, and the camera highlighted the aggressor's behaviors. Half the subjects in each film group were put in an anger-producing situation before the film (an experimenter's confederate criticized them). The postviewing measures of aggression were the intensity and duration of electric shocks that the subjects administered to the experimenter's confederate. Both aggressive films produced more punitive behavior than the control film. The adolescents who were provoked before viewing were more punitive than those who were not, and within this group, those who had seen the film featuring aggression were the most punitive. Of the unprovoked subjects, those who were exposed to the instrumental aggression film behaved most punitively. The most aggressive subjects were those who committed the greatest number of criminal offenses, were criticized by the confederate, and watched the film of a victim's responses to pain.

In a series of three ambitious field experiments, Parke et al. (1977) examined the effects of full-length, violent commercial films on the aggressive behaviors of male juvenile delinquents residing in minimum security institutions in the United States and Belgium. In all three studies, media-induced aggression was demonstrated in naturalistic (i.e., not contrived) situations. The first study, which was conducted in the United States, involved thirty adolescents in each of two living unit cottages. For five consecutive evenings, subjects saw an aggressive or neutral film. The results indicated that the adolescents who saw the aggressive films behaved more aggressively on measures of general aggression (defined as the sum of physical threat, physical attack, verbal aggression, noninterpersonal physical and verbal aggression, and physical and verbal self-aggression) and physical aggression (defined as the sum of physical attack, noninterpersonal physical aggression, and physical self-aggression) than those who saw the neutral films. Prior aggression levels did not influence the magnitude of the media effect. Furthermore, the level of aggressive behavior remained stable over the

experimental period rather than increasing with repeated exposures to media aggression.

The second study was conducted in the same institution with 120 adolescents who had not previously participated. The two studies were similar except the latter included neutral films that were better equated to interest level, and two additional conditions were added. To determine the effect of repeated exposures, an aggressive and a neutral film group were added, which viewed only one film (either aggressive or neutral). For the single-film exposure conditions, adolescents initially high in aggression became more physically aggressive after exposure to the aggressive film than they did to the neutral film. A similar pattern was found for the repeated exposure groups. Contrary to expectation, the aggression became more intense after exposure to the aggressive film than to the neutral film. A similar pattern was found for the repeated exposure groups. Contrary to expectation, the aggression effects were not greater for the multiple, compared with the single, exposure to film aggression group; in fact, the reverse was true for general and physical aggression.

Their third study was conducted in Belgium and followed essentially the same procedure as their first investigation. As with their previous research, the results showed that the adolescents exposed to the aggressive films became more physically aggressive relative to those who viewed the neutral films. However, unlike the first study, the adolescents who were rated as highly aggressive showed a greater increase in general and verbal aggression after exposure to the aggressive film (than to the neutral film) compared with those who were initially rated as less aggressive. An additional feature of the Belgian study was that it included an assessment of group membership characteristics: The adolescents ranked each other based on dominance and popularity. It was found that the most dominant, popular, and aggressive adolescents were the most reactive to media aggression. The least popular youths were also affected to a large degree.

DISABILITY AND TELETHONS

In 1977, Lattin accused telethons of not revealing the whole story. Telethons fail to talk about the laws that provide for architectural and transportation accessibility, that make education available to all children; they do not discuss employment opportunities, affirmative action, or the capabilities and initiative of handicapped people themselves. They present only a horror story of a "hopeless" life.

Although Lattin criticizes telethons for their disabled portrayals, she lauded them for fostering unity and bringing society together to assist its less fortunate members, something she thinks society does not do often enough.

Lattin (1979) both praised and criticized United Cerebral Palsy (UCP) but reflected her constituents' feelings that telethons can be positive if they follow certain guidelines: using both adults and children in demonstrations of programs and services, accurately reflect the degrees of disabilities and variety of living situations, inform nondisabled talent about appropriate terminology, avoid ref-

erences encouraging viewers to be thankful for their healthy children, avoid allowing the disabled to attempt to prove their ability to perform activities of the nondisabled, and emphasize UCP's advocacy roles for the disabled.

Sheed (1980) was also negative toward the disabled media events. He suggested the media show the disabled in buildings, inaccessible to them because of swinging doors and other structures that have not been redesigned to accommodate them.

British telethons are more suitable; their images usually are more positive and optimistic. The British disability movement dislikes the twentieth-century version of the beggar in the streets (Karpf, 1988). British Central Television examined the material and social obstacles forced upon people with disabilities who were trying to live independent lives.

USING MEDIA TO CHANGE ATTITUDES TOWARD THE DISABLED

Guldager (1973) assessed the impact of viewing spot television announcements on 390 college students to determine their attitudes toward deaf-blind children. Subjects were assigned to one of three groups in which they viewed a television program inserted with (1) three commercials containing a discussion of deaf-blind children, (2) three commercials showing deaf-blind children, or (3) no commercials (control condition). The results indicated that the students who watched the "discussion" commercials reported a significantly higher positive attitude toward deaf-blind children than subjects in the other two conditions. Analysis of the interactions of 30 students from the control group and 45 students from the combined experimental groups also showed a greater positive attitude toward deaf-blind children in the latter. The relative effectiveness of the two experimental conditions remained unclear, however, because a direct comparison of the interactions of subjects from these two groups was not conducted.

Sadlick and Penta (1975) found attitudes of senior nursing students toward quadriplegics as social and working persons were significantly altered in a positive direction through viewing and discussing a seventeen-minute videotape of a successfully rehabilitated quadriplegic. The significant change persisted (though diminished) over a ten-week period in which the students worked with quadriplegics in a rehabilitation setting. Attitudes toward other nurses working with quadriplegics were not significantly altered by this videotape. Attitudes toward themselves working with quadriplegics were significantly altered following the videotape, but the effect did not persist over time.

Donaldson (1976) examined the effects of different modes of presenting a panel discussion about disability on attitudes toward the disabled. The six-member panel, comprising young adults with visible disabilities (quadriplegia, blindness, cerebral palsy), presented a fifty-minute discussion that centered on the idea that disabled and nondisabled individuals share many common feelings, values, and goals. College students ($N =$ ninety-six) were randomly assigned to

either the live (L), video (V), audio (A), or control (C) group. All subjects in the three experimental groups viewed and/or listened to the same discussion. The live presentation was significantly more effective than the other modes in generating favorable attitudes. Video was more effective than the control groups, but differences among A, C, V, and A were nonsignificant. Donaldson concluded that although the live presentation was more effective, there are many practical disadvantages (e.g., management, cost) associated with this approach.

Ardi (1977) evaluated the effects of viewing six "Sesame Street" "Play to Grow" segments on forty-five second-graders. The children viewed the tapes individually and were then given a structured interview. The data revealed that although the children were aware of differences between the MR and normal children, negative attitudes toward the latter did not appear. However, the absence of a control group leaves the impact of the "Play to Grow" series unknown. Baran (1977, 1979) attempted to alter parents' attitudes toward their MR children using four, half-hour educational television (ETV) dramas portraying MR people in everyday situations.

There was a significant increase in favorable attitudes on four of the eighteen "Reactions and Concerns of Parents" items from the Thurston (1959) "sentence completion form" for parents who viewed the programs compared with those who did not. On three of seventeen items measuring parents' ratings of their own children's capabilities, parents who viewed the program rated their children significantly higher than parents who did not view the television shows.

Schanie and Sundel (1978) evaluated the effectiveness of twenty-one public service announcements broadcast over radio and/or television during a sixty-week period. The results indicated that the television announcements had a significant positive impact on adult telephone call activity. No significant effect on adult call activity was observed for radio announcements presented alone or in combination with television spots. Youth call activity was not affected by either mode. Survey data revealed a significant increase in the community's awareness of mental health resources, and a positive change in attitudes toward the cognitive structuring of problem situations. Attitudes concerning the appropriate behavior during a problem situation were not affected. Schanie and Sundel concluded that further research was needed to determine how to reach youths more effectively. They also suggested that media messages should be pretested to prevent an inadvertent increase in negative attitudes.

Potter (1978) found the informal use of television programs portraying the complete experience of the disabled encouraged her sixth-graders to ask questions and develop appreciation, acceptance, and understanding of the disabled life-style. She cited such television programs as "I Can Do It," "Wilma" (a true story about Wilma Rudolph, an Olympic star who had polio), and "The Waltons."

"Khan Du!" is an instructional television series that attempts to (1) "be realistic in the portrayal of disabled children and adults, and in their relationships with others"; (2) "show the similarities between disabled and non-disabled persons, especially with regard to abilities and career"; and (3) "use events modeled to real experiences, plus interaction with adult role models to build

self-esteem of disabled youngsters" ("Khan Du!," 1979, p. 3). The effects of viewing this series were evaluated on 1,080 children in grades three through six, 87 of whom were handicapped. None of the latter children were MR; however, the specific handicaps of the children were not identified or analyzed separately. The children were randomly assigned to the experimental (five "Khan Du!" programs) condition. Data analysis revealed that both handicapped and nonhandicapped children experienced significant gains in reported attitude toward handicapped people following the viewing of "Khan Du!" In addition, the nonhandicapped children showed a significant increase in their knowledge of handicapped people's abilities. (The handicapped children scored high in this area on initial testing.) The one area in which there were no significant increases for handicapped or nonhandicapped children was perception of one's own abilities. Overall, "Khan Du!" appears to be most successful in improving attitudes toward the handicapped.

Storey (1979) investigated the effects of viewing six "Feeling Free" programs followed by teacher-led discussion on children from twelve mainstreamed classrooms (age: $X=9.5$ years). "Feeling Free" is an ETV series developed as a means of facilitating mainstreaming. Pre- and posttest scores on the Children's Attitudes toward Handicapped People test revealed that only children who viewed the programs and participated in the discussions demonstrated a significant increase in positive attitudes toward handicapped people.

In 1979, Monson and Shurtleff discovered that the media can influence children's attitudes toward people with physical handicaps, particularly when cooperating teachers provide good models and encourage positive attitudes.

Gottlieb (1980) used a two-and-one-fourth-minute investigator-made videotape of an MR boy participating in various activities to stimulate discussion of mental retardation. The study resulted in one significant effect: The children with negative attitudes about MR children reported greater attitude change in the three groups that discussed the treatment videotape than subjects in the control group did. The videotape discussion appeared to be equally effective regardless of initial attitude toward MR (positive or neutral).

In 1980, Westervelt and McKinney studied fourth-grade students to evaluate the effects of a brief film designed to point out how the aspirations and interests of a handicapped child are similar to those of his or her nonhandicapped classmates. It appears the film alone may be useful to show to children immediately before they have a physically handicapped child join their class. However, the film alone does not appear to be sufficient to handle all questions that the nonhandicapped child might have about a handicapped peer, and its effect does not appear to be permanent. Used in conjunction with other experiences, such as listening to handicapped speakers and participating in discussion sessions, the film might help prompt a more receptive and understanding classroom environment for the physically handicapped child.

In 1984, Elliott and Byrd (1984a) conducted a study to investigate the differential effects on attitudes of a nonstereotypical television portrayal of blindness and a film designed specifically to inform viewers about blindness. This

study differed from previous ones in that an episode of a popular television program was utilized as one of the treatments. Although the Sadlick and Penta (1975) study referred to the use of television, a videotaped interview with a successfully rehabilitated person who had a spinal cord injury was employed as a treatment, and not an episode from an actual television program. Active discussion after viewing the television episode was incorporated as a part of the treatment—a variable that distinguishes this study from a previous experiment.

Results revealed that both experimental groups experienced positive movement on parallel forms of the ATDP (Attitudes Toward Disabled Persons) Scale. These findings support the effectiveness of the film *What Do You Do When You Meet a Blind Person?* and imply that a potential exists for the mass media to foster more favorable predispositions toward disability.

While television can portray negative stereotypes of persons with disabilities, it can also help reverse stereotypes as indicated by the theories discussed earlier in the chapter. Using television in a combination with discussions and presentation can change attitudes toward persons with disabilities.

DISCUSSION

A review of the research on persons with disabilities and the mass media for the past twenty years supports the following: (1) All media increased their coverage of persons with disabilities; (2) all media tended to negatively portray persons with disabilities; (3) all media showed some improvement in their portrayal of persons with disabilities, no matter how minuscule; (4) all media under certain circumstances can be used to change attitudes toward persons with disabilities; and (5) children with disabilities are heavy television viewers and are influenced by what they see on television.

What do the above observations concerning the mass media and persons with disabilities imply? The potential impact of these observations can only be understood in light of mass media theory.

Traditionally negatively portrayed, persons with disabilities received low-status conferral and were therefore potentially irrelevant or insignificant in the larger society. According to the social comparison theory, persons are likely to compare themselves with persons appearing in the media. Thus, comparisons made by persons with disabilities could result in dissociation from the society that portrayed them negatively.

The meaning theory, which suggests the media play a role in the development of meaning, is significant in analyzing the meaning of phrases descriptive of persons with disabilities. *Disabilities* could be a negative or positive word, depending on how persons with disabilities were presented in the media.

Cultivation analysis suggests that television is representative of the real world. If the media present persons with disabilities negatively, society will view them negatively; conversely, if the media expand the positive portrayal trend, perhaps society may be positively influenced.

The agenda-setting theory suggests that the media determine significant issues for society. Media tended to narrowly cover news related to persons with disabilities. The media focused on persons with disabilities as victims, geniuses, or superheroes. Therefore, because of the media's agenda-setting function, society may view persons with disabilities as victims, geniuses, or superheros. The media failed to introduce society to the full range of issues confronted by persons with disabilities such as civil rights and social and political problems.

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