



FilmDis White Paper on Disability Representation on Television: Examining 180 TV Shows from March 2018 to March 2019

White Paper by:

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Our study and white paper were completed through the work of Ashtyn Law and Dom Evans, with assistance from [MaeLee Johnson](#).

Introduction

The disability community comprises the largest marginalized group in the world. It includes people from every culture, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender, and religious affiliation. As many as [1 in 4, or approximately 20% of the population of the United States](#), have some form of disability. According to the World Health Organization, about 1 Billion people, [around 15% of the world population](#), have a disability. Despite that, disabled people are largely ignored by the media. When we are included it is often to our detriment. There has yet to be a study into representation of disability on television that goes in depth enough to explore how disability affects intersections of identity, whether disabled people are included in actually representing disabled characters, and how portrayals of disability actually affect disabled people. All of that's about to change with this, our first FilmDis study into disability representation on television.

Since disabled people come from all walks of life, it's important for the media to depict that accurately. We know that representation has a strong effect on the lives of marginalized people. When marginalized groups are not represented, or they are represented unequally within their group, it creates great disparities. The vast majority of studies into representation of disability and media have primarily focused on disability specifically. For this study, we felt it was imperative that we examine how gender, gender identity, race, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, and sometimes religious affiliation/culture impact disability representation. Finding out how intersections of identity affect representation has been a fascinating aspect of our research and is something we hope will shed further light on what communities are being underserved.

Disability is a natural part of our world. It's a part of the aging process. For those who are not born disabled, the likelihood of becoming disabled at some point in life increases exponentially with age. If not personally disabled, most people know someone, whether a friend or loved one, who has some form of disability. As such, it is imperative that we understand what disability representation is available through all forms of media, including television. Through this representation, we can explore what real-world implications this representation has on the disability community.

When most people think of disability representation, they think of visible disabilities – Blind people using white canes, Little People, wheelchair users, and people with Down

Syndrome. Despite visible disability being more conspicuous, the vast majority of disabled people have disabilities that do not always manifest visibly. These disabilities may include psychosocial disabilities such as Depression, ADHD, Anxiety, and Bipolar, as well as those who are D/deaf/Hard of Hearing.

Note: *Some D/deaf people do not consider themselves disabled, but for the purpose of this study as well as their continued exclusion from Hollywood they are counted as a part of the broader disability community.*

Likewise, some disabilities are visible, but may not be consistently present (they may go in and out of remission) or may be subtle enough that others don't notice them. They are also often not understood to be disabilities, but they are. These may include chronic health disabilities like Lupus, Diabetes, and Crohn's, and various forms of Cancer. This is part of what made identifying disabled actors difficult, especially since disabled actors who can hide that they are disabled are more likely to do so due to fear of discrimination in Hollywood, which seems to be a common practice.

Beyond disability, this study categorizes disabled characters on the basis of gender/gender identity, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, role type, and whether the actor is engaging in **disabled mimicry**, which is the performance of disabled roles by nondisabled actors or actors without the specific disability represented, which is often reduced to mimicking disability through physicality and vocal intonation. We recognize that a lot of disabled people live intersectional marginalized existences, so we feel it is important to understand how systems of oppressions impact representation.

Categorizing Disability & Disabled Characters

This study examines 180 of the over 500 shows that aired primarily in the United States between March 2018 and March 2019. We looked at every single character from lead roles down to extras and made notes about inclusion in all areas of representation. Of the 180 shows, 151 of them have some form of disability representation. This is quite surprising, as that means that 84% of the shows we watched contained at least **ONE** disabled Bit character. We do not count shows in that 151 total that only included disabled Extras and no other disabled characters.

Across the 151 shows there are 708 disabled characters in a Lead, Supporting, or Bit role. They are played by 710 actors, because 2 characters (Ethan Peck and Liam Hughes as Spock on *Star Trek: Discovery* and Sarah Carter and Islie Hirvonen as Grace Gibbons on *The Flash*) are played by two different actors at different ages. Shows aired on 22 different television networks (5 of which are local channels) and 6 streaming services. All of the shows are live action in this study, although we did initially also watch animated shows. We plan to release information about our findings on those shows at a future date.

One of the hardest parts of this study has been categorizing each character by disability. For many characters, their disabilities transcend through multiple categories. As such, we broke representation down into multiple groups, based on shared experiences and/or diagnosis. Disabled people can also be multiply disabled, and that was another important area that we wanted to explore with this study. There are also disabilities, we simply cannot categorize, especially on sci-fi or superhero themed shows, so we also created a category for disabilities that just do not fit anywhere else.

When naming categories, we take our lead from how television is defining disability. In the notes that we provide, which shows some of our research, you may see outdated terms such as “wheelchair bound” which is how these characters are described on the shows we watched. It is important to consider which group each character represents, and since this is the flagship study of what we plan will become a yearly study of disability representation on television, we welcome your feedback on disability categorization, and how we can improve for next year.

Of note: *Originally, we did attempt to also monitor whether characters are coded disabled or not, but that became rather complicated as disclosure, as well as visibility, was murkier than expected.*

Representation by Disability

We broke disability representation down into 16 major categories. One category, Neurodivergent and/or Psychosocial is further broken down into four different subgroups. It should be noted that there is a lot of overlap for Psychosocial groups, and that heavily influenced our decision to break the category down in such a way. We also wanted to explore this phenomenon we theorized might be present, where characters

have unspecified psychosocial disabilities. This turned out to be a popular category, as we anticipated.

The following sections explore how disability representation is affected in specific communities. There is not an overall consistency with casting or inclusion other than an overabundance of white, cisgender, males. Some communities have better, more inclusive representation than others, but every community is still vastly underrepresented. We also discovered patterns emerging based on gender and race. One of the most interesting aspects of the study is how certain genders seem to depict certain disabilities, more so than others. Additionally, seeing how race and gender impact representation together is quite eye-opening.

Alcoholism/Addiction

When most people think of disability, they don't typically consider alcoholism or addiction. While alcoholism and addiction don't usually qualify someone for Social Security Disability, there are government programs for disabled folks, such as vocational rehab that do often work with people in recovery. Addiction and alcoholism can have long-term effects on a person's health and well-being and can sometimes cause other disabilities.

For this specific category, we look at characters that are either currently dealing with some form of addiction or are in recovery for addiction. We do not count anyone dealing with comorbidity of addiction and other disabilities in this particular category. That's because we wanted to focus separately on how addiction is often used for self-medicating other disabilities, especially mental health or pain related disabilities. This is its own phenomenon. So, while there are plenty of characters dealing with alcoholism and addiction, these are the characters that are only dealing with alcoholism and addiction as a solitary issue.

Alcoholism & Addiction is one of the larger categories. Out of the 180 shows we watched, 64 shows feature alcoholism and/or addiction. That means that 35% of the shows we watched feature at least one person dealing with alcoholism and/or addiction. We split the category up, so most characters are labeled either dealing with alcoholism or dealing with addiction. Addiction overwhelms with 118 characters or about 17% of the 707 characters represented. There are 33 people with alcoholism, 6 with gambling

addiction, 5 with both alcoholism and addiction, and 2 people dealing with porn addiction.

Alcoholism and addiction are found on shows across 15 networks and 4 streaming services. Cisgender men and cisgender women are almost evenly split, with 79 characters being male, and 77 characters being female. Trans/non-binary characters are not represented save for 1 non-binary gay Black male (Miss Bruce on *Star*). Heterosexuals overwhelmingly dominate the category with 105 characters. The majority of these characters, 40 of them to be exact, are white heterosexual males. 43 of the characters feature unknown sexuality. It most likely is not relevant to their role. Lesbians have no representation, but gay men are 7 of the characters, 3 of whom are Black gay men, 2 of whom are white gay men, 1 IPOC gay man who is Latinx, and 1 Moclan (Bortus on *The Orville*). There is also 1 bisexual character, a bisexual white man.

Predictably, characters with alcoholism and addiction are white. There are 117 white characters, 23 Black, and 15 IPOC. The breakdown for IPOC characters includes 9 Latinx, 1 Indian, 2 Asians, 1 Hawaiian, 1 Biracial, and 1 First Nations. There is also 1 character from a non-Earth race, a Moclan (he is played by a Black actor, Peter Macon). The majority of the characters, 145 of them, are American. 5 are British, 2 are Unknown, 1 is Australian, 1 is Canadian, 1 is German, and 1 is from the nonexistent planet, Moclus.

As for age, alcoholism & addiction are present in every age range but children. The majority of characters are Adults (138). The rest are Elders (12), Teens (5), and 1 Baby. What should be of utmost concern is that the majority of these roles are Bit parts. There are 88 characters that are Bit roles, 47 are Supporting roles, and 21 of them are Lead characters. What this says to us is that while disabled people dealing with alcoholism and addiction are showing up throughout television sporadically, most of them are not involved in regular casting or may only be included as one-episode guest stars.

Further breaking down Lead and Supporting roles, 13 of the Lead characters are white, with 7 of those being white women. BIPOC share just five other roles. The breakdown for this is 2 Black gay men, 1 Latinx man, 1 Latinx woman, and 1 Fantasy race gay man (played by a Black actor). The only other diversity is 1 white man who is gay. Supporting roles feature 33 white characters, 16 of whom are female and 1 of whom is a bisexual male. There is also 1 white male Vulcan. The 16 nonwhite disabled characters include 5 Black women, 2 Black men, 1 of whom is gay, 4 IPOC women (1 Biracial, 1 Asian, 1

Latinx, and 1 First Nations), and 5 IPOC men (3 Latinx – one of whom is gay, 1 Hawaiian, and 1 Indian).

16 out of the 64 shows feature Extras with alcoholism and/or addiction. The leader for this is CBS with 4 shows, and runner-up is Amazon with 3. There are more men as Extras than women, although there is a mix of races represented including white, Black, and IPOC groups (Indigenous, Hawaiian, and Latinx). The vast majority of Extras are adults, and none are children or babies. CBS is also the overall winner for all of the networks with 42 of those 156 characters. A large reason for this is the show *Mom*, which centers around a daughter and mother on their quest for recovery together.

One of the issues we have with this particular category is figuring out which characters are actually played by people who have experienced alcoholism or addiction, personally. Because alcoholism and addiction are not considered visible disabilities, although some of the symptoms of substance use may be visible, it is hard to know unless an actor has spoken publicly about use and/or recovery. That means that the majority of these characters we just don't know. Unknown accounts for 152 characters, with 2 characters played by actors who have spoken about their struggles with addiction, and 2 characters played by actors who have said they are not.

Amputee

Amputees may cross over into other categories, such as Physical Disability and Chronic Health. However, it is important to keep amputees in their own separate category, because there is a lot of uniformity in how we see amputees being cast on television. Unlike less visible disabilities, It's much easier to find out if an actor is an amputee or not. Amputation can happen to nearly any body part, and for this study we see a wide variety of amputated body parts, including part of a butt cheek (Sir Gareth from *Knight Squad*).

Amputation is sometimes used for comic relief. For example, on *AP Bio*, a former bully of the protagonist, named Greg (played by non-amputee, Tim Heidecker) comes back to his alma mater to tell an inspiring story about how he has found success despite losing his toe. When the toe is stolen, it reveals he is still a bully. Toe amputation was also present on *Shameless*, when Frank amputates Debbie's toe since she can't afford to go to the hospital. Like Debbie, who was an established character prior to her amputation

Outlander (Fergus), *Goliath* (Tom Wyatt), *Hawaii 5-0* (Natano Reigns), *Iron Fist* (Misty Knight, Chen Wu), and *Room 104* (Dan) feature characters that are not amputees when their character is introduced.

Multiple characters are disabled veterans including Brad Fullerton (*Magnum P.I.*), and Sam Keefe (*Shameless*). The Amputee category also presents the darker side of disability representation. In *Room 104*, Dan and another white male heterosexual character consensually meet in a hotel room to amputate each other's penises and eat them. They succeed in amputating Dan's penis, but things are broken up when the police arrive. On *Goliath*, Tom Wyatt is a devotee who can only get off when fetishizing women amputees, and this is depicted with the misogynistic exploitation of female amputees. He later becomes an amputee himself.

Out of the 180 shows watched, 24 or 13% feature at least one amputee character. The shows span across 12 networks and 3 streaming services. The primary form of amputation represented is Legs with 14 characters. Other forms of amputation include Arm (4), Hand (4 – 1 with a bilateral hand amputation), Eye (3), Finger (3), Multiple Amputations (3 – all 4 limbs and tongue (1), both legs and hand (1), and hand, eye, and butt cheek (1)), Toe (2), and Penis (1).

The majority of amputee characters are cisgender males. A whopping 29 out of 34 characters or 85% of them are male, 12 of them specifically white heterosexual males. The rest (5) are cisgender women. There are 17 heterosexual characters, 12 of unknown sexuality because it wasn't relevant to their character, 2 bisexuals, and 1 gay male. The bisexual characters are a white man and a white woman, while the gay character is a POC, an Indian man. Trans, non-binary, and lesbian amputees apparently don't exist on television, or at least not in the sample we studied.

As for race/ethnicity, 24 characters are white, again a significant majority of mostly males. Of the 5 cisgender female characters that are amputees, 3 are white and 2 are Black. Overall, there were 7 IPOC characters (3 Latinx, 1 Middle Eastern, 1 Hawaiian, 1 Indian, and 1 Asian), and 3 Black characters total, meaning there was only one Black male amputee. While there is 1 Hawaiian character, there are no other Indigenous characters. Not surprisingly, the majority of characters are American (24). The rest of the characters are Australian (2), British (1), Chinese (1), French (1), and Mexican (1). There are also characters from a fictional location (2), and characters with Unknown (2) nationalities.

The majority of amputees are Adults (30). There are 2 Elders, 1 Teen, and 1 Child. There needs to be much more focus on younger amputees, and specifically amputations that happen very young or that happen from birth, which are not typically represented. Again, the sad part of this is recognizing how few Lead characters are amputees. For this category, only 3, or about 8% of the 34 amputee characters are lead characters. Supporting (15) and Bit (16) characters are the majority of representation.

Delving deeper into representation of Lead and Supporting characters, of the 3 Lead amputee characters, 2 characters are multiply marginalized. One of them is a white bisexual woman and another is a Black woman. Out of 15 Supporting characters, 6 are multiply marginalized. One of them is a bisexual white male. The others are BPOC. There is 1 Black man and 1 Black woman. The other three are Asian (1), Middle Eastern (1), and Indian (1). The Indian man is also gay. There is 1 show on CBS featuring Extras that were amputees, and all of them were white (both men and women). With so little representation, it would be hard to show an accurate picture of the vast diversity of the amputee community.

What is even more depressing is that the majority of amputees were played by non-amputees. 18 characters (53%) are not actually amputees. 13 of the characters are played by actual amputees, although actor Kurt Yeager plays 3 characters on his own. The rest of the characters (3) have such small roles, it was hard to find out if the actors are actual amputees. Of those that are amputees, only two of the characters, both played by Kurt Yeager (Joe on *The Village* and Terry Mitchell on *Take Two*), are Supporting roles. All the rest of the actual amputees are relegated to Bit roles, while Lead roles are played by those engaging in disabled mimicry.

Proving that including disability doesn't mean great representation, Amazon features the most amputees of any network/streaming service with 7 characters. The majority are on *Goliath*, the show with the harmful devotee representation, although there is also 1 on *Patriot*, whose prosthetic is used for comic relief. CBS and Netflix tie for second place with 5 characters apiece. Despite some representation, amputees remain largely invisible, especially for multiply marginalized amputees. We must start seeing more female, trans/non-binary, Indigenous folks, child, teen, and BIPOC characters that are amputees.

Blind, Low Vision

When we talk about disability on television, some people mention occasionally seeing Blind characters. These characters are easier to spot than those with less visible disabilities, especially if they are accompanied by accoutrements such as a cane or a service animal. Historically, there has not been a huge amount of Blind representation on television or in any media, and what has been available is largely problematic and offensive.

A lot of the portrayals of Blindness are inspiration porn, and that's no different for this study. The worst offender, by far, is the wishy-washy drama, *The Widow* from Amazon. Characters, Ariel and Beatrix (played by seeing actors Ólafur Darri Ólafsson and Louise Brealey), meet at a clinic where they are hoping to have their eyesight restored. Ariel, who was injured in a terrorist bombing in Africa and can identify who is responsible, is desperate to get his sight back but does not qualify for the surgery. Beatrix qualifies for the surgery and is eventually able to see. The reason why the actress said she took the role is because the character must look at a famous painting of Whistler's Mother for two seconds, which is ridiculous logic.

Another blind character, Maren Thompson, who has surgery, and is given the chance to see again, is played by Blind actress, Marilee Talkington on *High Maintenance*. Maren initially wants to gain vision, because her young daughter wants her to be able to see her. While the story can, at times, have an inspirational feel, there are a few really interesting aspects of this storyline. For one, Ms. Talkington clearly shows how ridiculous it is to assume that a Blind actor could not play a seeing character for some scenes. Second, when it is assumed that the surgery did not work, Maren's response is one of acceptance. She doesn't believe her life will be limited if she cannot see.

The amount of Blind/Low Vision representation on television is negligible. Of note is the fact that there seems to be very little understanding of Blindness, or that there is a wide variety of experiences with Blindness within the Blind/Low Vision community. With some of the lowest representation in this study, 12 of the 180 shows we watched feature a Blind/Low Vision character. That's around 7% of the shows we watched. There are 13 characters total, which span 8 networks and 3 streaming services. The majority of characters are labeled Blind (10), with 2 considered Low Vision. Another character,

Moirra O'Hara (played by Francis Conroy), on *American Horror Story: Apocalypse*, has vision problems because she was shot in her eye, and has eye damage.

The majority of Blind characters are cisgender females (8), and cisgender males (5) make up the rest. There are no trans or non-binary Blind characters, at all, which is a disservice to the multiple trans/non-binary Blind people that exist in the world. Nearly all of the Blind characters are heterosexual (9), while 3 characters have sexuality that is Unknown. There is only 1 gay Blind character, and he is a white male.

In truth, Blind representation has a white problem. All of the Blind characters that are women are white. The erasure of Blind BIPOC in all media is significant, and unfortunately television is not helping with that. There was only one nonwhite character that was Blind in all 180 shows we watched. The lone character is a Black male character, Hal (David Alan Grier), from *A Series of Unfortunate Events* on Netflix. Hal is a recordkeeper at the hospital, and he has Low Vision. In fact, Hal's glasses have glasses, and he still can't see, but that does not prevent him from doing important work at the hospital.

Worth discussion is how Black and Brown characters function around white disabled characters, which is prevalent in the depiction of Aunt Jocasta (Maria Doyle Kennedy) on *Outlander*. Jocasta is the aunt of the male protagonist, Jamie Fraser. She inherited a plantation from her late husband, and an older male enslaved person, Ulysses, acts as her eyes, essentially. She cannot function without his help and assistance, and he actively helps her to run the plantation that continues to enslave him and other Black people. It's hugely problematic that Black characters can play the saviors and caregivers for Blind characters, but Black and Brown Blind characters are not allowed to exist on their own.

Nationality wise, Americans continue to be represented the most, which is expected considering we are primarily viewing shows produced in Hollywood. There are 8 Americans. Other nationalities include British (2), Icelandic (1), Norwegian (1), and Scottish (1). The majority of Blind characters are Adults (7) followed closely behind by Elders (5). There is also 1 Teen character. Blind children and babies exist, but you wouldn't know that from this study. There needs to be much more diversity and inclusion for Blind children and allowing Blind young actors to even audition in Hollywood would be a great first step.

Most Blind characters are Bit (8) characters. Only 5 characters are Supporting roles. There are no Lead characters that are Blind on any shows. Out of the 5 Supporting characters that are Blind/Low Vision, none of them are nonwhite. 3 of them are white women and 2 of them are white men. None of the Supporting roles are LGBTQIA. This truly is one of the least diverse and least inclusive categories, which just speaks of how little Blind/Low Vision characters are included. There is 1 Blind Extra on 1 show, a cisgender white adult male on *The Rookie* on ABC. The networks with the most Blind representation overall, 2 characters each, are Amazon and Hulu.

It's frustrating to report that 9 of the 13, or 70% of the characters are played by nondisabled actors. Only 3 characters are played by Blind/Low Vision actors, and 1 is Unknown. All of this says that there needs to be much more authentic representation, as well as inclusion in casting of Blind/Low Vision actors, particularly those who are BIPOC and LGBTQIA. Blind actors deserve to have access to Lead and Supporting roles, not just a one-time guest starring performance. This is one category where Hollywood needs to improve the most.

One of the things that needs to change for Blind/Low Vision representation is how we perceive Blindness. Television needs to move away from the narrative that Blindness must be cured for people to function. Characters speak about wanting the "miracle of sight" and other harmful stereotypes, because Blind actors and creators have clearly not been involved in crafting these stories. Blindness is even explored as a punishment through Florence Scanwell on *Harlots*. Throughout the series, it is revealed that Florence (played by seeing actor, Dorothy Atkinson), who is a religious zealot and rages against sex workers, became Blind as a result of an STD (assumed Syphilis) when she was a sex worker herself. Creators must move away from using Blindness/Low Vision as a plot device and start making Blind/Low Vision characters well-rounded and multidimensional.

Body & Facial Differences, Scarring

The Body & Facial Differences and Scarring category could have vast diversity, but the truth is other than scarring we don't see very much representation. There are many reasons why someone might have a disability relating to Body & Facial Differences. There are congenital disabilities that can cause various forms of Differences, but accidents and other incidents later in life can also contribute. Fires can cause scarring

and other Bodily Differences, but we usually don't see that much representation unless shows feature firefighters.

Some of the portrayals of Body & Facial Differences and Scarring are offensive. For example, Hugo on *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, who has severe kyphosis, is referred to as the "hunchback." He performs in a carnival freak show, where he tries on different coats. On *Chicago Med*, parents of a teenager have to be persuaded to save their daughter, Blair, who has burns on over 80% of her body, because they assume she "wouldn't want to live that way." *The Flash* introduces the concept of self-loathing leading to homicidal behavior when Savitar is revealed to be a scarred, damaged Barry Allen in a previous season. The entire plot behind his nefarious villainy is his Facial Differences, and anger at the loss of those he loved. He returns briefly, this season, still scarred and still angry, when Barry and his daughter from the future, must go back in time to get something from Savitar.

Not all portrayals are harmful, though. Despite having multiple scars from the war in the future, Wolf on *Future Man* is a highly capable soldier and Time Traveler, as well as a chef, partner in a polyamorous cluster, and surrogate father to daughter, Lugenut. *Harlots* also shows scarred strong independent women. Violet Cross, a Black, bisexual woman, often transcends stereotypes. She is jailed and branded, literally, as a thief. Despite that, she ends up working in the home of Justice Josiah Hunt, where she is quite helpful to him. She also explores a positively depicted relationship with Amelia Scanwell, a young Christian woman who is confused about her feelings for Violet.

Only 5% of shows or 9 out of 180 feature a character with Body & Facial Differences or Scarring. This accounts for 10 different characters on 5 networks and 3 streaming services. The most representation went to Burn/Scars (7). Other representation includes "Hunchback" (1), Club Foot (1), and Cleft Palate (1). Of these characters, cisgender men dominate the narrative. In fact, all male representation is white. Trans/non-binary individuals are once again excluded from inclusion, as are gay and lesbian characters. However, surprisingly there are 2 bisexual characters, and one of them is a Black woman. The other is a white man. The rest of the characters are heterosexual (4), or their sexuality is Unknown (4).

Violet is 1 of only 2 nonwhite characters in this category. Both nonwhite characters are women. However, that means 8 of the characters are white. While Violet is Black, Mini is a Latinx child on *Mayans MC*. Together, these two female characters represent the only racial diversity in the Body & Facial Differences and Scarring category. This is a great

misjustice when it comes to representation, which needs to be rectified. The majority of characters are American (5), although British (3) representation is not far behind. The two other characters are Mexican (1) and Scottish (1).

Adults (7) account for the majority of roles. There are no Elders, but there is 1 Teen, 1 Child, and 1 Baby represented. Baby Kirk from *Call the Midwife* represents the historic exclusion of disabled people from greater society. Born with a cleft palate, his father is away at sea, and the other mothers in the maternity ward treat the baby like he is a pariah. His mother has five other children and feels overwhelmed to care for him. After one of the nurses goes out to the home and enlists one of her older children to help out their mother, who is protective of his little brother, Baby Kirk starts to thrive. His mother is grateful that she doesn't have to give him up because she never wanted to in the first place.

While 2 characters are Lead characters, Bit (6) characters still continue to dominate disability representation. The remaining 2 characters are supporting characters. None of the Lead characters are nonwhite, trans/non-binary, or women. One of them is a white bisexual man. The 2 Supporting characters are both BIPOC women. One of them is a Black bisexual woman, the other is a Latinx woman. We can determine that none of the actors playing these roles actually have Body & Facial Differences or Scarring. We are certain 8 actors do not, and 2 are unknown. There are no Extras with Body & Facial Differences or Scarring. The networks with the most representation overall are PBS and Hulu, which both feature 2 characters a piece.

The big thing to take away from this category is that there simply is not accurate or inclusive representation for people that have Body & Facial Differences and/or Scarring. If and when there is inclusion, characters tend to be white. Representation varies from not having any effect on a character's life to being a primary plot point. However, when people that are living with this disability have no part in crafting these stories, the disability is either forgettable or ridiculous. Additionally, it would be great to see stories that actually involve Body & Facial Differences that are congenital or that affect children and teenagers. Most of the focus has been on acquired disability, but there are many people living with congenital Body & and Facial Differences that have never accurately seen themselves represented on television or other media.

Cancer

If you watch a lot of medical dramas, you've probably seen your fair share of guest stars that have Cancer. Cancer can refer to [over 200 diseases, which involve uncontrollable cell growth that harms body tissues](#). How cancer affects each person will vary widely because there are so many different variables that can affect cancer. As such, it was imperative that we look for a wide diversity in representation, to reflect how common Cancer is in most families.

One of the more interesting portrayals of Cancer we saw was on *A Million Little Things*. Gary Mendez is a man in remission from Breast Cancer. When most people think of Breast Cancer, they think of women who have it, but it can also affect men. Gary's Cancer is still impacting his life, despite being in remission. He is not even able to have sex with his shirt off, presumably because of his embarrassment about how his chest looks following surgery.

Meanwhile, *Chicago Med* examines the struggle of Cancer treatment for undocumented people. When Linda Harper is diagnosed with Cancer, she tries to find a way to get her green card. There is a promising stem cell treatment that could put her in remission, but because she is not a citizen and does not have a green card she does not qualify for the treatment. Her brother could donate stem cells, but he is also undocumented, so he is afraid he will get deported if he goes to the hospital to get tested. *Chicago Med* also explores white supremacy, when Kenneth Baker, a white man with Cancer, deliberately plows down multiple people during a street fair in the hopes of killing, "as many Black people as possible."

Out of 180 shows, 16% or 29 of them have at least one depiction of Cancer. Considering the prevalence of Cancer in society, this signifies that Cancer representation is significantly lacking. There are 56 characters across 11 networks and 2 streaming services. The majority of representation features characters with an unspecified type of Cancer (28). The rest are characters with the following types of Cancer: Breast (6 – 5 females, 1 male), Leukemia (4), Lung (3), Brain (3), Colon (2), Lymphoma (2), Pancreatic (2), Endometrial (1), Glioblastoma (1), Ovarian (1), Prostate (1), Testicular (1), and Squamous Cell Carcinoma (1).

More cisgender females (30) have Cancer than cisgender males (26). LGBTQA representation is not present at all. However, there is one Intersex character. She is a Black woman, who discovers she is Intersex after abdominal pains reveal that she has Testicular Cancer. She is listed as a Black Intersex woman, because that's how the character chooses to identify by the end of the episode. Characters are either heterosexual (36) or their sexuality is not relevant to the story, so it is Unknown (20). We know that Cancer can happen to any type of person at any age, so a complete lack of diversity in sexuality or gender identity is a massive issue for this already largely underserved community.

The majority of Cancer patients are white (38). That's nearly 70% of all characters with Cancer. The other 18 characters are Black (11) and POC (7). POC representation can further be broken down to Latinx (3), Asian (3), and Middle Eastern (1). For Black characters, the majority are Black females (7) one of whom is Intersex. The other 4 are Black males. Asian representation is split between 2 females and 1 male. Latinx is split between 2 males and 1 female, and there is 1 Middle Eastern male.

You won't be surprised to know that 48 of the characters are American. Other nationalities include 4 British, 1 Rwandan (Hutu), 1 French, and 1 South American (unknown country of origin). There is also 1 character from the fictitious country of Qumar. We believe this may be paying homage to Aaron Sorkin's *The West Wing*, the original home of the country of Qumar. The majority of characters are Adults (25) and Elders (23). Young people are not well represented with Teens having 4 characters, and Children having 5 characters. There are no Babies with Cancer on any show.

Not surprisingly, Bit (42) characters are the majority of characters with Cancer. Showrunners do not like giving their Lead characters Cancer, because there are only 7. Of these 7 characters, only 2 are multiply marginalized; 1 is a bisexual Black female, and the other is a Bisexual white female. The rest (5) are cishet white males. There are 5 supporting characters, and 2 of them are BIPOC (1 Black female and 1 Latinx male). The other three include 1 white male and 2 white females. Extras with Cancer appear on 3 different shows, two of which are on ABC. The third show is on NBC. All of the Extras are white, but they are both males and females.

There's no way to know if someone has experienced or is dealing with Cancer. There are actors out there who are acting with Cancer, and many of them are hiding in the shadows, afraid to reveal their diagnosis because they are afraid of losing or not getting work. We don't know if any of the actors representing these characters have spoken

about having Cancer. The majority of people don't seem to, but there's just no way to know.

Cancer representation must become more diverse. Representation matters, and LGBTQIA people deserve better. The same is true for people who are BIPOC. We have seen Cancer in white people for years. We deserve to see how structural barriers like racism, homophobia, transmisia, and other forms of oppression impact Cancer diagnosis, treatment, and healthcare access. The fact that there are not any Indigenous characters with Cancer is a disservice to Native communities. There are so many potential stories that could be told about people with Cancer, especially for Lead and Supporting characters. Somebody needs to tell them.

Chronic Health

Millions of people around the world have a Chronic Health disability. There is vast diversity in what is considered a chronic health disability. It was hard sometimes to determine what disability should be placed in Chronic Health, but ultimately it came down to how disabled people experience their disability – if it is chronic in nature. Disabilities run the gamut from Diabetes to Cystic Fibrosis, Various Heart Issues to Pulmonary disabilities like asthma, and Lupus to a Mysterious Illness that acts like an autoimmune disability. Some categorization was tricky, such as Emma Blanchard, from *The Act*. We know she has Chronic Health disabilities, but she also is being poisoned by her daughter, DeeDee, which creates further disability before she dies.

The only trans representation in our entire study is featured in Chronic Health. She is on the show *Pose*. All of the characters from *Pose* that are disabled are BIPOC, except for the Extras who are BIPOC and white. Perhaps in juxtaposition, other characters with HIV include white South Africans (2), living in Rwanda in *Black Earth Rising*. This show offers characters with a variety of Chronic Disabilities, including Mark Viner (something pulmonary), Eunice Clayton (ovarian cysts and other issues dealing with the reproductive organs), and Alice Munezero (chronic stomach issues due to poisoning).

There are 54 shows (60%) with 109 characters (15% of 708) across 11 networks and 4 streaming services that feature characters that are disabled with Chronic Health disabilities. Characters represent different types of Chronic Health disabilities including Heart Condition/Heart Disease (25), Diabetes (8), HIV+/AIDS (8), Liver Disease/Liver

Failure (8), Asthma (7), Chronic Health (5), Mystery Illness w/Seizures (5 – Made Up), Allergies (4), Kidney Problems (4), Lupus (4), Cystic Fibrosis (3), Sickle Cell Anemia (3), Stutter (3), COPD (2), Crohn's (2), Pulmonary (2), Renal Failure (2), Scoliosis (2), Arthritis (1), Cirrhosis (1), Extreme Night Terrors (1), Facial Condition (1), Fainting Spells (1), Guillain-Barre Syndrome (1), Leg Ulcers (1), Leprosy (1), Lyme Disease (1), Respiratory (1), Sleep Apnea (1), Unable to Digest Food (1)

Cisgender males (58) and females (51) are not too far off from one another. One of the 51 females is a trans woman. The rest are cisgender. The majority of characters are heterosexual (54), while the rest are Unknown (44), gay (4), lesbian (1), and bisexual (1). The trans woman is Blanca on *Pose*, who is Biracial (Afro-Latinx). The Bisexual man is white, as is the lesbian. All 4 gay men are BIPOC (2 Black, 1 Biracial (Asian), and 1 Latinx). They include Pray Tell and his lover, Costas on *Pose*.

White people continue to dominate disability categories. However, Black storytellers are adding more characters who have been diagnosed with Chronic Health disabilities. The breakdown for characters by race is white (66), Black (29), POC (13 - 10 Latinx, 2 Biracial, 1 Middle Eastern). For females, 16 characters are Black (8 heterosexual and 8 unknown sexuality), and 5 are BIPOC (2 heterosexual including 1 Latinx and 1 Middle Eastern, 3 Latinx with unknown sexuality, and 1 trans Biracial (Afro-Latinx)). For males, there are 13 Black characters (6 heterosexual, 5 unknown, and 2 gay) and 8 IPOC (3 heterosexual Latinx, 3 Latinx of unknown sexuality, and 2 gay including 1 Asian and 1 Latinx). The continued exclusion of Indigenous characters, as well as Asian characters is felt across many categories, but most especially this one, which has so many different types of disabilities that are represented. This means 61% of characters with Chronic Health disabilities are white, 26% Black, and 12% POC (9% Latinx, 2% Biracial, and 0.9% Middle Eastern).

Thanks to shows like *Pose* and *Queen Sugar*, BPOC representation of Chronic Health is much more incorporated into the lives of the characters represented. While representation is still very limited for nonwhite characters, these shows are setting the standard for inclusion and authenticity. It also helps that some creators are involved in the communities represented. Ava Duvernay, the creator and showrunner of *Queen Sugar* was diagnosed with Lupus, and that has had a significant effect on the writing and creation of the character of Aunt Vi, a Black woman with Lupus. Shows like *Empire* and *Star*, also have a wide variety of disabled characters, recognizing that disability commonly accompanies other intersections of identity. Not all of these representations are great, but at least they are finally starting to exist.

The majority of characters are (surprise, surprise) American (88). Other nationalities include Canadian (5), British (4), Ghanaian (3), South African (2), Unknown (2), Unspecified European (1), Guatemalan (1), Mexican (1) and Rwandan - Tutsi (1). Adults account for 55 characters (54%), 26 are Elders, 15 are Teenagers, 11 are Children, and 2 are Babies. This is the only category of disability that represents every single age group. The majority of characters are Bit roles (68). Supporting (26) characters make up the next most popular group, and once again Lead (15) finishes last. For Lead characters, 8 are BIPOC. Of the 7 that are white, 4 are women, and 1 is a bisexual man. The breakdown for nonwhite characters that are Leads is 2 Black females, 2 Black males including 1 that is gay, 1 Biracial gay male, 2 Latinx males, and 1 Biracial trans female. The 26 Supporting characters include 8 white females including 1 lesbian, and 10 BIPOC (5 Black females, 4 Black males including 1 gay male, and 1 Latinx gay male).

It can be hard to identify Chronic Health Disabilities, because some people have visible symptoms and experiences affected by their disabilities, and others may have symptoms and experiences that are less noticeable to others. Therefore, unless actors have spoken about their experiences as disabled individuals, we only know of 1 character who shares the same disability with her character, Officer Patton (played by Kaydence Patton, who's Make-A-Wish was to star on television. She has a bit part on *The Rookie*). That being said, it's likely a lot more actors with Chronic Health disabilities act on television who remain silent about being disabled, although they may not be playing disabled characters. A lot of Chronic Health disabilities are stigmatized, and the media could really change those messages by offering depictions of characters with Chronic Health disabilities on more television shows.

Coma

The Coma category was created because sometimes television shows have characters in Comas with no explanation why. Essentially, it was created as opposed to listing these characters in the Random Disability category. There is a wide spectrum of reasons for why someone might be in a coma. Sometimes comas are induced to aid in healing, and sometimes people are in comas due to accident, injury, or illness.

For this study, we only had a few characters that were in a coma. In one, the character, Hana Ennis on *Black Earth Rising* remains in a coma throughout the entire series. She was doing relief work in Rwanda and the DRC prior to the start of the show, and it is later discovered that her coma is the result of an attack on her, not an accident. Another character, Michelle Vu on *The OA* sees into another dimension, which puts her in a coma. She does eventually come out of it.

It's unclear whether Michelle is a young woman or someone who is trans but not out/or aware of it. This confusion stems from her other dimensional selves appearing in the forms of trans teenager Buck Vu, and trans actor Ian Alexander portraying himself. Because Michelle is referred to as she throughout the series, we have counted her as a female for this study. We may never know the answer to whether the creators believe gender identity can change for characters between dimensions, since the show was canceled, but it should be noted that she is played by a trans actor. It should also be noted that no other characters have different gender identities in other dimensions that appear on the show.

There are 2 characters in Comas on 2 different shows. Both shows are on the same network, Netflix. The statistics for this are incredibly sparse, obviously, but neither character really fit into any of the other categories. Hana is in a world similar to the one we live in, and Michelle is in a sci-fi world that is supposed to be another dimension of our current world. Both (2) characters are female, although one is played by a trans actor. We don't know if either character is heterosexual. We really don't know their sexuality, at all. This is not central to either character.

Both characters are American. Hana is a white female. Michelle is an Asian female. There are no males in comas. Hana is an Adult and Michelle is a Teen. Both characters are supporting roles, although Michelle's part is bigger. She actually has a few lines, whereas you never really see Hana except for when she is lying in bed and her father is visiting her. Neither actor is actually in a coma. We expected that to be the case. There would be all kinds of ethical issues, especially surrounding consent, about including someone in an actual coma on a television show. There are also no shows that we watched, which feature a character in a coma as an Extra,

What we do recommend is that those who have been in a coma be consulted and included in the writing and character development of such characters. There's no way to know what it's like to be in a coma if you have not been in one but having people who

have been in comas would allow Hollywood to make these portrayals more authentic and realistic.

Deaf and Hard of Hearing (HOH)

The D/deaf/HOH community is incredibly diverse, but also often isolated from the hearing world. Unfortunately, Hollywood has no comprehension of this, nor do they understand the need for greater levels of inclusion, as well as better representation. Deaf characters have long been treated like a novelty in film and on television. Far be it from us to disprove this in this study. We can't do it, because not only is the Deaf/HOH representation abysmal, but not much has changed in the three decades since Marlee Matlin won an Oscar, the last person from the disability community to do so, that we know.

Deaf characters account for just 5 characters (0.7%). All of them are Deaf. None of them are Hard of Hearing. They are on 5 shows (2%) across 2 networks and 1 streaming service. ABC and NBC tie for the most shows with 2 each per network. The breakdown for characters is 3 cisgender females and 2 cisgender males. There is no trans or non-binary representation. There are 2 heterosexuals (1 white female and 1 Latinx female), 1 white gay male, 1 Black male of unknown sexuality, and 1 Black lesbian female.

As you can see, 2 of the characters are white, 2 of the characters are Black (CJ Jones as Odin Branch on *Castle Rock* and Lauren Ridloff as Margot on *New Amsterdam*), and 1 is Latinx (Raquel McPeck Rodriguez as Bonnie Rush on *Chicago Med*). This is one of the few categories in this study where white people, particularly white males, are in the minority. That being said, there are so few characters that even with this small bit of diversity there is not nearly enough inclusion for Deaf/HOH actors. We are especially worried about the lack of inclusion for Asian/Pacific Islander, Middle Eastern, and Indigenous representation. Deaf people are all over the world in every culture, but you wouldn't know that from this study.

All 5 characters are American. All 5 characters are Adults. While Deaf/HOH children and babies are seldom represented, we can't remember the last time we saw a Deaf/HOH Elder portrayed anywhere. Only 1 character is a Lead character. The rest (4) are Bit characters. The 1 Lead character is a white female. It is none other than Jocelyn

Turner from *Quantico*, played by Marlee Matlin. There is also 1 show that includes at least one Deaf Extra, as well as an ASL interpreter who could very well be Deaf themselves. This was at a rally on the OWN show *Queen Sugar*.

All 5 characters are played by Deaf actors. All of them involve the use of ASL, although some of them do speak verbally on occasion. All of the characters have their being Deaf interwoven into their story, some with better representation than others. For example, Jocelyn is a part of a special black ops team on *Quantico*, although team members do question her ability as someone Deaf. She also mentions she has greater ability to see as a result of being Deaf, which goes right back to our stereotype we mentioned earlier in this paper about people losing senses and therefore their other senses are enhanced.

Two of the stories, one on *Chicago Med* featuring a Deaf couple Bonnie and Peter Rush (Raquel McPeck Rodriguez and James Caverly) and one on *New Amsterdam* featuring a Deaf woman Margot (Lauren Ridloff), explore cochlear implants. In the latter, Margot has trouble with her cochlear implant, something very common that happens but is not discussed nearly enough. She finds the use too overwhelming, and ends up deciding to not use the implant, after all.

In the *Chicago Med* storyline Bonnie doesn't want Peter to get a cochlear implant, because she feels he is rejecting the Deaf community, but when he finds out he has Usher Syndrome, which will also eventually make him Blind, he decides to get it. There is some inspiration-filled line about how, "she'll be his eyes and he'll be her ears." While it's important to remember that these kinds of relationships do exist, where disabled people that are couples help one another in such a way, the writers of *Chicago Med* don't seem to have the nuance or know-how to write this without coming off as overly sentimental.

Ultimately, there needs to be way more characters that are Deaf. It's great that most of the characters in this section are not white, not all of them are heterosexual, and all of them are played by actual Deaf actors, but where are all the D/dea/HOH characters that are existing doing jobs, raising families, going to college, or just having fun? Deaf people are so much more, and representation is so lacking in this area. Also, hearing loss exists. It can be a spectrum, and hearing ability can and will change for many people over time. There needs to be representation for those who still may need accommodation because they can't always hear, but also are not completely unable to hear.

Note: *It should be noted that the character of Peter Rush, who is mentioned in relation to his Deaf wife, Bonnie is not counted as one of the 5 Deaf characters on Television. He is counted in the multiply disabled section.*

Down Syndrome

For many years, nondisabled people played characters with Down Syndrome and other intellectual disabilities. Luckily, at least where Down Syndrome is concerned, that is no longer being seen as acceptable. Over the past decade, especially, an emergence of actors with Down Syndrome have been making appearances on a variety of television shows. Unfortunately, there are no characters with any other intellectual disabilities. Of course, even in movies, those with non-specified intellectual disabilities are still usually played by nondisabled actors, usually as comic relief.

There are only 6 characters on 5 shows with Down Syndrome. The shows span across 4 networks and 1 streaming service. The leading network is PBS with 2 characters. Females dominate representation. There are 4 cisgender females and 2 cisgender males. There is no trans or non-binary representation. In fact, there is no LGBTQIA representation at all in this category. This is a great travesty considering that there are great performance groups in existence like Drag Syndrome, showing the diversity of the Down Syndrome community.

People with intellectual disabilities don't always get to experience love or attraction. We were a little surprised that it was clear at least 5 of the characters were heterosexual, and only one was with an unknown sexuality, but this is also such a small sample of characters, so it's hard to say what representation would look like if there were more characters with Down Syndrome.

All 6 characters are white. This is a common theme for casting characters with Down Syndrome. BIPOC erasure is rampant in all forms of media, and yet Down Syndrome does not discriminate by race. It is these communities that need to see representation the most, because they are already misrepresented, misunderstood, and excluded within society at greater levels than those who are white.

The most common nationality for the 6 characters is actually British (3). The other three are American (2) and Irish (1). All of the characters are adults. You rarely see Elder

characters with Down Syndrome, and the same is true with children or babies. Considering the prevalence of parents who choose not to have children because they discover they will have Down Syndrome, it's imperative that stories written by people that actually know about Down Syndrome include portrayals of babies and children with this disability. Teens are sometimes common, but not for this study. There are no Extras that we saw with Down Syndrome or other intellectual disability.

All 6 characters are played by actors who actually have Down Syndrome. Some of the performances are actually quite fantastic. One favorite is Nan (Jamie Brewer) on *American Horror Story: Apocalypse*. She reprises her role from a previous season, and is now a dead henchman of the voodoo devil from the spiritual realm. The character is fun and doesn't focus at all on the fact that she has a disability. These are the kinds of portrayals the disability community has been wanting for years.

On *Blood*, Kieron (Daniel Ryan) enjoys tossing back the wine, during a wake. In another scene, he's interrupting a couple having gay sex because he needs to use the bathroom. On *C.B. Strike*, Orlando "DoDo" Quine (Sarah Gordy) is a klepto. On *Call the Midwife*, Reggie (Daniel Laurie) and Jane (Poppy Barrett) fall in love after going to school together. Unfortunately, none of the characters have significant parts because all of them are Bit characters, except one. There are no female, LGBTQIA, and/or BIPOC Lead or Supporting characters. The 1 Supporting character is a white cisgender male. There are no Extras with Down Syndrome in anything we watched for this study.

We can keep saying over and over that Hollywood needs better inclusion. It needs more diverse inclusion. It definitely needs more diversity when it comes to race, sexuality, and gender identity when it comes to the Down Syndrome community. It is such a failure when there is no representation in certain communities. It is bad for these communities, but it's also bad for the world. Diversity makes the world better.

Learning

Learning Disabilities are not really explored that much. There are a variety of learning disabilities, and they can span from something that interferes a bit to something that can create great interference with schooling. There are so many factors that can affect the success of someone with a Learning Disability. Access to resources, family support, diagnosis, and school support all contribute.

For this study, there are only 4 characters with a Learning disability. They are on 3 different shows on 2 networks and 1 streaming service. The leading network is CBS with 2 shows. Representation is split up by Dyslexia (3) and Dyspraxia (1). The majority of characters are cisgender males (3). There is only 1 cisgender female character. All three of the male characters are heterosexual, and 1 female character has unknown sexuality, most likely because she's a child. There are no LGBTQIA characters.

As far as racial diversity, only 1 character is nonwhite. Ryan Sinclair (Tosin Cole) on *Doctor Who*. He has Dyspraxia. The other characters are white. The majority of the characters are American (2). Ryan is British. There is also a Vulcan, Spock (Ethan Peck, as an adult and Liam Hughes as a Young Spock) on *Star Trek: Discovery*. The other two characters are real-life father and daughter, Kenny and Angelica Scarlet Johnson on *SWAT* as Dominique Luca and Kelly. Out of the 5 actors playing these 4 characters, 3 of them are Adults and 2 of them are Children.

The story with Dominique and Kelly is actually quite great. Kenny Johnson has spoken quite openly about how he struggled in school, and many people gave up on him because of his dyslexia. He has a huge influence on the storyline for his character, who is a main member of LA SWAT. Like Kenny, his character, Dominique, is dyslexic, and when he finds a young girl Kelly about to get kicked out of school, he helps her. In this season, she is back and doing much better in school thanks to Dominique's help.

Going off what actors have said, we are fairly certain that 2 of the characters actually have a Learning Disability. We believe the 2 actors playing Spock are not dyslexic. We are not sure about at least one of the other actors. As far as roles, 2 of the characters are Lead characters, and 1 of them is a Black male. The other 2 characters are Supporting (1) and Bit (1). There are no Extras on any show with any type of Learning Disability.

Learning disabilities don't have to be difficult to include in scripts. There are many actors in Hollywood who have Learning disabilities already, and many of them don't talk about them much. It's fantastic that actors like Kenny Johnson are not only talking about their disabilities, but also seeking out inclusion on the shows that they are on. If more actors that had the ability to do so would ask for inclusion of such disabilities, it would be better for representation.

Little People

While the Little People (LP) community has had access to certain parts of representation in Hollywood, it's often been to the detriment of their community. In the last few years, a few roles that are much better have slowly started to emerge, but change seems to take forever. There are still many harmful depictions of Little People, especially in films. While there have been instances where nondisabled people have played Little People characters, this has usually been done in a mocking way for comedic effect. Typically, Little People are one of the few communities where Little People actors are able to play these roles.

We found 10 characters (around 1% of disabled characters) that are Little People. These characters span 7 shows on 3 networks and 2 streaming services. The network with the most shows is Amazon (4). The majority of characters are cisgender males (6), and there are 4 cisgender females. None of the characters are LGBTQIA, at all. The only sexuality present in these LP characters is heterosexuality (3), however, the majority of characters have unknown sexuality. We can't help but surmise that this is partly because most of the characters have such small parts, but also the idea that visibly disabled people should not be sexual is quite prevalent in our society. White males with unknown sexuality (4) make up the bulk of representation.

As far as representation, 8 are white and 2 are Latinx. The 2 Latinx LP are members of the tribute band Mini Kiss who perform on the show *The Dangerous Book for Boys*. There is no other BIPOC representation beyond those two characters. Both of these characters are male, and that means all 4 female characters are white. Similar to the Deaf and Down Syndrome communities Black and Brown Little People don't get to see themselves represented on television. It's even worse for Black and Brown females and trans folks. These characters simply don't exist in nearly every form of media. Imagine never being represented, ever, in your life, because that's what individuals that are BIPOC LP experience.

Almost every LP is American (9). There is 1 British character, though. She is a white, heterosexual woman on *Harlots* named Cherry Dorrington (Francesca Mills). Cherry is a harlot and is considered "a diverse experience" simply because she is an LP. As such, she often has a side hustle, usually scamming others with information she gathers since

people tend to not pay attention to her being around. Still, she's as independent as the other harlots, and mostly does what she wants. She's actually very resourceful.

There are 9 Adult characters, and 1 Elder. LP Babies, Children, and Teenagers lack any type of representation, and this is why many Little People grow up without seeing themselves reflected on television. The characters were broken up with 1 Lead character, a cisgender white heterosexual woman, Matilda "Mattie" Webber (Meredith Eaton) on *MacGyver*. Mattie offers some of the best representation of disability that we saw in this study. She is independent and has a great job in an authority role as the Director of Operations of The Phoenix Foundation. She even has a fantastic backstory, which explores her past with her ex-husband who returns to her present in need of her help.

The 2 Supporting roles are the aforementioned Cherry on *Harlots*, and Henrietta "Hetty" Lang (Linda Hunt) on *NCIS: Los Angeles*. Hetty is a total badass. Now in her Elder years, she runs the NCIS LA. Considered one of the most feared operatives from the CIA, she still has the ability to hold her own. All of her agents are extremely loyal to her, and some of them she has taken on a mentoring role. The rest of the characters (7) are Bit roles. We can also report that all 10 characters were played by 10 LP actors.

The main thing that we need to see for the LP community is broader representation across the board, but especially for multiply marginalized LP. It shouldn't be so hard to find Black and Brown LP representation, and female and LGBTQIA LP rep for BIPOC should not be totally erased. It is awesome that the three leading forms of LP representation are all women, but we definitely need more LPs all over television. Three is a paltry number. We also need to see LP males with decent storylines. Even white male Little People need to be represented. There is not enough representation for any LP community. It just doesn't exist.

Multiple Disabilities

We created the multiple disabilities category, because many people live multiply-disabled lives, especially as age increases. We were particularly interested in seeing how things like Alcoholism and Addiction, as well as Mental Health, are comorbid with a variety of additional disabilities. We know that some people self-medicate when they

don't have other options for treatment, or other treatment options don't work, so we wondered if that is present in media depictions.

The comorbid conditions we found with Alcoholism and Addiction include Addiction & PTSD (6), Alcoholism & PTSD (3), Addiction & Chronic (Pancreatitis) (1), Addiction & Scars (1), Alcoholism & Chronic (Sleep Apnea, Heart Problems, & Allergies) (3), Alcoholism, Addiction, & ADD (1), PTSD, MH – NOS (Mental Health – not otherwise specified), & Addiction (1), Alcoholism & Amputee (2), Alcoholism, Addiction, & Kidney Failure (1). Some seem to go hand-in-hand, and others, such as Alcoholism & Allergies seem to be unrelated. As for comorbidity of other disabilities with Psychosocial disabilities, such depictions are even more represented.

The most prevalent combination of disabilities we found is PTSD & Scars (8). PTSD is actually comorbid with a lot of different disabilities in this study including PTSD & Amputee (4), PTSD, Amputee, & TBI (1), PTSD & Chronic (2), PTSD, Depression, & Scars (1), and PTSD & Genital Mutilation (1). Other comorbid disability representation includes: Asthma & Allergies (1), Blind & Hearing Loss (HOH) (1), Blind & Partial Paralysis (1), Cancer & Blind (1), Cancer & Chronic (including Heart Problems) (2), Cancer & Cotard's Syndrome (1), Cancer & Mystery Illness (1), Cancer, Heart Problems, & Bi Polar (1), Cancer & MH – NOS (1), Cystic Fibrosis & Organ Failure (1), Deaf & Alcoholism (1), Deaf & Physical (1), Deaf & Usher Syndrome (1), Dementia & Alcoholism (1), Dementia & Chronic (2), Dementia & Dyslexia (1), STD & Various Chronic including Arthritis (1), Dementia & Dyslexic (1), Depression & Insomnia (1), Diabetes, MH – NOS, & Insomnia (1), Chronic (Diabetes), MH – NOS, & Physical (1), Heart Problems & Chronic (Diabetes & Hemophilia) (2), Mental Health & Chronic (Allergies, Asthma, Sleep Apnea) (5), Mental Health & Learning Disability (1), Mental Health & Neurological (Parkinson's) (1), Mental Health & Physical (1), Munchausen & Chronic (Diabetes) (1), Physical & Amputee (1), and Physical & Chronic (3).

There are 77 characters (11%) on 50 shows across 14 networks and 4 streaming services with multiple disabilities. The most common network represented is CBS. There are 44 cisgender males (2 that are Jewish), 33 cisgender females, and 0 trans characters. The majority of characters with multiple disabilities are heterosexual (49), followed by those with unknown sexual orientation (21). There are 3 lesbian characters, Emily Malek (Alexis Bledel) on *The Handmaid's Tale*, Nancy Birch (Kate Fleetwood) on *Harlots*, and Judith Gray (Alex Kingston) on *The Widow*, all of whom are white. There are 3 gay characters including Alex Manes (Tyler Blackburn) on *Roswell New Mexico*, Klaus Hargreeves (Richard Sheehan) on *The Umbrella Academy*, and Otto (Ron

Simons) on *The Resident*, 1 of whom is Black, 1 of whom is white and gender nonconforming, and 1 of whom is Indigenous. There is 1 bisexual character, Annalise Keating (Viola Davis) on *How to Get Away with Murder*, who is a Black woman.

There are 52 white characters with multiple disabilities. White heterosexual males have the most representation with 17 characters. There are 16 Black characters, 12 of whom are male. Ron Simons plays the lone Black gay male character. The rest are heterosexual (7) and unknown sexuality (4). The 4 Black female characters include just 1 bisexual character, Viola Davis' Annalise. Two of the Black women are heterosexual, and 1 has unknown sexuality. POC representation is split up amongst 9 characters (5 Latinx, 2 Indigenous, 1 Hawaiian, and 1 Asian). Six of those characters are male – 4 of them are heterosexual males (2 Latinx, 1 Indigenous, 1 Asian), 1 is a gay male (Indigenous), and 1 has a sexuality that is unknown (Hawaiian). The 3 POC female characters are all heterosexual and all Latinx.

64 of the characters are American, 8 are British, and there are 1 of each of the following nationalities: Canadian, Congolese, German, Rwandan (Hutu), and South African. There are 56 Adult characters, 16 Elder characters, 4 characters, and 2 children. Mahershala Ali plays character Wayne Hayes as both an Adult & Elder on *True Detective*, so he is counted in both groups. The majority of characters with multiple disabilities are Bit characters. There are 35 of them, but there are also quite a few Lead and Supporting characters as well.

About 29% of all characters with multiple disabilities, or 22 characters have Lead roles. Out of these characters, 13 characters are marginalized in some way, and 7 of those are nonwhite characters. The other 6 include 5 white females and 1 gay male. The 7 BIPOC Lead characters include 3 Black males, 2 Black females (1 of whom is bisexual), 1 Latinx female, and 1 Indigenous gay male. As for Supporting characters, of which there are 20, 16 of them are marginalized. There are 6 white heterosexual female, and 3 white Lesbian female characters. The other 7 characters include 3 POC male characters (1 Asian, 1 indigenous, 1 Latinx), 2 Black male characters, 3 Black female characters, and 1 Latinx female character. Only one show includes Extras with multiple disabilities, the Unwomen on *The Handmaid's Tale*. Only 2 actors we know of have the disabilities their character has, 18 do not have disabilities, 55 are unknown, and 2 we know don't have one of the disabilities but are not sure about the other.

It seems like there is a bit more inclusion in terms of Leads and Supporting characters when it comes to multiply disabled representation. However, we believe part of this is a

symptom of the idea that Showrunners want to include more diversity, so some of them are throwing diagnoses on characters which are vague or not otherwise specified. At the same time, more creators are recognizing that things like Addiction and mental health can impact the body and mind in other ways. A lot of these disabilities are comorbid because that's what it's like in the real world. However, it would behoove Showrunners to include more disabled actors and creators to better explore multidimensional representation for many of these characters.

Many characters are multiply disabled as the result of long-term inflicted Trauma. That's definitely true of Kate Ashby (Michaela Coel) on *Black Earth Rising*. Involved in the turmoil surrounding the Rwandan genocide she is scarred, and has severe psychological wounds including depression, suicidal ideation, and PTSD. The entire show *The Handmaid's Tale* is filled with women enduring PTSD along with chronic disabilities, and disability as the result of punishment. Handmaids are literally property, and even women who have made it to safety are dealing with the effects of the collective trauma. Annalise Keating has always turned to alcohol to handle her depression and trauma – the result of sexual assault when she was younger, as well as the generational trauma of racism.

Some representation is just ridiculous or for comic relief. Pat Cleary (Santino Bernard) has pretty much every chronic disability you can think of. In fact, it's become somewhat of a family joke on *The Kids Are All Right*. *Blindspot*'s Jane Doe (Jaimie Alexander) has a deadly poison that is running through her body, making her disabled, although at the last second of the season it is cured. She also has PTSD. The rather convoluted story has her character going to therapy with a therapist who literally betrayed her as well as the entire FBI. Dorothy Elgin (Rosemary Alexander) is an Elder living in a nursing home on *Criminal Minds*. She has Dementia and Physical disability, but that doesn't stop her from stabbing herself in the neck, so she doesn't reveal anything to the FBI!

Because there are more characters in Lead and Supporting roles, there is more room for better and accurate portrayals of disability in this category like Prosper Denton, who is experiencing physical and chronic health disabilities as the result of aging, on *Queen Sugar* and Bonnie (Allison Janney) on *Mom*, a woman in recovery from Gambling Addiction and Alcoholism, who also has ADD. We would like to see more authentic portrayals of multiply disabled characters, but we are also happy that there is slowly starting to be more diversity in this category.

Neurodivergent and/or Psychosocial

We chose to split the Neurodivergent and/or Psychosocial category into four groups. Since a lot of these disabilities have similar methods of diagnosis and characteristics which often lead to misdiagnosis, as well as a high rate of comorbidity, we felt it essential to keep them together but also give them their own distinct subcategories. We expected there would be a lot more mental health representation than other categories, and that is true.

Rather than having overall totals for this category, we have individual totals for each subsection. We felt that this would better explain how certain disabilities are represented more so than others, while also pointing out the disparities in representation.

Mental Health

There are 65 characters (9% of 708) on 44 shows across 9 networks and 5 streaming services that have Mental Health based disabilities. The leading network is CBS with 16 characters. Psychosocial disabilities represented include: PTSD (23), Anxiety (9), Depression (8), Bi Polar (5), Multiple Mental Health Symptoms (4), Mutism (4), schizophrenia (4), Borderline Personality Disorder (2), Dissociative Identity Disorder (2), and 1 character a piece with each of the following – Antisocial Personality Disorder, Dissociative Fugue Disorder, OCD, and Paranoid Delusions.

There are no transgender characters with Psychosocial disabilities, which is illogical considering trans people are more likely to have disabilities relating to mental health as a result of discrimination, oppression, and trauma. There are however 34 cisgender males and 31 cisgender females. The majority of these characters, 38 of them, are heterosexual. 21 have unknown sexuality. There are 2 bisexual/pansexual, 3 gay, and 2 lesbian characters. The pansexual is a Jewish woman with Depression and SAD, Ilana Wexler (Ilana Glazer) on *Broad City*. The bisexual is a white male teen with Anxiety, Adam Groff (Connor Swindells) on *Sex Education*. One of the gay males is a white man with Bipolar, Ian Gallagher (Cameron Monaghan) on *Shameless* and the other is a Latinx man with compulsive Hoarding, Jaime (Arturo Castro) on *Broad City*. One of the lesbians is a Black woman, Moira Strand (Samira Wiley), with PTSD on *The*

Handmaid's Tale and the other is a white woman with Depression, Catherine Meyer (Sarah Sutherland) on *Veep*.

There are 39 white characters, 14 Black characters, and 12 POC (4 Latinx, 2 Asian, 2 Hawaiian, 2 Middle Eastern, and 2 Indian). Black representation includes 4 heterosexual Black males, 1 Black male of unknown sexuality, 5 heterosexual Black females, 3 Black females of unknown sexuality, and 1 lesbian Black female. As for IPOC, there are 4 heterosexual males (2 Latinx, 1 Hawaiian, 1 Middle Eastern), 1 Latinx gay male, 3 IPOC of unknown sexuality (1 Hawaiian, 1 Indian, and 1 Middle Eastern), 2 IPOC females (1 Indian, 1 Latinx), and 2 POC women of unknown sexuality who are both Asian.

Nationality wise, the majority are American (53). Other nationalities include 5 British, 1 Guatemalan, 1 Iraqi, 1 Irish, 1 Nigerian and 1 Rwandan (Tutsi). There is also one character from a fantasy world, Danno (Charan Prabhakar) from *The Outpost*. The majority of characters are Adults with 54 characters, followed by 7 Teen, 3 Child, 2 Elder. The majority of characters with Mental Health disabilities are Bit characters, but not by much. There are absolutely no Extras with MH disabilities on any shows we watched.

There are 25 lead characters. Out of 25 characters, 18 are marginalized in some way and 8 are BIPOC. For Leads, there are 8 white females, including 1 pansexual, and 2 white males – 1 gay, 1 bisexual. BIPOC Leads include 2 Black males, 2 Black females, 2 IPOC males – 1 Latinx, 1 Middle Eastern, and 2 IPOC females – 1 Indian, 1 Latinx. Supporting characters features 10 marginalized characters out of 11 total, and 8 of them are not white. BIPOC representation in Supporting roles includes 4 Black females including 1 who is a lesbian, 2 Black males, 1 Latinx gay male, and 1 Indian male.

It can be hard to know who actually has mental health based disabilities in Hollywood. We imagine there are way more people living with mental health diagnosis than we know about. Out of all of the characters in this section, only one actor has spoken openly about having the same disability, Ilana Glazer on *Broad City*. Another actor, Rachel Bloom, Rebecca Bunch on *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*, has also spoken about her mental health, and though she has a diagnosis it is not Borderline Personality Disorder like her character, Rebecca. We know for certain that 10, including Rachel do not have the disability they are portraying, and 55 are Unknown. In this section, we are counting an extra actor because two actors play Tally North on *Bull*, Quinn Shephard and Sterling Jerins.

Portrayals of mental health run the gamut, probably because there is still a lot that is misunderstood about mental health. It's a vicious cycle where the media feeds harmful narratives, and those lead to misinformation which is fed back into new narratives. One of the worst is on *Iron Fist*. The DID community has been largely mistreated in the media. Depictions of Dissociative Identity Disorder can lead to long-term abuse and mistreatment to those with this Psychosocial disability. Mary Walker (Mary and Walker are two of her personalities), played by Alice Eve, is everything that's wrong with the portrayal of DID. She has wide darting eyes and erratic behavior.

One of Mary's personalities is evil, violent, and has super strength. She was a soldier and POW in Sokovia, and often has flashbacks. When she dissociates and "changes personalities" her hairstyle and dress change and her voice changes pitch. It feels like Eve took a diagnostic manual, and used a few symptoms, along with common yet harmful myths about this disorder, to make the patchwork that is her character.

We need to see better portrayals of mental health, because there is so much at stake. Portrayals can affect the mental health of people watching these shows. It can have long-term traumatic effects, especially because people watch portrayals of mental health, and believe them, even if they aren't that great or accurate. This can lead to the mistreatment of those with mental health disabilities by others. We especially need to see portrayals of mental health that deal with Children, Teens, and Elders. Children especially have nothing that they can view, which will be relatable, and help them feel like they are not alone. Black and Brown children are especially at risk, due to lack of accurate portrayals. Not having good mental health portrayals can be a matter of life and death.

ADHD

The ADHD category is rather sad. In fact, there are only 2 portrayals. There are 2 characters on two shows on 1 network, NBC. 100% of characters are cisgender white females. One is heterosexual and the other is bisexual. They are American Adults, and both of them are Lead characters. We could tell you about how there needs to be much more representation of ADD and ADHD, but we're pretty sure you can figure that one out already. Black and Brown people have ADHD! We do need women and girls to be portrayed as having ADHD, which is why it's great that these characters do, but we also

need portrayals of BIPOC characters with ADHD, especially those that are female, and trans/non-binary.

The two characters are Eleanor Shellstrop (Kristen Bell) on *The Good Place* and Lauren Bloom (Janet Montgomery) on *New Amsterdam*. We had a lot of trouble figuring out where to put Eleanor when it came to her sexuality. While actors from the show have said she's bisexual, there really isn't any clear indication of bisexuality other than a few offhanded comments and actions, to show this. This is one way that creators have benefited from saying they are diverse, without really giving queer people some form of visible representation. We decided that because even when you are dating someone of the opposite gender, that doesn't mean you aren't bisexual, although we argue that the bisexual community deserves better representation overall.

The portrayal of Lauren, a doctor who is taking Adderall and hiding it from her colleagues, is placed in ADHD for this season, but since her story is heading towards rehab, she will be moved to multiply disabled for the next study. We hope that there will be plenty of other characters with ADHD, so this category isn't quite so abysmal next year. Neither actor, to our knowledge has ADHD, although perhaps if there were more actors in Hollywood who did, we would see better representation in this category.

Autistic

We want to start this off by saying that we recognize there is at least one other Lead Autistic character that we know about, Shawn on *The Good Doctor*, but we weren't able to get to that show for this study (this is why we need your support for this work). As we did not watch the show, we are not counting him in the total for representation this year. Autistic characters have been quite underrepresented, and when they are, they are almost always white, male and either Teen or young Adult. We anticipated this would be the results when we started this study. We were not wrong.

There are 14 Autistic characters (2%) on 7 shows across 3 networks and 2 streaming services. The most popular network is CBS with 9 characters. There are 10 males and 4 females. All of them are heterosexual or have no sexuality that is known. There are no trans and non-binary characters, which is a disservice to the Autistic community, since there are many trans and queer neurodivergent people in the world. You will find many Autistic people that are LGBTQIA, and as such a complete lack of representation is erasure.

White males dominate representation with 5 characters, 3 of whom are heterosexual and 2 with unknown sexuality. Black males are next with 4 characters, one of whom is also Jewish. Finally, there is 1 POC who is Asian. He is one of the male characters who you don't know about their sexuality. As for females, the representation is pathetic in numbers specifically. There are 2 white females, 1 Black female, and 1 Asian female. None of them have known sexualities. Apparently, sex and sexuality are of no interest to Autistic people according to these characters on television, but we know that is often false.

Since, it's so clear that Autistic characters are not really meant to be sexual or romantic, based on what's on television currently, we should talk about how asexuality is not present in any type of representation, at least not as a conscious sexuality given to a character on any of the 180 shows. There are asexual Autistics, but there are asexual people in every category. The problem is that there is the assumption of asexuality in Autistic characters, and other disabled characters, which is why we keep seeing so many people with unknown sexualities. Sure, some of the characters are small and their sexuality has no bearing on their part, but the majority of every section has a large number of characters with unknown sexualities, which speaks to a bigger problem about how we don't see disabled people as sexual.

All 14 Autistic characters are American – 4 of them are Adult and 10 of them are Teen. Autistic people can apparently not be Elder or Children. Since so many children are Autistic, would it not be wise to include Autistic children as characters with some regularity? Wouldn't it further benefit studios to actually cast Autistic actors in these roles? It would be even better if the plotline wasn't mostly centered around being Autistic, like we see in shows like *Atypical*.

There are 2 Lead characters. One of them is a white heterosexual male Teen, Sam (Keir Gilchrist) on *Atypical*. There are a lot of problems with Sam, especially him constantly being labeled "high functioning" considering the issue with functioning labels, which create a false hierarchy in the Autistic community. He does however have a job, and a girlfriend, so there are occasional good things. It's just wrapped up in a lot of problematic representation. The other Lead character is also white, although it's unclear if he's heterosexual. His sexuality is never discussed. He is Moses Dreyfus (Mark Leonard Winter), an American character on the Australian drama *Pine Gap*. His portrayal as someone autistic can best be described as peculiar. It feels like they tried to pass him off as Autistic without ever saying he's actually Autistic, although he's

described as such in information about his character. Other characters constantly point out that he is weird and has no social relationships with anyone. He also wanders around randomly during work hours.

Supporting characters do a little better with 6 of the 8 supporting characters being marginalized in some way. 4 of them are not white. There are 2 Black males, one of whom is Jewish. This is Isidore Latham (Ato Essandoh) a doctor on *Chicago Med*. A lot of his performance is stereotyping Autistic behavior. He often acts like he is told to perform the diagnostic symptoms of being Autistic, rather than just being a doctor who happens to be Autistic. The other is Jasper (Domonique Brown) an Autistic Teen on *Atypical*. Jasper is a part of Sam's support group, and while he offers great representation of being Autistic because he's actually an Autistic actor, the group really only exists as a vehicle for Sam. Jasper is sarcastic and matter-of-fact, and while he doesn't have a huge part, he does have a distinct personality.

There is 1 Black female who is Autistic in a Supporting role. She is also on *Atypical*, and is also played by an actually Autistic actor. Her name is Amber (Layla Weiner), and she's a teenager although again we have no idea of her sexual orientation. Amber is very empathetic, but that can sometimes get her into trouble, especially when she takes things quite literally. However, all of the people in the support group who are actually Autistic seem to serve little purpose but to prop up the nondisabled actor playing the Lead character, which we believe is a disservice to these actors and the greater Autistic community.

The rest of the supporting portrayals include 2 white females, and 1 Asian female. There are 4 characters that are Bit characters, so the majority of Autistic representation is actually Supporting roles (8). That being said, if it were not for the show *Atypical*, the majority of this representation would be gone completely. We cannot leave representation of an entire community to one or two television shows, and that's what we see with Autistic representation, right now. There are Extras on 1 show, again that show is *Atypical*.

The thing we need to look at with Autistic representation is that neither Lead character is actually Autistic. While 8 of the characters are actually played by Autistic actors (4 are not and 2 are Unknown) it comes down to one show choosing to include actually Autistic actors. That's definitely where things start, but what really needs to happen is that representation across the board needs to be inclusive for Autistic actors, especially those who are not white, and who are LGBTQIA.

Mental Health – NOS

We felt very strongly about having a category that didn't specify what mental health disability someone had, because there are a lot of lazy screenwriters who enjoy making disabled characters without really specifying what their disability is. That's great in theory, but for a community that's vastly underrepresented having actual representation that is relatable and realistic is an imperative. We were certain that there would be a decent amount of characters who are simply labeled with "mental health diagnosis" and we were not wrong.

While not the biggest category, there are 32 characters (5%) who have an unspecified mental health diagnosis on 24 shows across 8 networks and 3 streaming services. ABC, CBS, and CW all tie for the most characters represented with 5 per network. We also include a few characters that have more than one psychosocial disability in this section. The disabilities for this section include 28 with Mental Health – NOS (not otherwise specified), 1 Dissociative Identity Disorder & Autistic, 1 Suicidal Ideation, 1 Panic Attacks, and 1 Trauma, MH – NOS, and Suicidal Ideation.

Of 32 characters, 21 cisgender males and 11 cisgender females. There is no LGBTQIA representation at all. The majority of the characters are heterosexual (21), and the other 11 are unknown. The racial breakdown for this category is 26 white people, 5 Black people, and 1 Asian. There are 2 Black heterosexual males, 2 Black males of unknown sexual orientation, and 1 Black heterosexual female. The Asian male has unknown sexuality. The majority of the female representation is heterosexual (8) with 2 white female characters with unknown sexuality.

The majority of characters are American (29), followed by British (2) and French (1). Adults account for 21 characters, with Teen quite far behind at only 6 characters. The rest of the characters are Elder (3) and Child (2). The breakdown for character roles is 7 Lead characters, 3 of whom are marginalized. All of them are white females. That's depressing. There are 10 supporting characters, and 7 of them are marginalized, although only 3 of them are not white. This means that 4 of them are white females, 2 are Black males, and 1 is a Black female.

The reason why it can be so bad for representation when it comes to making generalized statements about diagnosis without specifying a disability is because you end up with characters like Nick Godejohn (Calum Worthy) on *The Act*. While based on

an actual person, they never really attempt to explain what is going on with Nick. He ends up stabbing his girlfriend's mother multiple times. The portrayal has him as just weird and stereotypical. With the overwhelming association of mental health with violence, despite the fact that the majority of people with a psychosocial disability is more likely to be a victim/survivor of violence not a perpetrator, it takes a writer with nuance to make this character not become a stereotype of the "violent mental patient."

Since mental health is not usually always visible, we can only rely on actors to determine whether they are actually living with a mental health diagnosis/disability. We found only 1 character that we know has some form of mental health disability, and it's not too far off for what it seems like her character experiences. That actor is Lili Reinhart who plays Betty Cooper on *Riverdale*. Betty has really been through a lot, including her serial killer father playing mind games with her, and her mother making her believe she was in a cult. She sometimes takes medication for what seems like anxiety, and she also has symptoms of trauma at times. Lili has been an outspoken advocate for mental health, talking about her own journey with anxiety and depression quite openly. The other 31 characters don't have a mental health diagnosis or we just don't know.

Overall, Psychosocial disabilities are overwhelmingly portrayed by white, cisgender, heterosexual characters. This is one area that drastically needs better, more inclusive representation, because the impact of such representation can and will save lives.

Neurological

There are many different types of neurological disabilities, and there is also a lot of overlap between chronic health and physical disability. As such, we decided to focus mostly on certain disabilities that involve the brain specifically. Our assumption before we started was that a lot of characters that are Elder would be in this category, simply because disabilities like Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, Dementia, and strokes are generally attributed to older people, even if this isn't always accurate.

There are 36 characters (about 5% of 708 disabled characters) with neurological disabilities on 28 shows across 11 networks and 2 streaming services. The leading network is NBC with 8 characters. The most prevalent disability is Alzheimer's/Dementia with 24 characters. Other representation includes 3 Epilepsy (including 1 with Childhood Epilepsy), 2 Stroke/Physical (relating specifically to stroke), and 1 character with each of

the following disabilities – Absence Seizures, Brain Damage, Brain Tumor, Huntington's Disease, Neuropathy, Neurotoxicity, and Parkinson's.

There are 14 cisgender males and 22 cisgender females. Once again there is no LGBTQIA representation. The majority of characters are heterosexual (27), with 19 characters of unknown sexuality. Racially, 19 characters are white, including 1 cisgender heterosexual Jewish man. There are 13 Black characters. Black females account for 8 of those roles, with 7 of those characters heterosexual and 1 with unknown sexuality. Black males make up 5 characters, including 4 that are heterosexual and 1 that has unknown sexuality. The 2 IPOC characters account for 2 males (1 Latinx heterosexual male, and 1 Latinx male with unknown sexuality), and 2 females (1 Asian heterosexual female and 1 heterosexual female who is a POC, but it's unclear what her race or ethnicity is).

The majority of characters with neurological disabilities are American (31). There are also 3 British, 1 African and 1 Mexican character. We were right to assume that the majority of characters are Elder, in fact 23 of the characters are. The rest of the characters are 12 Adult and 1 Child. Neurological disabilities affect people in every age group, and yet this is the one area where Elder characters seem to be allowed to be disabled. We do need depictions of Elder people who have neurological disabilities, but not if they are the only representation.

The overwhelming majority of characters with neurological disabilities are Bit roles. That is why it can be hard to determine anything about the character. Sometimes they pass by the screen and have one or two lines. There is little character development for many of these characters, even those who may have a guest starring role on one episode of a television show. With this in mind it's not surprising to discover that only 1 character in this section is a Lead character. This character is Sister Monica Joan (Judy Parfitt) from *Call the Midwife*. She is one of the oldest characters featured in our study in her 80s or 90s. She is a cisgender white woman with unknown sexuality because she's a nun. She has Dementia but nobody ever talks about it. Apparently, her role consists of sneaking cake and praying a lot.

The 11 Supporting characters provide a little more diversity. Only 2 of the characters are white males, and one of them is Jewish. Albert "Pops" Solomon (George Segal) is a mainstay on *The Goldbergs*. Based on the real Al Solomon, creator Adam Goldberg's actual grandfather, Al has Alzheimer's, and has lost his driver's license because of it. It doesn't matter though because he still drives, partaking in many great adventures with

the character of young Adam over the series. There are 4 white female Supporting characters including one of the few younger characters, Rachel (Sharon Van Etten) from *The OA*. This twentysomething character has Aphasia as a result of a car accident. It's supposed to seem tragic because she was known for her amazing singing voice, but once she is murdered her spirit is able to sing and speak again.

There are only 5 nonwhite Supporting characters and 4 of them are male. 2 of them are Black males, and 2 of them are Latinx males. There is also 1 Black female character. It is Ophelia Harkness (Cicily Tyson) on *How to Get Away with Murder*. Ophelia is the mother of the protagonist, Annalise Keating. She has Dementia and is one of the better representations on this list. While she is no-nonsense, she does forget a lot of things, and it's hard for her to accept that, which is very common for older people who are starting to deal with disabilities that affect their memories. Her portrayal also addresses stigma in the Black community surrounding health and disability, in a realistic way.

We don't know or believe any of these characters have the disabilities that are represented. While many of the actors are indeed Elder and may be dealing with chronic disabilities that come with age, none have spoken about having these particular disabilities. We believe wholeheartedly that many more stories about Elder characters need to be told. For this section, however, what is most limited is the fact that young people are not represented. Neurological disability does not always happen once you reach a certain age. This is why so many people are shocked and surprised when it happens to them. We need to do better for these individuals, especially those in BIPOC communities where stigma surrounding disability and understandable mistrust of doctors and medicine is prevalent.

Physical Disability

Whenever we talk about disability representation, people always bring up physical disabilities. The wheelchair is literally used as the universal sign of disability. A wheelchair and other mobility devices are often one of the most visible indicators that someone has a physical disability. However, a lot of people have physical disabilities that don't use mobility devices, and often these individuals go unrecognized. We anticipated that physically disabled people who can walk would indeed go unrecognized, and that the majority of characters would be older, because wheelchair users generally are not allowed to be young, especially not children. Nobody wants to

think about little kids in wheelchairs because it's seen as depressing, even though wheelchair using kids often find whizzing around in their chairs quite exciting.

There are 64 characters with physical disabilities (about 9%) on 51 shows across 13 networks and 6 streaming services. Disabilities vary, although the majority of characters have a Physical Disability – Not Otherwise Specified (25). Other disabilities represented include 14 Age-related disabilities, another term for Elder related disability, 9 SCI (Spinal Cord Injury), 6 Cerebral Palsy, 3 Motor Neuron Disability, 3 Multiple Sclerosis (MS), 1 Arthrogryposis, 1 Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy, 1 Hip Problems, and 1 Spina Bifida.

There are 34 cisgender males and 30 cisgender females. LGBTQIA people with physical disabilities apparently do not exist on television despite existing in the world. The majority of characters with physical disabilities have unknown sexuality, no doubt, a combination of the part being too small to even discuss sexuality and the idea physically disabled people, especially wheelchair users, have no desire, ability, or need for sexual relationships. The fact that many characters are older also could play a role. There are 33 characters with unknown sexuality and 31 characters that are heterosexual.

The overwhelming majority of characters with physical disabilities are white; 48 characters to be exact. That means there are only 10 Black characters and 6 IPOC characters split up as 3 Latinx, 1 Asian, 1 Biracial, and 1 Punjabi Muslim. Black representation is split up between 4 Black males, 3 of whom are heterosexual and 1 with unspecified sexuality and 6 Black females, 3 of them who are heterosexual and 3 of them who have undetermined sexuality. The 6 IPOC include 4 males (3 Latinx and 1 Biracial), and the other 2 characters are 1 heterosexual Punjabi Muslim woman, and 1 Asian woman with undetermined sexuality.

Most characters are American (53). Other nationalities include 4 British, 2 French, 2 Irish, 1 Canadian, 1 Pakistani, and 1 person from a fantasy world. While there are many Elder characters, 22, in fact, the majority of characters are actually Adult characters. There are 31. Young people really get the shaft on this with 6 Teen and 5 Child characters. Apparently, Babies don't have physical disabilities in the world of television.

Surprisingly, there are 4 Lead characters with Physical Disabilities. We are surprised there are any at all, excluding JJ (Micah Fowler) from *Speechless*, a show that was widely publicized in and out of the disability community Lead characters don't generally get to be physically disabled on television. That's probably why 47 of these characters

are Bit characters. A mere 13 are Supporting roles. Lead characters include 1 white male, the aforementioned JJ, 1 white female and 2 Black males. JJ is one of the few young characters with a physical disability. He is an actual wheelchair user who has CP, like his character, although unlike JJ he can speak verbally.

One of those characters is Patton Plame (Daryl "Chill" Mitchell) a forensic computer specialist on *NCIS: New Orleans*, who is one of the best representations of a wheelchair user we found in this study. While you only occasionally see him doing things like dating or things outside his job, this is typical for most of the characters excluding the protagonist played by Scott Bakula, so he's portrayed as an equal to the rest of the team. The other two characters, Garrett (Colton Dunn from *Superstore* and Fiona Hogan (Grainne Keenan) from *Blood*, are both played by characters engaging in disabled mimicry.

While Garrett might not be such a bad character if he was played by someone actually disabled, since he's able to have relationships and seems to have a full life, it still is lacking because his performance is often reduced to sitting in a chair and not moving his legs. Fiona has to deal with her mother's funeral and discovers she has Motor Neuron Disease (MND) at the same time. She's already a bit anguished, so the entire thing is overwhelming. You do see her moving a bit slower, but that's about the effects of what you see of her disability for this series. It's hard to distinguish whether her anguish is more because of her diagnosis or because of her mother dying.

The Supporting category is a mixed bag. It also shows the influence of the work FilmDis has when it comes to inclusion on television. After connecting with one of the showrunners to discuss problems with disabled mimicry during the first season of *The OA*, the role of Dr. Marlowe Rhodes (played by British disabled actress, Liz Carr) was added to the second season. Dr. Rhodes is independent, has a high-powered job as a scientist, and lives on her own, which are things characters that are wheelchair users aren't typically allowed to have. Other depictions are not very substantial. The portrayal of Yaz's grandmother, Umbreen, as a young woman in Pakistan is fascinating, but in the present-day Nani Umbreen (Leena Dhingra) says very little other than that she is a wheelchair user, and this is all part of the natural aging process. You mainly only see her sitting in a manual wheelchair prior to flashbacks of her past.

Not all of the portrayals of physical disability are positive. Supporting character Clay Boone (Tanner Stine) on *Impulse* becomes disabled as punishment. While trying to sexually assault a young woman with powers, her powers essentially crush his spine.

He becomes disabled, and his dad buys him the best wheelchair on the market. However, the young woman struggles to tell anyone what has happened. Nobody really talks about what was done to her, and she's afraid to speak out because then she would have to reveal that she has these powers.

Other portrayals rely on comic relief. *Fuller House* uses famous older actors such as Lindsay Wagner (Millie) and Lanie Kazan (Irma), both of whom use mobility devices (Millie has a mobility scooter and Irma has a cane) to get around, when Stephanie, DJ, and Kimmy accidentally book themselves onto a 70s cruise, which actually means you have to be in your 70s or above. Kimmy spends the entire episode stealing Millie's scooter and driving around. In another episode, DJ pretends to be a wheelchair user with Kimmy as her nurse, when her ex-boyfriend is trying to sabotage her vet business. After discovering her deception, he then proceeds to push an actual wheelchair user (an extra played by a stunt woman) out into traffic thinking it's DJ.

What we hope will happen is that people will start recognizing that mobility devices are not tools of oppression or used for gags, but rather tools of freedom and independence. Wheelchairs, crutches, braces all allow physically disabled individuals access to the world they might not otherwise have. We also believe that stories about characters with physical disability where mobility devices might not be present is imperative to understanding the fabric that makes up the physical disabled community. Not all physically disabled people are alike. There is a wide diversity and Hollywood needs to start recognizing that.

While there are a lot of wheelchair users, there are also people using braces, crutches, and walkers. We would like to see much more diversity in the type of physical disabilities and the type of accoutrements that may or may not accompany said disabilities. There needs to be many more physically disabled characters on television. There are over 40 neuromuscular disabilities alone, and yet only one or two of them, or the vague moniker "Muscular Dystrophy" often accompany these disabled characters. We are at just the tip of the iceberg when exploring spinal cord injuries, cerebral palsy, MS, spina bifida, and various other disabilities that have a wide range of effects on individuals living with them.

Diversity for physical disabilities is a huge problem. We shouldn't have categories where LGBTQIA characters don't exist. We shouldn't have white people dominating representation to this level. Things need to change, because physically disabled people often have intersectional experiences.

Random Disability

The final category we use to classify disabled characters on television is Random Disability. This is basically a category for any disability that doesn't fit anywhere else. This is especially true for characters that are on sci-fi shows. There are some disabilities you just cannot explain in human terms. That's where we put these characters.

There are 13 characters on 9 shows that span across 5 networks and 3 streaming services. The networks with the most inclusion are CW and CBS All Access. They tie with 3 characters apiece. The most common disability is Unknown Illness (3). Other disabilities include 2 Cybernetic Implants, 2 Dark Matter Shrapnel in body (one of whom is in a coma throughout much of this), 2 Immune Deficiency (turned Alien Weapon), 2 Oxygen Users, 1 Cured ALS with side effects, and 1 Extreme Empathy.

Again, there are no LGBTQIA characters represented. By now we shouldn't have to say anything about why this is problematic. The characters are split up into 7 cisgender males and 6 cisgender females. There are also 7 heterosexual characters and 6 with unknown sexualities. The majority of these characters are white. 11 out of 13 are white leaving only 1 Black and 1 Asian character. Both the Black male and Asian female characters have unknown sexualities. The majority are American (9), with 2 characters who are British. There are 2 characters that come from another planet.

There are 9 Adult, 3 Child, and 2 Elder characters. There are 2 actresses who play Grace Gibbons (Sarah Carter and Islie Hirvonen) on *The Flash*, which is why there is an extra actor. There are no Lead characters that are disabled in this section. There are 8 Supporting characters, 5 of whom are white women. None of the Supporting characters are BIPOC. We are fairly certain 100% of these actors are not disabled, at least not with the disability their characters have.

We are not sure where to get started when it comes to authentic representation in sci-fi roles. How do you even talk about injuries from dark matter or side effects from curing ALS?! What we hope sci-fi creators start doing is casting disabled people in their television shows. You can make inclusion authentic by working with disabled actors to develop characters that are disabled, but also well-rounded and multifaceted. It doesn't always have to be about the disability.

Our biggest problem with a lot of these portrayals is that they are based on disability as punishment or disability as villainy, especially all three portrayals on *The Flash*. Grace, who takes up the mantle of the villain, Cicada due to anger at meta-humans over being disabled as a result of an accident she believes was caused by them, is joined by her uncle, Orlin Dwyer (Chris Klein), the original Cicada. He implanted these ideas in a comatose Grace, despite both of them now being meta-humans themselves thanks to their injuries. It's the old tired "internalized ableism makes me a villain" trope we've seen in horror, sci-fi, thriller, fantasy and other similar genres since disability has been included in media. The other character on *The Flash* has side effects after curing his ALS, which he also does to his daughter without her permission or consent. This is how her own meta-human powers developed. A classic story of superpowers as a result of "fixing a disability."

The messages that disabled people see, especially disabled children who are often looking for characters they can relate to, is that we don't exist and if we do something is wrong with us, so we need to be fixed. These portrayals do nothing to change that message. In fact, they further perpetuate it. If it has not yet become clear, Hollywood has a disability problem, and the answer is not to continue to let nondisabled people write stories about disability unchecked. Studios need to consider hiring disabled consultants to not only help with consulting on specific shows, but also throughout the entire creative development process to ensure that disability representation is authentic, representative, and inclusive.

Disability by Gender, Gender Identity, and Sexuality

We fully expected that the majority of television would exclude trans and nonbinary representation, but we didn't expect almost total and complete erasure. Here's a look at the study through the perspective of gender, gender identity, and sexuality.

Out of 708 characters on 180 shows, there are a total of 36 LGBTQIA characters or 5%. This isn't out of all the characters on television, just the specifically disabled characters we've recorded across 180 shows. There are millions of LGBTQIA people in the world, and we know that many LGBTQIA people are also disabled especially with Psychosocial and chronic health-based disabilities. A large part of this is due to trauma and stress from oppression, discrimination, and violence which can cause both Mental

health-based disabilities and chronic disabilities. Trauma puts not just mental, but also physical stress on the body. This alone should mean much more LGBTQIA disabled representation.

Here is the breakdown of characters:

10 are Black including 6 cisgender Black gay males (1 non-binary), 2 cisgender Black lesbian females, and 2 cisgender Black bisexual females.

7 are IPOC including 6 cisgender IPOC gay males (3 Latinx, 1 Indian, 1 Indigenous, 1 Biracial (Asian)), and 1 trans IPOC heterosexual female.

19 are white Including 7 cisgender white gay males (1 gender nonconforming), 5 cisgender white lesbian females, 4 cisgender white bisexual males, and 3 cisgender white bisexual/pansexual females.

There is 1 intersex character. Intersex people are very rarely represented, and general society has little comprehension or understanding about what it means to be intersex. Representation that is accurate and fair would greatly benefit this community.

The same is true for asexual representation. There are lots of asexual disabled characters, mostly because the parts are too small or because of the assumption that disabled people don't want, don't like, or shouldn't have sex. It would be nice to see representation that features actually asexual disabled people, not because they can't have sexual relationships, but because that is simply who they are.

Disability by Race, Ethnicity, & Culture

Native people are the most marginalized, and the least included on Television. Disabled Indigenous people are nearly nonexistent. We have failed these communities, and not including Indigenous storytellers, actors, or characters will continue to hurt Native communities who remain largely misunderstood and abused by the rest of the world. Representation would go a long way in rectifying this, but it can't happen without the inclusion both in front of and behind the camera for Indigenous, First Nations, Aboriginal, and Indigenous Pacific Islanders.

While all nonwhite disabled people lack authentic and inclusive media representation, beyond Indigenous people Asian people (including Indian, Pakistani, and other Southern Asian people) are vastly underrepresented. This is especially true for LGBTQIA representation, where very few non-white disabled characters are allowed to exist. Latinx representation is slightly more visible, but not enough to be truly inclusive. The same is true of Black representation. While more Black creators being allowed in writers rooms has led to greater representation and inclusion of Black disabled characters, there is still a long way to go before there is actual inclusion.

Ethnicity wise, Muslim and Jewish representation is barely visible. This is despite the visibility of people like disabled Palestinian American actress Maysoon Zayid. Muslim and Jewish representation are not usually seen beyond stereotypes, secularism, and whiteness/white supremacy. Muslim characters are specifically stereotyped as harmful, radical, and though religion is sometimes seen it's usually wrapped around a story that involves terrorism. Judaism likewise is seen as something secular, only celebrated on holidays or joked about through self-deprecation by Jewish characters. These disabled characters are also not visible in LGBTQIA spaces, even though Muslim and Jewish LGBTQIA people are fighting to survive like all other LGBTQIA people.

It should be noted also that not all Jewish people are white. There is only 1 Jewish character that is Black in the study, and there are many Jewish people that are POC. There are Jewish Latinx people who have a rich culture throughout Latin America, they have brought to the U.S. Jewish people exist all over the world. The same is true of Muslim people who are almost always depicted as POC from the Middle East, but there are Black Muslims, white Muslims, Biracial Muslims. You wouldn't know this by any type of representation. Disabled people exist in every culture, and their stories deserve to be told.

Here are the numbers based on race.

489 (69%) white disabled characters:

159 (22%) cisgender white heterosexual males – 3 Jewish, 1 Vulcan
141 (20%) cisgender white heterosexual females – 1 Armenian, 1 Jewish
91 (13%) cisgender white males with unknown sexuality
79 (11%) cisgender white females with unknown sexuality
7 (1%) cisgender white gay males – 1 gender nonconforming
5 (0.8%) cisgender white lesbian females

4 (0.6%) cisgender white bisexual males
3 (0.4%) cisgender white bisexual/pansexual females

135 (19%) Black disabled characters:

41 (6%) cisgender Black heterosexual females
36 (5%) cisgender Black heterosexual males – 1 Jewish
24 (3%) cisgender Black females with unknown sexuality
24 (3%) cisgender Black males with unknown sexuality
6 (0.8%) cisgender Black gay males – 1 non-binary
2 (0.3%) cisgender Black lesbian females
2 (0.3%) cisgender Black bisexual females

83 (12%) IPOC disabled characters:

23 (3%) cisgender IPOC heterosexual males – 14 Latinx, 3 Middle Eastern, 2 Asian, 2 Hawaiian, 1 Indigenous, 1 Indian
23 (3%) cisgender IPOC males with unknown sexuality – 13 Latinx, 4 Asian, 3 Hawaiian, 1 Biracial, 1 Indian, 1 Middle Eastern
16 (2%) cisgender IPOC heterosexual females – 8 Latinx, 2 Asian, 1 First Nations, 1 Indian, 1 Biracial, 1 Middle Eastern, 1 Unknown, 1 Punjabi Muslim
14 (2%) cisgender IPOC females with unknown sexuality – 8 Asians, 5 Latinx, 1 Unknown
6 (0.8%) cisgender IPOC gay males – 3 Latinx, 1 Indian, 1 Indigenous, 1 Biracial (Asian)
1 (0.1%) transgender IPOC (Biracial) heterosexual female

1 (0.1%) cisgender fantasy race (Moclan) gay male

Disability by Nationality

It would be weird to expect that American television would have characters mostly not from the United States. Of course, it would be great to have more representation that goes beyond the Western world, especially as many disabled people in these parts of the world have never been represented in any authentic way by Western media.

The U.S. is a melting pot, so having more diversity in nationality and culture speaks to the world we live in. Instead, we have 594 American characters, or 85% of the disability representation in this study. There are 48 British characters, 13 Africans – 4 Rwandan (both Hutu and Tutsi), 3 from Ghana, 3 South African, 1 Congolese, and 1 Nigerian, 9 from fantasy worlds, 8 Canadians, 6 French, 6 Unknown, 4 Irish, 4 Mexican, 3 Australian, 2 German, 2 Guatemalan, 2 Scottish, 1 Chinese, 1 European – NOS, 1 Icelandic, 1 Iraqi, 1 Norwegian, 1 Pakistani, and 1 South American – NOS.

Disability by Age

What makes someone an Adult versus an Elder? We found that there were definitely overlaps along with the overlap between Teen and Adult. Teenagers are technically children, in most instances, but their shared experiences are often similar to those of young adults up through early 20s. For this study we decided to break up age groups in the following way, mostly to make it easier for us to distinguish characters. Babies are usually toddlers and under, so any character 2 or under was considered a Baby. Children are identified as ranging from 3 to 12 years old. Teenagers are 13 to 19-year-olds. This became tricky when trying to identify characters when ages were not given for characters in the young adult range. Adults are considered from age 20 until 59, and anyone 60+ is an Elder.

In every single section above we wrote that Adults were typically the largest percentage of characters. Overall, 475, or about 67%, of all of the disabled characters we found for this study were Adult characters. This says to us that showrunners don't understand or don't care about including the stories of younger or older disabled people. We actually thought that there would be more Elder stories since disability is often associated with aging in our society, but Hollywood also doesn't always value older actors the way they do those between the ages of 20 and 40. Elder accounts for 136 characters and most of them are Bit roles. There are 61 Teen, 36 Child, and 4 Baby roles.

They say never work with children, and Hollywood has really taken that to heart when it comes to disability representation. It's sad, because you have some great dynamic disabled characters like Christopher Diaz (Gavin McHugh) on *9-1-1*, who are authentically portraying children that are disabled. Young people, especially multiply marginalized young disabled people really deserve to see themselves represented. We

hope that television showrunners will consider adding more disabled young characters, and casting authentically when they do.

Disability by Role

While disability is present on a variety of television shows, way more than we anticipated, it's not really done in a way where disabled characters and actors are entirely included. We have so many one-off guest roles or small Bit parts, so disabled actors have little to sink their teeth into when it comes to authentic roles. It doesn't help that most of these roles are played by nondisabled actors, many of whom clearly don't understand the disability their character represents.

We have long spoken out about the need for more background characters that are disabled, and we are slowly getting that as this study shows, but that doesn't mean these portrayals are good or authentic. Especially when you have a Bit character, having an authentic representation of disability makes the part that much better. A lot of these characters don't get much time to speak, so if they have to pretend they are disabled, they rely on physical stereotyping that is harmful and inauthentic. Having an actual disabled actor portraying a small role means you don't always have to mention they are disabled. Just by being disabled they can bring that to the role. You can't beat that type of authenticity.

There are 406 Bit characters with disabilities across 180 shows. That's 57% of representation. 187 characters have Supporting roles and there are 115 Lead characters. That's around 16% of the total number of disabled characters. While several shows do have extras, they are often in just one episode where there are other disabled characters present. Disabled people are part of the world in everyday life. We should not have to look for inclusion in background scenes just to try and count when disabled people are included.

While 115 Lead characters is more than we thought, the majority of these characters are played by nondisabled actors. Disabled actors are still trying to find inclusion in Hollywood. There are a variety of reasons why Hollywood is not accessible including not even being included in auditioning processes. This is slowly changing, but things need to happen faster. Disabled people have been waiting decades to be included, and that inclusion will only seek to help people better understand who disabled people are, what

disabled people need, and not to fear disability when it happens to them as it typically does with aging.

Disability by Network

While 84% (151 shows out of 180) of the shows that we watched had disability representation of some type, that only paints a portion of the picture. We watched 180 shows, which aired between March 2018 and March 2019. There were over 500 shows during this time, so this is just a sample of what aired. There are even more shows for next year, and we hope to cover them all.

The network with the most characters is CBS with 127. NBC is not far behind with 124. Network television did much better than other channels and streaming services. Here's a breakdown by network: 82 ABC, 71 FOX, 37 CW, 19 FX, 19 HBO, 18 PBS, 17 Showtime, 8 Starz, 7 AMC, 7 TNT, 7 USA, 5 Cinemax, 4 National Geographic, 4 Paramount, 4 Syfy, 3 BBC America, 3 OWN, 2 Comedy Central, 1 History, 1 Nickelodeon. The most popular streaming service was Netflix with 59 characters. The other streaming services include: 29 Amazon, 29 Hulu, 13 CBS All Access, 4 Acorn and 4 YouTube.

CBS diversity initiatives have been making a difference and it shows. However, there are still so many inequities when it comes to disability representation that shows could really benefit from having disabled people on their staff as writers, consultants, and other crew members.

Disabled Mimicry

We love to say in the disability community, "nothing about us without us."

It aptly applies to how many of us feel about the continued exclusion of disabled actors in Hollywood

Disability is not something you can act. Full stop. We have had many people argue with us about this, and not one of them, not even any of the actors we've spoken to can explain to us how someone "acts disabled." What they end up doing is what we refer to

as **disabled mimicry**. Mimicry is often done as a form of mocking, and we believe that portrayals that include nondisabled people are often mocking towards disabled people. That doesn't mean that the actor intended to mock disabled people. It just means that the actions come off as mocking, whether intentional or not.

We don't believe that most actors maliciously set out to play disabled people in a mocking way. Unfortunately, because disability is so different for each person and so specific for each type of disability, it is not something that can be easily emulated. This is why disabled folks across the world have spoken out for years about why disabled actors need to be included in Hollywood. If roles are going to be about disability, they need to include us.

The nondisabled community has long profited off of stories without our inclusion. In December of last year, Variety reported that, "[since 1988 one third of Oscars 30 lead actors](#)" were engaging in disabled mimicry. There's a similar situation with lead actress nominees since then. In the histories of the Oscars only TWO known disabled actors have won. They love to tell our stories. They love to win from our stories. They don't like to include us in them.

There are 70 characters (about 10%) played by authentically disabled actors. We are certain 147 characters are played by nondisabled actors. The rest, 471 characters, are unlikely to be disabled, but we aren't 100% certain this is the case. The roles are either too small and the actors not really known, and/or the actor has little presence online so we were unable to determine if they are actually disabled. Of course, there's also the issue of less visible disabilities, which can make it hard to determine if actors are disabled or not.

We believe that there are more disabled actors that are not able to be visible on this list. We have spoken with many disabled actors that have been afraid of revealing diagnosis. Especially for those with progressive disabilities, this is an incredible fear. Some even told us that their agents told them to not disclose their disability, because they would no longer receive work. Disabled actors should not be afraid to disclose their disability and should not be considered unable to do their job simply because they are disabled.

Things need to change in Hollywood, and inclusion needs to happen in front of and behind the camera.

Conclusion

Most studies done about disability representation on television and other media fail to include information that further explains the exclusion of disability on a wider scale. We set out to determine exactly where disability is showcased on television. In our study we watched 180 shows. We found out there are 151 that include some form of disability, and we found 708 disabled characters, not counting Extras. While this study reaffirms a lot of what we thought about inclusion of disability on television, it also offers further information about where this representation is lacking.

We knew that nonwhite disabled people are included in lower numbers than white disabled people when it comes to representation. This study confirms that is indeed correct. However, it also reveals that Black creators are including disabled characters now that many of them have been given the opportunity to develop and create their own shows. Many of these creators recognize that disability is a part of their history and a part of their community, something we don't always see with white creators. This is creating a blueprint for representation of marginalized disabled people, which we need to see continue.

We also knew that disabled actors are not being allowed to act or even audition, but to fully have a breakdown by disability, by type of role, by gender, sexuality, race, gender identity, nationality, ethnicity and other factors paints a much broader picture of where we are when it comes to authentic representation on television. We have statistics that better reflect lack of inclusion. This allows us to see where inclusion needs to be increased, and what Hollywood is doing wrong when it comes to authentic disability representation.

Our recommendation is that Hollywood seek out disabled consultants, creators, writers, crewmembers, and actors. Audition spaces need to be accessible and inclusive. We also urge creators to start writing roles that disabled people can play that aren't necessarily about disability. It's a lot easier to cast an actor that's disabled when you don't have to force specifications of disability type. Disabled people are more than just our disabilities, and while our disability should not be ignored, we also need to move beyond making disability the focal point of storytelling. We are also parents, siblings, lawyers, doctors, actors, writers, neighbors, schoolmates, romantic interests, and the list

goes on. Let disabled actors audition for roles that make sense for them, and that definitely means they don't have to be "disabled roles."

There's an instance where this happens from a show in this study. Selma Blair portrays the role of Jessica Harris, the sister of June Harris (as played by Parker Posey) on *Lost in Space*. Jessica is lounging on the couch when we see her, before being knocked out by her sister who wants to take her place on a rocket ship. Jessica is successful, has money, a career, and a life. There's absolutely no acknowledgment that she has any type of disability, and yet simply by being cast in this role Selma Blair, as a disabled actress, brings inclusion to this show. Why can't there be more characters like Jessica Harris?

At the end of the day, Hollywood truly needs to practice our mantra, "nothing about us without us." Disabled creators and actors are here and willing to work. They just need to be given the chance.

It should be noted that this entire study was done with absolutely no funding whatsoever. We could not find any support to complete this study, so it was done between our paying jobs. While we initially wanted to watch all of the over 500 shows that aired between March 2018 and March 2019, we ended up being able to watch 180 shows. Ashtyn watched 119 shows, Dominick watched 58 shows, and MaeLee watched 3 shows. This is intended to be a snapshot of what we are currently working on for our next study.

In order to watch all the shows for next year's study in this time period, with our current list featuring 610 television shows, we desperately need your help and support. Please consider financial support, so we can continue this important research, and hire others to help us expand into other markets, while also researching disability representation in other forms of media, including film, Broadway, and video games.



You can financially support our FilmDis 2019-2020 Study into Disability Representation on television by going [HERE](#).

About FilmDis: FilmDis started out as a discussion on Twitter back in 2014, started by filmmaker, Dominick Evans, about disability representation in the media. Today it is a full-fledged media-monitoring organization offering research, education, and consulting on disability representation in film, television, video games, and other forms of popular media. Check us out on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#) for news, reviews, resources, and research studies into representation of all forms of media.

Also check out our website here: <http://www.filmdis.com/>

About Ashtyn Law: Ashtyn Law went to school for screenwriting. She is the screenwriter of *trip*, *Nance + Sydney*, and *Inamorata*. She is currently developing the scripts for a new television series. She also works as a script consultant and tech writer. Ash has worked with major studios reviewing film and television including HBO, Showtime, Acorn, 20th Century Fox, CBS, ABC, and Disney. Ashtyn is multiply disabled, and is also part of the LGBTQIA community. Check her out on [Twitter](#).

About Dominick Evans: Dominick Evans received his BFA in Motion Pictures Production from Wright State University where he learned from Oscar-winning filmmakers. He primarily works as a director and disability consultant. Dominick has consulted on disability representation on multiple shows and television series for networks that include Lionsgate and Netflix. He has also reviewed material for major studios including HBO, Microsoft, Cinemax, Starz, EA, CBS, Disney, and Sony. He is a multiply disabled wheelchair user who is also trans, non-binary, and queer. You can follow him on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), or catch him streaming on [Twitch](#) and [Mixer](#).

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