



LIVERPOOL  
JOHN MOORES  
UNIVERSITY

Early Work  
By Student  
Researchers

SPARK

ISSN 2050-4187



Issue 11: Special  
Issue: Film Freaks:  
Denaturalising  
Common Views on  
Dis/Ability and  
Education through  
Iconic Films, August  
2018

# Spark

Issue 11: Special Issue: Film Freaks: Denaturalising Common Views on Dis/Ability and Education through Iconic Films, August 2018

ISSN 2050-4187

## **Editorial team**

### **Student editors:**

Jessica Delaney

Kirstie Mitchell

Ellen Thacker

### **Staff editors:**

Clara Kassem

Geert Thyssen

Publication date: 14/08/2018

Published by: **Liverpool John Moores University**, Faculty of Education, Health and Community, IM Marsh Campus, Barkhill Road, Aigburth, Liverpool, L17 6BD.

# Contents

Editorial	4
Introduction to Special Issue	5
What's Eating Gilbert Grape? (1994) (Lasse Hallström) Report by Jessica Delaney	8
Special People (2007) (Justin Edgar) Report by Ellen Thacker	15
Children of a Lesser God (1986) (Randa Haines) Report by Kirstie Mitchell	25
Conclusion	32
References	34
Guidelines for future contributors	40

## Editorial

Welcome to Issue 11 - a special issue of **SPARK**. Here, we bring together an excellent collection of work written by student interns on the Curriculum Enhancement Internship Project 'Film Freaks: Denaturalising Common Views on Dis/Ability and Education through Iconic Films'. This project connects with similar 'Film Freaks' initiatives held previously, among other places, at the University of Leuven (Verstraete, Van Hooste, Thyssen and Catteeuw, 2004). These seminars went on to develop into a widely attended public Disability Film Festival (<http://www.disabilityfilmfestival.be>) in the city of Leuven. During the internship project, four students worked collaboratively with staff to hold four film seminars aimed at denaturalising some of the present views on children, young people and adults with 'special educational needs and disabilities', on education as an enabling/disabling project and on dis/ability as different from/similar to 'freakery'. This issue is a collection of reports from these seminars combining both discussions and individual analysis. We would like to thank Zara Nargis for her contributions to the internship and her interesting film seminar on *Ray*, but unfortunately due to personal circumstances she was unable to submit her final report for publication. We hope you find this special issue interesting and welcome any feedback you may have.

**Jessica Delaney, Kirstie Mitchell and Ellen Thacker** (Student editors)

Please let us know what you think of this issue of Spark. If you are interested in publishing in Spark please go to our online journal space at <http://openjournals.ljmu.ac.uk/spark> Create a login and upload your work for consideration by the student staff editorial team.

If this issue of SPARK has inspired you to submit your own work to be published or if you would like to join the editing team, please feel free to contact us at: [SPARK@ljmu.ac.uk](mailto:SPARK@ljmu.ac.uk).

**Staff editors: Clara Kassem and Geert Thyssen**

## Introduction

As part of the LJMU Curriculum Enhancement Internship Project 'Film Freaks: Denaturalising Common Views on Dis/Ability and Education through Iconic Films', student interns and staff worked collaboratively to establish a film seminar series that aimed to denaturalise some of the present views on children, young people and adults with 'additional needs', education as an enabling/disabling project and dis/ability as different from similar to 'freakery' (cf. Bogdan, 1990; Shakespeare, 1994 Garland-Thompson, 1996; Verstraete, 2012; Richardson, 2018).

Four extra-curricular film seminars ran from February to March 2018 and were attended by both staff and students. Firstly, each student intern selected one film, in discussion with project leaders, with the aim of denaturalising 'mindsets' through 'visual imagery' (cf. Aitken, 2018). The interns then created a poster to advertise the seminar featuring their film and created a short introduction to contextualise their film choice. Films were shown to both staff and students and discussions were prompted by interns after the film viewing. Discussion points were subsequently interwoven with introductions to produce four reports that comprise this themed issue within SPARK. The reports centre on an overarching theme of 'in-between-ing' (transitory dimension to dis/ability) and include several subthemes including (1) (in/inter/)dependence; (2) state of being/reality and/vs. growth or movement; (3) barriers, boundaries, border-crossing; (4) sense of belonging/community; and (5) creativity, artistry and a/stereotypical representation.

Disability is often understood in relation to two models: the Medical and Social Model of Disability. The former sees "disability" as an individual attribute, a person's problem that must be prevented, "treated" or "cured" through medical interventions (e.g., Barnes and Mercer, 2008). Braddock and Parish (2001) have highlighted a range of different methods used throughout history to "cure disability" thus conceived. In this medical model people with disabilities are seen as

dependent on support by able-bodied (and -minded) people and often characterised by means of “personal tragedy” narratives (Barnes and Mercer, 2008). The latter, social model does not see disabled people as dysfunctional. The dysfunction lies with society (Clogston, 1998) disabling groups of people, hence the preference for the term “disabled”. Referred to as “the big idea” of the British disability movement (Hasler, 1993), a key milestone in this context was the publication of *Fundamental Principles of Disability* by the Union of Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) (Oliver, 2009). This Union argued:

It is society which disables people. Disability is something which is imposed on top of our impairments by the way we are unnecessarily isolated and excluded from full participation in society. Disabled people are therefore an oppressed group in society. (UPIAS,1976, cited in Oliver, 2009, p.42)

Impairment and disability are no longer synonymous. Impairment is defined as “lacking part of or all of a limb, or having a defective limb, organism or mechanism of the body” (UPIAS,1976, cited in Oliver, 2009, p.42), while disability is defined as “the disadvantage or restriction of activity caused by a contemporary social organisation which takes little account of people who have physical impairments and thus excludes them from participation in the mainstream of social activities” (UPIAS,1976, cited in Oliver, 2009, p. 42). Disability is thus a form of social oppression (Oliver, 2009). Consequently, the term “people with disabilities” has been rejected because it implies an individual, medicalised understanding of disability, where disability is seen as the responsibility of the individual (Clark and Marsh, 2002). “Disabled person” has been redefined to mean “people with impairments who are disabled by socially constructed barriers” (Clark and Marsh, 2002, p. 2).

Film, literature (e.g. Sintobin 2004) and popular culture more generally have lent themselves *par excellence* to the reiteration of stereotypes related to disabled people. Ten common stereotypical portrayals in particular emerge from key research conducted since the

publication of *Fundamental Principles of Disability* (Biklen and Bogdan 1977; Barnes, 1992; Nelson, 1998), which all align with the medical model of disability. These depict disabled people as: (1) pitiable and pathetic, (2) an object of violence; (3) sinister or evil; (4) atmosphere (where disabled people are included in films/books to add a sense of menace which often reduces disabled people to an object of curiosity (Barnes, 1992)); (5) supercrip (Nelson (1998,p.6) defines the supercrip as a likeable person facing the trauma of a “disability”. Through determination and courage, they either succeed triumphantly or succumb heroically); (6) object of ridicule; (7) own worst enemy; (8) burden; (9) sexually abnormal; and (10) incapable of participating in community life. Barnes (1992) and Nelson (1998) in turn found evidence of a potentially positive stereotype, namely: that of disabled people as normal. Disabled people in line with this stereotype are depicted as people who just happen to have impairments but are otherwise perfectly ordinary. Yet, Barnes (1992) argues that there are severe downsides to this portrayal, as the focus shifts to “ability” and may lead some disabled people to deny a ‘disabled identity’ (n.p.). Understanding the stereotype or trope of disabled people being “normal” like other people (commonly reiterated in nowadays media, not least by disabled people themselves, e.g. by Lost Voice Guy, the winner of Britain’s Got Talent, on BBC’s The One Show, Tuesday 5th June 2018) as nonetheless positive, is perhaps to point to the normality of diversity: all people are diverse even within groups of people sharing characteristics and a sense of belonging or community.

All reports touch on the themes of in- and interdependence in various forms, of barriers, boundaries and border crossing and that of representation in a/stereotypical ways. The first two reports, which focus on the films *What’s Eating Gilbert Grape?* and *Special People* respectively, more specifically delve into the themes of reality, growth and movement. The last report, which analysed the film *Children of A Lesser God*, focuses more on a sense of belonging or community as well as creativity and artistry.

## **Jessica Delaney (Education Studies and Early Years)**

### **What's Eating Gilbert Grape? (1994) (Lasse Hallström)**

Disabilities are presented and represented in films across various genres and time periods in many different ways. The media, therefore, including film, have certain responsibilities when it comes to including characters with disabilities of any kind. Goodley and Van Hove (2005) have argued that successfully representing characters with disability in films can affect not only those people in society who live with a disability, by giving them someone to relate to and, hopefully, allowing them to feel included and considered within the film-making world. It may also affect those people who are not disabled, in that they have a way to empathise with those similar to the character they are observing. For my part in this project, I chose to focus on the film *'What's Eating Gilbert Grape?'*, which follows the story of a family living in the fictional town of Endora, Iowa, supported chiefly by the second oldest child, Gilbert, played by a young Johnny Depp. Endora is a town described as being a place where "nothing much ever happens, and nothing much ever will" (*What's Eating Gilbert Grape?*, 1993), which is echoed by the apparent desolation of several of the characters to escape the town. Not only does Gilbert work to provide food and shelter for his family, including his reclusive mother, who has become obese through depression due to the death of her husband, but he also cares for his soon-to-be eighteen-year-old brother Arnie, played by Leonardo DiCaprio, who lives with an unspecified disability.

The film addresses several themes and sheds light on the lives and roles of various characters; however the greatest focus is on the title character, Gilbert Grape. Gilbert is the second oldest son of a depressed and consequently morbidly obese mother, as well as being an older brother and guardian to Arnie, who lives with a very different form of disability than his mother. In the United Kingdom, disability is defined as being the result of a long-term impairment which affects the person's ability to live their everyday life as they would without such an impairment (Equality Act, 2010). With this in mind, although Arnie's



and Momma's disabilities are obviously very different, it is clear that obesity, as well as whichever unspecified disability Arnie lives with both affect their lives in this way. This film arguably presents the disabilities of those around Gilbert as being more of a burden on him than on those actually those to whom they are attributed. Even the title of the film suggests that there is something about Gilbert's life that is wearing him down, be it the care he provides for his brother, the tireless financial support he offers his family, the affair he finds himself temporarily entangled in. One could argue that of all the aspects of Gilbert's life it is his caregiving responsibilities that take the most toll on him. The use of the word 'eating' in the title of the film could be a reflection on this, and how his mother's out-of-control habit of eating and eventual disability in the form of her obesity has come to place an enormous amount of pressure on Gilbert to fill the gap left in the family home after his father's death. As well as this, another interpretation of the word 'eating' could be in the more idiomatic sense, in that it refers to something bothering or annoying Gilbert Grape. This pulls the focus onto Gilbert himself rather than the disabled characters around him, which could be a comment on the way disability research is conducted, particularly when focussing on siblinghood. As mentioned in work by Meltzer and Kramer (2016), research into how disability affects siblings often places more importance on the sibling who does not live with a disability, opting to explore how the 'burden' of living with a disabled brother or sister has affected them, and has tended to minimise if not ignore entirely the views of the disabled sibling or siblings. The topic of how the film presented Gilbert's life as more of a struggle than Arnie or the mother's was discussed briefly during the seminar in which the film was screened. This topic is highlighted in Barnes's work (1992). Here, Barnes explores the ideas of how, often in media, people with disabilities are presented as being a burden on their families and the people around them. The disabled characters, Barnes (1992) argues, are often presented as needing the aid of a non-disabled person, placing the pressure to ensure a 'normal' life for

the disabled character onto the shoulders of the family member, friend, teacher, or whomever the person providing the support might be. Barnes (1992) also argues that the position of the caregiver in this scenario often becomes the martyr in the media, not just in fiction such as films and plays, but also in advertising campaigns for carers' charities. This idea that the caregiver is in some way becoming self-sacrificial in order to provide support and a better life for their disabled counterpart, suggests that it would in fact be easier and more beneficial to the caregiver, in this case Gilbert, if there were nobody to care for, or at least no disability to be responsible for, and therefore restricted by.

Another theme addressed by this film is that of movement and the desire to leave or move away. Within the first few minutes of the film, Gilbert can be heard saying "they're doing the right thing, just passing through", as he watches the campers make their yearly procession through Endora. This immediately tells the audience that Gilbert does not want to be permanently fixed to this town. Several references are made to people leaving the town or wishing to move on in some way. Arnie becomes fixated on one of these verbal references, repeating several times throughout the film "We're not going anywhere!". This could be nothing more than a feature of his disability, causing him to focus on and repeat lines that he hears from other people. However, it could also be interpreted as unintentionally taunting Gilbert, who clearly wants to leave this town so desperately but is not able to due to his family commitments. Aside from Gilbert's assumed duty to stay in the town and care for his family members, there is a more ominous tone that the one sure way to 'escape' Endora is through death. The husband of one of the characters is found dead in his garden during the film, and at this point his wife and children pack their belongings and leave. This woman had previously had an affair with Gilbert, and so was presumably not happy in her relationship, yet the only way she was able to leave the town and get out of this unhappy position was apparently through the death of her

husband. To some degree it feels as though the town is a place for people who do not belong anywhere else; the Grape family only survive there because their father had been so well known and respected, as was their mother before her disability took hold. They might not have fared so well in a city or larger town where the community and local services, such as the police, had less tolerance or understanding for them. The notion of having a desire to leave or keep moving is reinforced by the campers that Arnie and Gilbert admire each year. For Arnie it is a ritual shared with his brother to watch the trailers proceed through their town. But it seems to the audience that it means much more to Gilbert. The campers represent freedom, and the fact that it is possible to escape this town and keep travelling; he just needs to find a way to be free of his ties to Endora. Even when one of the campers, Becky, does end up staying in the town for a while, it is only because her trailer is broken and so she becomes, in a way, temporarily disabled from leaving or moving on.

Continuing on from this idea of movement, one topic that was discussed in some detail during the seminar at which I presented this film, and which is an area that the 'Film Freaks' project aims to explore, is that of education, and so I came to consider how '*What's Eating Gilbert Grape?*' touches on education in some way, if at all. Singh (2015) discusses the importance of 'lifelong learning', along with 'lifelong education'. 'Learning' could be interpreted as including many different forms of education, and the flexibility to find one's interests and how best one learns. "Learning" can also be said to narrow things down to what "learners" (thus construed, implying "acquirers of skills, competences, etc.") do, whereas "education" broadens up to what cannot be learnt without effort from others (cf. Gert Biesta). Education, etymologically, stems from the Latin verb *educere*, meaning "leading/guiding out" (i.e. out of some state in which one finds oneself or can get oneself in without external influence of an e-duc-ator: someone able to "lead/guide" one "out"). The second term, "lifelong education", one could argue suggests the need for a centre of learning,

such as a school or programme to attend. With this in mind, I would argue that while *'What's Eating Gilbert Grape?'* may not discuss education much in any formal sense of the word, in that we get no glimpse of Arnie, Gilbert, or either of the girls in a school or college environment, we do see them learn different things in a number of ways. Gilbert learns to display tolerance towards those who are different to him and who may present challenging behaviours, through his care for Arnie, and the conversation he shares with his mother regarding her disability. The film also explores the ideas of travelling, or moving, as a tool for learning and education. As mentioned earlier, there are repeated references to the characters' desires to move out of Endora, though all seem fixed to the place by some invisible force. The film ends with the death of Momma, Arnie and Gilbert's mother. In turn, this allows her children to move away from the family home, as there is no longer a physical tie to the town in the form of Momma. Although the end of the film is morbid, and, as was discussed during my seminar as part of the 'Film Freaks' project, made some people feel uncomfortable, it did allow for the younger characters of the film to move on, physically and emotionally. Ellen is able to move schools, Amy is offered a job in Des Moines, while Arnie and Gilbert appear to leave Endora behind entirely as they set off with Becky and her grandmother in the camper. Again, as Singh (2015) states, 'lifelong learning' is not necessarily to do with attending a classroom or educational setting, but rather about learning about one's self, and doing what is necessary for that person in order to continue learning throughout adulthood. For the Grape children, it seems that leaving Endora was necessary for their 'lifelong learning' to be possible.

One could argue that the film furthermore presents the theme of being an outsider in a variety of ways. The town of Endora has a population of a little over 1000 people, lying several miles away from the nearest city. This forces each and every citizen of Endora into the profile of an outsider in a geographical sense. This is reinforced by the town's apparent fascination at the presence of a new fast food

restaurant, taking away from the small town charm of Endora. Within the town, there is a sense in which the Grape family are outsiders from the rest of the population. With a father who hung himself prior to the events narrated in the film, a mother too disabled to leave the house, and a youngest son presenting another disability, the Grape family arguably does not fit in to the idea of a small town all-American family. Again, this is echoed by the fascination that children of the town have with Gilbert's mother, and their repeated efforts to see her through the living room window. Following on from this we can see the idea of disability, and the way in which that causes people to become outsiders from society. As explained by Davis (2017) the social model of disability defines a person as disabled based on the restrictions put on them by society, rather than due to an individual impairment of difference. This means that society as an entity inadvertently places the label of 'disability' onto people, forcing them into a compartment within their communities, and separating them from the majority. While Arnie and Momma are never vocally rejected by any person in the film, it is clear they do not function in the same way as the rest of the residents in Endora. In fact, the pair are often made into spectacles and distractions for the town, in the form of Arnie's daring climbs up the water tower and Momma's triumphant walk through town. This ties in with one of the aims of this project: to discuss whether or not people with (a) disability/disabilities are still presented in the media as 'freaks', much as they have been in the past (Garland-Thompson, 1996). The final addition to the theme of outsiders, is the presence of the travellers, coming from outside of Endora and passing through without even the intention to stop, never mind staying for long. Again these characters are geographical outsiders, as well as being social outsiders not previously known by the small population of the town.

This film was ambitious in the issues that it addressed and the way it presented people with disabilities as such likeable and complex characters, rather than as caricatures of their impairments. Despite this, it was not without its controversies. While the actress playing the

Grapes's mother, Darlene Cates, was not previously trained as an actress and was hired after the filmmakers spotted her on a documentary about overweight women in America, the same realism was not put into the casting choice of Arnie's character. An article from Entertainment Weekly written twenty years after the release of the film states that although there was the initial consideration to hire an actor with "modest disabilities" (Larbecque, 2014), the decision was made to instead hire a young Leonardo DiCaprio. This role eventually led to DiCaprio being nominated for the Academy Award for best supporting actor, and although he did not win the award this does raise some interesting questions. Is it better to have a young person with disabilities playing a character similar to themselves, or to have a trained actor with no disability 'tastefully' portray the disability, and see the film become recognised and acclaimed? Branfield (2010) would argue that the disability movement is a fight to be fought by disabled people and no one else, which would suggest that non-disabled people have little place in representing those with disabilities, particularly if they benefit in anyway, through money or awards, for presenting a struggle that does not belong to them.

*'What's Eating Gilbert Grape?'*, overall, is a tale about a family's struggle to cope with disability in its various forms, and adjusting to a life with ever changing demands. It offers themes of love, family, disability, pressure to provide care, and the ways in which those providing care can come to suffer in other ways. It offers a view into the lives of disabled people in small, rural communities, and poses some difficult questions. In particular, it explores extent to which disability constitutes a burden for non-disabled people and society at large disabilities.

## **Ellen Thacker (Mathematics and Education Studies)**

### **Special People (2007) (Justin Edgar)**

Films have a widespread and international outreach (Ellis et al., 2015) with their comments or opinions on disability potentially having a long-term effect on the community, which can be argued to be, generally considered as, both positive and negative depending on the context. Zhang and Haller (2013) conducted research into the effect mass media, including films, have on disabled individuals and their self-perceived identity by the inaccurate representations promoted via such media. In line with previous studies (Barnes, 1992; Clogston, 1990; Zhang and Haller, 2013), it was found that media outlets generally portray disability in accordance with one of three disability models. As mentioned previously, the *medical model* shows disabled individuals as dependent on medicines, hospitals and health care professionals such as doctors and nurses, whilst the *social pathology model* describes disabled people as unable to participate and contribute to society due to their oppression by and perceived disadvantage to able-bodied individuals (Clogston, 1990). Zhang and Haller (2013) further discovered that the media portray disabled people in stigmatising ways, the consequence being that preconceived prejudices are reinforced. Finally, the *supercrip model* (Clogston, 1990) views an individual as achieving great accomplishments despite their disabilities and this is celebrated as a true feat in the face of their own adversities and often ordinary feats. Whilst this model is seen to be empowering, much of the criticism of the framework comes from perceived exaggerations, the implication being that disabled people who do not possess an amazing talent or complete a great accomplishment are irrelevant and do not need to be celebrated as much (Barnes, 1992). A recent example of this is the Channel 4 Rio 2016 Paralympics adverts which introduced the Team GB athletes with the slogan: 'We're the Superhumans' (Channel 4, 2016). The slogan utilised #yesican, alongside this, suggests that if these disabled athletes can achieve sporting prowess then all disabled people have

no excuse to also attain similar feats. Catchpole (2016) discusses that there are things she as a disabled wheelchair user cannot do, such as walk, and conceives that many of the 'superhuman' individuals featured within the advert also will not be able to complete certain day-to-day tasks but instead focuses on the 'superhuman' aspects. Considering this, the Channel 4 message suggests that she is a failure for not being 'superhuman' and the general view that if more effort were given by individuals, then all disabled people could be 'superhuman'. Instead, the detrimental effect is that disabled people who are not viewed as 'superhuman' internalise and, in an able-bodied assessment, encapsulate an inaccurate 'sub-human' identity (Grant, 2016). Similarly, whilst the advert intends to be inspiring, the outcome as perceived by many disabled people is patronising, as it is another example of 'inspiration porn' (Young, 2014). Young (2014) reiterates the objectifying of disabled individuals as an inspiration through mediums such as film, adverts and posters. Not only can such depictions make disabled people feel devalued but they can also promote every individual as an object of unwanted inspiration due to the lack of authentic interaction with disabled people. Adverts such as the Paralympics trailer show people living with disability to be extraordinary and to do so is an inspiration; however, many view this as demeaning and patronising.

In a study commissioned by Scope in 2014, it was found that there are increasingly negative attitudes towards disabled people (Aiden et al., 2014). Whilst it is widely acknowledged that increased visibility of disabled people through the medium of film improves public attitude, most films featuring a disabled protagonist centre around such characters overcoming adversity and not being represented as 'everyday people'. This result, coupled with the obvious lack of disabled actors utilised in iconic films, presents a worrying gap in realistic disabled storytelling as the use of disabled actors allows for a more complex and accurate portrayal of the population and grants disabled people their own 'voice'. Representation, or rather



misrepresentation, of the disabled community has long been debated between non-disabled and disabled people. Whilst Robert F. Drake (1997), an individual has no evident impairment or disability, thus states that it would be 'inappropriate for non-disabled people to speak on behalf of disabled people'. Branfield (1998) provides a reflection of his own misconceptions and misunderstandings about the role of non-disabled people within the disability movement and declares that the disability movement should be pioneered by disabled people themselves. Indeed, in her view, the reality of a disabled individual's situation leads to an understanding which cannot be comprehended by those who face no genuine disabling factor in their day-to-day lives. This debate between scholars who can be labelled as 'non-disabled' and 'disabled', respectively, emphasises the need for discussion within the film industry about the ability of disabled people portraying similarly dis/abled characters. Furtherly, there have been calls for a higher representation of disabled actors within the film and television industry (cf. Aiden and McCarthy, 2014).

Representations of disability should be both dignifying and normalising (Bhardwaj, 2018), yet the depiction of a disabled person as 'normal' has its limitations. The ramifications of this are that characters depicted as 'normal' are diminished in their importance and tend to become a supporting one-dimensional character with little or no meaning to the overall media context (Barnes, 1992). Dignifying representations should allow disabled characters to retain pride, yet Shakespeare (1994) notes that demeaning depictions are instead utilised by the media to evoke pity and sympathy and these demeanours are usually exercised through passive, dependent behaviour, all of which is wholly inaccurate and, as discussed by Zhang and Haller (2013), these inaccuracies lead to a perceived identity which is acted upon by non-disabled people and also internalised by disabled people themselves.

Iconic films tend to be measured by their winning of accolades, internationally recognised by the industry and accepted by the public – the most cherished of these being the Academy Awards. The Oscars have long since recognised disabled characters and storylines, which predominantly feature a disabled character overcoming adversity, being pictured as a hero or exceptional talent. Outwardly, this seems progressive; however, of all the award-winning portrayals, disabled actors themselves have performed only two. The most recent of these dates back thirty years ago, more precisely to 1987, when the actress in question received a tirade of criticism for her win, as critics argued she was not acting as a deaf individual when portraying a deaf character (Matlin, 2012).

Throughout the Academy's history, the diversity of actors and actresses has been questioned, specifically with many of the industry and the public calling the Oscars racist with the lack of black people represented in nominations and awards won (Wilkinson, 2015; Kyriazis, 2016). However, many Best Actor and Actress honours have been awarded for the depiction of a disabled person, yet the interpretation has been delivered by a non-disabled person which calls into question the diversity of disability and ability within film making (Birrell, 2016).

The debate rages on with the 2018 Academy Awards and the film *The Shape of Water* led the nominations and was one of the most eagerly anticipated films throughout the awards season culminating in their win of Best Picture. The film tells the story of a mute woman who engages in a relationship with an amphibian aquatic creature, and whilst the actress Sally Hawkins who portrays the protagonist has received critical acclaim for her performance, one might enquire why a mute actress could not have played the same role and arguably given a more 'authentic' performance with a deeper understanding of the everyday difficulties a mute individual manages. Justin Edgar (2018), a director who himself is hard of hearing, describes the lack of representation by the disabled community itself as a matter of the

industry robbing them of a 'voice'. He views disability not as a tragedy but instead as something to be celebrated through the medium of a film, and therefore who better to showcase this than those who lead a life with a disability.

Upon completion of this initial research and considering the previous discussion, I sought to find a film which fits the iconic criteria but also utilised a disabled cast and as such I chose to provide an introduction to the 2007 film *Special People* produced by the company 104 Films of which Justin Edgar is co-founder. The film centres on a teacher who is enlisted to teach a filmmaking class to a group of students, all of whom use wheelchairs. Furthermore, the actors who play the students in the film are themselves physically disabled and, for the most part, wheelchair users. The film has been described as a 'milestone in mainstream cinema' (Barkham, 2008) for its use of a disabled cast; however, it remains unfamiliar to the majority of the public due to the lack of general iconic status.

This is to indicate that the film is not iconic in the traditional sense, yet I would argue iconicity in this case could be claimed for the film as it is representative of the industry and the shortcomings associated with disability in the media. The medical, social pathology and supercrip models described previously (Clogston, 1990) are utilised by media such as film to represent characters with disability on the big screen and by definition these three models underpin all films, described as iconic, depicting disability. *Special People* conforms to neither the medical, social pathology nor the supercrip model and whilst the supercrip model has been proven to empower disabled individuals to achieve feats which may have been considered idealistic, it is the framework of choice for many Hollywood production companies when portraying disability. As such, many of the films labelled as iconic and featuring disability (for example, *The Theory of Everything* and *My Left Foot*) tend to utilise this framework. *Special People* proves to be iconic in the fact that it does not fit the traditional mould and as such casts disability in an 'everyday' light. Considering

misrepresentation, which has been a theme in view of the industry and the films produced, perhaps *Special People* is representative of an 'authentic' experience/view of disability because the film does not represent any of the models described.

The film was shot in thirteen days and had a small budget of only £35,000 (Barkham, 2008) and it is the antithesis of films that usually win at such award ceremonies as the Oscars. Perhaps also partly due to this low budget, *Special People* does not romanticise disability as most film productions do by embellishing them and the context around them, or pinpointing a struggle and centring a plot around this, typically ending happily. Because of this, the plot of *Special People* seems scarce and unremarkable – it is not the story which is a success, but the use of a disabled director and a disabled cast which is the real victory. This may also offer an explanation as to why such a film has not received widespread critical or national acclaim. However, it advocates realistic representation of the disabled community. To return to the issue of increasing negative attitudes, many successful films have created storylines in which the supercrip model is the basis for a protagonist and the focus is on the incredible achievements and remarkable feats achieved by the individuals despite their disability or impairment. Whilst Zhang and Haller (2013) confirmed in their studies that the supercrip model is the most empowering of the models utilised by the media to portray disability; it is also recognised that these "superhuman" depictions are not representative, and the disabled community desire a more realistic approach to film-making concerning disabled and characters (Aiden and McCarthy, 2014), which is achieved by *Special People*. As one of the actresses Sasha Hardaway said of *Special People* "It shouldn't just be about the struggle. It should be about what you're achieving" (Barkham, 2008).

A discussion following the viewing of *Special People*, revealed that some people found the film an uncomfortable viewing experience due to the rather crass and blunt addressing of disability between characters. However, it was also noted because of this upfront

attitude towards disability, the film was thought-provoking and one of which a certain individual said that they would 'be thinking about on their way home'. Other initial thoughts mentioned were the obvious pop culture references and disdainful jokes, which created a sense of mockery throughout the film, and the structure of a film within a film, which was used to further emphasise parody. Upon reflection of the group discussion, I found that all comments made could be categorised into three themes addressed by the film: reality, disability and growth.

Throughout the film, there is a large focus on trying to capture the 'reality' of a day in the life of a disabled person; however, as the film progresses this 'reality' becomes increasingly distorted and far from the truth. This attempt is spearheaded by Jasper, a teacher in charge of running a film-making class for disabled teenagers. As the only main character who is able-bodied, Jasper is representative of an ignorant society attempting to shape disability into a sympathetic mould. His pretentiousness creates a barrier to true reality and he is absorbed by trying to capture what he views as real life. The self-absorbed nature of the character leads him to abuse the disabilities of the students for his own personal gain by creating layers of pity, such as fabricated stories of the teenagers being terminally ill. The film results in a failed film, made by Jasper, which had such a focus on picturing the students in a certain light and in the end is so far from the truth. This distortion of reality and the determination to showcase disabled people living with a particular struggle or a real 'mountain to climb' (which is not so subtly referenced in the film), creates a final piece of fiction, which has been heavily influenced by the *supercrip* model. The observation that can be made, is that it is not important to portray individuals with a prejudiced view, but instead to tell the truth to capture real life. As earlier discussed in the essay, it is important for both disabled and non-disabled individuals alike to be portrayed realistically as these performances contribute to public perceptions and *Special People* succeeds in alluding to the layers of fiction and

reality which are created within society by films, and how this is damaging and not true to life.

Continuing from the theme of reality, the theme of disability itself can be mentioned. Interestingly, the film was initially rated warning against 'disability themes' (Bignell, 2008), which was met with controversy, as crew and disability campaigners argued there was no need to caution against a film which comprises disabled characters and storylines. Whilst Jasper's condescending attitude towards the students, as he considers them 'worse off', continually riles them. In one particular scene between the students and other disabled characters which is the most uncomfortable. The students are taken to a day centre to connect with other individuals with disabilities and it becomes clear that the students themselves have a 'them vs us' attitude towards these people as they live with a range of different mental disabilities. The crude interactions that follow between the young students and the older members of the day centre create a hostile atmosphere, and the patronising aura given from the wheelchair users allows the viewer to appreciate how disability might be viewed within disabled circles, which is further reinforced by the day centre members being nameless. However, I believe the purpose of this scene is to portray how attitudes towards disabled people look outwardly and by showcasing this using different characters with differing disabilities creates a more shocking scene and invites the viewer to reassess their own interactions with disabled people. Furthermore, one of the students, a character named Dave, is revealed at the climax of the film to not be disabled, but instead pretends to be and continues to use a wheelchair. The reasons which are cited for this, are that people treat him differently and better in his new life as an individual confined to a wheelchair, as opposed to previously in his life littered with crime and petty theft. Initially, I interpreted this aspect of the film as a further comment on large film production companies hiring able-bodied actors to portray disabled characters. As previously mentioned, the success rate of such films at

award ceremonies, like the Oscars, is immense and, considering this, it could be argued that actors featured in such films owe their international success to the portrayal of such characters. Upon further reflection and discussion, the concept of transableism, the choice to view yourself as disabled as opposed to chance (Mackenzie and Cox, 2006), seemed to apply here. There is much debate and controversy surrounding transableism from the effects and subsequent pressures on Public Health (Mackenzie and Cox, 2006) and the insult caused to those who are disabled not through choice (Ruth, 2015). Whilst Dave's situation is not pursued further and, arguably, is not covered in enough detail, the notion is an important one to consider.

There are many obvious references within the film to growth and the sense of a journey; however, by the end of the film it becomes clear that it is Jasper who has undergone the most significant journey and transformation, not the disabled students. Traditionally in films concerning disability, it is the disabled subject matter which shows the most growth to reach an enlightened position by the end of the film, but *Special People* turns this now normalised concept on its head. By showcasing Jasper's growth as an individual makes a subtle comment on how it is not disabled individuals who need to adapt and grow, but instead able-bodied individuals who view disability as such. Considering this, in a wider social context, shows the film to comment yet again on the industry's attitude to storylines concerning disability. The final scene shows Jasper accepting his failure to educate the students on film-making and it were his own misgivings which caused the film to not be a success, not the students' disabilities. As Jasper is a teacher, he is representative of education within the film and as it transpires by the end of the film, Jasper has taught the students very little but has learnt through them and his own teaching, or rather his own failings as a teacher. He walks through a door on the left-hand side of the screen, labelled left and this obvious reference to '*exit stage left*' is a final joke aimed at the industry and the traditionalist, old-fashioned structure which disability films are centre around.

In conclusion, I believe this film to be a parody and thus a heavily critical comment upon the industry and its attitude towards the portrayal of dis/ability in the mainstream media. As the film comes from a production company which advocates the ability of disabled people within the film industry, be it in terms of acting, producing or directing, the two main themes of reality and disability are so heavily emphasised to the point that it is uncomfortable viewing the film. There are many interpretations of it and, as a complete product, it contains many layers of understanding, all of which could be assessed and analysed. The film creates a lasting impression, is extremely thought-provoking due to its intensity, pace, and content, especially considering the length of the film spans under an hour and a half. By considering the importance of such a film within a wider social context, the layers of fiction and reality incorporated creates a mockery of the current film industry and their oblivious attitudes towards disabled storylines and actors. Throughout the film, Jasper is explicitly focussed on creating a true story, one based on reality, but his endeavour turned out to be fiction – just as production film companies, by trying to focus on disabled reality, end up creating fiction.



## **Kirstie Mitchell (Education Studies and Early Years)**

### **Children of a Lesser God (1986) (Randa Haines)**

Children of a Lesser God (1986) was the final film chosen for a project that aimed to denaturalise views regarding disability and education through film. Visibility in this context has been described by Verstraete (2012) as requiring authenticity. Therefore, the inclusion of people with disabilities in film is essential, and, in addition, 'genuine' representations need to be provided. Person-first phrasing will be used throughout this article. Although it is argued that this term can be seen as disabling the person rather than the society, it puts the person ahead, rather than being defined by their disability (Clark and Marsh, 2002). Children of a Lesser God supports this need through the inclusion of actors who are actually deaf. Marlee Matlin, the female lead, has faced many challenges in her own life that reflect those included in the film. The following article, then, will investigate in particular Deaf education and Deaf culture. It will also explore relationships as well as dependence and abuse relating to the #MeToo movement that came from Hollywood sexual harassment allegations. Feedback gained from audience members after the screening will furthermore be highlighted throughout.

Children of a Lesser God is based on a 1979 Broadway play by Mark Medoff (Canby, 1986). The play has been revived and opened again on Broadway on the 22nd March 2018. Curiously, the Broadway website does state that captioning is available but American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters are only available for select performances. Incidentally, after a short revival the play unfortunately has closed after two months, with the last performance being on the 27th May 2018 (Children of a Lesser God Broadway, 2017). The film received five Oscar nominations, and Marlee Matlin won the Best Actress award, becoming the youngest ever actress (at 21 years old) and first deaf person to win an Oscar. It was the first female-directed film nominated for Best Picture and the first Hollywood movie to have significant use of ASL. In addition, the

supporting cast of actors were Deaf, which was equally progressive for the time. Foss (2014) highlights how the inclusion of Deaf actors can help counter stigma and promote acceptance. Critics, however, proclaimed Matlin's win a "pity vote", implying that it was undeserved as she was Deaf and thus not talking up a challenging acting role. This contradicts the need for authentic representation, therefore overlooking acting ability based on actors being Deaf or having a disability. Although Matlin is still proud of being the first Deaf person to win an Oscar, she feels things need to change, as no other Deaf people have won to date. Matlin is adamant that many people are still overlooked and not given a real chance (Matlin, 2012).

Deaf culture is defined as claiming difference, articulating and promoting a shared identity. This can be seen through the deaf community attending, and campaigning for Deaf schools and resisting mainstream schools and being "improved" through the use of cochlear implants or scientific testing (Barnes and Mercer, 2001). This is a key aspect of Sarah's identity in the film through her loyalty to the school and refusal to read lips or speak. Audience members brought up the role society plays in enabling or disabling. Sign language is seen as a language in its own right, and the challenges people who are Deaf face are mainly due to people not speaking their language (Barnes and Mercer, 2001; Oliver 2009). Those who are a linguistic or cultural minority do not always define themselves as disabled or people with impairments. This links to the social model of disability, according to which it is not the person's disability that causes them to be disabled, but rather that society does not accommodate for differences (Swain and French, 2000; Oliver, 2013).

Marlee Matlin, who plays Sarah, is involved in extensive charity work. This includes Viki, a website that has supporters captioning TV shows and movies. Such efforts have led the United States Federal Communications Commission to make closed captioning mandatory, ensuring full access for Americans who are Deaf or hard of hearing.

Matlin's work also includes The Billion Words March, which is pushing to expand captioning worldwide and to include complete and accurate captions on online platforms. She also works with charity DeafHope (BDA, 2015), whose mission it is to end domestic and sexual violence in Deaf communities, providing accessible support through empowerment, education and services (DeafHope, n.d.). Her charity work with Starkey Hearing Foundation, a charity giving people the 'gift of hearing', however, has been criticised by some of the Deaf community (Starkey Hearing Foundation, 2016). Contradictory to her character in *Children of a Lesser God*, Matlin sees this work as positive and wears hearing aids herself in order not to live in complete silence. This is the opposite of the Deaf community's resistance to being "improved" as mentioned previously (Barnes and Mercer, 2001).

The title "Children of a Lesser God" appears controversial nowadays, implying that people with disabilities are not on the same level as people without disabilities. Many religions have excluded or thought little of people with disabilities, Miles (2002) has thus noted in the seventh century, for instance, Muslim law suggested disabled people lacked the ability to make decisions, and asylums were commonplace in Buddhist civilisation many centuries ago. Being disabled was seen in many religions to be a form of punishment or a consequence of sinful actions of the parents, or as a challenge or lesson for the family (Miles, 2002). Disability has also been seen as a gift, which further highlights the differing views and religious and cultural connotations and perceptions of those with disabilities throughout history (Ingstad, 1995; Munyi, 2012) Schuelka (2013) discusses how the Bible supports the punishment theory and that disability also serves as a reminder of charitable obligation and compassion. In the Middle Ages, disability was seen to be an evil curse by the devil or witchcraft, which needed to be healed through exorcism (Schuelka, 2013).

Be that as it may, at the start of the twentieth century, there was a push for the prioritising of speech in Deaf education, forcing children to focus above all on oral communication. Deaf teachers were also forbidden to teach at schools for the Deaf and children were punished if they were caught signing (Edelstein, 2016). Although *Children of a Lesser God* is set in the 1970s, the film shows hearing teachers working in a school for Deaf students, and the character James plays the speech teacher. Despite working in many schools for the Deaf, he has limited signing ability. Feedback from an audience member at the viewing of *Children of a Lesser God* in the frame of the Film Freaks project stated how the headteacher was just doing the minimum required. Another viewer raised the question of whether education is about leading people somewhere else than places they could have gone alone by learning or perhaps providing freedom for people to find their own way. This is raised as an issue in the film through James ignoring the student who does not speak or take part in the speech activities, whether this is because he has given up on him speaking or he realises he should leave him be, as it is the student's choice not to speak. An audience member highlighted how this character was not seen after this scene, suggesting this was due to him choosing not to use his voice, therefore allowing for little story progression.

Another issue the film raises is that other people's perceptions can lead to an assumption of ability (Burchinal et al., 2011). Sarah as a character mentions being perceived as unintelligent because of being Deaf and refusing to speak. Verstraete (2012: 90) supports this by stating that those who are incapable of hearing or speaking are put on par with or below "dumb animals". "Don't do anything you can't do well" is a quote Sarah makes in the film about not wanting to speak, due to ridicule she had previously experienced. Many people hold stereotypical views of Deaf people, which can impact on their feelings and self-worth (Nikolarazi and Makri, 2004). Unlike her character, Matlin attended mainstream schools. The rule at the time

because of that was that those with 'special needs' often had to move school every year. She later performed at International Center on Deafness and the Arts through Education (ICODA) and was discovered by a talent scout, which led to her debut role in *Children of a Lesser God* (BDA, 2015). A Film Freaks attendee in this context commented on the roles of exclusion and engagement, and on whether these are for the benefit of the person in question or for the person pushing for either of them.

The film explores a relationship between a Deaf woman who refuses to speak and a hearing man. Disability is often associated with solitude or imprisonment (Verstraete, 2012). People with disabilities are also commonly seen as asexual and unattractive, with women being portrayed as passive and men more commonly as sexually deviant (Stewart, 1979; Brown, 1994; Milligan and Neufeldt, 2001; Esmail et al, 2010). Shakespeare et al. (1996) discuss the barriers and segregation of people with disabilities from experiencing sex and relationships. Sex education often excludes those with 'additional needs', and there is an emphasis on protection from suffering sexual abuse. Katz et al. (2000) found that people with learning difficulties are more likely to be seen as incapable of controlling their sexuality and making their own decisions. The World Health Organization (2005: 3) states that disabled people have the right to 'pursue a satisfying, safe and pleasurable sexual life'.

Whether these preconceptions relate to those who are Deaf, compared to those with a cognitive disability can be questioned.

Water is shown throughout the film, both visually and as part of Sarah's story and character. There is a scene in the film where she is swimming in the pool, exposing Sarah, as she is naked, yet she appears to be comfortable and confident. In another scene, she shows James how she imagines the water waves sound. The link made between deafness and water could be a reflection on soundwaves. Music plays an important role within the film, as the teacher, James, engages his students through showing them the

sound of vibrations through touch. Sound is produced through vibrations which travel in waves through the air, so it is possible for those who are Deaf to be able to feel the music in other ways (Williams, 1989). Sarah demonstrates her dancing ability in one scene, which surprises and mesmerises James. Those who are Deaf use non-verbal communication the majority of the time, so dance is an extension to this, as it is produced by feelings or thoughts (Edelstein, 2016).

At the Film Freaks seminar, audience members noted that Sarah's story was told through other, mainly male, characters. One audience member discussed how he found the perspective more interesting from Sarah's side and was disappointed when the focus went back to James, the male lead. Annoyance towards James speaking on her behalf was also brought up, as it felt like having to accept his interpretation of her emotions. The argument scene in which she chooses to speak for the first time is a compelling yet grating scene, in that her speech was an emotion-filled reaction to a provocation by James. As a result, viewers found James to be an invasive character, with a "my way or no way" attitude. The audience brought up how he fell for her when she was insecure, like a damsel in distress. James also fulfilled the role of a teacher, implying a power imbalance. A scene in the film shows him as authoritarian, deciding for Sarah that she is quitting her job and moving in with him, whether she wants to or not. This loss of agency and vulnerability is often a portrayed representation in regard to deaf characters within film (Foss, 2014).

Matlin and co-star William Hurt were actually in a real relationship off screen, which started when she was 19 and he was 35. Her autobiography (Matlin, 2010) discusses the abuse she experienced when in a relationship with him, how he would berate her as well as abuse her physically and sexually. After her memoir was published, the media just described their relationship as passionate and volatile rather than abusive (Matlin, 2010). Minimising

or excusing his abusive behaviour despite her descriptive details of his abuse could well demonstrate the culture of assault in Hollywood, as confirmed more recently by movements such as #MeToo (Codrea-Rado, 2017). The #MeToo movement followed sexual harassment allegations towards Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein and became a platform for people all over the world to discuss their experiences of sexual harassment, abuse or assault, not just in Hollywood.

Children of a Lesser God promoted an authentic representation by including Deaf actors, both in the main role and background parts. Despite this, there was criticism about how roles played did not equal acting, which overlooks the character portrayals beyond just signing. The comparison of the main character's education to the actress who plays her is an example of the different types provided for disabled people and how Deaf culture can influence the educational path chosen. The character Sarah chose to attend a school for the Deaf and to continue working there after leaving education, whereas Matlin herself attended mainstream schools. Sarah chooses not to speak, whereas Matlin uses hearing aids and does speak at times (BDA, 2015). Audience feedback regarding the controlling nature of the character James and the parallel to his relationship with his co-star in real life highlights the importance of charities such as DeafHope and of identifying abusive behaviour and the creation of dependency as a form of control.

## **Conclusion**

The reports touched on the themes of (in-/inter-)dependence in various forms: that of barriers, boundaries and border crossing and that of representation in a-/stereotypical ways. The internship provided insight into how disability is defined and portrayed and the discussions at the screenings provided much of the content in the reports. Students' reflection on the internship and what they took from it centred on how film as a medium can portray a diverse view of life and stigma faced by minority groups. This reflection enabled some students to feel more connected to the university in spite of limitations such as commuting or being a "mature student", which in turn enhanced the student experience in that it allowed them to feel like a more active member of a community. One student discussed how the project related to a module she was studying, which also allowed her to explore themes in more depth outside of the academic curriculum.

Students found the internship to be a thoroughly rewarding experience and the project focus a fascinating one. The interns were on courses with limited content regarding disability, so studying literature and media content with themes of disability provided the opportunity to explore concepts and representations of disability within film which had been previously unexplored by the students. One intern discussed how the internship process allowed her to evaluate the importance of film from a different point of view and she believes that as a result she has become more aware as a student. The interaction between peers and academics was found to enhance the students' interpersonal skills and one student reflected on how she thoroughly enjoyed being able to work with people whom she would not have cooperated with had it not been for the Internship project. Interns felt comfortable to be able to discuss any issues or ideas they had throughout the process and felt supported. One student upon reflection believes this contributed to an increased level of confidence outside of the project. Students discussed how gains from the internship could be categorised into social and academic learning. It



has enhanced academic skill development and knowledge as well as social competence. One student discussed how taking part in the internship will support her future teaching within the classroom.

Unfortunately, time constraints meant that the film seminars had to be scheduled for a Monday evening, causing attendance to be lower than hoped for and consequently scope for discussion more limited. However, the discussions which did follow were meaningful, insightful and interesting which confirms the seminars still worked effectively despite this limitation. The films selected by the students covered a range of styles and budgets, allowing for a varied range of portrayals of disability. The students would encourage any fellow student to embark on an internship of this kind in the future, as they have gained many benefits, including invaluable skills, through taking part in this curriculum enhancement project. To work as an intern allowed communication development and paved the way for further discussion about disability. The project offered further scope and analysis through film, and further development through projects looking into other forms of media such as literature and television could provide future internship opportunities.

## References

- Aiden, H. and McCarthy, A. (2014) Current Attitudes toward Disabled People. *Scope*. [online]. Available at: <http://www.scope.org.uk/Scope/media/Images/Publication%20Directory/Current-attitudes-towards-disabled-people.pdf?ext=.pdf> [Accessed: 26<sup>th</sup> January 2018].
- Barkham, P. (2008) Ready and Able. *The Guardian*. [online] Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2008/nov/20/film-disability-special-people-disable> [Accessed: 11<sup>th</sup> February 2018].
- Barnes and Mercer (2001) Disability Culture: Assimilation or Inclusion? In G.L. Albrecht, K.D. Seelman and M. Bur (eds) *Handbook of Disability Studies*. pp. 515-535. London: Sage Ltd.
- Barnes, C. and Mercer, G. (2008). *Exploring Disability*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. Cambridge: Polity.
- Barnes, C. (1992) *Disabling Imagery and the Media: An Exploration of the Principles for Media Representations of Disabled People*. Halifax: The British Council. Available at: <http://disability-studies.leeds.ac.uk/files/library/Barnes-disabling-imagery.pdf> [Accessed: 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2018].
- Bhardwaj, N. (2018) Disability is an identity, not a costume. *Blastingnews*. [online] Available at: <https://uk.blastingnews.com/opinion/2018/02/disability-is-an-identity-not-a-costume-002344339.html> [Accessed: 27<sup>th</sup> February 2018].
- Bignell, P. (2008) Director's anger over comedy film's 'disability' warning. *The Independent*. [online] Available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/news/directors-anger-over-comedy-films-disability-warning-1020484.html> [Accessed: 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2018]
- Biklen, D. and Bogdan, R. (1977). Media Portrayals of Disabled People: A Study in Stereotypes. *Interracial Books Child, Bull*, 8: 6-7.
- Birrell, I. (2016) Where are the disabled actors? *The Independent*. [online] Available at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/where-are-the-disabled-actors-a6831001.html> [Accessed: 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2018]
- Braddock, D.L. and Parish, S.L. (2001). An Institutional History of Disability, in: G.L. Albrecht, K.D. Seelman and M. Bury (eds) *Handbook of Disability Studies*, pp.11-68. London: Sage.
- Branfield, F (1998) What are you doing here? 'Non-Disabled' people and the disability movement: A response to Robert F. Drake. *Disability & Society*, Vol. 13(1): 143-144.

British Deaf Association (2015) The Actress Marlee Matlin [online] Available at: <https://bda.org.uk/the-actress-marlee-matlin/> [Accessed: 5th March 2018]

Brown, H. (1994) An Ordinary Sexual Life?: A Review of the Normalisation Principle as it Applies to the Sexual Options of People with Learning Disabilities, *Disability and Society*, Vol. 9 (2), pp.123-144.

Burchinal, M., McCartney, K., Steinberg, L., Crosnoe, R., Friedman, S.L., McLoyd, V. and Pianta, R. (2011) Examining the Black-White Achievement Gap Among Low-Income Children Using the NICHD Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development, *Child Development*, Vol. 82 (5), pp. 1404-1420.

Canby, V. (1986) Screen: An Adaption, 'Children of a Lesser God'. The New York Times [online] 3rd October 1986. Available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=9A0DE6D61731F930A35753C1A960948260> [Accessed: 6th March 2018]

Catchpole, L. (2016) I Love Channel 4's Paralympic Advert. But We Can't All Be Superhuman. *The Guardian*. [online] Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jul/20/channel-4-paralympics-advert-disabled-people-not-all-superhuman> [Accessed: 11<sup>th</sup> March 2018]

Channel 4 (2016) *We're the Superhumans Rio Paralympics 2016 Trailer*. [video online] Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=locLkk3aYIk> [Accessed: 11<sup>th</sup> March 2018]

Children of a Lesser God 1986 [film] Directed by Randa Haines. USA: Paramount Pictures (119 mins)

Children of a Lesser God Broadway (2017) Stop Assuming. Stop Judging. Start Listening. [online] Available at: <http://childrenofalessergodbroadway.com> [Accessed: 7th March 2018]

Clark, L. and Marsh, S. (2002) Patriarchy in the UK: The Language of Disability [online] Available at: <https://disability-studies.leeds.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/40/library/Clark-Laurence-language.pdf> [Accessed:23rd May 2018]

Clogston, J. S. (1990) *Disability Coverage in 16 Newspapers*. Louisville, Kentucky: Advocado.

Codrea-Rado, A. (2017) #MeToo Floods Social Media with Stories of Harassment and Assault [online] Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/16/technology/metoo-twitter-facebook.html> [Accessed: 5th May 2018]

DeafHope (n.d.) About [online] Available at: <http://www.deaf-hope.org/about-deafhope/> [Accessed: 5th March 2018]

Drake, R. F. (1997) What Am I Doing Here? 'Non-disabled people' and the Disability movement. *Disability and Society*, Vol. 12(4), pp. 643-645.

Edelstein, C. (2016) The Link Between American Deaf Culture and Dance: Assessing Nonverbal Communication and Recognizing the Value for Deaf Dancers. Undergraduate Honors Thesis: Butler University.

Edgar, J. (2018) Isn't it time disabled actors and directors were allowed to make their own films? *The Guardian*. [online]. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2018/feb/09/let-disabled-actors-and-directors-make-their-own-films-shape-of-water> [Accessed: 9<sup>th</sup> February].

Ellis, K. and Goggin, G. (2015) *Disability & The Media*. London: Macmillan Publishers Limited.

Esmail, S., Darry, K., Walter, A. and Knupp, H. (2010) Attitudes and Perceptions towards Disability and Sexuality, *Disability and Rehabilitation*, Vol. 32 (14), pp. 1148-1155.

*Equality Act 2010*. [online] Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/introduction> [Accessed: 22nd April 2018]

Foss, K.A. (2014) Constructing Hearing Loss or "Deaf Gain?" Voice, Agency, and Identity in Television's Representations of d/Deafness, *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, Vol. 31 (5), pp. 426-447.

Garland-Thomson, R. (1996) *Freakery: Cultural spectacles of the extraordinary body*. New York/London: New York University Press. [online] Available at: <https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=djPCfSAsHN0C&q=film#v=onepage&q=film&f=false> [Accessed: 22nd February 2018].

Goodley, D. and Van Hove, G., (2005) *Another disability studies reader?: people with learning difficulties and a disabling world*. Garant. [online] Available at: [https://books.google.co.uk/books?hl=en&lr=&id=JeFytXtOKloC&oi=fnd&pg=PA11&dq=what%27s+eating+gilbert+grape+and+disability&ots=mVpAdDn8W\\_&sig=dgVMpd96xs-aFhqL1JxsvLI4ccE#v=onepage&q=what's%20eating%20gilbert%20grape%20and%20disability&f=false](https://books.google.co.uk/books?hl=en&lr=&id=JeFytXtOKloC&oi=fnd&pg=PA11&dq=what%27s+eating+gilbert+grape+and+disability&ots=mVpAdDn8W_&sig=dgVMpd96xs-aFhqL1JxsvLI4ccE#v=onepage&q=what's%20eating%20gilbert%20grape%20and%20disability&f=false) [Accessed: 2nd February 2018].

Grant, K. (2016) Why Channel 4's Paralympics Advert Risks Alienating Disabled People More Than Ever. *i.* [online] Available at: <https://inews.co.uk/opinion/columnists/channel-4s-paralympics-advert-risks-alienating-disabled-people-ever/> [Accessed: 11<sup>th</sup> March 2018]

Hasler, F. (1993). Developments in the Disabled People's Movement. In J. Swain, V. Finkelstein, S. French and M. Oliver (eds) *Disabling Barriers Enabling Environments*. London: Sage.

Ingstad, B. (1995) *Disability and Culture*. California: University of California Press.

Katz, S., Shemesh, T. and Bizman, A. (2000) Attitudes of University Students Towards the Sexuality of Persons with Mental Retardation and Persons with Paraplegia, *The British Journal of Developmental Disabilities*, Vol. 46 (2), pp.109-117.

Kyriazis, S. (2016) Will Smith will boycott 'racist' Oscars & says 'Hollywood is going in the wrong direction'. *The Sunday Express*. [online] Available at: <https://www.express.co.uk/entertainment/films/636804/Will-Smith-boycott-Oscars-jada-racism-Hollywood> [Accessed: 11<sup>th</sup> March 2018].

Labrecque, J. (2014) Gilbert Grape at 20: When Johnny met Leo.... *Entertainment Weekly*. [online] Available at: <http://ew.com/article/2014/02/16/gilbert-grape-at-20-when-johnny-met-leo/> [Accessed: 23 February 2018]

Lennard, D (2017) *The Disability Studies Reader*. 5<sup>th</sup> ed. [online] Available at: <https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=Hgx6DQAAQBAJ&dq=disability+and+social+exclusion&lr> [Accessed 23rd February 2018].

Mackenzie, R. and Cox, S. (2006) Transableism, Disability and Paternalism in Public Health Ethics: Taxonomies, Identity Disorders and Persistent Unexplained Physical Symptoms. *International Journal of Law in Context*, Vol. 2(4), pp. 363-375.

Matlin, M (2012) Oscars: Marlee Matlin on her Best Actress win [online] Available at: <http://ew.com/article/2012/02/21/oscars-marlee-matlin/> [Accessed: 7th March 2018].

Meltzer, A. and Kramer, J. (2016) *Siblinghood through disability studies perspectives: diversifying discourse and knowledge about siblings with and without disabilities*. [online] Available at: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09687599.2015.1127212?needAccess=true> [Accessed: 22nd February 2018].

Miles, M. (2002) Some Influences of Religions on Attitudes Towards

Disabilities and People with Disabilities, *Journal of Religion, Disability & Health*, Vol. 6 (2-3), pp. 117-129.

Milligan, M. and Neufeldt, A. (2001) The Myth of Asexuality: A Survey of Social and Empirical Evidence, *Sexuality and Disability*, Vol. 19 (2), pp. 91-109.

Munyi, C.W. (2012) Past and Present Perceptions Towards Disability: A Historical Perspective, *Disability Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 32 (2).

Nelson, J.A. (1994) Broken Images: Portrayals of Those with Disabilities in American Media in: J.A. Nelson (ed.) *The Disabled, The Media and The Information Age*, pp. 1-24.

Nikolarazi, M. and Makri, M. (2004) Deaf and Hearing Individuals' Beliefs about the Capabilities of Deaf People, *American Annals of the Deaf*, Vol. 149 (5), pp. 404-414.

Oliver, M. (2009) *Understanding Disability: From Theory to Practice*, 2nd edn. Hampshire: Palgrave.

Oliver, M. (2013) The Social Model of Disability: Thirty Years On, *Disability & Society*, Vol. 28 (7), pp. 1024-1026.

Ruth, A. (2015) What A Disabled Person Thinks About 'Transableism'. *The Federalist*. [online] Available at: <http://thefederalist.com/2015/06/08/what-a-disabled-person-thinks-about-transableism/> [Accessed: 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2018].

Shakespeare, T. (1994) Cultural Representation of Disabled People: Dustbins for Disavowal? *Disability & Society*, Vol. 9(3), pp. 283-299.

Shakespeare, T., Gillespie-Sells, K. and Davies, D. (1996) *The Sexual Politics of Disability: Untold Desires*. London: Cassell.

Schuelka, M.J. (2013) A Faith in Humanness: Disability, Religion and Development, *Disability & Society*, Vol. 28 (4), pp. 500-513.

Singh, M. (2015) *Global Perspectives on Recognising Non-formal and Informal Learning: Why Recognition Matters*. [online] Available at: <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-319-15278-3#about> [Accessed 20 April 2018].

Sintobin, T. (2004) 'Techniek, technologie, streekliteratuur: De realiteit van een genre "Net als een trein, die ook niet buiten haar baan mag gaan (Technique, Technology, Regional Literature: The Reality of a Genre "Just like a Train that must also not Derail").' In *The Borders of Realism in 20th Century Narrative Literature*.

Proceedings of the International Conference (Louvain-la-Neuve, 1-3 Decembre 2004), pp. 217-229.

Starkey Hearing Foundation (2016) Who We Are [online] Available at: <https://www.starkeyhearingfoundation.org/Who-We-Are> [Accessed: 5th March 2018].

Stewart, W. (1979) *The Sexual Side of Handicap: A Guide for the Caring Professions*. Cambridge: WoodheadFaulkner.

Swain, J. and French, S. (2000) Towards an Affirmation Model of Disability, *Disability & Society*, Vol 15 (4), pp. 569-582.

Verstraete, P., Van Hooste, A., Thyssen G., & Catteeuw, K. (2004). "Het is maar hoe je het Bekijkt: Een Experiment met Filmseminaries voor Orthopedagogiek en Historische Pedagogiek." *Leuvens Bulletin LAPP*, Vol. 53: 47-66.

Verstraete, P. (2012) *In the Shadow of Disability: Reconnecting History, Identity and Politics*. Opladen: Barbara Budrich Publishers.

*What's Eating Gilbert Grape?* (1993) [DVD] Directed by Lasse Hallstrom. USA: Paramount Pictures. (117 mins).

Wilkinson, A. B. (2015) Oscars 2015: So Hollywood is Still Racist (and Sexist), Now What? *Huffpost*. [online] Available at: [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/a-b-wilkinson/oscars-2015-so-hollywood-b\\_6550568.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/a-b-wilkinson/oscars-2015-so-hollywood-b_6550568.html) [Accessed: 11<sup>th</sup> March 2018].

Williams, H. (1989) The Value of Music to the Deaf, *British Journal of Music Education*, Vol. 6 (1), pp. 81-98.

World Health Organisation (2004) *Sexual Health- A New Focus for WHO*, Progress in Reproductive Health Research, No.67, World Health Organisation: Geneva. [online] Available at: <http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/hrp/progress/67.pdf> [Accessed: 28th February 2018].

Young, S. (2014) *I'm not your inspiration, thank you very much*. TEDxSydney [video online] Available at: [https://www.ted.com/talks/stella\\_young\\_i\\_m\\_not\\_your\\_inspiration\\_thank\\_you\\_very\\_much?language=en#t-404305](https://www.ted.com/talks/stella_young_i_m_not_your_inspiration_thank_you_very_much?language=en#t-404305) [Accessed: 11th March 2018]

Zhang, L. and Haller, B. (2013) Consuming Image: How Mass Media Impact the Identity of People with Disabilities. *Communication Quarterly*, 61(3), pp. 319-334.

## **Guidelines for future contributors**

Spark only accepts contributions from LJMU undergraduates and recent graduates in Education Studies, Early Childhood Studies and related disciplines. Both staff and students may suggest pieces of undergraduate work for publication in Spark. This may be work previously submitted for assessment, or an original piece based on the student's own research interests. If based on an assessed piece of work, this should have received a mark of at least 75%, or have a significant portion which merits that mark. Non-assessed pieces should be of an equivalent standard.

**If you wish to submit your work for consideration, please register at <http://openjournals.ljmu.ac.uk/spark> to submit your document online. If you have any queries please email the editorial team via [SPARK@ljmu.ac.uk](mailto:SPARK@ljmu.ac.uk)**

At the top of the document submitted for consideration you should include:

- Author name(s)
- Your affiliation(s)
- Article title

Authors should ensure that their articles use

Font - Arial 12  
Line spacing - 1.5

Headings and subheadings should be in bold, aligned left and not underlined. Quotations that are longer than four lines in length should be indented from the left hand margin and have a clear line space from the text above and below the quotation. The date and page number should be inserted at the end of the quotation.

All references should be made using the Harvard system based on the LJMU Library Referencing Guidelines.