FilmDis Disability Representation on Television (2018-2019) Study Fact Sheet

The FilmDis Disability Representation on Television study examines 180 television shows airing between March 2018 & 2019. Of those 180 shows, 151 shows include at least 1 Bit character who is disabled. This includes shows on 22 networks and 6 streaming services.

The top five networks featuring disabled characters include: CBS (127), NBC (124), ABC (82), FOX (71), and CW (37). Local networks offer far more representation than cable channels.

The top three streaming services featuring disabled characters include: Netflix (59), Amazon (29), and Hulu (29).

Across the 151 shows that feature at least 1 disabled Bit character there are 708 disabled characters.

The most represented disability communities: Alcoholism/Addiction (156), Chronic Health (109), Multiply Disabled (77), and Mental Health (65).

The least represented disability communities: ADHD (2), Learning Disabilities (4), Deaf (5), Down Syndrome (6), and Little People (10).

The most represented characters are cisgender white males of which there are 261 characters. Only 7 of those cisgender white male characters are gay, and 4 are bisexual. This also includes 3 Jewish characters, and 1 Vulcan.

Cisgender white females make up 228 characters, including 5 lesbian, 3 bisexual/pansexual, and 1 Jewish characters.

This accounts for 489 white characters.

Black cisgender females represent 69 characters, which include 2 Black lesbian and 2 bisexual characters.

Black males represent 66 characters including 1 Jewish, and 6 gay male characters, one of whom is non-binary. That means there are 65 cisgender and one non-binary characters.

This accounts for 135 Black characters.

IPOC cisgender males account for 52 characters. These include 30 Latinx (3 who are gay), 6 Asian, 5 Hawaiian, 4 Middle Eastern, 3 Indian (1 who is gay), 2 Indigenous/First Nations (1 who is gay), and 2 Biracial (1 who is gay) characters.

IPOC cisgender females make up 30 characters. There are 13 Latinx, 10 Asian, 2 Unknown, 1 Indigenous/First Nations, 1 Indian, 1 Biracial, 1 Middle Eastern, and 1 Punjabi Muslim.

There is also 1 IPOC character that is trans. She is a Biracial (Afro-Latinx) woman.

This accounts for 83 IPOC characters.

There is 1 character from a fantasy race. We included the 1 Vulcan with the white cisgender representation because Vulcans can be white and Black. This fantasy character is a Moclan and is played by a Black actor, Peter Macon.

LGBTQIA representation accounts for only 36 characters. The breakdown for this is 19 are white, 10 are Black, and 7 are IPOC. This includes 1 non-binary Black man, 1 IPOC trans woman, and 1 gender-nonconforming white gay man. 19 of the characters are gay males. 7 are lesbians. 9 are bisexual (5 females and 4 males).

The vast majority, 594 characters, are American. Other nationalities represented include British, Canadian, Australian, Rwandan, Ghanaian, Congolese, Norwegian, Scottish, Chinese, Iraqi, Pakistani, Nigerian, South African, Irish, French, Icelandic, Guatemalan, Mexican, Unknown from somewhere in South America, Unknown from somewhere in Europe, and Unknown. There are also a few characters from fantasy worlds.

The majority of the 708 characters, 475 specifically, are Adult characters between the ages of 20 and 60. Other characters include 136 Elders (60+), 61 Teens (13-19), 36 Children (2-12), and 4 Babies (under 2).

Most of the characters in this study are Bit characters. This usually means they either have a very small role throughout a season/series or have a one-time guest role. There are 187 Supporting characters, and 115 Lead characters.

When it comes to **disabled mimicry**, a term for when nondisabled characters portray disabled roles, only 70 of the 708 characters, or around 10% of the characters are played by characters we know are disabled. The rest are either not disabled or their disability status is unknown.

All in all, disabled characters are scattered throughout television, but we still have a long way to go until disabled actors are getting significant roles that don't center around being disabled or being used as plot points, for inspiration, for pity, or to inspire nondisabled protagonists.

Hollywood needs to start auditioning disabled actors for any characters they could logically play, especially roles that don't center specifically on being disabled.