

Moving Images and Re-Articulations of Self-Identity: Young People's Experiences of Viewing Representations Disability in Films

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Abstract : The cultural value of disabled people has largely been overlooked within forms of media and cultural analysis until the 1980s, when disabled people and disability studies highlighted the cultural misrecognition of disabled people and called for improved forms of cultural recognition and representation. Despite an increase in cultural analysis of representations of disabled people, much has been assumed about how images are read, and little work has been done on the value attributed to disabled people by media audiences and the viewing interests and encounters of film audiences. In particular, there has been little work on film reception, or on the way that young people interpret images of disability. We set out to understand some of the ways that young people read disability imagery, by showing small groups of young people different types of film featuring impairments, chosen from three different eras in film. These were Freaks, Rear Window (remake), and Finding Nemo. The discussions after these films allowed them to explore their own experiences of disability alongside the evolution of cultural representations; in so doing they discussed significant themes of cultural value and reflected on their own identities, e.g. in/dependency, autonomy, and competency and the ways these intersected with self-identity, and attitudes to disabled people.

Keywords : film, audience, identity, disability

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