

## **A Critical Examination of the Relationship between the Media and the Political Agenda in the Social Deviance Portrayal of Disabled People**

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**Abstract :** This paper considers the media's role in formulating a dominant social deviance paradigm and medicalised portrayal of disabled people and examines how those representations of impairment reinforce the personal tragedy view that underpins the social value given to the category of disability. According to a materialist perspective, the personal tragedy medical model approach condemns disabled people to live an inferior 'life apart', socially excluded and prevented from living as fully participating citizens on an equal basis to non-disabled people. Commonly, disabled people are portrayed as a person who needs to be cured in order to achieve a better 'quality of life'; otherwise stories center on deviance, criminality or scrounger. Media representations have consistently used negative language and images that reinforce the personal tragedy 'deficient' view of disability. The systematic misrepresentation within film, literature, TV and other art forms have validated a process about what it means to be 'normal' and how 'difference' and 'identity' are interpreted. The impact of these stereotyped disabling images for disabled people is a barrier not experienced by many other oppressed minority groups. Applying a materialist analysis, this paper contends that the impact on audience's perceptions of impaired bodies and minds, and the harmful effects on disabled people can be linked with agenda setting theory - the relationship between the media and the political agenda.

**Keywords :** media, disabled people, political agenda, personal tragedy

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