

Abstract

Film is a powerful publicising agent of knowledge which has detrimental ideological and material implications that contribute towards the systematic exclusion of disabled people. This qualitative research study set out to investigate how acquired physical disability is constructed within three contemporary films. Using theoretical disability models and a compilation of stereotypic representations of disability in film as guidelines (adapted from Barns, 1992; Longmore, 1987; Norden, 1994), the study sought to assess the discourses that are perpetuated, challenged or omitted within contemporary cinematic portrayals of disability. Further, the study aimed to address how these discourses contribute to the maintenance or subversion of ableist power. The data underwent a critical discourse analysis (CDA) guided by a broad social constructionist and critical disability theory framework. In order to investigate discursive constructions in film effectively, a multi-modal lens was adopted. The findings suggest that while steps towards more nuanced and diverse representations of acquired physical disability are evident, the films continue to perpetuate hegemonic discourses, emotionally provocative and caricatured portrayals of disability. The thesis argues that contemporary disability films are still largely produced for and consumed by abled audiences. Subsequently, recommendations for transforming cinematic representations are addressed.

Keywords: *disabling representations; film; acquired physical disability; critical discourse analysis; multimodal*