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Giving Voice to the “Speechless”: Depictions of disability in television and Identity politics of Disability Studies

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Giving voice to the “Speechless”:

Depictions of disability in television and identity politics of



Disability Studies

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Voices of Speechless

- Relationships & identity
- Depictions of Disability in Media
 - [TV and Movie List](#)
 - The “Inspirational disabled”/Personality memoirs
 - Family dynamics: disability situated in Sitcoms
 - Disabled/nondisabled actors portraying disability
- “Speechless” on ABC
 - From the show runner background Scott Silveri



Sitcom Stereotypes

- Mom-Maya DiMeo [Clip](#)
- Dad- Jimmy DiMeo
- Siblings- Ray & Dylan
- Aide/Outsider-Kenneth [Clip](#)
- JJ- the center of it all [Clip](#)



Voices from the Inside: Quotes

“who as same aspirations, fun, vacations, relationships, kids in high school & college, who has same problems all other families have... but with one big difference and different problems”

“rarely do I see someone with a wheelchair or with another disability. When I do, I holler at the T.V. “Guy in a wheelchair!” The only time I see someone with a disability on T.V. is when it is inspiration-porn type situation.”


“show hits on so many “yeah that’s right situations” like the expenses of having a special needs child, advocating at school and community, friends, family and relationships



Voices from the Inside: Quotes

As someone living the experience JJ does in the show, one respondent felt it was a “great step forward with the progress and exposure of disabilities and disability rights. Now we need a show with a parent who is disabled, but has an able bodied spouse and able bodied children”

“the tv character, JJ & (her son) just want the same thing as everyone else does; Relationships, success, independence and a good life. Their family on Speechless and my family work together to make sure it’s done and everybody is well adjusted and happy”



Identity politics and Disability Studies

- Nirmala Erevelles: Unruly Bodies
 - Role of critical pedagogy in transgressing and exploring the material realities of disability
- Simi Linton: Body Politic
 - Memoir from abled to Disabled; insider's view of disability, advocacy and voice in disability agency



Resolution

Micah Fowler:

I hope as people watch Speechless they get to know JJ as a very normal person to the point that they don't even see his disability, but his humor and personality and that they can bring that into their own lives. One of the things I'm most committed to is to showing people that you don't have to act differently or be uncomfortable around disabled people. We are so normal. Just say, Hi!" Look beyond the physical or other limitations and see the real person, the heart, the personality, the love and yes, even the humor (Broverman, 2016).



Scott Silvari (L) and Micah Fowler (R)

End Credits

Broverman, A. (2016, September 1). Micah Fowler of New Sitcom Speechless Speaks. Retrieved from

<http://www.newmobility.com/2016/09/micah-fowler-speechless/>

Erevelles, N. (2000). Educating Unruly Bodies: Critical Pedagogy, Disability Studies, And The Politics Of Schooling. *Educational*

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Hill, L. (2016, September 8). 'Speechless' hopes to be the new family comedy that gets people talking. Retrieved from

<http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/tv/la-ca-st-fall-preview-minnie-driver-speechless-20160827-snap-story.html>

Hussain, R. (2017, Winter). Disability in the media- Changing for the better? *Making a Difference: A Quarterly Magazine of the*

Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities, 17(3), 6-8.

King, B. (2016, November 21). Speechless star Micah Fowler opens up about thriving with cerebral palsy: "I don't let it define me".

People. Retrieved from <http://people.com/celebrity/speechless-micah-fowler-opens-up-thriving-cerebral-palsy/>

Linton, S. (2007). *My Body Politic: A Memoir* [Kindle edition].

ABC Clips

Trailer: http://abc.go.com/shows/abc-new-shows/video/most-recent/VDKA0_emv0qkg6

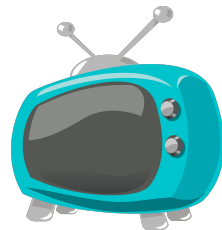
Being an Inspiration: (1:34) <http://abc.go.com/shows/speechless/video/most-recent/VDKA3444040>

Maya fights fo JJs rights (1:34) <http://abc.go.com/shows/speechless/video/most-recent/VDKA3393924>

JJ asks Claire out (1:02) <http://abc.go.com/shows/speechless/video/most-recent/VDKA3507209>



TV and Movie List of Disability in Media



Movies/Documentary:

A Patch of Blue
An Affair to Remember
(paralysis)
Born this way
Children of a lesser God
Fathers and Daughters (TBI)
Forrest gump
I am Sam
Johnny Belinda (deafness) -
Jane Wyatt

Miracle worker
Mozart and the Whale
My left foot
Of Mice and Men
Radio
Riding the bus with my sister
Rj Mitte on breaking bad (cp)
Scent of a Woman with Al
Pacino.
Simon Birch
Temple Grandin
The Bubble Boy,
The other sister
Three faces of Eve
Tom Cullen in the Stand
Who's eating Gilbert grape

TV:

American housewife
Big Bang (ocd/ Aspergers)
Glee
Life Goes On
Monk (ocd)
Parenthood (Aspergers)
Speechless
West Wing -Marlee Matlin

