

# **DISABLING IMAGERY AND THE MEDIA**

An Exploration of the Principles  
for Media Representations of Disabled People

the First in a Series of Reports

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THE BRITISH COUNCIL OF ORGANISATIONS OF DISABLED  
PEOPLE

Ryburn Publishing

'The history of the portrayal of disabled people is the history of oppressive and negative representation. This has meant that disabled people have been presented as socially flawed able bodied people, not as disabled people with their own identities'.

David Hevey, 25 March 1992

First published in 1992 by  
The British Council of Organisations of Disabled People  
and  
Ryburn Publishing Limited  
Krumlin, Halifax

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ISBN 1 85331 042 5

Composed by Ryburn Publishing Services  
Printed by Ryburn Book Production, Halifax, England

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## **Preface and Acknowledgements**

This report was conceived, sponsored and written with the full co-operation of disabled people and their organisation -in particular the British Council of Organisations of Disabled People (BCODP). It is the outcome of a co-operative effort.

From its inception the project has been under the direction of the BCODP Media Images Group and a research advisory group chaired by Jane Campbell (Joint Head of Disability Equality Training at London Boroughs Disability Resource Team and Co Chair of the BCODP) which included Jacqui Christie (London Disability Arts Forum), Kath Gillespie Sells (Joint Head of Disability Equality Training at London Boroughs Disability Resource Team and Regard) and Richard Wood (Director of the BCODP). Funding was provided by the Kings Fund Centre, London, and research facilities came from the Department of Social Policy and Sociology at the University of Leeds.

Work of the study began on 16 September 1991. Findings are based on a detailed content analysis of previous research in this field and contributions from several sources including disability organisations, media organisations and advertisers. At the start of the research a letter was circulated to all 82 BCODP member organisations and a random sample of 25 media organisations and advertisers. It contained a brief outline of the nature of the project along with a request for information on media portrayals of disabled people.

Data was subsequently analysed and a preliminary draft of the report produced. This was circulated to all contributors and media monitoring bodies including The Advertising Standards Authority, The British Board of Film Classifications, The Broadcasting Standards Council, The Broadcasting Complaints Commission, The Charity Commission and The Press Complaints Commission together with a further invitation for comment. Received comments were then incorporated into a second draft.

The revised document was discussed at a research advisory group meeting in February 1992. Further amendments were made and the final report was submitted to the BCODP Media Images Group for approval a month later.

This report could not have been completed without the enthusiasm, help and co-operation from those mentioned above. Additionally, special thanks must go to Lesley Aston (Independent Television Commission), Jane Atkinson (Lady Hoare Trust) , Hilary M. Barnes, Steven Bradshaw (Spinal Injuries Association), Mike Brothers (Greater London Association of Disabled People) , Chris Davies (Disabled Workers In the Media Alliance), Alison Davis (Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child), Maggie Davis (Derbyshire Coalition of Disabled People), Dawn Brooks (Disabled People in York), Bob Findlay (Birmingham Disability Rights Group), Bob Franklin (Department of Politics, Keele University), Francis Hasler (Greater London Association of Disabled People), Maggie Heaton (British Epilepsy Association), David Hevey, Rachel Hurst (Greenwich Association of Disabled People), Bushy Kelly, Barry Lane (Arts Council) , Geof Mercer (Department of Social Policy and Sociology, University of Leeds), Robert C. Mitchell (ICI), Elspeth Morrison (Disability Arts In London), Mike Oliver (Thames Polytechnic), Ann Pinton (Disabled Workers In the Media Alliance), Anne Rae (Greater Manchester Coalition of Disabled People), Leo Rawlings (Artsline), Austin Reeves (British Deaf Association), Richard Rieser, (Integration Alliance) , Richard Shaw (Derbyshire Centre for Integrated Living), Steve Smith (The Spastics Society), Ian Stanton (Greater Manchester Coalition of Disabled People), Jill Stewart (Rethink), Barbara Stocking (Kings Fund Centre), Sian Vesey (National Disability Arts Forum), and Rosalie Wilkins (Disabled Workers In the Media Alliance) for their comments, contributions and support.

However, it may be argued after reading this document that important aspects of media bias against specific sections of the disabled community have not been given the attention they deserve. The way the media ignores the sexual, ethnic and racial divisions within the disabled community as a whole, and generally undervalues the role of disabled women are two important examples.

Unfortunately this was unavoidable for two main reasons. Firstly, one of the key aims of the project was to produce a short overview of disabling imagery in the media accessible to both media personnel and disabled people.

Secondly, funding was limited and therefore the study had to be completed within a remarkably short period of time -four months.

I accept full responsibility for these and any other shortcomings apparent in this report but hope that they will not detract from its intended purpose: to initiate from all media organisations a firm commitment to eradicate disabling imagery in all cultural forms and so help facilitate an end to institutional discrimination against disabled people.

Colin Barnes, March 1992.

## **Part One: Introduction**

### **1. Discrimination and the Media**

This study focuses on stereotype portrayals of disabled people in the media and provides a number of important recommendations which will contribute to their demise. Although the misrepresentation of disability in charity advertising is of particular concern this report deals with the media as a whole: notably books, films, television, radio and the press. This is because the images used by charity advertisers are derived mainly from representations of disabled people in other cultural forms, and because the negative impact of charity advertising can only be fully appreciated when viewed alongside these depictions.

The impetus for the project stems from a growing awareness among disabled people that the problems they encounter are due to institutional discrimination and that media distortions of the experience of disability contribute significantly to the discriminatory process. Unless otherwise stated therefore it does not deal with specialist disability media -some of which is run and controlled by disabled people -that present a positive alternative. Examples include BBC Television's 'One In Four', Channel 4 's 'Same Difference', Derbyshire Coalition of Disabled People's newsletter 'Info' or Greater Manchester Coalition of Disabled People's quarterly magazine 'Coalition'.

Indeed, there is now clear evidence from several sources that Britain's six and a quarter million disabled people experience a lifestyle characterised by poverty and dependence.<sup>1</sup> Traditional medical explanations suggest this is because impairment has such a traumatic physical and psychological effect on individuals they are unable to achieve a comparable lifestyle by their own efforts. Disabled people and their organisations reject this as a sound basis for understanding the problems associated with disability.<sup>2</sup>

They, along with a growing number of professionals and policy makers, particularly overseas, maintain that it is not 'impairment' - individually based functional limitations whether physical, sensory, intellectual or hidden -which prevents people from achieving a reasonable lifestyle but restrictive environments and disabling barriers. Thus, 'disability' refers to a complex system of social constraints imposed on disabled people by a highly discriminatory society (see Part Three).

The problem of discrimination is compounded for disabled members of the lesbian and gay communities, disabled black people, disabled women and disabled members of other marginalised groupings.<sup>3</sup> This is because in addition to disability they frequently experience other forms of discrimination such as heterosexism, racism, sexism etc.

Thus, if a disabled person is also a member of one or more marginalised groups their experience of discrimination will be more complex and its consequences further disempowering. When explaining the outcome of disability, therefore, the likelihood of simultaneous oppression should always be considered.

The type of discrimination encountered by disabled people is not simply a question of individual prejudice, though this is a common view, it is institutionalised in the very fabric of our society. Research by the British Council of Organisations of Disabled People (BCODP) shows that institutional discrimination - attitudes and policies which deny basic human rights and equal opportunities to disabled people - is evident in education, employment, the benefit system, support services, the built environment, the leisure industry, and the media.<sup>4</sup>

Stereotype assumptions about disabled people are based on superstition, myths and beliefs from earlier less enlightened times. They are inherent to our culture and persist partly because they are constantly reproduced through the communications media. We learn about disability through the media and in the same way that racist or

sexist attitudes, whether implicit or explicit, are acquired through the 'normal' learning process, so too are negative assumptions about disabled people.<sup>5</sup>

While the media alone cannot be held responsible for this situation its impact should not be underestimated. Official figures show that 98 per cent of British homes have a television, and on average we spend at least 24 and three quarter hours a week watching it. Sixty five per cent of the population read a daily newspaper, 72 per cent a Sunday newspaper, 9 per cent read magazines, and 81 per cent of the 26 per cent who use public libraries borrow books.<sup>6</sup>

Whilst there is some dispute about the level of influence the mass media has on our perceptions of the world there are few who believe that it does not have any. There is, for example, widespread concern among the general public about the long term effects of broadcasting and the media - especially on children.<sup>7</sup>

## **2. Background to the Study**

Disabled people and their organisations have been drawing attention to the connection between disablist imagery, the media and discrimination since at least the 1960s. In 1966 the disabled writer Paul Hunt expressed the views of many when he wrote 'We are tired of being statistics, cases, wonderfully courageous examples to the world, pitiable objects to stimulate funding'.<sup>8</sup>

Following the establishment of the Independent Living Movement (ILM) in the USA in the 1970s, American writers identified a number of commonly recurring stereotypes of disabled people in popular culture and the media.<sup>9</sup> Subsequently, several reviews appeared documenting the extent of disabling imagery in books and children's stories, both in America and in the United Kingdom.<sup>10</sup>

During the 1980s the campaign for equal rights for disabled people intensified and concern over cultural misrepresentations of disability grew; firstly, among disabled people and their organisations and, later, among those connected with the media. In the early eighties workshops exploring media images of disability were at the heart of 'Disability Equality Training' (DET) courses organised and run by disabled people; formalised in 1985 as the 'Disabled Trainers Forum'.<sup>11</sup> Members of London's Liberation Network, an organisation controlled and run by disabled people, helped establish the National Union of Journalists' (NUJ) 'Campaign For Real People' to eliminate disablist bias in the press.<sup>12</sup>

Disquiet over the prevalence of disablist imagery in popular culture among the disabled community prompted the development of the disability arts movement. This led to the setting up of 'London Disability Arts Forum' in 1986 and a major conference on disability and the arts a year later.<sup>13</sup> Also in 1987 'Camerawork', a community arts centre in Bethnal Green, London, held a conference to find ways of promoting positive imagery of disabled people in the media. An exhibition; , A Sense of Self', followed which stressed the importance of subjects' participation and control in the production of cultural images of disability. <sup>14</sup>

As the decade drew to a close, concern over media bias against disabled people intensified. In 1988, 'Values Into Action' (formerly CMH) published a report showing how press reports misrepresent people with learning difficulties.<sup>15</sup> The following year two Kings Fund Centre initiated conferences 'They Are Not in The Brief' and 'Putting People in the Brief' highlighted the ways in which disabled people are misrepresented by the advertising industry -particularly charity advertising.<sup>16</sup> .

An ad hoc committee of disabled people, some of whom had experience of the media, was then formed to influence and coordinate subsequent developments. In January 1990 'Camerawork' in conjunction with 'Disability Arts In London' magazine hosted a one day seminar entitled 'Cap in Hand?'. This event was particularly important because it brought together sixty disabled delegates representing different sections of the disabled community from all over Britain.

Discussions inevitably centred around charity advertising because in the main this is the only area in which disabled people are seen or heard in mainstream culture. Moreover, it was unanimously agreed that there was an urgent need for an irreversible shift from images which emphasised impairments to those which focused on disability - the cause of disabled people's oppression.<sup>17</sup>

Indeed, several important proposals emerged out of this event. Firstly, corporate ignorance about disability can only be reduced if disabled people are integrated at all levels into media organisations. Since those who experience

disability daily have little or no say in how they are presented on television or in the press, broadcasters, newspapers and advertisers must be encouraged to recruit disabled employees.

Secondly, all media personnel should be encouraged to attend disability equality training (DET) courses designed and presented by disabled people. This is especially important for those in positions of authority who are responsible for programme production, newspaper content, and major advertising campaigns.

Thirdly, a consultative body should be established to which television companies, newspapers and advertisers can come for advice. The consultative body should be made up of representatives from disabled people's own organisations under the umbrella of the BCODP. Fourthly, research must be undertaken to produce a code of ethics on the portrayal of disabled people in the media reflecting the views of disabled people and their organisations.<sup>18</sup>

This report is the outcome of that research. From its inception, the project was under the control of 'The BCODP Media Images Group'; formed shortly after the 'Cap in Hand' Conference. Its development was closely monitored by a research advisory group of disabled people -all of whom have a history of working both professionally and voluntarily with disabled people and their organisations. Findings are based on a secondary analysis of the growing body of literature on disabling imagery in the media, contributions from BCODP member organisations, and data from a representative sample of media organisations and advertisers. The project was funded by the Kings Fund Centre, London.

### **3. General Outline**

This report has three specific aims:

- a. to provide a comprehensive insight into how the media creates and perpetuates negative representations of disabled people;
- b. to formulate a set of principles which will enable all those who work in the media eliminate disablist imagery and so redress the balance; and
- c. to give disabled people a quick and accessible guide to current media complaints procedures so they can contribute to the eradication of disablist imagery in the media.

Hence it is divided into three main parts. The first part examines stereotype portrayals of disabled people in popular culture and concludes with a summary of the negative consequences of their continued use, both for disabled people and for society as a whole. The second section outlines a set of principles for media personnel. The final part includes a list of addresses and telephone numbers which disabled people can contact if they are offended by what is presented in the media.

## **Part Two : Commonly Recurring Media Stereotypes**

### **1. Introduction**

The link between impairment and all that is socially unacceptable was first established in classical Greek Theatre. !9 Today there are a number of cultural stereotypes which perpetuate this linkage. However, these depictions are not mutually exclusive, frequently one will be linked to another. This is particularly the case with fictional characterisations. The disabled person as evil, for example, is often combined with the disabled person as sexually degenerate. The point is that the overall view of disabled people is decidedly negative and a threat to the well- being of the non-disabled community.

### **2. The Disabled Person as Pitiabie and Pathetic**

This has recently been reinforced by the alarming growth of TV charity shows such as 'Children in Need' and 'Telethon' - programmes which encourage pity so that the non-disabled public can feel bountiful. It is a regular feature of popular fiction; overtly dependent disabled people are included in storylines to depict another -character's goodness and sensitivity. The disabled person is frequently portrayed as especially endearing to elicit even greater

feelings of sentimentality - as opposed to genuine compassion. Examples include Tiny Tim in Charles Dickens's 'Christmas Carol', and Porgy in George Gershwin's opera 'Porgy and Bess'.

Another famous example is the story of John Merrick 'The Elephant Man' -now a hugely successful stage play and film. Both recount the tale of how Merrick, a man of 'normal' intelligence but with profoundly 'abnormal' physical features, is first kept captive in a fairground freakshow, and later rescued and 'cared' for by Sir Frederick Treves -an able-bodied member of the Victorian middle class. The careful recreation of Merrick's public humiliation at the hands of unscrupulous non-disabled men in both productions extract from the audience feelings of pity and distress. At the same time, they are reminded that disabled people's well-being is dependent solely upon the benevolence of others -in this case Sir Frederick Treves. This is a recurrent theme in all media depictions of disability.

This entirely negative view of disabled people appears regularly in the news media - both on television and in the press. Pictures of disabled individuals, frequently children, in hospitals or nursing homes are repeatedly flashed across our TV screens perpetuating the myth that disability is synonymous with illness and suffering. Recent research shows that most reports about disabled people in TV news programmes and documentaries are about medical treatments and impairment related cures.<sup>20</sup> Besides stimulating sympathy this constant repetition of the medical approach to impairment helps to divert the public's attention away from the social factors which cause disability.

Often the language used in these emotive broadcasts creates a mood of sentimentality which is both patronising and offensive to disabled people. While many reporters use 'neutral' terminology such as 'people with disabilities' or 'disabled people', their reports still have an unmistakably sentimental tone because they insist on referring to disabled people as 'plucky', 'brave', 'courageous', 'victims' or 'unfortunate'. Derogatory terms like 'cripple' or 'dummies' are never used but TV news stories often include depersonalised expressions such as 'the disabled' and 'the handicapped' -phrases which cause offence because they rob disabled people of their humanity, and so reduce them to objects.

Moreover, despite the NUJ's efforts to eliminate disablism in the print media a similar situation exists with the press. Editors and journalists like brevity so disablist language is common in newspapers and magazines. Indeed, one well known journalist - Keith Waterhouse, the 'Columnist of the Year' -has in 'The Derby Evening Telegraph' on 23 January 1992 publicly attacked what he terms 'politically correct language' claiming it emanates not from 'the disabled themselves but from their self appointed minders'. But even when reporters avoid offensive vocabulary their efforts can be thwarted by space conscious sub-editors and the 'quality' papers are sometimes as guilty as the tabloids.

Recent examples from 'The Independent' and 'The Sun' illustrate the point. On 24 September 1991 both papers contained stories about epilepsy. The Independent's article, albeit a much longer piece, contained several references to 'epileptics' -an adjective for a type of seizure, not a person, and offensive to people with epilepsy -whereas the Sun's contained no such references. Both newspapers had contacted the British Epilepsy Association (BEA) before publication. The Independent reporter rang to check the BEA's 'phone numbers but refused to discuss the content of the article. The Sun reporter discussed the content and produced copy in line with the BEA's suggestions.<sup>21</sup> It should be noted here that this is one of the few occasions when contacting an impairment specific charity has proved useful.

Also news stories about health and about fundraising events depicting disabled people as pitiable, passive and dependent regularly crop up in British newspapers -accounting for about two thirds of all coverage.<sup>22</sup> In many cases these reports are grossly inaccurate and damaging to disabled people. Moreover, there is a tendency for journalists to patronise disabled people by referring to them by their first name rather than by their full title as in most stories about non-disabled people.

A good example is a recent story about a four year old deaf boy who was not receiving treatment on the NHS. The story first appeared on the front page of 'The Daily Mirror' , 20 September 1991, under the banner headline 'Sick! Why Chris Shames You Prime Minister'. It went on to say that the NHS would not pay for a vital ear operation for the boy, Chris, and blamed John Major, the Prime Minister, and the Tory Government.

The following day another national newspaper sympathetic to the Government, 'The Daily Express', claimed that the 'Op' for Deaf Chris was agreed ten weeks ago'. This story claimed that the boy would be 'released from a world



of silence' after hospital chiefs had bent the rules. The £15,000 operation to place a tiny electronic device inside the boy's ear would be paid for by the NHS and a surgeon's fund -a charity.

Apart from the fact that both papers were exploiting the sympathy aroused by this story for political purposes it is incorrect. The implant will help the boy hear some sounds but not all. To get full benefit from the device he would have to have experience as a hearing person. This is something he has never had. Further, though the gains from the implant will be only marginal, it is likely that he will not be able to benefit from future operations because of the damage done to the ear during surgery.<sup>23</sup>

In spite of the well publicised concern among the disabled community about the tactics used by charity advertisers, they continue to portray disabled people as pitiable to raise money and recruit able-bodied volunteers.<sup>24</sup> Impairment specific organisations like 'The Haemophilia Society', 'Mencap', 'The Muscular Dystrophy Group'. and 'The Multiple Sclerosis Society' regularly present this view of disabled people in a variety of forms; in cinemas, on television, in the press, and in the deluge of unwanted 'junk mail' which most of us receive through our letter boxes.

One of the ' most explicit examples is the campaign by 'The Multiple Sclerosis Society'. It includes a number of cinema, TV and newspaper ads depicting stark black and white images of what are generally regarded as overtly attractive young white men and women with their eyes or parts of their semi-naked bodies torn out to symbolise impairment. The sense of tragedy is enhanced by the absence of colour, synonymous with suffering and adversity and the deliberate contrast between 'beauty' and 'flaw' i.e. impairment. The desperate message is rammed home with voice-overs or captions telling observers that multiple sclerosis can effect anyone, is associated with paralysis, blindness and impaired speech, and is also incurable.

A recent addition to this sombre range is a poster depicting the frontal view of a naked man from the waist up with his head listlessly falling to one side being supported from behind by another man. The expression on the face of the former is a mixture of despair and relief. His impairment, indicated by his apparent inability to support himself, and implied dependence is underlined by the fact that he is a hazy shade of grey, while the man holding him up is sharp and white. The latter's face is also hidden suggesting anonymous altruism -a quality greatly admired in our society. A sense of social isolation is created by a background devoid of other images and coloured black -a colour generally associated with doom and despair. The gloom is broken only by the words 'If multiple sclerosis shattered your life, we'd be there to pick up the pieces' picked out in white immediately above the two men. Below is the caption outlining the negative aspects of the condition, a request for donations, and a coupon addressed to 'The Multiple Sclerosis Society' which describes it self as a 'hope in hell'.

Apart from the obvious racist and sexist overtones the messages conveyed by this and similar advertisements have severe negative implications for disabled people. Firstly, besides emphasising the 'tragedy' of impairment, the use of 'overtly attractive' models perpetuates the cultural obsession with physical perfection and the 'body beautiful'. This makes social interaction difficult for anyone who is unable to conform to this stereotype, but particularly so for disabled people with un-conventional body shapes. Secondly, the fear generated by the inaccurate suggestion that living with impairment is a life shattering experience can effectively rob some disabled individuals of the self confidence needed to overcome discrimination.

Thirdly, by playing on the public's ignorance of disability these ads perpetuate the notion that disabled people have something 'wrong' with them and so maintain the social barriers between the two groups. Finally, the constant repetition of traditional medical explanations for disability by organisations which in the public mind have disabled people's best interests at heart seriously undermines the environmental approach favoured by disabled people themselves. In short, rather than alleviate disabled people's dependence these ads help to maintain it. Moreover, although a great deal of public mis-information about disability comes from the overwhelming majority of impairment specific charities and none are controlled or run by disabled people, many continue to receive financial support from Government.

A worrying development is the intrusion of this disabling stereotype into mainstream advertising. Examples include advertisements by British Gas and ICI - Britain's largest chemical company. The British Gas ad, featured extensively on TV during the Christmas period 1991, depicts a physiotherapist's assistant and her wheelchair user husband being shown how British Gas -or 'Gas Care' -are 'helping' disabled people in Scotland.

Though it has some value to disabled gas users unaware of the service its overall message is that disabled people are dependent, need help, and British Gas is providing it. The ads main function is to enhance the public image of

British Gas, not that of disabled people. Such exploitation does little to change public perceptions of disabled people, facilitate their empowerment, or their demand for equal rights.

ICI recently ran a TV commercial depicting a nine month old baby dressed in a jacket and bow tie sitting in a high chair to publicise its research on the treatment of Alzheimer's disease. The analogy of the child in conjunction with the voice over reinforced the perception that individuals with this condition - and by implication disabled people generally - are like children, stressed its most distressing symptoms, and also the amount of 'care', needed by 'sufferers'.

Aware of the sensitive nature of the ad ICI showed it to the Alzheimer's Disease Society, the Independent Television Authority, the Independent Television Commission (ITC) , and a small cross section of the general public before using it. They all gave their approval. It was not shown to disabled people or to organisations controlled and run by them. But after being shown on national television the ITC received a number of complaints from relatives and carers of people with Alzheimers Disease and ICI withdrew it 25 -unfortunately the damage had already been done.

### **3. The Disabled Person as an Object of Violence**

In reality disabled people are often subject to violent abuse by non- disabled people and this is frequently reflected in the media. Besides contributing to and underlining the mistaken belief that disabled people are totally helpless and dependent such imagery helps perpetuate this violence.

Throughout history disabled people have been the victims of violence. The ancient Greeks and the Romans were enthusiastic advocates of infanticide for disabled children. In medieval Europe disability was associated with evil and witchcraft. In some areas the persecution and murder of disabled people was approved by Religious leaders. For example, Martin Luther, 1485-1546, the Protestant reformer, said he saw the Devil in disabled children and recommended killing them. Since the industrial revolution similar practices have been sanctioned by science and, to some extent, the media.

During the nineteenth century scientific legitimacy for violence against disabled people was provided by the theories of Charles Darwin and the Eugenics movement. Out of the tendency to apply Darwin's theory of evolution; notably, natural selection and the survival of the fittest, to human affairs emerged the Eugenics movement. Concerned with 'racial degeneration' the Eugenicists reiterated ancient traditional fears that disabled people were a serious threat to British and European society. They set out to safeguard humanity's future by preventing the reproduction of 'defectives' by sterilization and segregation.

Eugenic ideals reached their logical conclusion during the 1939/45 war with the systematic murder of approximately 80-100,000 disabled people by the German Nazi party. Whilst the atrocities of the German death camps put an end to overt persecution of disabled people in Europe, there remains tacit support for these ideas among sections of the British population; and not only amongst supporters of extremist organisations like the National Front and The British Movement.

Research on human foetuses has been officially condoned by Parliament, partly on the basis that it may prevent the birth of disabled children. It is legal for British women to have an abortion after twenty four weeks, the point at which the abortion of non-disabled infants is illegal, if there is a 'risk' that the unborn child is 'seriously handicapped' -although 'seriously handicapped' is rarely defined. Whilst this is not the place to enter into the abortion debate this anomaly provides a clear indication of the extent to which British society undervalues disabled people. It is also common, though hardly ever discussed openly, for some doctors with the compliance of parents to allow 'severely' impaired babies to die if the impairment is unexpected. Disabled children are more likely to be abandoned by their parents than their able-bodied peers, they have less chance of being adopted, and they are more prone to physical and sexual abuse.<sup>26</sup> The absence in literature and other media of a full range of roles for disabled people strongly reinforces stereotype assumptions that disabled people are unable to look after themselves and, therefore, susceptible to violence. Moreover, the portrayal of disabled people as victims of violence is common in films and on television. The Hollywood classics 'Woman in a Cage' and 'Whatever Happened to Baby Jane' are both fine examples. In the former Olivia de Havilland, a wheelchair user, is trapped in a lift by a gang of young thugs while they ransack her flat. In the latter, Joan Crawford (who is also a wheelchair user) is wholly at the mercy of her murderous sister, Bette Davis. Another famous example is 'Wait Until Dark', in which a blind woman played by Audrey Hepburn outwits a bunch of delinquents, but only after they have thoroughly terrorised her in their search for drugs in her home. In the critically acclaimed comedy film 'Blazing Saddles'- the disabled character 'Mungo' is

chained up and periodically whipped. On television, research shows that when disabled characters are included in fictional programmes they are more than three times more likely as non-disabled characters to be dead by the end of the show. Over half of these fatalities were violent. Indeed, more than half of these were caused by the forces of good -mainly the police -because the disabled character was a criminal (see below). A fifth of the violent deaths were suicides -all committed by 'mentally ill' characters. The remaining violent deaths were murders.<sup>27</sup> Newspaper reports also tend to sensationalise violence against disabled people. For example, a recent study found that over half the stories about individuals with learning difficulties which appear in the national and local press portray them as victims. The extent of this victimisation included sexual abuse, theft and vandalism, and physical abuse.<sup>28</sup>

Besides reinforcing the notion that disabled people are helpless, pitiable and unable to function without protection, these stories reinforce, albeit implicitly, the Eugenic conviction that the 'natural' solution to the problems associated with impairment is a violent one.

#### **4. The Disabled Person as Sinister and Evil**

This is one of the most persistent stereotypes and a major obstacle to disabled people's successful integration into the community. The classic example is Shakespeare's Richard III. Exploiting early beliefs about physical impairment -in 'The Bible' there are over forty instances in which 'the cripple' is connected to sin and sinners - Shakespeare portrays Richard as twisted in both body and mind. This distortion of the experience of disability is present in a great deal of literature and art, both classical and popular, and continues to be produced today. For example, in Herbert Melville's 'Moby Dick' Captain Ahab becomes so obsessed by the white whale's destruction of one of his legs he sacrifices himself and most of his crew in pursuit of revenge. Melville uses impairment to heighten the sinister atmosphere of the book as narrator Ishmael describes Ahab's false leg tapping back and forth across the deck in the middle of the night. Writers of children's literature have exploited this stereotype to the hilt. Take Stevenson's 'Treasure Island' for example. In evoking the terror and suspense that mark the book's opening pages the key elements are the disabled characters 'Black Dog' and 'Blind Pew'. The former is introduced as 'a sallow faced man wanting two fingers'. This relatively minor impairment sets a tone that intensifies when Pew is described as that 'hunched and eyeless creature' and it is Pew who hands Billy Bones the dread black spot. When Long John Silver is perceived in a good light there is little mention of his wooden leg; but later as his treachery is revealed the references to his missing limb are numerous and foreboding. The depiction of disabled people as essentially evil has been a particular favourite among film makers. The list of films which connect impairment to wickedness and villainy is virtually endless. 'Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde', symbolises the stark contrast between goodness and evil; the former is straight backed, handsome and virtuous while the latter is hunched, ugly and 'mad'. Other memorable examples include the maniacal 'Dr Strangelove' with multiple impairments played by Peter Sellers, the villains in 'Dirty Harry' and 'The Sting' - all of whom limp - and the profusion of disabled criminals in the James Bond films. Similarly, fictional programmes on television often portray disabled *people* as criminals or monsters. The main focus of the often repeated 1960s cult series 'The Fugitive' is the hero's never ending search for a one armed murderer. The director David Lynch used a disabled person, a 'dwarf', to exemplify evil in his popular soap 'Twin Peaks'.

People who experience emotional distress are frequently depicted in this way on TV. Consider, for example, a recent episode of Thames Television's police series 'The Bill', shown on 10 December 1991, in which a young man, Mark, described as a 'schizophrenic' was arrested for disturbing the peace after smashing up his parents home. Mark was portrayed as confused, unpredictable and violently aggressive; someone who had terrorised his parents for years to the extent that his father no longer lived at home. The show's final scene depicted Mark's mother begging a policewoman for Mark to be put into a psychiatric hospital because she was unable to cope. Whilst the cause of Mark's problems were never fully explained in the programme hospitalisation was presented as the only rational solution.

Similar themes regularly appear in the press. Newspaper articles sensationalising the connection between intellectual impairments and criminality are common in both the tabloids and the 'quality' papers.<sup>29</sup> The overall message coming out of these stories is that such people cannot be trusted, are a danger to children and should be locked up.

This view is also presented by some charity advertisers. SANE (Schizophrenia A National Emergency), for example, recently produced a poster depicting a large face over which were superimposed the words 'He thinks he's Jesus. You think he's a killer. They think he's fine. He hears voices. You hear lies. They hear nothing'. The poster ends with the phrase 'Stop the madness'.

Such disturbing imagery is grossly inaccurate and does much harm to public perceptions of *people* who experience emotional distress and, by implication, the disabled community as a whole. Yet in general they are more likely to be introverted and sensitive than violent and aggressive, they are more likely to avoid rather than attack others, and given the appropriate support they are perfectly capable of living in the community.

## **5. The Disabled Person as Atmosphere or Curio**

Disabled people are sometimes included in the storylines of films and TV dramas to enhance a certain atmosphere, usually one of menace, mystery or deprivation, or to add character to the visual impact of the production. This dilutes the humanity of disabled people by reducing them to objects of curiosity.

Take for instance the classic horror film 'Frankenstein' starring Boris Karloff. To amplify the overall sense of menace the filmmakers included a 'hunchback', Fritz, as Baron Frankenstein's only servant. The character does not appear in Mary Shelley's original novel. Fritz's role in the film is also significant because he is presented as ultimately responsible for the monster's evil ways rather than its creator -the non-disabled Baron. In the early part of the film, when Frankenstein is creating the monster he sends Fritz to fetch a particular brain to be placed in its skull. While completing this task Fritz carelessly drops the brain, damaging it beyond repair, and then substitutes another - one taken from a known criminal. Later as the plot unfolds and the monster's true nature becomes apparent Fritz taunts it with a blazing torch, thus causing it to embark on its murderous rampage -the Baron appears relatively blameless.

Another well known example is the popular spaghetti western 'The Good, The Bad and The Ugly' starring Clint Eastwood and Lee Van Cleef. In the opening scene the character played by Cleef is told about the activities of an old enemy by a beggar with no legs known as 'Half Soldier', The role is limited to a few lines and 'Half Soldier' appears only once. This character provides a powerful image of the harshness and-brutality which characterised life in the old west. The name 'Half Soldier' also conveys the message that people with missing limbs are only half human.

Related to this stereotype is the view of disabled people as exotica. In the same way that John Merrick was publicly humiliated in fairgrounds over a century ago, disabled people are still put on display in so-called 'freak shows' today. Exploiting disabled people in this way is particularly prevalent in America, despite high profile campaigns to eradicate it, and 'dwarfs' and 'bearded ladies' are a regular feature of British circuses.

Moreover, a mail order company 'City Trading Ltd' recently ran an ad in a national Sunday Newspaper -The People, 20 January 1992 - for a '630 page photo-packed' book of 'Medical Curiosities'. It read 'You will read it... You will see it... and you will be fascinated by the 24 easy to follow medical explanations and biographical information which accompanies these "Freaks of Nature".'

Such exhibitions represent little more than disability voyeurism because they encourage lewd fascination with impairment. The non- disabled public's morbid preoccupation with physical difference is also kept alive in horror and science fiction films. These depictions nurture and perpetuate the unfounded belief that appearance is inextricably linked to a person's moral character and value.

## **6. The Disabled Person as Super Cripple**

This is similar to the stereotype portrayal of black people as having 'super' qualities in order to elicit respect from white people. Black people are often depicted as having 'a wonderful sense of rhythm', or as exceptional athletes. With disability. however, the disabled person is assigned super human almost magical abilities. Blind people are portrayed as visionaries with a sixth sense or extremely sensitive hearing. Alternatively, disabled individuals, especially children, are praised excessively for relatively ordinary achievements Although there are many examples of the super cripple movie one of the most recent is the award winning 'My Left Foot'. Based on the disabled writer and artist Christy Brown's autobiography - he referred to it as 'my plucky little cripple story' -it tells the tale of how Brown , overcomes' both impairment and the poverty of working class life in Dublin in the 1930s, to become nationally acclaimed as an artist, writer and poet. It is notable that although this film provided an excellent opportunity for a disabled actor to play Brown he was played by Daniel Day Lewis -an able-bodied actor. Unfortunately this is common policy in the film world and partly due to the fact that most drama schools and

colleges have not recruited disabled students for the acting profession. Of fourteen actors in the category of best actors/ actresses won by films dealing with disability only one winner, Marlee Martin in 'Children of a Lesser God' - a film about a deaf woman's relationship with a non-disabled teacher in a school for deaf people -had experience of the impairment portrayed. Ironically, although this film was about deaf people and the deaf community it was inaccessible to sign language users. The way the film was shot meant that much of the signing was not seen. Hence it was fully accessible only to a hearing audience.

The familiar theme that disabled people's achievements are largely dependent on the benevolence of others is also strongly represented in these films. 'My Left Foot', for example, is as much about the strong support network of women surrounding Brown as it is about Brown himself. Notably his mother who refused to believe the doctors when they told her Christy was a vegetable, the woman doctor whose belief in him played an important part in his 'rehabilitation' and the nurse who fell in love with him.

On television, 'Longstreet' and 'Ironside', two disabled private detectives, are good examples. 'Longstreet', a blind man has super human hearing compensating for his lack of sight. 'Ironside', though paralysed from the waist down, has extraordinary mental powers as well as unusual calm in the face of adversity. His name, colloquial for wheelchair, echoes the practice in children's books of naming characters according to their appearance.

Similar themes abound in news stories about disabled people's achievements -either extra-ordinary or managing to fit into a 'normal life' -both on television and in the press. On television they account for over a quarter of all news stories about disabled people. A high proportion of these reports are charity appeals like 'Children in Need', the Variety Club and 'Telethon' .The mood of these broadcasts is predictably sympathetic and emotive with statements such as 'These children have shown talent and determination in overcoming their disabilities'.<sup>30</sup> This triumph over tragedy approach conveniently excludes the central point that disability is a social issue which cannot be addressed by misplaced sentimentality over individual impairments.

However, such imagery is common in charity advertising. See for example the John Grooms poster depicting the powerful image of a disabled male athlete in a wheelchair with his head bowed showing grim determination. Over this are printed the words 'Will to Succeed'. Below it is the caption 'Not Helpless, Not Hopeless, Just Disabled. Help us (The John Grooms Society for Disabled People -an organisation controlled and run by non-disabled people) provide that support' and a coupon for donations. These representations have several negative implications for disabled people. Firstly, misguided assumptions about disabled people's abilities can result in them being denied essential services. For example, the belief that blind people can compensate for visual impairment with hearing is partly responsible for society's failure to produce information in Braille. Similarly, the assumption that all deaf people can lip read has inhibited the use of sign language. Secondly, by focusing on a disabled individual's achievements such imagery encourages the view that disabled people have to overcompensate to be accepted into the community. The negative psychological implications for the majority struggling to cope in a largely hostile environment are clear.

Finally, by emphasising the extra-ordinary achievements of disabled individuals like Christy Brown the media implies that the experiences of 'ordinary' people -disabled or otherwise -are unimportant and irrelevant. Hence non-disabled people view super cripples as unrepresentative of the disabled community as a whole and the gulf between the two groups remains as wide as ever.

## **7. The Disabled Person as an Object of Ridicule**

The cartoon character 'Mr Magoo', an elderly man with visual impairment, epitomises society's perceptions of the disabled person as the hapless fool. Ignorant of his impairment Magoo stumbles through life wreaking havoc apparently unaware of the innumerable dangers surrounding him although he survives them all. Moreover, throughout Magoo's exploits the audience is constantly reminded that his survival is due to luck rather than his resourcefulness.

But laughing at disability is not new, disabled people have been a source of amusement for non-disabled people for centuries. Along with other so-called timeless universals of 'popular' humour - foreigners, women and the clergy - Elizabethan joke books were full of jokes about people with every type of impairment imaginable. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries keeping 'idiots' as objects of humour was common among those who had the money to do so, and visits to Bedlam and other 'mental' institutions were a typical form of entertainment for the 'able but ignorant'.

While such thoughtless behaviour might be expected in earlier less enlightened times making fun of disabled people is as prevalent now as it was then. It is especially common among professional non-disabled comedians. Several of the comedy 'greats' who influenced today's 'funny' men and women built their careers around disablist humour. Harpo Marx, for example, pretended he couldn't speak to act the fool, and Radio stars of the 1950s and early 60s such as Al Read and Hilda Baker mocked their respective stooges by shouting at them as if they were deaf, and, by implication, stupid.

Today the mockery of disabled people is a major feature of many comedy films and TV shows. Take, for example, the award winning 'A Fish Called Wanda' -one of the film's main characters is an incompetent crook with a severe speech impairment called Ken. Those who exploit this kind of material are not confined to one specific brand of comedy -they are common to them all. The well known 'establishment' writer and comedian Ronnie Barker, for example, mimicked disabled individuals in two of his most successful TV sit coms: 'Clarence' about an odd job cum removal man with a visual impairment and; 'Open All Hours' about a local grocer with a speech impairment.

The phenomenally successful 'radical' comedy series 'Monty Python's Flying Circus' is full of overtly disablist imagery and humour. Consider the celebrated sketch about 'The Ministry of Funny Walks', or the often featured routine in which two or more of the Python stars wore badly fitting clothes and knotted handkerchiefs on their heads while uttering totally meaningless statements in slurred, loud and monotonous voices. The negative implications for people who have difficulty walking or have learning difficulties are obvious.

Disablist humour is common in 'alternative' comedy also. The words 'spas' and 'spasy' -both derogatory terms short for the word 'spastic' -were repeatedly used as insults in the cult TV series 'The Young Ones'. Indeed, one alternative comedian, Harry Enfield, has even used disabling comedy to sell chocolate bars. In a recent 'Dime Bar' ad he depicted a man with an obvious visual impairment in a supermarket who only realises he has someone else's shopping trolley while frantically searching for his precious 'Dime' bar.

The negative implications for disabled people of this type of abuse should not be underestimated. On the one hand, it seriously undermines what little opportunities they have to be taken seriously by non-disabled society. On the other hand, it has the capacity to sap their self confidence and esteem. This is especially the case for disabled children as parents of such children are only too aware.

Of course some people might suggest that all sections of the community are sometimes the butt of popular humour and that disabled people cannot and should not expect to be excluded from it. But being mocked publicly is only acceptable if the negative images which ensue can be offset against positive ones, or if those being ridiculed are able to defend themselves should they choose to. At present there are virtually no positive images of disabled people in the media, and disabled people do not have the resources or a legal framework within which to fight this type of discrimination.

It should also be noted here that over the last decade or so a number of disabled entertainers -Johnny Crescendo, Barbara Lisiki, Ian Stanton and Alan Sutherland for example -have developed a brand of humour which focuses on the absurd way our society treats disabled people. Similar to the comedy generally associated with other oppressed groups -notably women and black people -it makes sense of the senseless and, most importantly, satirises without rubbishing individuals. Yet they and their material are consistently ignored by the media.

## **8. The Disabled Person as Their Own Worst and Only Enemy**

The media sometimes portray disabled individuals as self pitiers who could overcome their difficulties if they would stop feeling sorry for themselves, think positively and rise to 'the challenge'.<sup>31</sup> This is a recurrent theme in many of the so called 'disability' films produced over the last few years. Well known examples are 'Coming Home' and 'Born on The Fourth of July'. Both movies document the 'psychological trauma' of coming to terms with disability in an able-bodied world. In both films the hero is saved by heterosexual relationships -this was generally considered a step in the right direction because hitherto most 'disability' movies depicted disabled people as sexually inactive (see below).

Both 'Coming Home' and 'Born on the Fourth of July' are essentially anti-war films which use disability as a metaphor for dependence and vulnerability. 'Coming Home' recounts the tale of a white American male, Luke Martin, coming to terms with his perceived loss of masculinity following paralysis due to injury in Vietnam. His

self esteem is only restored after going to bed with Sally, played by Jane Fonda, who falls in love with him. Her ex-soldier husband, on the other hand, 'mentally ill' as a result of the war, is rejected by Sally, and commits suicide - apparently in Hollywood some impairments are more acceptable than others.

'Born on the Fourth of July' is a similar tale but here the hero rises to the challenge only after successful sexual encounters with Mexican prostitutes. He then goes on to become an anti-war activist, writes a book, and runs for the US senate. Although both are presented as disability films neither confront seriously the kind of issues which concern the majority of disabled people; employment, housing and the environment for example.

Similar themes regularly crop on television. 'Journey to Knock', for example, shown on 8 October 1991, featured three wheelchair users with acquired impairments on a pilgrimage to a Catholic shrine in Ireland. The youngest of the three, Terry, deals with his obvious bitterness at having recently acquired Motor Neuron Disease by drinking excessively, proving his macho prowess as a pool player and seducing an unknown woman he chats up in a bar.

Stories implying that disabled people are their own worst enemy sometimes appear in the news media. This is particularly evident with reference to people with HIV who have been widely portrayed as solely responsible for their impairments. Further, on the few occasions when the press report disabled people campaigning for equal rights they invariably suggest that the campaign might be counter productive. Following a recent demonstration by CAT (The Campaign for Accessible Transport) in which nine disabled demonstrators were arrested for obstructing traffic one newspaper warned 'Even though the most militant within the disabled lobby can rely on public opinion for their cause ...Such tactics will eventually alienate the public support on which the disabled have to rely'.<sup>32</sup>

Such views stem directly from the traditional medical view of disability. The individual assumptions at the heart of this approach lead to a psychology of impairment which interprets disabled people's behaviour as individual pathology. It allows able-bodied society to reinterpret disabled people's legitimate anger over disablism as self destructive bitterness arising out of their inability to accept the 'limitations' of impairment. It helps them to avoid addressing the true cause of that anger; i.e. the attitudes and policies of an overtly disablist society. Indeed, in the same way that lesbians, gay men, black people and women are blamed for homophobia, racism and sexism, so too disabled people are blamed for disablism.

## **9. The Disabled Person as Burden**

This stereotype is connected to the view that disabled people are helpless and must be 'cared' for by non-disabled people. It fails to recognise that with appropriate support disabled people are able to achieve the same level of autonomy and independence as non-disabled people. It comes from the notion that disabled people's needs are profoundly different to those of the non-disabled community and that meeting those needs is an unacceptable drain on society's resources. During the 1930s the German Third Reich exploited this image extensively in propaganda films justifying their 'Euthanasia' programme. In these films disabled people were dehumanised, described as 'Existence Without Life', and presented as an unnecessary burden which must be got rid of.<sup>33</sup> Similar imagery is present in the media today. One of the most powerful examples recently shown on British television was the play 'Keeping Tom Nice', 15 August 1990. Written by an ex-social worker it is the story of a family driven to breaking point after 'caring' for their disabled son Tom for twenty four years. Tom, played by a non-disabled actor, is described as 'totally immobile, spastic, epileptic and incontinent'. He has a sister, Charlotte, who has incestuous desires for him, a mother who treats him like a child -but cannot bring herself to kiss him -and a father who refers to him as 'sexless and bloody useless'. The strain of having a 'vegetable' for a son causes Tom's father to physically abuse him. The ensuing shame and the fear of being found out by the local social worker -who not surprisingly is portrayed as someone who knows what's best for Tom -results in the father's suicide. The play can only have increased viewers sympathy for families with a similar 'burden', there was nothing in it to evoke empathy with disabled people whatsoever. Portrayals of disabled people as a 'burden' have been used extensively in advertising campaigns by the carers' lobby. Due to a chronic shortage of support services for disabled people, informal caring is now big business; not in terms of paid work for carers but in organisational and campaigning terms. Carers' organisations like 'The National Association of Carers' have raised thousands of pounds to support their members. To do this many have presented the cared for -disabled people- as 'a constant burden'.<sup>34</sup> The success of these campaigns can be judged by the fact that the term 'carers' is now synonymous with self sacrifice and martyrdom, whilst the concept 'disabled people' conjures up images of suffering and unhappiness for those around them.<sup>35</sup> The problem would not arise if disabled people were not forced to rely on unpaid informal carers -usually women relatives or friends - for essential services. Due to inadequate community based provision disabled people are rarely able to select or employ their own personal assistants. The exploitation of this particular stereotype by carers'

organisations is a direct outcome of this unsatisfactory situation. Moreover, while such imagery persists the belief that society would be better off without disabled people will never disappear.

## 10. The Disabled Person as Sexually Abnormal

Misguided presumptions about disabled people's sexuality have been a common theme in literature and art since ancient times. Moreover, the vast majority of these images are about male experiences -there has been little if any exploration of disabled women's sexuality. For example, in Homer's 'Odyssey', written at least 500 years BC, Odysseus is entertained in the Phaeacian palace of Alcinous by Demodocus' tale of Aphrodite's adulterous affair with Ares because her husband Hephaestus is a 'cripple'. Hitherto disabled people have, with few exceptions, been portrayed as incapable of sexual activity.

The disabled writer Louis Battye referred to this stereotype as 'the Chatterley syndrome' following D. H. Lawrence's novel 'Lady Chatterley's Lover'.<sup>36</sup> The book is about an heterosexual affair between an able-bodied couple; Lady Chatterley and a gamekeeper, Meadows. The relationship takes place because Lady Chatterley's husband is a disabled person, and perceived by Lawrence as sexually inactive.

This assumption is so widespread examples can be found in pop music, films, TV dramas and the press. Not too long ago the Country and Western singer Kenny Rogers had a world wide hit with the song 'Ruby Don't Take Your Love to Town'. The song's lyrics tell the story of a war veteran begging his lover, Ruby, not to let a war injury which effected the physical side of their relationship come between them.

As mentioned earlier the preoccupation with sexual impotency looms large in many of the films dealing with disability. However, its negative implications can be appreciated fully with reference to Brian Clarke's 'Whose Life is it Anyway?'. First a play and then a very successful film starring Richard Dreyfus it is the story of a disabled man's successful struggle to take his own life.

Ken Harrison is a sculptor who is paralysed from the neck down. He takes legal action to exert his right to die partly because he faces the prospect of spending the rest of his life in a long stay hospital, partly because he is unable to sculpt, but most significantly, because he believes he has lost his masculinity. He has a great sexual desire for one of the female junior doctors, Dr Scott, but is convinced he will be unable to satisfy that desire. This view is reinforced by Dr. Scott whose behaviour toward him is not that of a woman towards a man in a potentially sexual relationship.

Harrison hires a lawyer to get him discharged from the hospital believing that he will die without medical support. This is necessary because his consultant believes he is depressed and unable to make a rational decision. This is not the view of Harrison's solicitor, his psychiatrist, or the Judge who decides on the case. They see Harrison's choice as a rational reaction to an unacceptable situation. The court rules in his favour.

The message is clear; disabled people are sexually dead and therefore their lives are not worth living. Apart from the obvious dangers this is inaccurate. While some impairments may inhibit 'normal' sexual intercourse sexual behaviour is not confined to specific forms of physical activity. This is a point only now being appreciated due to the sex education programme to stop the spread of HIV and AIDS. Indeed, this stereotype says more about the able-bodied world's ignorance of sex than it does about its knowledge of disability.

The perception of disabled women as asexual is particularly pervasive in the media and frequently presented as the perfect alibi for men's adultery. This is a common theme in literature and on television. Take for example Marilyn French's 'Bleeding Heart'. A book about an illicit heterosexual affair between an able-bodied man and women -his involvement is justified throughout on the basis that his wife has an impairment and is incapable of sex. In two recent BBC television dramas, 'Goodbye Cruel World' and 'A Time to Dance', non-disabled men had adulterous affairs because their wives had impairments. Such depictions can only lower the status of disabled women; a status which is already disproportionately undervalued due to the widespread misconception that they are unable to fulfil women's traditional roles of wife and mother.

However, a variation on this theme is the depiction of the disabled person as sex starved or sexually degenerate. 'The Hunchback of Notre Dame' is the classic example. Rejected, isolated and ridiculed by French society the hunchback, Quasimodo, develops an unhealthy lust for the virginal Esmarelda. Following her rejection he terrorises the local community until finally he is killed. Sadly, the same story is repeated over and over again in a variety of



forms. Moreover, as noted above the connection between 'mental illness' and sexual perversion is a regular feature of the news media -particularly in the tabloid press.

A curious twist to this distortion is that men with certain relatively mild impairments -particularly ones sustained in war -are sometimes seen as especially brave and sexy. Real life examples include Lord Nelson, the eighteenth century British admiral, Moshe Dayan, the Israeli defence minister in the 1960s, and Ian Dury, a rock star of the late 1970s. Both the former wore eye patches and the latter uses a walking stick. Indeed, the image of the partially 'wounded male' has been successfully exploited by some mainstream advertisers in the USA.<sup>37</sup>

There are no equivalent roles for disabled women. In a male dominated society women with impairments are rarely seen in such a glamorous light. Indeed, on the few occasions when they are portrayed it is usually in a most unglamorous fashion. In the aforementioned TV soap 'Twin Peaks', for example, a female character with an eye patch was portrayed as both exceptionally physically strong -generally regarded as an undesirable characteristic for women in western culture -and dangerously psychologically unstable.

## **11. The Disabled Person as Incapable of Participating Fully in Community Life**

This stereotype is mainly one of omission. Disabled people are rarely shown as integral and productive members of the community; as students, as teachers, as part of the work-force or as parents. The absence of such portrayals feeds the notion that disabled people are inferior human beings who should be segregated.

Apart from the exploitations and misrepresentations mentioned above disabled people are conspicuous by their absence from mainstream popular culture. In TV films and dramas, for example, they represent less than one and a half per cent of all characters portrayed.<sup>38</sup> This contrasts dramatically with Government evidence showing that at least twelve per cent of the British population are disabled people.

It is also the case that when the portrayal of disabled people is compared and contrasted with depictions of non-disabled people they are of significantly lower status. They are less likely to be professionals or white collar workers and more likely to be unemployed. Moreover, their lowly status is lowered further by the patronising attitudes and behaviour of non-disabled characters. Additionally, disabled people are rarely seen in non-fiction programmes apart from those dealing solely with disability -some of which were mentioned earlier. There are no disabled newsreaders, weathermen or presenters of documentaries, for example, and disabled people are hardly ever seen on chat shows in discussions about subjects which do not relate directly- to disability.

A further issue concerns the relative failure of the news media to report on disability other than in the manner discussed above. With few notable exceptions major issues like the extent of institutional discrimination, disabled people's lack of rights, and the campaign for anti-discrimination legislation are overlooked by reporters -both in broadcasting and in the press.<sup>39</sup> For example, Charter 88, a national organisation of politicians from all political parties, academics and other notables campaigning for the introduction of a written constitution in the UK, held its national conference and annual general meeting (AGM) at Manchester University on November 2, 1991. Four disabled activists disrupted the AGM by taking control of the platform. In front of over a thousand people, many of whom were national figures, they read a prepared statement about disabled people's lack of rights and Charter 88's failure to see disability as a political rather than a medical issue. The incident was not reported in the national press though the event received substantial coverage in all the 'quality' newspapers including two full page articles in 'The Guardian' and 'The Independent'.

Other than the examples cited earlier disabled people are rarely depicted in mainstream adverts. Apart from concealing disability and disabled people from the community as a whole, this undermines their role as consumers in the same market place as non-disabled people. Indeed, the omission of disabled people from mainstream advertising is not limited to the private sector. The Government, for example, one of Britain's biggest advertisers with an '£88 million ad programme' in 1989, is one of the worst offenders in this respect. A Government spokesman recently stated that the Department of Social Security's own commercials do not address disabled people and do not include them as actors, and even if they were included under present circumstances they would not have any influence upon how they are portrayed.<sup>40</sup> The exclusion of disabled people from mainstream community life is seldom discussed seriously in charity advertising. Few charities, for example, mention disabled people's lack of rights in their ad campaigns. One of the few exceptions is the recent poster by the Spastics Society depicting a close up of two babies. Below it is the caption 'One has Cerebral Palsy The Other has Full Human Rights'. Below this is an explicit description of the impairments associated with cerebral palsy - the reason why the child will be treated

differently -the statement 'In an Ideal World She'd Turn to the Law In Reality She'll Turn to the Spastics Society', a description of how the Spastics Society will help - physiotherapy, work experience and training in segregated centres and colleges run by the Spastics society - and a coupon for donations.

Clearly, apart from the reference to the lack of rights the message is a familiar one. Impairment - cerebral palsy -is the cause of the problem - unequal treatment - and it can be solved only by solutions which focus on individual disabled people, and not on society. Most importantly, it implies that disabled people have no choice but to turn to charities controlled and run by non-disabled people for help. This is simply not true. Throughout Britain there is a growing network of self help organisations controlled and run by disabled people themselves providing an alternative approach. In 1981 a small number of these organisations came together to form the BCOBP; ten years later the figure stood at eighty two representing over 250,000 disabled individuals. Most of these organisations operate with inadequate funding and little public recognition and support. This and similar commercials effectively deny them that recognition and support. Hence they effectively impede disabled people's struggle for self determination and independence.

## **12. The Disabled Person as Normal**

A recent development is the presentation of disabled characters in some areas of the media as 'ordinary' or 'normal' - people who just happen to have impairments. This is particularly evident in TV dramas and soaps and the advertising industry. While this has obvious advantages for furthering integration and must be welcomed it has certain limitations for removing discrimination which need to be considered.

Disabled characters are increasingly being seen in TV dramas such as 'The Trials of Rosie O'Neil' and the science fiction series 'War of the Worlds'. There is a disabled male clerical worker in the office where Rosie O'Neil works and a disabled scientist, Norton, in 'War of the Worlds'. It is notable that many of these depictions are in American productions. However, disabled characters have appeared in British soap operas like 'Brookside', 'Eastenders' and 'Emmerdale'. In Channel 4 's 'Brookside' a disabled person, Andy, befriended Owen - Sammy Rogers' husband-following his temporary disablement due to a car accident. In the BBC's 'Eastenders', Mr Rhodes, was a disabled council official who threatened to close the local community centre. Rick, a blind student in Yorkshire television's 'Emmerdale', shared a flat with a friend of one of the show's main characters.

Unfortunately these portrayals were largely one dimensional and did little to reflect the experience of disability. The disabled office worker in 'The Trials of Rosie O'Neil' appeared regularly but was never included in the plot and had no dialogue. The scientist Norton had a speaking part but his activities were mostly restricted to a laboratory. Neither Andy nor Rick were given surnames and Mr Rhodes had no first name. Though all three were played by disabled actors -Mike Scarlet, Sid Williams and Julian Griffiths -which is undoubtedly a major step forward, not one of the issues which concern disabled was mentioned in the script. The characters remained marginal to the main storylines and only appeared about half a dozen times each. Moreover, in common with depictions of disabled people on television generally they are unrepresentative of the disabled population as a whole. Indeed, 65 per cent of disabled characters on TV are male, 50 per cent are between the ages of twenty five and forty, and 95 per cent are white; yet the majority of disabled people are women, in the older age groups, and many are from minority ethnic or racial community backgrounds. Disabled characters are also shown overwhelmingly to have impairments which effect their mobility, behaviour or appearance.<sup>41</sup> On television, as with the media generally, the wheelchair and the guide dog have become symbols for the experience of disability. Besides being inaccurate this perpetuates widespread ignorance about the realities of impairment.

Although it has not yet come to Britain depictions of disabled people without reference to disability have spread into mainstream advertising in the USA. Due largely to pressure from disability activists several American corporations decided that portraying disabled people in their commercials might do them some good. Subsequently a number of TV ads appeared showing suitably glossy young disabled actors using wheelchairs and sign language in 'normal' environments -parks, restaurants and offices -advertising Levi's, McDonald's, GMAC, and Apple computers.

While this might be seen as a step in the right direction in terms of integration the emphasis on youth and commerciality represents little more than a 'normalisation' of disability which does not really challenge or undermine its meaning to non-disabled people. Like all media portrayals of disabled people they do not reflect the racial, gender, and cultural divisions within the disabled community as a whole -disabled people do not fit neatly into able-bodied perceptions of normality. Also the emphasis on normality tends to obscure the need for change.

Logic dictates that if disabled people are perceived as 'normal' then there is little need for policies to bring about a society free from disablism.

In the UK the disabled person as 'normal' is now evident in charity advertising. Due largely to growing criticism from the disability rights movement some charities have produced commercials which focus on the 'positive' rather than the 'negative' aspects of disability. 'Normal' or 'able-bodied' attributes or abilities of individual disabled people are emphasised while impairments are played down or ignored.

In addition to the issues raised earlier three further points are applicable here. Firstly, the emphasis on 'ability' not impairment in charity advertising is irrelevant to disability and can also be seen as a denial of impairment and a 'disabled identity'. Impairment is a fundamental part of a disabled person's personality. It is something which cannot be denied without negative psychological implications. Also since the emergence of the disability rights movement and disability culture a 'disabled identity' is something to be celebrated not undermined (see the section on language).

Secondly, there is an inherent contradiction in the claim that disabled people are basically 'normal' but at the same time have to get others, notably non-disabled people, to beg for the basic necessities of life. This makes the claim to normality untenable because 'normal' people are rarely dependent on the benevolence of others for their livelihood. Finally, the focus of this 'new' approach remains squarely on individual disabled people rather than on the disabling society in which we all live. The very opposite of what is needed.

## **13. Conclusions**

This section has demonstrated how the vast majority of information about disability in the mass media is extremely negative. Disabling stereotypes which medicalise, patronise, criminalise and dehumanise disabled people abound in books, films, on television, and in the press. They form the bed-rock on which the attitudes towards, assumptions and about and expectations of disabled people are based. They are fundamental to the discrimination and exploitation which disabled people encounter daily, and contribute significantly to their systematic exclusion from mainstream community life. It is also clear that recent attempts by some elements in the media to remedy the situation and 'normalise' disabled people will only partly resolve the problem.

The only solution with any hope of success is for all media organisations to provide the kind of information and imagery which; firstly, acknowledges and explores the complexity of the experience of disability and a disabled identity and; secondly, facilitates the meaningful integration of all disabled people into the mainstream economic and social life of the community.

Failure to adopt such an approach has important implications for both disabled people and society as a whole. At present around twelve per cent of Britain's population are disabled people. It is highly likely that this figure will increase dramatically in the next few years due to several factors including medical advances and an ageing population - the likelihood of acquiring an impairment increases significantly with age. Disablism in the media is no longer simply morally and socially reprehensible it is economically inept.

# **Part Three : Principles for Media Representations of Disabled People**

## **1. The Language of Disability**

Society's misconceptions about disabled people are constantly being reinforced by disabling terms like 'cripple', 'spastic', and 'idiot'. Of course there is nothing inherently wrong with these terms it is simply that their meaning has been substantially devalued by societal perceptions of disabled people; in short, they have been turned into terms of abuse. Their continued use contributes significantly to the negative self image of disabled people and, at the same time, perpetuates discriminatory attitudes and practices among the general public.

In the same way that lesbians, gay men, black people, members of minority ethnic groups and women have identified the power of language in the promotion of heterosexism, homophobia, racism and sexism, so too disabled people are sensitive to the ways in which words cultivate institutional discrimination.

Consequently, a major aim of the British Council of Organisations of Disabled People (BCODP) and the disability rights movement in general is the elimination of disablist language in books, in libraries, in schools, and in the media. Therefore, all those who work in the communications media are asked to alert themselves -to unacceptable terminology and refrain from using it.

Unfortunately this is not as simple as it sounds because many of the terms commonly used in relation to disability are used interchangeably and mean different things to different people. Much of this confusion stems from definitions of disability devised by non-disabled people who work in official bodies like the Office of Populations Censuses and Surveys and the World Health Organisation. Based on able-bodied assumptions about the experience of disablement these organisations define disability as the relationship between impairment and handicap. 'Impairment' refers to a defective limb, organ or mechanism of the body; 'disability' is the resulting lack of function; and 'handicap' denotes the limitations on daily living which result from disability.

Rejected by disabled people and their organisations these meanings individualise and medicalise the problems associated with living with impairment. Their whole focus is on the individual and their perceived inadequacy - restrictive environments and disabling barriers are effectively ignored. They ensure that disabled people are held responsible for any difficulties they encounter during the course of their daily lives.

In contrast the British Council of Organisations of Disabled People (BCODP) favour an approach similar to that developed by the Union of Physically Impaired Against Segregation in 1976, and later adopted and adapted by the Disabled People's International (DPI) -the first international organisation controlled and run by disabled people -in 1981. Hence, although increasingly recognised as attributable to social causes also,<sup>42</sup> the term 'impairment' refers to individually based functional limitations -whether physical, intellectual sensory or hidden -but 'disability' 'is the loss or limitation of opportunities to take part in the normal life of the community on an equal level with others due to physical and social barriers'.<sup>43</sup>

This shift of emphasis not only makes the problem of terminology much simpler, but also identifies the main cause of disability -a highly discriminatory society which penalises those who do not conform to able-bodied perceptions of normality. 'Disablism', therefore, refers to prejudice, stereotyping, or 'institutional discrimination' against disabled people.

It also means that the phrase 'people with disabilities' is incorrect - people have impairments, they do not have disabilities. Additionally, though the tendency to place the noun 'people' before 'disability' is viewed positively because it emphasises the fact that individuals with impairments are in fact people - something which historically has been denied - it has a number of important implications which need to be explained.

Firstly, 'people with disabilities' assumes that disability is the property of the individual and not of society. Here the terms 'disabilities' and 'disability' refer to a medical condition; and 'person with a disability' can easily be substituted by 'person with cerebral palsy' or 'person with multiple sclerosis' etc. As we have seen disabled people and their organisations have rejected the implications of the medical model of disability.

Secondly, by linking 'disability' to 'impairment' this phrase conveniently side-steps the consequences of institutional discrimination against disabled people -poverty, dependence and social isolation - and, by implication, the need for change.

Thirdly, it is an explicit denial of a political or 'disabled identity' . Since the emergence of the disability rights movement the word 'disabled' before 'people' or 'person' has come to signify identification with this collective identity. Phrases such as 'people with disabilities' undermine that identity.

Referring to disabled people as 'handicapped' stems from the notion that the whole of life is a competition -as in horse racing or in golf - and implies that they will not do well. Also 'Handicap' has allusions to 'cap in hand' and begging. Neither term is acceptable to the disabled community.

Use of phrases such as 'the impaired', 'the disabled', 'the handicapped', 'the blind', 'the deaf', 'the deaf and dumb', 'the crippled' tend to dehumanise and objectify disabled people and should be avoided. It is also offensive to label someone by their impairment. For example; an 'epileptic' or an 'arthritic'. Where it is absolutely necessary to refer to an individual's impairment it is better to say 'has epilepsy' or 'has arthritis'.

Words and phrases that characterise disabled people as dependent or pitiable and/ or which perpetuate the myth that disabled people are incapable of participating in the life of the community should also be avoided. For example: the meaning of 'invalid' is clear -in-valid. In general terms it connotes illness. Illness and disability are not the same thing and should never be confused.

Emotive" terms like 'afflicted', 'stricken', 'sufferer' and 'victim' in sentences relating to a particular condition or impairment must be avoided. They are subjective and place the writer's set of values on the individual or group being described. Examples include: 'afflicted/stricken with polio', 'multiple sclerosis victim/sufferer'. Also phrases like 'confined to a wheelchair' or 'wheelchair bound' are inappropriate. Wheelchairs empower rather than confine - they are a mobility aid just like a pair of shoes.

Finally, it should be noted that this list is not exhaustive and occasionally meanings are subject to change. When in doubt check with an organisation controlled and run by disabled people. Information about these organisations can be obtained from The British Council of Organisations of Disabled People.

## **2. The Portrayal of Disabled People in the Media**

### *Recruitment of Disabled People*

Following the recommendations made at the 'Cap in Hand' conference there must be more effort to recruit disabled people to work in mainstream media organisations. Disablist imagery will only disappear if disabled people are integrated at all levels into the media.

### *Disability Equality Training*

There is an urgent need for more disability equality training (DET) organised and sponsored by disabled people and their organisations for all media employees. To combat negative portrayals of disabled people media personnel must be fully aware of the implications for society of their continued production. There has been some encouraging signs over the last two years in some areas of the media, but there is still much room for improvement.

### *Accessible Media Content*

Media personnel should strive to ensure that all media content is produced in accessible forms for disabled people. For example, all TV programmes should be accompanied by sign language and subtitles for deaf people and all print media should be widely available in Braille or on tape for blind people. This provision need not encroach on mainstream services but their availability should be well publicised. Such a policy sends a clear signal to the non-disabled community that disabled people are valued members of society and must be integrated accordingly.

### *Language and Terminology*

All media personnel must be aware of the disabling impact of language and avoid using inappropriate terminology. This is particularly relevant to journalists and reporters because of the psychological effects of discrimination; many disabled people have internalised their oppression to the extent that they describe themselves in stereotypical and derogatory ways. Often emotive words have become so indelibly linked to specific impairments, reinforced by the subjective judgements of 'carers' and others, that they are used unconsciously. Hence, intelligent and sensitive reporting is sometimes necessary so that the true feelings and beliefs of disabled people are revealed rather than simply the regurgitation of familiar clichés.

### *The Employment of Disabled Actors*

Where possible all portrayals of disabled characters in the media should be played by disabled actors. As it is no longer acceptable for white actors to play black people or men to play women, it should also be unacceptable for non-disabled actors to play disabled characters. Since there may be a shortage of disabled actors it is important that writers, producers, directors, agencies and advertisers put pressure on colleges and drama schools to take positive steps to recruit and train more disabled people for the acting profession.

### *Advice and Consultation*

Authors, scriptwriters, journalists, reporters and advertisers have a responsibility to check the accuracy of their work before it is made public. In order to avoid inaccuracies they should seek advice from organisations controlled and run by disabled people. Information about these organisations can be obtained from The British Council of Organisations of Disabled People.

## ***Accurate Portrayals***

### *i. Disabled people and discrimination*

When portraying disabled people in the media it is important to remember that the general public have little insight into the environmental and social barriers that prevent them from living full and active lives. Living with disability means being confronted with environmental and social barriers daily; any portrayal of disabled people, in whatever context, which does not reflect this experience is both grossly inaccurate and a major cause of their continued existence.

### *ii Disabled people and charity*

Avoid depicting disabled individuals as receivers of charity. Show disabled people interacting with both disabled and non-disabled people as equals; giving as well as receiving. Too often disabled individuals are presented solely as recipients of pity.

### *iii Disabled people and individuality*

Shun one dimensional characterisations of disabled people. Wherever appropriate portray disabled people as having individual and complex personalities with a full range of emotions and activities. In common with all human beings disabled individuals experience a variety of emotions such as happiness, depression, anger etc., and play an assortment of roles including lover, parent, provider etc. This variation should be accurately reflected in media portrayals of disabled people.

### *iv Disabled people and evil*

Avoid presenting physical or intellectual characteristics of any kind as the sole determinants of personality. Be particularly cautious about implying a correlation between impairment and evil.

### *v Disabled people and disability voyeurism*

Refrain from presenting disabled people as objects of curiosity. Disabled individuals should be presented as members of an average population or a cast of characters. Disabled people are generally able to participate in all aspects of community life, and should be portrayed in a wide variety of roles and situations.

### *vi Disabled people and comedy*

A disabled individual should not be ridiculed or made the butt of a joke (blind people or people with visual impairments do not drive cars, play darts or bump into everything in their path; despite the myth making of some script writers, rather limited comedians, and unscrupulous mainstream advertisers).

### *vii Disabled people and sensationalism*

Avoid the sensational in portrayals of disabled people. Be especially cautious of the stereotype of disabled people as either the victims or the perpetrators of violence.

### *viii Disabled people and the super cripple*

Resist presenting disabled characters with extra-ordinary abilities or attributes. To do so is to suggest that a disabled individual must over compensate and become super human to be accepted by society.

### *ix Disabled people and will-power*

Avoid the 'stiff upper lip' type storyline that implies a disabled character need only have the 'will' and the 'right attitude' to succeed.

### *x Disabled people and sexuality*

Avoid showing disabled people as sexually abnormal. Do not portray disabled individuals as sexually dead or as sexually degenerate. Show disabled people in loving relationships expressing the same sexual needs and desires. as non-disabled people.

### *xi Disabled people and the disabled population*

When depicting disabled people in the media ensure that they are representative of the sexual, racial, ethnic, gender and age divisions in the disabled population as a whole.

## **3. The Portrayal of Disabled People in Advertising Media**

The British Council of Organisations of Disabled People (BCODP) recognise that we live in a society which continues to force disabled people to its very fringes and which ensures that they remain dependent on charitable handouts.

The BCODP understands that as long as disabled peoples' welfare and existence depends on the goodwill of others - i.e. charity -their full participation and integration into the community is not possible. The BCODP acknowledges that to operate effectively and practically as an organisation in today's society it is necessary to assume charitable status. This decision should not be seen as an endorsement of the use of charity as a way of meeting basic rights, or as a way of achieving equality, but must be regarded as a practical and operational matter.

The BCODP will continue to be a registered charity until such time as disabled people have won the right to exist as equals in society, and have won the right to take control of their own lives.

The following recommendations, therefore, should not be construed as either reformist or tokenistic. They were developed to initiate from advertisers a decisive commitment to eliminate disablist imagery in all cultural forms, and so contribute to the elimination of institutional discrimination against disabled people.

All advertisers concerned with disability must include references to disabled people's lack of basic human rights and forced dependence on charity for essentials such as education, training, house adaptations, wheelchairs etc. in their advertising campaigns.

Advertisers must not portray disabled people in advertisements unless they are part of a larger group which is representative of the population as a whole.

All advertisers concerned with disability must indicate how they use their resources, preferably in their advertising campaigns. Many charity advertisements imply that the lion's share of the charity's income is spent on provision for disabled people when in many cases it is used to fund medical research -something which has nothing to do with disabled people or disability.

Advertisers such as The Muscular Dystrophy Group, The Multiple Sclerosis Society, The Spastics Society etc, whose name implies that they are organisations of disabled people, i.e. controlled and run by disabled people, should state clearly in their advertisements that they are organisations for disabled people controlled and run by non-disabled people.

# Part Four: Complaints Procedures

## 1. Books

If you wish to complain about representations of disability and disabled people in books contact the publisher, the address is usually in the front cover. If you wish to complain by telephone use directory enquiries to get hold of the publishers' telephone number.

If you wish to complain about disablist imagery in books kept in public libraries contact the head of the library either by letter or by telephone. If this proves unsatisfactory get in touch with someone on the local authority's committee with responsibility for libraries.

For books used in schools write to the school's headteacher or one of the school governors. If this proves fruitless then complain to the Local Education Authority with overall responsibility for the school.

## 2. Films and Videos

If you have a complaint about portrayals of disabled people in films shown at the cinema or on video write to:

The Director  
The British Board of Film Classifications 3 Soho Square London  
W1 y SDE  
or telephone: 071 4397916

## 3. Broadcasting Services: Television and Radio

If you have a complaint about portrayals of disabled people on television or the radio write to:

The Director  
Broadcasting Standards Council  
5-8 The Sanctuary London  
SW1P 3JS  
or telephone: 071 2330405 or 071 2330544

Alternatively, write to:

The Secretary  
Broadcasting Complaints Commission  
Grosvenor Gardens House  
35-37 Grosvenor Gardens  
London  
SW1W OBS

or telephone: 071 630 1966

### **The BBC**

If you want to complain about television or radio programmes broadcast nationally by the BBC write to:

Viewers' and Listeners' Correspondence  
BBC White City  
201 Wood Lane London  
W12 7TS

For telephone complaints about TV programmes broadcast nationally by the BBC ring: 081 743 8000

For telephone complaints about radio programmes broadcast nationally by the BBC ring: 071 580 4468



If you wish to complain about regional programmes contact one of the BBC's regional offices. Although there are several local offices around the country the BBC's National and Regional headquarters are:

### **BBC SCOTLAND**

Broadcasting House,  
Queen Margaret Drive,  
Glasgow  
G12 8DG  
Telephone 041 330 2345

### **NORTH EAST ENGLAND**

*BBC Television (Leeds)*  
Broadcasting Centre  
Woodhouse Lane  
Leeds LS2 9PX  
Telephone 0532 441188

### **BBC WALES**

Broadcasting House  
Llantrisant Road  
Llandaff  
Cardiff  
CF5 2YQ

### **MIDLANDS**

Broadcasting Centre  
Pebble Mill  
Birmingham  
B5 7QQ

Telephone 0222572888

Telephone 021 4148888

### **BBC NORTHERN IRELAND**

Broadcasting House  
Ormeau Avenue  
Belfast  
BT2 8HQ

### **SOUTH WEST ENGLAND**

*BBC Bristol and BBC West*  
Broadcasting House  
Whiteladies Road  
Bristol  
BS8 2LR

Telephone 0232 244400

Telephone 0272732211 51

### **NORTH WEST ENGLAND**

New Broadcasting House  
Oxford Road  
Manchester  
M60 1 SJ

### **SOUTH EAST ENGLAND**

BBC South and East  
Elstree Centre  
Clarendon Road  
Borehamwood  
Hertfordshire WD6 1JF  
Telephone 081 953 6100

Telephone 061 236 8444

## **Independent Radio**

For complaints about portrayals of disabled people or the treatment of disability on independent local radio stations write to:

Radio Authority  
70 Brompton Road London  
SW3 1EY  
or telephone: 071 581 2888

Alternatively, contact the station direct. The address and telephone number will be in the telephone directory.

## **Independent Television**

If you wish to complain about the portrayal of disabled people in all non-BBC television services operating in or from the UK, i.e. Channel 3 (ITV), Channel 4, the proposed Channel 5, and cable and satellite services, then contact the Independent Television Commission (ITC) (formerly the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) ) either by letter or by telephone. There are a number of regional offices around the country:

LONDON  
ITC  
70 Brompton Road

MIDLANDS (WEST)  
ITC  
Lyndon House

London  
SW3 1EY  
Telephone 071 5847011

62 Hagley Road  
Birmingham B16 8PE  
Telephone 021 454 1068

NORTHERN IRELAND  
ITC  
Royston House  
34 Upper Queen Street  
Belfast  
BT16HG

MIDLANDS (EAST)  
ITC  
10-11 Poultry  
Nottingham  
NG1 2HW

Telephone 0232248733 Telephone 0602585105

SCOTLAND NORTH EAST  
ITC  
123 Blythswood Street  
Glasgow  
G24AN  
Telephone 041 2264436

ENGLAND/THE BORDERS/ISLE OF MAN  
ITC  
3 Collingwood Street  
Newcastle Upon Tyne  
NE1 1JS  
Telephone 091 261 0148 53

#### **4. The Print Media: Newspapers and Magazines**

If you wish to complain about portrayals of disabled people or how disability issues are treated in local or national newspapers, periodicals and magazines write to:

The Director  
Press Complaints Commission  
1 Salisbury Square London  
EC4Y 8AE

or telephone: 071 353 1248

Alternatively, the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) has an Ethics Council which is able to deal with complaints about portrayals of disabled people and the treatment of disability issues in the press. If you want to complain to the NUJ write to:

Ethics Council  
National Union of Journalists Acorn House  
314 Grays Inn Road  
London  
WC1  
or telephone: 071 2787916

#### **5. Advertisers**

At the time of writing the Independent Television Commission (ITC) was producing a complaints procedure specially for TV advertising. If you wish to complain about portrayals of disabled people in TV commercials, contact one of the ITC offices listed above.

If you wish to complain about portrayals of disabled people in advertisements in the cinema, on posters, or the print media - newspapers and magazines etc. - write (along with a copy of the offending ad if possible) to:

Complaints Department  
Advertising Standards Authority  
Brooke House  
2-16 Torrington House  
London  
WC1E 7HN

or telephone: 071 580 5555

Alternatively, if you know who is responsible for the offending ad, for example, the manufacturer of the product or the charity offering services, complain directly to them.

Of course for portrayals of disabled people in charity advertising you can always notify the Charity Commission.

Their address is:

The Charity Commission  
57-60 Haymarket  
London  
SW1 y 4QX

Telephone: 071 2104533

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great deal of media attention. In 1994, Robert Latimer was tried and convicted of second-degree murder in the death of his daughter Tracy, who was disabled by a severe form of cerebral palsy. There is no question that the media had a tremendous impact on the way that this case was viewed by the public. In fact, in his decision to grant Latimer's first appeal, Chief Justice Bayda refers to "the hundreds of letters received by the appellant and his family, the many petitions and telephone calls, as well as the editorial commentary in the country's newspapers, [which] were an unsolicited, spontaneous (and in many respects an unprecedented) public outcry in response to the sentence." Because the impact of the media on the public is dynamic, dynamic media is not enabled by default. However, if you have previously enabled dynamic media, you may want to turn it off at a later time. To disable dynamic media after you have enabled it, you remove dynamicmedia from the file name and/or you remove the -r dynamicmedia run mode flag. To disable Dynamic Media after it has been enabled: On the command line, when launching the quickstart, you can do either of the following: The memory limit is configurable and should fit the system resource availability and the type of image content being processed. If you have many very large assets and have enough memory on the system, you can increase this limit to ensure that the images are processed in parallel. An image that requires more than the maximum memory limit will be rejected. Goodreads helps you keep track of books you want to read. Start by marking "Disabling Imagery and the Media: An Exploration of the Principles for Media Representations of Disabled People" as Want to Read: Want to Read saving list | Want to Read. See a Problem? We'd love your help. Let us know what's wrong with this preview of Disabling Imagery and the Media by Colin Barnes. Problem: It's the wrong book It's the wrong edition Other. Details (if other): Cancel. Thanks for telling us about the problem. Return to Book Page. Not the book you're looking for? Preview "Disabling Imagery and the Media" by Colin Barnes. Disabling Imagery and the Media: An Exploration of the Principles for Media Representations of Disabled People. by Colin Barnes.

Broadcast media programming for disabled audiences. Broadcast media has in recent years begun to recognize the large audience of people with disabilities that it reaches. Programming dedicated to disability issues is increasing. "Disabling Imagery and the Media" (PDF). Disability Studies. Retrieved 10 February 2017.