



DISABILITY

in the media

“Disabled people should be shown as an ordinary part of life in all forms of representation, not as stereotypes or invisible.”

This was the verdict of 150 Key Image Makers at the 'Invisible Children' conference.

Ten main stereotypes of Disabled People.

The disabled person as:

Pitiable and pathetic Charity adverts, Telethon, Children in Need, Tiny Tim in a 'Christmas Carol' or Porgy in Gershwin's 'Porgy and Bess.'

An object of violence 'Whatever Happened to Baby Jane' or 'Wait until Dark' set the style for countless TV films.

Sinister or evil Shakespeare's 'Richard III,' Stevenson's 'Treasure Island,' 'Dr. Strangelove,' 'Dr. No,' Spielberg's 'Hook' or Freddy on 'Elm Street.'

Atmosphere Shown as curios or exotica 'freak shows' and in comics, horror movies and science fiction e.g. 'Hunchback of Notre Dame' or 'X-Men.'

'Super Grip' or 'Triumph over Tragedy' 'Reach for the Sky,' the last item on the news, e.g. climbing a mountain.

Laughable 'Mr. Magoo,' being the butt of jokes or films like 'Hear No Evil, See No Evil' and 'Time Bandits.'

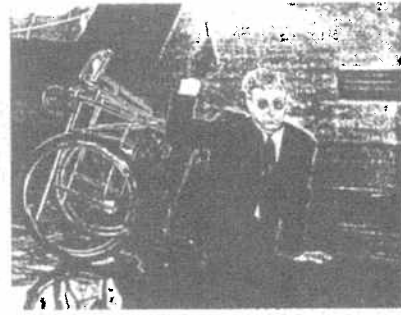
Having a chip on their shoulder Laura in the 'Glass Menagerie,' often linked to a miracle cure as in 'Heidi' and the 'Secret Garden.'

A burden/outcast As in 'Beauty & the Beast' set in subterranean New York, the Morlocks in the 'X-Men' or in 'The Mask.'

Non-sexual or incapable of having a worthwhile relationship Clifford Chatterley in 'Lady Chatterley's Lover,' 'Born on the Fourth of July' or O'Casey's 'Silver Tassie' to name but a few.

Incapable of fully participating in everyday life Our absence from everyday situations, not being shown as integral and productive members of society. When we are shown the focus is on our impairments.

DISABILITY *in the media*



The Invisible Children Conference was an exciting and thought provoking day held in London on 1st March and attended by more than 150 key image makers.

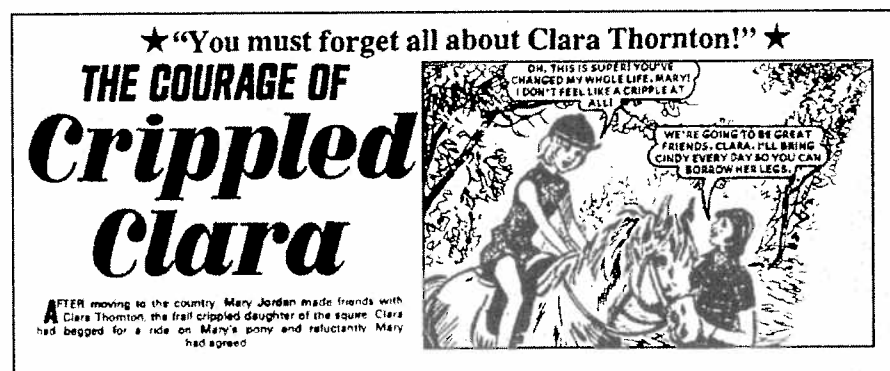
The representation of disabled people is not a minority issue. There are 6.5 million disabled adults in the UK and 840 million people worldwide. Two thirds of working age are unemployed.

TV and film directors, producers, scriptwriters, editors, actors, authors and illustrators came together with a number of leading members of the Disabled People's Movement, who argued for a change in the way disabled people are portrayed.

There was general agreement that to continue to portray disabled people as invisible or one-dimensional re-inforces the discrimination and isolation disabled people experience in all aspects of life. This can include becoming targets for bullying and physical attack. It was felt that children are particularly affected by the images to which they have access. Unfortunately most children and young people rarely meet disabled children in their schools and form their views of them mainly through the media. The inclusion of disabled people in producing and creating images and portrayal of disabled people as "real people" is crucial. It was felt that now is the time to achieve this.



**POLIO VICTIM'S
MARATHON BID
TO RAISE CASH**



STRUCK by cerebral palsy, seven-year-old Saadia Ghani was beset by many afflictions, one of which was her inability to formulate speech.

MAESTRO BANS CRIPPLE

We can all, at any time, become disabled, develop a physical or mental impairment. Perhaps the need to distance ourselves from reality makes it convenient to rely on stereotypes of disability. They are less troubling than accepting the individuality, the joy, the pain, the appearance and behaviour and the rights of disabled people.

With a very few welcome exceptions like Grange Hill and Skallagrigg, disabled characters and images are largely absent, or when they do appear they are presented in a negative and stereotyped way.

Change can occur. Twenty years ago Black people were in a similar position. Now the necessity for their inclusion is taken for granted.

Lack of portrayal of disability in our society is not accidental. Western culture from Greek and Roman times, reinforced in Renaissance Europe, has seen the "body beautiful" as an ideal and those with physical or mental imperfections as being in receipt of divine retribution. The Bible accepts this but also offers us pity towards disabled people as sinners. Popular culture up until very recently has seen disabled people as objects of fear or fun. Such ideas are deeply embedded in myth, legend and classical literature. Today's celluloid entertainment culture reinforces the tendency to judge people by their appearance.

The myths about disabled people may come from the past, but they show remarkable present persistence and are deeply rooted in the fears we all have about disability.



FORCED TO LIVE
The fate of damaged children



IMAGES

the way forward

- Shun one-dimensional characterisations and portray disabled people as having complex personalities capable of a full range of emotions.
- Avoid depicting us as always receiving; show us as equals giving as well as receiving.
- Avoid presenting physical and mental characteristics as determining personality.
- Refrain from depicting us as objects of curiosity. Make us ordinary.
- Our impairments should not be ridiculed or made the butt of jokes.
- Avoid sensationalising us especially as victims or perpetrators of violence.
- Refrain from endowing us with superhuman attributes.
- Avoid Pollyana-ish plots that make our attitude the problem. Show the societal barriers we face that keep us from living full lives.
- Avoid showing disabled people as non-sexual. Show us in loving relationships and expressing the same range of sexual needs and desires as non-disabled people.
- Show us as an ordinary part of life in all forms of representation, factual and fictional.
- Most importantly cast us, train us and write us into your scripts, programmes and publications.



Save the Children 

This leaflet was produced by the 1 in 8 Group, formed after the Invisible Children Conference. We are a number of individuals working in the media committed to challenging the portrayal of Disabled People.

The Invisible Children conference was organised by Integration Alliance and Save the Children.

There will be a full report of the Conference available shortly for £6 (incl. P&P) from Save the Children Publication Sales, Save the Children, 17 Grove Lane, London SE5 8RD, (telephone 0171 703 5400) or Integration Alliance, Unit 2, 70 South Lambeth Road London SW8 1RL.

If you would like a speaker to develop these points please contact Richard Rieser 78 Mildmay Grove, London N1 4PJ. 0171 254 3197.

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