

Public Abstract

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Title:BELIEFS ABOUT INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITY AS RELATED TO
MEDIA PORTRAYAL OF DISABILITY IN GLEE

This research explores an area of media effects that has received very little attention - how exposure to portrayals of disability on television relates to beliefs about disability. An online survey was used to study respondents' viewing habits of the television program Glee, which featured several characters who had varying disabilities (wheelchair use, down syndrome and many others), and how that related to beliefs about disability.

This study was grounded in show-specific cultivation theory and its discussion of how television viewing can influence perceptions and beliefs as well as social cognitive theory and the process of media identification. The results showed that identification with Artie, a main character on Glee with a disability, is correlated with frequency of viewing as well as more positive beliefs about individuals with disability. In addition, any viewing of Glee, rather than frequency, was also related to more positive beliefs about individuals with disability. While social cognitive theory, in particular identification, showed strong relationships with findings, results did not line up with cultivation as frequency of viewing did not correlate with more positive beliefs.

Overall, the research demonstrated that portrayal of disability in the media relates to beliefs about individuals with disability and hopes to encourage more inclusion in the media landscape as well as additional research related to disability in the media.