

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

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how exposure to disability portrayal on television is related to beliefs about individuals with disability. This study uses 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. An online survey was conducted to examine 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 viewing these mediated representations related to beliefs about individuals with disability. 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.