FilmDis White Paper on Disability Representation on Television: Examining 250 TV Shows from April 2019 to March 31, 2020

White Paper by:

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Introduction

It's been about five years since Hollywood started a major conversation about representation of marginalized characters on television and in films. At the time, disability wasn't even mentioned, and we were part of conversations about why and how disabled representation should be included. Since then, we've seen Hollywood occasionally casting disabled actors, and some studios have started looking towards disabled consultants to help guide them towards better representation and inclusion. Sadly, the process is moving too slowly.

For years, those of us working in the realm of media representation have been fighting with the notion that disabled characters don't really exist. While that's certainly true for film, that hasn't been true for television, especially not in recent years. The problem with disability representation on television is not that there's a general lack of disabled characters. There are disabled characters all over television. The problem is twofold.

First, the most significant problem is how disabled characters are represented and included within television narratives. These characters often remain embedded in stories that only highlight their disability. Without being disabled, the plot couldn't exist. Second, disabled creators, storytellers, and actors are not the ones most often involved in crafting said narratives about disability. If "nothing about us without us" is the slogan of the disabled community, Hollywood is certainly failing at helping us uphold that promise.

In our previous study, we watched 180 television shows and found 708 disabled characters on 151 of those shows. Disabled characters appeared on shows spanning across 22 different television networks and streaming services in last year's study. We showed the world that Hollywood is not lacking disabled characters the way previous studies have asserted. Where disabled representation is truly lacking is in the inclusion of multiply marginalized disabled people. This year, we hope to explore that. Beyond this, the biggest struggle when it comes to accurate and inclusive disabled representation is in how stories about disability are told and how disabled characters are typically cast.

Watching television in the 2020s is a full-time job. There were over 500 television shows that aired between April 2019 and March 31, 2020. Though this is FilmDis' first study affected by the COVID pandemic, since the pandemic started near the end of this viewing period, only the shows airing at the end of this study were affected. We already know that next year's study, which primarily includes shows filmed during the pandemic,

has been much more significantly impacted by Coronavirus. We are unsure how this will affect next year's data.

As always, we remain vigilant about and committed toward examining representation from an intersectional lens. Like last year's study, which you can read here, we have broken the data down into a series of categories. The first category is representation by disability. We have some shocking changes from last year's results to report. These changes are significant, and some of them are quite disappointing.

The categories have remained the same for the most part, although we have had to make some minor changes. For example, ADD/ADHD was separated from other Neurodivergent & Psychosocial disabilities, in its own category last year, but because of the numbers being so low, we've included those numbers within the general Psychosocial numbers, instead. We also found a better way to label Multiple Disabilities, so the numbering might be slightly different for individual disability diagnosis within this category.

Note: *We wish to continue to acknowledge that some D/deaf & HOH individuals do not consider themselves disabled. This is an intra-community discussion that is ongoing and should remain within said community. Due to the continued exclusion of D/deaf actors and creators in Hollywood, we continue to include them as a part of the broader disability community for this study.*

Beyond disability, we have examined this year's list of disabled characters based on race/ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexuality, nationality, age, type of character, and whether the actors portraying disabled characters were disabled or engaging in **disabled mimicry**. The only area we've changed has been type of character. We added Guest Stars to join Extras, Bit, Supporting, and Lead characters. Our data collection also breaks down how many characters aired on what network, giving us a snapshot of how the networks are doing individually in relation to representation.

Previous studies on disability representation have only included disabled characters from the perspective of disability. This ignores an important fact within disability representation. Even within limited representation of disability, multiply marginalized disabled people remain on the margins of inclusion. The more marginalized you are, the less likely you are to see yourself represented. All our work advocates towards changing this for the betterment of the entire disabled community.

Definition: *Disabled mimicry is the performance of disabled roles by nondisabled actors or actors without the specific disability represented, which is often reduced to mimicking disability through physicality and vocal intonation.*

Categorizing Disability & Disabled Characters

This study examines 250 of the 500+ shows that aired primarily in the United States between April 2019 and March 31, 2020. We watched every single episode of every show and cataloged every single character that fit within the disability categories presented below. We acknowledge that it is not always easy to categorize disability, and as such welcome any and all feedback in relation to how we categorize.

Across 250 shows, we found 218 (87%) included at least one disabled character no matter whether it was a bit or a lead character. This is a slight increase from last year, when we found 84% of the shows we watched included at least one disabled character. While we did include data for every show that features Extras, we didn't include any shows in the 218 number above If they only contained disabled Extras and no other disabled representation.

This year we found 2,108 actors playing 1,198 disabled characters. The number of actors is slightly higher than our character count, because there were a few different disabled characters, including Annie Wilkes on *Castle Rock* and the various characters on *This is Us* who had multiple actors portraying the same character at different stages of their life. Disabled characters aired on shows across 30 different television networks, spanning network television, cable, and streaming services.

All the shows we watched were live action, and at least part of every episode needed to be in English to qualify for the study. We would've been unable to view every television show in every country between the two people who watched every show, which was why we had to set these parameters. However, with greater funding we would love to expand our work to include studies of television beyond Hollywood and the primary countries that produce Hollywood content.

It remained difficult this year when categorizing disability, particularly since a lot of disabilities transcend various categories. We recognize that physical and neurological disabilities, for example, can often accompany one another, which is why we tried to be vigilant in maintaining a type of order to better show what communities are lacking representation, and where improvements need to be made. Our goal was to break down characters based on shared experience and/or diagnosis. One area where we saw a

massive uptick is characters is Multiple Disabilities. We tried to break this category down as best we could but welcome feedback about how we could improve this section.

While the creation of our categories reflect how the disabled community tends to talk about disability, within that, we included information about how Hollywood chooses to identify disability. **As such, you may encounter outdated and harmful descriptors of disability most of the community tends to reject.** To better ensure those reading this who lack understanding of what the disability community prefers when it comes to language, outdated terms will be highlighted with quotation marks around them.

In last year's study, we attempted to determine how many characters were coded disabled, but that became quite messy, and we cut that from this study completely. Now, for character to be considered disabled they must either have a diagnosis, which is presented on the show, or must exhibit symptoms or other signifiers of a specific disability that are understood as such within the individual disability community. We recognize that diagnosis is a privilege, so we tried to be open-minded about characters without formal diagnosis, which is common especially for marginalized disabled people.

Representation by Disability

Disabled characters have been placed within 16 major disability categories. The Neurodivergent and/or Psychosocial category is the only one that we separated into further categories. Those categories are Autistic, Psychosocial, and Psychosocial – NOS. The latter is something we see a lot where characters have some kind of Psychosocial disability, but the show never delves into what that disability specifically is. This was a theory we explored with last year's study, and we've definitely seen a pattern emerging around this phenomenon.

Below, you can look at each specific disability community to see how they have been represented. We urge you to go back and look at our previous study to compare how these numbers have changed, although we will include a brief look at the difference between these two studies within each section. We believe you will be both heartened by some of the fantastic portrayals of disabled characters we've seen this year, and infuriated by back slides in representation, particularly when it comes to multiply marginalized disabled characters.

Alcoholism/Addiction

There's a lot of discrimination around including Alcoholism and Addiction as a part of the disabled world. Our data backs up a very real occurrence, particularly our multiply disabled section, which shows that Addiction and other disabilities are often comorbid. It's impossible to live in a world where healthcare is often driven by profit, and not have people choosing to self-medicate. Alcohol is often an easy choice for this, and with ableism prevalent in the medical community, lack of access to medical treatment and medications needed to help with pain, fatigue and other bodily symptoms can lead to individuals taking their medication needs into their own hands.

Alcoholism & Addiction can also lead to other disabilities on their own. Dealing with Addiction can be hard on the body, and as such should be included in this study. We refuse to stigmatize Alcoholism & Addiction and those dealing with it, whether still using or in recovery. For this study, we include both characters dealing with Addiction currently and in recovery for this very reason.

We are only counting characters that specifically are dealing with Alcoholism & Addiction in this section. We will not be highlighting Multiply Disabled characters with comorbid diagnoses until later in the study. They are a part of the Multiply Disabled section. We do, however, include characters dealing with both Alcoholism & Addiction at the same time, or with using various drugs.

Despite splitting up characters dealing with Alcoholism & Addiction in this way, we still have many characters in this category. In fact, this is our largest category out of the 16 categories included in our study. Last year, we only counted 118 characters on 64 shows, and this year we've nearly doubled that amount.

There are 214 characters on 94 shows dealing with Alcoholism & Addiction in this study. This means that over 85% of the shows we watched had at least one character with Alcoholism or Addiction. This is up from 35% of the shows featuring these characters last year. Like our previous study, Addiction is more prevalent than Alcoholism. However, the margins have narrowed between the two. While our previous study featured 118 characters with Addiction and 33 characters with Alcoholism, this year we see an increase of 10+ as there are130 characters with Addiction, and Alcoholism has doubled with 72 characters.

The breakdown for Alcoholism & Addiction is as follows:

Addiction: 130: Specifics include 7 Opioids, 6 Gambling, 6 Crack, 4 Heroin, 3 Compound V (a fictional drug), 2 Meth, 2 Steroids, 1 Green Light (a fictional drug), and 1 Opioids + Heroin. The rest are NOS (not otherwise specified).

Alcoholism: 72
Alcoholism & Addiction: 12

There are 94 shows offering characters with Alcoholism & Addiction on 14 television networks and 8 streaming services. Last year, characters were almost evenly split between Cisgender Male and Cisgender Female, but this year Cisgender Males dominate with 122 Cisgender Male characters and 92 Cisgender Female Characters. There is only one Trans character in this category, despite Transgender people facing disproportionately high rates of Addiction. The breakdown by sexuality is 144 Heterosexual, 61 Unknown Sexuality, 4 Bisexual, 3 Lesbian, and 2 Gay Male. The LGBTQIA section remains abysmal, but there are a few more characters than last year. It just took watching 70 more shows to find them.

Things haven't really improved much when it comes to sexuality, race, and disabled representation with Alcoholism & Addiction. White people remain the face of Addiction with 149 White characters. There are 36 Black characters, which is only about 10 more than last year. That's ridiculous when we watched a significantly larger number of shows for this study. IPOC characters also increased by about 10, with 29 characters. The breakdown for IPOC is 14 Latine, 11 Asians (including 4 South Asian/Indian), 1 Indigenous, and 3 Ambiguous/Unknown.

The specific breakdown by race, gender, and sexuality is as follows:

-89 Cisgender White Male (67 Heterosexual, 19 Unknown Sexuality, 2 Bisexual (1 maybe Bi), 1 Gay)
-59 Cisgender White Female (41 Heterosexuals, 15 with Unknown Sexuality, 1 GNC (gender nonconforming) with Unknown Sexuality, 1 Bisexual, 1 Lesbian)
-18 Cisgender Black Male (10 Heterosexual, 8 Unknown)
-15 Cisgender IPOC Male (4 Heterosexual – 2 Latine, 1 Asian (South Asian), 1 Indigenous, 10 with Unknown Sexuality – 6 Latine, 3 Asians (1 Chinese), 2 Ambiguous/Unknown), and 1 Gay Asian)
-18 Cisgender Black Female (15 Heterosexual, 1 Unknown, 1 Bisexual, & 1 Lesbian), -14 IPOC Female (7 Heterosexual – 4 Asian, 2 Latine, 1 Ambiguous/Unknown, 7 Unknown Sexuality – 3 Asian (all South Asian), 4 Latine).
-1 Trans White Lesbian Female (thanks to the return of *The L Word: Generation Q)*

Last year, every age group was included in the Alcoholism & Addiction category, but this year only features 8 Teen, 190 Adult, and 16 Elder. This breakdown is not too different from last year although Children & Babies are no longer included in any storylines concerning Addiction. Overwhelmingly, 182 characters are from the US. We

recognize that since we are focusing on television shows that primarily air here that this would be the case. However, since we watch some television from the UK, Canada, and Australia, there are also 21 British, 2 Canadian, 2 Chinese, 2 Scottish, 2 Irish, 1 Chinese American, and 1 Australian character.

Furthering the breakdown into types of roles, Bit characters continue to win this category. 109 characters are Bit characters, 64 are Supporting, 25 are Lead, and 16 are Guest Star. Of the 25 Lead characters, 21 of the characters are White, 13 being Cisgender White Males (only 1 Bisexual), and 7 being Cisgender White Women (5 Heterosexual,1 Lesbian, and 1 GNC with Unknown Sexuality). This means that there are only 4 Black & Brown Lead characters with Alcoholism/Addiction. This includes 1 Black Heterosexual Male, 1 Black Heterosexual Female, 1 Black Bisexual Female, and 1 Asian (South Asian/Indian) Male with Unknown Sexuality.

Supporting characters are not much better with 31 Cisgender White Male (1 Gay) and 18 White Cisgender Female. There is 1 Trans White Lesbian, Tess (Jamie Clayton) on *The L Word: Generation Q*, who is a bartender at Dana's bar, and ends up relapsing after trying to help another queer character deal with their Addiction. This leaves 14 Black & IPOC characters – 5 Black Heterosexual Females, 3 Black Heterosexual Males, 2 Black Males of Unknown Sexuality, 2 Cisgender Asian Males (South Asian/Indian – 1 Gay, 1 Unknown Sexuality), and 2 Cisgender Asian Females (South Asian/Indian – 1 Heterosexual, 1 Unknown Sexuality).

It's difficult to determine whether actors are actually disabled in a lot of categories, and this is one of them. Unless an actor has spoken about dealing with Addiction and/or Alcoholism publicly, we can't possibly know if they have dealt with Alcoholism or Addiction. Therefore, it's no surprise to us that 200 characters were played by actors who are Unknown. Just 2 characters are played by one actor we knew has spoken out about living with Addiction/Alcoholism (Thanks, Denis Leary, who we count as characters on *The Moody's* & *Animal Kingdom*).

We know that 12 characters were played by actors who have not dealt with Alcoholism and/or Addiction personally. However, this is one of the few categories where it would be hard to ensure that only disabled actors played these roles.

This year, there were a lot of characters that dealt with relapses. Beyond Tess, Rita on *Castle Rock*, backslides after discovering where her stepdaughter and kidnapped daughter are, and Elise (Antoinette Crowe-Legacy) on *Godfather of Harlem*, who relapses before eventually getting clean and converting to Islam, are just two of the multiple characters who struggled with Addiction. We also found a lot of characters that

are clearly dealing with Alcoholism/Addiction, but never seem to have it addressed or get the help they need. A great example of this is Johnny Lawrence on *Cobra Kai*, whose general mode of functioning involves drinking to deal with his problems.

A central theme on the Deaf-run dramedy, *This Close*, created by Deaf creators Shoshannah Stern (Kate) and Joshua Feldman (Michael) is Michael's struggle with Addiction. Though Michael is considered a multiply disabled character, he interacts with multiple non-Deaf individuals also dealing with Addiction, particularly when he is at rehab. One of them includes Zagat, a woman just a little too obsessed with her dog, played by the fabulous Margaret Cho.

One of the best portrayals of Addiction is the FX show, *Snowfall*. What the show does well is show how easy it can be to become addicted, and how it can happen to pretty much anyone. Wanda (Gail Bean) became addicted early in the series because her boyfriend, at the time, was dealing and she wanted to learn how to cook herself. Now, they are no longer together, because once she started doing crack, she is never able to stop. Mel (Reign Edwards) is in a similar situation. All it takes is one encounter with crack for her to become addicted. Planning to celebrate her upcoming graduation and acceptance to an Ivy League school, Mel goes to a party and tries crack for the first time. Unfortunately, she never makes it to college. The show is particularly good at highlighting the volatile nature of the drug, as well as its impact on the Black community.

Amputee

The Amputee category is nothing short of disappointing, this year. Given the various ways people can experience amputation, this category has the potential to be quite diverse. Unfortunately, that's not what is happening in Hollywood. Sure, it's great that we've increased the amount of Amputee characters from 34 last year to 56 (5% of characters) this year. Still, this category lacks a lot of diversity, and that includes in casting.

Like last year, we continue to see amputation used for comic relief. Multiple shows in the study featured this including *American Horror Story: 1984*, where Margaret Booth (Leslie Grossman) cuts off her ear so she can appear mentally unstable and pin her serial murders on another person, and Jacob Bowman (JT Neal) on *Bless This Mess*, who amputate his own finger when showing off a machine but eventually has an emotional breakthrough with his father, as a result. A lot of fantasy superhero shows also use amputation to diversify some of their superheroes – see Yo-Yo (Natalia Cordova-Buckley) on *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* and Roy Harper (Colton Haynes) on *Arrow*.

An interesting component is when amputation is used in fantasy storytelling. It was a major part of the Amazon show, *Carnival Row*, where Rycroft Philostrate (Orlando Bloom) discovers that he is half-faer. To give him a better future, his faerie wings were cut off when he was a baby. Despite amputation and mutilation of the faer being a central part of this show neither Bloom, nor the other amputee character from the show, Ivos (Michael Ford-FitzGerald), a faer with a leg amputation, are played by actual amputees. Of course, it might be difficult to find someone with wings amputated!

Despite this category having its fair share of problems there are a few good portrayals of amputees. Fergus (César Domboy) on *Outlander* had his arm amputated earlier in the series. This season, he continues to be a good father and provider for his pregnant wife, Marsali (Lauren Wilde) and several children. They have a good home and life, where he actively engages in activities on the frontier with all the other nondisabled men. While he is not played by an actual amputee, his character is one of the better written options. The best amputee representation though, has to be double leg amputee, Logan (Eric Graise) on *Locke & Key*, who is pretty much portrayed as an average teenager, who can hold his own with the other students. We look forward to seeing his character develop in future seasons.

The 56 Amputee characters are spread across 40 different shows on 12 networks and 4 streaming services. Amputations occurred in a wide variety of locations on the body this year including the Penis (3), which appears for the second time in our study largely thanks to the inclusion of *Game of Thrones*. The most popular form of amputation this year was Leg (11), followed by Arm (8), Finger (8), Eye (8), Hand (6), Multiple Amputations (6 – 3 Double Leg, 1 Arm & Leg, 1 Double Arm, & 1 Double Hand), Ear (4), Toe (1), and Faer Wings (1).

Our last study highlighted that there were way more Male amputee characters (29/34) than Female. Things have only improved by 0.2%, with 47 out of 56 Amputee characters being Male. Cisgender White Males make up 36 characters – 18 with Unknown Sexuality (1 Faer), 17 Heterosexual (1 Jewish, 1 Half Faer), and 1 Gay Male. Black Male characters make up 8 characters – 2 Heterosexual, and 6 with Unknown Sexuality. IPOC Male characters only account for 3 Characters – 1 Heterosexual (Middle Eastern) and 2 with Unknown Sexuality. Cisgender Female characters make up the rest of the characters, 6 White – 3 Heterosexual, 2 Unknown Sexuality, 1 Bisexual, 1 Black Female with Unknown Sexuality, and 2 IPOC Female – 1 Heterosexual (Latine), and 1 with Unknown Sexuality (Asian).

Speaking of race, there are 42 White Amputee characters, 8 Black, and 5 IPOC (2 Middle Eastern, 2 Asian, 1 Latine). Sexuality wise, the breakdown is 30 of Unknown Sexuality, 24 Heterosexual, 1 Gay and 1 Bisexual. Both LGBTQIA characters are White, but it's not like White LGBTQIA disabled people are getting well represented, either. The Amputee category of representation desperately needs to diversify and hiring Black and Brown Amputees is a great way to get started at this.

HBO & ABC lead the networks with 9 Amputee Characters each. CBS, CW, and Netflix tied for second place with 5 characters apiece. Americans make up 43 characters and Fictional Nationalities/Races (including Burguish, Faer, and Westerosian) make up 7. There are also 2 Canadians, 1 Brit, 1 French, and 1 Mexican. Most Amputees are Adult (48), followed by Elder (4), Teen (3), and Child (1). The majority are also Bit characters (31), followed by Supporting (17), Lead (5), and Guest Star (3).

Looking at the diversity of Lead and Supporting characters, only 2 out of the 5 Lead characters are not White Cisgender Male characters. One, of course, is a White Cisgender Female who is Bisexual. The other is the aforementioned Yo-Yo, who is a Cisgender Heterosexual IPOC (Latine). Supporting features 7 out of 17 Marginalized characters, 3 Cisgender White characters (2 Heterosexual Females, 1 Gay Male), 2 Cisgender Black Males (1 Heterosexual, 1 Unknown Sexuality), and 2 IPOC Cisgender characters (1 Middle Eastern Heterosexual Male, 1 Asian Female of Unknown Sexuality). It's impossible to show accurate representation of Amputees when so few marginalized people are even included on television.

Unlike the previous category it's much easier to know whether nondisabled actors are engaging in disabled mimicry as Amputees or not. Like last year, the unfortunate truth is that most Amputees are played by non-Amputees. It's so prevalent that 42 characters, or 75% are actors who are engaging in disabled mimicry. Only 9 are known Amputee actors. That means 5 characters we just don't know if they are Amputees or not, most likely because their parts were so small, and the actor might not have even been credited correctly for the role.

This is worse than last year when only 53% of the characters were played by non-Amputees. The fact that this is getting worse not better following Hollywood's call for better inclusion makes it clear that studios don't believe that they should include disabled Amputee actors.

Blind, Low Vision

There are not nearly enough Blind characters on television. Last year there were only 13 Blind characters, and this year that number has doubled, to 27. A large part of this is due to the Apple TV show, *See*, which was highly promoted for being about an entire world full of Blind characters. Because nearly every character is Blind, the characters are written with much more depth than a lot of one-off Blind characters. Unfortunately, most of these characters are not played by Blind actors themselves, and when Blind actors are included, their roles are generally small or one-off roles.

Let's get real. We love Jason Momoa, but the sting of having him as the Lead Blind Character would have been less painful had one of the other Lead characters, such as the amazing Bisexual Queen character, Queen Kane (Sylvia Hoeks) been played by an actual Blind Actor. There is plenty of talent out there who could handle such a role. The creators of *See* should know since they cast seriously underutilized Blind actress, Marilee Talkington as Souter Bax, a remarkably interesting character who only appears in four episodes.

There's a general lack of understanding about Blindness, and that leads to insinuations about what Blind actors are capable of. We've talked with stunt coordinators who have worked with Blind martial artists and assured us that there are people capable of performing high intensity roles, but because of ableism, struggle to get cast in roles they could play. This lack of knowledge often comes out through the conception and writing of Blind & Low Vision characters.

The problem with casting non-Blind actors in Blind roles isn't just that it takes away roles from Blind actors who are already struggling to get auditions. These performances have real-world impact on the Blind & Low Vision community. When nondisabled actors play Blind characters, they often don't have the nuance to do so without harm. They also often don't understand whether their performances are actually harmful or not.

This is incredibly evident through the casting of Perry Mattfeld as the Lead character, Murphy Mason on CW's freshman show, *In the Dark*. Murphy could have been such a better character had Blind creators been involved in crafting her. Adding a nondisabled actor to an already problematic character is a recipe for disaster. From the beginning, it's clear that Mattfeld is engaging in disabled mimicry.

They give Murphy a stereotypical glazed over expression, which is blatant physical mimicry. They also make her hypersexual which would be great since a lot of disabled characters don't get to express their sexuality, although it feels very performative – much like she was made this way just to say, "Hey! Blind people can have sex! Wow!". Murphy also does the thing that Blind people have said frustrates them a lot about

portrayals – she touches her friend's face despite mentioning that that's not something Blind people do. She also has a friend who tells her she likes to have sex so much because it's the only time she can "not feel Blind" The show just gets worse from there.

This is Us made the right decision in casting Blind actor Blake Stadnik as adult Baby Jack. However, the storyline when he is baby Jack is why we caution people about anticipating that storylines will be great if disabled actors are cast as a character. The problem with Baby Jack is partly that we've seen the narrative with his father, Toby (Chris Sullivan), many many times before. It's the "mourning the loss of the child you wish you had" stereotype. Meanwhile, Kate (Chrissy Metz) is the stereotypical "special needs" mom. Emphasis on calling them special needs, because that is what Kate would do. Kate loves her son and means well. She has the ability to turn into a very fierce advocate for her son, but she makes the mistake many parents of disabled kids make by not knowing how to advocate. This is because the writers are following the pattern of shows like *Speechless*, where the parents are written through the perspective of a nondisabled lens, not a disabled one.

This is why Kate goes off to a conference, last-minute, with Baby Jack, leaving Toby behind to stew. She is able to go to this conference, which actually is something disabled families sometimes do, but she does so without a mention or thought to the fact that a lot of disabled families could not afford to do this, especially last minute. Even when getting equipment and things baby Jack needs, there are no fights with insurance, no long waiting periods. They are able to get him everything he needs right away. That's just not reality if you're not a millionaire. There's a privilege written in Kate and Toby's story that the majority of disabled families don't have. We don't believe the writers have the nuance to recognize this and address it in the proper way.

Not all performances of Blind/Low Vision characters are horrible representations of Blindness. While there are plenty of problems historically speaking and racially speaking about Aunt Jocasta's (Maria Doyle Kennedy) character in *Outlander*, as a Blind woman she's a fully realized human. She's allowed to have love and sex not only with her multiple husbands, but with her lover, Murtagh (Duncan Lacroix). She runs her own plantation and was just as prevalent in helping plant the seeds of white supremacy in the Colonial South as all the other nondisabled white women. There's a lot of reasons for this character to not exist, but her Blindness is not one of them. She could have easily been played by a Blind actress.

One of our favorite representations of Blindness/Low Vision is Dasha (Svetlana Efremova) from *Spinning Out*. Dasha is a Russian woman teaching figure skating in the United States who has Advanced glaucoma and is losing her vision. The best thing

about her is that she is a fully realized character who has a distinct life. She was a figure skater in Russia, who fell in love with a woman that married a man to hide her queerness. At some point she must contemplate having surgery that will not cure her Glaucoma but give her a little bit more time before she loses most of her vision. It's a story that tackles medical treatment and a way with a lot of nuance and is never portrayed as a cure or fix it all.

The 27 Blind/Low Vision characters appear on 12 shows airing across 6 networks and 4 streaming services. If you read last year's study, you won't be surprised to know that Cisgender Female characters make up the majority of Blind/Low Vision characters. In fact, there are 19 Cisgender Female characters. They include 16 White Women (10 Heterosexual, 4 Unknown Sexuality (1 Faer Fictional Race), 1 Bisexual, 1 Lesbian), 2 IPOC (2 Unknown Sexuality – 1 Indigenous, 1 Ambiguous/Unknown), and 1 Black Female with Unknown Sexuality. Cisgender Male characters account for the additional 8 characters – 5 White Male (2 Heterosexual, 3 Unknown Sexuality), 2 Black Male (1 Heterosexual, 1 Unknown Sexuality), and 1 IPOC (1 Heterosexual – Asian).

This Blind/Low Vision section continues to have a white problem, which is what we wrote last year. The majority, 20 characters or about 77% of the characters are White. Only 3 characters are Black, and 3 Characters are IPOC (1 Asian, 1 indigenous, 1 Ambiguous/Unknown). There are absolutely no Trans Blind characters at all. LGBTQIA representation is extremely limited with 1 Lesbian and 1 Bisexual character, both of whom are White Female characters. The function of whiteness and heterosexuality prevalent in white Blind characters ensures that these characters continue to be a part of the system that upholds white supremacy, as we see with Aunt Jocasta, without ever explaining this from a nonwhite perspective.

Most Blind characters are from the Fictional worlds, AlKenny & Kazua on the show, *See*. With so many Blind characters, the show should be willing to employ more Blind actors. There are 9 American, 1 Scottish, 1 Japanese, 1 Russian, and 1 British. Most characters are Adult (17). There are also 9 Elder, and 1 Teen. The majority of Blind/Low Vision characters are Supporting characters (13), followed by Bit (6), Lead (4), and Guest Star (4).

There are ZERO Black and Brown Lead characters in this section. There are only 4 Lead characters at all, and 3 of them are Cisgender White Female (2 Heterosexual, 1 Bisexual). The Supporting section is a little better with 5 Cisgender White Female (4 Heterosexual, 1 Lesbian), 3 Cisgender Black (1 Heterosexual Male, 1 Male of Unknown Sexuality, 1 Female of Unknown Sexuality), and 3 Cisgender IPOC (1 Heterosexual

Male – Asian (Japanese), 1 Heterosexual Female (Latine), 1 Female (Indigenous) of Unknown Sexuality).

Apple TV, obviously, wins the network with the most Blind/Low Vision characters. It has 13 characters. We worry that this section will be deflated when the show goes off the air. Speaking of *See*, the majority of the characters are played by actors engaging in disabled mimicry. Therefore It's no surprise that 21 characters are played by actors that are not Blind. Only 5 Blind/Low Vision characters are played by Blind/Low Vision actors. Only 1 is Unknown.

The networks need to do a lot of work to establish better and more authentic Blind/Low Vision characters and portrayals. It was hard to talk about characters that are not white in this section simply because a lot of them don't have great parts even when they are included. The exception is of course, *See*, which features some great roles that would have benefited casting Black and IPOC Blind actors.

Performers like Alfre Woodard, who plays Paris, the healer and confidant who has a huge role in helping Baba Voss (Momoa) and his family get to safety and Yadira Guevara-Prip (Bow Lion), who plays a Blind Warrior who can disguise herself amongst the other Blind people as The Shadow, could have been breakthrough roles for nonwhite Blind Actors. Woodard is a fantastic actress in her own right, but it's not fair that only nondisabled actors get to sink their teeth into the meatier roles available as Black and IPOC Blind characters, while Black and Brown Blind/Low Vision actors remain unable to even audition for most roles.

Body & Facial Differences, Scarring

Last year we had way more characters that were evil and were scarred as a result. This is a common trope we see in films and television, so it's nice to see some other forms of representation for those with Body & Facial Differences. That doesn't mean there are no evil scarred characters. Qin (Ismael Cruz Cordova) on *The Mandalorian* attempts to double cross Mando (Pedro Pascal) when Mando is trying to get him out of jail.

Batwoman's Mouse (Sam Littlefield) is kept locked away by his father due to the scarring on his face. His father ends up kidnapping a young girl and holding her prisoner for years just so she will be Mouse's friend. *NCIS: New Orleans'* Eddie Barrett (Eddie Cahill) is a murderous drug dealing cult leader with burns all over his body from a fire. Luckily, this portrayal doesn't follow the standard trope because Eddie is not evil because of his burns. He's just a narcissistic asshole.

Some characters are scarred and burned, but it is not the reason why they are evil. Gravedigger/Tyson Sykes (Wayne Brady) was experimented on and eventually turned into a super soldier. The experimentation and exploitation of Black soldiers is embedded in history. It's a lot more complicated than he is just an evil character when his life was systematically destroyed, and he's filled with trauma. Jeri Ryan's Gwendolyn Hayes on *MacGyver* is scarred when her plane is sabotaged during an assassination attempt, and she becomes the antagonist of the fourth season. Despite her nephew, Angus, not agreeing with her plans to reboot humanity, she sacrifices herself for him. Ultimately, it becomes clear that she very much loves Angus, and only wanted to topple civilization because she thought it was the right thing for humanity, even if it wasn't. But, like most scarred villains she ends up dead in the end.

A lot of the portrayals are characters that just happen to have scars, burns, and other Body & Facial Differences. One such character is Mini (Melany Ochoa) on *Mayans MC,* A child around the age of 10, she has been orphaned and is just trying to survive.

The Body & Facial Differences and Scarring category could have vast diversity, but the truth is other than scarring we don't see very much representation. There are many reasons why someone might have a disability relating to Body & Facial Differences. There are congenital disabilities that can cause various forms of Differences, but accidents and other incidents later in life can also contribute. Fires can cause scarring and other Bodily Differences, but we usually don't see that much representation unless shows feature firefighters.

Last year we only had 10 characters on 9 shows with Body & Facial Differences. This year that number has jumped exponentially to 87 characters on 56 shows. It seems like a lot of these portrayals involve slapping a scar on someone, which is an easy way to make a character disabled without having to make a concerted effort towards inclusion. The most represented Body & Facial Difference is Burns/Scars with 74 characters. Of those, there were 45 Scars, 17 Facial Scars, 11 Burns, and 1 NOS. Other representation includes, Damaged Eye (2), Skin Condition (2), Conjoined Twins (2 – at the hip), Cleidocranial Dysplasia (1), Hunchback (1), Scars + Earlobe Deformity (1), Body "Deformity" (1), Skull "Deformity" (1) Born without Fingers (1)

You won't be surprised that Cisgender White Male characters massively outnumber all other groups. In fact, there are 42 Cisgender White Male (32 Heterosexual, 7 Unknown Sexuality, 2 Gay, 1 Bisexual). Cisgender White Female characters make up the next highest total with 14 characters (8 Unknown Sexuality, 3 Heterosexual, 2 Lesbian, 1 Bisexual). Together, there are 55 White characters with Body & Facial Differences.

As always, Black and Brown disabled people remain underrepresented in the Body & Facial Differences category. There are 5 Black Cisgender Male characters (4 Heterosexual, 1 Unknown Sexuality), 3 Cisgender Black Female (3 Heterosexual), 13 Cisgender IPOC Male (8 Unknown Sexuality (4 Latine, 3 Asian, 1 Middle Eastern/Muslim), 3 Heterosexual (2 Latine, 1 Hawaiian), 1 Gay (Latine), 1 Ambiguous/Unknown), and 10 Cisgender IPOC Female (5 Heterosexual (4 Latina, 1 Asian), 4 Unknown Sexuality (2 Asians – South Asian/Pakistani Muslims, 1 Latine, 1 Middle Eastern), 1 Ambiguous/Unknown)

LGBTQIA representation is rather sparse in this category. There is 2 Cisgender White Gay Male, 2 Cisgender White Female Lesbian, 1 Cisgender White Bisexual Male, 1 Cisgender IPOC Gay Male (Latine), and 1 Cisgender White Bisexual Female. Out of the 7 characters that are LGBTQIA, 6 of them are White, and all of them are Cisgender.

Most characters with Body & Facial Differences are American (50). One of them is Indigenous Hawaiian. There is also a Mexican American, Irish American, and Chinese American. Other nationalities represented include British (8), Russian (6), Fictional (4), Mexican (3), Unknown (3), Scottish (2), Irish (2), Middle Eastern (2 – including 1 Muslim), Unspecified African (2), Pakistani (2 – including 1 Muslim), German (1), Australian (1), and Vietnamese (1).

Most characters are Adult, which seems to be typical of all sections. There were 67 Adult, 9 Elder, 7 Teen, and 5 Child. The leading network for Body & Facial Differences is CBS with 11 characters. HBO, CW, and Netflix are tied in second place with 9 characters each. Parts are split up into 34 Bit, 33 Supporting, 15 Lead, and 5 Guest Star.

As we look at how Lead and Supporting characters are distributed, it's disappointing to report that only 5 out of 15 Lead characters are not Cisgender White Heterosexual/Unknown Sexuality Male. The breakdown includes all Cisgender characters – 2 White Female characters (1 Lesbian, 1 Bisexual), 1 Black Heterosexual Male, 1 IPOC Heterosexual Female (Latine), and 1 IPOC Male of Unknown Sexuality (Asian). Supporting characters have a larger role with 18 out of 34 being diverse in some way. Again, all of them are Cisgender, and the characters are listed as 6 White Female (3 Unknown Sexuality, 2 Heterosexual, 1 Lesbian),3 IPOC (Latine) Males (2 Heterosexual, 1 Unknown Sexuality), 3 IPOC (Latine) Females (2 Heterosexual, 1 Unknown Sexuality), 3 Black Heterosexual Male, 2 Black Heterosexual Female, and 1 White Bisexual Male.

One area that has changed for the better is the fact that last year there were no actors that we know of who had Body & Facial Differences playing characters in any of the shows we watched for the study. This year, at least 7 of the characters have one of the disabilities that fit in this category. While it still stinks that 69 characters don't have a Body or Facial Difference, and we don't know about 12 of the actors, it's good to see some representation happening.

A few of the characters we watched this year are really great representation, because they just happen to be actors that already had Facial Differences. One of them is Dustin Henderson (Gaten Matarazzo), on *Stranger Things*. He has a genetic disability called Cleidocranial Dysplasia. Dustin gets to be like all the other kids. They don't ignore his disability. He explains what it is and occasionally gets picked on for it, which is typical for being a teenager with a disability.

Tommy Flanagan plays two different characters with facial scars on shows we watched for this study. One of them is *Mayans MC*, where he reprises his role from *Sons of Anarchy*, Filip "Chibs" Telford. He also plays Alec McCullough on *Wu Assassins*. Tommy was injured when he was attacked several years ago outside a club where he was a DJ, and they often incorporate his scars into his character without hiding them with makeup. This is a good way to incorporate disability representation, occasionally, simply because he just happens to be a character that's already disabled.

This category needs vastly more authentic representation. Those with Body & Facial Differences are largely stigmatized in our society and it's because tropes like 'scarred and burned people are evil because they are angry about being disabled' exist. A lot of people with this type of disability want to be seen as human in all their flaws. It seems like some studios are looking towards moving past this trope, but as long as there are still evil characters angry because they are disabled, there is work to be done to change this.

Cancer

Last year we defined Cancer as a chronic disability that includes [over 200 diseases, which involve uncontrollable cell growth that harms body tissues](#). Shows have been featuring characters with Cancer for at least the last few decades, but not all those portrayals are great. Cancer can affect everyone differently. For some, it will be terminal. For others, something that goes into remission. Some deal with lifelong complications because of their Cancer, while others go into remission with no remnants or lingering side effects.

This allows for a wide variety of portrayals of Cancer. The problem is that it can be hard to talk about Cancer, and as such it can also be hard to show authentic portrayals of Cancer. As more and more creators with experiences of Cancer themselves or with loved ones develop characters with Cancer in Hollywood, we will begin to see even more authenticity offered.

Our study last year also talked about *A Million Little Things*' Gary Mendez (James Roday Rodriguez), who is in remission for Breast Cancer. When Gary went to his first support group for Breast Cancer survivors, he was the only man. For men with Breast Cancer, that is likely the first time they saw themselves portrayed on television, in all its awkwardness and accuracy. Now, this season, Gary is integrated in the group. He's just another member, and because of this portrayal men having Breast Cancer is becoming more normalized.

Cobra Kai did something really interesting to honor Rob Garrison, who played Tommy, one of the original Cobra Kai's in *The Karate Kid* movies. Garrison was living with Terminal Brain Cancer, and the show brought Tommy back so Johnny and the rest of his high school friends could give him one last night of fun. Tommy ends up dying, and Garrison passed away shortly after the filming of the episode.

So often, Cancer portrayals focus on treatment, and the character's entire life revolves around the hospital as well as their Cancer. A lot of people who live with a Cancer diagnosis will tell you that life goes on during treatment. That's why it's nice to see a portrayal like Maggie (Marlyne Barrett) on *Chicago Med*. The show is not the greatest at disability representation in general, but Maggie's story with Breast Cancer has her meeting her future husband Ben (Malik Whitfield) at chemo. You get to see their relationship develop both through their Cancer treatments and their time together. The two and up going into remission and eventually getting married. It's a pretty good story, especially for a Black Female character with Cancer. So often, these kinds of stories tend to remain narratives for white characters.

Other stories this year explored how disparities in care and community feelings toward medicine can impact getting Cancer treatment. On *SWAT*, Daniel Harrelson, Sr. (Obba Babatundé) enters back into his son and namesake Daniel Harrelson, Jr.'s (Shemar Moore) life right as he starts to get sick with symptoms of Lung Cancer. The elder Harrelson is hesitant and puts off getting tested for Cancer. His storyline revolves around him getting his diagnosis and his children, who he was estranged from for years, trying to convince him to have treatment when he is, understandably, uncomfortable with the medical establishment.

We found a solid 100 characters with Cancer on 48 different shows, which is almost double the amount of characters we found last year. What's even more interesting is that representation is even between Male and Female at 50 apiece. This, of course means that there are no Trans characters with Cancer. Apparently, Trans people don't get Cancer, at least if you ask Hollywood. Characters appear on shows across 11 networks and 2 streaming services. The network with the most characters is ABC with 31 characters, followed by NBC (26) and CBS (13).

The most common form of Cancer represented, other than Cancer – NOS, is Lung Cancer (7).Other forms of Cancer that were represented include Brain Cancer (5), Breast Cancer (4 – 3 Female, 1 Male), In Remission (2), Multiple Cancers (2), Lung & Brain (2), Pancreatic (2), Brain Tumors (2), Throat (2), Leukemia (2), Heart Tumor (1), Lymphoma (1), Ovarian (1), Uterine Thyroid (1), Bone (1), Neuroblastoma (1), Eye (1), Glioblastoma (1), Liver (1), Prostate (1), Stomach (1), Liver & Lung (1), Brain & Spine Tumor (1), Squamous Cell Carcinoma (1), Mesothelioma (1), Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma (1).

In our previous study, the majority of characters with Cancer were Female. Adding 70 shows to our roster changed the dynamics to where while there are 50 Male and 50 Female characters, Cisgender White Male once again is the group that has the most characters. In fact, there are 37 Cisgender White Male (22 Heterosexual, 13 Unknown Sexuality, 2 Gay) characters with Cancer in this study. The 29 Cisgender Female (18 Heterosexual, 9 Unknown Sexuality, and 2 Lesbian) characters are the second highest number of characters. Together, there are 66 White characters with Cancer or 66% of all characters. Are we surprised, at this point, that white characters dominate the narrative?

Black Cisgender Male characters are less common than Cisgender Black Female characters with Cancer. The breakdown is 13 Cisgender Black Female (9 Heterosexual, 4 Unknown Sexuality) and 7 Cisgender Black Male (6 Heterosexual, 1 Unknown Sexuality). IPOC characters do not fare much better. IPOC Cisgender Male characters account for 6 characters (5 Heterosexual – 4 Latine, 1 Mixed (Black, Chinese, Indian, & White), 1 Unknown Sexuality – 1 Asian), and IPOC Cisgender Female makes up 8 characters (7 Heterosexual – 4 Latine, 3 Asian, 1 Unknown Sexuality – 1 Asian). Notice that there are absolutely no LGBTQIA Black or Brown characters in this entire category.

Unsurprisingly, 91 characters are American. One of them is an Irish American character. The few other nationalities represented are British (5), and Unknown Nationality (1). The breakdown for each is Adult (61), Elder (27), Teen (6), and Child (6).

Stories about young people with Cancer are often gut wrenching, but they also deserve representation. Young people, in general don't often get to be disabled, which is a disservice to the millions of young disabled people around the world who have never seen themselves represented on television.

Most Cancer stories are surrounding Bit characters. There are 59 Bit roles, 17 Supporting, 14 Guest Star, and 10 Lead characters.

It can be hard to know what actors have had Cancer, especially if they haven't talked about a Cancer diagnosis. As such the majority of characters are Unknown (57). We know that 41 actors represented here do not or have not had Cancer, and 2 actors have had Cancer. One of them is the previously mentioned Rob Garrison and the other is *Dead to Me*'s Christina Applegate, who has been open about her battle with Breast Cancer both on and off the show. There are so many people in Hollywood that have had Cancer who could help craft even better narratives, but the real struggle here with representation is allowing space for multiply marginalized characters and their stories.

Cancer is a prime example of a disability that literally happens to anyone from any background, race, gender, sexuality, age, etc. Poor and working-class people will have exposure to some different Cancers, and this can especially impact multiply marginalized communities like the Black, Indigenous, LGBTQIA, POC, and disabled communities. It's not uncommon for disabled people with other disabilities to also have Cancer, especially since a lot of disabled people are forced to live in poverty. So why are the most common representations of Cancer by the dominant group and not the marginalized ones?

Television loves to do this thing where you can only have one form of marginalization. You can be Black or Brown and have Cancer but you're not going to also be LGBTQIA or have other disabilities. You can be disabled but are less likely to be non-white or LGBTQIA. You can be LGBTQIA, but less likely to be non-white or disabled! Television needs to recognize that people are multifaceted, and our existences are often intersectional. This is Hollywood's call out, about this.

Chronic Health

For years, people with Chronic Disabilities have fought to be considered disabled, which allows them greater access to the care and treatment they need. There are so many Chronic Health based disabilities that it can be hard to explain who exactly fits within this community. Portrayals of Chronic Disability range from the absurd, often done for

comic relief, down to heart wrenching stories we might consider **inspiration porn**. Everything from allergies to Congenital heart conditions is considered a Chronic disability. Greater awareness of Chronic Disabilities as disabilities could lead to better medical options, treatment, and access to care, so television can make a significant impact in helping this community.

We can't mention Chronic Health representation without mentioning the amazing *Pose*. We are devastated that next year will be our last year to include this groundbreaking show in our study. *Pose* has a little bit of everything we've been trying to tell you needs to happen in Hollywood. You've got Black and Brown representation. You've got LGBTQIA representation, particularly Trans representation which is missing throughout this study. You've got the 90s gay scene, community, family, and care taken when writing these stories. The only thing missing is actual disabled people having the opportunity to perform on a show like this.

Pray Tell (Billy Porter) and Ricky Evangelista/Wintour (Dyllon Burnside) paint a raw, intimate portrayal of Black gay men living and loving during the height of the AIDS epidemic. The storyline for Candy (Angelica Ross) shows the very real danger of violence against Trans women faced in the 90s, something Trans women, particularly Black and Brown Trans women continue to face every single day. As someone who came up in the 90s queer community, the evocative stories woven into the show resonate deeply.

A common way shows incorporate Chronic Disabilities, often for comic relief or just to make the character a little bit more interesting is by giving them a random allergy. Rarely, you see anything happen that could happen to someone with allergies such as actual anaphylactic shock (when you see someone have an allergic reaction it's often done to make people laugh, but anaphylactic shock is no laughing matter). A series of shows have throwaway allergies in this study including *Katy Keene*'s Guy LaMontagne (Luke Cook) - Flowers, *Supergirl*'s Kelly Olson (Azie Tesfai) – Blueberries, *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*'s Officer Debbie Fogle (Vanessa Bayer) – Turkey, *Curb Your Enthusiasm*'s Cheryl David (Cheryl David) – Talcum Powder, and *Chicago Med*'s Nina (Molly Hernandez) – her husband's Semen.

One thing that is frustrating about portrayals of disabled characters is when characters are portrayed as having to hide their disability when it's dangerous for them to do their jobs. There's this idea that disabled people are incapable. It's truthful that there are things that disabled people might not be able to do, but a lot of narratives tend to focus on that without recognizing that there are a lot of things disabled people CAN do.

When *The Good Doctor* focused on Dr. Morgan Reznick (Fiona Gubelmann) having to quit being a surgeon because of Rheumatoid Arthritis, that was one thing, but when another doctor allowed her to operate on a patient anyway, just so she could experience surgery, the entire tone of the story changed. The recklessness of her doing surgery when she couldn't do so without shooting up her hands with medication is one of those stories just created to add a little drama to a show. Next story, please!

Chronic Disability is always one of the biggest categories number wise because there are so many different chronic disabilities. This year, there were 161 characters with a chronic disability on 67 shows airing across 12 networks and 7 streaming services. NBC leads the networks with 39 characters, while ABC came in second with 29. CBS and FOX tied for third with 23 characters.

Chronic Health runs the gamut of disabilities. The most common Chronic Disability represented is Heart Problems/Heart Disease (including 1 Hypertrophic Cardiomyopathy, 2 Congenital) with 37 characters. Other disabilities represented include: 16 Diabetes (1 Juvenile), 16 Allergies (6 Food, 4 NOS, 2 Cats, 1 Wasps, 1 Semen, 1 Talcum Powder, 1 Flowers), 10 Asthma, 10 Kidney Disorder, 7 Transplant (5 Heart, 1 Kidney, 1 Liver), 9 Elder Stuff, 8 Respiratory (1 SPB, 1 Possible Emphysema), 6 HIV/AIDS (4 AIDS, 2 HIV), 4 Liver Disease/Liver Failure, 4 Chronic Pain, 4 Arthritis (2 Rheumatoid, 1 Still's Disease), 3 Crohn's, 2 Renal Failure, 2 Liver Disorder (2 Porphyria), 2 Blood Disorder, 2 Autoimmune Disease, 1 Throat Dysphasia, 1 Hemochromatosis, 1 Wolf Parkinson White Syndrome, 1 Acute Hepatitis, 1 Insomnia, 1 Thyroid Problems, 1 Adrenal Gland Issue, 1 Hyperlipidemia, 1 Immunodeficiency (no immune system), 1 Skin Condition, 1 TMJ, 1 Ehler's Danlos Syndrome, 1 Esophageal Disease, 1 Epilepsy, 1 Chronic Health, 1 Spinal Stenosis, 1 Sickle Cell Anemia, 1 Ulcers, 1 Sleep Apnea.

Surprise surprise. Cisgender White Heterosexual Male characters are the most represented in Chronic Health. There are 43 Cisgender White Heterosexual Male characters in this category including 1 Jewish. Counting 43 Heterosexual, there are 67 Cisgender White Male total including 22 Unknown Sexuality (1 character was played by child Trans Female actor, but the character was Cisgender Male), and 2 Gay. Cisgender Female didn't quite fare as well with 40 characters including 23 Heterosexual, 15 Unknown Sexuality, and 2 Bisexual. It's really depressing when you look at how many white characters there are versus Black and Brown characters. Every section it's the same story.

For Chronic, the figures add up to 13 Cisgender Black Male including 5 Heterosexual, 5 Unknown Sexuality, and 3 Gay. Cisgender Black Female does a little better, with 21

characters, but that's half the amount of White Female characters! The breakdown for Cisgender Black Female is 11 Heterosexual, 9 Unknown, and 1 Lesbian. There is also 1 Trans Black Heterosexual Female. IPOC representation is similar with 10 Cisgender IPOC Male characters – 5 Unknown Sexuality (3 Asian, 1 Biracial Asian, 1 Hawaiian), 4 Heterosexual (2 Latine, 1 Asian), 1 Gay (1 Biracial Asian) and 9 Cisgender IPOC Female characters – 5 Unknown Sexuality (3 Asian, 1 Latine, 1 Ambiguous/Unknown).

Do we even need to comment on the LGBTQIA representation at this point? Without *Pose*, will there be any Trans representation? There barely is anyway. One show cannot carry a community. There is 1 Trans Black Heterosexual Female and 3 Black Cisgender Gay Males thanks to this show. IPOC Male accounts for just 1 Cisgender Biracial Asian Gay Male, but this was the last year for *How to get Away with Murder* so Oliver will be gone next year. Black Queer Female representation includes 1 Cisgender Black Lesbian Female. Not even white people get LGBTQIA representation because there is only 2 Cisgender White Gay Male and 2 Cisgender White Bisexual Female. That's 10 characters total out of 161. That's about 6% of the characters in this category.

Chronic Health is represented through 145 American, 11 British, 2 Australian, 1 African Unspecified, 1 German, and 1 Unknown. This is the first category where every age group is represented. There are 85 Adult, 40 Elder, 20 Child, 12 Teen, and 4 Baby. We were hoping there would be more Lead and Supporting characters than last year, but the Chronic Health category shows just how little has changed since there is 105 Bit, 26 Supporting, 16 Lead, and 14 Guest Star.

It's really frustrating that there are only 16 Lead Characters. Of these, 9 are not Cisgender White Heterosexual or Unknown Sexuality Male. This includes 2 Cisgender White Female (1 Heterosexual, 1 Bisexual). There are 3 Cisgender Black Heterosexual Female and 2 Cisgender Black Gay Male Lead characters. IPOC rep includes 1 Cisgender Heterosexual Female and 1 Cisgender Biracial Asian Gay Male.

The 26 Supporting roles include 16 marginalized characters. There are 8 Black Supporting characters, including 2 Cisgender Black Heterosexual Male, 2 Cisgender Male with Unknown Sexuality, 1 Cisgender Heterosexual Female, 1 Cisgender Female of Unknown Sexuality, 1 Cisgender Black Lesbian Female, and 1 Trans Black Heterosexual Female. There are 6 White characters, including 4 Cisgender White Heterosexual Female, 2 White Unknown Female, and 1 Gay Male. Finally, there is just one IPOC character – 1 Cisgender Biracial Asian Male of Unknown Sexuality.

There is nobody with a verifiable disability in this category. Most of the actors are Unknown. A large part of that is there are so many Bit characters, that a lot of these

characters are one-off throwaways. The Unknowns outweigh the Nos by double. There are 109 Unknown, and 52 No. Individuals with Chronic Disability must be thrilled to know that there is little actual representation by actors known to have Chronic Disability. Disabled actors deserve to audition just like any other actor, and not just for **disabled roles**.

Coma

We created the Coma category because we had a few characters we needed to put somewhere that were in Comas. Shows randomly like to place people in comas, and this year we have 5 characters on 5 different shows. Since there are only a few characters we can mention the shows include *The Blacklist*, *Charmed*, *The InBetween*, *New Amsterdam*, and *Station 19*. You would think with five characters it would be hard to be diverse and in some ways that's true, but representation is pretty split, surprisingly enough.

In at least one case, Rosemary Shea (Nathalie Babis (adult) and Portia Colpitts (young)), on *Charmed*, the character is such a small part, but is important to the overall season storyline. The car accident that left her comatose is a major catalyst for her brother, one of the main antagonists of this season, and the accident has a major impact on him and his life.

5 characters in a coma are featured across 3 Networks. There was nobody in a coma on a streaming service that we saw this year. There are 3 Cisgender Heterosexual Male – 2 White, 1 Black. There are 2 Cisgender Female characters – 1 White Female of Unknown Sexuality, 1 Black Heterosexual Female. That means that there are 2 Black characters and 3 White characters. The winning network with the most characters is NBC with 3 characters. CW and ABC tied for second place with 1 character each. None of the characters were LGBTQIA, which we expected.

Almost all the characters are American (4). There is 1 Russian. There are surprisingly diverse age ranges in this category with 3 Adult, 1 Teen, 1 Child, and 1 Elder. There is an extra age range listed because one character is played by two actresses at different ages. Most characters are Bit characters, and that's because a coma is an easy way to bring drama for a short time to a show. It's often a throwaway plot. The other two roles are 1 Supporting and 1 Guest Star. There are no Leads, and the only Supporting character is a Cisgender White Male.

All 5 characters are not really in comas. I think this is the one section we don't want actual disabled people to be represented. It would be a huge violation of someone's privacy to film them while they were in a coma for real. People in comas cannot consent, so we advocate for not using actual people in comas for narrative productions. That's just common sense.

Deaf and Hard of Hearing (HOH)

We've already briefly mentioned the Deaf run show, *This Close*, which features representation of disability and Deafness at multiple intersections including race, gender, sexuality, and multiple disability. This show alone is responsible for about 1/3 of the Deaf representation we found in this study. Without the show, we believe that Deaf representation will be significantly lowered on television. That being said, a single show should not carry an entire disability community. This needs to be just the first of many shows run by Deaf showrunners. Both are also Jewish, which is not something really explored that much on television either.

This Close revolves around the relationship of Deaf friends who are living and working in LA, Kate (Shoshannah Stern) and Michael (Joshua Feldman). This season, we learn a lot more about Kate's life before she came to LA. We get to see a lot of the audism she experienced in her small hometown, and she engages with other young Deaf people, such as Emmaline (Millicent Simmonds), a Deaf teenager with a cochlear implant who is secretly learning sign language behind her mother's back, because her mother doesn't want her to give into being Deaf. There are also some scenes of a Deaf school that discuss the audism a lot of these kids experience in their own families.

One thing we need to see, which you won't be surprised by, is we need more Black and Brown Deaf representation on television. We are lucky enough to have great representation on *The Walking Dead* thanks to Deaf/HOH actresses Lauren Ridloff (Connie) and Angel Theory (Kelly), who play sisters. Connie is Deaf, and Kelly is losing her hearing, so they rely on each other to make it through the zombie apocalypse. Connie's guidance in teaching her sister how to survive as a HOH person is fantastic and is a good template for how to include more Black Deaf characters, especially in fantasy/sci-fi shows.

A very frustrating aspect of this study is present in this category and that's the throwaway Deaf character. Shows love to pretend they are "woke" so they throw in a Deaf or other marginalized character and make that particular performance all about sending a message of being "inclusive." This is exactly what happens on *Zoey's*

Extraordinary Playlist. Zoey's father Mitch is disabled, and his caregiver, Howie, has a Deaf daughter, Abigail (Sandra Mae Frank). Frank's performance is great, but the character is a dud. She only exists as a catalyst for Howie, because he is struggling with the fact that his daughter is independent.

When Abigail tells Howie she's going to Africa, he has a fit, and tries to coddle her. This leads to Abigail singing "Fight Song" to declare her independence and her frustration with her father imposing limitations on her. They have to pick an inspirational song for the disabled person, because disabled people living as themselves is, so inspirational!

It's great that Abigail wants to be independent, but her character only exists so that Zoey can "help" Howie accept his daughter. It's not an altogether bad message, allowing your disabled children to have independence and strive for whatever they choose, but execution is inspiration porn. There are also all kinds of "hearing" puns throughout the episode including the name of it which is, "Zoey's Extraordinary Silence."

Deaf representation for the 31 Deaf characters across 21 shows on 9 networks and 3 streaming services is hit or miss. It's definitely better when Deaf actors get to play themselves, and the only thing that was good about Frank appearing on *Zoey's Extraordinary Playlist*. It would've been even worse with someone who was not Deaf. The network with the most Deaf representation is Sundance with 9 characters, and ABC comes in second with 4. There are also a few Deaf characters in the multiply disabled category, and we talked about Deaf representation in the Alcoholism/Addiction section as well.

The majority of characters are Deaf (26), while there are 5 characters who are HOH (Hard of Hearing). Representation is split almost evenly between Male and Female. Cisgender White Male accounts for 11 characters, including 5 Unknown Sexuality, 4 Heterosexual (1 Jewish), and 2 Gay. Cisgender White Female make up 12 characters including 9 Unknown Sexuality and 3 Heterosexual (1 Jewish).

There are 3 Cisgender Black Male characters – 2 Heterosexual, 1 Unknown Sexuality. There are 2 Cisgender Black Female – 1 Heterosexual, 1 Lesbian Without *The Walking Dead* there would be no Black Deaf Female representation. The only other non-white characters are 3 Cisgender IPOC Male (1 Middle Eastern, 1 Asian, 1 Latine) characters. There are no IPOC Female characters at all. LGBTQIA representation is also terrible with only 3 characters – Kelly on *The Walking Dead* is the only Lesbian, and there are two Gay Male characters, 1 on *This Close*, and 1 on *Special*, which also has a disabled showrunner.

The majority of Deaf characters are American (24). There are also 2 British and 1 each of the following – Canadian, German, Syrian, Australian, and Scottish (Maybe?!) Age representation is split between 19 Adult, 7 Child, 3 Teen, and 2 Elder. As for the type of characters, Bit wins again with 18 characters, followed by 6 Supporting, 5 Guest Star, & 2 Lead.

Both Lead characters are Cisgender White characters. The first is a White Cisgender Gay Male, and the second is a Cisgender White Heterosexual Female who is Jewish. The Supporting category is the complete opposite with no White characters. There are 4 Black characters including 1 Cisgender Black Heterosexual Male, 1 Cisgender Black Heterosexual Female, 1 Cisgender Black Lesbian Female, and 1 Cisgender Black Male of Unknown Sexuality. There is also 1 Supporting character that is IPOC, 1 Cisgender Male (Middle Eastern) of Unknown Sexuality.

Thanks to having so many Deaf people involved in television, 24 of the characters are Deaf. Wow! It's like magic. When actually Deaf creators cast the roles, we are going to see actual Deaf people in them. What a novel concept! If you're looking for a category to follow, it's this one, and you need to do so before *This Close* goes off the air.

Down Syndrome and Intellectual Disability

The way those with Intellectual Disabilities have been treated throughout eons can only be described as disgusting. They are treated like the lowest of the low even within the disabled community, and that's reflected in how often they are represented. People don't care about those with Down Syndrome other Intellectual Disability. That's why it's sad to see how little characters with Intellectual Disabilities are represented.

If ever there was a community that needed to be represented it's this one. The lack of knowledge about Intellectual Disability (ID) is so rampant that those with ID are more likely to experience violence, mistreatment, misunderstanding, and have a lack of access to everything a lot of us take for granted – housing on our own, employment, and independence from our family. A lot of times, individuals with ID are infantilized, and given little freedom. Having better representation could change the narrative for individuals living with ID, for the better.

Last year, we found 6 characters with ID, all with Down Syndrome. We watched 70 more shows this year than last year, and we still only found 6 characters with ID. This accounts for 0.5% of 1,198 characters. The majority still have Down Syndrome (5), but there is also 1 character with a non-specified Intellectual Disability. The characters are

featured on 6 shows, so one show per character, because heaven forbid people with Down Syndrome interact with one another! The shows are spread across 3 networks and 1 streaming service. NBC and PBS are tied for first place with 2 characters apiece, and ABC and Britbox are tied in second with 1 character.

The majority of the characters are Cisgender White Male. There 4 of them, and they are split evenly between Cisgender Heterosexual Male (2) and Cisgender Male with Unknown Sexuality (2). The other two characters are Cisgender Female, and there is 1 Cisgender White Heterosexual Female and 1 Cisgender Black Heterosexual Female. It's interesting to note that the majority of characters are Heterosexual since characters with ID are often not allowed to express their sexuality. This may be why there are no LGBTQIA characters, at all.

We could go on and on about there being only 1 Black/Brown character, and how when there is little diversely non-white characters always get sacrificed for inclusion of White characters, and that's 100% true. But this section is also working with literally 1 other Female character. This is barely called or considered representation at all!

Most of the characters are American (3), but there are British (2) and Austrian (1) characters as well. There are no Lead characters, 3 Bit, 2 Supporting, and 1 Guest Star. There are no Lead or Supporting characters with ID who are not in the category Cisgender White Male. That means no Female characters, no Black or Brown characters, and no LGBTQIA characters. This was the same thing that happened last year.

The one good thing about this category is that, typically, actors with Down Syndrome are cast to play characters with Down Syndrome. This didn't used to be the case, but now it is more common so the 5 characters with Down Syndrome are all played by actors with Down Syndrome. Unfortunately, the one character that is labeled Intellectually Disabled is played by a nondisabled actor. It's Viktor Krull (Thomas Mraz) on *Vienna Blood*. This character offers horrible representation.

It's a period piece, and Viktor is accused of murdering a girl that he becomes obsessed with after she is nice to him. His mother insists he can't be guilty because he is "different" and "slow", but everything points towards him. He ends up getting murdered by other criminals the police let into his cell, and he dies a painful and horrific death.

Some of the characters with Down Syndrome deal with relevant issues, such as *Chicago Med*'s Chante (Ghaliyah "Gigi" Cunningham"), a character who is the Guest Star of the week. Her story revolves around Chante getting in a bus accident and finding

out she's pregnant at the hospital. She tells the doctor that she doesn't want the baby and she wants to have an abortion. Her guardian insists that she wants to keep the baby, going against Chante's wishes, but Chante can decide for herself. The plot explores how she struggles with not wanting to disappoint her guardian, but not wanting to have the baby, herself.

A lot of shows include characters with ID as one-off characters. They are the story of the week or Bit characters that "inspire" the protagonists or add a little comic relief to the story. Seldom do actors with Down Syndrome get to be a part of their own story. This is one area where *American Horror Story* has gotten representation right, in the past. Unfortunately, this season didn't include *AHS* alumnus, Jamie Brewer, who has played many great roles showing the potential for ID characters. We need more of that and less characters with stories like Viktor Krull.

Characters with Down Syndrome and other Intellectual Disabilities could greatly benefit the community they represent. Representation greatly affects how disabled people are treated, and not seeing characters with ID on television is part of why people with ID are treated so poorly. Studios are urged to start casting actors with Down Syndrome but not just for roles that revolve around their disability. People with ID can be fun. They can be dramatic. They can do anything anyone else can do, depending on the person. So, giving them such stringent limitations as to not even include them on television is a great travesty and injustice.

Learning

Last year, Learning Disability was our smallest category with just 3 characters. This year the number has increased to 10, and Down Syndrome is now the smallest category. Learning is not even the next smallest, but it is still too underrepresented and out of 1, 198 characters only 10 (0.8%) of them have one of the many learning disabilities affecting people throughout the country.

As long as Kenny Johnson (Dominique Luca) is on *SWAT* there will always be at least one episode that features a storyline about dyslexia. The actor has been very candid with his struggle with dyslexia, which his daughter, Angelica Scarlet Johnson (Kelly), also has. Every year, Johnson invites his daughter onto the show, where he mentors her as an adult SWAT member with dyslexia, helping her through her own struggles. They have incorporated this story into every season, and we get to watch Kelly grow as a dyslexic character.

The Learning Disability representation for this study has mostly been not bad. *The Ponysitters Club's* Skye (Morgan Neundorf) is also dyslexic, and there are multiple episodes that deal with her struggles in school. Skye must explain to her classmates how she has to learn things, and she has to figure out how to navigate working in a group, which isn't always easy when you have a different learning style. Showing the character navigating through the school system is an important form of representation.

There are 10 Learning Disabled characters on 10 shows. The most common disability represented is Dyslexia (5), followed by NOS (4) and Dyspraxia (1). Most people represented with Learning Disabilities are Cisgender White Male, and Male characters, in general, outperform Female characters 7 to 3. The Cisgender White Male accounts for 5 characters – 3 with Unknown Sexuality, probably because there are a lot of children in this category, and 2 Heterosexual. There is 1 Cisgender Black Male with Unknown Sexuality and 1 Cisgender IPOC Male (Latine) with Unknown Sexuality. The only Female representation is 3 Cisgender White Female with Unknown Sexuality.

The network with the most characters is Netflix with 2, and all the other networks tie with 1 character including BBC America, CBS, FOX, Britbox, NBC, Starz, Acorn, and Disney. Part of the reason why the characters are so spread out is because there is this ongoing idea that disabled people don't often interact with one another. This is a huge mistake, as a lot of disabled people depend on each other to create community, particularly Black and Brown disabled people. The potential for more stories about this is limitless.

Americans always seem to overwhelm all other nationalities, and this category is not different. There are 6 American, 3 British and 1 Irish. Adult and Child are split evenly with 4 characters apiece, and there are 2 Teen. The highest number of characters when it comes to role type is Supporting with 4. There are 3 Lead and 3 Bit characters. The 3 Lead characters with Learning Disability include 1 Cisgender White Female of Unknown Sexuality, 1 Cisgender Black Male of Unknown Sexuality, and 1 IPOC (Latine) Male with Unknown Sexuality. Only 1 out of the 4 Supporting characters is not a Cisgender White Male. The 1 Supporting character is a Cisgender White Female of Unknown Sexuality.

This study keeps repeating itself over and over. That's because every category has the same major problems. Every category lacks LGBTQIA disabled representation. Every category lacks Black and IPOC disabled representation. This is a known problem, and it's on the studios to fix it. It's something that can be done by integrating disability into stories about marginalized people. Every community has disabled people, but there is not enough representation showing this.

Only one of the characters that we know of, 1 is someone with a Learning Disability. We could not count Kenny Johnson for this category because this year he is multiply disabled! His entire story revolves around how he has a severe injury that has a sustainable impact on his life. While he is able to eventually pass the test to get back to working SWAT, he still has health problems associated with the injury. This means that there are 6 Unknown and 3 No.

One of the few characters from last year that we wrote about is a Cisgender Black Male. It's *Doctor Who*'s Ryan Sinclair (Tosin Cole). He happens to have dyspraxia and once again it's only mentioned briefly. I guess that is what happens when you are busy saving the world with the Doctor. Also, it doesn't help that it's not clear whether Cole actually has dyspraxia himself. Regardless, it could provide much greater representation than it does. This is what we call a throwaway disability role.

The other non-white character is the Cisgender Latine Male Lead character on *911: Lonestar,* Mateo Chavez (Brett Rice). Mateo passed the physical part of the firefighter test multiple times, but he cannot seem to pass the written test. The fire chief has him tested and it is discovered that he has severe dyslexia. That allows him to get accommodations through the ADA so he can take the test orally. This is presented incredibly positively, and with the help of his station, he is able to study until he knows all the information. All the other firefighters record the material from the book so he can listen to it, since it's easier for him to learn that way. There is also pressure on him to pass the test because he is a DREAMer, who will get deported if he doesn't pass.

This is a category that would be easy to integrate with more characters, but studios have to be willing to take the chance and make characters that have Learning Disabilities. Involving disabled people in the creative process is key to creating more and better disabled characters. In any category, not just this one.

Little People

Little People (LP) deserve better representation. That can be said about every category here, but the LP community has a proven record in Hollywood. LP actors have been a part of film and television since the beginning. Yet, in 2021 there are still so few LP characters you can count them on two hands.

Last year we had 10 LP characters on 180 shows, and this year we have 8 characters (0.7%) on 250 shows. That's ridiculous. The problem is that this was the last year that Tyrion Lannister (Peter Dinklage) will be on *Game of Thrones*. So, we are losing

another LP character for the next study. Who knows at this point if he's going to be replaced by another character? After next year's study we will also be losing Matilda "Mattie" Webber (Meredith Eaton) from *MacGyver*, unless the fans manage to revive it and save it for another year. *Harlots* is also over, so Francesca Mills won't be back next year as Cherry Dorrington. That's another character that's going to be lost.

That's the problem though. The LP community keeps losing characters and not replacing them. We watched 70 additional shows this year and got less characters. We shouldn't be seeing less characters. We should be seeing more characters, and LP characters are easy to integrate into nearly any setting. There just must be creators who have the imagination to include them.

Last year, Mattie Webber won the award of Dominick's favorite character/performance of the entire study. This year, her story is not quite as meaty. We could use years more of her character to explore who she is even further. Audiences have not had nearly enough time with Mattie, who is the head of the Phoenix Foundation. This year she must share her leadership duties, much to her chagrin. Still, at the end of the day, she's the head of an international spy organization, the kind of character we want to see more disabled actors playing.

Out of all the 2 Lead characters, 1 is a Cisgender White Heterosexual Female. That character is Mattie Webber. While we love her, it would be nice to have some non-white LP Lead characters, particularly LP Female characters and LP Trans characters. Supporting is not much better with 2 Cisgender White Female characters including 1 Heterosexual, and 1 Unknown Sexuality.

The eight different LP characters are on 8 different shows, which are on 4 networks and 1 streaming service. The leading network is NBC with 3 characters, followed by CBS with 2, and the rest of the networks are tied with 1 (ABC, HBO, and Hulu). The characters are split evenly between Cisgender Male and Cisgender Female with 4 characters apiece. All of them are White. There is literally no Black, Brown, or LGBTQIA LP representation on any of the 250 shows we watched for this year's study.

The breakdown by gender and sexuality is 3 Cisgender White Heterosexual Male, 3 Cisgender White Heterosexual Female, 1 Cisgender White Male with Unknown Sexuality, and 1 Cisgender White Female with Unknown Sexuality. There's no other way to say this but Hollywood has universally failed the LP community. Not sure if the studios think audiences should be appreciative that they let the LP characters mostly be Heterosexual, because, you know, at least they have a sexuality, which is not always

the case for disabled characters, but we've seen enough Heterosexual characters for a lifetime. It's a hollow victory.

The exclusion of absolutely no nonwhite LP characters is a travesty. With an extraordinarily strong reality that the LP community will continue to lose characters over the next few years, the devastating impact of dwindling representation is on their doorstep. This is not just a callout but a demand that studios start auditioning LP actors tomorrow. Bring them in for any character they can logically play. Stop sidelining them to fantasy, sci-fi, and the occasional Bit part in a comedy or drama. As studios you are not even giving them that, right now.

Getting back to the breakdown, 6 characters are American 1 British, and 1 from a Fictional World (Westeros). There are no young LP characters. Apparently, according to Hollywood, LPs cannot be Child, Baby, or Teen. The majority are Adult (6) and there are 2 Elder. Bit and Supporting characters are tied at 3 characters, and there are 2 Lead characters.

The only good thing about this category is the fact that it is the only category that is 100% free of disabled mimicry. All 8 characters are played by LP actors. This is how it should be for nearly every category (excluding Coma – please do not encourage filming of people in comas). This is what studios should aspire to, especially for disabilities that are apparent by looking at the character. While people with less visible disabilities should still have accurate representation by individuals with said disabilities, it's a bit harder to know who is and isn't disabled, especially when actors are often afraid to disclose whether they have a disability for incredibly valid reasons.

One thing noticed from last year was that there are impersonators in every study. Last year it was Kiss, and this year it's Danny DeVito. These are definitely throwaway roles. In this case, the impersonator was on *Fresh Off the Boat* and is played by actor Stewart Gordon. There is also a Tarot Reader (Sarah Folkins) on *Manifest*, because why not throw in some cultural appropriation?

Overall, there were more good LP characters than bad. On *New Amsterdam*, Mark Walsh (Matthew Jeffers) is an ER doctor, and you get to see him occasionally performing duties as any other doctor would. This is a really great way to incorporate LP and other disabled characters into formulaic shows such as medical and legal dramas. Of course, there is also Hetty (Lauren Coover) on *NCIS: Los Angeles.* Just like Mattie, Hetty is a badass in charge. As the head of the Los Angeles office of NCIS, it's also implied that she's worked with the CIA all over the world. Hetty has been great throughout the series, although it would be nice to see more of her character.

At the end of the day, Hollywood is responsible for how problematic this category is. The LP community has been heavily involved in Hollywood for so long that they shouldn't be having these problems. They should be fully integrated playing whatever characters they can, without being pigeonholed by certain role types or stereotyping. The hope of this study is that next year we will have many more LP characters to report. We will continue to advocate for changes for LP characters, and the many other disabled characters lacking representation on television.

Multiple Disabilities

There are 180 characters (15%) with Multiple Disabilities on 81 shows. Shows air on 14 networks and 7 streaming services. The network with the most characters is ABC (30), with NBC (27), and CBS (25) completing the top three networks. Netflix has the most characters of the streaming services with 15 characters.

There are innumerable combinations of disability present, and we are going to attempt to list all of them. The most common is Addiction & Psychosocial disability, with 19 characters, but we know from the real world that people can have any combination of disability together. We feel it is of utmost importance that Hollywood continue to show comorbid disability through characters that are multiply disabled.

This is how the Addiction/Psychosocial disability breakdown works out:

Addiction/MH: 19 (Addiction/PTSD: 4 (Pill Addiction -1), Addiction/Psychosocial: 4, Addiction/Alcoholism/PTSD: 3, Addiction/Alcoholism/Deaf: 2, Addiction/Trauma: 2, Addiction/BiPolar: 2, Alcoholism/Addiction/ADD: 1, Addiction/PTSD/Panic Attacks: 1)

Here is the breakdown of all other multiple disabilities represented:

Chronic/Psychosocial: 16 (Heart Problems/PTSD: 2, Anxiety/Autism/Crohn's: 1, Anxiety/OCD/Heart Problems: 1, Depression/Lymphedema: 1, Ulcers/Anxiety: 1, Anxiety/Panic Attacks/Sleep Apnea: 1, Allergies/Mental Health (Panic Disorder): 1, Anxiety/Panic Attacks/Asthma: 1, Allergies/NOS: 1, Allergies/OCD: 1, PTSD/Lupus: 1, Asthma/ADHD: 1, PCOS/Binge Eating Disorder: 1, PTSD/Chronic Pain: 1, Chronic Pain/Anxiety: 1)
Multiple Chronic: 14 (Heart Problems/Sleep Apnea: 1, Cataracts & Tinnitus + more: 1, Multiple Heart Conditions: 1, Elder Stuff/STDs/Arthritis: 1, Multiple Elder Conditions: 1, Chronic Pain/Sleep Apnea: 1, Unformed Trachea, Chronic Health: 1, Heart

Problems/Kidney Failure: 1, Cystic Fibrosis/Organ Failure: 1, Emphysema/Heart Problems: 1, Narcolepsy/Sleep Apnea/High Blood Pressure/Kidney Damage: 1, Heart Problems/Lyme Disease: 1, Celiac Disease/Osteoporosis: 1, Autoimmune Disease/Chronic Pain: 1)

Multiple Psychosocial: 11 (PTSD/Depression: 2, Agoraphobia/Panic Attacks: 1, Anxiety/Depression: 1, Panic Attacks/Depression: 1, Panic Attacks/Anxiety: 1, PTSD/Anxiety Disorders (Multiple): 1, PTSD/Anxiety: 1, Trauma/Depression: 1, Narcissistic Personality Disorder/Binge Eating Disorder: 1, Delusions: 1)

Psychosocial/Body Differences: 10 (PTSD/Scars: 6, Trauma/Frostbite: 1, PTSD/Burns: 1, PTSD/Cybernetic Implants: 1, Cutting (NOS)/Scars: 1)

Cancer/Chronic: 8, (Cancer/Asthma: 1, Cancer/Arthritis: 1, Cancer/Heart Problems: 3 (Lymphoma -1, CHF-1/Breast Cancer: 1), Brain Tumor/Epilepsy: 1, Lymphoma/Allergies: 1, Breast Cancer/Heart Problems: 1)

Psychosocial/Amputee: 7 (Depression/Amputee: 1, PTSD/Depression/Amputee: 1, PTSD/Amputee: 3, Penis Amputee: 1, PTSD/Genital Mutilation: 1)

Chronic/Physical: 7 (Physical/Elder Stuff: 1, Physical/Sleep Apnea: 1, Physical/Arthritis: 1, CP/Allergies: 1, Lung Problems: 1, Asthma: 1, SciFi Disability: 1)

Alcoholism/Psychosocial: 6 (Trauma: 2, Bipolar: 1, Depression/PTSD: 1)

Chronic/Neurological: 6 (Renal Failure/Alzheimer's: 1, Heart Condition/Dementia: 1, Chronic Pain/TBI: 1, Heart Problems/Stroke 1,Dementia: 1, NOS: 1)

Addiction/Chronic: 6 (Addiction/Kidney Disease: 1, Alcoholism/Kidney Failure/Kidney Transplant/Addiction: 1, Addiction/Heart Problems: 1, Addiction/Diabetes: 1, Addiction/Renal Failure/Heart Problems/Hepatitis: 1, Gambling Addiction/Knee Pain: 1)

Blind/B&F Differences: 5 (Blind/Scarring: 4, Eye Damage/Scars: 1)

Alcoholism/Chronic: 4 (Alcoholism/Heart Problems: 2, Alcoholism/Sleep Apnea: 1, Hip Replacement: 1)

Neurological/Physical: 4 (Dementia/Physical: 3, Stroke/Physical NOS: 1)

Multiple Neurological: 4 (Brain Damage/Stroke: 1, Dementia/Stroke 1, Brain Embolism/Stroke: 1, Heart Problems/Liver Damage: 1)

Cancer/Neurological: 4 (Cancer/Dementia: 2, Cancer/Stroke: 1, Cancer/TBI: 1)

Addiction/Cancer: 4 (Brain Cancer – 3)

Alcoholism/Cancer: 3

Chronic/Learning: 3 (Scoliosis/Learning Differences: 1, AIDS/Dyslexia: 1, Chronic Pain/Dyslexia: 1)

Psychosocial/Physical: 3 (Agoraphobia/Physical: 1, PTSD/Physical: 1 (Cane User - 1), Crutch User/PTSD: 1)

Psychosocial/Neurological: 3 (Schizophrenia/Alzheimer's: 1, PTSD/TBI: 1, AVM (arteriovenous malformation), Temporal Lobe Epilepsy, "Multiple Personality Disorder" DID: 1)

Physical/B&F Differences: 2 (Physical/Scars: 1, CP/Scars: 1)

Learning/Psychosocial: 2 (Bipolar: 1)
Addiction/B&F Differences: 2 (Addiction/Scars: 2 (1 Opioid))
Chronic/Body Differences: 2 (Scarring)

1 each of the following Disabilities:
Deaf & HOH/Physical (HOH/Physical), Amputee/Psychosocial/Neurological (Amputee/PTSD/TBI), Amputee/Body B&F Differences), Cancer/Amputee (Eye), Cancer/Blind, Cancer/Physical, Addiction/Allergies (NOS), Addiction/Amputee (Leg Amputee), Addiction/Psychosocial/Amputee (Psychosocial/Addiction/Amputee (Pill Addiction)), Albinism/Heart Condition, Alcoholism/Neurological (Alcoholism/Early Onset Alzheimer's), Cancer/Chronic/Psychosocial (Lymphoma/Heart Problems/Bipolar, Cancer/Psychosocial (Brain Tumor), Cancer/Unknown (Terminal Cancer, plus what the guy thinks is Dementia, maybe), Chronic/Amputee (Diabetes/Right Hand Amputee, Chronic/Blind (Ulcers/Cataracts), Chronic/Down's Syndrome: 1, Chronic/LP (Dwarfism/Sleep Apnea), Chronic/Microdeletion (Crohn's Disease/Microdeletion), Chronic/Psychosocial/Neurological/Scars: (Coronary Artery Disease/PTSD/Dementia/Burns), Psychosocial/Coma (PTSD/Coma), Multiple Cancer (Multiple Tumors:), Neurological/Amputee (Brain Injury/Amputee), Neurological/Deaf & HOH (Stroke/HoH), and Physical/Visual (Manual WC User/Cataracts).

The Multiple Disabilities category is full of Male characters, and Cisgender White Male characters, in particular dominate the category with 72. There are 46 Heterosexual (1 Jewish), 20 Unknown Sexuality, 5 Gay (1 Jewish), and 1 Bisexual. Cisgender White Female characters account for 52 characters with 39 Heterosexual, 9 Unknown Sexuality (1 Romulan), 3 Bisexual, and 1 Lesbian. There is also 1 Trans White Lesbian Female.

The 19 Cisgender Black Male characters are split up amongst 13 Heterosexual and 6 Unknown Sexuality. 15 Cisgender Black Female characters are split up into 12 Heterosexual, 1 Unknown Sexuality, 1 Bisexual, and 1 Lesbian. Meanwhile, Cisgender IPOC Male account for 11 characters including 9 Heterosexual (6 Latine, 2 Asian, 1 Indigenous), 1 Unknown Sexuality (1 Latine), and 1 Gay (Indigenous). The 9 IPOC Female characters break down into 7 Heterosexual (3 Asian, 1 Middle Eastern, 1 Indigenous Latine, 1 Biracial), 1 Unknown Sexuality (Biracial), and 1 Queer (1 Mixed – Indigenous Latine & White). There is 1 IPOC Heterosexual Female (1 AfroLatine). While this category provides a little bit more diversity than other characters, it's frustrating to realize that White characters still largely out balance all other races 125 characters to 55.

Last year, the study only featured one Trans character, who was previously in the chronic category. This year, there is a small scattering of Trans characters, 2 who are a part of this category. That character from last year is still on the list for this study. Blanca Evangelista (MJ Rodriguez) from *Pose* deals with complications from her HIV turning into AIDS, so she is now Multiply Disabled. Her storyline explores her coming to terms with the fact that she has AIDS, and the reality of possible death, as well as the changing of her family as her children grow, and move in and out, eventually leaving her to look to the new generation of queer children to raise.

There is not that much queer representation either, but what is there, accounts for 5 Cisgender White Gay Male, 3 Cisgender White Bisexual Female, 1 Cisgender White Lesbian Female, 1 Cisgender Black Lesbian Female, 1 White Cisgender Bisexual Male, 1 Cisgender Black Bisexual Female, 1 Cisgender IPOC (1 Indigenous) Gay Male, and 1 Cisgender IPOC Queer Female (Mixed (Biracial – Indigenous Latine & White). That accounts for 14 Queer characters that are Cisgender plus the 1 Trans Lesbian for a total of 15 characters with Queer sexuality.

No surprise, most characters in the Multiply Disabled section are American (156) followed by British (9), Fictional (5 – 1 Romulan), Canadian (2), French (1), Scottish (1), Australian (1), Mexican (1), Unknown (1), Haitian (1) and Austrian (1). The age ranges are broken up between 129 Adult, 39 Elder, 9 Teen, and 7 Child.

Nearly half of the 26 Lead characters are played by characters that are not Cisgender White Heterosexual or Unknown Sexuality Male characters. The breakdown of these lead characters is:

13 Cisgender White (8 Heterosexual Female, 4 Gay Male, 1 Bisexual Female)
9 Cisgender Black (5 Heterosexual Male, 1 Unknown Sexuality Male, 1 Heterosexual Female, 1 Bisexual Female, 1 Unknown Sexuality Female)
4 Cisgender IPOC (3 Heterosexual Male (2 Latine, 1 Indigenous), 1 Gay Male (Indigenous)

More than half (35) of the Supporting characters are diverse in some way. This includes:

19 Cisgender White (14 Heterosexual Female, 2 Bisexual Female, 1 Lesbian Female, 1 Unknown Sexuality Female, 1 Gay Male)
9 Cisgender Black (6 Heterosexual Female, 2 Heterosexual Male, 1 Lesbian Female)

6 Cisgender IPOC (3 Heterosexual Female (1 Biracial, 1 Middle Eastern), 2 Heterosexual Male (1 Asian (Japanese), 1 Latine), 1 Queer Female (Mixed – Indigenous Latine & White) x
1 Trans IPOC Female (AfroLatine)

We have no clue if they are actually disabled or if they are engaging in disabled mimicry. There are 91 Unknown characters, 73 No, and only 20 are actual disabled actors. That means that for certain, 73 actors engaged in disabled mimicry to play these roles.

A lot of actors like to take on disabled roles because they think it's a challenge but imagine being told your life "is a challenge." Something to be conquered. Actors think they win the game by conquering, and conquering means winning awards for the portrayal. It's a really gross way to think about disability and doesn't help anyone. It's more likely to hurt the disabled community being represented. The actor can move on, but the community must live with their portrayal forever.

The Multiple Disabilities category features shows by the two other disabled showrunners we know have shows that contain data in this study. The first is Ryan O'Connell, who plays Ryan Hayes on *Special*. Ryan is a Gay character, and the show provides similar LGBTQIA representation to the representation we find on *This Close*. It's notable that two shows created by actually disabled creators feature LGBTQIA representation better than the majority of the other shows created by nondisabled people.

A lot of *Special* focuses on Ryan's own internalized ableism. When others are ableist to him this is not always addressed in a way that is explained to the audience. There are other shows that have done this better. Where the show succeeds best is incorporating more disabled characters, authentic situations, and LGBTQIA inclusion. O'Connell casts disabled characters authentically. The weakest part of the show is its humor, particularly around his incredibly ableist work environment. A lot of the humor falls a bit flat. The saving grace is Ryan's best friend Kim (Punam Patel), who is the one that makes the scenes at work palatable. The show kind of reminds us of the early films that emerged from LGBTQIA creators about being queer in the 90s. It's not the best written but has definitely got authentic representation where it counts.

The other disabled showrunner is Ava Duvernay, who is the creator and showrunner of *Queen Sugar*. Ava has incorporated her own experience with Lupus into the character of Aunt Vi (Tina Lifford). This season, Vi occasionally experiences pain and fatigue from her Lupus, but her real struggle is with PTSD, which involves panic attacks and

flashbacks, when her abusive ex-husband comes back to town, and keeps showing up. She eventually goes with one of her nieces to confront him, and she helps his current young girlfriend, who he is also abusing, escape. Though the actress does not have Lupus herself, DuVernay's personal experience is clearly evident within the writing of Vi's character.

There are some ridiculous stories surrounding representation of Multiple Disabilities. One of the more absurd is Guest Star Francesca Faridany as Rachel Elliott, on *Bull*. Rachel is a financial whiz who owns her own company. She's also dealing with alcoholism. She is accused of murdering her husband, but because she was drunk AND she has early onset Alzheimer's, she can't seem to remember murdering him at all. It really feels like the writers are just trying to emphasize why she can't remember by making her have both Alcoholism and Alzheimer's. While this combination of disabilities could make evocative television, this just comes off as over-the-top.

There are also multiple instances of doctors involved in medical malpractice, who never get fired for doing things that are wholly unethical. This is especially true of some of the doctors (Will and Natalie in particular) on *Chicago Med*. Here is a glimpse at some of the more ridiculous storylines featuring disabled characters.

Mike Monroe (Kyle Adams) plays someone dealing with addiction to heroin. He needs a surgery he's had two times, previously, and if he keeps using, he will need to get the surgery again. Will forges one of the other doctors' names for a prescription for antidepressants, so he can have the surgery. Evelyn Myers (Adria Dawn) has an advanced directive because she has kidney disease and needs dialysis. She also has Alzheimer's, and she forgets about the advanced directive, but because she signed it when she was considered "lucid" her family and the doctors are going to ignore the fact that she now says she wants medical treatment. However, Will can't stand for that, so he completely ignores it and tries to give her treatment anyway. At the end, the family takes her home to hospice so she can die, and Will still keeps his job.

Good or bad, the Multiple Disabilities category offers a way for disability to be explored with greater complexity. There are a lot of disabled people who have more than one disability, so it's really great to have this category. However, considering the nuances that come with having one disability, writing about the intersection of two requires even more knowledge and understanding of disability issues. This is why it is of utmost importance that disabled people be a part in crafting these stories. We want to avoid more stories about Will Halstead being an incompetent doctor who gets away with everything as a cisgender white man, as opposed to scenes with Aunt Vi getting support

from her husband Hollywood, because she's struggling with a flareup of Lupus. We'll take those scenes any day.

Neurodivergent and/or Psychosocial

This year we decided to switch the Neurodivergent and/or Psychosocial category so that instead of four separate categories it is broken down into three distinct parts. This was because we just don't have enough ADD/ADHD representation to have its own group. As such, we have placed ADD/ADHD in the basic Mental Health sub header. The other two sub headers are Mental Health – NOS and Autistic.

The reason we initially wanted to separate them was because we knew a lot of television shows like to give characters Psychosocial disabilities without specifying what disability they actually have. The character may act out a series of "symptoms" or perform in a stereotypical way, but without specifying what they have, it is hard for the community that could be represented to really get a sense of representation. This is a phenomenon we've noticed in television and film for a while when it comes to Psychosocial Disability specifically.

Mental Health

The terms Psychosocial and Mental Health can and have been used interchangeably, although disability activists in the MH sphere may have strong feelings about using the term Mental Health. Psychosocial also encapsulates social disabilities such as Autism and ADHD, which kind of fit in with the idea of Mental Health, but also have their own distinct characteristics that separate them from other Psychosocial disabilities.

For this study we found 111 characters (9%) with a specific Psychosocial diagnosis. We put them in the general MH category for that reason. The characters are spread out across 68 shows, which were featured on 11 networks and 5 streaming services. NBC leads it with the most characters at 23, followed by CBS at 22, and ABC at 17.

The most popular disability represented in this section is PTSD with 38 characters. Other representation includes 14 Bipolar (1 Bipolar I), 12 Anxiety (2 Extra Dimensional Anxiety), 9 Depression (1 Postpartum), 6 Schizophrenia (1 Early Onset, 1 "Paranoid" Schizophrenia), 5 OCD (1 Rapunzel Syndrome), 4 Multiple Mental Health Symptoms (1 Impulse Control Disorders), 4 "Paranoid" Delusions (1 "Lunacy"), 4 ADD/ADHD (3 ADHD, 1 ADD), 2 Psychopathy, 2 Nervous Condition, 2 Trauma, 2 Personality Disorder,

1 Bulimia, 1 Panic Attacks, 1 Attachment Disorder, 1 "Criminally Insane," 1 Conduct Disorder, and 1 Malignant Narcissism.

Male and Female is split evenly, with slightly more Male. The most common group, as always, is Cisgender White Heterosexual Male, which makes up 35 characters. With 14 Cisgender White Unknown Sexuality Male and 1 Cisgender White Gay Male, the Cisgender White Male characters account for 50 characters. That's nearly half. Cisgender White Heterosexual Female helps to make Cisgender White Female (34) the second highest represented. There are 23 Cisgender White Female, 6 Cisgender White Unknown Sexuality Female, 3 Cisgender White Lesbian Female, 2 Cisgender White Bisexual Female characters. All the White characters account for 84 characters, which is just over 75% of the characters in this section.

That leaves the other 25% spread between all other racial and ethnic identities. For Black representation – 5 Cisgender Heterosexual Male, 5 Cisgender Black Heterosexual Female, 2 Cisgender Black Lesbian Female, 1 Cisgender Black Unknown Sexuality Male, and 1 Cisgender Black Unknown Sexuality Female equals 14 characters (about 13% of the characters in this category). For IPOC representation – 5 Cisgender Unknown Sexuality Female (4 Asian, 1 Mixed – Indigenous, Black, & White), 4 Cisgender Heterosexual Female (4 Latine), 2 Cisgender Heterosexual Male (1 Asian, 1 Latine), 1 Cisgender Unknown Sexuality Male, and 1 Cisgender Bisexual Female (1 Asian – South Asian/Indian). This accounts for 13 IPOC characters (about 12%).

About 88% of the characters, or 98 characters are American (2 Irish American). The rest are British (4), Irish (2), Bulgarian (1), Fictional (1 Alternative Britain), French (1), Nigerian (1), Canadian (1), Australian (1), and Unknown (1). Check characters in the MH Psychosocial section are primarily Adult (91), but there are also 9 Child, 9 Teen, and 4 Elder. Roles are broken down into 41 Bit, 34 Supporting, 29 Lead and 7 Guest Star.

This is a hard category to know whether all of the characters are played by disabled actors, particularly because Psychosocial disability can manifest in so many different ways. We only know of 1 actor that is for sure disabled in this category. They are. 47 characters we know are not disabled and have engaged in disabled mimicry. The other 65 characters are Unknown.

You can't have Psychosocial disability without at least some highly problematic, over-the-top representation. No type or show does drama the way the CW superhero shows do. Beth a.k.a. Alice (Rachel Skarsten), the antagonist of this season of *Batwoman*, is Kate's long-lost twin sister. She is kidnapped as a child and forced to live in a basement

from ages 13 until 24. Alice has a lot of trauma from experiencing torture and abuse at the hands of Mouse's father, who kidnapped her to be the friend and companion of his scarred child, Mouse. This leads Alice down a dark path towards villainy and treachery. This of course leads to her own sister locking her up in Arkham where she gets tortured again, this time with shock treatment.

Some of the shows featured in this study show representation that is incredibly harmful and could lead to horrible consequences for people who have Psychosocial disabilities. For example, on *The Code*, Capt. Maya Dobbins (Anna Wood) has a brother named Matt, who is running for the Senate. What people don't know is that Matt has Psychosis also known as "Delusional Disorder." When he is off his medication, he has delusions. However, he has side effects from the medication including trouble concentrating and it makes him hazy. He goes off his medication because he wants to do well in his debate.

Maya finds out he is not taking his medication, but he tells her he's working with his therapist who knows about the medication making him sick. He says that cognitive behavioral therapy is helping him function off his medication, but she still wants him to tell everyone that he has psychosis. She believes the voters should know. When he does well in the debate, his party wants to support him, but only if Maya is involved because they believe that her military service will help his election. Unfortunately, she's not comfortable with that and tells them about Matt's psychosis, outing him to them. Outing people is never okay! This is a horrible example of disability representation.

We are also troubled by how quickly portrayals of Psychosocial disability can devolve into violence. This is a misconception that can lead to harm and even death for people with Psychosocial Disabilities. For example, Ian Tucker (Andrew Rothenberg) on *Instinct* is diagnosed with "Malignant Narcissism." This means that he has no choice but to kill two people, because they take his therapy appointment. It infuriates him that his appointment got pushed back because of them, so of course what other alternative did he have? The idea that people with Psychosocial disability are unnecessarily violent is not a new one, but the truth is that Psychosocially disabled people are more likely to be victims of violence not perpetrators.

Dealing with Psychosocial disability on period pieces can be a delicate matter. Such is the case of Ann Walker (Sophie Rundle) on *Gentleman Jack*. Walker is known for her "feminine delicacies." She is often considered sickly, and it's largely because she has what is called a "nervous disorder." What Walker is probably experiencing is a mix of internalized homophobia, at least initially, and trauma from being a lesbian at a time when it is considered unacceptable.

Ann experiences long stretches of trauma and illness. Anytime something happens or she realizes she cannot be with her love, Ann Lister, she delves into a deep depression, and has physical symptoms of illness. Her family treats her delicately and like an invalid. When she is forced to stay with her sisters and her sister's abusive husband, other family members must intervene. Ultimately, Ann is happiest when she is with Ann. When she can truly be herself, the trauma is able to fade, albeit temporarily.

There are so many ways that portraying Psychosocial disability can go wrong, and we've seen that a lot in this category. The best advice for making better representation of Psychosocially disabled characters is to have more writers and creators lending their expertise and experience relating to these particular representations. At the end of the day, writing with personal experience is going to trump all other writing. This category desperately needs that kind of authenticity.

Autistic

The Autistic section has not grown that much since last year. In fact, disappointingly, there are only 15 characters that are Autistic, this year. They are on 8 shows across 5 networks and 1 streaming service. This is literally 1 more character than last year, despite watching 70 more shows! That's pretty deplorable as far as representation goes.

With as much talk as there is about Autism, and the major misconceptions that most of society has about Autistic people, it is imperative that not only is there more Autistic representation, but it needs to be authentic. This means that Autistic people need to be brought into the discussion.

We have consulted on more than one film/television production, with at least one autistic character. So many of our suggestions for these productions have been us encouraging them to hire an Autistic person to help develop better dialogue, help develop a better storyline, and to help navigate through sensitive material, from an Autistic perspective. Nobody knows being Autistic better than Autistic people, and there are many in Hollywood just waiting to be utilized.

This is the first section whereas streaming services win the most characters of all, and that's Netflix, with 8 characters. CBS and Freeform (making its debut on a top three list for our study) both tie for second place with 2 characters a piece. Netflix is the winner because of the show *Atypical*. The thing about this show is that they have hired some Autistic actors, but they are all Supporting or Bit characters. They did it because they

cast a non-Autistic in the Lead role. The thing is, a non-Autistic is still in the Lead role, and there have been some not so great stories on it. It's a perfect example of why Autistic people should be leading Autistic narratives.

This Autistic category is incredibly White. That's always been the narrative around Autism. It's part of why it is such a struggle for non-white people to get diagnosed as Autistic. A nice change is that there are more Female characters this year than Male. Cisgender White Unknown Female (5) is the largest category, followed by Cisgender White Heterosexual Male (3), Cisgender White Unknown Sexuality Male (2), and Cisgender White Bisexual Female (1). In all, 11 of the 15 characters are White.

Black and Brown representation accounts for 1 Cisgender Black Heterosexual Male (Jewish), 1 Cisgender Black Unknown Sexuality Male, 1 Cisgender Black Unknown Female, and 1 Cisgender IPOC Unknown Sexuality Female. This is the bare bones of representation, and what you get when you don't even have that many characters in general. The default always seems to be to make the characters White first, and then studios decided to throw in the occasional Black and Brown character to claim they are handling diversity.

Even more perplexing, there is only ONE LGBTQIA Autistic character. There has been lots of discussion about how Autistic people are more likely to be comfortable with embracing non-binary gender expression and queer sexuality. It makes perfect sense that the ONE show we believe gets Autistic representation the best, *Everything's Going to be Okay*, also includes the lone Bisexual, Matilda (Kayla Cromer). LGBTQIA characters should be all over this category, and it's just a travesty that is not.

Everything's Going to be Okay is the model for how creators should be casting Autistic characters. Kayla Cromer is the first actually Autistic person to play a Lead character that is also Autistic, that we know of, on network or cable television. While the show does better than others, there are still moments that are problematic. As a comedy it's hard to navigate between laughing at and laughing with the Autistic Lead. That being said it is worlds better than shows like *The Good Doctor* and *Atypical*, whose lead characters are played by non-Autistic Cisgender white men.

The most important part of the show is that she gets to be an average teenager who is about to enter college. There is some discussion of "functioning labels" and the character identifies as "high functioning" which is one of those things that a lot of Autistic people have asked creators to stop doing. But the fact that she gets autonomy over much of what she does is a huge plus.

Our least favorite character representing the Autistic category is Dr. Shaun Murphy (Freddie Highmore). Shaun is an Autistic savant. The "autistic savant" has been a narrative that creators love to represent since at least *Rain Man*. It's also the bane of many Autistic individual's existence. Characters like these put unwanted expectations on Autistic people, because they demand that all Autistic people must be a savant to be authentically Autistic.

This portrayal has real-world consequences. Shaun is not that great of a doctor. He's constantly undermining his boss and has a bedside manner that would get most doctors removed. Apparently, in the world of this show, autistic people are cruel. He says that he doesn't really care about his patients because he is upset with other things and will advocate or even try to prevent them from having surgeries that he doesn't think should be possible. He also occasionally tells his patients that they are "stupid."

Shaun is very abusive towards his roommate, who he claims he loves. She tells him she can't be with him, so he tells her that he will beat up her car. He also berates her and calls her names just because he wants her to be sad since he is also sad. He wants her to feel the pain he feels. That's not love. The big problem with *The Good Doctor* is that Shaun is abusive and harmful, but the show equates that with being Autistic. Autistic people must contend with enough mistreatment and misunderstanding. To have this show out there spreading this message is more harmful than not having this representation.

Autistic characters are almost exclusively American (14). There is 1 British character though, *The Rook*'s Josie Fairburn (Rosie Sansom, an actress that does not identify as Autistic). The only age categories are Teen and Adult, and it's one of the only categories where Adult does not win. There are 11 Teen characters and 4 Adult. The roles are broken up into 10 Bit characters, mostly on *Atypical*, 3 Lead characters (the aforementioned Matilda, and the two men played by non-autistics Shaun on *The Good Doctor*. and Sam on *Atypical*), and 2 Supporting.

Thanks to *Atypical* casting so many Bit characters that are actually Autistic to get rid of the outcry about the show casting someone who isn't Autistic as Sam, 10 of the characters are played by actual Autistic actors. There are 4 characters that are not Autistic, and 1 that is Unknown.

There is only 1 Lead or Supporting character that is marginalized in any way. She is a Cisgender White Bisexual Female. It's obviously Matilda from *Everything's Going to Be Okay*. We can only imagine how Black and Brown disabled people are going to feel reading the statistics. This is unacceptable. Hollywood, do better.

The best representation is always authentically done by the disabled people who have these disabilities. Creators just need to understand that non-disabled people just don't know how to act disabled. They don't do it without harm and real consequences for the communities they are trying to represent. At the end of the day the prevention of harm should be the motivator, but since it won't be, Autistic people just give better performances as Autistic characters. That's just the truth.

Mental Health – NOS

Why is it that television characters love to get diagnosed with not otherwise specified Psychosocial disabilities? We have our theories, and they revolve around wanting to create drama and intrigue for a character, while also providing a minor bit of diversity. If you give characters the symptoms of disability, that means you're being diverse, right?!

Well… It's a really easy scapegoat and is often just done for dramatic effect. You see this especially on medical shows. There's always a story of the week, and it's always so dramatic. When it's about mental health, the person is always in crisis, and maybe harming themselves or someone else in the process.

We believe that as studios become more aware of the harm they cause with portrayals of Psychosocial disability the greater responsibility they have to tell stories that lead to clear representation. This means making it clear what they are representing. There is a huge amount of power in naming things, and a lot of laziness in what we are seeing studios doing with these NOS characters.

We also want to point out that we are not saying that you have to be diagnosed to be legitimately disabled. Not getting a diagnosis is actually a true story and would provide some interesting representation. Getting a diagnosis is a privilege. There is sexism, racism, ableism and various other forms of harm embedded in demanding a diagnosis of people that are often fighting to be taken seriously by the medical establishment.

As multiply marginalized disabled people ourselves, we recognize that diagnosis is not always possible, but not having a diagnosis with so many characters is not giving communities of disabled people the representation they deserve either. If people are not diagnosed the story should revolve around why diagnosis is so hard to get. It should revolve around why the medical establishment is so horrible to marginalized people.

This is about why showrunners and other creators do this. Instead of a reason based on the struggle with getting a diagnosis for many communities, not getting a diagnosis for a disabled character is used as a way to make "interesting" throwaway characters. It's also so they don't have to be held accountable for the kind of representation they give a character since they can use the scapegoat that obviously their portrayals of said disabilities are not harmful because "obviously they were not actually representing that disability you think they were."

This year, there are 32 characters (3%) in the Psychosocial – NOS category. They appear on 26 shows airing on 11 networks and 2 streaming services. CBS and CW are tied in first place with 6 characters each, and NBC comes in third place with 3 characters. All of the characters are simply considered as having some kind of Psychosocial disability but it's not specified what that disability is. There is one person who has "Anger Issues."

The character with Anger Issues is Pope (Shawn Hatosy) on *Animal Kingdom*. It's clear throughout the series that Pope has struggled with Psychosexual issues, but it's never explained what they are or why. At one point, he ends up in jail although they never show that. When he gets out, he has a lot of Psychosocial struggles, so his mother, Smurf (Ellen Barkin), gets him involved in MMA fighting. Of course, that makes his anger issues worse, not better.

There are actually more Female characters in this category than Male characters. The biggest group represented is Cisgender White Heterosexual Female with 10 characters. There are 3 Cisgender White Unknown Sexuality Female characters, as well, making the total of White Female characters 13. The 10 Cisgender White Male characters are broken down into 5 Heterosexual Male and 5 Unknown Sexuality Male.

This category is not helpful to Black and Brown people. It's full of white people, and that is just so uninteresting. Telling stories about more marginalized people is what is going to help revive television storytelling. We've seen stories about white people over and over again. Isn't it time for other people to get their stories told?

There are NO Black Female Characters in this entire section. Unacceptable. The only Black characters are 2 Cisgender Black Unknown Sexuality Male characters. There are a few IPOC characters including 4 IPOC Unknown Sexuality Female (2 Asian – 1 South Asian/Muslim, 1 Middle Eastern), 2 IPOC Heterosexual Female (1 AfroLatine, 1 Ambiguous), 1 Cisgender IPOC Unknown Sexuality Male (Latine).

The breakdown by Nationality is American (24), British (3 – 1 Pakistani-British), 2 Fictional, 1 Syrian, 1 Spanish, 1 Austrian. As for age, there are 23 Adult, 5 Teen, 3 Elder, and 1 Child. The majority of characters, 13 of them, are Bit characters followed by 8 Supporting, 7 Lead, and 4 Guest Star.

Out of the 7 Lead characters, only 3 are marginalized in some way. The 2 White characters are both Cisgender White Heterosexual Female characters, and there is 1 IPOC character, a Cisgender Asian Female with Unknown Sexuality (South Asian/Pakistani & Muslim). As for the Supporting characters, 2 out of the 8 characters are marginalized. Both of them are white. They are White Heterosexual Female characters. It's disappointing that there remains to be so much whiteness in all of this.

Because there is no actual disability mentioned, it's impossible to know if the actors playing these roles are playing characters with disabilities they have. We know that 13 of the actors are not disabled, at least that was spoken of publicly. Some of them have downright said they don't have the disability they represent, but there are 19 actors that are just Unknown.

We don't think it's bad to have characters that don't have a diagnosis, for all the reasons we mention above. It is hard to get a diagnosis. Those of us who are non-male are often not taken seriously by the medical establishment. It's even worse for those who are also LGBTQIA and/or Black or Brown. What we think is bad is when the motivation behind choosing not to give a character an official disability label or diagnosis is to avoid responsibility for how those characters are portrayed, especially when it is pretty clear what disability is supposed to be represented.

Again, this is why we continue to advocate for including disabled people in writing rooms, and to help with story creation from the beginning of the project onward. The only way that things are going to get better for disabled people is to get them behind the camera as well as in front of it. Until then, these NOS stories and characters will continue to frustrate disabled people.

We cannot think of a better person to represent this category and its problematic aspects than young Sheldon Cooper (Ian Armitage) on the show *Young Sheldon*. Autistic people have wanted confirmation of what exactly Sheldon has for years when the character was a hallmark of *The Big Bang Theory*, but creators have refused to confirm he is Psychosocially disabled, at all. Nobody is buying it, especially as the writers attempt to relate Sheldon to his mentor, Dr. John Sturgis (Wallace Shawn), who has a mental break and ends up institutionalized.

This is definitely a type of scenario where the creators don't want to take responsibility for getting representation wrong, so they completely choose to make his Psychosocial disability present but not specified. There's an entire generation of Autistic people who have been let down by the lack of confirmation that a character they really resonated with is actually part of their community. What such a confirmation could have done for representation is the real tragedy in all of this.

Neurological

In this study, there are 53 characters (4%) with Neurological Disability on 38 shows airing on 10 networks and 4 streaming services. The channel with the most characters is CBS with 14. ABC is in second place with 11, and NBC is in third with 8 characters.

The most common form of Neurological representation is Alzheimer's/Dementia with 26 characters. Other representation includes 8 TBI (1 PBI), 5 Stroke/Physical, 3 Epilepsy, 2 Neurotoxicity (1 Lead Poisoning), and 1 character of each of the following – William's Syndrome, Eagle's Syndrome, Moebius Syndrome, Subacute Sclerosing Panenencephalitis, Amnesia, Corticobasal Degeneration, Moyamoya, and PSP.

While Male and Female is pretty evenly split with 27 Male characters and 26 Female Characters. As always, this category is balanced in favor of Heterosexuality and White characters. There are 16 Cisgender White Heterosexual Male characters including 1 Jewish character. This is the biggest group, but Cisgender White Heterosexual Female characters are close behind with 14, including 1 Jewish. The Cisgender White characters with Unknown Sexuality include 4 Male and 2 Female. There is also 1 Cisgender White Lesbian Female, which brings the number of White characters with Neurological Disability to 37.

That's too many White people. Meanwhile, there 7 Cisgender Black Heterosexual Female, 4 Cisgender Black Heterosexual Male, and 1 Cisgender Black Male of Unknown Sexuality characters for a total of 12 Black characters. Even worse is the 1 Cisgender IPOC Male with Unknown Sexuality, who is Asian, the 1 Cisgender IPOC Gay Male who just happens to be Latine, the 1 Cisgender IPOC Heterosexual Female who is Asian, and the Cisgender IPOC Female with Unknown Sexuality who is Ambiguous/Unknown. There are literally 4 IPOC characters.

The LGBTQIA representation is relegated to 1 Gay Male and 1 Lesbian. This is actually a category that has more Elder characters than any other group (there are 28 Elder characters, 19 Adult, 3 Teen and 3 Child), and that just kind of hammers home this idea

that LGBTQIA Elders are not really a thing. LGBTQIA Elders face complex issues when trying to access healthcare and having stories about this on television could really help break through barriers to care for this age group.

The majority of characters with Neurological Disability are American (46). There are also 4 British, 1 Canadian, 1 Irish, and 1 Unknown characters. There are 30 Bit characters, 11 Supporting characters, 9 Guest Star, and 3 Lead characters. The Lead characters are all Cisgender White Female characters with 2 of them being Heterosexual, and 1 having Unknown Sexuality. As for the Supporting characters, 4 out of the 11 characters are marginalized in some way. The leader for Supporting is 2 Cisgender Black Heterosexual Male characters. There is also 1 Cisgender White Heterosexual Female and 1 Cisgender White Lesbian Female.

Overwhelmingly, non-disabled actors are usually cast in roles as Neurologically Disabled characters. There's been a lot of discussion about whether people with disabilities like Alzheimer's and Dementia should be allowed to perform. This is definitely subjective, and really depends on the individual. It depends on how their disability progresses, and so many other issues. We just don't like a blanket exclusion on people simply because they are disabled. Disabled people know their capabilities, and at least getting in the room to audition is a start, because that's not even happening.

As for the numbers behind this, 39 characters are played by non-disabled actors, 1 is actually disabled, and 13 are Unknown. The only yes is Gregory on *This is Us*, played by Timothy Omundson. The role was written specifically for the actor who had a stroke, and this is an example of creators incorporating a disability into a story. It also looks at the fact that not every neurological condition is Alzheimer's and Dementia. People who have disabilities like Epilepsy or other neurological issues may be perfectly fine to perform their duties as an actor. They just need to be given the chance.

This Is Us also provides an interesting look at Alzheimer's through Rebecca Pearson (Mandy Moore). Explored through multiple years, you see Rebecca before, during, and after her Alzheimer's diagnosis. At one point, it looks like you see her in the hospital about to die as the family gathers. Her main story revolves around her son Randall (Sterling K Brown) demanding that she get an experimental treatment. It is to a point where he downright is harassing and threatening her to agree, much to the chagrin of his brother, Kevin (Justin Hartley), who wants to respect his mom's wishes.

The thing is, *This Is Us* is trying to represent so many different disabilities, and some of the representation, especially surrounding actors that are actually disabled, is good, but then you have representation like this where the writing makes a judgment call on

morality in disabled stories. There could've been much more pushback into this representation, and exploration of why it's not okay to bully people into medical decisions, but that's really not there.

Another thing that definitely needs to stop happening when it comes to representation of Neurological Disability is mistaking being a discriminatory asshole for disability. Being disabled doesn't make you racist. It's a copout – an excuse to legitimize racism. *Bob Hearts Abishola* features Dottie (Christine Ebersole) as Bob's racist white mother. Of course, she becomes the racist white lady after she has a stroke. The writers give her all of the "stroke" highlights including the droopy lip, the wheelchair, the arm she cannot use, and her vocal mimicry sounds ridiculous. The only thing worse than the stereotypical racist white lady is the included laugh track that cracks up at all her rude jokes. Perhaps it's wrong that we were cheering on the nurse, when Dottie begs her to smother her with a pillow?!

This year, it's not enough to have disabled people, but there are also people that are faking having Neurological Disabilities. Such is the case of Jesse Manes (Trevor St. John) on the show Roswell New Mexico. The big bad of the show, Manes, whose son is physically disabled and also has PTSD due to injuries he sustained in Afghanistan, tries to get his son to feel sorry for him when he has a stroke. As a result of the stroke, he supposedly has to use a cane. It's revealed he's faking though, in a pitiful attempt to make his son feel sorry for him. We did not count them as a character, but felt his story was worth mentioning, since pretending to be disabled is something a lot of CW shows like to do.

Representing Neurological Disabilities authentically provides fantastic opportunities for representation of Elder characters that we have yet to see. Having fully fleshed out Elder characters that have engaging storylines that delve beyond diagnosis and what comes next is where this category could benefit the most. That being said, Younger people with Neurological Disabilities also deserve their own stories, and hopefully next year we will have more stories about young people in this category.

Physical Disability

There are hundreds of different physical disabilities, but none of them particularly get a lot of representation on their own. The physical category makes up all of the characters that have actual physical disabilities, as well as anybody who appears to use a cane, crutch, or wheelchair, which are often just throwaway characters just to be in the background.

Don't get us wrong, we've been advocating for disabled people at every level of inclusion, and we need wheelchair users and cane users, and walker users in the background, but if that's primarily where these characters stay, there's no chance of really developing them into characters that actually have depth and a purpose.

We found 87 Physically Disabled characters (7%) on 66 shows. These characters appear on 12 networks and 7 streaming services. The most popular network is CBS with 16, NBC with 12, and ABC with 9. For a streaming service, Netflix can compete with the big local networks with 8 characters, making it the most for streaming.

The most popular disability is Physical – NOS with 54 characters. That is depressing to physically disabled people to know that these characters are not even important enough to have a disability that is specified. That is a significant amount of characters with physical disabilities, who have no discernible diagnosis. NOS includes 10 Cane Users, 8 Manual Wheelchair Users, 3 Power Wheelchair Users, 1 Exoskeleton, and 1 Walker User.

There are also 5 characters with Arthrogryposis, but don't let that number fool you because they are all by two different actors. One is the amazing Liz Carr, of *Silent Witness* fame. This was her last season on *Silent Witness*, but we also have her on *Devs* and the *Les Misérables* miniseries. The other actor is another British actor, Mat Fraser, of *AHS: Freakshow* fame, who we recorded on *His Dark Materials* and *Silent Witness*.

Other disabilities represented include 6 Multiple Sclerosis, 4 ALS/Motor Neuron Disease, 2 Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy, 2 Muscular Dystrophy (2 Power Wheelchair Users), 1 Cerebral Palsy, 1 Hip Replacement, 1 Spina Bifida, and 1 OI Type 3 (Power Wheelchair User),

Male characters largely outweigh Female characters 55 to 32. Of course, the majority are Heterosexual and White. There 26 Cisgender White Heterosexual Male, 15 Cisgender White Unknown Sexuality Male, and 1 Cisgender White Asexual Male characters for a total of 42 Cisgender White Male characters. The other white characters are accounted for with 12 Cisgender White Heterosexual Female, 7 Cisgender White Unknown Sexuality Female, and 1 Cisgender White Bisexual Female characters. That's 20 characters, meaning that there are 62 white characters. Do we need to even say anything at this point?

We do, because we are white, and we are sick of seeing this statistic in our work. White people overwhelmingly get more characters and this is the exact category that shows this every single time we do this study. The 25 non-white characters include 6 Cisgender Black Heterosexual Male, 6 Cisgender Black Heterosexual Female, 5 Cisgender IPOC Unknown Sexuality Male (4 Latine, 1 Hawaiian), 3 Cisgender IPOC Unknown Female (3 Latine), 2 Cisgender IPOC Heterosexual Female, 1 Cisgender Black Bisexual Male, 1 Cisgender IPOC Heterosexual Male (Asian – Japanese), and 1 Cisgender Black Unknown Sexuality Female. This accounts for 7 Cisgender Black Female, 7 Cisgender Black Male, 6 Cisgender IPOC Male, 5 Cisgender IPOC Female characters.

There is literally only one LGBTQIA Physically Disabled character. It is a Cisgender Black Bisexual Male. To be physically disabled is to be considered lacking all forms of sexuality in the minds of many people, but at least for this study a lot of the characters get to at least be Heterosexual, which was a little bit of a change from last year's study. That being said, most of the other categories had a little bit more Queer representation, but there are no Trans characters. There's only one Bisexual. The queer community is full of physically disabled diversity and it's just not present on television.

The Nationality breakdown for this section is American (66), British (10), Irish (4) Fictional (2), French (1), Taiwanese (1), Mexican (1), Spanish (1) and Russian (1). There are 49 Adult, 31 Elder, 8 Child, and 1 Teen characters. We mentioned this last year and were going to say it again. We really need to see more Child and Teen disabled characters, especially physically disabled characters.

We are seeing the results of lack of young disabled characters play out right now during the pandemic. A lot of initiatives to get disabled people vaccinated are aiming towards Elder communities, ignoring young disabled people who are often also high risk. This is because we don't see young physically disabled people on television or in film all that often, and therefore young disabled people become forgettable to people who don't interact with them all that often. Young disabled people are an afterthought for most things in this society, and disabled representation would be able to help rectify that.

The Role types are broken up into 55 Bit roles, 23 Supporting, 5 Lead, and 5 Guest Star. When it comes to Lead characters 4 out of 5 are 1 Cisgender Black Heterosexual Male, 1 Cisgender White Bisexual Female, 1 Cisgender White Heterosexual Female, and 1 Cisgender White Asexual Male. As for the 13 out of 23 Supporting characters, 10 of them are not white. There are 3 Cisgender Black Heterosexual Male, 1 Cisgender Black Bisexual Male, 1 Cisgender Black Heterosexual Female, 1 Cisgender Black Female of Unknown Sexuality, 1 Cisgender IPOC Heterosexual Female (Asian), 1

Cisgender IPOC Female of Unknown Sexuality (Latine), and 1 Cisgender IPOC Heterosexual Male (Asian – Japanese).

Shockingly, the majority, just barely, of characters that are Physically Disabled are played by actual disabled people. This is a first for this study, and we are excited to report this. We've been working very hard on Hollywood to make this happen, and it still needs to get better. Right now, the problem is a lot of these characters are one-off. They get one episode or only a few episodes. We need to see more physically disabled characters portrayed as Lead and Supporting roles. This will also ensure that there are far less NOS characters going forward.

The best performance of Physically Disabled characters, and dare we say it, possibly of the whole study is Esperanza Jimenez (Sammi Haney) from *Raising Dion*. The young actress who portrays her has OI and uses a power chair. What works about her character is that not only does she get to be a fully fleshed out character who is not defined by her wheelchair or disability, but also the show doesn't ignore it. The writing for her is terrific. Hands down, this show deserves to be listed as the one that all other television shows need to follow when writing disabled characters.

From the beginning, Esperanza is not treated like the average disabled character. She is not here to inspire anyone. She is just a child living her life, wanting to have friends, wanting to play, and wanting to enjoy school. She is treated like a regular person, but at the same time because she's a wheelchair user in the real world she will face a huge amount of ableism just because she is visibly disabled. The show does not sugarcoat this, but what it does right is every instance of ableism is explained. There's no excusing it, and Esperanza is the first one to hold people accountable. When people mess up, they are expected to apologize and learn from it.

We could write an entire essay on why she's one of the best disabled characters we've ever seen on television, but there are so many other disabled characters that have the potential to be as good as her. We truly hope that all the other television studios look to this show. We commend Netflix for taking the chance to cast a disabled actress and actually allow her to be a person. We wish that Netflix would use that same principle on their other television shows.

When it comes to exceptional disabled young actors, we've been cheering on Gavin McHugh as Christopher Diaz, a child with Cerebral Palsy on *911* since the show started. Christopher is portrayed by young actor, Grant McKinney at six years old, this season as well. Both young actors have CP, and that brings a sense of authenticity to the role,

even when the writing tends to bend a little more towards inspiration porn. That's not as much the case this year though.

The next time people try to say that physically disabled actors are incapable of doing stunts, they need to go look at this season of *911*. In it, a rogue wave crashes into the coast of California. Not only is Christopher alone, having to survive, and find his way back to his father's friend, Buck (Oliver Stark), who currently is unable to work at the firehouse so he was out with Christopher when the wave happened, but McHugh himself was in the water performing those stunts. The crew was really willing to work with him to make sure it could happen. This is what occurs when television creators insist on authenticity. It proves to be a much better performance for all involved.

The actually physically disabled actors are kicking ass with decent stories this year. We could focus on the multiple horrible portrayals of Physical Disability, but because this category has some of the best representation, we thought we would give you a little respite from all the horribleness. This time, it is Guest Star Rachel Miner as Jenny on *Chicago Fire*. When a fire happens in her house, Jenny knocks over her wheelchair and crawls up the steps to save her son. As a result, her neighbor tries to have her son taken away claiming she cannot protect him and is therefore a bad mother. Jenny ends up having her son removed from her care while she is in the hospital.

This is the kind of story that episodic shows like this one need to be telling. Disabled people, especially physically disabled, intellectually disabled, and those with psychosocial disabilities often have CPS called on them because "do-gooders" who don't understand disability or disabled parenting love to believe they are "saving children" from neglect and abuse. What ends up happening in this story is Matt Casey () and the other firefighters help Jenny fight to get her son back, which ends up happening, as it should. The message of the show is that it's wrong to take a child away from their mother just because she uses a wheelchair.

While the Physically Disabled category could definitely use more portrayals like the three listed above, having these kinds of stories gives us a lot of hope for representation in the future. If only every category could have portrayals as great as these. We look forward to seeing how this category progresses next year.

Random Disability

Last year, we decided to create a category for Random Disability. This is where all the unusual disabilities created in sci-fi shows or the otherwise uncategorizable characters

end up going. This year we have found 15 characters. They are featured on 12 shows on 4 networks and 4 streaming services. The most popular network to have these types of characters is CW with 6, followed by Netflix with 3. All the other networks tie for third place with just 1 character (NBC, Shudder, BBC America, Acorn, HBO, and Britbox).

The most common disability type for this section is Supernatural with 8 characters. Those characters are split up into: 2 Split in Two, 1 Dark Matter, 1 Trapped inside Own Head, 1 Superpower illness, 1 Martian Disability, and 1 Werewolf PTSD. The other disability represented is 7 Unknown including 1 Unknown Head Injury, 1 Possibly Age Related, and 1 Mystery Illness. The rest are NOS.

The gender, sexuality, and race breakdown is: 5 Cisgender White Heterosexual Male, 1 Cisgender White Unknown Sexuality Male, 4 Cisgender White Heterosexual Female, 1 Cisgender Boy Unknown Sexuality Female, 1 Cisgender Black Heterosexual Male, 2 Cisgender Black Unknown Sexuality Male, and 1 Cisgender IPOC Unknown Sexuality Male (Asian – Japanese). This means that there are 11 White characters.

Since there are 11 White characters, that means there are 4 characters between all Black and Brown communities. There are 3 Black characters and 1 IPOC character. This category is a lot about fantasy-based disability, but nonwhite actors should get the chance to be a part of the story lines just like white actors. It seems really ridiculous that one race, white people, get to be the vast majority of characters on every television show, even the made-up ones.

There are no LGBTQIA characters in this section. Apparently, everybody in fantasy worlds are Heterosexual, or their sexuality is Unknown. The people creating such environments are incredibly unimaginative. A lot of the shows cater to younger audiences. That's why CW is the top network for this section. Because of that there's a responsibility to let LGBTQIA youth see themselves represented. LGBTQIA disabled youth are part of the LGBTQIA community, but they often get left behind. Studios need to stop contributing to this.

Nationality wise, 10 of the characters are American, 3 are British, 1 is Japanese, and 1 is an extraterrestrial, because they are literally from another planet. The age breakdown is 12 Adult, 2 Elder, and 1 Teen. Again, Children are being left out of what could be a really cool opportunity for young disabled actors to get a chance to participate in supernatural and fantasy television. These characters need to be created.

The majority of these characters are 7 Bit, 3 Guest Star, 3 Supporting and 2 Lead. Most of these characters are one episode character of the week storylines or otherwise throw

away characters. The creators probably gave the character a disability to spice things up. A lot of the disabilities revolve around the plot, so they are used as plot devices.

One such plot line that revolves around disability is on the CW show, *Charmed*. Helen Mcgantry (Azura Skye) is split into two parts as Light Helen and Dark Helen. It is done to create the white lighters, who protect the witches. Every white lighter is split into two and the dark part is sealed in a bottle. As the first Helen cannot be sealed away, so she and her dark half are trapped in a mental institution in the past. Unfortunately, Dark Helen gets loose and chaos ensues. What you end up learning though is that at the end of the day, Dark Helen just really wants to be back with her love. The story is sad because Helen never truly had any freedom, and she ends up dying so she can finally be free.

The CW also has Chester P. Runk (Brandon McKnight), who is disabled for an entire episode, as well as the rest of the season although the implication is that he may be able to return to the state he was before. Chester is a scientist, and like many scientists on *The Flash* before him, his experiment goes wrong. His consciousness is separated from his body, and he has to go through an excessive treatment. Later in the season you see him again and he is still undergoing treatment, but they say that he is almost regenerated back. We kept him on the list simply because the entire time he is on the show he is a disabled character, but it's annoying to have disabled characters who end up being "cured" right at the end because superpowers, and magic, and stuff

Out of the 2 leads, 1 of them is marginalized, and that character is a Black Heterosexual Male. Out of the 3 Supporting characters, 1 is a Black Unknown Male. That is the only representation for either category, but at least it's not white representation. It's kind of ironic that this is how the category worked out, but it doesn't say very much about how inclusive television is to have two characters that just happen to both be Black Male characters when every other section largely favors white characters.

One of the more complex forms of representation in this category is that of Malefic J'onzz (Phil LaMarr) on *Supergirl*. Malefic is the brother of J'onn J'onzz, also known as Martian Manhunter. He has a Martian disability where he is unable to connect to the Martian hive mind. After he does something that their father deems dangerous for the other Martians, Malefic is locked away where he becomes bitter. When he is freed by the White Martians, Malefic works with them to kill his own people, the Green Martians. For that, he is sentenced to prison in the Phantom Zone.

Malefic is released by the Monitor to test J'onn in preparation for the upcoming crisis that will destroy the multiverse. However, the brothers eventually end up making peace

when J'onn learns that he is responsible for erasing his brother from the collective minds of his family, himself, and the rest of the Martian people, which is considered the very worst of offenses you can commit. He realizes that his brother is a product of the mistreatment he received, and he works to help rehabilitate him.

Finally, we probably don't want most of these characters to be disabled because really does anybody want to be Split into Two or have Werewolf PTSD? Obviously, 12 characters are not disabled, and 3 are Unknown. It would be cool to have actual disabled characters play supernaturally disabled characters. Or just having them be disabled like they are in these fantasy environments makes them disabled characters as long as they don't ignore the disability completely, which sometimes happens. But there's so many possibilities in this category for how actual disabled people could be included without creating harmful storylines. It's worth consideration by the studios.

Disability by Gender, Gender Identity, and Sexuality

Last year, we had only 36 LGBTQIA characters, and only one of them was Trans. This year, we have been anxious to figure out whether television has gotten better about representing disabled people with diverse gender identities and sexualities. The truth is, not much has changed. There are a few more characters, but considering we watched 70 more shows this year, it's not as impressive as it could have been.

There has been a lot of discussion around the idea that there's a lot more overlap between the disabled and LGBTQIA communities, within recent years. It makes sense because people that face oppression are more likely to experience Psychosocial and Chronic disabilities. Stress on our bodies from oppression can mean that multiply marginalized communities are more susceptible to becoming disabled.

The sad thing is that this is not reflected in the media. We mentioned this before, and it's the absolute truth. Television and film creators don't seem to like making characters that have intersectional identities. If they are going to represent race, that's it. If they're going to represent LGBTQIA, those characters are probably white and nondisabled. If they're going to represent disability it's almost always white. We literally have the research to back that up. Just go reread every section up above.

The world is much more intersectional than that, and there are a lot of disabled people that have yet to ever see themselves represented in anything. Representation really helps to center you and make you feel like you're a part of the world. If you're not

represented, you're much more likely to question what your place is, and where you belong, if you feel you belong at all.

This year, we found 71 characters that are LGBTQIA. This is out of 1,198 characters, which means that LGBTQIA representation accounts for about 6% of the disabled characters we've counted for this study.

Here is the breakdown of characters, based on race, gender, and sexuality:

15 are Black including 6 Cisgender Lesbian Female, 3 Cisgender Gay Male, 3 Cisgender Bisexual Female, 1 Cisgender Bisexual Male, 1 Trans Heterosexual Female, and 1 Trans Lesbian Female disabled characters.
8 are IPOC, including 5 Cisgender Gay Male (2 Latine, 1 Asian, 1 Indigenous, 1 Biracial (Asian/White)), 1 Cisgender IPOC Queer Female (Mixed – Indigenous Latine & White), 1 Cisgender Bisexual Female (Asian – South Asians/Indian), and 1 Trans Heterosexual Female (AfroLatine).

48 are White LGBTQIA characters including 16 Cisgender Gay Male (1 Jewish), 13 Cisgender Bisexual Female, 11 Cisgender Lesbian Female, 4 Cisgender Bisexual Male (1 Maybe), 2 Trans White Lesbian Female, 1 Cisgender Asexual Male, and 1 GNC Female of Unknown Sexuality disabled characters.

Last year, we counted 10 Black LGBTQIA disabled characters, 7 IPOC LGBTQIA disabled characters (6 of whom were gay males), and 19 White LGBTQIA characters. After watching 70 more shows we came up with 5 more Black LGBTQIA disabled characters and 1 more IPOC LGBTQIA disabled character. There were 19 White LGBTQIA disabled characters last year, and Cisgender White Male characters alone account for more characters than last year. It was a little surprising to see that there were more White Female characters than White Male characters, but the racial diversity is the real travesty of this section of evaluation.

One area that was an edition to the study is the 1 Asexual character. Of course, this character happens to be White. Last year, there was an Intersex character, but there are none this year. Essentially, in order to include the Asexual character, the Intersex character was sacrificed. Equally of note is the fact that there are no Bisexual IPOC Male characters. There were a few Bisexual and Lesbian Female characters added in Black and Brown communities, but the overall number is still abysmally small.

As for the Trans representation, the only Trans characters are Trans Female characters. This is part of why so many people don't seem to think there are any other

kinds of Trans people but Trans Girls & Women. The erasure of Trans Male, other Trans masculine and Non-binary gender disabled characters feeds into this narrative of exclusion. That being said, there needs to be way more Trans Female disabled characters, across the board, but particularly Black and Brown Trans Women & Girls.

If you are not weeping while reading this, you should be. The fact that so little progress was made in watching 70 more shows is not surprising. It also explains why Intersectional disabled people are amongst the most marginalized. This makes the solution to fix this problem clear. Include LGBTQIA disabled characters, especially those that are not white, on more television shows.

The LGBTQIA and disabled communities like to remain separated. There is a huge amount of anti-LGBTQIA sentiment in the disability community. Likewise, despite a lot of disabled LGBTQIA people existing, there is an excessive amount of ableism. Neither community wants to work together. These two communities don't listen to each other.

As long as these communities refuse to address their issues with one another, the people that live between these intersections of identity are going to suffer as a result. There are disabled creators and there are LGBTQIA creators currently working in Hollywood. Now we need intersectional creators to have their voices finally heard. Only then will we start seeing the disabled LGBTQIA characters we deserve.

Disability by Race, Ethnicity, & Culture

For the second year in a row, Indigenous disabled characters are the least represented of any characters that show up in our study. Since marginalized people are often more likely to have disabilities, Indigenous people should be included in much higher numbers. At this point, it's pretty clear that it's willful ignorance and exclusion that is keeping Indigenous people out of Hollywood.

Considering that there is a huge overlap between oppression, marginalization, and disability every single nonwhite community should have way more representation than they do. It's depressing to write about how overwhelmingly white every category is in this study. It's not fair to the millions of nonwhite disabled people in the United States who've had a much harder time because nobody has really even considered their existence.

While there have been slight increases in the number of Black and Brown communities, when you look closer at the numbers you see the problems with how representation has increased.

837 White disabled characters (70%) including:

329 Cisgender White Heterosexual Male (5 Jewish)
207 Cisgender White Heterosexual Female
153 Cisgender White Male with Unknown Sexuality
100 Cisgender White Female with Unknown Sexuality
16 Cisgender White Gay Male (1 Jewish)
13 Cisgender White Bisexual Female
11 Cisgender White Lesbian Female
4 Cisgender White Bisexual Male
2 Trans White Lesbian Female
1 Cisgender White Asexual Male
1 GNC White Female with Unknown Sexuality

203 Black disabled characters (17%) including:

70 Cisgender Black Heterosexual Female
61 Cisgender Black Heterosexual Male (1 Jewish)
37 Cisgender Black Male with Unknown Sexuality
20 Cisgender Black Female with Unknown Sexuality
6 Cisgender Black Lesbian Female
3 Cisgender Black Bisexual Female
3 Cisgender Black Gay Male
1 Trans Black Heterosexual Female
1 Cisgender Black Bisexual Male
1 Trans Black Lesbian Female

158 IPOC disabled characters including:

41 Cisgender IPOC Male with Unknown Sexuality (19 Latine, 12 Asian (including Chinese and Japanese), 3 Middle Eastern, 3 Hawaiian, 2 Unknown/Ambiguous, 1 Biracial (Asian)

40 Cisgender IPOC Heterosexual Female (18 Latine, 15 Asian,
2 Unknown/Ambiguous, 1 Indigenous,1 Middle Eastern, 1 Biracial (Black/White), 1 Mixed (Indigenous Latine),

1 AfroLatine

36 Cisgender IPOC Female with Unknown Sexuality (17 Asian (including South Asian/Indian, 1 South Asian Muslim, and 2 Pakistani Muslim), 9 Latine, 2 Unknown/Ambiguous, 2 Middle Eastern, 1 Indigenous, 1 Biracial, 1 Mixed (White, Black, Indigenous)

33 Cisgender IPOC Heterosexual Male (20 Latine, 7 Asian (including South Asian/Indian and Japanese), 2 Indigenous, 1 Hawaiian, 1 Middle Eastern, 1 Mixed (Black, White, Chinese, & South Asian/Indian), 1 Unknown/Ambiguous)

5 Cisgender IPOC Gay Male (2 Latine, 1 Asian, 1 Bisexual (Asian), 1 Indigenous)

1 Cisgender IPOC Queer Female (Mixed – Indigenous Latine
& White)

1 Cisgender IPOC Bisexual Female (Asian – South Asian/Indian)

1 Trans IPOC Heterosexual Female (AfroLatine

While white characters pretty much stayed the same, going up maybe one percentage point between last year's study and now, in order to create room for more IPOC characters, Black characters were sacrificed. The same is true for the amount of Latine and Asian characters. In order to make more room for more Asian characters, other IPOC (particularly Indigenous and Latine) disabled characters were sacrificed. If any characters need to be sacrificed, it's some of the white characters. That's the only way marginalized communities will have disabled representation.

The world is not white people versus every other race, but you wouldn't know that from representation. There seems to be this misconception that equality is going to look something like 50% white people and 50% every other race in the world. When only a small handful of these people get represented, you can't get a really good understanding of their issues or experiences with disability. This is about telling stories that haven't been told, as much as inclusion, and non-white people deserve to see their stories told.

Disability by Nationality

Since the US is a melting pot, it's always fun to see what kind of representation happens in this study when it comes to Nationality. Honestly, it's getting pretty boring seeing stories only about Americans, so it is good to have a bit of diversity. We welcome even more in this area.

Please note that we use the term American just for ease of use. We want to completely acknowledge the fact that we are living on Indigenous land, and that the true Americans are the Indigenous people of this nation. However, using terms like USian is much more awkward when it comes to accessibility. It would've been impossible to use it with problematic voice software. We are open to discussion on changing how we identify characters that are considered "American." Please just know we understand the complexities surrounding the use of this term, and only used it simply as an identifier within the study for ease of use.

As anticipated, the majority, 980 disabled characters, are American. Of that there are 4 Irish American, 2 Chinese American 1 Mexican American and 1 Hawaiian American. Beyond that, 89 characters are British, including 1 Pakistani Brit, 37 characters are from a Fictional world or tribe (some of which include Alkenny, Westeros, Romulus, Payan, The Burgue, and Tirnanoc), 12 Irish, 9 Canadian, 9 Russian, 8 Unknown Nationality, 7 Scottish, 6 Australian, 6 Mexican, 4 French, 4 German, 4 Austrian, 3 Japanese, 3 African NOS, 2 Pakistani, 2 Middle Eastern NOS, 2 Chinese, 2 Syrian, 2, Spanish, 1 Afghani, 1 Vietnamese, 1 Haitian, 1 Nigerian, 1 Taiwanese, and 1 Bulgarian.

Disability by Age

While there are some overlaps between what makes a character Teen or Adult or Adult Versus Elder, we tried to stick with the following formula when figuring out what age range characters fit into. Child goes for anyone between the ages of 2 and 12. Baby would be anyone before 2 years or so. A Teen is someone between 13 and 19, although depending on if they appear 19 or 20, we may have placed them into Adult. It was really a case-by-case basis.

The area that's limited the most is seeing young disabled characters. Growing up as disabled children, it's incredibly hard to never see yourself represented. The fact that representation is overwhelmingly Adult, also might reflect the fact that it's easier to just not include children due to child working laws and what not, but if nondisabled children are going to be included in storytelling, disabled children should be as well.

Representing disabled Teens and Children with greater authenticity could be life changing. We believe bullying, mistreatment, and misunderstanding could be addressed through representation of young disabled people in film and television. We know that television has a distinct impact on how people relate to those they don't understand, so this is the way to help make the world better for disabled people. It starts with young people. It has to if we want things to change for the better.

That being said, the age ranges of all 1,198 characters are as follows:

833 Adult
217 Elder
82 Teen
72 Child
4 Baby

Elder stories tend to be specific to things involving "old age." It seems like once Adult characters reach their 60s or later it becomes all about their old age and disability. Elder people have the same wants, needs, and desires as Adult people, but we don't get to see that reflected. Really, fine tuning what kind of stories are told about disabled people in terms of age is going to be central to improving the representation of disability based on age.

Disability by Role

Throughout many of the sections we spoke a lot about how the characters dominate the narrative. To be fair, there are more Supporting characters than we anticipated, but we're still looking at least half of the characters being Bit roles or less. That really shows what creators think about including disabled characters and actors.

We found 509 Bit roles and 115 Guest Stars – a lot of these roles are what we like to call throwaway roles because they are just one-off, one-episode characters. They are added for dramatic or comedic effect depending on the show, but the characters have no real long-term longevity or inclusion in the narrative of the stories.

It's nice to see that Lead (174) and Supporting (321) have grown, but we continue to see that a lot of these characters remain white people, cisgender people, and heterosexual people or people with unknown sexuality. It seems like creators just want to create a quick character, cast the easiest to find non-disabled actor and be done with

it. All that does is ignore a large part of the disabled population, and also keeps disabled actors on the margins in Hollywood.

There are so many stories for disabled Lead and Supporting characters that have yet to be told. Since disabled stories are rarely told authentically there is a plethora of authentic material that is ripe for the picking. Creators just have to be willing to listen to disabled people about what kind of content to create. It shouldn't just all revolve around disability, either. We really need disabled people to be able to live their lives in whatever way they can. The more narratives the better.

Disability by Network

We knew that last year CBS was going to win the network with the most disabled characters. For the last several years, CBS has had multiple initiatives attempting to find more disabled actors. Or at least that's what we've seen from them. To be fair that has translated into some great performances such as Mattie Webber on *MacGyver* and Shammy on *Magnum PI* amongst others. However, we were in for a surprise this year.

CBS keeps doing what they are doing, which is kind of helpful, but they still have a long way to go to be truly inclusive. As we were compiling data, we started noticing a trend with the local shows. NBC and ABC have made a concerted effort to include more disabled characters, and for the first time the networks are truly at competition. Even FOX stepped up and has over 100 characters this year. The smaller networks have shown growth, as well.

It is with a bit of shock that we announce NBC has overtaken CBS this year, and they now hold the crown as the network with the most disabled characters. The breakdown for the top five networks, all of them local is:

NBC (191), CBS (182), ABC (172), FOX (104), and CW (77)

The cable network with the highest number of characters is HBO with 49 characters. Other networks have the following character breakdown:

PBS (30), Showtime (25), FX (25), AMC (24), Starz (15), Sundance (15), BBC America (9), Freeform (7), TNT (6), OWN (4), Paramount Network (4), Disney (3), Nickelodeon (1), and USA (1).

As for streaming, the network with the most shows is Netflix with a whopping 108 disabled characters. They completely dominated all of the other streaming services including Hulu with 33, Amazon with 30, Acorn with 20, Britbox with 18, Apple TV with 17, CBS All Access with 15, EPIX with 7, Shudder with 4, and Disney+ with 2.

Hopefully, all of these networks will grow and have many more disabled characters that we can report in next year's study. We are already actively engaged in watching shows for next year. The work is never done.

Disabled Mimicry

The term disabled mimicry was created after Black disabled activists spoke out about how the terms currently being used "cripping up" and "crip face" were appropriating terms to describe white people pretending to play Black characters, which is called blackface or blacking up.

There's a lot of misunderstanding about "cripping up" and how it relates to blacking up. Blacking up is literally the process of engaging in blackface. The two terms go together, so while non-Black disabled people continue to argue over the validity of using this term to describe nondisabled actors playing disabled characters, it still is appropriative of the language used by the Black community.

The reason why we chose the term disabled mimicry is because mimicry literally means to both mimic and mock. That's what happens when nondisabled people play disabled roles, especially when they take on physical, vocal and other visible or auditory stereotypes as a means of showing the audience that they are disabled. Do we believe that actors intend to mock disabled people? No. But these actors simply can't show that they are disabled unless they are doing so through harmful stereotyping.

So, what they are doing is literal mimicry. They are trying to mimic the movements, the actions, the vocal intonation, the accent, or the lack thereof of actual disabled people. There's no way they can do it without mocking these movements, characteristics, vocal tones, etc. it just can't be done, therefore it is mimicry. The only exception is actors completely removing all aspects of disability, which is the opposite – it's erasure.

With this in mind, disabled mimicry really fits the idea of what actors do when they pretend to be disabled. We can't look at Dustin Hoffman's performance in *Rainman* without recognizing it as mimicry. The same for Eddie Redmayne in *The Theory of Everything* or Leonardo DiCaprio in *What's Eating Gilbert Grape*. All of these

performances personify what disabled mimicry is, and we see it all the time when nondisabled actors play us in film and television.

We anticipated that the majority of disabled performances on television would be actors engaging in disabled mimicry. That's absolutely true, but we are slowly starting to see more disabled actors involved in television. Kayla Cromer's Matilda is a revelatory character for the Autistic community, simply by being the first Autistic Lead character played by an Autistic person. Sammi Haney is a revelatory character, just by being one of the first authentic portrayals of a wheelchair user to be seen on television. Hollywood is capable of casting authentic disabled actors, and writing authentic disabled experiences, but studios must be willing to take the chance on disabled actors and creators.

This year, only 128 characters were actually disabled with at least one of the disabilities they portrayed. There were a few characters that played multiply disabled characters and may have had one of the disabilities but we were unsure about the others. We still counted those characters as disabled. We also want to give a shout out to Selma Blair, who portrayed a character where you don't even know if she's disabled on *Lost in Space*, as well as Eileen Grubba, who plays a character you don't know is disabled on *Watchmen*.

This is an interesting thing that studios are starting to do. They're casting disabled actors, especially established disabled actors in small roles, and then, they essentially remove their disability, so the audience is unaware that they are disabled people. The camera shoots them in ways that do not emphasize their disability or bring attention to it at all. There are good and bad things about this. It's good that disabled actors are able to be considered for any role they can play, but it's also not always the best to make disabled people into nondisabled characters, when we don't have good representation or inclusion for disabled characters. We need more authentically disabled people playing roles where their disability isn't hidden. Especially since right now, a lot of the disabled roles are all about disability. If studios are going to create disabled roles, they need to be played by disabled actors. Truthfully, it's better to have roles that are disability aware (the audience is aware the character is disabled but it may or may not have any real bearing on the story), as opposed to disability erasure.

Of course, we are of the school where we believe that we need to move beyond the idea of the "disabled role." A lot of these roles that revolve around disability are either for nondisabled protagonists to learn a lesson or to educate the audience about a disability. Disabled people are not here just to teach nondisabled people to be better,

kinder, or more compassionate. Disabled people are complex human beings like everyone else, and like everyone else deserve complex stories.

This doesn't mean erasing disability. This means becoming aware and conscious of disability. Again, we urge studios to look to *Raising Dion* to see how the characters on the show handle ableism and inclusion. Sammi Haney's inclusion as Esperanza has allowed her character to encounter ableism naturally through the story, and only to address it when it comes up. It is much more about showing what she actually goes through day-to-day as opposed to trying to create a narrative that lectures the audience about disability.

Ableism exists in our lives as disabled people. It unfolds for some of us every day. But there are plenty of times throughout our day when it's not a part of our lives. There are a lot of parts of our day when our disability is not even our focus or highlight. You would not know that from television. This is why it's so horrible that 468 actors engage in disabled mimicry out of 1,208 disabled characters represented. This is about 40% of the representation. The amount of characters played by actual disabled actors is only 10%, which leaves 50% for characters that are Unknown, but assumed No.

There are so many ways that studios could integrate more disabled people into their casting. That's where it begins. Studios need to start auditioning disabled actors not just for disabled roles but for any roles they can logically play. If they started casting disabled actors in any roles the actor could play, we would start to see greater inclusion much more organically.

At the end of the day, the Hollywood television studios need to make initiatives to include disabled people at every level – from production to creation to acting. Disabled voices have been silenced long enough in Hollywood. It's time to let us move forward and take our place in crafting our own stories and narratives.

Conclusion

Our first study last year, we had no idea what to expect from disability representation. We had been told by other studies that disabled people were not anywhere. At the beginning of this paper, we told you that we were going to show you all the ways that disabled people have been failed in Hollywood, as well as extrapolate on what we see as the real issues with representation in Hollywood.

The most important issue to address is storytelling. You could have the most diverse cast in the world, but if the story is offensive and harmful to disabled people it's a waste of casting. We are urging Hollywood studios to make a commitment to hire disabled consultants to help them develop projects from the beginning stages. These consultants would be able to help craft characters within current television vehicles, as well as develop new characters for upcoming shows. This would also allow them to vet representation on new shows, preventing harm towards disabled communities before it starts.

We also believe that studios should have a dedicated disabled person as a part of their casting and on set teams. The casting individual would be able to help zero in on the kind of roles that would benefit from disabled actors auditioning, as well as ensuring that auditions are accessible to all actors. The on set crew would be able to make sure that filming and the on set location is accessible to the actors.

Beyond that, disabled writers and directors, especially those that are not Cisgender white men, need to be involved in creating television. There are very few multiply marginalized disabled creators, and many of them like Ava DuVernay are not well recognized as disabled creators. There needs to be more so better and more authentic stories can be told.

Disabled characters are all over Hollywood, but we need to see more disabled characters especially with Down Syndrome and Other Intellectual Disability, Autistic characters, Little People, Deaf characters, Blind/Low Vision characters, Amputees played by amputees, Physically disabled characters that actually have specific disabilities, and those with Body and Facial Differences. The stories about these characters need to be authentic, and disabled actors need to be at the forefront of telling and acting in these narratives.

There also needs to be better storytelling for those with Psychosocial, Neurological, and Learning Disabilities, as well as those dealing with Alcoholism and Addiction. Definitely more creators who have experience with these disabilities can help with their crafting. Disabled people need to move away from having their disabilities be the story of the week, especially when they are villains. There is much more to disabled lives than what we see, and with Hollywood in desperate need of fresh stories and voices disabled creators and their ideas for television are ripe for the picking. Hollywood just needs to let the stories bloom.

This year we are proud to announce that we received a grant from GADIM to help support this year's study. Further support would allow us to not only hire more people to help with this study, but also hire individuals to help us compile data in studies looking at film, video games, web content, Broadway, and more!

Organizations & Businesses can financially support our FilmDis 2020-2021 Study into Disability Representation on Television by becoming a sponsor. Email us for further details.

About FilmDis: FilmDis started out as a discussion on Twitter back in 2014, by filmmaker, Dominick Evans, about disability representation in the media. Today it is a full-fledged media-monitoring organization offering research, education, and consulting on disability representation in film, television, video games, and other forms of popular media. Check us out on Twitter and Facebook for news, reviews, resources, and research studies into representation of all forms of media.

Also check out our website here: http://www.filmdis.com/

About Ashtyn Law: Ashtyn Law went to school for screenwriting. She Is the screenwriter of *trip*, *Nance + Sydney*, and *Inamorata.* She is currently developing the scripts for a new television series. She also works as a script consultant and tech writer. Ash has worked with major studios reviewing film and television including HBO, Showtime, Acorn, 20th Century Fox, CBS, ABC, and Disney. Ashtyn is multiply disabled and Is also part of the LGBTQIA community. Check her out on Twitter.

About Dominick Evans: Dominick Evans received his BFA in Motion Pictures Production from Wright State University where he learned from Oscar-winning filmmakers. He primarily works as a director and disability consultant The Hollywood. Dominick has consulted on disability representation on multiple shows and television series for networks that include Lionsgate and Netflix. He has also reviewed material for major studios including HBO, Microsoft, Cinemax, Starz, EA, CBS, Disney, and Sony. He is a multiply disabled wheelchair user who is also trans, non-binary, and queer. You can follow him on Instagram, Twitter, and Tik Tok, or catch him streaming on Twitch.

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