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Awareness with Accuracy: An Analysis of the Representation of Autism in Film and Television

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AWARENESS WITH ACCURACY: AN ANALYSIS OF THE REPRESENTATION OF
AUTISM IN FILM AND TELEVISION

by

LaCreanna Young

B.A., Howard University, 2010

A Research Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Master of Science Degree

Department of Mass Communication and Media Arts
in the Graduate School
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in the field of Professional Media and Media Management

Approved by:

Dr. Paul Torre, Chair

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TITLE: AWARENESS WITH ACCURACY: AN ANALYSIS OF THE REPRESENTATION OF AUTISM IN FILM AND TELEVISION

MAJOR PROFESSOR: Dr. Paul Torre

This was a study analyzing accuracy and stereotypes about autism representation in *Rain Man*, *Mercury Rising*, *Parenthood*, and *Arthur*. The autistic characters were viewed a minimum of five times. Their behaviors were compared with common myths about autism as presented by the Autism Research Institute. Autistic characters were labeled as dispelling or reinforcing the five myths analyzed. Production efforts to be scientifically accurate and autism representation since the release of *Rain Man* were also analyzed. While the media analyzed did utilize various efforts to represent autism accurately, this study found that each medium relied upon many of the Autism Research Institute's myths as well as modern myths created by society. This was a preliminary analysis with time limitations. Future research should analyze diverse Autism Spectrum Disorders, characters and myths.

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Chapter 1

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Studies have shown that mentally and physically disabled individuals make up a great percentage of the American population. Nearly 15 percent of the U.S. population, or 53 million Americans, can be classified as disabled (Grovesman, 2011). This large percentage enables this group of individuals to serve as the largest minority group in America (Olkin, 1999).

Similar to many other minority groups, the disabled continue to face challenges pertaining to equal rights and general acceptance. Unfortunately, unlike many other minorities, this group is more likely to be misunderstood and inadequately represented in everyday life. This real life inadequate, and oftentimes inaccurate, representation is easily transferred to the small and big screens known as television and film (Bejoian & Connor, 2006).

The problem with media images of disabled members of our society is that there is an increase in able-bodied children and adults relying on media, such as television and film, to expose them to and educate them about various disabilities (Bejoian & Connor, 2006). As a result, these media images are used to help shape and mold the attitudes of many forming perceptions of disabled individuals. The purpose of this research paper revolved around the aforementioned misrepresentation and limited exposure of the disabled in film and television. However, instead of addressing all disabilities, this research paper concentrated solely on Autism Spectrum Disorders.

Currently, one in every six American children is diagnosed with some type

of developmental disorder. Among the top developmental disorders being diagnosed are classical Autism or a related Autism Spectrum Disorder (Melnick, 2011). With this staggering statistic comes the need for accurate representation of autism, and the inclusion of its possible severity, in film and television (Dachel, 2011, p. 2). *Awareness with Accuracy: An Analysis of the Representation of Autism in Film and Television* research concentrated on the way in which some easily accepted myths of autism are present in media. More specifically, this research focused on the stereotypical elements of the autism portrayals in characters in the films *Rain Man* and *Mercury Rising*, as well as the television shows *Parenthood* and *Arthur*.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews literature written on media's role in stereotyping the disabled. I begin with the definition of disability, according to the American Disability Association. I then discuss media's role as a perceived source of valuable information and education. The isolation and misrepresentation of those that are disabled is the next discourse covered. I conclude this chapter by focusing on material that discusses the various stereotypes of autism.

Definition of Disability

According to the United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the American Disability Association defines disability as:

1. a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities; or
2. a record of physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a major life activity (*ADA: Definition of disability under ADAA, 2011*).

Media as Education

The impact of media on society can be easily observed in the trends of everyday life and measured by consumer spending in the marketplace. This is a statement in which media producers are probably proud to take pride. However, when it comes to those same producers acknowledging the actual impact media have on society, they are often hesitant to do so (Klobas, 1988, p. xi).

For many, media, such as film and television, are often perceived as a reflection of reality. Therefore, if misrepresentations are present, they can have a

major impact on shaping audience's attitudes and behaviors towards the disabled (Bejoian & Connor, 2006). According to authors Lynn Bejoian and David Connor, most adults and children spend more time learning about the real world through media such as film and television than through the print media (Bejoian & Connor, 2006). As a result, information about disabilities is more likely to reach this mass audience through those media than through a printed research journal. One fact that makes this statement true is that media have had growth in access and popularity.

The popularity of motion pictures and the convenience of movie viewing in the home have made film an important medium for educating society about disabilities--both mental and physical. As noted by author Stephen Safran, "For many citizens with limited exposure to individuals with specific impairments, film, regardless of its accuracy, serves as a major source of information on the very nature of disabilities" (Safran, 1998, p. 227).

In his article *Disability Portrayal in Film: Reflecting the Past, Directing the Future* (1998), Safran focused on the role films could play in serving as a tool for awareness and education for shaping the knowledge and attitudes of teachers and students (Safran, 1998). This same notion of using films for awareness and educational purposes can be applied to the general society to help educate society on disabilities such as autism and reduce stereotyping.

Stereotyping and "Othering"

In the chapter *The Concept of the Stereotype* of the book *Stereotyping: The Politics of Representation* (2001), author Michael Pickering discussed

possible reasons for stereotyping and the various dilemmas that surround these reasons. The problematic foundation of stereotyping is that it is a narrow perception of the whole. This narrow perception is often used to help the majority obtain a sense of dominance, security, and order in society (Pickering, 2001). The narrowness of most stereotypical perceptions enforced by the majority can limit flexibility, openness, and overall acceptance.

Stereotyping, as discussed by Pickering, is often a tactic used by the majority for convenience. Placing those that are different into categories, regardless of accuracies, is a method used to ensure the existence of continued control by the majority (Pickering, 2001). This placement is an element of Pickering's definition of 'othering'. On page 47 of his book, Pickering stated "While they occur in all sorts of discourse, and can draw various ideological assumptions, stereotypes operate as a means of evaluatively placing, and attempting to fix in place, the people or cultures from a particular and privileged perspective" (Pickering, 2001). In essence, othering is used to make a certain individual or group feel isolated and different from the whole. This isolation can be observed in everyday life and easily transferred to media.

Stereotyping the Disabled in Media

As a society, stereotypical perspectives of disabilities have supported the notion that a disability is a negative thing. Instead of being considered a natural part of life, these stereotypes primarily contain negative connotations (Bejoian & Connor, 2006). The able-bodied majority are continuously exposed to misconceptions that limit the conceptualization of the disabled while being

reinforced with notions that are often inaccurate. According to Bejoian and Connor, "People see and hear these influences because they circulate throughout the media" (Bejoian & Connor, 2006, p. 53).

Rhoda Olkin, author of *What Psychotherapists Should Know about Disability* (1999), shares beliefs similar to those of Bejoian and Connor. Olkin mentioned how the professional literature and media articles that have been written oftentimes contain concepts and terminology that focus on the negative aspects of disabilities which in turn help mold negative perceptions (Olkin, 1999, p. 24).

In their article, *Pigs, Pirates, and Pills: Using Film to Teach the Social Context of Disability* (2006), *Bejoian* and Connor allude to the fact that negative stereotypes of disabilities remain in existence for one primary reason. This reason is the limited amount of access to accurate portrayals of various disabilities. That is why media with accurate representation of disabilities that help combat negative stereotypes are in extreme demand.

According to author Martin Norden, media's representation of disabled individuals is similar to that of other subgroups that differ from the majority. These subgroups may include racial and ethnic minorities, as well as women. In his book entitled *The Cinema of Isolation: A History of Physical Disabilities in the Movies* (1994), author Martin Norden focused on the correlation of the treatment of the disabled in reality and their representation in movies. Norden quoted Andrew Grant and Frank Bowe as stating the following: "Prior to [the late 1960s and early 1970s], being disabled almost assured social, educational, and

occupational isolation” (p. 2). Fast forwarding 20 to 40 years later, individuals with disabilities have merged into mainstream society with the help of legislation such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) (Norden, 1994).

The ADA, which became law in 1990, was created to help ensure that the disabled would be offered fair treatment and accommodations pertaining to housing, transportation and employment (Norden, 1994). Norden quoted the late Senator Edward Kennedy who declared, “[The ADA] ensures that millions of men and women and children can look forward to the day when they will be judged by the strengths of their abilities, not the misconceptions about their disabilities” (Norden, 1994, p. 308).

Unfortunately, movie themes oftentimes reflect that stereotypical trend of isolating disabled individuals (Norden, 1994). This stereotypical trend continues to resurface in film for many reasons. Some of these primary reasons stem from the actions taken by the able-bodied majority.

Unlike disabled individuals, able-bodies are those that are able to perform daily activities with minimal interference from mental or physical disabilities (Norden, 1994). These are the individuals that make up the largest percentage of the U.S. population, also known as the majority. This majority presents itself in almost every aspect of life, including educational and professional (Norden, 1994).

Norden mentioned that the able-bodied are the individuals that create and saturate most stereotypes of the disabled. This is because it is customary for this population to define and categorize the disabled in manners that most

interest its able-bodied majority (Norden, 1994, p.2). By defining the disabled minority in broad and often inaccurate ways, it is easy for the able-bodied majority to be oblivious to the fact that the disabled are truly victims of not only stereotyping but discrimination as well (Norden, 1994).

Stereotyping a Commercial Success

When it comes to depicting disabilities, certain disorders and stereotypes have proven to generate more commercial success (Smith, 1999). Psychiatric disorders rank as the most common disability featured in film (Safran, 1998). Physical and sensory conclude the top three (Safran, 1998). Unfortunately, such roles for the disabled are often limited to the disabled person being stereotyped as some sort of dependent or victim of societal prejudice (Safran, 1998). According to author Claude Smith, there is another category to add to the above list. That category is freak.

In his article, *Finding a Warm Place for Someone We Know: The Cultural Appeal of Recent Mental Patient and Asylum Films* (1999), author Claude Smith discussed how characters with mental disabilities were included in the first form of media--literature (Smith, 1999). It was with this medium that the trend of associating mental disorders with a freakish or horror theme began (Smith, 1999). Since then, behavior that is perceived as slightly different or completely abnormal continues to be exploited.

Another author that elaborated on the stereotypical exploitation is Jack A. Nelson. His book, *The Disabled, the Media, and the Information Age* (1999), discussed six stereotypical images of the disabled present in film and television

in his book. These were that the disabled person was either framed as a hero, threat, victim, one who is need of care from others, one who is unable to adjust, and unfortunately--one who should not have survived (Nelson, 1999).

Nelson continued his discussion by mentioning that the disabled can be considered the overlooked minority--especially in mainstream media (Nelsen, 1999). Either they are invisible or inaccurately portrayed in media such as film. In *Dispelling Stereotypes: Promoting Disabilities through Film*, authors Weber et al. stated, "Film is one important resource that helps form the public's beliefs and dispositions about people with disabilities" (Weber et al., 2010, p. 841). For this reason, popular film festivals have been used as venues for more accurate displays of the disabilities as regular humans living ordinary lives without being pitied or with superhero powers (Weber et al., 2010). Today, film festivals have expanded to include more disabilities including that which is the subject of this research—autism.

Discussing Autism

Unlike some disorders, autism cannot be easily defined. Stemming from the Greek word "auto" meaning self, autism is oftentimes mistakenly labeled as a disease. As mentioned in his book, *Explaining Autism* (2010), author Robert Snedden elaborated on the fact that autistic individuals are those with a brain that has developed differently (Snedden, 2010). Although the physical appearance of someone with autism may vary, one common characteristic of autism can be easily observed. This characteristic is that communicating and establishing relationships may be more of a challenge for someone with autism

compared to that of a non-autistic person (Snedden, 2010).

Since its discovery in 1911, the medical term autism has been applied to a wide range of developmental conditions, which are all known as Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) today. The individual cases of ASD can include both high-functioning and low-functioning autism. An example of high-functioning autism may include someone that is able to perform academically at normal or above average levels. Low-functioning autism can be perceived as an individual with difficulty learning. Regardless of the learning levels, many autistic individuals have the one characteristic mentioned above in common—difficulty communicating and interacting with others (Snedden, 2010).

History of Autism

Although the term autism has been around since 1911, the actual medical study did not begin until 1943 with Dr. Leo Kanner. Dr. Kanner conducted studies for Johns Hopkins University (Snedden, 2010). It was 1943 when he decided to study 11 children of similar ages. The study concluded in 1948. Over the course of the five-year study, Kanner observed similar behavior when it came to the children's behavior. However, it was after the first two years when he noticed that the majority of the subjects participated in limited social interaction (Snedden, 2010). As Kanner evaluated possible factors that contributed to the lack of social interaction with the children, he was immediately able to exclude environmental factors such as parenting. Snedden elaborated on this point by stating the following:

He [Kanner] strongly believed that there was a biological reason for their

condition. As the condition appeared so early in life, he did not think there could be an outside cause for it. He believed they were born without social instinct (Snedden, 2010, p. 11)

In 1944, one year following the beginning of Dr. Kanner's autism study, an Austrian doctor named Hans Asperger published a medical description of the condition known as Asperger Syndrome (Snedden, 2010). Asperger's study involved observing the behaviors of four young boys. Asperger focused on their physical and mental abilities. The results of Asperger's study found that although some of the boys were able to function on high levels, they had difficulty with forming friendships. Asperger attributed some of this difficulty to the fact that many of their actions reflected those of single-minded individuals (Snedden, 2010). Single-minded individuals can be those that have a one-sided or limited perception of the present activity.

Rise of Autism

According to a study conducted in 2000, by the United States Department of Education, there has been a drastic increase in the number of school-aged children being diagnosed with autism. More specifically, a 544 percent increase was noted from the year 1992 to 2000 (Snedden, 2010). Many specialists are finding a direct correlation with the increase in autism awareness and autism diagnosis.

Prior to this awareness, many autistic individuals were categorized as developmentally disabled and even mentally retarded (Snedden, 2010). Along

with this increase in awareness also came an increase in the number of factors examined for possible contribution to autism development. Author Robert Snedden listed the following as examined factors: cell phone radiation, pesticides, plastic, pollution, processed foods, and vaccinations (Snedden, 2010).

Although the increase in awareness has enabled professionals to examine and understand autism more accurately, it has also created a different form of categorization. For instance, every autistic person has his or her own unique case of the disorder. This range of unique cases promoted specialists to categorize autism cases under the unique umbrella known as Autism Spectrum Disorder (Snedden, 2010). As previously mentioned, ASD can include high-functioning Asperger Syndrome and low-functioning classic autism.

Signs of Autism

When trying to diagnose ASD, specialists often turn to three main reoccurring signs of the disorders. These are social problems, communication problems, and lack of imagination (Snedden, 2010). Social problems refer to an individual having difficulty interacting with others while communication problems refer the inability or difficulty understanding the problems of others. Lack of imagination pertains to an individual's hesitance to partake in activities that would force him or her to use creativity and imagination. Instead, these individuals often seek comfort by performing activities that are repetitive. (Snedden, 2010).

Since Asperger Syndrome is often considered to be the mildest form of autism, it has its own set of signs. Researcher and autism specialist Dr. Lorna

Wing listed the following as the main signs of Asperger Syndrome (Snedden, 2010, p. 34):

1. Lack of empathy
2. Inappropriate, one-sided interaction
3. Little or no ability to form friendships
4. Repetitive speech
5. Poor nonverbal communication
6. Intense absorption on certain concepts
7. Ill-coordinated movements

Although Snedden's previously mentioned definition serves as the current definition of the various Autism Spectrum Disorders, this definition may change by the end of 2012. In a *New York Times* article entitled *New Definition of Autism will Exclude Many, Study Suggests* (2012), author Amy Harmon mentioned that the American Psychiatric Association is planning to make some major revisions to its *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (D.S.M.)*. The *D.S.M.* is the standard reference used for research, treatment, and insurance decisions concerning mental disorders (Harmon, 2012).

The *D.S.M.*'s latest edition, the fifth edition, has not been updated in 17 years and many experts are considering updating it to contain less vagueness for the criteria of autism. Many of these experts believe that the broad definition of autism and its closely related pervasive developmental disorders, not otherwise specified (*P.D.D.-N.O.S.*) has led to the continuously increasing diagnosis rate of one out of 100 (Harmon, 2012).

The proposed revisions may exclude, what is considered to be, high-functioning autism and include a much stricter criteria for autism diagnosis. For example, individuals will be classified as autistic if he or she illustrates a severe lack of communication skills and social interaction under the revised edition (Harmon, 2012). For the purposes of this study the following definition of autism is used:

Autism- a disorder characterized by extreme withdrawal, self-stimulation, cognitive deficits, language disorders, and onset before 30 months (Hallahan & Kauffman, 1997).

Autism Myths

According to the Autism Research Institute, there are fifteen common myths of autism. For the purposes of this research, only five are analyzed. These five myths are as follows:

1. Individuals with autism never make eye contact.
2. Individuals with autism are unable to verbally communicate.
3. Autistic individuals are unable to show and respond to affection.
4. Autistic individuals do not smile.
5. Autistic individuals are not perceptive to cues from other individuals.

Research Questions

1. In what ways do the following texts dispel or reinforce any of the Autism Research Institute's myths: *Rain Man*, *Mercury Rising*, *Arthur's* 'George and the Missing Puzzle Piece' episode, and *Parenthood's* 'Qualities and Difficulties' episode?
2. In what ways did the production of the following media attempt to be scientifically accurate: *Rain Man*, *Mercury Rising*, *Arthur's* "George and the Missing Puzzle Piece" episode, and *Parenthood's* "Qualities and Difficulties" episode?
3. In what ways have autistic characters been depicted in media since the 1988 release of *Rain Man*?

Operational definitions

1. Production impacted by an autistic individual- an autistic individual contributing to the pre-production, production or post-production or an autism specialist consulted.
2. Autism Research Institute's stereotypical myths-
 - a. Individuals with autism never make eye contact.
 - b. Individuals with autism are unable to verbally communicate.
 - c. Autistic individuals are unable to show and respond to affection.
 - d. Autistic individuals do not smile.
 - e. Autistic individuals are not perceptive of cues from other individuals.
3. Affection displays- expressing an emotion of like or love to another with verbal or non-verbal communication.

4. Perceptiveness to cues- the analysis section of this paper evaluated the autistic character's perceptiveness to cues by that character's ability to directly respond to or follow directions given by an abled-bodied character.

Chapter 3

METHOD

Representing disabilities with accuracy serves as a difficult challenge for filmmakers and television producers. However, many of the authors referenced in the literature review of this paper support the claim that the developmentally disabled are often underrepresented or misrepresented in film and television. Some authors, like Klobas, believe this misrepresentation deserves to be criticized (Klobas, 1988). Autism representations are not any different. For that reason, two films and two television shows with autistic characters were analyzed.

Based on revenue generated domestically during opening weekends, *Rain Man* (1988) with over seven million dollars and *Mercury Rising* (1998) with over ten million dollars were selected to be analyzed. Although each of these films were able to generate hundred of millions of dollars domestically and internationally, these films were selected solely based on opening weekend revenue for a very important reason. This reason is because this immediate revenue may have helped to represent audiences' interest in their autism plots. PBS's "George and the Missing Puzzle Piece" episode of *Arthur* was selected because *Arthur* is a popular program that targets children. A recent media representation of autism was the final medium selected to be analyzed. This was NBC's *Parenthood*'s "Qualities and Difficulties" episode.

This study utilized quantitative and qualitative approaches. Each approach was used to ascertain the autistic characters' actions that reinforced or dispelled

the Autism Research Institute's myths. To accomplish this, an in-depth quantitative content analysis was conducted to determine the percentage of scenes in which each character displayed each myth. This content analysis was elaborated upon qualitatively with research by author Robert Snedden and other autism researchers. The final approach used in this study was a textual analysis. This was applied to determine the media content creators' intentions for their productions to be scientifically accurate.

For this analysis, each medium was reviewed in its entirety a total of three times. In addition, scenes containing each medium's autistic character were reviewed twice. The DVD versions of *Mercury Rising*, *Rain Man*, and *Parenthood* were viewed. The YouTube version of *Arthur* was used. The first viewing of each medium was conducted to gather preliminary data about the characters and plots. The second viewing was completed to determine whether any of the autistic characters' scenes directly reinforced or dispelled any of the Autism Research Institute's previously myths. Calculations for the number of scenes depicting the myths were made after the second viewing.

The third and fourth viewing involved reviewing scenes with the autistic characters. The third viewing compared what was considered one of the Autism Research Institute's myths with what Robert Snedden considered a sign of autism. The final viewing determined accuracy of the calculations and notations documented.

A textual analysis was also utilized to address the depiction of autistic characters since the 1988 release of *Rain Man*. Instead of focusing on the media

producers' efforts to be scientifically accurate, this analysis focused on the more obvious elements displayed. More specifically, this textual analysis focused on the exact autism spectrum disorders depicted and the characters created to display them.

Since this study was completed in one academic year, time constraints served as the primary limitation. As a result of this limitation, all representations of autism in media were not analyzed. In addition, every autistic myth was not addressed in this study.

Chapter 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**Autism and *Rain Man*: About *Rain Man***

Released in 1988, Academy Award-winning Best Picture film *Rain Man* is a story about the uniting of an opportunistic younger brother, Charlie Babbitt, with his newly discovered autistic older brother, Raymond, after the passing of their father. The plot of this roughly 130-minute film involves Charlie kidnapping Raymond from his institutional home and initially holding him as ransom for the amount of 1.5 million dollars—half of their father’s three million dollar estate that was left to Raymond. While on a road trip from Ohio to Los Angeles, Charlie gains an appreciation for his older brother and his unique condition.

Starring Tom Cruise as Charlie and Dustin Hoffman as Raymond, *Rain Man* is one of the first films to capture the life of an autistic individual. Classified as an autistic with extraordinarily rare skills, an autistic savant (Eldenson, 2012), Hoffman’s character exposes audiences to signs and traits of autism. Additionally, his character takes viewers inside institutionalized life and even mistreatment from able-bodied characters.

Autism in *Rain Man*: Results of Content Analysis

Table 1: Reinforcing or Dispelling ARI's Myths in *Rain Man*

Percentage of scenes featuring Raymond's actions that reinforced or dispelled one of the Autism Research Institute's myths. Actions not being analyzed were labeled as not applicable.

Myths	Reinforced Myth	Dispelled Myth	N/A
Never make eye contact	94%	6%	0%
Unable to communicate verbally	0%	100%	0%
Respond to or show affection	16%	0%	84%
Do not smile	6%	18%	76%
Not perceptive to cues	24%	76%	0%

Raymond's disorder closely resembled what is known as low-functioning autism, or classic autism (Snedden, 2010). This first became evident with Raymond's lack of eye contact. When Raymond was first introduced in the film, he failed to make eye contact when Charlie spoke to him. It was his lack of eye contact in this scene, and many others, that helped Raymond reinforce this

common myth about autistics. From the analysis, there may have been only one scene that featured him making eye contact. This scene featured Raymond being taught how to dance by Charlie's girlfriend. She instructs him to look at her and Raymond follows her directions. This is an example of Raymond responding to cues, which he did in 76 percent of his scenes. The scene also displayed Raymond's inability to respond to affection. Whether a woman was kissing him, as featured in this scene, or telling his brother goodbye, Raymond reinforced the Autism Research Institute's myth about affection in 16 percent of his scenes.

Raymond's representation of classic autism was also portrayed by the fact that he was able to communicate verbally. However, he often spoke in incomplete sentences that required repetition for others to understand. As Snedden mentioned on page 34 of his book, poor communication often accompanies repetitive speech as a sign of autism. Fortunately for Raymond, he was able to express his delight and excitement clearly to others with a smile. In 18 percent of the scenes that featured his character, Raymond dispelled the Autism Research Institute's myth by smiling. However, unlike the scene when Raymond laughed at a joke, Raymond also smiled during inappropriate and dangerous situations. For example, Raymond smiled as he took the wheel from Charlie while they rode on the highway.

Autism in *Rain Man*: Results of Textual Analysis

By 1988, autism, like many other disabilities, was not embraced or even understood by general society. As a result, many media makers did not consider media reflecting autism to be potential commercial successes. That is why *Rain*

Man is often considered to be the first film to address autism in an accurate manner (Treffert, 2011). In order to accomplish this during a period when such topics remained unaddressed, the production crew of *Rain Man* had to conduct some extensive research.

The first draft of *Rain Man* was written based on a developmentally disabled individual that writer Barry Marrow knew personally. This particular individual was diagnosed with a condition known as savant syndrome. Over the years, savant syndrome has been mistakenly classified as a form of autism because similar to autistics, these individuals are born with brain developmental issues (Treffert, 2011). However, savant syndrome is a condition that can accompany many different developmental disorders including autism and even brain injuries. Some of the characteristics that make these individuals, known as savants, unique may range from having impeccable memories to performing astonishing mathematic calculations (Treffert, 2011).

Simply having the savant abilities that were previously discussed would have made Raymond an interesting character. However, Dustin Hoffman, and many individuals involved with the production, believed that combining Raymond's savant abilities with a condition like autism would create a better character for the film. As a result, Raymond Babbitt's savant characteristics allowed him to memorize figures and perform impressive calculations in his head. His autistic characteristics prevented him from making eye contact and showing affection. That is why Raymond was referred to as an autistic savant (Treffert, 2011).

Determined to portray the complexities within autism and savant syndrome as accurately as possible, actor Dustin Hoffman used Morrow's script, as well as his own personal experiences to play Raymond Babbitt. After the revised script was greenlit, there was an announcement of a strike by the Writers Guild of American that placed the film's final production on hold (Treffert, 2011). Hoffman used this time off to study secondary research and conduct his own primary research of savant and autistic individuals. He studied various forms of media, visited psychiatric facilities, communicated with professionals, and spent time with autistic savants and their families.

Hoffman was able to understand these two unique conditions intensely and eventually borrow some of their behaviors for the movie. For example, Raymond Babbitt's ritual of eating food with toothpicks was a behavior Hoffman incorporated from one of the autistic savants as a result of observing (Treffert, 2011). The scene transcription in Appendix C involves Raymond illustrating his savant abilities by reciting the history of plane crashes.

In addition to Hoffman's research, the producers of *Rain Man* also consulted with medical professionals to gain more insight on Raymond's condition. David Treffert, MD, a clinical professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison's medical school, was contacted to review the 1986 draft of *Rain Man*. Treffert was consulted because of his immense research surrounding savant syndrome (Treffert, 2011). For the autism representation, two consultants from autism specialty centers were hired. They were Dr. Bodil Silvertsen of California and Dr. Ruth Sullivan of West Virginia (*Rain Man: Full Cast and Crew*, n.d). As

previously discussed, Raymond Babbitt served as one character analyzed that displayed signs of classic autism. The second classic autistic character analyzed was Simon Lynch of 1998's *Mercury Rising*.

Autism and *Mercury Rising*: About *Mercury Rising*

Mercury Rising is an action-packed film revolving around an FBI agent named Art Jeffries (Bruce Willis) and a nine-year-old autistic boy named Simon Lynch (Miko Hughes). Similar to *Rain Man*'s depiction of autistic savant abilities, Simon's autism has him fascinated with difficult puzzles and complex codes. So much so that he was able to solve one of the government's top codes. This code, known as "Mercury", was hidden inside of Simon's book of puzzles and believed to be insolvable by humans and computers.

Once the National Security Agency discovered that the code had been broken, Chief Nick Kudrow (Alec Baldwin) created a mission to have Simon assassinated. Convinced that autistic Simon was "one of nature's mistakes" and that he may place "Mercury" into the hands of enemies, Kudrow led a team that assassinated almost everyone in Simon's path—including his parents. Based on the novel *Simple Simon*, *Mercury Rising* followed Art as he served as Simon's caregiver, protected him from harm, and gained experience dealing with an autistic child (Pearson, 2011).

Autism in *Mercury Rising*: Results of Content Analysis

Table 2: Reinforcing or Dispelling ARI's Myths in *Mercury Rising*

Percentage of scenes featuring Simon's actions that reinforced or dispelled one of the Autism Research Institute's myths. Actions not being analyzed were labeled as not applicable.

Myths	Reinforced Myth	Dispelled Myth	N/A
Never make eye contact	60%	15%	25%
Unable to communicate verbally	44%	44%	12%
Respond to or show affection	11%	17%	72%
Do not smile	16%	0%	84%
Not perceptive to cues	20%	55%	25%

As mentioned previously, Simon Lynch was considered to be an autistic savant like Raymond Babbitt. Although Simon's ability to decrypt the government's code enabled him to be classified as a savant, his autism characteristics still reflected classic autism. One reason for this was Simon's poor

verbal communications skills. During the film, Simon only verbalized two complete sentences. These sentences were: “Mommy, Simon is home” and “You are a stranger.” Simon’s use of these two sentences repetitively, and sometimes inappropriately, depicted his position on the low-functioning autism spectrum. For example, in the scene that featured Simon returning home following his parents’ murder, he stated “Mommy, Simon is home” upon entering the door. As illustrated in his introduction, Simon’s routine for entering his home consisted of him ringing the doorbell repeatedly, stating “Mommy, Simon is home,” and then continuing to the kitchen for hot chocolate. This use of, and dependency on, routines is a common sign of autism.

Another sign of Simon’s position on the low-functioning autism spectrum was his lack of eye contact. Similar to Raymond Babbitt, Simon had to be coached to look someone in his or her eyes. That is the reason that his character reinforced this Autism Research Institute’s myth in 60 percent of his scenes.

Since this was a film containing a great amount of action and murders, Simon was not provided with many opportunities to show affection, respond to affection, or simply even smile. That is why the highest percentages for both myths were documented as non-applicable. The one myth that Simon dispelled exceedingly was the myth about autistic individuals being unperceptive to cues. Simon’s actions dispelled this myth in 55 percent of his scenes.

Autism in *Mercury Rising*: Results of Textual Analysis

Ten years after the release of *Rain Man*’s award-winning representation of the autistic savants, producers of *Mercury Rising* decided to depict this extremely

rare ASD with a unique approach. To accomplish this, research was conducted and Miko Hughes was coached as he prepared for his role as Simon Lynch. The head of Pediatric Psychiatry at the University of Chicago not only served as the advisor to this film, but he also exposed Hughes to actual autistic children as he helped Hughes understand the complexities of his role as Simon (Draaisma, 2009).

Autism in *Parenthood*: About *Parenthood*

In 2010, broadcasting network NBC premiered its second attempt to broadcast a weekly series as a spin-off of the successful film *Parenthood* released in 1989 (Stetler, 2010). The film, which starred actor Steve Martin, grossed over 100 million dollars domestically. One year after the film's release, NBC premiered its first film-to-television adaptation of the film; unfortunately, low Nielsen ratings caused the 1990's *Parenthood* to be cancelled after its 12th episode (Stetler, 2010). In the spring of 2010, the current film-to-television adaptation of *Parenthood* premiered on the network addressing relevant issues of today's societies.

Although *Parenthood* has had three different versions with three different casts, the premise of the show has remained the same, that of depicting the trials and tribulations associated with raising a large, but very close-knit family of three to four generations (Stetler, 2010). In the current *Parenthood*, there are three generations of Bravermans dealing with everyday life issues. One issue that brings the show a lot of attention is its portrayal of Asperger Syndrome. *Parenthood* has become such a success with the general audience because its

content not only features common signs of Asperger Syndrome, but its content also features the impact this high-functioning form of autism can have on a family (Diament, 2010).

Adam Braverman (played by Peter Krause) is the oldest sibling of the family and also the father of an eight-year-old autistic son--Max Braverman (played by Max Burkholder). During the pilot episode, Max was diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome after showing multiple signs of the disorder: including unresponsiveness to peers, inability to show affection when it was offered, and lack of and inappropriate social skills. Once an education specialist suggested that Max be evaluated for autism, Adam immediately denied the possibility of Max having autism. His initial decision was based on his comparison of Max to another autistic child who was unable to communicate as well as Max. As previously mentioned, Max was diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome by the end of the first show. Subsequently, Max's disorder has been a focal point for many episodes. This was especially true in *Parenthood's* "Qualities and Difficulties" episode which aired March 1, 2010 (Diament, 2010). Results of the analysis of the representation of autism in this episode follow.

Autism in *Parenthood*: Results of Content Analysis

Table 3: Reinforcing or Dispelling ARI's Myths in "Qualities and Difficulties"

Percentage of scenes featuring Max's actions that reinforced or dispelled one of the Autism Research Institute's myths. Actions not being analyzed were labeled as not applicable.

MYTHS	REINFORCED MYTHS	DISPELLED MYTH	N/A
Never make eye contact	33%	67%	0%
Unable to communicate verbally	0%	100%	0%
Unable to respond to or show affection	17%	0%	83%
Do not smile	0%	17%	83%
Not perceptive to cues	66%	17%	17%

Unlike the two characters discussed previously, Max was the first character analyzed that was considered to be a high-functioning autistic. This is because Max had Asperger Syndrome. In the first scene of "Qualities and Difficulties" Max was just informed by his parents that he had Asperger Syndrome. This very first scene involved Max dispelling two of the ARI's myths about autism. These myths were that autistic people never make eye contact and

that they are unable to communicate. Max expressed himself verbally and made appropriate eye contact with both of his parents as they tried to explain his condition to him. See Appendix A for the transcription of this very crucial scene.

The remaining six scenes involved Max communicating verbally with other individuals, thus dispelling this myth by 100 percent. Four of the six scenes contained Max making eye contact with another individual. However, the two scenes in which he did not make eye contact were very important scenes. These two scenes involved his parents trying to further discuss Asperger Syndrome with him and why his disorder should not be perceived as a disability. They also shared with him how the family planned to assist him in any way that he felt was necessary to help him adjust to his newly diagnosed disorder. Instead of making eye contact during these scenes, Max exhibited what seemed to be emotions of confusion and frustration by focusing on his hands or objects such as a table.

Max's confusion was not only depicted in the two scenes referenced above, but was present throughout the majority of his scenes. This is why only one out of his six scenes contained him smiling. This scene was towards the end of this episode as he and his father waited in line to board the Velocerator roller coaster at an amusement park. Max smiled as he recited specific facts and details about the speed and abilities of this particular roller coaster. Max's knowledge of this roller coaster illustrated one of Dr. Wing's key signs of Asperger Syndrome – an intense absorption on certain concepts (Snedden, 2010, p.34).

Soon after Max boarded the Velocerator, an employee informed him that

the roller coaster needed some repairs and would not be in operation for the rest of the day. Once Max received this information, his behavior immediately changed and exhibited some of Dr. Wing's signs of Asperger Syndrome discussed by Snedden in the literature review section of this paper. See Appendix B for the transcription of this scene and elaboration on Max's autistic behaviors. Although he was only documented as smiling once in this episode, that one smile was all that was needed to dispel ARI's myth about autistic people never smiling. The remaining five scenes were labeled inapplicable because Max was featured in scenes that were surrounded by confusion instead of pleasure.

Autism in *Parenthood*: Results of Textual Analysis

Representing Asperger Syndrome as accurately as possible was a major priority for writer and executive producer Jason Katims. As the father of a 13-year-old son with Asperger Syndrome, Katims felt that one way of keeping this second adaptation of *Parenthood* relevant was to incorporate some of his personal experiences with ASD into the show (*Speaking with Jason Katims of "Parenthood,"* 2010). In an interview with well-known autism organization Autism Speaks, Katims stated the following about the show's production efforts: "The writers and directors have had a lot of people help us along the way. Psychologists, parents, special needs teachers, researchers--we've opened ourselves up to as many resources as possible" (*Speaking with Jason Katims of "Parenthood,"* 2010).

The professionals previously mentioned do not serve as the only autism specialists consulting and validating *Parenthood's* content on the subject matter.

Parenthood also seeks the assistance of Dr. Roy Sanders of Marcus Autism Center in Atlanta and Sheila Wagner of Emory Autism Center of Emory University, also in Atlanta. These two professionals post a review of each episode's representation of autism on *Parenthood's* website every week. Additionally, they provide an open forum for audience members to post blogs in response to their posts and post questions to each other on *Parenthood's* The Experts Speak blog (*The Experts Speak*, 2012). All of these professional efforts help the cast of *Parenthood* become an important component of NBC's public service campaign-The More You Know.

Since 1989, NBC has become a creditable source for informing the public of various societal issues through its The More You Know public service campaign (*The More You Know Overview*, n.d.). One important aspect of this campaign is the public service announcements (PSA) that are televised during its primetime, nightly, and weekend programming enabling the network to reach over 60 million viewers weekly. Some of the issues covered in The More You Know campaign range from education about the V-Chip, environment, and health. Asperger Syndrome is one of the more recent health issues that has been added to this campaign.

To help inform audiences about Asperger Syndrome, NBC broadcasts a PSA during its primetime lineup that stars Max and his parents from *Parenthood*. In this brief PSA, the actors encourage viewers to learn the signs of the disorder, seek assistance from professionals, and never be afraid to ask questions when in doubt. Being a part of this campaign, as well as the professionals on and off set

help assure *Parenthood's* viewers that Max's portrayal of an autistic child meets the creators' vision-to be as accurate as possible.

Autism in *Arthur: About Arthur*

Celebrating over 15 years on television, the top PBS children's program, *Arthur* is considered to be one of the most popular animated series targeting children ages four to eight (*Arthur: Program Summary*, 2012). Beginning as a book series created by Marc Brown, Arthur has become a leading brand that is dedicated to teaching children about life lessons and challenges in a creative, educational, and most importantly—entertaining manner (*Arthur Facts*, n.d.).

Autism in *Arthur*: Results of Content Analysis

Table 4: Reinforcing or Dispelling ARI's myths in "George and the Missing Puzzle Piece"

Percentage of scenes featuring Carl's actions that reinforced or dispelled one of the Autism Research Institute's myths. Actions not being analyzed were labeled as not applicable.

MYTHS	REINFORCED MYTH	DISPELLED MYTH	N/A
Never make eye contact	20%	60%	20%
Unable to communicate verbally	0%	100%	0%
Unable to respond to or show affection	40%	0%	60%
Do not smile	0%	80%	20%
Not perceptive to cues	60%	0%	40%

Airing April of 2010, this episode of *Arthur* reinforced only three of the Autism Research Institute's myths. The first myth analyzed was Carl's ability to make eye contact. Three out of five of his scenes showed him making eye contact as he spoke with other individuals such as George and his mother. Only one out of his five scenes displayed him not making eye contact when given the opportunity. There was one scene that featured him concentrating on his activity

and it did not illustrate an opportunity for him to make eye contact with another individual. As a result, this scene was labeled not applicable.

Carl's ability to smile and verbally communicate was evaluated and discovered to help dispel myths about autistic individuals. Carl communicated verbally in 100 percent of his scenes and smiled at appropriate times in 80 percent. For instance, Carl smiled when George returned the missing puzzle piece that he lost and again when George offered him a book as a gift. However, when Carl was given the gift from George, he did not tell George thank you or communicate any other sign of gratitude. This was one of the scenes that helped reinforce the myth that autistic individuals are unable to give or respond to affection.

The affection myth's category was found to reinforce the myths in 40 percent of the scenes. The remaining 60 percent were found to be inapplicable. The final myth analyzed was: autistic individuals are not able to respond to cues. Whether his mother gave the cue to Carl or George gave him the cue, Carl was found not to reply in three out of the five scenes. These three scenes, or 60 percent, reinforced this myth about autism.

Although the majority of Carl's behavior did not reinforce the Autism Research Institute's myths, his actions were reflective of many of the signs of Asperger Syndrome previously discussed by author Robert Snedden. One of the first signs of Asperger Syndrome represented by Carl was an "intense absorption on certain concepts" (Snedden, 2010, p. 34).

This sign was first present in Carl's behavior when he explained to George

in great detail about a specific characteristic that distinguishes male lions from their female counterparts. He also elaborated on the current habitats of this animal. Carl's later sharing of facts about trains and his impeccable ability to draw also illustrated Carl's ability to concentrate on certain concepts. The scene showed Carl so focused on sharing facts about trains that he displayed actions that reinforced one of the Autism Research Institute's myths. Reinforcement of the myth featured George as he tried to gain Carl's attention. Carl was not perceptive to George's verbal cues and hand gestures because he was solely concentrated on his facts.

Carl's concentration on certain concepts illustrated another sign of Asperger Syndrome discussed by author Craig Kendall in his book *The Asperger Syndrome Survival Guide: What You and Your Family Need to Know* (2009). This second sign states that Carl is very intelligent with an excellent memory (p.9). He is also a very detailed-oriented individual. For example, in a classroom scene, Carl explains to George that his mother is getting him apple juice. Carl also had the desire to share that the juice would be in a box instead of in a bottle. In that same scene, Carl also makes note of the color of George's backpack. Carl further makes note when George does and does not carry his backpack.

Autism in *Arthur*: Results of Textual Analysis

As the years have progressed, producers of television's *Arthur*, WGBH of Boston, have taken a substantial amount of pride in the educational component of *Arthur's* content. For instance, *Arthur* is one of the children's programs that helps PBS abide by the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) rules

under the 1990 Children's Television Act passed by Congress. Under this Act, television stations must complete the following:

1. air at least three hours of children's core programming every week
2. indicate that these programs are educational and informational by labeling them with the educational and informational (E/I) logo throughout the duration of the program
3. air the minimum of 30- minute programs between the hours of 7 a.m. and 10 p.m.
4. make them regularly scheduled weekly programs with information pertaining to their air dates and times easily assessable by the public (*Children's Educational Television*, n.d.).

Since *Arthur* is one of the most popular shows under the FCC's educational and informational requirements, its content is expected to be enlightening and useful to its audience. One way of accomplishing this task is for its producers to make sure *Arthur's* content is as accurate as possible. This standard applied to *Arthur's* episode about Asperger Syndrome- "George and the Missing Puzzle Piece."

In order to properly educate the production staff on various societal issues including health, environment, and national education, WGBH has formed partnerships with organizations such as the Boston Public Health Commission (BPHC), Children's Hospital of Boston, and even the National Education Association (*Enhancing Education: A Children's Producer's Guide*, 2004). By partnering with BPHC, WGBH is able to use *Arthur's* content and media

campaigns to help this organization achieve one of its missions-- create projects that help change the public's attitude and behavior towards health issues (*Enhancing Education: A Children's Producer's Guide*, 2004).

WGBH's collaboration with BPHC and the Children's Hospital of Boston was evident in *Arthur's* "George and the Missing Puzzle Piece" episode with Carl's behavior as well as the facts presented by other characters. The analysis component of this research found that Carl's behavior contained various elements that are considered to be customary for individuals with Asperger Syndrome. These behaviors ranged from responding unexpectedly to unfamiliar situations to not expressing gratitude when given the opportunity.

This analysis also found that the adult characters in the program provided facts about Asperger Syndrome in a manner a child could understand. For example, a local chef explained Asperger Syndrome to George by stating that Carl's brain works differently than others. He continued by providing George with the example that Asperger Syndrome may make you feel as though you are on a strange planet where you have to learn, understand, and adapt to your surroundings. He concluded with the fact that an individual with Asperger Syndrome may always feel a little different even after learning his or her environment. It is with the contributions of organizations such as BPHC and the Children's Hospital of Boston that *Arthur* continues to be a part of an educational outreach program that supplies resources to families, teachers, librarians, and community centers (*Arthur: Program Summary*, 2012).

Representation of autistic characters since *Rain Man*: A brief analysis of the past 20 years

As an approach to address my final research question pertaining to the representation of autism since the 1988 release of *Rain Man*, the impact of *Rain Man* on audiences is briefly discussed below.

As previously mentioned, the release of *Rain Man* helped generate awareness and interest in autism. In fact, in the article *Changes in Perspectives of High-Functioning Autism through Rain Man*, author Joshua Solomon stated the following:

With the release of *Rain Man* came the increased understanding of autistics and a willingness to find out what autistics are thinking, thus improving the treatment and awareness so that they can live more normal lives than their counterparts in the past (Solomon, n.d., p. 1).

In efforts to continue to represent autistic characters in media while still being profitable, media makers have developed content that reflect disorders along the autism spectrum. Unfortunately, as illustrated in the core titles of this analysis, autistic characters over the past 20 years are commonly portrayed in very similar manners—with some type of savant ability (as seen in *Rain Man* and *Mercury Rising*) or as a high-functioning autistic (as seen in *Arthur* and *Parenthood*). This lack of diversity within these autistic representations helps dispel older stereotypes about autism while continuously creating modern ones.

This analysis discovered that older myths, such as the analyzed Autism Research Institute's myths, are no longer the primary stereotypes of autistic

character in media. Instead, media's portrayal of autistics with common everyday, and even extraordinary, abilities helps the general public form inaccurate expectations and misunderstandings about ASD. As mentioned in the *Rain Man* analysis, savantism is an extremely rare syndrome. In fact, it is only present in about 10 percent of all autistic cases (Treffert, 2011). Depicting autistic characters with high-functioning abilities and extraordinary savant capabilities may provide audiences with inaccurate and exaggerated perceptions of autistic individuals (Treffert, 2011).

In addition to the lack of diversity within the ASD being depicted, there is also a lack of diversity within the actors selected to play the roles of autistics. Unfortunately, this lack of diversity helps reinforce modern stereotypes about autism. These stereotypes are so common in media that they are oftentimes regarded as norms of autism. A discussion of these two stereotypes follows.

The two most prevalent stereotypes about autism are reinforced in every media included in this analysis. One of these stereotypes is that autism is a disorder exclusively for males (Draaisma, 2012). Media thrive on this particular stereotype by developing autistic characters that are males. In addition to the characters analyzed in this study, this can be easily seen in 1986's *The Boy Who Could Fly*, 1993's *What's Eating Gilbert Grape*, and even a 2009 Australian film named *Mary and Max* (*Autism Research Institute: Movies Featuring ASD*, 2012).

Although some individuals believe casting males for autistic roles is stereotypical, representing autism with male characters does have some validity. According to author Satoshi Kanazawa, males have a greater chance of being

diagnosed with autism than females (Kanazawa, 2008). Research suggests that there are two theories that support this notion. One is known as the Extreme Male Brain versus the Extreme Female Brain theory. This theory suggests that women are more empathetic, perceptive to feelings, and even treat inanimate objects as if they had feelings. Males, on the other hand, are suggested to be introverts that are unperceptive to other's emotions. That is the essence of autism. That is why four out of five autistic cases are usually found in males (Kanazawa, 2008).

The second theory that is continuously being studied surrounds the role genes may have in defects in brain growth and brain development in males (Chavis, 2010). The casting of males for autistic roles reinforces the inaccurate notion that autism is a disorder exclusively for males. While conducting research, there was only one film screened that did not contain a male autistic character. This film was *Down in the Delta*.

Down in the Delta is a 1998 film that depicts an African-American family getting adjusted to life after leaving their hometown of Chicago and relocating to Mississippi. The story revolves around Loretta (played by Alfre Woodard) as she tries to overcome her drug addiction and raise her two children.

In addition to battling her drug addiction, Loretta has to learn to understand and accept her youngest child, Tracy, who is autistic. The viewing of this film helped dispel the stereotype that autism only affects males because Tracy is a female. Tracy's role as an autistic also helped dispel another modern stereotype about autism. This stereotype is that autism only affects Caucasians.

The analysis of this research alone is evidence that many of media's portrayals of autistic characters are depicted using Caucasian actors. Unlike the stereotype about autism being an exclusively male disorder, this Caucasian myth has no validity. According to a 2006 study by the Center of Disease Control, ASD is prevalent in all races—regardless of socioeconomic factors. This was discovered after researchers studied ASD in 11 sampled states across the United States (Rice, 2009).

Chapter 5

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research focused on the media trends regarding the historic representation of Autism Spectrum Disorders in the films *Rain Man* and *Mercury Rising*, as well as the television shows *Arthur* and *Parenthood*. It is evident that these media, as well as others, depict autistic characters based on stereotypes formalized by general society. This finding was discovered with this study's very first research question: In what ways do the texts *Rain Man*, *Mercury Rising*, *Parenthood* and *Arthur* dispel or reinforce any of the Autism Research Institute's myth? In attempts to address this question, a content analysis was performed of the autistic characters represented. While each medium had its own unique storyline, it is apparent that each relied heavily upon common autism myths identified and discussed by the Autism Research Institute.

Regardless of the differences in content of which stereotypes were present, each of these media consulted with autism specialists and utilized personal experiences to try to make its autism portrayal accurate while still being entertaining. This finding was discovered through the textual analysis used to address this study's second research question: In what ways did the production of the following media attempt to be scientifically accurate: *Rain Man*, *Mercury Rising*, *Arthur's* "George and the Missing Puzzle Piece" episode, and *Parenthood's* "Qualities and Difficulties" episode?

The analysis of this research found that Autism Spectrum Disorders, like many other disabilities, are difficult to understand and analyze. As a result, easily

accepted myths about the disorder, such as the race and gender affected, were and still are frequently reinforced in media's portrayal of autistic characters. This was observed with one of its most famous depictions in 1988's *Rain Man* and still evident more than 20 years later in recent media like *Parenthood*. This finding was discovered with a textual analysis in respects to the final research question of this study: In what ways have autistic characters been depicted in media since the 1988 release of *Rain Man*?

This study and its findings are important because they help address an issue that's often overlooked—the underrepresentation of images of the developmentally disabled in media. Although this research did not discover a definite indication that the autism portrayals in *Rain Man*, *Mercury Rising*, *Parenthood*, and *Arthur*, were accurate or inaccurate, *Awareness with Accuracy: An Analysis of the Representation of Autism in Film and Television* did discover an important finding. This research found that these depictions are examples of attempts to represent ASD in media.

To obtain a more in-depth understanding of the representation of autism in media, future analyses are needed. These future studies should analyze more media with more diversity within autism portrayals. More specifically, these studies should focus on the exact Autism Spectrum Disorders being addressed and the actors selected to play the autistic roles. Essentially, these future studies, with larger data samples, may be helpful in differentiating portrayals of autism that are accurate from those that are stereotypical.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: *Parenthood*

Video 00:00:35	Audio
MS-Max	Well, what's Asperger?
WS-living room	
Dad	It's a form of autism.
Max	What's autism?
MS Parents Mom	People who have autism are called autistic.
Dad	Some people have disabilities.
Mom	It's not really a disability, honey. It's a syndrome. Your brain just works a little bit differently than other people's. It processes differently.
Dad	You're wired differently.
CU Max	I don't have wires inside of me. I have muscles, and I have capillaries, and I have nerve endings, and I have blood, and I have bone.

MS Parents Dad	And they all work perfectly. We all have tough stuff in this world we have to deal with. For you, Asperger is just one of those tough things.
Mom	Nobody is sure why it happens.
Dad	No matter how tough it seems, just know your mother and I are here for you and we love you.
Mom	Do you have any questions honey?
CU Max	Do you guys have Asperger?
Mom (sobbing)	No, daddy and I don't have it.
CU Max	Does Hattie?
CU Dad	No, Hattie doesn't have it.
Max (looking down)	Just me.
WS Parents Mom	We love you so much honey. So much.
CU Max	Can I go up to my room now?
Dad	Sure, you can go up to your room.
WS Max Exits	
Mom (cries as dad comforts her)	No, no. Just stop.
Dad	Christina, I'm sorry.

Mom	I'm not mad at you.
Mom continues to cry as dad comforts her. 00:02:34 Cut to next scene	Crying

APPENDIX B: *Parenthood*

Video 00:24:19	Audio
WS Rollercoaster	Sound of rollercoaster and people screaming
MS Max	This is so cool. Hey dad, did you know that the sideler is an inversion of the rollercoaster where it makes a 90-degree turn while the train is inverted?
CU Dad	I did not know that.
MS Max and Dad	...and the fastest rollercoaster in the world is an Abu Dhabi. It can go from zero to 150 miles an hour in four seconds.
CU Dad	Wow!
MS Max and Dad	If you sit in the front row, you have to wear protective goggles. It's gonna be awesome. Whew!
CU Dad smiles at Max	
MS Max and Dad 00:26:28 WS Max and Dad board the Volcerator	I can't wait. I can't wait. I can't wait.

Max	I can't believe this. We're actually on the Volcerator. We're on it!
Dad	All right! It's gonna be great.
Max	Yes, yes it is. It's gonna be really cool.
Dad	Let's make sure we keep our hands and arms inside at all times. You ready?
Max	Why isn't it going?
Dad	Cause a few more people have to get on.
Mom	No, it should be going by now.
PA Announcement	We're sorry folks but the Volcerator needs repairs so we're gonna be closed for the rest of the day. Please come back and visit us soon.
Max	What?
Dad	Okay, listen. This is something we didn't plan on but we have to get off the ride now.
Max	No we don't. You said we would ride the Volcerator as many times as I wanted.
Dad	I know I did. They have to make repairs.
Max	No, no. You took me out of school so that we could come here and ride the

	Volcerator. We changed everything.
Dad	They have to make sure that the ride is safe.
Max	We have to ride it!
Dad	There's another ride right over there.
Max (screaming)	No, I don't want another ride. I want the Volcerator!
Max gets off of the ride and runs. Dad follows.	It's not fair. It's not fair.
Dad	Max! Max!
Max stops and Dad catches him. Max screams at Dad	You promised that I could ride the Volcerator as many times as I wanted.
Dad	I know I did.
Dad attempts to hug Max. Max hits and screams at dad. He calms down and embraces Dad's hug.	Amusement parks sounds of rides and people.
Fade to black 00:27:59	

APPENDIX C: *RAIN MAN*

Video 00:44:04	Audio
<p>WS Inside airport</p> <p>Charlie snaps his fingers to gain Raymond's attention</p> <p>Charlie</p>	<p>Ray, let's go. Come on.</p> <p>What are you watching?</p>
Raymond	I don't know.
CU Raymond and Charlie	
Charlie	You don't know?
PA Announcement	Final call for flight 1559—service to Salt Lake City and Los Angeles.
<p>CU Airplane</p> <p>Raymond looks out of the window at the plane.</p> <p>Raymond</p>	<p>Uh, oh.</p>
Raymond	There's an airplane out there.
Charlie	<p>That's right, and everybody's boarding.</p> <p>Let's go.</p>
Raymond	Airline travel's very dangerous
Charlie	Don't be silly.

	<p>It's the safest travel in the world. You'll love this. Trust me.</p> <p>Now come on.</p>
Charlie	We're in an airport. People fly out of airports. Why do you think we're here?
CU Raymond	<p>Flying's very dangerous. In 1987, there were 30 airline accidents.</p> <p>211 were fatalities and 230 were definitely passengers.</p>
CU Charlie	<p>This plane is very safe. Believe me.</p> <p>I gotta get to L.A. I don't have time for this shit.</p>
Raymond	Oh, I don't know. I don't know.
Charlie	You don't know?
Raymond	No. Is it this airline?
Charlie	Yeah.
Raymond	Okay, fine. We can.

CU Flight monitor Charlie	There's an American plane
CU Raymond Raymond (cont)	American flight 625... crashed April 27, 1976.
CU Raymond and Charlie Charlie	We don't have to take American. There's a lot of flights. Pick another airline. Continental. We'll take Continental.
Raymond	Continental crashed November 15, 1987. Flight 1713. 28 casualties.
Charlie	This is very serious.
Raymond	Yeah, very serious.
Charlie	I have to get to Los Angeles. So you're gonna get on that plane. Do you understand me?
Raymond	Yeah.
Charlie	You have to get on a plane.
Raymond	Yeah.
WS Raymond and Charlie	

Charlie	Now, there's a Delta.
Raymond	Yeah
Charlie	It leaves at midnight. How's Delta?
CU Raymond and Charlie	
Raymond	Delta crashed August 2, 1985. Lockheed L-1011. Dallas-Fort Worth. Terrible wind shear.
Charlie	All airlines...
Raymond	135 passengers.
Charlie	All airlines have crashed at one time or another. That doesn't mean that they are not safe.
Raymond	Quantas.
Charlie	Quantas?
Raymond	Quantas never crashed.
Charlie	Quantas?
Raymond	Never crashed.
CU Raymond and Charlie	
Charlie	Well that's...

Raymond	Never crashed.
Charlie	That's gonna do me a lot of good. Quantas doesn't fly to L.A. out of Cincinnati. You have got to get to Melbourne...
Raymond	Australia.
Charlie Charlie (cont)	in order to get the plane that flies to Los Angeles. Do you hear me?
Raymond	Canberra's the capital. 16.2 million population
Charlie	Let's go.
Raymond	Very lovely beaches.
Charlie	We're getting on this plane!
CU Raymond and Charlie Charlie drags Ray towards the plane. Ray begins to scream and beat himself.	Ray screams.
Charlie Charlie (cont)	Ray! Ray! Ray! We're not gonna take the plane. He's okay. He's okay!

	<p>We're not gonna take the plane.</p> <p>Just relax. He was upset.</p> <p>We were gonna take the plane. We're not gonna take it now.</p> <p>We're not gonna fly, okay?</p>
MS Raymond and Charlie	
Raymond	No flying.
Charlie	We're not gonna fly. You tire me, Ray.
Raymond	Yeah.
Charlie	<p>We're gonna drive to Los Angeles.</p> <p>Okay? Come on, Ray. Ray? Come on.</p>
Raymond	Yeah.
Charlie	Come here!
Raymond	No flying.
Charlie	We're not taking the plane. Just grab the fuckin' bag.
Raymond	No flying.
Charlie	You're killin' me, Ray. I just want you to know.
Raymond	No flying.

Charlie	I gotta be in L.A. in three hours. It's gonna take me three days. Come on!
Raymond	No flying.
Charlie	No flying.
Raymond	No flying. I got 'Jeopardy' at 5:00. I watch 'Jeopardy' at 5:00
Charlie	Don't start with that.
Raymond	'Jeopardy' at 5:00
00:47:35 Raymond and Charlie exit the airport abruptly. Cut to next scene	

APPENDIX D: *Mercury Rising*

Video: 00:37:59	Audio
O/S Nurse with CU Art Art	Hi. Good evening. Are you the doctor?
O/S Art with CU Nurse Nurse	Ah, no. I'm the nurse.
O/S Nurse with CU Art Art	Is a doctor going to see this boy?
O/S Art with CU Nurse Nurse	I took care of him.
O/S Nurse with CU Art Art	Is that the best you could do for him, give him a shot?
O/S Art with CU Nurse Nurse	He's autistic.
Art	Autistic?
Nurse	Uh huh
O/S Nurse with CU Art Art (cont)	Well, what does that mean? Nothing gets through?
O/S Art with CU Nurse	

<p>Nurse</p> <p>O/S Nurse with CU Art (Art looks puzzled)</p>	<p>No, it's just the opposite. Everything gets through. He has trouble with feelings and emotions so he gets very frightened and confused.</p>
<p>Art</p>	<p>Wait, I'm not going to be able to question this boy?</p>
<p>O/S Art with CU Nurse</p> <p>Nurse</p>	<p>Probably not.</p>
<p>00:39:37</p> <p>Nurse walks away. Art looks at Simon through the glass.</p> <p>Cut to next scene.</p>	

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