

DISABLED IMAGES

A quantitative content analysis on disability television representations in Flanders

Susan Vertoont – Friday, December 1, 2017

INTRODUCTION

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PhD-project

“A holistic inquiry into television representations of disability in Flanders”

Quantitative content analysis

3 generalist broadcasters in Flanders

Case-study – Qualitative analysis

(Production – Text – Reception)

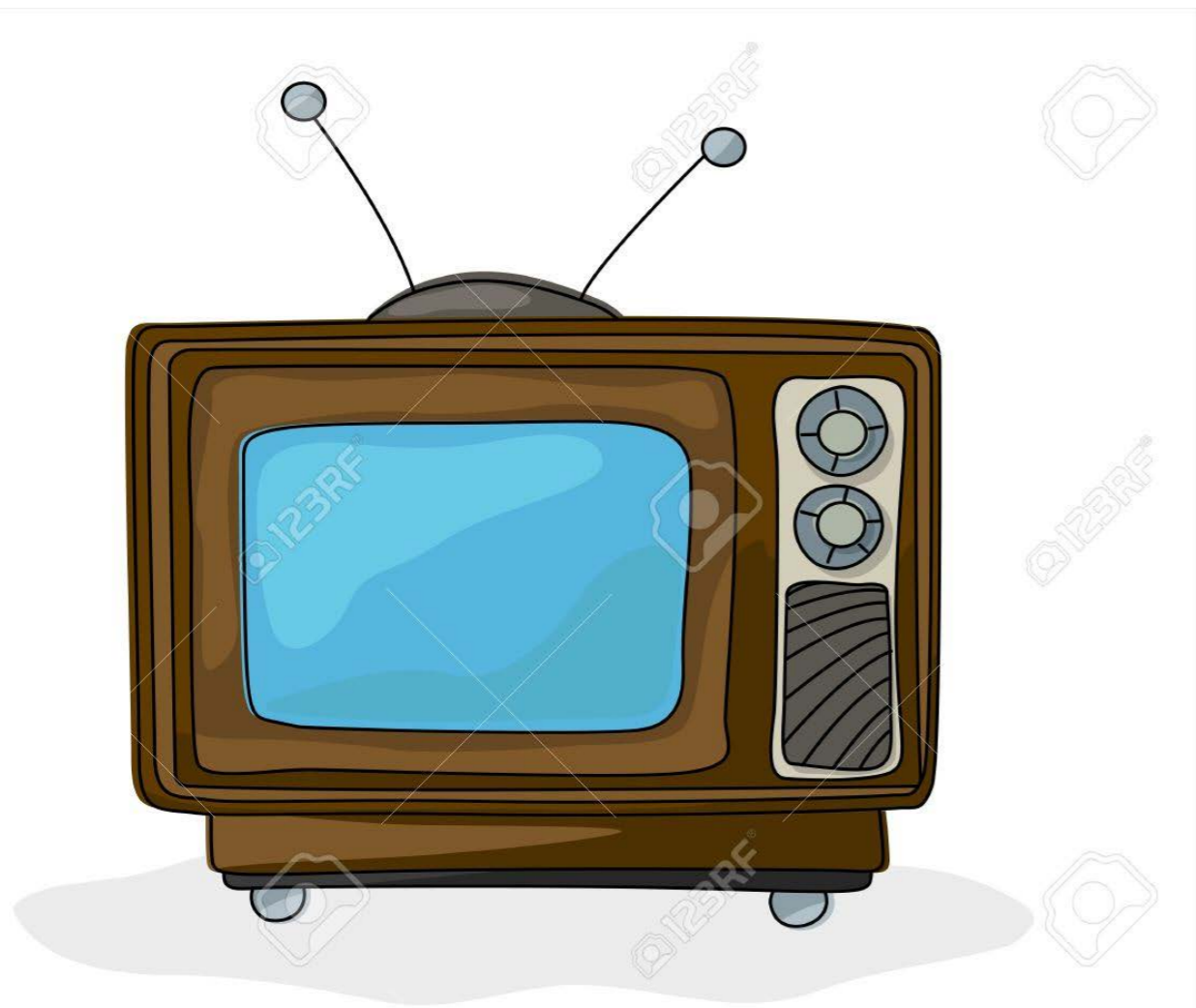
Fictional television program

Case-study – Qualitative analysis

(Production – Text – Reception)

Factual television program

WHY TELEVISION?



- popular cultural mass medium
- provider of information and entertainment
- cultural agent
- agent of normalisation
- ...

WHY REPRESENTATIONS?

No mirror of 'reality'

The result of a production process

Related to our social reality



(Krijnen & Van Bauwel, 2015)

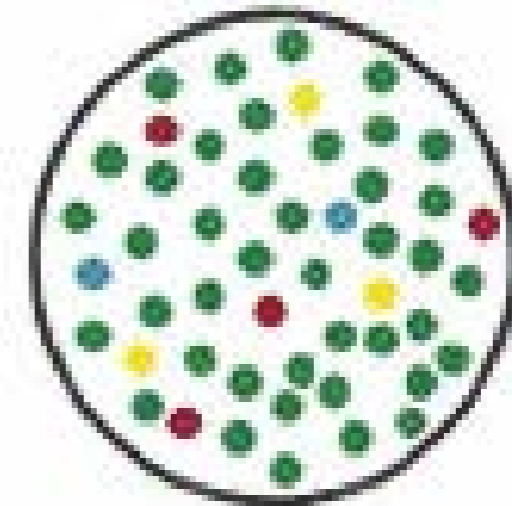
Representations of disability

Quantitative research

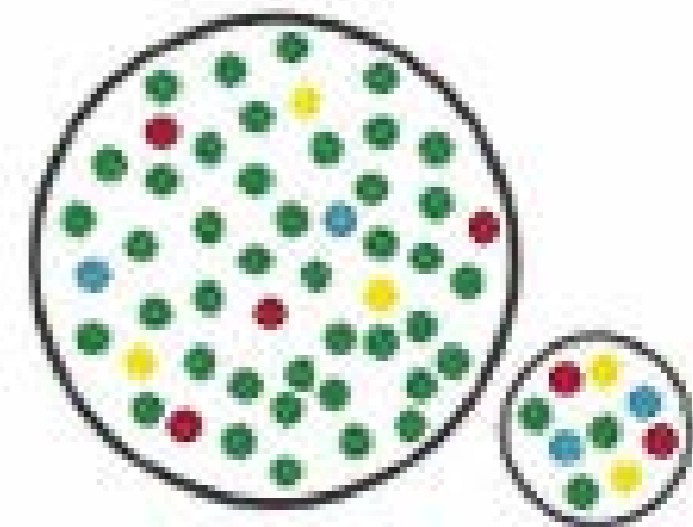
→ Underrepresentation

→ Naturalises the marginalisation of disability in society

INCLUSIE



SEGREGATIE



Representations of disability

Qualitative research

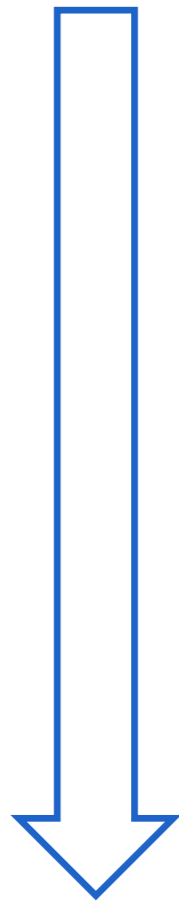
→ Prejudicial and stereotypical imagery

- Always superheroes, villains, tragedies, ...
- Rarely ordinary characters with ordinary problems

→ Medicalizes, patronizes, criminalizes, dehumanizes, ...
instead of normalizing disability



~~Central question:~~



representations?

- Causes stagnation within the field of research
- Narrows theoretical and political force
- Narrows narrative deployment for cultural producers

(Mallet, 2009)

Central question:

“How to achieve cultural recognition on equal terms?” (Ellis, 2015)

*“Instead of dividing the representation of disability into a positive and negative binary oppositions, it is important that we **see people with disability along the full spectrum of human experience and popular culture characterization** – as good, bad, right, wrong, strong and weak. There needs to be moments where disability is relevant and irrelevant.”*

(Ellis, 2015, p. 8)

WHY QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH?

To examine and document bias and voids

The goal is diversity ...

1. Diversity of disability intersecting with other axes of identity on screen
2. Diversity of television roles for characters with disabilities

... not proportionality

→ Cfr. the shown particular ↔ the implied general (Gray, 2008)

1. Intersectionality

- Studying the intersections between different social identities
- Gender, class, sexuality, ethnicity, ... are axes of power
- Can cause multiple oppressions
- Dominance of **white, young, middle-class, physically disabled men** in media representations (Desnerk, 2007)



2. Role diversity

- Studying the diversity in television roles
- Dominance of non-empowering roles with little agency
- Disability always in the same few genres and the same few roles



METHODOLOGY

RQ 1: In relation to what other identity axes are characters with disabilities represented?

RQ 2: In what roles are characters with disabilities represented?

- Constructed week: January 2016 – February 2016
- Prime time television
- 3 generalist broadcasters in Flanders



- 115 programs – 2.414 characters

Only 44 characters with a disability

= 2,0%

- Requirements not met to test significance (Chi²)
- Results do indicate patterns of inequality, bias and exclusion

RESULTS

INTERSECTIONALITY

IMPAIRMENTS

Impairment	Number of characters % (N)
Health impairments	25,0% (11)
Physical impairments	31,8% (14)
Learning difficulties	25,0% (11)
Multiple impairments	15,9% (7)
Do not know	2,3% (1)
Total	100,0% (44)

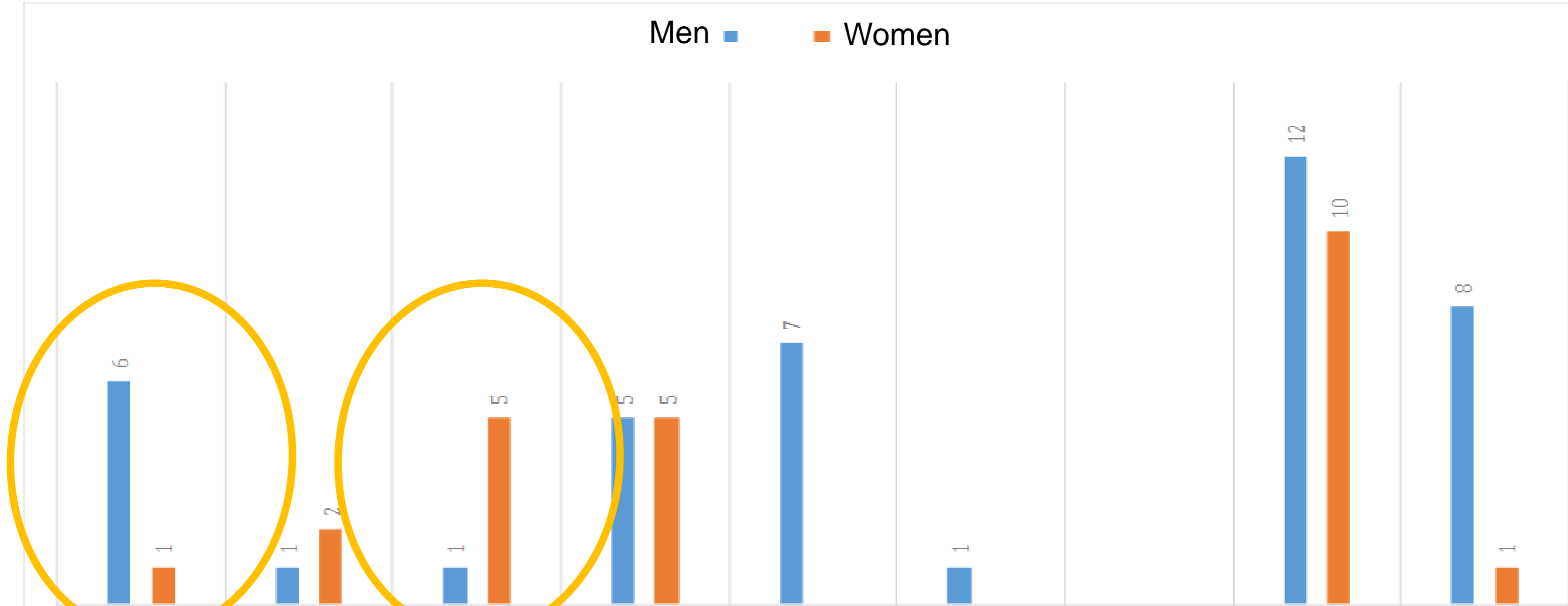
GENDER

40,9% women with disabilities ↔ 35,4% women without disabilities

Impairments	Women % (N)	Men %(N)	Total % (N)
Health impairments	38,9% (7)	16,0% (4)	25,6% (11)
Physical impairments	33,3% (6)	32,0% (8)	32,6% (14)
Learning difficulties	16,7% (3)	32,0% (8)	25,6% (11)
Multiple impairments	11,1% (2)	20,0% (5)	16,3% (7)
Total	100,0% (18)	100,0% (25)	100,0% (43)

GENDER

Men ■ Women

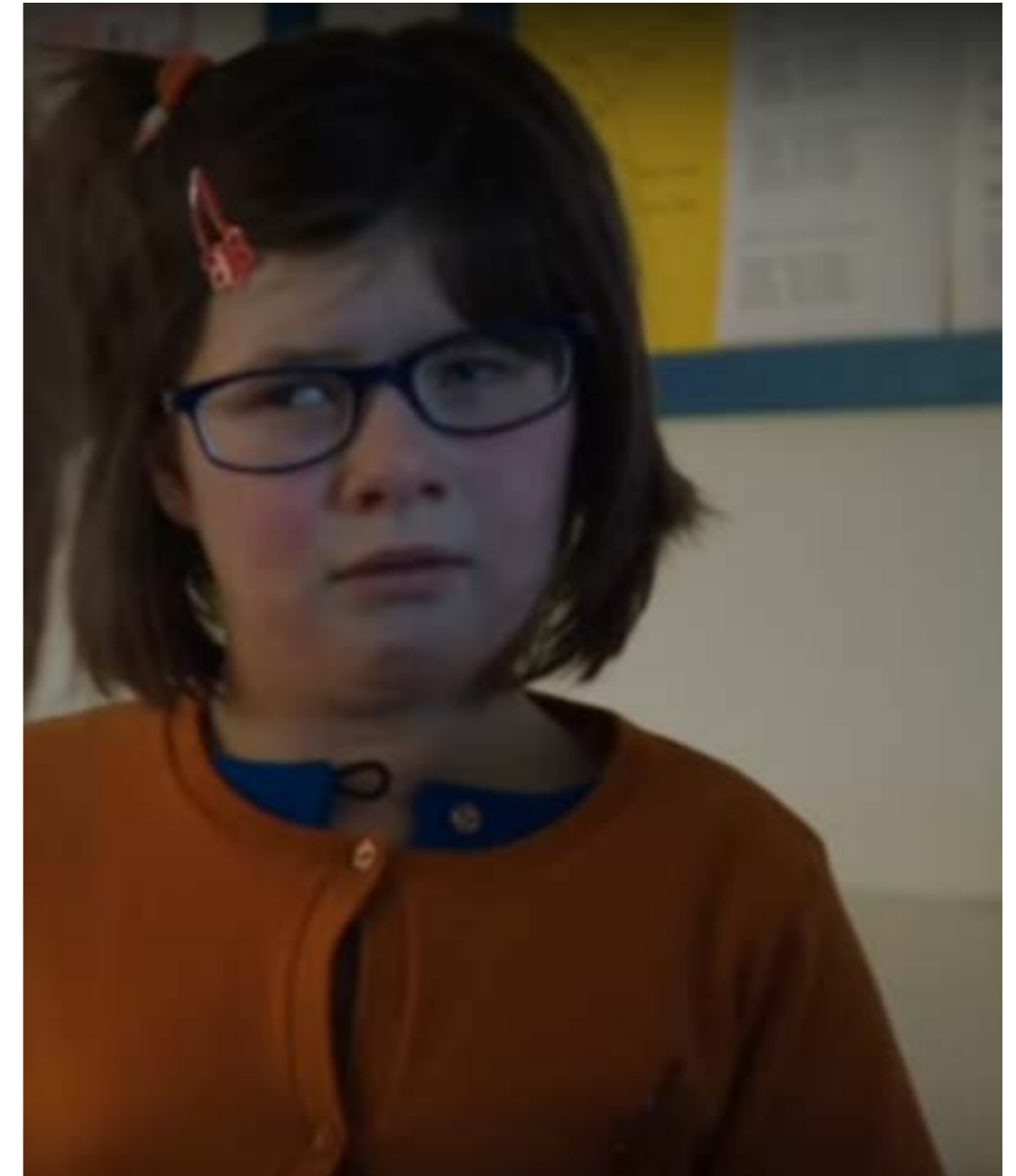


Superhero

Victim

AGE

- 79,1% adults with disabilities
↔ 73,7% adults without disabilities
- No seniors with a disability (0,0%)
- 9,3% children with disabilities
↔ 3,7% children without disabilities



WORK

Beroep	Disability % (N)	No disability% (N)	Total % (N)
Unemployed	15,9% (7)	1,0% (21)	1,3% (28)
Pupil, student	13,6% (6)	7,4% (156)	7,5% (162)
Employed	25,0% (11)	58,5% (1.230)	57,8% (1.241)
Retired	0,0% (0)	2,3% (48)	2,2% (48)
Do not know	45,5% (20)	30,8% (648)	31,1% (668)
Total	100,0% (44)	100,0% (2.103)	100,0% (2.147)

RESULTS

ROLE DIVERSITY

FICTION

- Disabled characters appear mostly in soaps (40,0%) – serials (24,0%) – series (20,0%)



- Most of the time ‘protagonists’ (68,0%)
- No ‘background characters’ with a disability (0,0%)

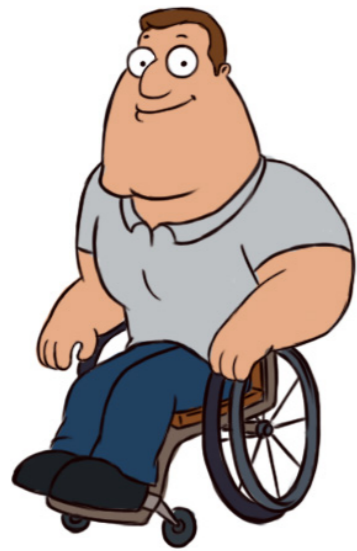
FACTUAL

- Only disabled characters in news episodes (31,3%) – human interest programs (68,8%)
- Only ‘expert by experience’
 - physical impairment or health impairment
 - or ‘subject of a portrait’
 - learning disabilities
- No presenters, journalists, experts, quiz candidates, ... with a disability

CONCLUSION

Very few disabled characters within a rather large sample

1. Intersectionality?



2. Role diversity?

- Little diversity concerning roles and genres for disabled characters
- Especially in factual programs

- The few characters that do exist, are loaded with expectation and representational weight (Gray, 2008)
- Plea for more characters, multiple representations, more intersecting identities, diverse roles in diverse genres

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More information:

Vertoont, S. (2017). Beelden met een beperking: Een kwantitatieve inhoudsanalyse naar de representatie van handicap op primetime televisie in Vlaanderen. Gent: CIMS.