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Becca Irvine  
*University of Lynchburg*

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The Portrayal of Individuals with Developmental Disabilities within the Media:  
A Critique of Six Films Produced Across Sixteen Years

Becca Irvine

Lynchburg College

The Portrayal of Individuals with Developmental Disabilities within the Media:  
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The media is a world in itself that can be beneficial but also vicious in some regard. When looking at the media in society today, many factors come to mind along with a number of questions. For the purposes of this paper, media will be defined as “the main means of mass communication (especially television, radio, newspapers, and the internet) regarded collectively” (Oxford Dictionaries, 2014, p.1). This paper will take a deeper look into how individuals with developmental disabilities are portrayed in the media, specifically through film. Questions and criteria were predetermined and discussed prior to the viewing of these six films. These included: Are films educating or stereotyping when portraying individuals with developmental disabilities? Are these films showcasing individuals with developmental disabilities in an appropriate manner? As Mullins questioned in regard to the perception of individuals with disabilities,

What reality do we want to call into existence: a person who is limited or a person who is empowered? By casually doing something as simple as naming a person, a child, we might be putting lids and casting shadows on their power.

Wouldn't we want to open doors for them instead? (Ted talk, 2010).

This simplistic yet powerful perspective inspired the structure and data collection for this paper through the desire to truly understand how individuals with developmental disabilities are being portrayed in films from the past and present. Although the information found can be misleading, it allows a deeper look into a means of portrayal in the world of film.

In taking a look back, individuals with disabilities made a debut in the film community in 1898 in a 50 second ‘humorous’ short regarding a man pretending to be

blind to get additional money. This was followed in 1908 and 1931 with films regarding prosthetic legs and curing blindness (Kids As Self Advocates [KASA], 2005). Needless to say, the initial portrayal of individuals with disabilities was far from glamorous or accurate. Since this time, a variety of trends have been seen in the film industry regarding the portrayal of these individuals. Generally, specific categorical portrayals are seen such as those that appear as superheroes, those that elicit pity, those that play the victim and the depictions that are vulnerable (Special Olympics, 2005). In most recent years, these specific depictions have spiked most likely for the purposes of increasing the market value of the film. What appears to not be considered in these circumstances is the authenticity of the portrayal. Often times, “the typical stereotypes that these characters fulfill and have been fulfilling in the media for decades on end, disabled innocence (Tiny Tim), disabled inspiration (Helen Keller), and disabled evil (Captain Hook)” (KASA, 2005, p.1). When broken into such categories, it is somewhat apparent in each film of what the producers and directors are focusing upon. Due to these skepticisms and concerns, the reviews for the purposes of this paper carefully noted such suspicions of these depictions.

This paper will explore six films that involve individuals with developmental disabilities and gain a better grasp on the portrayal as determined through the attached tables. The films that were critiqued include *Adam*, *Radio*, *What's Eating Gilbert Grape*, *Forrest Gump*, *Tru Confessions*, and *The Ringer*. These films span a total of 16 years and involve main characters and supporting characters with developmental disabilities, some played by actors who are typically developing and others played by actors with disabilities. Through careful observations, the films were reviewed for a variety of means, including social communication and interaction, behaviors, and

presence in early childhood, as well as terminology utilized, self-awareness, and advocacy. A brief overview of each film will be discussed along with the specified findings before a cumulative review is exposed.

### *Adam*

This film showcases a budding romance within the hustle and bustle of New York, but with a twist. Adam, a man who has just lost his father, enters a world of the unknown where his predetermined routines and patterns become blurred. When a woman (Beth) comes into his life, Adam's world is turned upside down with change that takes viewers on a journey through the eyes of an individual diagnosed with Asperger syndrome, a disorder on the autism spectrum that is no longer a standing diagnosis according to the DSM-V. One of the most intriguing aspects of this film is that Adam's diagnosis is not mentioned for the majority of the beginning portion of the movie until he discusses it with Beth. Instead, the film showcases Adam's difficulty with social interactions, repetitive behaviors, ritualized days, and extensive interest in space. This sets the stage for a viewer to see an atypical difference in Adam and builds curiosity (De Pencier, Urdang, Vanech, & Mayer, 2009).

Adam has difficulty with social-emotional reciprocity and the development and maintaining of relationships. This is evident through his social awkwardness, gullibility, and aversion to trying new things and meeting new people. Behaviorally, Adam has difficulty controlling his emotions and has instances where he throws items, bangs his head, and hits himself in the head due to the difficulty he has in verbalizing his thoughts and feelings and, instead, bottles them up. On the other hand, Adam is extremely vocal, showcasing impeccable articulation and a literal means of understanding. It is

showcased throughout the film that he has the ability to create relationships and warm up to people that he feels comfortable with.

Based on the year of when this film came out, the terminology and language utilized, specifically the diagnosis of Asperger syndrome, is appropriate. Through the portrayal of Adam, viewers observe a great deal of self-awareness and self-advocacy within this young man along with accurate behavioral and emotional interpretations. The fact that this role is played by an actor who is typically-developing is impressive due to the accuracy and commitment within the role. When discussed in a New York Times article, *Adam* received a general review but was noted to include, “playing a character who is mentally disabled can be a fast track to Oscar or to oblivion” (Catsoulis, 2009, p.1). This calls to question the major purpose behind the film as well as the perception it received. Additionally, this article points out the acting ability of Hugh Dancy for playing the roll of “a Manhattan engineer who *suffers* from Asperger’s syndrome (a form of autism)” (Catsoulis, 2009, p.1). It is language such as this that effects perception of this film and, in the bigger picture, individuals with developmental disabilities; a diagnosis does not mean that an individual ‘suffers’ from that disability.

*Adam* appeared to be a realistic portrayal of an individual with a developmental disability. Although there were times in which the producers did have the audience feeling pity for Adam, it was overall a convincing interpretation of the ritualistic and socially difficult experiences that a person with this diagnosis can face. In other terms, the portrayal of Adam could be seen as “disabled innocence” as well as “disabled inspiration” at some points during the film (KASA, 2005). Overall, this would most likely be considered as a vulnerable yet realistic interpretation. [For further details of the interpretation of the film, see Table 1.]

### *Radio*

This film opens to a small town where everyone knows everybody else and football represents a season. There is a young man who pushes a shopping buggy through town on a daily basis while receiving little to no attention; it becomes evident that this individual is different than everyone else. A relationship builds between this young man, affectionately nicknamed ‘Radio,’ and Coach Jones who is the football coach, athletic director, and a teacher at the high school. Coach works to integrate Radio into the daily routines of the football team as well as the high school and the town. Throughout the film, it is shown that Coach initially took pity on Radio and wanted to better address a situation that he had not responded to well in the past. Many emotions are displayed towards Radio throughout this film: love, distaste, disgust, annoyance, disturbance, and more. However, Radio eventually becomes a well-known individual in the town and a pillar of the community (Gains, Robbins, & Tollin, 2003).

Throughout this portrayal, it is clear that Radio is an extremely caring, lovable, and often gullible individual who puts his trust in everyone. With his understanding being extremely literal, it takes time for him to fully process situations and develop answers; he appears to prefer to act upon each interaction or comment. Radio seems to be routine oriented and often sensory dependent – he would rather touch others on his own terms, specifically being invited to have contact. In the film, his mother explains that she never received a specific diagnosis but she just knows the fact that Radio is different. Throughout the film, viewers see and hear Radio’s comfort level grow through an increase in speech and language. Although he does get easily upset (e.g., hitting self) and appears to read others’ emotions well, he cannot necessarily appropriately vocalize or advocate for himself.

Based on the setting and time of this film, the terminology and language would be considered appropriate. Unfortunately, there was little to no self-awareness or self-advocacy for Radio; instead, he had a great deal of extended familial advocacy especially from Coach Jones and, eventually, the town. Although an actor (i.e., Cuba Gooding Jr.) was playing the role of an individual with a disability, the overall depiction was generally accurate. Due to some of the negative connotations within the film, the analysis would be considered to have mixed considerations yet accurate to a point. In accordance with observations, it would be fair to assume that this character being portrayed (based on a true story) would be diagnosed with the label of intellectual disability.

Overall, this appeared to be a realistic depiction of an individual with an intellectual disability and how others would and could treat him. This would be considered a portrayal that elicits pity with character shown as “disabled innocence” (KASA, 2005). The producers would most likely consider this a feel-good film that emphasizes the ups and downs of the life of an individual with an intellectual disability. As noted in a review of the film,

There is no cynicism in “Radio,” no angle or edge. It’s about what it’s about, with an open, warm and fond nature. Every once in a while human nature expresses itself in a way we can feel good about, and this is one of those times. (Ebert, 2003, p.1).

In being a non-fictional depiction, this film showcases the heart of a small town coming together for the greater good of an individual with a disability. This film clearly depicts the positive impact an individual with a disability can have on others, and how others impacted him. [For more information about *Radio*, see Table 2.]



### *What's Eating Gilbert Grape*

Arnie, the brother of Gilbert Grape, serves as a supporting character in this film and he is signified as being 'different.' The setting is portrayed as a rural small town and showcases a larger family with a small income. Arnie is a young adult who is looked after primarily by his siblings; he requires constant guidance and attention or else he runs off to climb the water tower or sits in a tree. Throughout this film, the audience sees the daily difficulties of a struggling family (Matalon, Ohlsson, Teper, & Hallstrom, 1993).

Arnie is portrayed as having a number of rituals with his family and himself, including daily activities as well as the yearly watching of campers pass through town. He appears to be rather gullible and literal as well as having little understanding of personal space or strangers. He is often seen crying, hitting his head, not making eye contact, running away, and wringing his fingers. Arnie is quite vocal yet repetitive in his speech and language. He has difficulty with recalling information and understanding word choices of others. However, Arnie is portrayed as an overly happy individual who lives life to the fullest while always saying how he feels.

The terminology and language used throughout this film are both appropriate at times yet inappropriate at others; however, this is also representative of the time period in which it is set. This can be referenced by the lack of knowledge regarding a diagnosis of Arnie's condition and using phrases such as "he shouldn't be alive." The behaviors depicted by Arnie are quite accurate for an individual with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Throughout the film, it appears as though Arnie knows that he is different than others but he does not have a grasp on self-awareness or self-advocacy. His biggest and most active advocate, for the majority of the movie, is his brother Gilbert.

This was an indifferent depiction of an individual with a developmental disability, which could be due to the fact that Arnie was a supporting character. Yet again, this film portrayed the individual and the family with “disabled innocence” due to the fact that Arnie was not supposed to live as long as he did (KASA, 2005). In that sense, the family and Arnie specifically could be seen as victims within this film. However, the New York Times did give this film a mostly positive review including the comment “the film’s real show-stopping turn comes from Mr. DiCaprio, who makes Arnie’s many tics so startling and vivid that at first he is difficult to watch” along with that he “winds up capturing the enormous range of Arnie’s raw emotions” (Maslin, 1993, p.1). Although a supporting character, it is clear that Arnie makes an impact on audiences through a noticeably realistic depiction of an individual with a disability. [See Table 3.]

### *Forrest Gump*

In this beloved film, the audience meets a mother and her son who has a physical difference. Once he receives leg braces for his crooked spine, it is portrayed that he is ‘below normal’ with his IQ being 75. However, Forrest’s mother advocates for him throughout his life in terms of schooling and his career path. Forrest’s journey through life includes a variety of events and people that he stumbles upon. In the end, Forrest lives a prosperous and momentous life (Starkey, Tisch, Finerman, & Zemeckis, 1994).

Throughout this film, Forrest showcases difficulties in social-emotional reciprocity as well as nonverbal cues. Because of his physical and vocal differences, he does not maintain many friends, except for his mother and Jenny, and later Bubba and Lieutenant Dan. In his younger days, he appears to be slightly routine-based but does not necessarily keep that trait throughout his life. Forrest is quite literal and not turned-

off by the presence of strangers. He does appear to have some sensory difficulties with those he does not know and has a hard time reading others' emotions. However, Forrest is quite vocal but very self-focused yet curious. This film has turned into somewhat of a classic in the past twenty-years, yet it has varying reviews. One review captured the following,

And yet this is not a heartwarming story about a mentally retarded man. That cubbyhole is much too small and limiting for Forrest Gump. The movie is more a meditation on our times, as seen through the eyes of a man who lacks cynicism and takes things for exactly what they are. (Ebert, 1994, p.1).

This suggests that viewers may be looking beyond Forrest Gump and his disability by focusing upon the historical aspects of the film.

Based on the time setting of the film, appropriate terminology is used at times. The overall portrayal of Forrest over such a long lifespan is interesting because a variety of actions and periods are seen. For instance, it is not portrayed that Forrest truly understands that he is different or 'not smart' until he meets his son; thus, he did not appear to have self-awareness or self-advocacy throughout the majority of the film. His mother, however, was his biggest advocate and made sure that he was able to participate as much as others and understand that being different is okay through her countless quotes.

This film definitely portrayed Forrest as a "disabled inspiration" due to everything he endured and accomplished (KASA, 2005). Although initially vulnerable, this film showed that Forrest made a place for himself despite his differences. In summation, Forrest would more than likely be diagnosed with ASD or a developmental

disability based on the portrayal. [For further details of the interpretation of the film, see Table 4.]

### *Tru Confessions*

In this coming of age film, viewers see a realistic portrayal of family life with an individual with a developmental delay. Eddie and Tru are twins who have just started high school; the major difference is that Eddie has been diagnosed with a developmental delay. With the addition of a television competition, the audience is able to see the true ‘day in the life perspective’ of Eddie through the happy and playful times and the times of frustrations (May & Hoen, 2002).

Eddie appears to have a much lower functioning age than his chronological age, which is depicted through his interests, speech and language, and his classroom placement. He appears to be literal in nature but also enjoys a good joke. Eddie has difficulty communicating his feelings and communication with others in general. He is quite vocal with repetitive and short phrases and recalls information quite vividly. He appears to have some sensory difficulties as well as a need for continuity and sameness.

For a film from 2002, the terminology is overall accurate but somewhat difficult to watch due to the use of the term “retard.” However, the behaviors represented are quite accurate. Throughout the film, it is made clear that Eddie has the knowledge that he is different and considers himself to be a “r-word,” but he does not have the concept for self-advocacy; fortunately, his family members are great advocates for him. In reviewing this depiction and taking into consideration what the film said, Eddie would most likely have a diagnosis of DD or ID.

This feel-good film does not hold back the fact that advocating and living with a person with a disability can be difficult at times but also rewarding. It shows an

incredible example of familial advocacy that is not often seen on screen. Overall, the film gives a different perspective in that it is coming from a sibling rather than a parent or outside party. Still, Eddie is portrayed through “disabled innocence” and with great vulnerability (KASA, 2005). [For more details, see Table 5.]

### *The Ringer*

In this film, individuals with various disabilities are cast as athletes in the Special Olympics along with several actors. The main character, Steve (played by Johnny Knoxville), pretends to have a disability in order to participate and rig the Special Olympics. Although a colorful comedy, this film portrays inclusion and acceptance of individuals with and without disabilities. It shows a united front that forms among the individuals participating within the Special Olympics and ultimately displays the wonders of inclusionary practices (Farrelly, Farrelly, & Blaustein, 2005).

Due to the number of individuals within this film who have a disability or are being portrayed as having a disability, the data were collected as an overall whole. With that being said, a variety of social communication and interaction difficulties were seen including difficulty with building relationships, repetition, and varying sensory needs. Overall, all the individuals were observed as quite social, especially within their friendship group. The level of awareness for hidden curriculum (e.g., social cues and emotions/feelings) was quite impressive as well as the level of vocals within difficult situations.

Although the language within the film was not always appropriate, it appeared that the writers did this on purpose. However, the self-awareness and self-advocacy was evident in all individuals, which is not a usual sight. Due to the comedy aspect of this film as well as the point of it, it was difficult to truly evaluate how the individuals were

portrayed; at times, the individuals could collectively be viewed as portraying “disabled innocence, disabled inspiration, and disabled evil” due to the triumphs and tribulations of the film (KASA, 2005). As expected, reviews of this film were differentiated and some brought forth arguable viewpoints. One of these included, “The movie surprised me. It treats its disabled characters with affection and respect, it has a plot that uses the Special Olympics instead of misusing them, and it’s actually kind of sweet” (Ebert, 2005, p.1). This perspective sheds light on the advocacy that this film built for this community. [For further details of the interpretation of the film, see Table 6.]

### **Discussion**

In viewing this cross-section of films from the 1990s and 2000s, it is clear that individuals with developmental disabilities are portrayed in a variety of ways. As mentioned previously, individuals with disabilities have historically been portrayed in three major perspectives, “disabled innocence (Tiny Tim), disabled inspiration (Helen Keller), and disabled evil (Captain Hook)” (KASA, 2005, p.1). As aforementioned, this was taken into consideration when viewing these films and collecting data.

Within these six specific films, all of these major perspectives were portrayed through individuals with developmental disabilities. Major commonalities as well as differences were collected within the data. All of the characters specifically observed would more than likely be considered to have a developmental disability. The majority of these individuals had significant difficulties with social communication as well as interactions and generally showed a sense of ritualistic routines and a need for sameness. Some of these characters were observed to have a need for sensory input or output. The overarching sum of individuals was quite gullible with little to no understanding

regarding the danger of strangers. Many appeared to have behavioral difficulties, but all were vocal in some sense.

Surprisingly, self-awareness as well as advocacy of some means (either self or familial) was a major theme within these six films; this is positive, as this has become a major point of concern in the present. The terminology and language used in regards to these individuals were probably the area of most concern based on the data. Overall, the analysis showed these films to be mostly positive. Because the films were not chosen in a completely unbiased fashion (recommendations were given by outside sources), this is not a surprising analysis.

One of the major aspects gathered through film reflection is that society and the media have been quite affected by the many changes that have been occurring in the terminology used within the world of special education regarding individuals with disabilities. This is evident when reviewing these films as well as the collected information on each. Over the past several decades, terminology regarding this population has changed drastically from categorical labels to social norms to politically correct terms and phrases. This became apparent when half of the films watched for this paper included the “r-word.” Contrary to some belief, terminology does in fact matter and can affect those with and without disabilities in extremely negative fashions. As Siperstein, Pociask, and Collins (2010, p.126) stated:

although the reasons for and momentum behind the most recent shift in terminology are many, none of these reasons have had the same visibility in the media and among the growing voice of self-advocacy groups as the stigma that can be attached to the derogatory invective, *retard*. (p.126)

Thus, it is important that films portraying individuals with disabilities take this information into consideration in order to best depict society today or society in the setting of that day. Although certain terminology may reflect the time period of the film, it is vital that producers and directors consider the effects that the film, terminology, and portrayal could have on society. This could be thoughtfully done through a public service announcement in the beginning or ending of the film, in order to showcase understanding and acceptance for all.

It is also important to consider the positive affects that films portraying individuals with disabilities can have on society. The film industry could ultimately assist in inclusionary measures of individuals with disabilities in the future by using realistic and positive portrayals. As aforementioned, the media has great effect upon our society – both negative and positive – through the attitudes gained in reading, watching, or hearing. It should be noted that “attitudes determine treatment toward an individual, and that treatment will influence the personality development in that individual” (Elliott & Byrd, 1982, p.348). Thus, the media can be used as an assistant to change the negative interpretation of individuals with disabilities that has been hovering over society for an extensive amount of time. With that being said, it is vital that the interpretations are true but a large focus needs to be present in eliminating the superhero and victim portrayal and/or the eliciting of pity and vulnerability.

### **Personal Perspective**

This assignment was challenging yet rewarding. It allowed me to take a step back from my general perspective of watching films and fully engage in an observational process. Although difficult to remain completely unbiased, I believe that this film analysis took me out of my comfort zone.



Initially, I was excited for this project because I was able to individualize it to my interests and it allowed me to watch films. However, I quickly learned that this was not as simplistic as I thought it would be due to the intensity of the films, the overall critiques, and reflecting on the entirety. As an advocate for individuals with disabilities, I find the media to often be misleading and judgmental of this population. When I chose this topic, I never expected to be so challenged by the varying portrayals that I have seen yet reaffirm my passion for advocacy. With the addition of several reviews that I found on these films, it was interesting to research how others may have interpreted these films and portrayals as well.

Upon compiling my data, I realized just how true some of the articles that I had researched are regarding the major concepts of portrayal of individuals with disabilities (e.g., superheroes, victim, disabled innocence). I have always been a fan of films portraying individuals with disabilities because it is creating visibility. However, I now realize that that is not necessarily positive in all regards. I truly believe that studies similar to this need to be conducted in order to show society and the film industry the importance of accurate portrayal and how it can affect others.

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**Table 1**  
**Portrayal of Individuals with ID in the Media: Films**

Film: Adam Character: Adam

Criterion:

- Social-emotional reciprocity
- Developing, maintaining, and understanding relationships
- Stereotyped or repetitive motor movements, use of objects, or speech
- Insistence on sameness, routines, ritualized patterns
- Highly restricted, fixated interests; abnormal in intensity or focus
- Present in early childhood.
- Clinical impairment in social.

Characteristics Observed:

Social Skills: socially awkward, reverts to interest in space during conversations, prefers to not try new things, gullible, Harlan (dad’s friend) is only friend/relationship

Behavior: difficulty controlling emotions (throws things and hits self when upset), everything has a particular place, collector

Vocal: extremely articulate, very literal, emotionally around others once warms up to them

Miscellaneous:

Terminology/Language used appropriately	<b>Yes</b>	No
Physical representation and behaviors accurate	<b>Yes</b>	No
Self Awareness/Self Advocacy	<b>Yes</b>	No
Familial Advocacy	<b>Yes</b>	No
R-Word Utilized	Yes	<b>No</b>
Actor playing role (not real)	<b>Yes</b>	No
Individual with Disability (real)	Yes	<b>No</b>

Overall Analysis:

**Mostly Positive**      Mostly Negative      Mixed

Proposed Diagnosis: ASD (as discussed in film)

Comments: Positive showing of the ups and downs in life; great to see relationship aspect

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Note: This table, and those that follow, were adapted from Patton, (2014a) and Patton, (2014b).

**Table 2**  
**Portrayal of Individuals with ID in the Media: Films**

Film: \_\_\_\_\_ *Radio* \_\_\_\_\_ Character: James Robert Kennedy “Radio”

Criterion:

- Social-emotional reciprocity
- Nonverbal communicative behaviors
- Developing, maintaining, and understanding relationships
- Stereotyped or repetitive motor movements, use of objects, or speech
- Insistence on sameness, routines, ritualized patterns
- Highly restricted, fixated interests; abnormal in intensity or focus
- Hyper- or hypo-reactivity to sensory input or unusual interest in sensory aspects of environment
- Present in early childhood.
- Clinical impairment in occupational

Characteristics Observed:

Social Skills: shy, over trusting, cautious, keeps to self at first, loving and kind to those he knows, often misunderstood and not embraced

Behavior: gullible, easily upset (will hit self), sensory difficulties

Vocal: becomes very vocal through repetition and small phrases, literal understanding, cannot stand up for self

Miscellaneous:

Terminology/Language used appropriately	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Physical representation and behaviors accurate	<b>Yes</b>	No
Self Awareness/Self Advocacy	Yes	<b>No</b>
Familial Advocacy	<b>Yes</b>	No
R-Word Utilized	<b>Yes</b>	No
Actor playing role (not real)	<b>Yes</b>	No
Individual with Disability (real)	Yes	<b>No</b>

Overall Analysis:

Mostly Positive      Mostly Negative      **Mixed**

Proposed Diagnosis: Intellectual Disability (ID) (physical aspect and DD)

Comments: showed what can be done when others care; rags to riches story ‘disabled innocence;’ not necessarily realistic; based on true events

**Table 3**  
**Portrayal of Individuals with ID in the Media: Films**

Film:           *What’s Eating Gilbert Grape*                              Character:           *Arnie*          

Criterion:

- Social-emotional reciprocity
- Nonverbal communicative behaviors
- Developing, maintaining, and understanding relationships
- Stereotyped or repetitive motor movements, use of objects, or speech
- Insistence on sameness, routines, ritualized patterns
- Highly restricted, fixated interests; abnormal in intensity or focus
- Hyper- or hypo-reactivity to sensory input or unusual interest in sensory aspects of environment
- Present in early childhood.

Characteristics Observed:

Social Skills: gullible, doesn’t understand concept of strangers, extremely friendly but looked at as different

Behavior: gullible, easily upset (will cry, hit self, and run away), sensory difficulties, very young functioning age, wringing of hands and wrists, difficulty with eye contact, not self sufficient, very active (climb water tower)

Vocal: vocal through repetition and small phrases, literal understanding, cannot stand up for self, recall is difficult

Miscellaneous:

Terminology/Language used appropriately	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Physical representation and behaviors accurate	<b>Yes</b>	No
Self Awareness/Self Advocacy	Yes	<b>No</b>
Familial Advocacy	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
R-Word Utilized	Yes	<b>No</b>
Actor playing role (not real)	<b>Yes</b>	No
Individual with Disability (real)	Yes	<b>No</b>

Overall Analysis:

Mostly Positive            Mostly Negative            **Mixed**

Proposed Diagnosis: ASD

Comments: ‘disabled innocence;’ difficulty caring for individual with disability with little support or resources; expected not to live, so try to give him everything

**Table 4**

### Portrayal of Individuals with ID in the Media: Films

Film: Forrest Gump Character: Forrest Gump

Criterion:

- Social-emotional reciprocity
- Nonverbal communicative behaviors
- Developing, maintaining, and understanding relationships
- Insistence on sameness, routines, ritualized patterns
- Highly restricted, fixated interests; abnormal in intensity or focus
- Hyper- or hypo-reactivity to sensory input or unusual interest in sensory aspects of environment
- Present in early childhood.
- Clinical impairment in occupational

Characteristics Observed:

Social Skills: literal, socially awkward, difficulty reading emotion

Behavior: literal (sees black and white), shows emotion on occasion, mostly self-focused, over enhanced eye-contact, curious, keeps mementos

Vocal: very vocal, literal/rigid, difficulty understanding complex ideas

Miscellaneous:

Terminology/Language used appropriately	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Physical representation and behaviors accurate	<b>Yes</b>	No
Self Awareness/Self Advocacy	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Familial Advocacy	<b>Yes</b>	No
R-Word Utilized	Yes	<b>No</b>
Actor playing role (not real)	<b>Yes</b>	No
Individual with Disability (real)	Yes	<b>No</b>

Overall Analysis:

Mostly Positive      Mostly Negative      **Mixed**

Proposed Diagnosis: ASD/ID

Comments: ‘disabled inspiration;’ displays the positive and negatives when having a disability; overcomes obstacles; aware that he is different



**Table 5**  
**Portrayal of Individuals with ID in the Media: Films**

Film: Tru Confessions Character: Eddie

Criterion:

- Social-emotional reciprocity
  - Nonverbal communicative behaviors
  - Developing, maintaining, and understanding relationships
  - Stereotyped or repetitive motor movements, use of objects, or speech
  - Insistence on sameness
  - Hyper- or hypo-reactivity to sensory input or unusual interest in sensory aspects of environment
  - Present in early childhood.

Characteristics Observed:

Social Skills: gullible, little concept of boundaries or strangers

Behavior: easily upset, hits self, overly emotional (happy and sad), young functioning age

Vocal: can compose own thoughts and vocalize, uses repetition at times, extremely vocal overall

Miscellaneous:

Terminology/Language used appropriately	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Physical representation and behaviors accurate	<b>Yes</b>	No
Self Awareness/Self Advocacy	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Familial Advocacy	<b>Yes</b>	No
R-Word Utilized	<b>Yes</b>	No
Actor playing role (not real)	<b>Yes</b>	No
Individual with Disability (real)	Yes	<b>No</b>

Overall Analysis:

Mostly Positive      Mostly Negative      **Mixed**

Proposed Diagnosis: ID/DD

Comments: ‘disabled innocence;’ separate setting classroom but in mainstream school; twin sister wants to make him more comfortable; mom and sister big advocated but dad has temper

**Table 6**  
**Portrayal of Individuals with ID in the Media: Films**

Film:                           *The Ringer*                           Character:   Jeffy/Various Cast Members  

Criterion:

- Social-emotional reciprocity
- Nonverbal communicative behaviors
- Developing, maintaining, and understanding relationships
- Stereotyped or repetitive motor movements, use of objects, or speech
- Insistence on sameness, routines, ritualized patterns
- Highly restricted, fixated interests; abnormal in intensity or focus
- Hyper- or hypo-reactivity to sensory input or unusual interest in sensory aspects of environment
- Present in early childhood.
- Clinical impairment in social and occupational

Characteristics Observed:

Social Skills: overall social, aware of hidden curriculum cues, extremely supportive of one another, strong relationship bonds

Behavior: ‘higher functioning,’ upset with selves at times, showcased all emotions

Vocal: all extremely vocal, more to each other than strangers or those without disabilities

Miscellaneous:

Terminology/Language used appropriately	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Physical representation and behaviors accurate	<b>Yes</b>	No
Self Awareness/Self Advocacy	<b>Yes</b>	No
Familial Advocacy	<b>Yes</b>	No
R-Word Utilized	<b>Yes</b>	No
Actor playing role (not real)	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Individual with Disability (real)	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>

Overall Analysis:

Mostly Positive      Mostly Negative      **Mixed**

Proposed Diagnosis: various diagnoses – ID/DD/etc.

Comments: ‘disabled innocence’ and ‘disabled inspiration;’ watches movies to become the character of Jeffy; bonds formed between athletes – team/family atmosphere; very self-aware of disability/diagnosis and others; quite stereotypical at times