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“For a Kid Like Me”:

A Radio Documentary

about the Impact of Autistic Representation in Film

A Conversation about the Good, the Bad and the Ugly

by Aina Sallent Fortes

A Dissertation by Practice submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements

for MA in Journalism and Media Studies (HETAC).

Faculty of Journalism and Media Communications

Griffith College, Dublin

August 2025

Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of the MA in Journalism & Media Studies is my own; based on my personal study and/or research, and that I have acknowledged all material and sources used in its preparation. I also certify that I have not copied in part or whole or otherwise plagiarised the work of anyone else, including other students.

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Abstract

This radio documentary examines the state of autism representation in media, specifically in Hollywood films. It contains a content analysis of twelve films, as well as interviews and opinions from autistic people and experts. The current depictions of autism on film are lacking in diversity and accuracy, oftentimes leading to misinformed perceptions of autism. This misinformed view results in a lack of diagnoses for people who do not conform to a male, white, heteronormative stereotype and people with different speech and intellectual abilities. Autistic people who are not savants with scientific special interests are also severely underrepresented in the media analysed.

The interviews carried out add to the notion that a plural and diverse representation of autism in media can aid in the process of autism acceptance (rather than mere awareness) and improve the quality of life of ASD individuals of all kinds. The resulting documentary also highlights the reality that autism is not always visible and how that impacts mental health. To lead ASD people to the support they require, the documentary focuses on the lived experience of autism and how it compares to outward expression. Drawing on the “nothing about us without us” movement, this dissertation project concludes that autistic people should be involved in the creative process of narratives about autism.

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1. The Issue with ASD Representation in Film

The current lack of diversity in neurodivergent representation in media negatively impacts the image we have of what the different neurotypes can look like which leads to a gap in diagnoses: women, POC, high-masking or socially skilled folks with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) or attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) in particular get overlooked or misdiagnosed by medical professionals, and cannot advocate for themselves because they lack the information that accurate representations of their identity would grant them.

In film history, it seems that one particular phenotype of ASD/ADHD, or what was previously diagnosed as Asperger's, has been stereotyped and used to centre plots around "difficult children": the white, male, cisgender, heterosexual, nerdy and socially inept individual with savant syndrome (usually with a scientific special interest). This stereotype originates from a small percentage of real people who deserve to be represented in film, yes. Still, it has dominated the public's perception of the entire spectrum for decades and caused feelings of exclusion, and in some cases, it has encouraged discrimination or even violence. Some characters in anglophone media that fit the stereotype are Sheldon Cooper from *The Big Bang Theory* and *Young Sheldon*, Raymond from *Rain Man*, Sam from *Atypical*, Shaun from *The Good Doctor*, Adam from *Adam*, and Nathan from *X+Y*.

More recently, female versions of this phenotype have emerged as friends and love interests at the centre of narratives or along with the other main characters. However, this sign of progress has not cured the public of the notion that autism mostly manifests in white boys. Many problematic trends in these films must also be challenged. Intersectional identities that coexist with neurodivergence create a litany of problems for neurodivergent folks living in a neurotypical world. Women, POC, LGBTQIA+ folks, the elderly, the unemployed, and differently-abled people already suffer from other forms of oppression. Hence, a lack of neurodiverse representation is a sign of a larger societal problem regarding ableism that we should address.

The goal of my documentary is to establish the issues of ASD representation found in the literature review in a way that is easily understood by the public, complete

with illustrative examples. A content analysis of films where the main character is stated as having Autism/Asperger's (excluding ADHD and AuDHD due to lack of samples) was carefully performed to collect data on how diverse each film protagonist's character traits and identity markers are. The findings are all detailed in the content analysis section, in chapter three.

1.2. Terminology and Content Warnings:

Asperger's is no longer an acceptable term for autism with low support needs, due to the Nazi and eugenic inclinations of the man the syndrome is named after (Ellis, 2024).

Person-first language versus Identity-first language: there are two contrasting ways to refer to ASD, person-first describes phrases like "person with autism" or "I have autism", whereas identity-first describes phrases such as "autistic person" and "I am autistic". Many autistic people have expressed a preference for the latter because autism is inseparable from the individual; it affects every facet of life, and person-first language implies that ASD is an illness, a disease that burdens the person. The author of this dissertation, being autistic, believes that a neurotype is not an illness and prefers the latter version. Following this logic, the phrase "suffering from autism" should also be avoided. Furthermore, the neurotypical argument for person-first language is that saying person with autism reminds one of the humanity of the person being spoken of or to. However, it has been countered that forgetting someone's humanity is never acceptable. The ethos of the author of this piece agrees with the latter sentiment. One way or another, what will not be used is the word "autistic" as a noun, it will be used as an adjective.

On-the-spectrum vs autistic: It is a general belief that on-the-spectrum came from a good place, to reinforce the notion that autism is a spectrum and each individual presents differently and may have a range of support needs and traits. However, it seems to have become a euphemism, implying "autistic" is a dirty word, and so it will not be used in this study, perhaps at the cost of a lack of synonyms that will make the text a bit more unpleasant to read, but hopefully with the result that the audience will understand that autism is not a taboo. Similarly, phrases such as "disabled" and "intellectual disability" are used wherever appropriate in the text. Though sometimes they are replaced by euphemisms like "differently abled", language pertaining to disability cannot move on until ableism is properly

addressed in society: it is not intrinsic traits but the act of living in an exclusionary society that disables a person.

Allistic and neurotypical are the terms used to refer to people who are not autistic or neurodivergent, respectively. The fact that many people have not heard of the word “allistic” could signal the stigma attached to what is perceived as the “disorder” without considering the nature, connotations and significance of not naming the “order”. By not identifying non-autistic people, like we might fail to identify cis-gender or heteronormative people, we are establishing that what is “normal” is “natural” and above the need for examination, classification or identification. That being said, any of these terms may be embraced by autistic people when describing themselves, this is just what this author prefers and believes to be the most inclusive language.

Content warnings:

There is a mention (non-descriptive) of self-harm due to bullying towards the end of the *X+Y* analysis. There is a vague description of a violent death and discourse on police brutality at the end of the analysis for *Please Stand By*. Also throughout mentions of bullying or abuse of disabled people and death of relatives (never graphic).

Chapter Two: Evidence of Research

2.1. Radio Documentaries about Autism

- All About Autism

“All About Autism is a documentary about life on the spectrum. It aims to educate and inform people about what autism is and helps to resolve some misconceptions about the autistic community. The documentary celebrates neurodiversity and will hopefully help to break the stigma that can sometimes accompany an autism diagnosis,” writes Jonathan Duane on the iRadio website (O'Malley and Duane, 2020). This is the most comprehensive and updated documentary available today. It is most useful because it does not talk exclusively about people on the autism spectrum with intellectual or physical disabilities.

- Who Is Izzy Baia?

“A radio documentary giving an insight into the world of Kevin Whelan and his relationship with Brian, an autistic teenager in Galway (First broadcast 1997),” as described by RTÉ (McCarron, 1997). This is the least helpful piece of radio because it focuses on one particular story about an Irish boy with high support needs and does not support my intention of showcasing diversity.

- The Moon Is an Orange Triangle

This award-winning 3-part documentary follows six families with children on the spectrum. It focuses on the children, but also on the common pitfall of the effect their autism has on their family, which is a common trope in ASD-related media. Minors obviously should not have to advocate for themselves, but parents of ASD children have a pretty bad track record of misrepresenting their children and their needs and of making it all about the impact on the parent without any of the child’s perspective (Toomey, 2014).

- Forgotten Community - Adults Living With Autism

This radio piece by RTÉ explores the idea of the lack of support for disabled autistic people after the age of 18 and attempts to raise awareness. It is an interview with Susan Crawford, whose son, Tomas, is an adult with autism-related catatonia. They are both running a marathon to raise funds and awareness for people like Tomas, who struggle without support after graduating from school (O'Connell and O'Rourke, 2019).

2.2. The State of The Art in Autism Representation Research

Michelle Dean and Anders Nordahl-Hansen published “A Review of Research Studying Film and Television Representations of ASD” in 2022. The study analysed academic articles about “eighty-seven characters with ASD from film and television shows” (Dean and Nordahl-Hansen, 2022) to extrapolate data on the diversity and accuracy of each representation of autism. The resulting article has a high number of citations (24) and appears in much of the relevant literature on the lack of diversity in ASD film and TV. It was the first systematic review of literature that examined the study of ASD characters in media. It revealed both “stereotypical patterns” and “a burgeoning diversity” (Dean and Nordahl-Hansen, 2022, p. 475).

The review pointed out that the patterns of invisibility that affect some types of ASD characters (double minorities or vulnerabilities) corresponded with the "historic underrepresentation of minority groups in popular film production" (Dean and Nordahl-Hansen, 2022, p. 476). Researchers in medical and pedagogic fields had already found that people of colour struggle to access disability support: the review cites Harstad et al. (2013) and Mandell et al. (2009). The latter, "Racial/Ethnic Disparities in the Identification of Children With Autism Spectrum Disorders", found that POC with ASD are less likely to be diagnosed. This is how they measured it: "Black (odds ratio [OR]=0.79; 95% confidence interval [CI]=0.64, 0.96), Hispanic (OR=0.76; CI=0.56, 0.99), or of other race/ethnicity (OR=0.65; CI=0.43, 0.97)" (Mandell et al., 2009).

When it comes to diversity, a common criticism of poorly written ASD narratives is that so far, the ones represented tend to be a very specific phenotype: "The existing characters with ASD represent a narrow scope of the disorder with only white males in their 20s and 30s with savant skills (Singer, 2017), and these representations may be less relatable to cross cultural audiences" (Dean and Nordahl-Hansen, 2022). Savantism is not a trait of every autistic person, but film and TV almost make it seem synonymous with ASD or Asperger's (an outdated term): Another criticism is that savantism is overrepresented in portrayals of characters with ASD (Nordahl-Hansen et al., 2018a) even though the prevalence of savantism occurs in fewer than one in three individuals with ASD (Howlin et al., 2009)" (Dean and Nordahl-Hansen, 2022).

Do these Characters Truly Inform People's Ideas of what ASD Is?

The most relevant point made by Dean and Nordahl-Hansen, however, is that people do "form personal perceptions of ASD based on the characters they observe on the screen" (Dean and Nordahl-Hansen, 2022). They cite Berger (2015), proving that "media portrayals of disability have perpetuated negative and positive assumptions about disability, and have disproportionately extended stereotypes about disability characteristics", and add that ASD characters are sometimes the only known contact with ASD people that an individual may have. They claim parasocial relationships with ASD characters are positive because if Neurotypicals can relate to Neurodivergent folks, they are more likely to provide support and

understanding, charting a better path forward towards inclusion and equality (Dean and Nordahl-Hansen, 2022).

Negative Results of Autism Representation in the Media and Other Perspectives

In contrast, "Portrayal of Autism in Mainstream Media – a Scoping Review about Representation, Stigmatisation and Effects on Consumers in Non-fiction and Fiction Media" argues that current portrayals of Autism in media have mostly led to stigma that is detrimental to the ASD community (Mittmann et al., 2024). The study found that said stigmatisation was "most prominent in newspapers and movies & TV" as opposed to literary fiction. They found that "novels tend to present ASD in a complex, authentic context of family and community, rife with everyday problems, picture books tend to 'explain' ASD with a clinical perspective" (Mittmann et al., 2024).

Diagnosis and Timing of Disclosure Issues

"Diagnosis of Autism in Adulthood: A Scoping Review" is a very useful resource for understanding and evaluating the ripple effects and consequences of late diagnosis (Huang et al., 2020). This aids in illustrating the point that late diagnosis can be detrimental in many cases and that more knowledge of ASD traits is beneficial to those cases.

The research article "Does Learning You are Autistic at a Younger Age Lead to Better Adult Outcomes? A Participatory Exploration of the Perspectives of Autistic University Students" asked students what age they had learned of their diagnosis and their feelings about it. The researchers concluded that those who "learned that they were autistic when they were younger reported higher well-being and QoL* relative to students who did not gain access to this important information about themselves until they were older," (Oredipe et al., 2023).

The Necessity of Gender and Race Theory

Gender-based studies on the diagnostic difficulties of women are also increasing in numbers, while the racial/ethnic perspective still needs to catch up. An instance of both is the article "Autism Presentation in Female and Black Populations: Examining the Roles of Identity, Theory, and Systemic Inequalities", a narrative

review that asks the question: “What do we know about Black and female autistic lives, and how have systems coalesced to limit that knowledge?” (Diemer et al., 2022). It points out a trend in the literature towards “a more medical model”, which may decrease the perceived relevance of essential sociocultural influences. It touches on “double vulnerability” and what that means for the intersection of three minority groups: autistic black women (Diemer et al., 2022).

The researchers, Maire Claire Diemer, Emily D Gerstein and April Regester (all of the University of St Louis) found that “Autistic Black girls” are invisible in the scientific community and “face near-complete neglect.” They pointed to the correlation between discrimination in the research and late diagnosis and the “ripple effects” that this causes: exclusion, lack of information and access to resources. The research exposes class distinctions: the more wealthy one’s family, the easier it is to be diagnosed and access support (Diemer et al., 2022).

Queer Stories and Why They Are Particularly Relevant

The underrepresentation of queer characters in the ASD cinematic universe is a significant issue because neurodivergent folks are more likely to be queer than neurotypicals: “When evaluating sex differences, autistic males are uniquely more likely to be bisexual (compared to nonautistic males); conversely, autistic females are uniquely more likely to be homosexual (compared to nonautistic females)” (Weir et al., 2021). Research consistently demonstrates that individuals on the autism spectrum have a higher likelihood of identifying as LGBTQ+ compared to the neurotypical population.

Unfortunately, research on this topic is less widespread than the others listed previously and could be further explored. Especially seeing as increasing the visibility and diversity of queer ASD characters would promote greater inclusivity and representation for this marginalised community.

2.3. Content Analysis

1. *Rain Man (1988)*

The main characters in the film *Rain Man*, directed by Barry Levinson, are the Babbit brothers: Charles “Charlie”, allistic, and Raymond, autistic. Charlie discovers he has a brother upon his father’s death, when Raymond is left $3 million. Charlie

only gets a car and some rosebushes. Upset that he is not inheriting his father's most valuable assets, Charlie looks for Raymond and finds him in a psychiatric facility, where he is informed of Raymond's disability, the severity of which means that, though he is described as high-functioning, it would be best for Raymond to remain interned where he can stick to his routines and rituals. Charlie, intending to get at least half of the money that his father left in a trust for Raymond's care, takes his brother on a road trip from Cincinnati to Los Angeles, during which he is mean and abusive towards Raymond whenever his autistic traits get in the way. The conflict is resolved when Raymond's savantism benefits Charlie: the pair go to Las Vegas, where Charlie makes his brother count cards to compensate for the losses he has incurred in his business since dealing with the will and his brother's "issues" (all issues that arose out of Raymond being taken out of care against his will). In the end, despite there being no apology, Charlie's decision to keep Raymond in his life and let go of the money is seen as a happy, equally satisfying outcome for both men.

Raymond Babbit is a presumably heterosexual white man of around 40 years old. We can only deduce his sexuality out of an expressed desire to go on a date with a woman, and there is no other mention of attraction, romantic or sexual. In a scene with Charles' love interest, Susanna, where she offers Raymond a dance and a kiss, the autistic man never expresses any interest other than his go-to agreement, "yeah", which he is later shown to say somewhat indiscriminately and without nuance. When asked about his opinion of the kiss, Raymond only mentions that it is "wet" (Levinson, 1988). This raises an issue about consent. Overall, the film fails to "delve into the ability of autistic individuals to live successful, independent lives" and, through an unlikeable main character, accidentally teaches people that it is acceptable to treat autistic folks like objects: Charlie's lies and manipulation should have a more profound and negative impact on Raymond's psyche.

Despite this, the film received very good reviews at the time, and is still viewed as a champion of autism acceptance. This recent review raves about the relationship between the characters, ignoring the lack of communication and the abuse on the part of the allistic adult (Charlie), but does acknowledge that the film is only representative of one instance of ASD, and a product of its time:

> Rain Man articulates a powerful message about the importance of understanding autism and how doing so can transform the perspective of a neurotypical individual and make them more empathetic in the process. This is portrayed very movingly in the relationship between Charlie and Raymond, whose actors exhibit superb chemistry together. At the same time, however, the film's portrayal of autism reflects perceptions among the public and the medical establishment that were commonly held at the time of Rain Man's release, and thus it inaccurately characterizes some of the traits associated with autism as well as Raymond's particular range on the spectrum. (Skudra, 2021)

Overall, *Rain Man*'s contribution to culture and to neurotypical perceptions of autism is that it started a conversation, that, for better or for worse, brought us here, to this study.

2. *What's Eating Gilbert Grape? (1988)*

This is another film about the insolent brother of a high-support-needs autistic boy played by an allistic actor (Leonardo DiCaprio). Gilbert Grape is a teenager who has to take care of his obese (and therefore also disabled) mother, who cannot leave the house, and his three siblings: two self-sufficient girls who take care of the house and his autistic and intellectually disabled brother. Gilbert is good at taking care of Arnie: he knows his brother well, and uses techniques to keep him safe and happy that make sense with Arnie's idiosyncrasies: he likes to play hide and seek and climb to high places, he enjoys nursery rhymes and is overall a happy, funny, mischievous kid, about to turn eighteen.

However, as often happens in these kinds of films, when things get difficult for Gilbert, taking care of Arnie becomes an unwelcome burden, and what was normal for the family one day earns Arnie a sucker punch to the face the next. Earlier in the film, the younger sister tackles Arnie to the ground and is hurting him when Gilbert intervenes and acts as if what Ellen is doing is completely unacceptable (it is). However, after beating his brother up, we see Gilbert's retreat from the house as his chance to escape the life he finds so disappointing and uninteresting. Instead, he sulks around looking remorseful. The characters do not see this. When he returns home the next morning, on Arnie's birthday, to apologise, a couple of words are exchanged and immediately the brothers hug and smile, as if all was well. One wonders whether that means that this is a regular occurrence in the family and that Arnie has internalised that abuse is a part of love, or whether the filmmakers are trying to say that Arnie is too far removed from reality to resent his brother. This flaw, where the audience is shown growth or remorse and penance from an abuser,

which is not shown or communicated to the disabled character, is repeated in several pieces of media: *Rain Man*, *Mercury Rising*, *Jack of the Red Hearts* and *Music*.

Psychology Today characterises both Arnie and Music as the trope of "The Autistic Burden", explaining that it "implies that the character's autism is a burden on the individual and those around the individual" (Bogart, 2025). This could be helped by more insight into the character's point of view, but in these films, portraying the lived experience of autistic individuals does not seem like the priority.

3. *Mercury Rising (1998)*

The main character in this film is an FBI agent, Art Jeffries, who finds himself in the position to protect Simon Lynch, a nine-year-old autistic boy with high support needs who came across a code and translated it. The code, created by the NSA and hidden in a puzzle magazine to test if anyone could decode it, is protecting highly valuable information, which means several forces are trying to kidnap or kill Simon. *Mercury Rising* was directed by Harold Becker and written by Lawrence Konner and Mark Rosenthal, and received mostly negative reviews. The main issue with the film is the convoluted plot and unnecessary action-packed folly, but the issue that concerns us is its exploitation of the autistic character as a plot device. An autistic film critic reviewed the film and called it: "offensively reductive and completely insipid", and mentioning that "there isn't any background given towards [Simon's] cleverness and his impaired social abilities, rather instead the film just relies on him being put in danger because that's what I can only assume Harold Becker even thinks that's how children on the spectrum behave. It feels outright insulting" (Rebanal, 2018).

Simon Lynch is dehumanised throughout the entire film. His portrayal is exaggerated, to say the least; the actor playing him is not very believable, and his traits are all dropped whenever it is convenient for the plot. He is mostly non-verbal, does not like to be touched by strangers, and is a savant exclusively for solving codes. He is portrayed as extremely unintelligent, to the point that he does not understand that walking towards a train driving full speed at him is dangerous. What is worse, at the beginning of the story, his parents are brutally murdered, and throughout the entire plot, nobody explains this to him or attempts to have a conversation with him about it.

As mentioned, Simon is white, 9 years old, and has no other traits or characteristics other than being able to solve complex codes. He develops a bond with the main character, who is trying to protect him, but it is never explained what connects them other than their circumstances. To get Simon to stop screaming when Art forcibly moves him from one location to another, Art tells him that he is a friend, someone to be trusted. He does so by using the communication aides that the boy carries with him at all times. This, however, is only ever told, not shown. Since the boy has no personality, it is impossible for the two characters to bond on a personal level through commonalities. Eventually, Simon stops reacting to the danger and confusion, and we are meant to believe that it is because of their bond.

4. *Mozart and the Whale (2005)*

In this film written by Ron Bass (the writer of *Rain Man*), two autistic adults with low support needs meet at a group for autistic adults and fall in love. Donald Morton is a taxi driver who constantly has accidents due to getting overexcited when thinking about the numbers of the streets and the car plates. His special interest and the way his savantism manifests is through mathematics. He runs the adult support group, where he meets Isabelle Sorenson, an artist with a passion for music and an intense, vibrant personality. She is heavily "manic-pixie-dream-girl-coded", which is a pattern in feminine autistic representations worth exploring. The intersection of quirky girls who are objectified by nerdy boys and autism is a known phenomenon. Charlotte Colombo wrote about it in a piece for The Independent in 2023:

> Realising that I played into this "manic pixie dream girl" stereotype was a hard pill to swallow, but it didn't take me long to realise I was not alone. Along with Fern Brady's book, I found several viral TikToks, with millions of views each, of neurodivergent women joking and sharing experiences of how men interpreted autism and ADHD traits as part of the "manic pixie dream girl" persona of mismatched outfits and funny catchphrases. What they were ignoring were the less palatable aspects of neurodiversity.
>
> It was then that I realised it was a systemic problem, and just a further example of neurodivergent women remaining bound by this innate need to perform. With neurodivergent women quite literally being "not like other girls", it's all too easy for us to be stereotyped and reduced to the "manic pixie dream girl" persona. But this reduces us to a two-dimensional romantic fantasy. (Colombo, 2023)

Her opinion, that ASD and ADHD traits can be cherry-picked to present an interesting but still attractive persona to unsuspecting men, is shared by many neurodivergent women. It is a problem when it comes from within, because it is a

form of masking, but it is more upsetting when it comes from male directors or writers portraying women.

Mozart and the Whale is a better representation than many of the others because there are many autistic characters who are doing well and who are entirely different. The relationship has intense ups and downs, which can be quite relatable, but also fall into some unnecessary stereotypes: words like “crazy” and “psychotic” are often used by the characters to refer to themselves and each other, which is not ideal. A reviewer mentioned that Donald comes across not as a whole, rounded person, but as a “bundle of autistic traits with not much of a real character tying them together” (Atkinson, 2015). An autistic brain is rarely irrational. Traits have motives. For example, autistic people have social anxiety due to repeated failure in social interactions, not because they are born scared. This film, like many of the others, if not all of them, spends a lot of time portraying sensory overload and other easy-to-understand characteristics, while completely ignoring or brushing over the complexities of others. In a heterosexual relationship dynamic, where the woman mentions having been sexually harassed, a conversation about consent or the statistics of autistic rape victims compared to the total population would have been a much-needed insight and added depth.

5. *Snow Cake (2006)*

This film was unavailable on all streaming and paywalled platforms that were accessible at the time, and therefore, the analysis was impossible. From the description, it features an autistic adult woman as one of two main characters. She is white, played by Sigourney Weaver, and has a romance with a character played by Alan Rickman. The plot is unconventional and it seems the film does a poor job at representing autism empathetically, according to this review:

> Linda (Sigourney Weaver), presumably in her 40s, lives with her teenage daughter in the township of Wawa in the Canadian province of Ontario. One day a car accident kills her daughter. […] Alex (played by Alan Rickman), who was driving the car at the time of the accident, shows up at her doorstep to explain and apologize. Amazingly, Linda appears rather unaffected by the news. She’s not apathetic, though; she displays anger (at her intruding neighbour), joy (at the toys which her daughter had bought for her minutes before the accident), and distress (at Alex’s wet clothes which threaten to contaminate her carpet), but no sorrow, grief, or sadness. One could say that such an unimaginably tragic occurrence as losing one’s only child takes time to process. That’s possibly true; except during the 1 hour and

> 47 minutes of the film, Linda barely displays any emotion whatsoever with regards to her daughter dying. Pretty much the only time she expresses any negative reaction at all to Vivienne's passing is when she refers to her, in the past tense, as "useful". (Belek, 2013b)

In the case of films that were unavailable to watch, however we will only be looking at the observable characteristics of the autistic people depicted, and not at the plot points. That means the takeaways from *Snow Cake* are that the autistic character is a white woman, a heterosexual adult, with no apparent savantism or special interest in STEM. It is unclear whether Linda has an intellectual disability, she does have a romantic interest, though her actual understanding of love is questionable, and there seems to be no bullying though the dead relative trope is present.

6. *Adam (2009)*

Adam, a 29-year-old man diagnosed with Asperger's, is played by Hugh Dancy (who, incidentally, is married to Claire Danes, the main actress in the next film). This film is a step forward in representation for several reasons: first, Adam is truly the main character of this film. Second, he is an adult, and he is doing quite well in life. That is, until his father dies and, soon after, he is fired from his job. Thankfully, while this is happening, he meets his neighbour, Beth, with whom he slowly forms a lovely bond, and who helps him navigate these difficulties and return to a state of well-being and happiness. Third, Adam also has additional support in the form of Harlan, one of his father's old friends, who is always there for him, but he lives alone and takes care of himself. Fourth, he overperforms at his job, and when they fire him, it is not his fault, but an adjustment of the staff. Fifth, he gives Beth emotional support and hugs when she needs them and is generally a believable person, which is more than some of the other films can claim.

There are some genuinely inspired moments in this story, though it does have a few flaws. When Beth is trying to learn about Asperger's, she reads books about it from autistic authors, not neurotypical medical professionals. This is helpful and drives forward the narrative because she truly begins to learn about how Adam feels and experiences the world. She also asks Adam questions and is both curious and understanding. At one point, she gives him a book about finding a job as an autistic adult, and Adam, overcome with joy, kisses her. However, when Beth lies to him to cajole him into meeting her parents, Adam has a meltdown that feels vastly exaggerated for dramatic effect. He calls her a liar, screams that he hates her and

that he hopes her father goes to jail forever (he is being prosecuted for fraud) while throwing things on the floor and breaking them.

Overall, *Adam* is almost unoffensive in its depiction of autism, but it has one structural flaw that Ben Belek, the "Autism Anthropologist", explains perfectly:

> In its use of the alien metaphor, Adam is a striking example of Othering. It is not a bad-intentioned endeavour at discussing autism, but a misguided one nonetheless. Difference is fine – we need differences, we thrive on differences. Sameness should not be an ideal, and differences should not be concealed. But one has to be sensitive to power dynamics when discussing differences. To refer to another as so strange that he may well have come from a different planet is, well, plain wrong. Not just for its implications (the false assumption that autistics can never be sufficiently understood by us NTs – so what's the use of even trying?), but for the very reasoning that brought it on: Autism means difference, but not THAT much of a difference. We don't need to look up to the stars to account for this difference – the people on Planet Earth are sufficiently diverse. And we are all equally human. (Belek, 2013b)

This take explains why there is a sense of the fantastical in the film: Adam is not treated entirely like a regular person, but like an almost-human being with a pure heart and good intentions (which is what makes him attractive to Beth) affected by awful circumstances. This is dehumanising, even if the character is portrayed as better than human at times, which is a common pitfall of neurodivergent portrayals. The film ignores the reality that one, it is possible to understand and connect with autistic people, and two, that most of our struggles are to do with ableism, not extreme events like a parent's death or being fired.

7. *Temple Grandin (2010)*

This film is a biopic depicting the life and educational journey of Temple Grandin, a white American woman who revolutionised the way cattle are handled in more than 50% of the US. She is referred to (on her own public social media accounts and posters announcing her talks) as the world's "most famous woman with autism". The film is a success in many ways that others are not. One would think that basing it on a real person who is still alive and able to disagree with her portrayal would help significantly, but what comes across as the most evident upgrade to this autism tale is the lack of intense melodrama. As the reviewer for the NYTimes puts it: "Hers is a tale that could be easily played up for drama, intrigue and weepy reconciliations, but this narrative is loyal to Ms. Grandin's credo: emotions are secondary to tangible results. And the result is a movie that is funny, instructive and also intangibly charming."

It is a successful representation too because Claire Danes, who plays Dr Grandin, does a fair job at representing the mannerisms that are accurate to the person she is playing. Autism manifests differently in everyone, so one cannot say that a representation that is accurate for one individual will be accurate for everyone. However, because this individual is in the public eye, one may compare and appreciate how Dr Grandin was portrayed, rather than mocked. Exaggerated and nonsensical physical depictions of disability are a dime a dozen in Hollywood and in most of the films analysed here. Grandin's difficulties in keeping her tone even and going through automatic doors, and her story with the "squeeze machine", are unique to her, but also relatable to autistic people. Especially those who have an understanding of where their traits come from and what makes them similar to other neurodiverse folks, despite apparent differences in behaviour.

In *Beyond the Spectacle of the Autistic Adult,* the reviewer reminds us that "mainstream awards often go to films that portray disability within the familiar ableist narrative of overcoming the burden and tragedy of impairment" but agrees that "Temple Grandin offers a more complex representation," although some scenes "spectacularize Grandin by setting her apart, both intellectually and socially, from the world around her" (Gregory, 2010).

Temple Grandin also receives praise for being a "convincing illustration of the rejection and stigma autistic adult women experience" by portraying sexism in a male-dominated industry in the 1970s, and relating that to Grandin's autism thorugh her perseverance, her resistence to bullying and her hyperfocus on what matters to her. Gregory concludes that the "film also illustrates how Grandin's desire for independence and rejection of femininity threaten the feedlot employees and manager, [...] The film shows the culmination of the men's resentment toward Grandin when they smear the windshield and hood of her pick-up truck with bull testicles" (Gregory, 2010). Grandin's reaction, angry and passionate, is a good depiction of the feminine rage that comes with being twice marginalised and having a strong sense of justice, which gives her the dignity she deserves.

8. *My Name Is Khan (2010)*

This film was unavailable on all streaming and paywalled platforms that were accessible at the time, and therefore, the analysis was impossible. It is an Indian

drama in dual Hindu and English, which does not fit the description of Hollywood depictions of Autism, but it was so widely recognised at the time of release that it appears in many articles recommending films about autism and may have as wide a viewership as any of the others in this list. Due to the lack of representation of ASD in people of colour, the film was added to the study. Reviews said that it was "an amazing film" and that, in "the latter half of the film, you start to forget that Khan is in any way different, finding yourself swept up in this powerful story of love, loss and acceptance" (A Is For Aoife Not Autism, 2017).

According to Laura Sep on Disability Movies the film is "an epic about the life of the fictional Rizwan Khan, a man who grew up in India and showed symptoms all his life, but didn't get diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome until after reaching adulthood and immigrating to America", and Rizwan is portrayed "as a boy genius who could fix electrical appliances and recite historical facts" (Sep, 2010). We can observe then, that the main character is a male autistic adult, non-white, a savant with a special interest in STEM, heterosexual and in a relationship, and both bullied and involved in tragedy.

9. *X+Y (2014)*

In X+Y, which is based on a documentary about the 2006 IMO called *Beautiful Young Minds*, Nathan is an autistic boy, diagnosed at 9 years old. He is a savant with a passion for maths, and his life is severely impacted when his caring father dies in a car accident while the boy is in the passenger seat. His loving mother, Julie, has to raise Nathan by herself, and seems to be doing a good job: she learns her boy's idiosyncrasies and works relentlessly to keep both of them afloat. That being said, it does seem like it is just too much work. Films about autistic children are often about the parents' suffering. It could be argued that these narratives portray autistic children as burdens. Julie also needs support, because all humans need a network, people to talk to, to pick them up from the airport, to bring food over when life is too much, to take them out of the house when they are overworking themselves… sometimes, all autistic people need, like everyone else, is friends. Nathan's tutor, Martin, who has multiple sclerosis, helps both the parent and the child and is an overall positive influence, as they are on him. Julie and Martin do everything they can to help Nathan attend the International Mathematical

Olympiads (IMO) as a teenager. In the end, the trio forms a new familial system: a happy ending for all of them.

Against the character, it has to be said that Nathan's lack of affection towards his mother seems unjustified: it could be a result of the classic pattern that often falls onto heterosexual parents where the father is always the "good cop" and the mother is forced to be the "bad cop" despite not wanting to be, so that the children learn to associate their father with good times and their mother with fights, lectures and prohibitions. This, in Nathan's case, with his father being dead, could certainly be accentuated.

A positive of this character, however, is that he is not only good at maths. A photographic (eidetic) memory characterises savant syndrome: Nathan uses it to learn Mandarin and speak to his new friend Zhang Mei (with whom he can socialise more easily because she is kind and they are often not in a group setting). He can also learn piano with ease. On the flip side, he can also remember every detail of the car accident where his father died years ago. Overall, while coinciding with the stereotype of autism in Hollywood, Nathan is a complete person. His main flaw, being unnecessarily insensitive towards his mother, seems like a writing device, designed to create tension. The trait could be said to skew away from a more truthful representation of autistic people (who are often highly sensitive and kind), but it would also be inaccurate to represent autistic folks as perfect angels.

The film also includes another autistic character, Luke, who communicates much more than Nathan, but still not successfully, and as a result is bullied by his peers. Luke does not make it into the IMO team and when the other boys make fun of him, and accuse him of not being funny and being weird and annoying, he tries to adapt by copying a monologue from TV to tell as a joke. The exchange is painful, it does not land, and later we see Luke committing self-harm. Nathan tries to talk to him, and it is revealed that the other boy does not even enjoy maths. Luke is only there, presumably, to justify his own existence, because he is convinced his special abilities are the only thing that makes up for his disability. As mentioned in the previous reviews, having more than one neurodivergent character is always a positive. In this case, the awful contrast between the two boys is a perfect illustration of what difference having a welcoming environment and caring friends can do to a person (whether autistic or not).

10. Jack of the Red Hearts (2015)

Jack (Jacqueline) is not the autistic character in this film, but a teenage girl who lies to get hired as the caretaker of Glory, an autistic girl, when her mother wants to return to her work (she has been caring for Glory full-time). Because she has no experience in the role, which she got through said illicit methods, Jack treats Glory quite badly until she learns how to help her, including verbal and physical abuse (mild, but still inexcusable in and outside of the film's universe). This film, just like *Rain Man* and *What's Eating Gilbert Grape?*, fails to make the main character apologise to the victim of their abuse. Glory's family gets an apology for her lies, but Glory, who is intellectually disabled and has high support needs, is never shown to resent Jack even after being mistreated for weeks, and she never receives an apology. The amendments the teen makes are beneficial to the child, but they feel inadequate and insufficient. Glory's needs are met, but her wants are not explored or addressed.

The plot mainly revolves around Jack's struggles to get her sister back from the foster care system now that she is 18. The main issue are the lies she tells and what she has to hide from her employers in order to achieve the financial independence she needs to be able to take care of her sister. While taking care of the autistic child, who has very little personality or agency, she is essentially shown not caring about anyone but herself and her sister, right until the very end.

It is often in these pieces of media that not enough thought is given to the inner lives and thoughts of the autistic people being bullied, abused, hurt, lied to, kidnapped, etc. These heavily traumatic events do not appear to change the characters in any way. Only positive change is enacted on them by the visible struggle of their families and companions. This is only a representation of the systematic abuse of autistic folks and how neurotypicals see them as either objects, burdens or victims. As this neurodivergent reviewer puts it, "an eleven year old child is tied to a gate in public, treated like an animal, and no one is bothered by this?" (Tonia Says, 2016). Overall, the film comes across as another drama where autism is a burden and a plot device for the character development of the neurotypical people.

11. *Please Stand By (2017)*

Wendy is a young autistic woman, probably in her early twenties, who is writing a script for a contest. She lives in a care facility where her support is paid for by her sister, who is a new mother and cannot take care of her. This is another film where the autistic character lives in a care facility (like Raymond), and she is not the only neurodivergent person in her life (like the support group in *Mozart and the Whale*). In real life, autistic people who are not institutionalised also flock together, often without knowing it, due to similarities in interests and personalities. Wendy's special interest is Star Trek, which is a common occurrence, especially because the autistic community has claimed Spock. Headcanons where autistic folks claim characters who are not directly stated as being neurodivergent are common. Another example from a TV series is Abed from *Community*.

Wendy is so set on submitting her script to Paramount Pictures that when the deadline for mailing it in passes and she loses her chance, she decides to take a bus from San Francisco to L.A. to deliver it in person. This is a significant challenge, a disruption to her routine, and something she has never done before, but despite many obstacles, she makes it.

On the way, she is left in the middle of nowhere by the bus driver because she had snuck her dog into the bus, where pets are not permitted. Then, a couple with a baby rob her. Later on, she is stopped by the police. Her sister and her carer have reported her missing, and the two agents who spot her pursue her, she runs away and when she is backed into a corner, she panics and hides. One of the officers, realising she has a Star Trek insignia on her backpack, speaks Klingon to her to signal that he is a friend (a trope that is executed better here than in *Mercury Rising*) and will not hurt her, that they are only trying to get her to where she is going safely. He says, "A warrior does not let a friend face danger alone", which is a beautiful sentiment, and the tense moment passes. Now, imagine that Wendy is not a white girl. Imagine that the autistic person running from the police in L.A. is black, and wonder if the outcome would be the same. There are other situations in which autistic folks do not survive interactions with the police despite not being criminals:

A Thirty-Two-year-old Palestinian autistic man, Eyad Hallaq, was killed by the police in Jerusalem five days after George Floyd's historic death in 2020. "He had limited

communication skills and no comprehension of the palpable haze of sectarian tensions overshadowing that district of the city," reported Forbes (Alexiou, 2020). They also denounce this man's death as part of a wider issue, where police forces are not instructed in the communication differences of disabled folks. The article describes Hallaq as "petrified and unable to understand the commands" of the officers, running and hiding behind a container, not unlike Wendy herself: "According to reports, despite his carer screaming in Hebrew that he was disabled, he was shot twice in the chest." The article also quotes a report by the EHRC, which points to a lack of education in the legal system on the "unique communication needs of those with learning disabilities and autism spectrum disorders, thereby limiting their participation and access to justice by failing to make appropriate adjustments" (Alexious, 2020).

12. *Music (2021)*

As this is the latest and most controversial film released, and in order to gather other opinions from the neurodivergent community, the documentary will feature several YouTube video essays from ND creators evaluating certain things: autism representation in media, the issues with *Music*, and how to write autistic characters.

Jesse Gender is a respected Trans and Autistic academic with 281K subscribers who analyses media that relates to her special interests. She says in her video "Sia's Music: The Trap of Symbolic Autistic Representation" that the film is a failure in many ways. She criticises the new director for casting an allistic actress with whom she has a complicated relationship: Maddie Ziegler pushed back against the role that was written with her in mind because she was worried about offending people, and Sia used her influence (Sia started Ziegler's career and is her godmother, they have a history going back years, during most of which the dancer has been a minor) to keep the project going (Jessie Gender, 2021).

Jessie Gender also points out that whatever research the pair claimed to have done was insufficient. The film was made in collaboration with Autism Speaks, a US organisation that the autisric community does not support because of its "shady use of its funds (only 4% of which actually go to helping autistic people)" and its history of trying to find a cure for autism (Jessie Gender, 2021). This information is easily found online. Sia claimed to have never heard of it.

The portrayal of the character Music comes across as mocking, exactly what Ziegler was worried about: she is performing too many tics and stims, all at once, and non-stop for the entire film. Autistic people do not have constant involuntary movements, stims are used to regulate the nervous system, so they respond to stressful situations. Each person has their own personal stims and portraying a person as having so many at once is unrealistic and can remind one of the way autistic children are often bullied.

The film is also hard to watch as someone with sensory issues because it features lots of strobing lights and overwhelming scenes. The Autism Research Institute in California writes that "Seizure disorders and epilepsy are frequently reported medical comorbidities in individuals with autism. [...] In the general population, fewer than 1% of children (age 17 and younger) develop clinical seizures. By comparison, one of the largest studies aimed at identifying the prevalence of epilepsy in children with autism found that among children aged 13 years and older with ASD, 26% were diagnosed with epilepsy. (Viscidi E.W. et. al, 2013)" (ARI, 2025). This speaks to the fact that the film was not made with autistic audiences in mind.

Megan X from the channel, I'm Autistic, Now What? also has an interesting point in her video "How South Korea SAVED Autism Representation" where she praises the TV series *Extraordinary Attorney Woo* for doing a good job of representing an autistic adult despite the actress, Park Eun-bin, being allistic. Quoting interviews with Park Eun-bin, she mentions that "the fact that she decided not to be influenced by anyone's specific mannerisms or presentation, that really seems to paid off in this case" (Megan X, 2025). Sia, however, made Ziegler watch *Forrest Gump, Rain Man, What's Eating Gilbert Grape?* (she said she wanted to make "*Rain Man: the Musical*") and based all of Music's mannerisms on a non-verbal autistic boy that she knows in real life. As evidenced by this analyis of the films, apart from *Forrest Gump* which we did not examine, these are not good representations to take as inspiration.

Megan goes on to describe how Sia was diagnosed autistic after the film and the backlash which, in many people's views, did not excuse her, but made her inaccurate representation a worse offense. Meg also argues that directors should cast autistic actors to play themselves because on top of their experience informing the role better, giving autistic people a job is always a good thing: she

quotes the statistic by the ONS that reported in 2021 how only 22% of autistic adults are employed (Megan X, 2025).

The last and most offensive problem with Sia's film is the use of harmful restraining techniques which, in the past, have proven fatal: in 2019 an autistic boy died in a school in California after being restrained in the manner shown in this film (Fry, 2019).

Film Classification Chart

Film	Rain Man (1988)	What's Eating Gilbert Grape? (1993)	Mercury Rising (1998)	Mozart and the Whale (2005)	Snow Cake (2006)	Adam (2009)	Temple Grandin (2010)	My Name Is Khan (2010)	X+Y (2014)	Jack of the Red Hearts (2015)	Please Stand By (2017)	Music (2021)
Gender	M	M	M	M+F	F	M	F	M	M	F	F	F
Race	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	NW	W	W	W	W
Age	A	C	C	A	A	A	A	A	C	C	YA	C
Sexuality*	S	-	-	S	S	S	A	S	S	-	S	-
Savantism/EM	Y	N	Y	Y/N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	N

SpIn in STEM	Y	N	Y	Y/N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N
Intellect. Disability	Y	Y	Y	N	-	N	N	-	N	Y	N	Y
Familial Abuse of ASD character	Y	Y	Y - by guardians	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N - but neglect	Y
Dead Parent/s	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y- dead child	Y	N- absent father	N	Y	N	Y	Y
Presence of Bullying	N	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	Y - racially motivated	Y	Y- looked down on	Y	N
Real Main Character	N	N	N	Y	-	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	N
Love Story	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N	N	N

*sexuality refers to sexual preferences as depicted, not mentioned, for lack of data

Chart Key:

Gender: Male/Female

Race: White/Non-White

Age: Child/Adult/Young Adult

Sexuality: Straight/Asexual

Others: Yes/No

Chapter Three: Constructing and Designing the Radio Documentary

3.1. Design Concept

Much consideration was given to the structure of the documentary, and each of its design features. The intended length was longer than a traditional radio piece because documentaries, video essays or podcasts about topics like neurodivergence average at an hour long: with the complexity of the topic, the amount of content analysed, the interviews and the detail to which each element was elaborated, a 45-minute long piece seemed the most appropriate. The idea was always to start with the content analysis and end with the interviews. The clips

were chosen in the research stage as signficant quotes appeared and illustrated the main points of the documentary. The main topics drafted were the lack of representation, how that affects individual perceptions of autism and how that impacts diagnosis in non-white/male people. The final structure can be broken down like so: section one includes an introduction, the content analysis and research-based section, and clips from other autistic creators who have spoken out about autistic representation in media. Section two concludes the narrative by proving the thesis was correct with personal anecdotes, to what extent it allows for variation as exemplified by the other voices in the interviews, and what can be done to improve representation and solve the issue.

3.2. Structure and material analysed

The films I intended to analyse are the following:

Rain Man (1988), *What's Eating Gilbert Grape?* (1993), *Mercury Rising* (1998), *Mozart and the Whale* (2005), *Snow Cake* (2006), *Adam* (2009), *Temple Grandin* (2010), *My Name Is Khan* (2010), *X+Y* (2014), *Jack of the Red Hearts* (2015), *Please Stand By* (2017), *Music* (2021)

However, due to a lack of availability, *Snow Cake* and *My Name is Khan* were not analysed. This list is in chronological order, but in the documentary, the discourse is organised by topic and relevance (grouping films with similar themes or issues together). An evaluation of their overall value is explained below, from best to worst representation:

1. *Temple Grandin*
2. *Please Stand By*
3. *Adam*
4. *X+Y*
5. *Mozart and the Whale*
6. *Jack of the Red Hearts*
7. *Rain Man*

8. *What's Eating Gilbert Grape?*
9. *Mercury Rising*
10. *Music*

3.3. Clips , Sound Effects and Music Choices

The song "futile devices" by Sufjan Stevens was selected in light of the lack of copyright restraints and because of its subtle power and emotion. It is used in several instances as an instrumental background and twice for the lyrics. It builds the idea that these films are futile devices in their intention of representing autism. An accelerating heartbeat effect was added to the introduction for emphasis of the negativity of the stereotypes. The initial clips are a result of searching for the words autistic and autism in a server that provides you with film clips called "PlayPhraseMe".

Clips from the films and YouTube videos mentioned are used in some places for variation of voices and to prove certain points:

Rowan Ellis in "The Infantilised Spectacle of Autism Representation":

Autism definition 17:36-19:03

Asperger's controversy: 21:50-23:05.

Jessica Kellgren-Fozard in her video "Autism Tropes in Media" Features Annie Elaine talking about the bad quality of autism representation in media 10:27-11:16.

X+Y:

Nathan explaining his autism 1:00-1:50,

"I've got special powers" moment 10:10-11:12.

Temple Grandin NPR interview where she equates herself to an animal: 20:00-20:10.

For the second part of the documentary, I conducted two interviews with neurodivergent people. Then I conducted another one with a potentially autistic person who is on the fence about seeking a diagnosis, and one with a neurology expert to build the narrative. These interviews were less based on the films and

more on their general experience with autism representation, diagnosis and experiences of autism to add colour.

The resulting radio programme should address the main problems in the films' depiction of ASD to create guidelines for creating new, accurate and diverse autistic characters. The final product should be a 45-minute-long radio piece that is dynamic, engaging and encouraging for neurodivergent people and creatives who want to represent the community. This dissertation is meant to inspire accurate and diverse representations of ASD individuals. Most importantly, it should remind people of the importance of images in the process of understanding oneself. People with undiagnosed ASD should ideally learn from the documentary that being diagnosed is a positive experience if it leads them to the support they need.

3.4. Contributors and Interviews:

Eric Navarro
(Pronouns: he/him)
Caucasian, 26 years old, Spanish, based in Dublin
Formally diagnosed with ADHD, ASD self-diagnosis
ericnavarrocrass@gmail.com | Telephone: 89 944 8222

Contributed to helping define differences in ASD presentation between men and women and to the conversation about the films' male characters and their flaws.

Fiona Earley
(Pronouns: she/her)
Comhordaitheoir um an Ollscoil Báúil leis an Uathachas | Ollscoil Chathair Bhaile Átha Cliath
Autism Friendly University Coordinator | Dublin City University: Autism-Friendly University Initiative
fiona.earley@dcu.ie | Telephone: 01 700 6395

From the Autism-Friendly University Initiative at DCU, Fiona Early contributed her perspectives on the importance of accurate representation for people to identify with autistic characters and seek out support.

Ruairí Ó Bradáin
(Pronouns: he/him)

Caucasian, 20 years old, Irish, based in Dublin
No diagnosis, suspected ASD
braidenr@tcd.ie | Telephone: 83 044 4998

Contributed to the conversation about the films' representation and ability to signal to autistic people who have not been diagnosed that they might need to get an autism assessment to improve their lives.

Vera Ejabukwa
(Pronouns: she/her)
African, Nigerian, based in Limerick
Formal ADHD diagnosis
fiona.earley@dcu.ie | Telephone: 89 408 7735

Contributed to the conversation on neurodivergent late diagnoses of women and POC.

Conclusions and Discussion

Neurodivergence is severely underrepresented in the media we consume. Autism, in particular, which affects one in fifity school-aged children (and therefore one in fifty adults, though the research fails to show that autism does not decrease or disappear with age), is mostly misrepresented. Ignorant portrayals of ASD are harmful to the community and inform allistic people with stereotypes that only cause a further chasm in their understanding of those around them with different neurotypes. WIth the growth of the neurodivergent movement, better representation should be a given, and this documentary should be a guide to that effect. While examining the existing issues in the films selected for analysis, the major themes that emerged were: lack of diversity in representation (most characters are white, male, minors and savants), the unnecessary prevalence of tragedy and melodrama, and the infantilisation and dehumanisation of the characters.

After such analysis, guidelines for better representation where provided: positive autistic traits, presence of co-morbidities, physical experiences, and, above all, representation written and performed by the minority being represented, with as realistic a portrayal as possible. I hope this documentary serves as a beacon to both autistic and allistic people looking for truth in the matter of autistic representation in media and has proven the thesis with which it started: that there is a lack of diversity in autistic representation in media and that it has a negative impact on people who need a diagnosis. Additionally, the documentary also proved that perceptions of autism in the general population would be improved through better writing and performances of ASD.

If given the chance, I would have expanded much more on the content analysis in the final product, I believe this could be a whole podcast. There were many time, size and length constraints that limited my ability to fully analyse the issue at hand in the depth that my autistic brain requires. My supervisor, Francesca, approved the content and gave me the confidence to stop when I reached the word limit, and even if many ideas that were relevant had to be cut out, the piece still feels complete and like it was properly executed.

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