Binge-Watching, Binge-Caring: The Issues with Mainstream Inclusion Rhetoric in Media and Disability Rights Institutions

This project will draw parallels between the entertainment industry and institutions that both emphasize the "inclusion" of people with disabilities. I argue that the commodification of disability tropes through the process of "inclusion" can deepen implicit biases against communities of different abilities. TV shows and organizations with the goal of inclusion often simply capitalize on altruistic buzzwords rather than educating the public on the ways that society needs to change in order to become fully equitable to the disabled community. This research is not meant to devalue the advances that entertainment and corporations have achieved in their efforts to become more inclusive. Rather, I strive to propose strategies for the the propagation of not just inclusion, but integration and interdependence between various underrepresented groups in society.

In order to support my thesis, my paper will discuss examples of "inclusion" in two parts. Part I will focus on the Netflix show *Atypical*. *Atypical* is a show about a teenage boy with autism who learns how to date as he goes through his last year of high school and his first years of college. Through an analysis of its script and several scenes in the series, I will highlight the usage of tropes in the development of the main character. I connect the case of *Atypical* to other TV programs that also perpetuate false tropes. Notably, *Atypical* widely promoted how the development team consulted autism researchers at UCLA and autism organizations across the country in order to present a realistic narrative. So, naturally, Part II of the research will center on the rhetoric used by popular disability rights charities and institutions that also implicitly perpetuate harmful tropes of disability. Combining evidence from two very different fields will

allow me to highlight how initiatives across the board can distract from discrimination at a larger, systemic level.

Scholarly evidence will further shed light on the larger systemic issues that surface-level "inclusion" cannot erase. Discussions that tackle the topics of care webs, the ideological tug-of-war between the social and medical models of disability, and power politics will serve as part of the theoretical foundation of the paper. The "Nothing About Us Without Us" movement will also be employed as an example for how the disabled community should possess more agency in the drive for inclusion. To receive more personal, anecdotal evidence on the topic, I will also interview Sheena Midori Brevig, a television actor and writer of color with a sibling diagnosed with cerebral palsy. Brevig's interview will touch on her and her brother's perceived impacts (both negative and positive) of "inclusion" rhetoric within entertainment and charity organizations. Furthermore, a legal analysis of court cases against organizations like Autism Speaks (who often provide advice to television show producers) will expose the hidden hypocrisies that surround the movement for disability inclusion.

The research will contribute to the field of Disability Studies through the concept of *proactive allyship*- a concept that encourages people to research the movements that they support, and to be skeptical of media representations and charity movements that hinge upon false tropes rather than principles for justice. Exposure of the parallels between entertainment and non-entertainment institutions will allow scholars to deeply interrogate the reductive, implicit biases and harmful tropes that are embedded in the very "inclusion" movements that claim to benefit individuals of all abilities. All in all, the most important message from the research is the necessity of a shift in inclusion rhetoric. People must view the systemic barriers of

injustice that impact the disabled communities as connected to other barriers and tropes that impact other oppressed groups in society. Through this research, disability scholars can prove how“inclusion” will never be enough in the fight for true disability justice.