

Acquiring a Broken Brain for Laughter and Tears: Representations of Brain Injury in Film

Biggest tropes and clichés

- The Hero's Journey (often a Supercrip): good for an inspirational cry
- The Bumbling Fool: good for a laugh
- The Individual: experiences divorced from society, institutionalized ableism, oppression
- TBI films are primarily white, middle class, cis het and typically do not acknowledge this or how privileges lead to better recovery and access to resources, including disability pride resources
- Brain Injury advocacy and support organizations recommend films with horrid, or at least somewhat useless, representations of disability to families with a new TBI survivor

Recommendations

I recommend these for honesty, acknowledgement of ableism, challenging stereotypes, and representations of peers with TBI as complex people with agency (though still primarily white-created and featuring white people).

Fiction

The Lookout: Realistic portrayal, believable impairments, shows non-disabled people targeting and coercing disabled man who is multi-dimensional and has agency

Documentary:

Marwencol: Mark Hogencamp and his 1/6 scale model WWII Belgian town where he plays out battles, wars, and relationships, and photographs it all.

Fierce Grace: Ram Daas has a stroke and confronts his impairments with raw honesty and a beautiful type of acceptance that includes anger and frustration.

Prodigal Sons: Follows a severe TBI survivor and his sister, a transwoman, and a search for family.

Brain Injury Dialogues: Multi-character documentary showing range of TBI disabilities. Directed by a peer with TBI

Every 21 Seconds...Or Why I Scream At the Refrigerator: Multi-character documentary showing range of TBI disabilities. Directed by a peer with TBI.

The Crash Reel: Serious content warning for a 10-minute crash reel in the film showing professional athletes sustain massive, sometimes fatal, head injuries. Be advised.

Who Am I To Stop It: (Note: I made this film, a peer with TBI.) An intimate look at isolation, art, and transformation after brain injury from the social model of disability.

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