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## IN BETWEEN *THE EIGHT DAY* AND *THE PEANUT BUTTER FALCON* – R(EVOLUTION) IN REPRESENTATIONS OF A PERSON WITH DOWN SYNDROME IN THE FILM\*

**Introduction:** Films constitute a powerful educational tool driving social change; viewers imitate the presented models or attitudes, even if they are not part of their personal experience. Therefore, it is extremely important to properly depict people with disabilities in the media, as their image in the media is infrequently their only representation in the mind of an average viewer. This paper compares two films telling similar stories of young men with Down syndrome.

**Research Aim:** The aim of the study was to find the answer to the question whether over the period of 25 years between making of the two analysed films, the manner of creating the profile of a film character, an adult man with Down syndrome, has changed in accordance with the current trends and developments in the social life, and whether the incapacitating representations of disability found in the literature are still incorporated in film characters with disabilities.

**Research Method:** Elements of media content analysis were used to describe, categorise and interpret the selected films.

**Results:** Substantial differences in the manner of creating character profiles were observed; the changes were related to the model of disability underlying the character, as well as the presence of incapacitating representations of disability in the analysed film productions.

**Conclusions:** The media, despite its logic and expectations of the broadcasters, have been taking into account research results and suggestions made by the community of people with disabilities, educators and media researchers regarding portrayal of disability in the media resulting from the implemented social change. It is necessary to provide continued, systematic and scheduled education to individuals working in the media and film industry on the impact of the media on social attitudes and shaping the consciousness of art viewers. Disability representation in the media cannot be accidental or merely reflect the film makers' imagination.

**Keywords:** Down syndrome, disability stereotype in the media, model of disability

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## INTRODUCTION

Down syndrome (DS) is a disability discernible at first glance – it is written on one's face; it gives a straightforward yes-or-no answer: you either have it or not. The characteristic facial features (including, almond-shaped slanting eyes; short, flattened, small nose; flattened back of the head; a tongue frequently sticking out of the mouth that is smaller than usual) according to the theory of staring, obscures all other features and provokes, if not coerces staring (Garland-Thomson, 2020). The phenomenon aggravates when the element departing from the standard, as it is the case with DS, is the face. According to Macgregor, any facial distinctiveness is “the most shattering form in the social model of disability” (Garland-Thomson, 2020, p. 174). Before one finds out who the person with DS really is in the course of mutual interactions, the moment this person is looked at, he or she is immediately and automatically categorised in accordance with stereotypical views of disability, stigmatised (Kosakowski, 2003; le Breton, 2004; Wedding et al., 2014; Sałkowska, 2015). The onlooker already knows his or her representation reflected in the social mirror and all related social consequences.

“Proper” staring, construed in scientific terms and having positive impact, may originate a bond, lead to a meeting, not rejection; it can make the person visually present, acknowledging their autonomy.

What is the proper way of staring at a person with DS, then? Although people with disabilities are becoming increasingly visible to the society, knowledge about such people is still scarce (CBOS, 2017). This cognitive gap may be bridged by the film industry that strongly impacts social perception of disability and, as an inseparable part of our culture, allows the vast majority of the global population to stare in the retreat of a movie theatre or in the privacy of their homes. Film speaks a universal language of our times, it is a channel for transmitting educational content in the fastest and most attractive form, courageously tackling various issues. It affects both, the intellect and emotions. Understanding of a film depends on the viewer and his or her experiences of different kind: a mature and critical viewer will receive the message in a mature and critical manner. Film has also gained the reputation of the knowledge of reality (Plisiecki, 2012). Films constitute a powerful educational tool driving social change; viewers imitate the presented models or attitudes, they analyse the phenomena, even if they are not part of their personal experience (Plisiecki, 1993). Therefore, it is really important to provide a reliable and up-to-date material complying with the current beliefs.

The more so, that film is characterised by *artistic immortality*. Although different points of view or beliefs presented on the big screen become outdated, films evoke the interest of subsequent generations not due to up-to-dateness of the vision of the world, but due to their intrinsic values (Parol, 2017). For this reason, a comparative analysis of the ways of portraying persons with DS on the silver screen

over the last quarter century that abounded in major social changes, appears to be interesting and significant both for the education sector and the film industry.

## RESEARCH AIM AND QUESTION

Positive representation of a person with disability in a film serves a number of purposes; it makes this group of individuals less anonymous, it wipes out the so-called *fencing effect*, it renders disability as something normal. This is what happens when the protagonist is universal, original and at the same time “in some ways familiar, just like everyone of us” (Kozubek, 2016, p. 120). The viewers, by observing the events “from the inside”, become participants, they see or feel the same things as the characters. According to Kozłowska, it is the media, including the cinema that:

constitute the prevailing source of meanings and the definition of social reality, by creating, collecting and publicly presenting the cultural and social values [...], they come as the source of the public system of meanings that provides criteria and measures for judging what is normal and what departs from the officially and publicly approved standard of normal behaviour and opinion, both in the social and normative aspects. (2006, p. 108)

Thus, film may constitute the common ground for agreement and dialogue, and facilitate social acceptance and pursuing joint initiatives (Szyszka, 2013; Parol, 2017). The message communicated by a film not only reproduces and multiplies the reality but produces it to a large extent. The viewers’ task is to grasp it, understand and remember it. Studies have shown that a well-matched representation in the media is able to, among other things, modify attitudes toward disability and the manner of defining different concepts, as well as to reduce social distancing (Kazanowski, 2010; Bieganowska, 2015; Bieganowska-Skóra, 2017). It can also impact other aspects of social life – it is enough to mention the so-called *Rain Man Effect* – popularity of the film contributed to significantly increased funding for research in autism spectrum disorders (at the same time, the film perpetuated a false belief that people with autism are geniuses) (Bełza, 2021).

It should be remembered that screenwriters most often have no personal experiences with people with disabilities and they base their stories on stereotypes, which makes their plots incredible and mawkish (Wedding et al., 2014, p. 181). Disability provides a structure for the plot but the portrayal of the main character fails to provide a deeper understanding of his problem.

Considering the above-presented arguments and regularities, the answer to the question forming the aim of this study: Has the manner of creating a profile of a film character, an adult man with DS, changed over the years 1996–2019 in accordance with the current trends and developments in the social life? appears to be interesting indeed.

## RESEARCH METHOD AND SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

This paper has used the components of media content analysis methodology which may be used to measure social awareness as a method “proper for researching the beliefs, assessments, perceptions, opinions or ideas present in different media” (Ścigaj and Bukowski, 2012, p. 11). This methodology is effective in describing, classifying and interpretation of media messages describing selected social and media tendencies. It not so much explores the reality but the reflection of reality in the media. At present, emphasis is put on the description of quality indicators of the content offered by the media, approaching it in terms of their social and cultural value, and not only describing the content itself (Michalczyk, 2009). The analyses were based on the assumptions of framing, that is a set of concepts stipulating that the manner of presenting a given topic translates into its perception by recipients. In both analysed films, a personal frame was used, according to which a given situation is shown through the lens of a specific character. This operation is intended to help the viewers identify themselves with the character, promote a specific approach and a system of responses to a given situation, and to get an impression that the presented issue concerns themselves (Niesłony, 2016). According to Entman (Niesłony, 2016, p. 157), frames “select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described”.

Qualitative analysis of the content in question was conducted: we compared the characters with Down syndrome portrayed in both films – manner of their representation was referred to the assumptions of the models of disability (individual and social) and to disability stereotypes promoted by the media, presented in the literature. Analysed subjects were the main characters – young men with DS. Variability of the representations over time was described; by comparing the two films, tendencies and styles of communicating disability were analysed.

The study material consisted of two films: *The Eighth Day* and *The Peanut Butter Falcon*. Twenty-three years separating the two productions have been the period of significant change in the perception of disability and people with disabilities; it has been a time of gradual departure from the individual model of disability in force over the centuries, to the benefit of the social model and dissemination of its assumptions. It has also been the time marking the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the growing social activity and visibility of persons with disabilities, as well as self-advocating activities.

Both films tell a similar story: a young, adult man with DS secretly leaves the institution in which he has lived and sets out on a journey. On his way, he meets another man who is currently at a crossroad of his life and attempts to get out of the trouble. Unexpectedly, their company and the sequence of events change both

men: the disabled one makes his dream come true; the non-disabled one – changes his priorities and finds the meaning in life.

In both films, the main characters are actors with Down syndrome. Both productions received similar user recommendations from the Polish FilmWeb website, and they represent the same film genres (drama, comedy).

*The Eighth Day (Le huitième jour)*

- Franco-Belgian production
- World premiere: 22/05/1996 (released in Polish theatres nearly one year later)
- Film synopsis: Harry is a busy businessman in the midst of a life crisis, he meets Georges, a young man with DS who, wishing to return to his family home, escaped from an institution in which he has lived
- Written and directed by: Jaco Van Dormael
- Leading role: Pasqual Duquenne (it has been the first film in which an actor with Down syndrome starred as the main character; he received Palme d'Or award in Best actor category at the Cannes International Film Festival)
- In 1997, the film was the official Belgian entry for the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film. It gained a reputation of a “European Rain Man”
- Until the present day, it has been watched and assessed by 3,789 Web-Film users (average rate: 7.4/10), and 5,712 users are planning to watch it (www1).

*The Peanut Butter Falcon*

- American film
- World premiere: 09/03/2019 (available in Polish theatres from 03/01/2020)
- Written and directed by: Tyler Nilson and Michael Schwartz
- Film synopsis: Zak, a young man with DS escapes from a state-run care facility and embarks on a journey to make his dream come true – he wants to travel a few thousand kilometres to get to the “Atomic Throw” wrestling school he had known from video tapes, and to meet his idol, Salt Water Redneck. He travels together with Tyler, a sneak thief. Eleanor, Zak's caretaker at the nursing home, soon joins the party.
- Leading role: Zack Gottsagen, an actor with Down syndrome. Zak,
- The film has been rated by 18,219 FilmWeb users (average rate of 7.2/10), and 11,359 users are planning to watch it (www2).

Another similarity confirming proper sampling is the fact that both plots fit into a classic story design developed by Joseph Campbell. He noticed that although stories originated in different cultures, periods or continents differ in terms of their substance, they may be consolidated in order to form one structure, a universal tem-

plate. This template, known as the monomyth, or the hero's journey, has been present in legends from all over the world and became a model for majority of stories. The hero's quest is a series having no beginning and no end. The hero's journey is divided into 3 stages: departure, initiation and return. During the journey, the key transformation longed for by the hero takes place, the goal the hero has pursued is achieved (Tkaczyk, 2017). The aforesaid similarities between the two stories were juxtaposed in Table 1, by reference to a simplified six-component story template referred to as fairy tale, conceived by Leach and Gresimas, and compiled by Tkaczyk (2017, p. 77).

Table 1.

*Analysed films in the context of a story template by Leach and Gresimas*

Template components	<i>The Eighth Day</i>	<i>The Peanut Butter Falcon</i>
1. Subject (hero)	Georges	Zak
2. Object (goal, pursuit)	Return to his family house and his mother; the happiest time in Georges's life	Quest to an idealised wrestling school known from video films Learning the "atomic throw" technique from Salt Water Redneck
3. Enemy (key difficulty)	Social segregation facility Institutionalised support No family support Social stereotypes Approaching the protagonist as a patient who is expected to subordinate to the rigorous life at the facility	
4. Helpmate, support (someone or something that gives the hero extra strength)	An accidentally encountered non-disabled man in a difficult life situation (in both films, the helper is a donor at the same time) A painting rendering Georges's family house, Songs by Luis Mariano, operatic singer	Video cassettes with wrestling lessons
5. Donor (a character who sends the hero on the journey, provides him with knowledge, motivation, often in the form of a magical object – therefore, the donor may be the support at the same time)	The deceased mother of Georges	Idol – Salt Water Redneck
6. Recipient (a person who benefits from the entire story; it may be the hero himself)	Harry (he rediscovers the joy of life) and his family (they reunite after the conflict)	Zak Tyler Eleanor Salt Water Redneck

Source: Author's own study.

## DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURE

The specific study method imposed a specific research procedure. Accordingly, the first step was to determine the aim of the analyses. Then, the medium whose content was analysed had been selected (film). The next step was to select the specific material for analysis. It was verified and limited to two films acting as their counterparts, meeting the requirement of time span designated by the aim of the study.

Next, the categorisation key was developed and tested – a set of categories for assigning the elements of the comparison. It is expected to meet the disconnection condition and to be exhaustible, that is consider all possible unit categories important from the point of view of the addressed questions (Klepka, 2016; Ścigaj and Bukowski, 2012). In this case, the considered categories were: assumptions of the social and individual model of disability (Table 2) and classification of the incapacitating representations of disability in the films according to Barnes.

Table 2.  
*Comparison of the models of disability*

Criterion of comparison	Individual model of disability	Social model of disability
Attitude to disability	personal tragedy	social issue
Essence of the problem	illness, damage, lost possibility to practise the profession, psychological maladjustment, absence of motivation and cooperation	dependence from professional assistants, architectural barriers, economic barriers, etc.
Location of the phenomenon	personal dimension	in the structure of the society
Role of the person with disabilities	patient	consumer
Solution	professional intervention of physicians, rehabilitation specialists, therapists, etc.	enforcement of rights, advisory, self-help, removal of barriers
Supervision	by experts	self-control, possible choice
Expected deliverables	adaptation of the individual	acceptance of the individual by the community; social change

Source: Author's own study (after: Ogólnopolski..., 1998, p. 45).

In the late 1990s, Colin Barnes (1997) distinguished 11 incapacitating ways of portraying people with disabilities in the British media and highlighted the resulting outcomes. According to the researcher, a disabled person is most often portrayed in the media as:

- pitiable and pathetic
- an object of violence
- sinister and evil



- atmosphere or curio
- super cripple
- object of ridicule
- their own worst and only enemy
- burden
- sexually abnormal
- incapable of participating fully in community life
- normal

This classification has become a kind of standard and point of reference for many scholars. Results of Longmore's (2003) analysis conducted in the United States showed that this division may be referred to as international, as regardless of latitude, methods of representing disability on the big screen have been similar and equally incapacitating.

The collected material was investigated in great detail, in order to be able to prepare study results and formulate conclusions.

## RESULTS

The opening scene of *The Eighth Day* already introduces the air of mawkishness, peculiarity and poignancy, triggering a sizeable package of stereotypes proposed by Barnes; from the counting-out rhyme uttered by Georges, resembling the Genesis creation narrative, we find out that after six days of work God "rested and then he pondered whether (the world) was not missing something. On the eighth day he created Georges, looked at what he had done and it was good!". This narrative shows that a person with Down syndrome was not included in the original plan of creation, it is something extra, it complements the world but it is not an inherent part of it. This mood is exacerbated by the motif of the protagonist's conversations with his mother who died 4 years before and who appears in many moments during the film. Georges says to her with sadness: "I am different", and hears her response: "Yes, it's true, you are better, you're an angel". When speaking about his origin, Georges creates a myth referring to the already outdated term used in reference to people with DS – Mongoloid: "I don't know where I was born, in Mongolia I believe".

Georges is presented as a person incapable of participating fully in community life and as burden for the environment, also as a sinister individual. He flies into a rage when something goes awry. While in a shoe shop, he bangs his hand on the counter, he begins to get aggressive; he agrees to be walked out of the shop by Harry who promises to give him a box of his favourite chocolates Georges is forbidden to eat for health reasons, which makes the inexperienced viewers likely to believe that arguments will not do the job while communicating with a person



with mental disability, and that in order to communicate, one needs to use behavioural methods. While in his sister's house, after he finds out he will not be allowed to stay there, the main character pulls the cloth off the table, smashes the room into pieces, throws himself to the floor screaming out loud. His sister explains to him: "I love you but I have already given you all I could. I have my own life right now, I have kids, I have a husband. I told Mum that I will not take care of you. Your visits always end badly". Harry's brother-in-law commands him to drive Georges to where he came from. There is no place for a disabled relative in their family. Care over Georges exceeds the powers of his closed ones; the only person who regarded him as the rightful family member was his mother. Georges is the only one to stay at the institution for the weekend – his colleagues visit their homes every weekend. They all wear unfashionable clothes, they have strange haircuts, they behave in a peculiar way.

Georges is not quite aware of his special status granted by the society, for example, when he speaks about love. He is in love with his colleague, Nathalie; he wants to marry her but he does not realise the limitations imposed by disability:

N: We cannot make love – it is forbidden.

G: Said who?

N: My dad.

G: But he does it himself.

N: This is different. He is normal. He has a job, works as a director, he's got a car and so on.

Any woman favourably disposed towards George is a potential wife – George speaks of a shop assistant in the shoe shop "this lady is also nice, we are going to get married". His behaviour is child-like. He is non self-reliant. Although he is an adult, he is incapable of performing the basic tasks, e.g. to carve his chop. While driving a car, he flings insults at a truck driver making obscene gestures towards him. What is meaningful, that in the volley of abuse, he uses the word "Mongolian". (When asked whether he knows that this term refers to himself, Georges replies "Me, Mongolian – I forgot"). The upset truck driver decides to "deliver justice" to the attacker, yet when he notices who was the author of the insults, responsibility for the situation falls upon Harry (in line with a stereotype); although he is innocent, he is the one that is beaten up. The viewer learns that a person with Down syndrome is not a partner. Even when it comes to the purchase of items intended for him, just like in the scene in the shoe shop: the shop assistant asks Harry what kind of shoes he needs. Harry replies that the shoes will be for Georges, so he should ask Georges about it. In reply, he hears: "Get out of here! Get him out of here!".

Harry initially plans to drive Georges back to his mental institution but when Georges says to him "You like me, my buddy, Harry my buddy", he undergoes transformation. From a man being a sales specialist, teaching others to smile in-

sincerely in order to multiply the profits, Harry – owing to Georges – decides to enjoy life, to notice and appreciate small things, just like his friend. The disabled character helps the environment recover the balance, he shows a normal world, teaches others to admire everyday life. Having completed his task, he eats an excessive amount of the forbidden chocolates and, wishing to fly like a bird, he falls down to the ground from the roof. The main character dies, and all problems of the people around him vanish into thin air. This perpetuates a frequent stereotype that the death of a disabled character is the only possible solution; that in the real world there is no place for someone who departs from the standards.

A completely different model of being, living and self-awareness is presented by Zak, main character of *The Peanut Butter Falcon*. He is depicted as an active person from the very beginning. Just like Georges, he escapes from the institution in which he has lived. This is not done on the spur of the moment and through inattention of the personnel. Zak has planned it, and this has not been for the first time; he tried it unsuccessfully a number of times in the past. After each escape, he loses benefits due to residents of the institution for some time. The fact of having no close relatives is very painful for Zak; he treats it as the confirmation that something is wrong with him: “I’m a bad guy, because I was left by my family”. When Carl, his room mate, helps him in the escape – he puts liquid soap over the spread out bars in their window to help him slip through, Zak expresses his gratitude by saying “You’re my best friend! You’re my family!” which is the greatest acknowledgement in his mouth.

Zak is an active person, he escapes to implement his well-thought out plan: he wants to get to the “Atomic Throw” wrestling school he had known from video cassettes. When he meets Tyler on his way, he offers him his company. He seeks his company – as opposed to Georges who stood in the rain in an open field waiting for someone to stop by. When asked by the stranger why he should take him, Zak answers: “maybe we could be friends and buddies, road dogs! “we will [loaf around], chill and have a good time” which sounds like a promise of good fun and adventure. At the same time, he warns him straightforwardly: “I want you to know something about me – I am a person with Down syndrome”. He is aware of his limitations: “The coach said I am disabled”, “I can’t be a hero, because of my Down syndrome”. Not only can he see his special status but also notices similarities between their situations: “Two bandits on the run – we’ve got something in common”. Tyler initially is very reserved about the situation – he does not want to establish any relationship, he is afraid of the boy with DS: “I’ll drop you there [to the wrestling school], don’t think I’m playing a good uncle, it is on my way” but he quickly accepts his co-traveller. He becomes his mentor and teacher – he explains to him the rules of life, he teaches him how to swim, he trains him, treats him like an adult (treats him to alcohol), appreciates, defends him, allows him to take part in all activities, they find a common language (in *The Eighth Day*, the relationship

between Harry and Georges was based on hierarchy and care). Zak becomes his equal partner. Tyler expects others to treat him in a similar way. The viewer observes the discrepancies in the attitudes of professionals and “ordinary people”; for the principal of the institution, Zak is a “half-naked boy with Down syndrome, no money, family and no idea how to get along in this world”. Tyler rebukes Eleanor who helps Zak get dressed “he used to do it himself before”. He utters meaningful words to her: “Stop calling him a moron! When people call him a moron, they mean that he cannot do the same things as they can. Maybe you are not using the word moron, but you make him feel like one!”.

When they reach their destination, it turns out to be a huge disappointment – the legendary Salt Water Redneck much more often hits the bottle than his opponents, he is frustrated, addicted and disillusioned. But asked by Tyler and Eleanor, he agrees to help Zak make his dream come true. He very quickly subdues to the enthusiasm of the main character. He trains Zak and arranges a dream fight for the boy – treating his dream very seriously. A professional wrestler appointed for the combat with Zak changes the rules – he decides to fight without leniency: “You stupid little dipshit! Get up, you moron! Keep fighting! This is not “*I have a Dream*” Foundation!” He also treats him seriously but in the negative aspect – in accordance with the stereotype of a disabled people treated as normal proposed by Barnes; since the person with disability is or wishes to be treated as “ordinary”, there is no need to apply any conveniences. Zak gets brutally beaten and the viewer is sure that he suffered the same fate as Georges: he made his dream come true, at the same time fixing the world, he changed the fate of other people (Eleanor and Tyler are into each other), so the story may end here. It turns out however, that the screenwriters had another idea for ending the story. Zak not only survived but he also changed his life – he did not return to the institution and he became a member of the family of his friends. Closing credits leave the viewer with the belief that the end opens up the most beautiful chapter of the history of which a person with Down syndrome is the inalienable component. The person is not just a component making others repair their mistakes in life, learn and idealise, find solutions to all their problems. He is a rightful partner whose opinion is respected; an active and agentic person having his own plans and goals, and what is more, able to pursue them.

The list of “active” incapacitating representations of disability in the analysed films is given in Table 3. In *The Eighth Day*, as many as six active stereotypes were reported, whereas in *The Peanut Butter Falcon* only two.

When relating both stories to the model of disability, it should be concluded as follows: also in this sense, we can observe a significant shift in depicting the DS on the big screen. Georges’s disability is treated as his personal affair and affair of his family, no one else is interested in this issue. When his mother dies, he is referred to an institution which appears to comply with the medical model, it is a “storeroom” with passive, responsive and sad residents. Zak stays in a similar place

but the viewers have no doubts that he does not fit in there; he also pays attention to this fact and rebels against living in an old people's home: "I am young, not old! I don't know why I'm here?". He is answered by Eleanor, his caretaker: "You don't have a family that could properly care for you. State authorities had to put you somewhere and that's how you got here".

Table 3.

List of "active" incapacitating representations of disability in both films

Person with disability	<i>The Eighth Day</i>	<i>The Peanut Butter Falcon</i>
pitiable and pathetic	•	
an object of violence		
sinister and evil	•	
atmosphere or curio	•	
super cripple		
object of ridicule		~
their own worst and only enemy	•	
burden	•	
sexually abnormal		
incapable of participating fully in community life	•	
normal		~

Source: Author's own study.

As far as the essence of the problem is concerned, in *The Eighth Day* there is no doubt that it is the character's mental disability – it prevents him from proper participation in the community life. The fact that it is discernible, triggers stereotypical approach to a person with DS – there is no room for changing anything. In a restaurant, Georges wearing sunglasses chats to a waitress, she is nice to him and even starts flirting with him. When Georges takes off his sunglasses and the truth comes out, the waitress stops smiling, and confused says "I'm sorry, I didn't know" and hurriedly walks away. Here, the solution may only involve permanent assistance and professional supervision.

When looking at Zak's self-reliance and activity, the audience believes that it is the barriers in the system as well as social barriers that contribute to his disadvantaged position and limit him in many situations, hindering or preventing his independent functioning. With the necessary help of his assistants, Tyler or Eleanor, he can make it, colloquially speaking.

When discussing the role of a person with disability, the solution and supervision – it is beyond doubt that Georges is depicted as a patient, a non self-reliant recipient of various interventions. There appear elements of imposing on him the role of a customer, yet the earlier described scene in a shoe shop dispels all doubts.

Zak, on the other hand, is perceived by himself and Tyler as a consumer of goods in the broad sense – he enjoys life and is committed to pursuing his dreams. This attitude is in contrast to the approach of the director of the institution from which he had escaped, and – initially – also of Eleanor’s, who respects Zak very much but at the same time believes he is someone that needs to be helped. She reproaches Tyler: “You drag the boy with Down syndrome across some no-man’s land. He requires special care and this is my job. We have regulations. He takes medicines.” Tyler sums it up straightforwardly: “They don’t care about him – we do! What do you think he should be doing in his life? I gave him my word that I will take him to the wrestling school”.

The “expected deliverables” category is also polarised in both films. Georges was not able to adapt, therefore there is no place for him in this world; Zak – due to acceptance of his environment - keeps growing and becomes an indispensable part, not only of his own world, to which he makes a valuable contribution.

Table 4 presents models of disability characteristic for each analysed film.

Table 4.  
*Models of disability in the analysed films*

	<i>The Eighth Day</i>		<i>The Peanut Butter Falcon</i>	
	Individual	Social	Individual	Social
Approach	•		•	•
Essence of the problem	•			•
Location of the phenomenon	•			•
The role of person with disability	•	~	~	•
Solution	•			•
Supervision	•			•
Expected deliverables	•			•

Source: Author’s own study.

## DISCUSSION

Due to the fact that the sample determined by the aim of study encompassed only two films analysed from a specific point of view, there are no similar studies in the literature that could serve as a reference for the obtained results. They may, on the other hand, be referred to conclusions drawn from studies and analyses pertaining to the general representations of people with disabilities in the media. The observed changes in the manner of creating the representation of a person with Down syndrome in the analysed films converge with chronology of portraying people with disabilities in the Polish cinema developed by Otto (2012).

These changes are progressive – they advance in a direction reflecting forecasts and expectations of the community of people with disabilities, as well as scholars researching this issue; we have observed a departure from presenting disability as taboo or something unusual, to the benefit of making standardisation attempts (person with disability is represented as having their limitations but at the same time being active, functioning in different life areas in accordance with their capabilities (Żuraw, 2009; Bieganowska, 2015; Bieganowska-Skóra, 2017; Wojakowski, 2020). Analysis of depictions of disability in the approximate period of time (1997–2016) published in *Polityka* weekly, has shown similar changes in the applied terminology as in the analysed films (Struck-Peregończyk and Kurek-Ochmańska, 2018). What is more, a change in relation to the statement promoted by the media and popularised by Bystrowski (2006) that being a disabled person prevents one from being happy has been observed as well. Results of analyses conducted as part of this study contradict the conclusion by Wojakowski (2020) from analysis of texts found in opinion-forming weeklies related to the continued discrepancy between expectations and the actual representation of disability in the media, but they go hand in hand with the conclusions by Bełza (2021) about the direction of changing the image: from dehumanisation of people with disabilities, to valuation of their social role, to the approach positing their equal participation in the community life and implementation of self-advocacy assumptions. These changes also harmonise with some trends observed in the portrayal of people with DS in the literature: depicting the emotions of a person with DS, considering the categories of humour; they contradict other trends, however: no happy ending of the story, introduction of the character with DS only as the background (the so-called second fiddle books) (Właźnik, 2019).

## CONCLUSIONS

1. The conducted study has shown that in the analysed films, the portrayal of people with DS has changed over time; in this case, what has been true in real life, has been truly reflected on the screen, which is rather uncommon. Profiles of the main characters with DS, regardless of their fairy tale-like and unrealistic plots, were created in accordance with current knowledge about and existing approaches to disability at the time of making the films.
2. The dilemma included in the title of the paper, whether the observed changes have been evolutionary or revolutionary cannot be resolved in a clear-cut manner. Considering the quantitative list of active stereotypes of disability and assumptions of the models of disability present in particular productions, one would rather refer to it as a revolution, the differences being substantial indeed. However, taking into account the long time

span, that is nearly 25 years between production of both films, as well as changes that have occurred in the social, medical and political approach to disability in the period in question, it should be stressed, to do justice, that although they have been significant, they have been arranged to form an evolutionary, logical continuum.

3. In view of the pace of social change in this respect, and the demonstrated significance of the question of representations of people with disabilities in the media, media depictions should be subject to continued, various, systematic and in-depth reviews, the results of which should be promoted in the film industry and incorporated in the process of educating subsequent generations of film makers.

### STUDY LIMITATIONS

The most significant limitation of the conducted analyses has been the fact that they included only two films. The reason for this is that no other productions using a similar plot design as those analysed in the study have been found in the global cinematography. Although the films were made on different continents, which, due to cultural differences, could prevent a substance-based and matter-of-fact analysis of the manner of creating a character with disabilities, the parallel results of analyses by Barnes and Longmore mentioned in the paper, justify the selection of the study material, allowing to make it a platform for the comparison, and giving authority to undertake the research and discussions in question. It appears fairly justified to conduct similar research exploring changes in the manner of creating a film representation of people with disabilities other than DS.

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### MIĘDZY ÓSMYM DNIEM A SOKOŁEM Z MASŁEM ORZECHOWYM – (R)EWOLUCJA W KONSTRUOWANIU FILMOWEGO WIZERUNKU OSOBY Z ZESPOŁEM DOWNA

**Wprowadzenie:** Dzięki wychowaniu przez film dokonują się społeczne przemiany, widzowie naśladują prezentowane wzory czy postawy – nawet te, które nie są ich osobistym udziałem. Dlatego tak ważne jest, aby w mediach właściwie z pedagogicznego punktu widzenia ukazywać osoby z niepełnosprawnością, gdyż to właśnie wizerunek medialny jest nierzadko jedyną ich reprezentacją w świadomości przeciętnego widza. W pracy porównano dwa filmy opowiadające analogiczne historie młodych mężczyzn z zespołem Downa.

**Cel badań:** Celem zaprezentowanych badań była próba odpowiedzi na pytanie o to, czy na przestrzeni 25 lat dzielących czas powstania obu analizowanych filmów, zmienił się sposób konstruowania postaci bohatera filmowego – dorosłego mężczyzny z zespołem Downa – adekwatnie do bieżących trendów i zmian, które nastąpiły w życiu społecznym oraz o to, czy wymieniane w literaturze przedmiotu „obezwładniające” wizerunki niepełnosprawności są wciąż obecne w postaciach niepełnosprawnych bohaterów filmów.

**Metoda badań:** Do opisu, klasyfikacji i interpretacji wybranych filmów wykorzystano elementy metody analizy zawartości mediów.

**Wyniki:** Zaobserwowano diametralne różnice w sposobie konstruowania postaci bohatera filmowego – zmiany dotyczą zarówno modelu niepełnosprawności, w którym osadzona jest jego postać, jak i obecności w analizowanych produkcjach klasycznych, obezwładniających wizerunków niepełnosprawności.

**Wnioski:** Świat mediów, mimo rządzących nim praw i oczekiwań dysponentów mediów uwzględnia sygnalizowane przez środowisko OzN, pedagogów i badaczy mediów wyniki badań i propozycje w zakresie sposobu ukazywania niepełnosprawności w mediach będące skutkiem przemian społecznych. Konieczna jest stała, systematyczna i zaplanowana edukacja adeptów sztuki medialnej i filmowej w obszarze wpływu mediów na postawy społeczne, kształtowanie świadomości odbiorców sztuki. Medialny wizerunek niepełnosprawności nie może być dziełem przypadku lub odzwierciedleniem fantazji twórców.

**Słowa kluczowe:** zespół Downa, stereotyp niepełnosprawności w mediach, model niepełnosprawności