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How artists have used their disabilities as inspiration to create art and the positive impact this has on people growing up with a disability.

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Key thinkers, Stewart Hall, Christine Sum Kim, Lennard Davis, Tanya Titchkosky

**Project summary-** This project will be diving into artists and key thinkers who explore how to use their disabilities to create art and to build awareness on the topic of disability to create a broader sense of understanding.

## Introduction

This body of work explores how artists with disabilities, particularly those with hidden disabilities such as deafness, have used their experiences as inspiration to create art, and the positive impact this has on people growing up with disabilities. Through an autoethnographic lens, this study aims to examine the gaps in media representation of disabilities and analyze how these portrayals shape societal perceptions. By reviewing the history of media representations—from stereotypical depictions to more nuanced and authentic portrayals in contemporary films like CODA and Sound of Metal—I will reflect on how these narratives have influenced the visibility and self-acceptance of individuals with disabilities. I will also explore the cultural significance of disability representation in toys, media, and art, highlighting the connection between the visibility of disability in popular culture and the broader social shifts towards more inclusive and accepting societies. The work of theorists such as Stuart Hall, with his concept of ‘the other’ in Cultural Identity and Diaspora (1990), Lennard Davis in Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body (1995), and Tanya Titchkosky in Disability, Normalization, and Power (2003) will be integral to this study, as each provides valuable insights into the themes of otherness, normalization, and the power structures that shape societal views of disability. Throughout this exploration, I hope to shed light on the ongoing need for more inclusive storytelling, challenge harmful stereotypes, and celebrate the diverse experiences of people with disabilities. As someone who has lived with hearing aids and been shaped by a world that often views difference as a deficit, I now believe it is time to redefine what it means to be ‘normal’ and embrace the many ways people experience the world.

The topic of disabilities is an emotive and often controversial issue, of which I have significant personal experience.

I was born deaf and have grown up needing hearing aids. This was difficult growing up in South Wales in between (2003-2024) being the only hard of hearing individual in my class up until I started university, I have been faced with many obstacles, including, bullying from other children which lead to self-hatred and hiding a part of me which I should have been embracing. Instead of walking around with pride at the fact that I survived and not

hidden away, i destroy a huge part of my hearing by sabotaging my hearing aids. I ripped apart, hid and lied about the battery not working when asked where they were and many of my hearing aids throughout the years due to individuals not being so kind. I recall one issue that happened when I was in primary school and a group decided to make a game called the deaf touch and if you were tagged you would have to simply act deaf, which was a huge mockery and overly stereotyped version of being deaf. From that moment I truly despised not being ordinary.

As I am now older, I see many younger girls walking with their hearing aids in and being so unfazed by them I love how the times have changed and for the better. Having actors and artists with disabilities playing, speaking and even singing about these roles has had a positive impact on the younger generation as they are now seeing the impact of those who may have these disabilities and to be kinder to everyone.

Writing from an autoethnographic perspective and experiences as a deaf individual there is not a lot of representation of artists, celebrities, writers and more in the media which is why there is a lack of people telling their stories and experiences of living with their disabilities. In the majority, media runs with a stereotype representation which can be incredibly damaging to those who do not fit in the molds that the media creates. This then is faced with judgment from individuals which can be in schools, workplaces or even just everyday society.

## Chapter 1

The lack of media representation of disabilities, especially hidden disabilities, is still prevalent in society. Media plays a pivotal role in shaping society norms, attitudes and perceptions. It improves people's understanding of others. It has the power to either perpetuate stereotypes or challenge them. In media representation has historically been sparse and often one-dimensional. A lack of accurate and diverse portrayals is especially pronounced for those with hidden or invisible disabilities. Disabled in the Cambridge dictionary is described and presented as "Having an illness, injury, or condition that makes it difficult to do the things that other people do" (Cambridge University Press, 2024) There are several reasons why disability and particularly hidden disabilities- has been underrepresented in media. These reasons come from a combination of social attitudes, media industry trends and the lack of diverse perspective in decision making roles. "The word media is derived from the word medium, signifying mode or carrier" (Kashaf ,2019). Media appeals to ordinary people with sources such as role of medium in society by medium discussing how the media acts as a reflection of society and how it shapes the public's understanding. Hollywood has played a crucial role in improvising the representation of deaf people, by raising awareness and encourage more inclusive narratives but Hollywood has also time and time again been misrepresented, with deaf characters often portrayed through stereotypes or without authentic representation. Historically deaf characters were portrayed by hearing actors who would exaggerate their disabilities or had minimal depth, forcing stereotypes and misconceptions about deaf culture a notable example is the casting of hearing actors in roles that could've been

played by deaf actors such as *Children of a Lesser God* (1986) where Marlee Matlin a deaf actress gave a performance which got her a Oscar, she still had to fight against industry norms that favored hearing talent for roles requiring sign language. More recently films like *CODA* (2021) where they hired deaf characters but it sparked debate Critics argue that authentic representation of Deaf characters, particularly in lead roles, should involve Deaf actors, as they bring lived experience to the portrayal. These discussions are part of a broader movement advocating for more inclusive storytelling, which acknowledges and celebrates the complexity of Deaf culture without resorting to stereotypes.

*CODA* the film by Heder, S. (2022) Produced by Philippe Rousselet, Fabrice Gianfermi, and Patrick Wachsberger. USA: Apple Original Films. are controversial in the deaf community, the movie was seen as controversial around the employment as the actress Emelia Jones who portrays Ruby Rossi the child of deaf parents the movie missed the opportunity to cast a deaf actress in the lead role with the film being about centrality of deaf culture to the story the community feel the film's success should not overshadow the lack of deaf representation in key roles. (Heder, 2022)

Critics have argued that *CODA* oversimplifies the complexities of deaf life, whilst being praised for the highlighting deaf culture and giving deaf actors more screen time, there are concerns that the movie presents a feel good narrative at a more expense of a more nuanced portrayal of the community focusing more on the hearing character (Ruby) rather than her family who are played by deaf actors Troy Kostur and Marlee Matlin who have both one Oscars for their portrayals of deaf characters. *CODA* raised debates about the representation in Hollywood whilst *CODA* gives more of a visible platform for deaf actor's arguments came as movies about marginalized communities should have authentic representation both in front and behind the camera. (Doe, 2021).

In recent years disabilities have been shown in the media more being portrayed in movies I have researched and watched movies which explore being deaf. The movie *Sound of Metal* explores the main character's deafness and how the way he interacts with the world and influences his music, showing how artists and musicians turn to art to show their frustrations with his hearing loss and attempting to retain his former life (as a musician).

The movie depicts the character's shift from conventional heavy metal music to trying to find new forms of expression in a deaf world as his interest to use silence and vibration in music. Similar to Christine Sun Kim a contemporary American artist who is deaf uses her deafness as a central theme in her work. Like the main character Kim experiences the world differently than those who can hear she challenges this in her art. Kim frequently collaborates with other artists and performs in ways that intergrade sign language, visual arts, and sound-based installations. In her performance works, she uses her own body to communicate through sign language or through gestures that mimic sound highlighting the importance of non-hearing-based communication. Like the main character in *Sounds of Metal* connections with the deaf community, where he learns about sign language and the deaf culture echoes Kim's exploration of how deaf individuals create alternative forms of expression in both art and communication. (Kim, 2015)



Fig. 3 *Piano 2015*

Kim's work, like her "How to Hear" series, questions and deconstructs traditional concepts of sound by translating them into visual forms, and her performances and installations create space for rethinking Deaf culture and sensory perception. The ongoing series explores the concept of hearing without sound, Kim uses visual elements for example soundwaves, vibrations and sign language to communicate how deaf people can interact with the concept of hearing in ways that do not rely on traditional auditory perception. In one installation she painted a piano by placing wet paint brushes on top of the vibration of the piano or varieties of objects that create sound and writes what she hears on to the paper as well to capture that moment, so others hear what she hears. (Kim, 2015). How to Hear.

One of the first representations for the deaf community was when I saw a Toy Story characters with hand made hearing aids with them. Which was a transformative moment for me which changed my whole perspective on being deaf. I pictured myself and myself in this world. Seeing my favorite toys looking like me was moving as I often felt isolated in a society where hearing was the standard and deafness was something that needed to be explained or fixed, seeing a toy that represented me- one that was deaf and navigated the world in ways that felt familiar was both validating and empowering. I feel that if I had these toys I would've felt more comfortable being deaf and accepting of being me.



Fig 4 Woody and Jessie with hearing aids

Parents have spoken about how important it is to have deaf representation in toys for their children with how it gives them confidence and to be themselves. It also goes beyond representation- a crucial step towards fostering inclusion, acceptance and self-identity and self-worth (Lindsay & Edwards, 2018). For deaf children, toys that depict deaf characters using sign language or living in a deaf-centric world validate their experiences and demonstrate that their experience and demonstrate that their identity is both valuable and worthy of recognition. To researchers a positive representation through toys can challenge negative stereotypes and reduce feelings of isolation which sends a positive and powerful message that being deaf is not something to be 'fixed' or 'overcome' but rather an aspect of diversity to be embraced (Snyder & Channell, 2019). Having deaf toys helps hearing children develop an awareness of empathy for the deaf community promoting a more inclusive and understanding society. As Lindsey and Edwards (2018) highlight, such toys not only affirm deaf children's experiences but also play a critical role in breaking down societal barriers and contributing to a culture that values all forms of human diversity.

The concept of otherness is a theory study and conceptualization of 'the other' it can be an idea an individual, group or culture being perceived as fundamentally different from the norm or from what is considered familiar. The Oxford Cambridge dictionary otherness is described as "being or feeling different in appearance or character from what is familiar, expected, or generally accepted" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2024).

Stuart Hall's concept of "the other" is defined as opposition to the self. This opposition can be racial, cultural or national, and it serves to maintain the power and identity of the dominant group. However, Stuart was also interested in the ways in which 'other' can resist or subvert this marginalization. Instead of viewing the "other" as a fixed category Hall saw it as a dynamic, shifting, and in some cases, as a site of potential transformation

and resistance. In the essay Cultural identity and diaspora (1990) he discussed how cultural identity is formed, especially in the context of the African diaspora and other displaced or migrant communities. Hall challenges essentialist notions of identity, offering a more fluid, complex understanding of cultural belonging. (Hall ,1990).

Hall rejects the idea of cultural identity as a fixed, static essence. He believes cultural identity is always a production of a process of becoming, rather than a preexisting, immutable thing, a process shaped by history, power, and the interplay of cultural and social forces. In the context of diaspora, cultural identity is not something that exists independently of time and place, it is shaped through ongoing interactions with other cultures, histories and experiences. In his essay “cultural identity and diaspora’ Hall Stuart,1990

## Chapter 1.1

### The Cypriot ear or the limestone Votive Ear



Fig .1 Cypriot ear

The limestone votive ear is referring to a certain type of offering found in Cyprus and in other ancient Mediterranean cultures, these votive offerings were typically objects shaped in the form of body parts and dedicated to deities or spirits in religious rituals. The limestone votive ear is an example of the offering in which the ear was carved out of limestone and is presented as a symbolic gesture of devotion or prayer. The whole reason for this is likely thought to symbolize specific requests or needs, such as healing or divine attention. The symbolism of the ears was highly chosen for its association with hearing and communication within the divine, in many cultures' ears were symbolic of the ability to hear and understand divine messages or prayers, offering the ear to the gods, individuals who were worshiping were seeking the divine “hearing” or attention asking the gods to listen or answer their prayers. The ears were often linked to health especially in the context where deafness, ear ailments, or communication were central issues. A votive ear could symbolize a request for healing or protection related to a sense of hearing. A version of the ear was featured in the met museum to celebrate disability pride month in 2020 the

one shown in fig one has four syllabic signs on the lobe which reads “I belong to a deaf person” showing that it highly that the person was asking for a cure to deafness. There is a long, long history of people trying to fix deafness. (Martinez, 2020).



Fig .2 Photograph showing her mute tattoo the limping chicken (February 2016)

A newer version of the Cypriot ear is tattoos which the picture above shows. These tattoos are behind the ears which can hold a deep personal and cultural significance, offering a way to express identity, connection, and pride in a visible and unique form. The tattoos symbolize important aspects of deaf culture, with solidarity within the community, the use of sign language or a celebration of deaf identity. Where those who used to carry limestone votive ear wanted to change and not be different which highlights that times have truly changed behavior if it is slowly its changing for the good. Tatoos behind the ear can be empowering offering a form of self-expression in a society where deaf individuals are very often seen as “other” or marginalized, these tattoos can be an act of reclaiming a person's body and narrative, celebrating deafness as something to be proud of rather than something to “fix” or conceal. Many of these tattoos serve as a reminder of resilience, belonging, and the importance of being heard- not just through sound, but through the unique forms of expression. Empowering people to offer a form of self-expression in a society where deaf people are often marginalized or seen as other, tattoos become powerful act of reclaiming their narrative, these tattoos celebrate deafness as something to be proud of rather than something to ‘fix’ or conceal. Serving as a visual reminder of resilience, belonging and the importance of being heard, not always being through sound but through unique forms of expression that defy societal norms. Ttoos can become symbols of strength and agency within a community which has been marginalized for so long.

Lennard Davis, a renowned theorist in disability studies, explores the concept of ‘otherness’ in his work “Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the. body. (1995) Davis is a key figure in disability studies in his exploration of how the concept of “normalcy” is socially constructed and its functions to exclude those who really do not fit in the ideal. Enforcing Normalcy Davis is critiquing the ways in which society defines

disability as another by placing it as abnormal, inferior, and outside the norm. Tracing the historical roots of the medical model of disability, which treats disability as a problem to be cured or fixed its contrasts with the social model, argues that disability is primarily a result of societal barriers rather than individual impairments. Relevance to disability: Davis work highlights the role of concept of normalcy in creating disability as other stating that the social construction of the “normal: body leads to the marginalization and exclusion of those who deviate from this ideal. He discusses how the deaf community has been affected by this concept of normalcy signifying that deafness such as other forms of disabilities have been seen as something to be “cured” or “treated”

Davis, L.J.1995. Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body. Davis discusses deafness has often been pathologized in the medical model of disability. Explaining how hearing loss and deafness are typically framed as a deficiency, something that needs to be fixed or treated. From Davis this aligns with border social and medical practices that enforce the notion of normalcy, or the ideal of the normative body which is the body that can hear, speak and function in conventional ways. In this context, deafness is perceived as a deviance from the ideal, leading the marginalization and othering of def individuals In his influential work, Lennard J. Davis explores the impact of normalcy on various disabled groups, including the Deaf community, although the idea is not confined to any one passage. Below is a reference from the text where Davis addresses the experience of the Deaf community in relation to the concept of normalcy.

In the essay, Davis discusses how Deafness has often been pathologized in the medical model of disability. He explains how hearing loss and Deafness are typically framed as a deficiency—something that needs to be fixed or treated. According to Davis, this aligns with broader social and medical practices that enforce the notion of normalcy, or the ideal of the "normative" body, which is the body that can hear, speak, and function in conventional ways. In this context, Deafness is perceived as a deviance from the ideal, leading to the marginalization and othering of Deaf individuals. Davis specifically states that:

"The ideal of normalcy is not a neutral concept but a way of enforcing conformity, a way of silencing differences. It is a historical product that marginalizes and excludes those who are different. For the Deaf, this is particularly poignant, for they live in a society that defines them by their perceived lack of normality—the inability to hear. The result is that the Deaf are rendered as deficient and in need of correction, just as other disabled bodies are subjected to the same gaze." (Davis ,1995).

This reflects how deaf people have been impacted by the broader concept of normalcy rooting in the medicalization of the body which has led to the idea that deafness is an abnormality that should be corrected, either through medical intervention or by assimilating into the hearing world.

Tanya Titchkosky’s work: Disability, Normalization, and Power. focuses on how the concept of otherness is tied to the normalization of bodies and minds in society, her analysis of disability, Tanya examines how social and intuitional process create disability as other through the enforcement of normalcy in everyday life. Critiquing the way disabled individuals are often positioned as lacking or deficient because they do not conform to

societal expectations of able-bodiedness or mental health. Her work discusses the need to deconstruct the social norms that define “normal” and “abnormal” in order to challenge the marginalization of disabled people. (Titchkosky, 2003) The emphasis on normalcy in society creates a framework where disabilities are often relegated to the status of other showing disabled people as lesser or incomplete members of society. The process of ‘othering’ stems from deeply ingrained societal norms that define what is considered ‘normal’ and by extension, what is deemed ‘abnormal’. Those who do not fit into this box are seen through a lens of deficiency as through their bodies or minds are broken, incomplete or in need of fixing. This way of seeing not only devalues their lived experiences but also erases their identities, contributions and ways of being in the world. Titchkosky calls for a fundamental shift in societal attitudes, begging that disability should no longer be viewed as a tragic or an awful condition but more of a natural and valuable part of human diversity. Framing disability as something to be fixed, Titchkosky is an advocate for recognizing as a legitimate aspect of the human experience that deserves equal recognition, respect, and inclusion. These reframing challenges the deeply rooted medical and social models of disability that have long stigmatized difference and reinforced the notion that there is a ‘correct’ way to live in this society. In the context of deafness, for example this shift is seeing deafness not as a disability in need of cure but a rich cultural identity and valid form of communication that can contribute to the broader tapestry of the human experience.

The emphasis on normalcy leads to a kind of “othering,” where disabled people are often seen as lesser or incomplete members of society. Titchkosky calls for a shift in societal attitudes to recognize that disability should not be viewed through a lens of pity or deficiency but as part of human diversity that deserves equal recognition and respect. (Davis, 1995 pp. 373-382.) The concept of normal itself as Davis and Titchkosky argue is a social construct that reinforces narrow definitions of what it is like to be a human, the idea of ‘normal’ body or mind is rooted in cultural, historical and medical norms that exclude those who deviate from the prescribed standard. Within this framework, ‘normalcy’ is not just an ideal, but a powerful force that is who belongs and who does not, who is valued and who is disregarded. The reality, however, is that human diversity is vast and multifaceted—our bodies, minds and abilities exist on a spectrum that cannot be captured by a single standard. To test this severe concept of normalcy, it is essential to change our understanding of what it means to be ‘normal’, rather than seeing normalcy as a fixed ideal, we must embrace it as a shifting, fluid notion that reflects the diverse and complex nature of the human existence. Usually in this more inclusive sense, it wouldn't imply uniformity or conformity but would acknowledge and celebrate the many ways individuals see and experience the world. The perspective shifts the focus from fixing or ‘normalizing’ individuals who are deemed as different to a recognition of human variation instead of asking individual to conform to a narrow definition of what it is like to be a human we should ask how we can evolve to be more accommodating, accepting of diverse experiences and identities in embracing this understanding. Moving with a society that values people not for their ability to meet an arbitrary standard of normalcy, but for their uniqueness and humanity. In this context, “being normal” would no longer be a measure of adequacy or worth but rather a celebration of everyone's ability to contribute to the

richness of human experience. By rejecting the constraints of a singular, idealized normal, we can create a more inclusive society where difference is not a deficiency but a strength, and all forms of human existence are valued equally.

## Chapter 2

Disabled artists are increasingly making their mark in contemporary culture, and their work is beginning to receive recognition it deserves, this shift is a part of a larger movement to promote visibility and voices of marginalized groups in the arts. Nancy Rourke an outstanding deaf visual artist who is mostly known for her powerful works which reflect the deaf experience American sign language culture and the beauty of deaf identity. Her work explores themes of deaf culture, the preservation of ALS and the importance of representation.



Fig 5 Nancy Rourke 2012

Deaf people can do anything captures Nancy's commitment to portraying deaf individuals not as victims of their condition but as capable, talented and a diverse group of individuals who are exactly like everyone else and can thrive in the world. The Frase itself can be used in various forms of deaf advocacy and culture, challenges the stereotype that deaf individuals are limited or inferior. Rourke's choice to feature this Frase is incredibly bold, direct lettering reinforces the affirmative, self-empowering message at the heart of the work. This work typically portrays deaf people engaging in multiple activities often painted with vibrant colors and dynamic compositions. Throughout her work Rourke insists that deaf individuals like anyone else are multifaceted and have the ability to pursue careers,

education and passions just like their hearing peers and individuals. Nancy speaks about being deaf in her interview with bold magazine she states that her deafness is not a limitation but essential part of her identity and artistic expression she believes that deaf individuals have unique experiences. One of her central goals with her paintings is that she can dismantle the stereotypes often imposed on to deaf individuals she expresses her frustrations with the mainstream media's portrayal of deaf people which enforces victimhood or otherness her art by contrast portrays deaf people as empowered and capable. Rourke Nancy,2024)

Nancy Rourke has broken significant boundaries in the art world by championing Deaf culture and defying stereotypes about disability. As a Deaf artist, she has used her work as a platform to challenge the conventional perceptions of what it means to be Deaf, both within the art world and broader society. Unlike many artists who may be defined by their physical abilities or lack thereof, Rourke has made it her mission to celebrate Deafness as an integral part of her identity and artistic expression, not something to be pitied or marginalized. Her artwork reflects the empowerment and resilience of the Deaf community, positioning Deaf individuals as active participants in the cultural narrative, rather than passive victims or outsiders. Through her bold use of vibrant colors, symbolic imagery, and powerful messages, Rourke has helped to reframe the narrative surrounding disability in art, demonstrating that Deafness is not a limitation, but a unique perspective on the world that can yield extraordinary creativity.

Rourke's work has particularly shattered boundaries by addressing the lack of representation of Deaf individuals in mainstream art and media. Historically, disabled artists, especially those from the Deaf community, have been underrepresented, often depicted in stereotypical or simplistic ways. By contrast, Rourke creates art that is dynamic and multifaceted, celebrating Deaf culture with authenticity and pride. One of her most iconic pieces, "Deaf People Can Do Anything," serves as a declaration of the Deaf community's strength and ability, directly challenging the notion that Deafness is an obstacle to success. The piece is not just an artwork; it is a powerful affirmation of Deaf identity and capability, resonating with both Deaf and hearing audiences alike.

In addition to breaking visual boundaries, Rourke has pushed artistic conventions by embracing a variety of mediums, from painting and drawing to more interactive forms of expression. She actively participates in exhibitions, workshops, and advocacy projects that showcase the contributions of Deaf artists to the larger art world. Through her work, Rourke has created space for other Deaf artists, inspiring them to express their stories and experiences through art. Her pioneering efforts have contributed to a larger cultural shift towards inclusivity, where Deaf artists are not only accepted but celebrated for their unique perspectives. Through her groundbreaking contributions, Nancy Rourke has established herself as a trailblazer who is reshaping the landscape of contemporary art. Nancy has also inspired many artists some, I have previously mentioned such as Christine Sum Kim with her work through sound and silence and others such as Chuck Baird whose vibrant

paintings and performance celebrates Deaf heritage and history.



Fig 6 *The mechanical Ear* by Chuck Baird

The mechanical ear is an artwork created by Chuck Baird. It was created as a mixed media painting combining vibrant and symbolic imagery with elements of visual story telling what Baird's approach to the art space it was. Using acrylic paints to build up layers of color and texture reflecting the dynamic, expressive nature of ASL which is central to his creative process. He takes traditional deaf cultural imagery with modern, often mechanical symbols to comment on the relationship between deaf individuals and the hearing world. The title 'the mechanical ear' is a metaphor for the reliance on technology such as hearing aids and cochlear implants, His work is has similar dynamics to Nancy's work fusion with ASL with visual imagery she many of times has emphasized movement, expression and storytelling has also had an impact on contemporary deaf artists who use multiple mediums like photography video and sculpture to highlight the deaf experience and be an advocate for more greater visibility and representation withing the art world. Blending cultural pride with visual Innovention, her work has become a guide for individuals exploring sign language and identity in the world of art.

#### Conclusion:

In conclusion, the journey toward inclusivity and acceptance for the Deaf community is one of gradual, but essential, change. My own experiences of growing up as a deaf

individual in a society that often regarded hearing as the standard have been both challenging and transformative. From enduring bullying and internalizing the belief that my deafness was something to hide or "fix," to witnessing the evolving representation of deaf people in media and toys, I have witnessed the power of representation in reshaping attitudes toward disability. As highlighted by theorists such as Lennard Davis and Tanya Titchkosky, the concept of "normalcy" has long perpetuated the marginalization of those who deviate from an idealized standard of ability. However, a shift in perspective is emerging—one that sees disability not as a deficiency, but as a natural aspect of human diversity. The increasing visibility of deaf actors, artists, and even toys that reflect deafness offers a powerful affirmation of identity, promoting pride and acceptance. While Hollywood's representation has been historically flawed, recent strides, such as those made in CODA and the inclusion of deaf characters, signal a growing commitment to authentic portrayal. As a society, we must continue to challenge the limiting notions of normalcy and embrace the rich spectrum of human experience. In doing so, we not only create a world that values difference, but one that actively celebrates the diverse ways in which individuals experience and contribute to life. The path forward is one where the Deaf community is seen, heard, and respected—no longer "othered," but recognized for the unique and valuable identity it offers to our collective humanity.

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