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Inaccurate Representation of Medicine in Film

Since the beginning of cinema, many filmmakers have left their input on the tropes and stereotypes present in the films they create. The filmmakers do this to create an exciting, upbeat, and interesting scene for the viewers to watch. However, the idea of creating a captivating scene may, in turn, lead to something that is not necessarily as realistic as it would be in real life. This is especially true when it comes to the topic of medicine, in particular, how medical treatment in movies may not reflect how it actually is in real life. Some films that stand out the most in this area are films such as *Million Dollar Baby* (2004), *Get Out* (2017), and *The Package* (2018). These films can make medical treatment almost comical to those in the medical field while giving everyday people a false sense of how medicine actually works.

The first example of medical misrepresentation that stood out from the crowd for being completely inaccurate is the 2004 film, *Million Dollar Baby*. *Million Dollar Baby* (2004) is a film about a veteran boxing trainer named Frankie (Clint Eastwood) who trains a young girl named Maggie (Hilary Swank) after she stumbles in his gym asking for help. The film takes a quick turn when Maggie gets injured by getting knocked out by her opponent and hitting her head on a stool inside of the ring. The series of events leaves Maggie with a terrible spinal cord injury and paralyzes her from the neck down (*Million Dollar Baby* 2004).

This is where medical inaccuracies start to take place. Maggie wakes up in the hospital hooked up to a ventilator, unable to move, but somehow she is still able to speak. Due to the nature of her injury and the fact that she had to be hooked up to a ventilator in order to be able to breathe, it would be impossible for her to talk as the ventilator would have blocked her ability to speak (*Million Dollar Baby* 2004). According to the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), “When you talk, air moves from your lungs up through your vocal folds. The air makes the vocal folds vibrate to produce a sound that comes out of your mouth (ASHA, Ventilator Dependence).” If you have a trach or a ventilator hooked up to you, the air will not reach your vocal cords, and therefore no sounds will be created, and even if they are, they will be choppy and raspy, unlike how it was shown in the film. The film most likely had the character talk because it would add to the emotional plot of the story and tug at the viewer's heartstrings as they watched her struggle with her injuries. However, it was simply too easy for the actor to talk and did not line up with how ventilators work in real-life situations.

Another film that is very obviously medically inaccurate is the 2017 film *Get Out*. *Get Out* is a film that follows the main character Chris (Daniel Kaluuya) as he visits his girlfriend Rose's (Allison Williams) parents' house for the weekend. Chris is shocked as he finds out that the family is trying to transfer the consciousness of some of the highest bidders into those of younger black people because they believe that they have special and more innate abilities than white people (*Get Out* 2017).

While the concept alone for this movie is enough to make people's heads turn, the medical inaccuracies are also something to take into question. In the film, Rose's dad Dean (Bradley Whitford), is a neurosurgeon focused on brain transplantation. For starters, according to the Neurosciences Institute at Stanford University, “neurons are very sensitive to environmental

changes and can die due to insufficient oxygenation during surgery. When these neurons die, the point of head transplant is lost as dead neurons also lose their synapses (Tay, Brain Transplants).” Not only is brain transplantation impossible in this day and age, but the procedure is also done in the father’s basement, with only the help of his son, two patients, and no anesthetic or breathing equipment. While the director Peele did great in creating a psychological thriller that topped the movie charts, the scientific and medical backing of his film is severely lacking (*Get Out* 2017).

The last film that caught my eye in terms of real-life to film medical discrepancies is the 2018 Netflix film titled, *The Package*. *The Package* is a comedy about four teenagers that go on a camping trip where a mishap happens to one of the teenagers, Jeremy (Eduardo Franco), that causes him to chop off his own genitalia. After sending Jeremy to the hospital, the teens figure out that his genitalia is still with them as they rush against time to try and get it back to him before it is too late (*The Package* 2018).

While the film is considered a comedy and so the viewers can expect the film to not show complete accuracy in its representation of medicine, the way that the medical care of the character’s genitalia is nonetheless one that can be considered completely inaccurate. As seen in many other films, as soon as the “package” is found by the teens, they throw the genitalia straight into a cooler full of ice in order to freeze and preserve the appendage (*The Package* 2018). According to Elizabeth Cohen, CNN’s Senior Medical Correspondent, this is definitely the wrong approach, stating, “direct contact with ice could give the vessel's freezer burn and make reattachment difficult (Cohen, What to do).” While keeping the appendage cold is a good idea in order to prevent more damage and bacteria to the affected area, freezing the appendage could cause serious implications that the film did not take into consideration. A wild approach that the film took was the fact that it took an extremely long amount of time before the teens

could return the genitalia back to its owner, mixing up genitalia and actually attaching it to the wrong man before returning it to the teen in question at the end of the film (*The Package* 2018). This would never happen in real-life circumstances for many reasons, and if anything, the appendage would die in the process, making it unable to ever be attached back to its original owner. For comedy's sake, many people may let this chain of events slide, but for the overall purpose of medical care, it's safe to say the plot is implausible.

In conclusion, medicine in filmmaking has many different representations over the course of time, plot, and genre, which can be considered completely contradictory to real-life situations. While the idea of certain medical plots and procedures may help to further the plot if done incorrectly on screen, it may also hinder the audience's perception of how real-life medicine actually works. This can be detrimental to people who may be experiencing such issues in real life because they will not know how to handle the situation. To prevent this issue, filmmakers need to start taking better care in accurate representation of the medical field by doing more research about the issues and injuries that they are covering, especially in terms of transplants and anesthetics, which are the most common problem of misrepresentative information in these films as a whole.

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