



National Center on Advancing Person-Centered Practices and Systems

Person-Centered Supports in Pop Culture

Summary of a webinar from August 18, 2021

Introduction

This webinar is about people with disabilities in pop-culture. Pop-culture means things like TV, movies, and social media. It's important for pop-culture to show people with disabilities having real lives. This helps create expectations about supports or services people with disabilities need. The panelists share what they see in pop-culture and how to make it more person-centered.

What the Panel Sees in Pop-Culture

Kathy says, pop-culture affects how people think about people with mental illness. She says, "Most people think the person has to be locked up in a hospital. That's the only way they're going to get better."

Finn says, "You can be absolutely brilliant. You could solve important mathematical problems. You could discover the cure for COVID-19. You can be good at all those things but still need help. There are so many ingrained stereotypes out there that, if you have high support needs, then you must be incapable of everything and that is not the case."

Mary says commercials and movies make nursing homes look scary. She says "Here's how they look to me, in a word, pastel. Ivory walls, peach drapes, brown carpets, beige sofas, old people in periwinkle, pistachio, pink... Maybe advertisers don't know any real people with dementia. We're still adults with adult emotions, thoughts, and tastes. We're still human, living in color."

What the Panel Wants to See in Pop-Culture

Mary says, "What if a person's life with dementia was portrayed as truly worth living!"

Finn says, "If we do have better depictions of the kinds of help that people need to live in the community, as people with disabilities or older adults, then I think that's going to let people know that those are options. And let people know that they can advocate change within different systems to ensure that they get that kind of help."

Kathy says, "My hope would be is that as we get more people with disabilities telling our stories for us... that maybe we'll see more genuine portrayals."

Andy says "If people with disabilities are going to be able to tell their stories in the writing room and in the casting room then you'll get diversity."



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The speakers on this webinar were:



Andy Arias is an actor, producer, and advocate. He has produced many films including [The Unicorn Closet](#) and the critically acclaimed [Extra Special](#). He is currently producing the documentary [Dani's Twins](#). In his work, Andy strives to create true portrayals of people with intersecting marginalized identities. Andy also works as an adjunct faculty at Georgetown University, where he highlights the crucial role of media and its ability to influence and shift perceptions.



Kathy Flaherty is the Executive Director of [Connecticut Legal Rights Project, Inc.](#), an agency that provides legal services to low-income individuals with mental health conditions on matters related to their treatment, recovery, and civil rights. Kathy combines her personal experience as a psychiatric and long COVID survivor and her legal background to speak to issues affecting people with disabilities. Kathy lives in Newington, CT with her husband, Jim Valentino, and their rescue cat Stella. Kathy is on Twitter [@ConnConnection](#). Kathy has written op-eds on a variety of topics, including politics, law, mental health, adoptee rights, and soccer.



Finn Gardiner is a disability rights advocate with interests in educational equity, intersectional justice, comparative policy, and inclusive technology. Finn holds a Master of Public Policy degree from the Heller School for Social Policy and Management at Brandeis University and a bachelor's degree in sociology from Tufts University. Finn is currently the Communications Specialist at the Lurie Institute for Disability Policy at Brandeis University.



Mary L. Radnofsky, Ph.D., is a former ghostwriter and college professor of Education and Human Development, French, Astronomy, and Qualitative Research; she also founded and ran the Socrates Institute, a non-profit educational organization for over twenty years. Dr. Radnofsky, who has had vascular angiopathy for over 15 years, is the first person with dementia to speak at the United Nations regarding the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. She has travelled globally with her medical alert dog, Benjy, to discuss the rights of people with dementia, conducting simulations for care partners to practice human rights-based communication techniques