social sciences

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Analysis of Mockery and Discrimination towards People with Disabilities in Cartoons: The *Family Guy* Case

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Abstract: Disability is a topic that arouses social interest and that has been approached and represented in different ways throughout history. Analysing media portrayals of disability is needed to ease the development of inclusive societies. This work aims to identify the social representations of people with disabilities and the cases of mockery and discrimination that appear in the well-known *Family Guy* cartoons. For this purpose, a mixed methodology has been chosen, extracting all possible cases of the concepts used to refer to disability. The results show that the most commonly used concepts are pejorative and typical of dispensational and medical-rehabilitative paradigms. Regarding mockery and discrimination, it is observed that when both are related to a direct interaction with people with a disability, they appear in a much higher percentage. Although *Family Guy* is not an educational series and is aimed at audiences over 16 years of age, the results of this work promote media education as a tool to critically analyse the representations offered by the media to promote an inclusive society.

Keywords: disability; cartoon; *Family Guy*; mockery; discrimination; media; media literacy; representation

Citation: Garcia-Claro, Jaime, Octavio Vazquez-Aguado, and Roberto Martinez-Pecino. 2022. Analysis of Mockery and Discrimination towards People with Disabilities in Cartoons: The *Family Guy* Case. *Social Sciences* 11: 231. https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci11060231

Academic Editors: Barbara Fawcett and Kara Fletcher

Received: 18 March 2022
Accepted: 20 May 2022
Published: 25 May 2022

1. Introduction

Throughout history, people with disabilities, especially visible ones, have been used as a source of entertainment, and the field of cartoons is not any different. In the world of art, perhaps the best-known and most recent exploitation of disability in our times is that of the circus, where deformities were considered something exotic and monstrous (deformities in the lower and upper limbs, achondroplasia, colloquially called 'dwarfism', microcephaly, conjoined twins, etc.). It was common to exhibit them in huts and travelling fairs, and even in local venues where they were exhibited in the streets (March 2021), including in non-specialised premises, such as grocer's shops, as was the case in Barcelona from the 19th to the 20th century (Delclós 2021). Specifically, the most exploited disability was dwarfism. While other visible disabilities were (and still are by some people) also considered monstrosities (Thompson 2018), people with dwarfism have been labelled as both funny and monsters, according to Pritchard (2017, 2021). Although Pritchard states that these shows have all but disappeared in Europe, there are still countries that keep using people with dwarfism for their amusement. Specifically, in Spain, circuses with animals have been banned, but most clowns are still "dwarfs". Another show that is still common is the "bombero torero" (bullfighter fireman): people with achondroplasia, dressed in bullfighter's clothes, put on a comic show including bulls where they let themselves be gored and rolled around on the floor. Although this was a spectacle born in the midst of Franco's dictatorship (1948) and most associations for people with disabilities have asked different governments to ban it (elDiario.es 2021), posters advertising the event can still be seen, especially in the spring.

In terms of animism, deities and popular religiosity, we find a diversity of behaviours, such as considering people with different disabilities as divine beings, such as people with microcephaly in certain parts of India, where they are considered descendants of the god Hanuman (Toboso and Arnau 2008). Several siblings with this condition were worshipped from 1987 until their death (Blogdisea 2013). In contrast, it has historically been maintained that eugenic infanticide was a common practice in ancient Sparta (Inzúa 2001). However, a recent study has found that, according to archaeological and even some historical studies, this was not so widespread; the famous historian Plutarch is even said to have had an osteoarticular disability (a shorter leg) (Sneed 2021). What does seem to be a reality, according to a recent journalistic investigation, is that, in countries such as Guinea Bissau, there are communities that consider children with a disability or persistent illness to be demons who should be killed or left to die of starvation (García and Agudo 2021) in the style of the witch trials of the Middle Ages (Head 2019).

The following is a brief review of the different conceptions or paradigms of disability over time. Dispensational and demonological perceptions (Inzúa 2001; Toboso and Arnau 2008) of disabled people lead to the belief that they are not valid for society, their disability is due to sin, and that, being a dishonour for the family, they must be hidden (Pérez-Dalmeda and Chhabra 2019). The medical-rehabilitative paradigm promotes the notion that the person is sick, less valid, and is susceptible to be treated by different areas of medicine (Corona-Aguilar 2015). Moreover, in social models (Díaz-Jiménez et al. 2019), disability becomes an "adjective" for the person instead of being considered a "disabled subject". From this last model, a new one emerges: the human rights model, in which the person is recognised as a subject of rights, as a citizen, and part of human diversity (Snyder and Mitchel 2010 in Pérez-Dalmeda and Chhabra 2019, p. 12).

This article aims to analyse the meanings/words used to refer to people with disabilities (a range of disabilities) in the cartoon series *Family Guy*, as well as the episodes of mockery and discrimination towards this group. To do so, we will begin with a brief history of cartoons, continuing with the importance of animation as a socialising entity, and the role of humour in "animated disability", with a focus on *Family Guy*. Finally, a mixed analysis will be carried out (case counts, statistical analysis, and critical discourse analysis).

1.1. Brief History of Cartoons

Some animation experts date the origin of cartoons to Indonesia and Malaysia in the 17th century, specifically to a genre called "wayang kulit" (leather theatre). Leather figures held up by wooden rods and a backlight cast moving shadows, accompanied by music or the story of an omniscient narrator. The phenakistoscope, invented by Joseph Plateau in 1831, is believed to be a derivative of wayang kulit, and thus the most direct ancestor of the cartoon (Lipton 2021).

This instrument consisted of two discs, one of which was movable, with different designs, and the other fixed, with openings. When the movable disc rotated, the succession of scenes could be seen through the aperture.

Greenberg (2018) argues that J. Stuart Blackton, an American, was the inventor of cartoons in 1906, with the short film *Humorous Phases of Funny Faces*, which consisted of a succession of faces. According to Crafton (1990), the first recorded cartoon work was *Fantasmagorie* in 1908, by Frenchman Émile Cohl: a one-and-a-half-minute animated short film with 700 illustrations painted in India ink on white paper, which were then converted to negative to create the black and white effect. In the approximately 80 s film, a "stick clown" appears and interacts with various characters, such as a woman who removes the feathers from her hat, and an elephant that transforms into a horse.

However, the real cartoon revolution began in the first half of the 20th century when, in 1928, the most famous cartoon character, Mickey Mouse, appeared in the animated film *New York Steamboat Willie* (Ruíz 1995). Following the Disney phenomenon and the creation of the Disney Pictures studios, a succession of works on a variety of themes began to appear on screens, from stop motion animation, the most famous example being Tim Burton's

The Nightmare Before Christmas (Touchstone Pictures), to 3D animation by Disney Pixar studios. Since then, the production company has monopolised the content for children's audiences, and some authors have even baptised the phenomenon as "Disneyisation" (Vizcaíno-Verdú et al. 2021).

1.2. Animation, Disability, Humour and Family Guy

To talk about cartoons and animation is to also talk about different audio-visual discourses, which have great social and cultural influential power. Bearing in mind that different media are tertiary socialisers, in the era of digitalisation they have become a support for primary socialisation (for example, when mothers and fathers use television or platforms to entertain their children, or when audio-visual media are used in schools to reinforce education). Taking media platforms from a socialising point of view, authors such as Morduchowicz and Aguilar define them as public pedagogies with great emotive and persuasive power, which have the capacity to influence us more than real facts (Fabbro and Martín 2016).

Within audio-visual communication, cartoons are a widespread genre found in many different settings; they have gone from being screened in primitive silent movie theatres with a soundtrack in the background, and especially aimed at children, to occupying a large part of the audio-visual offering, with specific channels on both public and paid television, as well as on new platforms. YouTube is one of the most influential platforms in today's society, with 2 billion daily users of its free services around the world (Newberry and Adame 2019), along with Netflix, with 213.6 million subscribers (Mena-Roa 2021b) and, since 2019, the Disney+ platform, specialising in cartoons with 118 million subscribers (Mena-Roa 2021a).

These new screening platforms go beyond the local, becoming a global genre capable of creating international trends and influencing thousands of cultures (Lobato and Lotz 2020, p. 133). Moreover, images reinforce the function of language due to their great symbolic weight, which significantly influences the socialisation process (Mcquail and Windahl 1997).

Thus, cartoon series have played an important role in the formation of collective identities and in the reinforcement of certain patterns of behaviour, not always desired or desirable, and given that cartoons were initially endowed with a presumption of morality, authors such as Puiggròs defend the progressive amoralisation of this genre (Puiggròs et al. 2005).

1.2.1. Disability in Hollywood

Before we continue with animation discussions, we would like to digress for a brief overview of the social representation of disability in films, and the patterns that are repeated. In the documentary *Code of the Freaks* (Chasnoff 2020), film directors, screenwriters, disability professionals, and actors/actresses with and without disabilities take a look at how Hollywood has interpreted disability. It starts, of course, with the mythical film *Freaks* (Browning 1932), a "circus of horrors" where the main attraction is the deformities of its actors: dwarfism, microcephaly, lack of lower or upper limbs, etc. This connects with the idea of voyeurism towards disability and its objectification that authors such as Thompson (2018) and (Pritchard 2017) are already talking about.

Another recurring theme that the documentary picks up on is that of ethnicity: it is rare to see black characters with disabilities (Krebs 2020) and usually, when they do appear, they are given a halo of goodness or supernatural powers: see *Radio*, directed in 2003 by Michael Tollin, or *The Green Mile*, released in 1999 and directed by Frank Darabont. A curiosity of *The Green Mile* is that the actor Tom Hanks plays a non-disabled boss, but 5 years earlier he had played a disabled person in *Forrest Gump* (1994).

One of the most relevant issues is gender: how are women with disabilities portrayed in film? It seems that they appear as an object of voyeuristic desire, defenceless and

sexualised. In contrast, when it comes to men with disabilities, they are either depicted as asexual, or the sex is paid or sympathetic (Chasnoff 2020).

The endings of these films are also often repeated: presenting disability as undesirable, the ideal solution is a cure, suicide or institutionalization. Fortunately, something is changing in this repetition of patterns, and we can find characters with disabilities who are empowered and have no desire to be secluded, cured, or commit suicide, but rather to live their lives like everyone else. A recent example would be Peter Dinklage, also known as Tyrion Lannister from *Games of Thrones* who, in addition to playing a character in the series, also rejects roles in films that focus on disability and the reproduction of negative stereotypes (Ellis 2014).

1.2.2. Humour and Disability in Animation and Cartoons

According to Lockyer (2015, pp. 12–13), laughter is an essential component of building bridges, establishing relationships and reducing social distance between people with and without disabilities through comedy. Of course, "laughing with" is not the same as "laughing at". Laughing at or making fun of people with disabilities promotes ableism and discrimination (Reid et al. 2006 in Pritchard 2021), while laughing with people with disabilities challenges prejudice (Shakespeare 2004 in Pritchard 2021). Following Lockyer, conducts a study using semi-structured interviews with stand-up comedians with disabilities, and his findings are that most use humour for self-affirmation, to break down negative stereotypes, and sometimes also to laugh at non-disabled people. However, they do not overlook the fact that even among their own non-disabled peers, negative stereotypes are reproduced when presenting them to the public, or the difficulties they encounter when accessing certain stages on their own. Moreover, more visible disabilities also determine the attitudes of the public (p. 14).

Humour and disability are terms that, together, are controversial, because we have been taught from an early age to "not look" (Thompson 2018). What is not seen does not exist, does not engage us or make us feel bad, but, at the same time, *humour bridges the discomfort that many people feel when approaching a new or unfamiliar situation, and the messages received through it are remembered for longer* (Kolucki 1994, in Haller and Ralph 2003, p. 4).

Although humorous characters with disabilities have appeared throughout the history of cartoons (see *I Haven't Got a Hat* (1932), which features Porky Pig, a pig with dysphemia (stuttering) and *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, produced in 1937), *The Simpsons*, in the late 1980s, included irreverent humour critical of American society. From their first appearance in 1989 to the present day, characters with disabilities have appeared in the stories of the yellow family, although usually as secondary or incidental characters. As Fink (2013) recalls, one of the most absurd episodes occurs in episode 135 of season 7, "King-size Homer", in which Homer Simpson becomes morbidly obese in order to become disabled and work from home. He eventually sees that being obese and disabled brings him more trouble than good and turns to his boss to pay for liposuction. Here, the idea of healing as expounded by Chasnoff (2020) is repeated. There are several characters with disabilities in *The Simpsons*, but it is not the central theme of the series.

Though cartoons are supposed to be aimed at children, *The Simpsons* was created for an adult audience, although the millennial generation has grown up watching them from a young age and the scriptwriters have been able to adapt. The same is not true of *South Park*, a series specifically rated for +18 audiences. They use foul and aggressive language, which is why it is also classified as irreverent and satirical humour. From 1997 to the present day, the producers have faced several campaigns calling for the cancellation of the series. The creators, Parker and Stone, "took it with humour" and launched a hashtag on Twitter #cancelSouthPark, gaining more visibility and even renewing more episodes with the production company. Krebs (2020, p. 2), notes in his study of the series that, in an interview, the creators themselves acknowledge that they have changed themes and adapted them to the new times, which has not been impervious to criticism, especially constructive criticism. Mallet in Krebs (2020, p. 5) argues that stereotypes can be interpreted

in two ways: as negative reinforcers and stigmatisers, or as subversive tools for change. *South Park* is also not a disability-focused series, although some secondary or incidental characters appear, and Krebs himself discusses the relationship between ethnicity (he calls it "race"), disability and humour. Again, black people with disabilities either do not appear or, when they do appear, reproduce the stereotypes found in Chasnoff (2020).

South Park and *Family Guy* were created within a very short time of each other, and although the latter is the subject of our discussion, we do not want to overlook a lesser known but no less important series: *Pelswick*, a series produced in Canada in 2000 whose writer and cartoonist, John Callahan, is tetraplegic. The main character, Pelswick, is a teenager with the same disability as his creator, but unlike other series, the boy has a gang of non-disabled friends, dresses like any other teenager, and makes jokes about himself in an attempt to normalise his disability through humour. Shultz and Germeroth analysed the Callahan cartoons in 1998, two years before they were brought to the screen, and described them as *a force of resistance in taking stereotypes of people with disabilities to ridiculous extremes, and mocking the attitudes of those who consider themselves able-bodied* (Haller and Ralph 2003, p. 1).

1.3. Family Guy Series

The *Family Guy* series, created in 1999 by the screenwriter and actor Seth MacFarlane, can be included within the spectrum of an American animated series of acid humour, as can other very popular series of the same style, such as *The Simpsons*. In fact, according to some audio-visual content websites (Casciari 2007), as well as in *The Simpsons* series itself (episode 364, season 17, "Italian Bob"), reference has been made to possible plagiarism in the scripts, and even beyond: episode 1 of season 13 of *Family Guy*, "The Simpsons Kid", is a crossover of both animated families that shows their similarities.

The cast of the series consists of the Griffin family, headed by Peter, the "family man", his wife Lois, their children Meg, Chris and Stewie, and their talking dog Brian. The Griffins' life is set at 31 Spooner Street in Quahog, Rhode Island, USA. Its plot is based on the life of a middle-class American family in the current socio-political context, interacting with secondary characters such as their neighbours and friends, and even some famous incidental characters. Gags/flashbacks constantly appear that allude to an absurd event.

This work, which forms part of a more extensive investigation, aims to identify whether episodes of mockery and discrimination appear in *Family Guy* and, if so, to delimit, record, recount and analyse them in order to provide a scientific educational perspective as a support for professionals in the field of education to have material to develop educational, communicative and critical education strategies for students. The reason for having chosen this particular series for the research, and in its Spanish dubbing, will be explained in the following section.

Although *Family Guy* is not a series focused on disability, it has been chosen because it is striking that, in the first 16 seasons, there are 53 characters with a disability, and 445 cases that deal with the issue. As McKeown and Darke (2013) say in the article where they analyse episode 12 of season 8, "Large Medium Extra", and a teenage girl with Down syndrome appears: "Family Guy is apparently obsessed with disability" (p. 156).

2. Materials and Methods

In order to carry out the following research, a mixed methodology was used to identify, quantify and interpret the data collected. We opted for descriptive and inferential statistics and the content analysis technique proposed by Bardin in Andréu-Abela (2001), defined as:

> *the set of techniques for the analysis of communications aimed at obtaining indicators (quantitative or otherwise) by systematic and objective procedures for describing the content of messages, allowing the inference of knowledge concerning the conditions of production/reception (social context) of these messages*. (p. 2)

Specifically, a categorical and thematic content analysis has been used, the main aim of which was to arrive at the concepts and relationships that can explain the collected data (Altmis 2021; Yıldırım and Simsek 2012).

Additionally, we used the methodology of critical discourse analysis (Wodak and Meyer 2003) understood as *"the study of those social actions that are put into practice through discourse, such as the abuse of power, social control, domination, social inequalities or marginalisation and social exclusion"* (Íñiguez 2006, p. 67).

First, in order to select the sample, five randomly selected episodes of the adult cartoon series *The Simpsons*, *South Park*, *Family Guy* and *American Dad* were viewed from various seasons. In this first phase, it was found that, although some characters with disabilities appeared in all the series, most of them were incidental, such as Timmy in *South Park* or Ralph in *The Simpsons* (Garcia-Claro 2016). In *Family Guy*, Joe, a secondary character in a wheelchair, appears in most of the episodes (Garcia-Claro et al. 2017) and even most of the main characters have some kind of disability throughout the series.

From this stage, having already watched 15 more episodes of *Family Guy*, also at random, and after verifying that the episodes of mockery and discrimination towards characters with disabilities were repeated in the majority of episodes, the main objectives to be addressed in the research were derived:

- OB1: Identify the meanings and concepts used in the communicative treatment of disability;
- OB2: Analyse the cases of discrimination and mockery of characters with disabilities.

Secondly, the first 16 seasons of the series in Spanish—a total of 309 episodes of 22 min each—were delimited as the sampling unit. The recording units were also selected: concepts used to refer to people with disabilities, mocking events, and episodes of discrimination. To undertake this task, a matrix was created in the IBM SPSS programme to code (Table 1) and record each episode and, at the same time, transcribe the scene for subsequent analysis due to the complexity of the analysis of an audio-visual document, so as not to generalise events and bias the results (López-Noguero 2002). The results were divided into two groups: indirect, when mockery/discrimination occurs without interaction with the character, in an incidental way; and direct, when there is both verbal and physical interaction with the character with a disability. In order to count the concepts used to refer to disability, as they were too numerous and diverse to be coded, they were written down in a manual list for later counting.

Table 1. Codebook.

Codebook	
Code	**Meaning**
1	Direct mockery
2	Indirect mockery
3	Direct discrimination
4	Indirect discrimination

Source: Own elaboration.

The third phase consisted of viewing the 309 chapters in detail, using the SPSS matrix to code and transcribe the cases, and using a notebook to record additional information to complement the research, and even to record ideas for future research.

Fourth and finally, the concepts of mockery and discrimination were accounted for, contingency tables and graphs were generated, and a chi-square test was carried out.

To avoid bias and subjectivity as much as possible, both the concepts of mockery and discrimination as well as the codebook and meanings, and to meet the criteria of credibility, analysability, verifiability, transparency and usefulness, the research methodology was subjected to four external judges in order to confer reliability and validity to the research methodology (Roller 2019). In this way, it was agreed that mockery would be understood

as "any action, gesture or saying to make fun of a person by treating them with contempt", and discrimination as the "different and prejudicial treatment of a person on the basis of sex, ethnicity, ideology, disability . . . ".

3. Results

After data collection, the data were counted and captured in different formats in order to carry out a quantitative analysis of frequencies and percentages, and a qualitative analysis involving content and critical discourse analysis.

3.1. Conceptualisation of Persons with Disabilities

With regard to the concepts used to refer to people with disabilities, n = 43 was counted, of which Disabled (n = 18), Delayed (n = 18), Paralytic (n = 13), Deaf (n = 12) and Handicapped (n = 11) stood out due to their recurrence. (Table 2 and Figure 1).

Table 2. Concepts used for persons with disabilities.

Adjective/Appellative	No. of Times It Appears
Disabled	18
Delayed	18
Paralytic	13
Deaf	12
Disabled	11
Cripple	8
Paraplegic	8
Blind	7
Special	6
Useless	5
Half man	4
Invalid	4
Dwarf	5
Subnormal	4
Crazy	3
Be unable	2
Spaghetti legs	2
Jelly legs	2
Android	1
Load	2
Fool	2
Peculiar	1
Sclerotic	1
Monster	1
Person with special needs	1
Miserable	1
Rare	1
Painful	1
Irritable	1
Unhappy	1
Robot	1
Sad	1
Bubble gum legs	1
Blessing	1
Mental hilarious	1
Lunatic	1
Crippled	1
Wheel	1
Gold wheels	1
Butter legs	1
Sick	1
Autistic	1
Regrettable	1

Source: Own elaboration.

Figure 1. Most used words. Source: Own elaboration.

The remaining concepts, although occurring less frequently, were distributed in different chapters and seasons, with some exceptions.

3.2. Cases of Mockery

With regard to mockery, it can be seen that the number of cases increased exponentially, reaching the maximum peak in season 4, with n = 20 direct and n = 1 indirect cases out of a total of n = 53 cases of appearance of characters with disabilities analysed. In contrast to this trend was season 11, with n = 0 direct and n = 1 indirect cases out of a total of n = 28 analysed (Table 3).

Table 3. Cases of mockery in *Family Guy* series.

	Cases of Mockery		
Season	**Direct**	**Indirect**	**Total Analyzed Cases**
S1	2	0	11
S2	5	0	6
S3	4	0	23
S4	20	1	53
S5	13	5	45
S6	6	0	25
S7	5	0	18
S8	7	0	24
S9	9	0	27
S10	15	0	36
S11	0	1	28
S12	8	0	32
S13	4	0	15
S14	10	2	32
S15	6	1	36
S16	8	0	34
TOTAL	**122**	**10**	**445**

Source: Own elaboration.

The chi-square test showed that there were statistically significant differences in the presence of mockery depending on whether the references to people with disabilities were direct or indirect (χ^2 = 137,988, gl 2, $p < 0.05$). The analysis of the adjusted standardised residuals showed that direct references showed a greater presence of mockery than the indirect references. In percentage terms, it was found that mockery represented 33.25% of all cases in which characters with disabilities appeared. Of this, 30.73% were direct cases and 2.52% were indirect cases.

The graph in Figure 2 shows the oscillations between seasons and also the peculiarities of seasons 4, 5, 11, 14 and 17, which break the trend and present indirect cases of mockery n = 1, n = 5, n = 1, n = 2 and n = 1, respectively, while the others present n = 0.

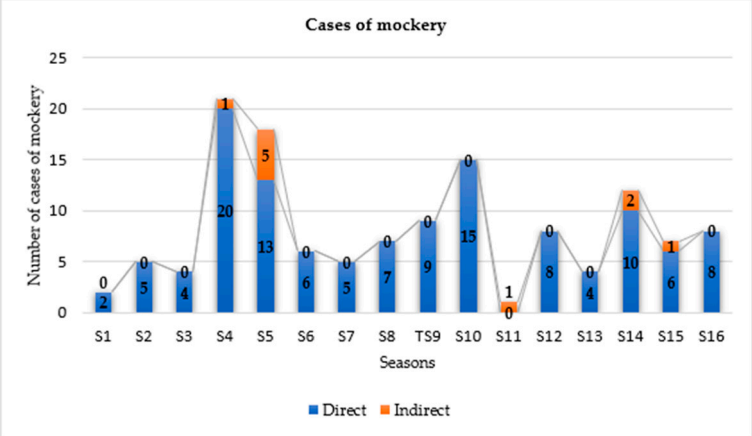

Figure 2. Cases of mockery. Source: Own elaboration.

In the following, and due to the too-large number of cases to analyse all of them in one article, a critical discourse analysis of some examples taken from various seasons will be carried out (Altmis 2021; Andréu-Abela 2001):

In episode 20 of season 2, "Wasted talent", Peter wins a tour of a brewery. His friend Joe, a policeman in a wheelchair, has another pass for the tour, but at minute 9.45 he finds that there is no ramp or other means of access. The factory owner, instead of apologising or offering any compensation, calls in the "oompa loompa midgets" (emulating the film *Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory*, both the 1971 and 2005 versions) who, after a song in which they remind him that he is in a wheelchair and can be thankful he is not horse food, violently push him off the premises while his friends and family do nothing; in fact, they take the tour. As Mallet argues, stereotypes do not only serve to represent the negative in people but can also be used to subvert order. It depends on whether or not the stereotype is disabling. In this particular case, we found disabling stereotypes (Fink 2013), in addition to the fact that those who carried out the mockery were also people with disabilities. They seem to want us to think that if a group of people with dwarfism taunts a person in a wheelchair, it will be taken as a "fight between equals", when in reality it perpetuates the ideas of "dwarf servants for fun" (Chasnoff 2020; Pritchard 2017[1], 2021) and the "helpless cripple". Here, we find ourselves in a situation where companies and public administrations, although gradually complying with accessibility regulations, prefer to pay fines/penalties rather than adapt their facilities, as the laws are not punitive enough. For example, Spain's 2013 General Law on Disability gave a deadline of 4 December 2017. To date, 60% of public and private establishments have not complied with the law. Most of the adapted toilets are poorly constructed or are used as storage rooms.

In episode 9 of season 4, "Breaking Out Is Hard to Do", presenting a scene that has also been analysed by Pritchard (2021, pp. 58–60), Peter and Quagmire accompany Joe on his night patrol. At minute 10.50, they receive a warning of a domestic dispute and, upon entering the house, find a couple with dwarfism fighting. Peter and Quagmire laugh, and when Joe tells them that the situation is serious, Peter replies: "that's not domestic abuse, that sounds like a joke". Joe tries to separate them and gets involved in the fight (they are depicted as puppets behind a sofa) while Peter plays circus music. Finally, they fall asleep, Joe carries them, and Quagmire says "oh, they fell asleep", to which Peter replies: "sure, for them it's like running three kilometres". Here, again, Joe is seen interacting with people with achondroplasia, but both kinds of stereotypes are present: on the one hand, there are the usual stereotypes described by Pritchard about dwarfism as circus people, reinforced by the music played by Peter. However, on the other hand, they are presented

as a "normalised" married couple having a quarrel like any other marriage. Similarly, Joe does his job as a policeman after the taunting episode. Here, the scriptwriters have played with disabling stereotypes which, at the same time, normalise the situation when the gag ends. It would also be important to analyse the role of the non-disabled viewers: Peter and Quagmire are left watching and having fun, contrary to the social canon of "don't look at the freak" (Thompson 2018).

As an example of self-mockery and subversive stereotyping, in episode 16 of season 3, "A Very Special Family Guy Freakin' Christmas", Joe goes out with Peter, Quagmire and Cleveland (his friends from the bar) to get drunk. Peter is reluctant at first because Joe does not think it is fun, but Lois, his wife, obliges. Since Peter is the one driving, he cannot drink, and everyone else is having a good time but him. At minute 5.47, they stop the car and Joe drunkenly climbs a lamppost and falls. He shouts mockingly: "oh no, I've broken my legs", and everyone laughs except Peter. As Haller and Ralph (2003) argue, this is an example of a character with a disability making fun of himself in order to normalise his disability, and even daring to laugh at other people without disabilities (Peter had previously been given a pee snow ice cream and thought it was lemon).

3.3. Cases of Discrimination

Regarding the appearance of discrimination, similarities can be seen with the previous section on mockery. Although season 4 is one of those with the most cases (n = 20 direct and n = 0 indirect cases, out of a total of n = 53 analysed), it is surpassed by season 10 (with n = 21 direct and n = 0 indirect cases out of n = 36 analysed) and equalled by season 15 for direct cases (n = 20), but surpassed in indirect cases (n = 1), out of a total of n = 36 (Table 4).

Table 4. Cases of discrimination in *Family Guy* series.

	Cases of Discrimination		
Season	**Direct**	**Indirect**	**Total Analyzed Cases**
S1	6	0	11
S2	4	0	6
S3	3	1	23
S4	20	0	53
S5	14	0	45
S6	6	0	25
S7	5	1	18
S8	7	0	24
S9	9	0	27
S10	21	0	36
S11	4	0	28
S12	10	1	32
S13	7	0	15
S14	8	2	32
S15	20	1	36
S16	10	1	34
TOTAL	**154**	**7**	**445**

Source: Own elaboration.

Similarly, the graph in Figure 3 also shows the spikes in seasons 4, 5, 10 and 15, and the appearance of indirect cases in seasons 3, 7, 14, 15 and 16, with n = 3, n = 1, n = 1, n = 1, n = 2, n = 1 and n = 1, respectively.

As in the previous section, the chi-square test shows that there are significant differences in the presence of discrimination (χ^2 = 217,668, gl 1, $p < 0.05$). The analysis of the adjusted standardised residuals shows that more discrimination appears in direct references than indirect cases. Percentagewise, in terms of discrimination, this represents 40.55% of the total number of cases analysed, with 38.79% being direct and 1.76% indirect.

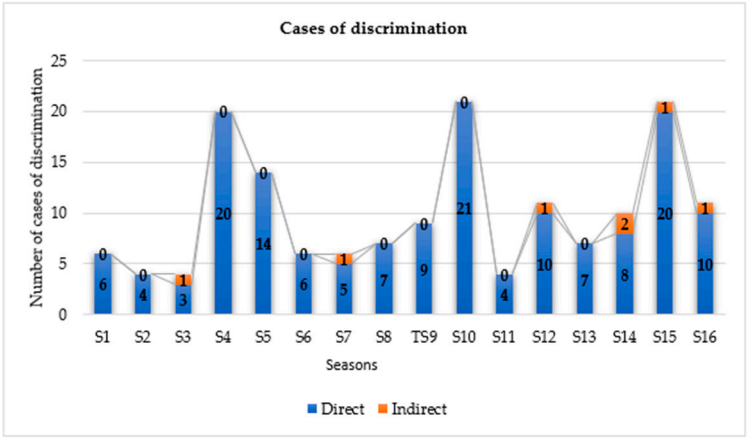

Figure 3. Cases of discrimination. Source: Own elaboration.

Some examples of discrimination for content and discourse analysis are presented, as in the previous section:

In episode 11 of season 2, "A Picture is Worth 1000 Bucks", at minute 2.05, Peter and his family and friends go to an amusement park to celebrate his birthday. As there is a long queue of people on the roller coaster, Peter grabs Joe and says to the person in front of him: "Excuse me, my friend is a disabled person, can you let us through?" Meanwhile, Joe smiles and they all go through to the front of the queue. Here, we can find several stereotypes and social conceptions: on the one hand, Joe and Peter use disability as a privilege (Fink 2013) because they assume that society is tolerant of these practices (Mallet 2009 in Fink 2013, p. 2). This tolerance can be seen as positive discrimination or as paternalism and condescension, because it can create dissonance in the viewer about what is "right and moral", as well as being one of the most stereotypical images of disability (person in a wheelchair).

On the other hand, in episode 2 of season 3, "Brian Does Hollywood", at minute 6.20, Tom Tucker, the anchor of the local news in Quahog, appears with his son with a backwards face (a disability that does not exist in reality). They are in a waiting room with other families for a TV casting call, including Lois Griffin and her baby Stewie. When Stewie sees him, he winces and says, "How am I going to get through this, biting the head off a chicken?" Just then, a juror comes out, makes the same disgusted gesture as Stewie, and walks right past Jake. Tom gets up angrily, demanding explanations, and gets shut out. Then, he says, "You know what we're going to do? We're going to get a camera and make our own movie, because you're normal". Here, we can really see the negative discrimination because of his "freakish" appearance. Unlike in Thompson (2018) and Chasnoff (2020), this time, "monstrousness" has served to be rejected in the entertainment world. Of course, not being a circus role, they can justify the negative stereotyping.

The last example we will use is found in episode 21 of season 10, "Tea Peter". This is an incidental character because he does not appear on screen. While the Griffins are watching TV, at minute 6.20, an omniscient narrator says: "From the sequel to the film 'Goodbye, little girl, goodbye', comes the sequel 'Goodbye, little handicapped girl, goodbye'". In the scene, the girl's parents come out and a policeman tells them that they are doing everything possible to find her, to which the father replies: "Well, there's no hurry either, you can relax". The mother says: "Yes, take it easy. Oh, and if she bites you, blow this horn twice". There are several incidental characters that appear in *Family Guy* and, in this one, especially, negative stereotypes appear: parents who prefer their daughter not to appear and remain absent (Chasnoff 2020), aggressiveness, and meanness (Longmore 1998 in Fink 2013) without even naming the type of disability. At all times, the parents speak in a calm and passive, non-ironic attitude, implying that they are in no hurry to find their daughter (we could relate this to the dispensational paradigm (Inzúa 2001; Toboso and Arnau 2008)). It is reminiscent of Longmore's quote (1985 in Fink 2013, p. 5): "among the

most persistent stereotypes is the association of disability with malevolence. Deformity of the body symbolises deformity of the soul, and makes them emblems of evil".

4. Discussion and Conclusions

> *[...]when we are brave enough to look disability squarely in the face, we are rewarded with an invitation to construct new ways of understanding the previously negative connotations of the monstrous body*. (Thompson 2018, p. 183)

Both the qualitative and quantitative analysis of the concepts used to refer to people with disabilities, as well as the cases of mockery and discrimination analysed in the previous section, have led to the following conclusions:

The most recurrent concepts are precisely those used to refer to people with disabilities in a derogatory way. It is worth noting that delayed (*less valid* in Spanish) and disabled coincide in a number of appearances, while the rest of the concepts (the vast majority) appear residually.

These words were (and still are) used mainly with the perception of disability from dispensational and medical-rehabilitative paradigms (Corona-Aguilar 2015; Inzúa 2001; Toboso and Arnau 2008). Although the tendency to portray disability as something negative, both in film and other media, seems to be shifting towards inclusion (Cocq and Ljuslinder 2020; Kent 2019; Vertoont et al. 2021), there are still programmes or articles that use pity and shame to increase ratings. Moreover, they are portrayed as "the others", those who are not considered members of society, or in contrast to what is culturally considered "normality" (Altmis 2021, pp. 147–48; Kolotouchkina et al. 2020).

The latest studies on disability even advocate for the disappearance of the social model of disability, including its more inclusive contributions within the human rights model, "decriminalising" and "de-blaming" disabled people themselves for the limitations that, both due to their physical condition and socio-cultural barriers, do not allow them to advance towards full citizenship status (Lawson and Beckett 2020; Rees et al. 2017). Bearing in mind that we are analysing a series of acid and absurd humour, we must be cautious when drawing conclusions because, following Hall's Reception Theory, representations will be perceived and coded/decoded by the audience depending on the socio-cultural context to which they belong. She argues that humour can also be used to challenge negative representations and stereotypes (Pritchard 2021).

Just as there are educational series, such as *My brother Ozi* (Altmis 2021), there are also intermediate points between education and absurdity, such as the case we discussed in the introduction, *Pelswick* (Haller and Ralph 2003), which is both irreverent and normalising.

Focusing on mockery and discrimination in *Family Guy*, quantitatively, we found that, in general terms, neither stood out, except when we analysed the difference between direct and indirect interactions: negative stereotypes prevailed in the direct interactions. Additionally, interaction is precisely what characterises us human beings, hence the importance of this analysis.

As Fink (2013) argues, the incorporation of images about disability in cartoons increases viewers' awareness of how the media represents disability; how they influence the understanding and attitudes of non-disabled people; and how recipients interact with texts/images and challenge those attitudes and interpretations (p. 3). However, again referring to Reception Theory, the media have promoted the inclusion of information related to disability, but they continue to offer wrong or biased approaches that in no way favour the elimination of deep-rooted prejudices or contribute to the full integration of people with disabilities (Calvo 2017, p. 438). Indeed, Chew in Fink (2013) acknowledges that there is a fine line between advocacy for people with disabilities and mere exhibitionism. On the one hand, the media has contributed to familiarising people with disabilities and making them less strange but, on the other hand, it can contribute to turning them into a freak to be exhibited (p. 11).

Although we are analysing a series originally rated for 18+ and currently for 16+, we cannot ignore the fact that children and teenagers have access to it, and the scriptwriters

know it. Haller and Ralph argue that children (and even adults) need a certain amount of rudeness and nastiness, but they also need to be shown that people with disabilities are just like everyone else and want to be treated as such (Moore 2000, p. C13, in Haller and Ralph 2003, p. 1).

For all these reasons, and as a conclusion, we are committed to the implementation of active media and critical literacy, which is not limited to schools, but rather a public–private partnership, where the media themselves also assume this commitment. In Spain, recently, one of the most influential media groups, Atresmedia, has committed itself to promoting media and information literacy (MIL), implementing actions that promote critical thinking, creativity and values to facilitate the personal and civic development of young people within the framework of information society (Fundación Atresmedia 2022). If there is good critical education in the media, as some recent studies on the subject argue, there will be greater knowledge of the typology of content (satire, criticism, different types of humour, etc.) and its interpretations, and fewer stereotypes will be reproduced towards people with disabilities (Gebhardt et al. 2022; Vázquez-Barrio et al. 2021).

5. Future Research

As a future line of research, we plan to analyse fewer seasons and episodes in order to compare the linguistic versions of Latin American Spanish, U.S. and U.K. English, and Portuguese from Portugal and Brazil. Thus, a comparative linguistic and cultural analysis of the representations of disability in *Family Guy* will be possible. Grounded theory and Atlas.ti software will also be used to analyse the literal transcriptions. Although the series has been running for 20 seasons and currently only half of its episodes have been released, it was decided to analyse only up to the 16th season due to the high number of episodes and the limited time frame of the investigation. For this reason, we also propose to extend the analysis into other series.

Another possible future line of research could be the impact of the reproduction of stereotypes on children and adolescents, taking into account that series, in addition to entertainment, provide elements of socialization, identity and coherence, and caution should be exercised when developing scripts or allowing certain audiences to partake in viewing (López and Aguaded 2014, p. 119).

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, J.G.-C.; methodology, J.G.-C. and R.M.-P.; software, J.G.-C.; validation, J.G.-C., R.M.-P. and O.V.-A.; formal analysis, J.G.-C.; investigation, J.G.-C.; resources, J.G.-C.; data curation, J.G.-C.; writing-original draft preparation, J.G.-C.; writing-review and editing, J.G.-C and R.M.-P.; visualization, J.G.-C.; supervision, O.V.-A. and R.M.-P. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: The study does not report any data.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Notes

[1] For Pritchard (2017), the terms "midget and dwarf" are considered offensive.

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