

Negative Depictions of Strabismus in Children's Animated Movies

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Introduction

Strabismus is known to negatively affect patients' self-confidence and ability to interact with society. Characters with strabismus is commonly depicted in animated films marketed to children, and such depictions may affect the perception of strabismus by young impressionable audiences.

Methods

We reviewed all 123 animated movies from Studio Ghibli (23), Disney (33, after the Disney renaissance in 1989), Pixar (26), and DreamWorks (41) and identified all characters with strabismus. Personality traits and characteristics were assigned to each character. Chi-square test was used for statistical analysis when appropriate.

Results

We identified 43 characters with strabismus, with at least one character identified in 32 of the 123 films (26%). These characters were more likely to be portrayed as unintelligent (42%) than intelligent (2%), villains (21%) than heroes (7%), and followers (33%) than leaders (7%). Twenty-six (61%) did not speak, 23% were portrayed as frightening, 30% had other physical deformities, and 33% were clumsy. The most common type of strabismus was exotropia (54%), followed by esotropia (21%), vertical (14%), and roving eye movements (12%). There was no significant difference in frequency of characters with strabismus between studios.

Conclusions/Relevance

Characters with strabismus are common in animated films, where they are significantly more likely to be portrayed negatively than positively. These films are targeted at children, and their negative depictions of strabismus are likely to exacerbate social stigma faced by children with strabismus. Pediatric ophthalmologists should advocate that animation studios refrain from using strabismus to visually convey negative character traits.

References

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