

# Drawing disabilities: Representations of intellectual developmental disability in the body

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## Aims of research:

To identify and characterize visual representations that reflect stigma towards intellectual developmental disability (with relation to gender)

## Theoretical field:

Stigma, Stereotypes, intellectual disabilities, and gender differences

**Strategy:** Arts based qualitative phenomenological research methods so as to capture the participant's projected internalized representations of people with disabilities, but also self explanations of their image

**Methods:** 52 students were asked to draw a man and a woman with moderate intellectual disability. They were then asked to provide a (recorded) narrative, explaining the image on the level of content, symbols and composition

**The analyses of the data** was of 104 images ( half men and half women) together with their explanatory texts

The research was passed by the department ethical committee

## Eyes:



"The eyes are big with small pupils, as if they are cut off, from the external world, he's in his thoughts, he's not connected "

## Deformation of arms and legs (limbs)



"His hands are thrown to the sides, as if he doesn't know what to do with them"--- "when you say someone has an intellectual disability you imagine someone with a distorted body "

## A Proper Posture

"They are always disproportionate leaning to one side"



## Gender differences:

Theme; lack of masculine symbols for men, such as low levels of facial hair, but extreme femininity in women such as large breasts and long hair and pink clothes



Theme; Lack of mobility and limited movement in public spaces



(The word "LOVE" in Hebrew).

## Findings:

### A weakened body (rather than mind)

"I drew him sitting on a chair and not standing, to show he needs support"



### Hair and head:

A "dumb blonde" construction of femininity



Head and hair as an enlarged focus, rather than the body Hair was defined as wild and unbrushed, and heads were disproportionately large for the body.



"She has a larger head and mouth than her body, she isn't in proportion"

"Her hair is wild, un-brushed"

### Mouth:



"I drew dribble, he's dribbling, it's part of his problem, controlling his mouth, something wrong with his mouth."

**Conclusions:** The perceptions of the students were predominantly negative, although the literature points to less stigma in educated populations such as the students. Most interestingly, although the stigma is intellectual, it was translated to physical attributes of a fat and distorted body. The stigma was thus generalized from the mind to the body.

**Methodological conclusions:** This indirect but embodied method of drawing, enabled stigmas to be shown. the explanation of the image also enabled the participants to "meet" their own stigmas and on this level may have been transformative.

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