

Group: Amy, Kate
Carol, Jenn

September 24, 2002
Prepared by: Jennifer

Images of Disability Portfolio
Group Reflection
Film ~ *I Am Sam*

Film Title: *I Am Sam*

Viewed: September 21, 2002 9:30pm - Peery Hall Rm 220

Type of film: Drama, Fiction

The film *I Am Sam* tells the story of a man with mental retardation and autistic tendencies who is forced to defend his right to keep his seven-year-old daughter, Lucy. At the center of the controversy is whether Sam is mentally capable of caring for his daughter. As Sam is said to have the mental capacity of a seven-year-old, specifically the question is raised, "what happens when Lucy turns eight"?

Sam works at a low wage job at Starbucks. When he finds himself having to go to court to keep Lucy, he realizes that he does not have the money to pay for a good lawyer. Sam has a strong support group of friends, largely consisting of other people with different disabilities. Together this "team" finds Rita, a hostile and on edge attorney who initially refuses but then later takes Sam's case. Other characters that play a role in the film include Annie, a woman with a severe psychological disorder who lives nearby. She has helped raise and care for Lucy since infancy. Finally there is Lucy's foster mom who is conflicted by her own desire to keep Lucy, versus Lucy's clear need for her father Sam.

In this film there are several characters with exceptionalities, though the main focus is on Sam. In the group there was some difference of opinion on how individuals with exceptionalities are portrayed in the film. Katie believed that Sam was portrayed as

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interact

superhuman in his efforts to take care of his child. Carol then pointed out that Sam was portrayed more as ordinary. She noted that while Sam has problems keeping Lucy, it's a contrast to Rita (a fully-able person) who has even more problems with her son. The group for the most part gravitated to Carol's opinion, though Kate held firm.

Jenn didn't believe that devalued roles associated with people with disabilities were a part of the film. She argued that it seemed an effort was made in the film to avoid such negative images. Amy countered by saying that Rita's character does support devalued roles because in the beginning her reaction toward Sam falls in line with "object of dread".

The group also discussed at length how the movie *broke* devalued roles. Katie said that the movie contrasted "object of burden/charity" because he had friends, including others with disabilities that offered support voluntarily. Sam goes to buy shoes for Lucy, but got to the checkout counter and didn't have enough money to pay for them. The man at the counter did not just let Sam have them for free, as would be the case with an object of charity. Instead Jenn pointed out that Rita even said at one time in the film, "Sam, I'm afraid I've gotten more out of this than you have". It's the idea of reciprocal friendship.

When the question was posed as to whether Sam faced "great expectations", there was again differing of opinion. Carol said "yes" but Amy disagreed. Kate pointed out that Sam did face great expectations because he didn't realize that people with MR can take care of a child. The group agreed that Sam's positive contributions included being a good father and a friend. He had the inherent strengths of being a father, especially in contrast to Willy's father.

Kate noted that Sam possessed great self determination in moving closer to Lucy, getting a second job, bothering his boss for a raise. Jenn concurred that he was persistent. There was argument over whether or not Sam received full citizenship in light of his mental retardation. Jenn said that same received "no breaks", at all, even because of his MR. Katie said that Sam deserved Lucy because he was a good father, and regardless of his MR, however the court (which at times could be metaphor for society) did not agree. In terms of relationships, the group felt that this was a key to the movie. Reciprocity and a support system were central themes in *I Am Sam*. Sam's character has reciprocal relationships as he offered insight and friendship to Rita, and fulfilled the role of father to Lucy. Also, necessary to the eventual outcome of the movie were Sam's friends that helped him to find Rita and showed him support in his battle against the courts.

Excellent analysis

When the group discussed whether people would have a more positive attitude about people with exceptionalities after viewing this film, there was an overall consensus. Katie noted that what you get from the film is the understanding that the importance of people with exceptionalities is that they're people with abilities and that *all* of us have exceptionalities and *all* of us have problems.

This film pushes the envelope and announces that people with disabilities and exceptionalities are not as helpless as they are portrayed. Katie highlighted that as a culture we're anxious and impatient, and not as comfortable with people with disabilities. This was represented by certain characters in the movie such as Rita and the waitress. It's also represented by the psychologist who examines Sam is does not bother to break down the explanation of his rights in a manner that he can understand. Sam had the ability to understand and to respond. He often did so through connections to other things such as

songs. There was a mind at work, even though he had problems verbalizing it. The message that this sends is that we as a culture make no accommodations, that we help to limit people with disabilities entitled full citizenship.

In terms of our personal reaction to the film, we all enjoyed it immensely. It was an emotional, and thought provoking film. The acting was amazing. Because the majority of the actors were not people with disabilities, yet they represented people with disabilities, Jenn was concerned that the overall outcome would be one that mocks the disability culture. This seemed not to be the case. The movie tackled serious issues with a serious approach. Furthermore while Sam had mental retardation, several different disabilities were represented. We would definitely recommend this film to other students.

Jenn

Carol

I need to see it /
don't D?