

Disability and the Media

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CDIS 5075 3.0 York University, Toronto, Canada July-August 2015

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[Beth Haller Website](#)

[Book Website](#)

Course Description

This course focuses on issues related to disability and mass media representations, including news, entertainment TV/film, advertising, imagery, social media, and the Internet. It explores the relationship between critical disability studies and media studies and the huge array of media representations of disability. The course will use textual analysis methodology as a way for students to research, analyze and write about the meaning of mediated disability representation in North American culture.

Course Materials

Haller, B. (2010). *Representing Disability in an Ableist world: Essays on Mass Media*. Louisville, Ky.: Advocado Press.

McKee, A. (2003). *Textual analysis, A Beginner's Guide*. (This book is about methodology, which students will read to guide their analysis for the final paper, which is a textual analysis. They should have it read before they begin their final research paper.)

Canadian Association of Broadcasters. (2005). [*The Presence, Portrayal and Participation of Persons with Disabilities on Television Programming*](#).

Center for Integration & Inclusion in Journalism. (2002). [*Newswatch: Covering the disability community*](#).

The Structure of the Course

This intensive summer course will meet for 3-hour evening sessions over the course of 2 ½ weeks. The final research paper won't be due until the end of the summer session.

SOME GENERAL POLICIES

Accessibility, Accommodations, Abilities

If you have specific accommodations you need as a person with a disability, please let me know as soon as possible so I can provide those. All students should let me know what I can do to maximize your learning potential, participation, and general access in this course. I am available to discuss this in person or via email.

Plagiarism, or the submission of work which you did not write, will get a zero for that assignment and may lead to formal charges of academic dishonesty which could result in an F in the course, depending on the extent of plagiarism. It is the sole responsibility of each student to ensure that your work is honest and is not plagiarized. All students are required to read the full [York policy on academic integrity](#) and also to complete the tutorial about how to respect these procedures.

Academic writing

All assignments must be typed and have one consistent citation style (APA, MLA, Chicago). Proper composition, spelling, grammar and organization are extremely important in graduate school and this will be reflected in the grading of your assignments. Be sure to paginate your assignments. All assignments must be properly documented, include a bibliography and have proper citation form.

Grading criteria for written assignments and course in general will come from the [Graduate Grading System of York University](#).

Assignments

- Class participation and readings presentations (30 percent)
- Disability Blog/Social Media analysis paper/presentation (20 percent)
- Media Analysis Paper on an Entertainment Program or Disability Issue Proposal (15 percent)
- Media Analysis Paper on an Entertainment Program or Disability Issue (35 percent)

Class participation and reading presentations (30 percent)

A rewarding aspect of graduate study is the opportunity for colleagues (faculty and students) to interact, learn from each other and, sometimes, to produce new knowledge. Aside from helping me to get to know you as a colleague, your class participation will help me evaluate your analytical skills, your preparation for each class, and your ability to integrate concepts we discuss into your understanding and analysis of disability and media issues.

Because of the intensive nature of this course, I will put you in groups to give presentations about the readings that will include your group's questions and commentary. You will also be expected to ask questions or comment on the presentations of your classmates.

Try to engage with the readings in a critically constructive way. Think about the ways you can extend the ideas or issues raised by an author(s) by linking them to the lived experience of disability, to the media texts, other CDS readings and your final research project.

Disability Blog/Social Media analysis presentations (20 percent)

Individuals will make presentations about disability blogs and social media pages. I will give you a list of blogs/social media sites to select from. Each student will write short profiles about specific 2 blog sites and 1 FB page (about 500 words total). I will provide a sign-up sheet for the blogs and social media sites that will be available for analysis.

Read several articles from this [special issue of DSQ on Disability Blogging](#), and incorporate them into your papers and presentations.

What the presentations should include:

- Explain what model(s) or perspectives on disability the blog/social media post appears to operate under.
- What seems to be the blogger's and disability organization's perspective toward disability, toward people with disabilities? How do you know?
- Be sure to support your argument with specific references to the blogs/tweets/FB wall posts and the date of entries.
- Who is the site's intended audience? Who are they seeking to reach?
- Based on the blogger bio/organizational profile, what are their backgrounds and how does that seem to influence the blog/social media content?
- What are your reactions and reflections on the blogs/social media sites?.
- How do or don't the blog/social media posts fit the disability models discussed?
- How do they reflect the perspectives in the DSQ essays about disability blogging?
- Discuss the larger societal impact of the blogs/social media sites.
- The presentations can include a short Powerpoint with screen grabs from each blog/social media site discussed, or I will project each blog FB page as you discuss them.

Blog choices

- [A Typical Son](#)
- [Autistic Hoya](#)
- [Bad Cripple blog](#)
- [Disability News Canada](#)
- [Get Mobilized!](#)
- [Glenda Watson Hyatt](#)
- [Inky Ed](#)
- [JJ's List](#)
- [Just Stimming](#)
- [Left Brain/Right Brain](#)
- [Life After Paralysis](#)
- [Nick's Crusade](#)
- [Ouch! \(BBC Disability Blog\)](#)
- [Planet of the Blind blog](#)
- [Powerchair Diaries](#)
- [Rolling Around in My Head](#)
- [Square 8](#)
- [That Crazy Crippled Chick](#)
- [Verve, Mobility Resource blog](#)
- [Words I Wheel By](#)

Facebook pages

- [Accessible Media Inc.](#)
- [Autistic Self Advocacy Network](#)
- [Disability Alliance BC](#)
- [Centre for Leadership in Disability Leadership-in-Disability/256231957394](#)

- [Citizens with Disabilities Ontario \(CWDO\)](#)
- [Council of Canadians with Disabilities \(CCD\)](#)
- [Deaf News Today](#)
- [Disability Law in the News \(International\)](#)
- [The Disability Foundation \(Vancouver, BC\)](#)
- [Disability Scoop](#)
- [Down syndrome in arts and media](#)
- [International Paralympic Committee](#)
- [National ADAPT \(USA\)](#)
- [National Disability Rights Network \(USA\)](#)
- [New Mobility magazine](#)
- [Tangled Art + Disability](#)
- [World Institute on Disability](#)
- [Yo! Disabled and Proud](#)

Final Project: Media Analysis Paper on a News Topic or Entertainment Representation of Disability: Proposal (15 percent) & Final paper (35 percent)

- Select your topic/text for analysis, i.e. a qualitative content analysis/textual analysis of major Canadian newspapers' coverage of a disability issue or a qualitative content analysis/textual analysis of a film/TV show listed below. (These entertainment representations are the only choices for a very specific reason, so if you don't want to do your paper on one of these, you should do a news analysis.)
- Your proposal should be about 500 words and can be used as the introduction in your final paper. It should discuss the significance of topic, i.e. how these media representations are important in portraying disability North American culture and it should include the beginning of a theme list, i.e. what media models or narrative themes or disability stereotypes (both positive and negative) might be found in the media text(s). The proposal is due by email 3 weeks after the first class.
- Go to the [Media & Disability Bibliography](#) for a bibliography of research about media and disability and do a search in the Academic Search engine, Ebsco. Write a literature review about all the research relevant to the topic.
- Research the topic in the disability media, such as [Abilities magazine](#), [New Mobility magazine](#), [The Ragged Edge archives](#), disability organization Web sites [Canadian Centre on Disability Studies](#), [ADAPT](#), etc., disability blogs/social media sites, etc. See if you can find reaction from the disability group represented about their reactions to the news topics or film/TV program text.
- Apply the McKee book methodology for your paper. The general question your paper should answer is: How is the disabled person represented in the film or TV program? or How is the disability topic represented in Canadian news media?
- Look at the general cultural themes McKee discusses (pp. 102-105) and see if you can come up with disability-related themes you will be looking for in the text. The Models of Disability and the Media Models of Disability Representation can help you evaluate the representations of disability in the text or news coverage.
- Research the specific disability issue in the news or the specific disability portrayed in the film or TV show so you can assess the representation presented.
- The final paper should include:
 1. An introduction to the text or news topic you are analyzing and why it is important
 2. The literature review
 3. Your methods, i.e. how you developed the list of themes you are looking for in the text

4. Your findings
 5. Your conclusions about how the film/TV program or news coverage represents disability topics or people with disabilities
 6. A complete reference list in a proper academic reference style (The final paper should have at least 15 references).
- Your paper will be evaluated on the quality of your writing, the organization of your paper, and your ability to integrate analytical concepts from critical disability studies literature into your analysis.

Paper Length

At least 2000 words, including the 500 words from the proposal/introduction.

- The proposal is due by email 3 weeks after the first class.
- Final paper due by email: August 21

Submit 500-word proposal for final papers/projects in class 8 (July 20).

- Films & TV program choices for the final film/TV project (All have been checked for their availability on iTunes or Canadian Netflix.) Note: No more than 2 students per film or TV show. DO NOT work on the final research paper with another student.

Films

- “Adam” (feature film about a man on the autism spectrum) iTunes: \$19.99 to buy & \$4.99 to rent.
- “Girlfriend” (independent film about a man with Down syndrome who pursues a nondisabled single mother) Rent for \$2.99
- “Monica & David” (documentary about a married couple with Down syndrome) on Netflix; iTunes: \$9.99 to buy & \$4.99 to rent.
- “My Left Foot” (feature film/biopic about Irish author with CP Christy Brown) iTunes: \$9.99 to buy.
- “The Sessions” (feature film/biopic about American writer Mark O’Brien who lived in an iron lung) (For this analysis, also watch the documentary about him, Breathing Lessons) on Netflix; iTunes: \$24.99 to buy & \$4.99 to rent.
- “The Station Agent” \$9.99 (independent film about man who is a little person) on Netflix; \$4.99 to rent.
- “Temple Grandin” (biopic on HBO about the autistic animal science professor and author) \$24.99 to buy & \$4.99 to rent.
- “Wretches & Jabberers” (Documentary about two autistic men traveling the world as advocates.) iTunes: \$17.99.

TV shows (You will need to purchase at least 4 episodes for your paper).

- “American Horror Story: Freak Show,” (which had multiple disabled characters for its circus-themed season.)
- “American Horror Story: Coven,” (which had a main character with Down syndrome in its witch school-themed season.)
- “American Horror Story: Asylum,” (in which the characters are living in a psychiatric hospital in the 1950s)
- “Glee” (fictional TV show about a high school show choir that has a member who is a wheelchair user. The show added a cheerleader character with Down syndrome in season 2. Please select episodes that focus on the Artie character or the Becky character.) Season 1 on

Netflix; \$3.49 per episode on iTunes.

- “The Little Couple” (reality show about a newly married couple who are little people) \$1.99-\$2.99 per episode on iTunes.
- “Little People, Big World” (reality show about parents who are little people and have 4 kids, one of whom is also a little person) \$1.99 per episode on iTunes.
- [“My Gimpy Life”](#) (all episodes free on YouTube) (Web show created and starring an actress who uses a wheelchair)
- [“Riding Shotgun with Zach Anner”](#) (all episodes free on YouTube) (Web travel reality show from a man with cerebral palsy)
- “Switched at Birth” (fictional TV show about two teens switched at birth, one of whom is deaf and part of the Deaf community) \$2.99-\$3.49 per episode on iTunes.

Course Schedule & Readings

I will give you pdf's for most of the articles not available online. Also, we may not have time to discuss all the readings in each week's Discussion area, but they are meant to give you different perspectives on Disability and Mass Media, and a number of them should be integrated into your papers for the course.

We will watch all the screenings in class.

July 6: Stigma, representation and models of disability

Readings:

- Goffman, E., (2006). Stigma selections, *The Disability Studies Reader*. London: Routledge
- Ableism definition from ABC-CLIO Companion to the Disability Rights Movement (pdf).
- Haller, Beth. "[Media models of disability representation](#)"
- Models of disability from [Michigan Disability Rights Coalition](#)
- Haller, B. (2000). If They Limp, They Lead? News Representations and the Hierarchy of Disability Images. *Handbook of Communication and People with Disabilities* by Dawn Braithwaite and Teri Thompson (editors). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum. (pdf)
- Haller, B., (2000, Jan./Feb.). [False positive: The Supercrip image kicks real issues off the media radar screen](#), *The Ragged Edge*.
- Jones, C. (2013). [Interview with Ray Cohen, Founder of the Canadian Abilities Foundation](#). *Canadian Journal of Disability Studies*

Screenings:

- "Shameless: The Art of Disability" (DVD)
- Autistic teen's No Pity documentary: online at the [PBS Website](#)

July 7: The power of media to frame disability, inspiration porn & emerging media forms

Readings:

- Haller, B. (2010). Chapter 1. The changing landscape of disability "news": Blogging and social media lead to more diverse sources of information.
- Dobbs, J. (2009, September). [Why does Facebook matter?](#) *New Mobility*.
- Volkman, M. (2009, Sept.). [Trading anonymity for advocacy](#). *New Mobility*. (at the bottom of this link)
- Krotoski, A. (2011, March 5). [What effect has the internet had on disability?](#) *The Guardian*.
- Greensmith, C. (2012). [Pathologizing Indigeneity in the Caledonia "Crisis."](#) *Canadian Journal of Disability Studies*.
- Young, S. (2012, July 2). [We're not here for your inspiration](#). ABC Ramp Up
- Smith, S. E. (2012, August 30). [Disabled people are not your inspiration](#). Xojane.

Screening:

- Stella Young video, "[Inspiration porn and the objectification of disability.](#)"
- "No bigger than a minute" (DVD)

July 8: Content and textual analysis, the news and disability

In-class activity: We'll do a search of Canadian news websites to look at the kinds of disability topics they cover.

Readings:

- Haller, B. (2010). Chapter 2. Researching media images of disability: How content analysis provides a method for assessment
- Haller, B. (2010). Chapter 3. Changing disability terminology in the news.
- Devotta, K., Wilton, R. & Yiannakoulis, N. (2013). Representations of disability in the Canadian news media: a decade of change. *Disability and Rehabilitation*, 35(22): 1859- 1868. (pdf)
- *AP stylebook* disability entry (pdf)
- Canadian Press Stylebook guidelines for inclusive language
- Lunsford, S. (2005). Seeking a Rhetoric of the Rhetoric of Dis/abilities. *Rhetoric Review*, 24(3), 330-333. (pdf)
- Haller, B., Rioux, M., Dinca-Panaitescu, M., Laing, L., Vostermans, J., Hearn, P. (2012). [The Place of News Media Analysis within Canadian Disability Studies](#). *Canadian Journal of Disability Studies*.
- Free: Guidelines of How to Write and Report about People with Disabilities, 8th edition, from [Research and Training Center on Independent Living](#), University of Kansas
- [“Unhandicapping Our Language”](#)

Screenings:

- “Lives Worth Living”

July 9: Disability media, Accessible media

Readings:

- Haller, B. (2010). Chapter 6. Disability media tell their own stories.
- *Journal of Developmental Disabilities*. (2011). [Tying your own shoes. One film, four perspectives](#).
- Kama, A. (2004). Supercrips versus the pitiful handicapped: Reception of disabling images by disabled audience members. *Communications*, 29, pp. 447-466. (pdf)
- Canadian Radio-TV Telecommunications Commission. (2014). [TV access for people with hearing impairments: closed captioning](#).
- Murphy, S. K. (2013, March 11). [Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act Summary and Actions](#). 3 Play Media blog
- Stelter, B. (2010, June 21). [On Web video, captions are coming slowly](#). NY Times

Screenings:

- [“Tying your own shoes”](#)
- [“Sisters of Invention: As Real As It Gets”](#) documentary
- “The Specials” (DVD)

July 13: Imagery

Readings:

- Frazee, C. (2010). Introduction. *Invisible No More: A Photographic Chronicle of the Lives of People with Intellectual Disabilities*. NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Hahn, H. (1988). Can disability be beautiful? *Social Policy*, 18:3, pp. 26-32. (pdf)
- Hevey, D. (2006). The enfreakment of photography. *The Disability Studies Reader*. London: Routledge. (pdf)
- Garland-Thomson, R. (2001). Seeing the Disabled: Visual rhetorics of disability in popular photography. *The New Disability History*. NY: NYU Press. (pdf)
- Pietropaolo, V. (2010). [*Invisible No More: A Photographic Chronicle of the Lives of People with Intellectual Disabilities*](#). NJ: Rutgers University Press. (No purchase needed for students. I will bring a copy that we can look at and discuss the images as a group.)
- Markotić, N. (2012). [Play the Facts and the Truth: Disability in Documentary Film](#). *Canadian Journal of Disability Studies*.

Screening:

- “Music by Prudence” (DVD)
- “Citizen Sam” ([On NFB website](#))

July 14: Advertising

Readings:

- Haller, B. (2010). Chapter 10. Advertising boldly moves disability images forward.
- Hahn, H. (1987, March). Advertising the acceptable employable image: Disability and capitalism. *Policy Studies Journal*, pp. 551-570. (pdf)
- “Liberty Mutual’s responsibility revolution” available on the [Advertising & Disability website](#)
- Walters, T. & Griffis, L. (n.d.) Imagery, Individual Identity And Independent Living Addressing Oppression through Positive Imagery. Independent Living Canada.
- Phillips, C. (2001). Re-Imagining the (Dis)Able Body. *Journal of Medical Humanities*, Vol. 21, No. 3. (pdf)
- Inclusion Network. (n.d.). [Pride Against Prejudice: Disability Awareness Campaign](#) Begins November 5th. [Press release].
- Ladau, E. (2013). [Just one of the guys – A critique of the Guinness wheelchair basketball commercial](#). Words I Wheel By blog.

Screenings:

- [Cingular Ad with Dan Keplinger](#)
- [Nuveen ad with Christopher Reeve](#)
- [Liberty Mutual ad with Teal Sherer](#)
- [Bob’s House – Pepsi Super Bowl ad](#)
- [Cherie’s Verse](#)
- [Guinness beer ad](#)
- [Wells Fargo bank, “Learning Sign Language,”](#)
- [Meet South Africa tourism](#)
- [Emily’s OZ](#)
- [The Making of Emily’s OZ](#)

July 15: Neurodiversity/autistic rights/mad pride/disability arts

Readings:

- Haller, B. (2010). Chapter 5. Autism and inclusive education in the news media: A case study.
- Kang, S. (2012). Coverage of autism spectrum disorder in the U.S. television news: an analysis of framing. *Disability & Society*, 28:2, pp. 245-259. (pdf)
- Solomon, A. (2008, May 25). [The Autism Rights Movement](#), *New York magazine*
- Ne’eman, A. (2010). [The Future \(and the Past\) of Autism Advocacy, Or Why the ASA’s Magazine, The Advocate, Wouldn’t Publish This Piece](#), *DSQ*
- Murray, S. (2007). Hollywood and the fascination with autism. *Autism and Representation*, Mark Osteen, (Ed.) NY: Routledge. (pdf)
- Klar, E. (2013). [Decolonizing “autism acceptance.”](#)
- Johnson, D. (2008). Managing Mr. Monk: Control and the Politics of Madness. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, Vol. 25, No. 1, pp. 28-41. (pdf)
- Kelly, C. (2013). [Towards renewed descriptions of Canadian disability movements: Disability activism outside of the non-profit sector](#). *Canadian Journal of Disability Studies*.

Browse:

- [Mad Pride Toronto 2015](#)
- [Mind Freedom International](#)
- [Autistic Self-Advocacy Network](#)
- [WrongPlanet.net](#)
- [Human Rights Watch, Disability Rights](#)

Screening:

- “Autism The Musical;” (DVD.); clips from “Rain Man” (1988) (online)
- [Video about use of the autistic consultant on TV show, “The Bridge.”](#)

July 16: Controversies over film representations of disability

Readings:

- Haller, B. (2010). Chapter 9. Media advocacy and films: The “Million Dollar Baby” effect.
- Black, R. S., & Pretes, L. (2007). Victims and victors: Representation of physical disability on the silver screen. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, 32(1), 66-83. (pdf)
- Dolmage, J. & DeGenaro, W. (2005, Spring). [‘I Cannot Be Like This Frankie’: Disability, Social Class, and Gender in Million Dollar Baby](#), *DSQ*.
- DSQ, (2005, Summer). [Million Dollar Baby special section](#).
- How to read a film, [University of Washington Website](#)

Screenings:

- [“Code of the Freaks,”](#)
- [\(Hospital Scene\)](#) - “Million Dollar Baby”
- [Maggie’s Final Request](#) – “Million Dollar Baby,”
- [Review of “Million Dollar Baby” Movie](#) by Disabled People video

July 20: Entertainment TV and humor

Assignment: Bring me your 500-word final project proposal on this date. (For the film/TV analysis, its first-come, first served on selecting the film or show).

Readings:

- Haller & Becker. (2014). [Stepping backwards with disability humor? The case of NY Gov. David Paterson's representation on 'Saturday Night Live.'](#) *DSQ*.
- Haller, B. (2010). Chapter 8. The New Phase of Disability Humor on TV.
- Bauer, P. (2005, Dec. 11) [What's so funny about disability?](#) *NY Times*.
- LeBesco, K. ["There's Something About Disabled People: The Contradictions of Freakery in the Films of the Farrelly Brothers."](#) *DSQ*, Fall 2004
- Reid-Hresko, J. & Reid, K. (2005, Fall). [Deconstructing Disability: Three Episodes of South Park.](#) *DSQ*.
- Shannon, J. (2005, Nov.) [Krazy Kripples: South Park and disability.](#) *New Mobility*.
- Eagleson, H. (2014, Nov. 11). [Hollywood's 'inspiration porn' is terrible but here's how we can fix it.](#) TakePart.

Screenings:

- "South Park" (DVD)
- [Maysoon Zayid, TEDX](#)
- [Lost Voice Guy comedian](#)
- [Mat Fraser, actor of "American Horror Story," discusses freaks](#)

July 21: Student presentations on Disability Blogs/Social Media

July 22: Individual meetings with students

Meetings about their final research paper ideas. The final research paper will be sent by email at the end of this summer session.