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Literature Review: Journalism and Disability from a Canadian Perspective

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Abstract

Using a dual lens of disability theory and journalism, this literature review compacts a wide range of sources to investigate the reasons for the nature of journalistic representations of disability in Canadian media, and the subsequent interpretations of these by disability scholars and advocates. Through five key themes – attitudes, representation, language, framing, and a broader category of gate-keeping, agenda setting and editorial controls -- this review recognizes longstanding and persisting gaps between journalists' understanding of disability and disability advocates' understanding of journalism, as well as a jarring lack of Canadian research to these ends. Encouraging a shift from dialogue *about* disability and journalism to a dialogue *between* players in both fields, this paper calls for further Canadian-based research at a time when journalistic stories are shaped by more than journalists' attitudes towards disability, and disability representation exists stereotypically or out of synch with journalistic principles of fairness and accuracy.

Key words

Journalism, disability, news, radio, Canadian media, media representations, media framing, communication, disability stereotypes, attitudes toward disability.

Literature Review: Journalism and Disability from a Canadian Perspective

Journalists are people who tell stories about other people. Their ideas and interpretations of events help shape the news, and the stories they convey through various media go on to affect people's understandings of one another and the social issues penetrating the communities in which we live. Canadians rely on these stories for information as people with disabilities work towards social justice and equal participation in their communities (Boyer, 1988, p.3).

Canadian journalists' stories about disability are laced with themes that stem from their own perspectives, the attitudes of the people who surround them, varying understandings of language, conflicting representations of people with disabilities and themselves, as well as politics of the newsroom involving framing, agenda setting, and gate-keeping. As American media and disability scholar Beth Haller writes "media content is shaped by dominant societal beliefs about disability that come from the power of the dominant able-bodied culture, which defines…disability" (2010, p. iii).

The literature selected for this review showcases long lasting imbalances in the way journalists and disability allies, who have a growing interest in media advocacy, understand the motives behind each other's respective work (Haller, 2010, p. vii, 52; Boyer, 1988, p. 39). This review does not focus on actual representations of disability in the media, but instead looks for secondary sources that comment on such representations. In its attempt to begin to make sense of misunderstandings between groups, this literature review queries the motives behind journalistic coverage of disability and the ways in which various power structures create a communication gap between journalists and disability advocates. This literature review also seeks to understand and describe the constraints placed upon journalists in covering disability and the ways in which journalists negotiate these constraints.

My search for information about journalistic representation of disability began with a disciplined search constrained to academic databases and scholarly journals produced in North America. This literature review relies primarily on journal articles from publications that fall under the umbrella of journalism and communication, such as *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator* and *Canadian Journal of Communication*. The other primary sources that inform this review are the writings published in major disability studies publications, such as *Disability & Society*, among others. While some qualitative work in the area of disability and journalism has been done, content analysis remains the dominant form of research as reflected in these sources.

However, because my focus is on disability representation in Canada, perhaps the most useful sources were government reports and organization reports that surveyed the responses of journalists to disability coverage in Canada. These include reports from groups mandated to represent the media such as The Canadian Association of Broadcasters (CAB), and government watchdogs such as the Canadian Radio-television Telecommunications Commission (CRTC).The Canadian Newspaper Association (CAN), for example, tells us Canada boasts 97 general interest, paid circulation newspapers. *The Toronto Star* is the largest with a weekday circulation of more than 300 thousand (CNA). And, according to CRTC listings, Canada is also home to 106 community radio stations, 43 campus radio stations, and the nationwide Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC). Further, the CRTC also lists 30 pay-TV licenses across Canada. Despite this vast media landscape, there is a general absence of literature specifically pertaining to journalism and disability as it emerges in Canada other than that found in such reports.

However, two notable Canadian studies laid the foundations for this literature review. First, a landmark study from 1988 by the Canadian House of Commons titled “No News is Bad News” found “unevenness” and “imbalance” in the relationship between journalism and

disability in this country (Boyer, 1988, p.1). Although it is now dated, this expansive study is useful for Canadian reference. It combined content analysis of Canadian newspapers with interviews with journalists and people with disabilities about their perceptions of news coverage and portrayals of disability, and dealt with several of the themes listed in this literature review, among others (Boyer, 1988, p. 2, 6). Second, in January 2004, the CAB attempted to address the "presence, portrayal and participation of persons with disabilities" in television upon the release of Public Notice 2004-2 (CAB, 2005). The Association's large-scale consultations and forums included disability NGOs, broadcasters, performers and persons with disabilities. Among a list of other points, the organization's research concluded that the presence of persons with disabilities is "extremely low" both on-screen and behind the scenes, and the existing representations are often negative and stereotypical, thus also inaccurate and unfair (CAB, 2005, p. 3, 13, 29). The CAB final report, "Diversity in Broadcasting: Persons with Disabilities" called for better communication between people with disabilities and broadcasters (CAB, 2005, p. 27-29).

Aside from these sources, very few others addressed the issue of journalistic media coverage of disability in Canada, and I found myself broadening my search to access literature that would address the discrepancies between journalists' attitudes towards disability and the representation of disability in Canadian media. Conversations with Beth Haller, whose name repeatedly popped up in my searching, as she is the leading expert on disability representation in the media, led me to books published by people (mainly Americans) with an interest in the topic such as Joe Shapiro and John Hockenberry. Many of these books are products of the Advocado Press. I also read books about disability by Canadian journalists such as Ian Brown and Barbara Turnbull, and later turned to books by Canadian disability scholars such as Tanya Titchkosky.

Haller also introduced me to John Clogston, an American researcher of news media representation of disability. In the late 1980s and early 1990s he laid the foundation for much of

her work and completed the most comprehensive survey or journalists' attitudes towards disability to date until his death in 1995. His works – some published, some unpublished – arrived on my doorstep from Haller's office by airmail. Another foundational report about Canadian media came to my attention second-hand: apparently, in the 1980s, the Government of Canada published something like the literature review I hoped to write. Beth Haller led me to Ottawa's 1988 report of the standing committee on the status of disabled persons. This report remains highly unsearchable online, but one copy happened to have a dusty home high in the stacks of one of York University's libraries, only retrievable by librarians with access to reference items.

Overall, my strict search snowballed into a collection of miscellaneous sources, all highly telling of why media representations of disability in Canada appear as they do. Retrospectively, this progression is predicable as journalism is not confined to the academic sphere and emerges at various cultural locations. My intention to survey Canadian literature on this topic was met with a small body of work, and many absences of information. Therefore the most recent literature on this topic comes mainly from the United States and the United Kingdom. None of the writings, no matter their origin, include analysis of new media such as blogs and tablet applications simply because these were not published at the time of writing. The Canadian sources used in this literature review, then, are highly informative but generally outdated. These are, unfortunately, the only sources currently in existence. That said, media monitoring research from Disability Rights Promotion International (DRPI) about Canadian news sources is pending. Beth Haller writes about early results from this research in this very issue of *The Canadian Journal of Disability Studies*.

Overall, the key themes emerging from the sources surveyed here are: attitude, representation, language, framing, gatekeeping and communication, which are the themes that

divide this paper. Unlike a typical literature search that may guide a researcher through something of a scholarly conversation, my sources seemed to be asserting ideas met with little response from other sources. And because these themes tend to overlap, I have tried to separate them in this review for clarity. By building salient categories to divide the overarching messages described by the authors of my sources, it is my intention to highlight how journalistic representation of disability emerges as a layered concept, riddled with complications in need of untangling and rethinking.

Attitudes

For this category, I will examine one source that comments on Canadian research on disability, attitude, and journalism, before I expand my review to consider the issue more broadly, outside of the country and over time. Beginning with the theme of attitudinal representation, research about attitudes towards people with disabilities dominates the sources chosen here. This research is generally based on operational scales of measurement developed as early as the 1950s that conceptualize attitude as a dichotomy; an understanding of an idea and a reaction to the idea (Clogston, 1991, p. 3, 21). This literature review generally adheres to this formal notion of attitude. In Canada, the 2004 Canadian Attitudes Survey affirmed that progress was made towards including people with disabilities in Canadian society, despite the ongoing presence of social barriers (Government of Canada, 2004). Also, in its 2005 report, the CAB argued the negative attitudes of Canadians towards people with disabilities perpetuated the idea "that persons with disabilities cannot perform in education or work at a level matching…the able-

bodied," making attitude a key barrier to participation in society (CAB, 2005, p. 5, 6, 19, 25, 29).[1]

In her writing, Haller points out that people's attitudes towards disability are shaped by journalistic narratives about disability rather than social contact with people with disabilities (Haller, 2000, p. 274; 2010, p. iv, 56 - 57). Arguably, then, the attitudes of journalists towards people with disabilities hold influence over public perception and public attitudes (Auslander and Gold, 1999, p. 1395; Haller, 2000; Turnbull, 1997; Shapiro et al., 1993) because their work influences "the climate of opinion within which policy affecting disabled persons will be made" (Boyer, 1988, p.3).

Perhaps the most prominent research about journalists' attitudes towards disability comes from Clogston. In 1991, Clogston completed a groundbreaking, large-scale survey investigation[i] into journalists' attitudes towards physical disabilities by surveying journalists. The results were divided between attitudinal variations he described as traditional[ii] and progressive.[iii] He discovered that newspaper journalists generally have progressive attitudes towards people with disabilities though these attitudes are not usually reflected in their published stories. Unsurprisingly, he found journalists' contact with people with disabilities, style guides, and professional work environments were more influential in shaping stories of disability than their own, personal views about disability (Clogston, 1991, p.45; Clogston, 1992).[iv]

Journalists, as communicators, are routinely expected to take a neutral stance in their attitudes as "the absence of value stands out as journalism's chief value" (Glasser and Marken p. 266, 2005). This neutrality suggests journalistic attitudes may not be telling of the ways in which disability is understood and translated to the public. Sociologist Harold Mendelsohn suggests a

[1] The National Disability Authority, in Ireland, confirms that attitudes towards disability are improving worldwide (Hannon, 2010, p.3).

link between journalism and the public: Mass communications affects the values and attitudes of people, and in turn, people's values and attitudes reflect mass communication (1964, p. 30, 32). Also, Mendelsohn argues mass communication is only one of several influences of social behaviour (1964, p. 33).

Disability and education researcher Douglas Biklen suggests journalism is less powerful in molding public opinion than people assume because "the media's public has proven remarkably resistant to domination" (1986, P. 46). Also, American journalist and author Joseph Shapiro maintains a similar stance, insisting that "journalists hold a mirror to society" as they tell stories (1989). If Shapiro is correct, then journalism's reflective approach reveals more about society's attitudes towards disability than journalists' attitudes (Biklen, 1986, p. 46). And, as Biklen notes, "the media may not be able easily to make a prejudiced person unprejudiced" meaning journalists working towards fair and accurate coverage of disability are not in a position to convince audiences that people with disabilities – generally understood to be a special interest group -- deserve this type of coverage. From this idea, it stands to reason that the reverse of this assertion is not reasonable either, so the necessity of this scholarship should be questioned if it suggests journalists producing media are a key explanation for societal discrimination against people with disabilities (46). So, although journalists' ideas shape the news, and news messages are the public's main information source about disability, it does not follow that journalists' attitudes may account for discriminatory representation and social abjection of people with disabilities (Biklen, 1986, p. 46; Haller, 2000, p. 274; 2010, p. iv, 56 – 57).

Indeed, the debate over whether or not journalism reflects public opinion or shapes public opinion – or both – is dizzying and inconclusive. However, as sure as there is no concrete definition of "news," there is no hard evidence or consistent findings to prove the mass media has any major effect on manipulating the attitudes of its audience (Auslander and Gold, 1999, p.

1397; Dahl, 1993, para. 10; Mendelsohn, 1964, p. 31-35; Boyer, 1988, p. 25). Lewis Anthony Dexter aptly points out that the argument that journalism influences the public's attitudes – or vice versa – is an insecure one:

> We find credit given to mass communicators for changing the course of history and we find attacks on mass communicators for failing to use their 'tremendous influence' as the critic would like, but very little effort to determine whether, taking into consideration the whole set of social circumstances, mass communications could be at most any more effective than the flea who sat on the elephant's back and chanted, 'how powerful am I!' (Dexter & White, p. 30, 1964)

Research on attitudes has been highly prevalent in commentary on disability and journalism outside of Canada and over time – now may be an opportune moment to begin building more scholarship on this issue from a Canadian perspective.

Representation

By representation, in this section, I refer to the issue of *how much* disability gets covered in new media and to a lesser degree, *by whom* (later sections will focus more on the "how" of this representation). Researchers suggest that journalists – especially journalists with disabilities working in sometimes unaccommodating newsrooms – unfairly shoulder much of the responsibility of representing others with disabilities through their work.

A contested belief exists that people with disabilities understand the world differently than non-disabled people (Smith in conversation with David Shapiro, 1994, p.7). For example, in 2005 researcher Brian J. Sweeny interviewed British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) journalist Peter White. White maintains that his disability allows him to probe for information more effectively than a non-disabled interviewer who might encounter retorts such as, "How dare you. You're not disabled" (2005, p.187). However, the argument that a journalist with a particular

disability has a broader, better understanding of disability in general than her or his non-disabled counterparts simply doesn't add up; no one has a fundamental understanding of *all* stories related to *every* disability (Boyer, 1988, p. 21). In addition, many journalists may not disclose hidden disabilities or even identify as having a disability, and consequently endure prejudice against their journalistic skill as they tell the stories of people with disabilities not matching their own.

Canadian researchers also point to a certain fear among audiences critical of journalists that people with disabilities are "sidelined" in newsrooms if their bylines do not appear in the paper or they lack "on-air presence" (Ross 2001, p. 432; CRTC). However, Clogston pin-points this misunderstanding when he describes newsrooms as organic workplaces. He says general knowledge, experience, and communication in the workplace is lateral, meaning that tasks are designed to meet certain situations (1991, p. 50). For example, a radio journalist with a disability who chases stories but whose voice does not get on the air is not considered less valuable than the radio show's host, who may not experience disability – each journalist's work has equal value in the newsroom because, journalistically, "on-air presence" is just as challenging as working off-air, even though audiences are not obviously exposed to her or his voice on the radio.

Clogston also explains that contact with co-workers with disabilities makes reporters more progressive, just as contact with people with disabilities can reduce prejudice (1991, p. 140; Hannon, 2010, p. 4). Shapiro echoes this point, arguing that politicians' personal connections to disability lead to policy change, therefore journalists' connection to disability may also lead to more progressive coverage (1994, para. 12; Hannon, 2010, p.8).

The Canadian government and organizational reports that emerged in this literature search commonly recommend two steps towards bridging the communication gap between journalists and people with disabilities: disability training in journalism schools and in the workplace, as well as increased recruitment of people with disabilities into both settings[v] (CAB, 2005, p. 23,

29). Disproportionately low levels of employment of people with disabilities in newsrooms are said to worsen employee's attitudes towards people with disabilities, especially as newsrooms have more influence on a story than each journalist's personal beliefs or attitudes (CAB, 2005, p.12, 24, 29; Clogston, 1991, p. 49, 142, 151; Boyer, 1988, p. 3, 76; CRTC, 2006). Meanwhile, authors, journalists and other researchers whose work appear in books and scholarly journals out of the U.S. advocate for more journalists to adopt a disability beat[vi] (Shapiro, 1994, para. 12, Boyer, 1988, p. 37). Of course, these researchers did not mention that nearly two decades ago in Canada, before they published the idea, freelance columnist Helen Henderson adopted a disability beat for the *Toronto Star* that is still running at the time of writing (Henderson, personal communication, 2009).

Additionally, the Canadian readings suggest the fast-paced nature of journalism and the environment in which the craft is conducted typically do not accommodate or include people with disabilities. Even journalistic promotions, such as advertisements for newscasts, stereotype journalists with a non-disabled physicality as they act out such motions as "stand-ups" on television (Edwards, 1992, p. 54). The CAB report notes that radio studios: "tend to be cramped in physical design and require a certain amount of redesign to accommodate wheelchairs" (CAB, 2005, p. 57). As Edwards writes, "There is a serious need to examine the number of newspaper, radio or television journalism jobs that actually require this stair-dashing, running individual, as opposed to the intellectually able editorial writer or editor" (1992, p. 54).

Although Edwards makes a valid point, he overlooks the fact that the whole spectrum of disability – including people with developmental disabilities – is underrepresented in journalism, and clearly absent from any of the literature's discourse on journalistic representations of disability overall, except through brief mentions. For example, the 2005 CAB report noted that the presence of people with disabilities was noticeably limited to people with visible disabilities

(and generally stereotypical), while any other disabilities were rarely featured on-screen in Canada (CAB, 2005, p. 14, 21). Most everyone else featured on screen was considered to be living without a disability (p. 21). To borrow from a broadcaster quoted in CAB's 2005 report, "No one would care if Ian Hanomansing took over from Peter Mansbridge. But someone with a disability? No way." (CAB, 2005, p. 13).

Additionally, in his book, Shapiro includes anecdotes about reporting on people with developmental disabilities throughout the text (Shapiro, 1994). Haller, too, notes the absence of research about journalism and developmental disability, and includes a chapter in her book about representations of individuals with Autism and, throughout, mentions shows such as *How's Your News?* and several others that feature people with developmental disabilities (2010, p. 87-115, 198-169). Journalists who do write about developmental disability in Canada and other parts of the world, including Ian Brown, Helen Henderson, and myself, have so far not been studied and did not appear in any of the works considered for this review.

Language

Another key debate in the field of disability and journalism surrounds language. Journalistic language can be described as the word choices and tone journalists put forward as they translate information into many types of journalistic stories. Using linguistic tools, journalists "make" disability, continuously portraying people with disabilities through cultural representations (2001, p. 202; Haller, 2010, p. 50; Haller, Dorries & Rahn, 2006, p. 61-62; Smith, 1991, p. 4-6; Dahl, 1993, para. 2; Boyer, 1988, p. 14, 56). The combined sources in this study offered popular examples of inappropriate language, repeatedly mentioning such phrases "confined to a wheelchair" or "wheelchair-bound" (CAB, 2005, p.6; Linton, 1998; Smith, 1991, p.5; Haller, 2010, p. 55; Haller, 2000, p. 284-285; Boyer, 1988, p. 14). Meanwhile, stigmatizing

and inappropriate metaphors were also mentioned, while disabling words such as "victim," "handicapped" or "special needs" were understood by media researchers to be "sloppy" syntactical shortcuts to take up less print space or airtime (CAB, 2005, p.6; Haller, Dorries & Rahn, 2006, p. 65; Boyer, 1988, p.7, 17; Auslander & Gold, 1999, p. 1396; Shapiro, 1994, para. 31; Henderson, personal communication, 2009; Boyer, 1988, p. 7, 14, 56). Widely acknowledged was the idea that labels such as "handicapped" work to "other" groups or individuals and often act as replacement names for a group, created by communicators outside of the group in question who lack accurate knowledge of this group (Haller et al., 2009, p. 69, 70, 72; Goffman, 1963; Dajani, 2001, p. 196; Boyer, 1988, p. 17). Generally, researchers call this effect "disabling language," referring to negative references about people with disabilities serving to perpetuate negative stereotypes, and how these references serve to orient the public perceptions of disability (CAB, 2005, p. 20; Auslander and Gold, 1999, p. 1395; Boyer, 1988, p. 14). Referring to representations of disability that include much more than language, Haller describes the media's choice of words as a product of ableism:

> I believe that the media narratives that ignore, devalue or misrepresent disability issues reflect abelism of society through those narratives. Media content is shaped by dominant societal beliefs about disability that comes from the power of the dominant able-bodied culture, which defines and classifies disability. When these dominant beliefs ignore or represent disabled people with stereotypes, this is known as "ableism". (Haller, p. iii, 2010)

However, journalists do not always knowingly employ disabling language. Rather, this discourse may be systemically woven into a story, or printed in a headline they do not choose (Clogston, 1991, p. 55; Hardin & Preston, 2001, p. 44). American disability advocate Marshall Mitchell recalls this kind of disabling language, or ableism, in an interview with *Quill* magazine: "There was a news story where the reporter said a 'wheelchair-bound' person fell out of their chair; well, they weren't bound in too well, were they? The reporter didn't even understand what

they had said" (Tallent, 2007, p. 34). Haller, Dorries, and Rahn maintain that journalistic language has always had the power to define disability groups, which is why the Disability Rights Movement in the U.S. has been pushing for appropriate language use for decades (Haller et al. p. 61, 2006; Haller, 2010, p. 49). Meanwhile, terminology surrounding people with disabilities tends to be used more positively in referring to individuals rather than groups, and it is believed that this positive text may build upon the dignity of individuals with disabilities (Auslander & Gold p. 1395, 1999; Boyer, 1988, p. 14).

While people with disabilities may claim certain identities, they are not necessarily given an opportunity to convey this identity between "syrupy messages infused with pity" (Valentine & Skelton, 2009, p. 63; Boyer, 1988, p. 6, 9) and "condescending and paternalistic" stories (Clogston, 1991). Yet in the restricted space of journalism, lengthy terminology such as "people with disabilities" may be unacceptable (Henderson, personal communication, 2009). Faced with limited space and time, journalists are far from reaching a norm of appropriate language to represent people with disabilities (Auslander & Gold, 1999, p. 1402; Prince, 2009, p.7).

Haller and her colleagues suggest journalists have the same individual "cultural fears" about disability as everyone else, and that these fears are deeply embedded in our North American society (Haller et al., 2006, p. 62). In the U.S., disability advocates worked with the news media to get appropriate disability related terminology in all the major journalism textbooks. Despite their efforts, many journalists may not regularly use their style books, relying on memorized or routine ways of reporting instead, and they continue to use inappropriate and incorrect disability terms such as "wheelchair-bound" (Smith, 1991, p. 7; Hardin & Preston, 2001, p. 47). Researchers Auslander and Gold say formal guidelines and stylebooks with correct terminology do not make a difference to journalists' word choices and the tone of their stories because "informal decisions rule" in newsrooms (1999, p. 1404). Yet, there are few suggestions

on how to realistically implement solutions for these problems aside from researcher Karen Finlon Dajani's observation that "personal judgment must serve as a guide and at the heart of that judgment is attitude" (1993, par. 46) and Haller's call for journalists to confront their own attitudes towards disability and employ more creativity in their storytelling (Haller, 1998, p. 26). In Canada, when disability is represented in the news media, we continue to find many examples of inappropriate "disabling language" and the CAB report, supported by most of its participants and scholars from across North America, calls for change.

Framing

In a journalistic context, framing is the way journalists build and focus news stories. A concept originally developed by sociologist Erving Goffman in 1974, framing can be loosely described as how news stories define and construct social issues to be understood by particular audiences (Davis & Kent, 2006, p.1, 2, 4). Journalists collaborate with other media professionals to present stories through different frames that will resonate more effectively with wider audiences based on newsgathering norms and personal experience (Haller, 2010, p. 50; Haller et al., 2006, p. 62; O'Malley, 2008, p. 21; Haller, 1999, p. 21, 56; Valenzeula, 1999, p. 42). U.K radio researcher Mary Pat O'Malley explains frame theory as referring to the expectations of the world, "based on prior experience, against new experiences" and their measurement and interpretation (2008, p. 21).

News media frames disability through images and words that are often stereotypical: the white man in a wheelchair or a person with schizophrenia as babbling and detached from reality, for example (Haller, 2000, p. 247; Ross, 2001, p. 423; Jones & Horwood, p. 5, 2001, Haller, 1999, p. 77; Schneider, 2003, p. 186; Boyer, 1988, p. 57). Framing occurs not only in the body of the text of the story, but also in the presentation of the story through means such as images,

headlines, and page layout in a newspaper or the story's position in a broadcast line-up[vii]. Canadian disability studies scholar Tanya Titchkosky examines disability through headline analysis because headlines "frame a topic for the imagined reader" and they make meaning for someone who is looking for something sensible and interesting (2007, p. 12; Boyer, 1988, p. 15, 57-58). "[Frames] *govern* our ways of knowing, taking interest in [something] and explaining it," Titchkosky writes (2007, p. 120). It is important to note, however, that because framing is a shared process among media makers, certain aspects of a journalist's story are not in her or his control. For example, headlines appearing over a story are often written by newsmakers other than the journalist who wrote the story. Yet for this reason, perhaps framing can represent cultural attitudes that are more diffuse, not located in the bias of one individual writer.

Some frames suggest news gatherers are not sensitive to the changing nature of disability as a movement, while others work to push disability rights forward (Boyer, 1988, p. 45). Collectively, Clogston and Haller have defined eight different types of frames found in journalism about disability. Clogston's categories of framing include: The social pathology model, which pegs people with disabilities as charity cases; the medical model, which links disability to illness and relies on medical information to tell a story; the "supercrip" model wherein people "overcome" disabilities to live regular lives; the "minority/civil rights model," which categorizes people with disabilities as part of a specific community who are working towards civil rights; and the cultural pluralism model, wherein people with disabilities are presented in the same way non-disabled people might be portrayed. Meanwhile, Haller has developed three more frames: the perspective that people with disabilities come with a social cost is called the business model; the legal model, which promotes more litigation accessibility for people with disabilities to bring their complaints to courts; and the consumer model, which considers people with disabilities as a new consumer base (Clogston, 1991; Clogston, 1994;

Haller, 2000, p. 275). As this literature review includes readings of journalists who write about disability, it is clear that a ninth frame is emerging: autobiographical writing, largely in long-form journalism, is becoming more widely produced as journalists write about their own experiences with disability, such as Canadians Ian Brown, John Hockenberry, Barbara Turnbull, and others.

Other researchers have identified different themes that are the result of framing. Karen Ross's research on radio journalism, in particular, says that some people with disabilities feel represented as "tragic but brave," "dependent and helpless," "bitter and twisted," and/or "sexless and isolated" (2001, p. 425). Other literature, points to concerns that people with disabilities are portrayed as a disability -- their humanity an afterthought (Ross, 1997, p. 672). Canadian writer Karen Finlon Dajani points to the "handicap role" as a trope often employed when someone is presented as having overcome disability (p. 198, 2001). Ross points out that: one person's attempt to fight a particular impairment becomes the benchmark story, implying that anyone else with that impairment should be battling it as well (Ross, 2001, p.425).

However, critics must consider that people with disabilities may subscribe to these frames – and that may not always be a bad thing. For example, Australian researcher Kate Ellis analyses current affairs programming leading up to the 2008 Paralympics Games. She notes that media critics may overlook athlete's own descriptions of themselves and, instead, accuse journalists of victimizing people with disabilities when writing about an athlete who genuinely believes she or he has overcome barriers and self-identifies as inspirational (2009, p. 28-33). Consequently, the supercrip frame is projected toward the audience as journalists report accurately on how people with disabilities sometimes feel about themselves. She suggests such critics redirect their focus: "Insights into the experience of impairment offered by athletes in these stories must be responded to by the social model otherwise it will outlive its relevance…and continue to position people with disabilities as a vulnerable group" (Ellis, 2009, p.33).

Further, there are triangular pulls that influence framing (Haller, 2000, p. 58; Boyer, 1988, p. 14). These pulls coincide with journalists' work as they are caught reporting on government legislation, working in the interest of people with disabilities and disability allies, and working for the corporations that employ them (p. 58). Haller says it is because of these conflicting directions that disability advocates are caught "trying to move forward a serious political agenda, and the media focuses on blind people who go bowling" (Haller, 2001, p.63). Yet there might be moments, particularly in a Canadian context, when the political interests of people with disabilities, can be furthered by a more sophisticated relationships with journalists. For example, scholar Catharine Frazee has appeared in several newspaper articles, as well as television programs and documentaries telling her story and exemplifying disability advocacy and, sometimes, describing disability studies. After all, journalism can be a positive tool for change, provided Canadians with disabilities recognize and negotiate some of the framing of disability in this country.

Gatekeeping, Agenda Setting and Editorial Controls

Canadian people with disabilities and disability-based organizations have complained that media coverage relevant to disability is sporadic or absent, and they have noted that this content is generally reliant on events rather than long-terms trends (CAB, 2005, p. 6; Boyer, 1988, p. 21). Therefore, it is important to examine the nature of journalism, and whether or not media coverage relevant to specific interests groups ought to be ongoing.

Social scientist Kurt Lewin suggests that news flows through channels that serve as "gates," through which information may or may not pass (Dexter & White, p. 160, 1964). While the gatekeeping process varies in each newsroom, typically the news begins with an idea from a journalist. An assignment editor must then approve the idea – literally telling a journalist whether

or not the idea is what she or he will be published -- before it travels through different "gates" within a newsroom towards final publication or broadcast. In other words, a journalistic story stems from one individual's idea, but journalists do not function independently from the powers within their news organizations; their stories pass through several filters that determine their news value before they are published or broadcast (Boyer, 1988, p. 28).

> News is created as a result of the symbiotic relationship among the editor, who decides that a story will be covered, the writer who is sent to dig up the necessary information, and the sources, which provide the necessary information. If an editor sends a reporter out to write a "hero" story and the sources, regardless of the actual situation, provide a "hero" approach to the story, then the writer is stuck. This journalist is in no position…to write anything but a "hero" story. (Boyer, 1988, p. 39)

Another factor in gatekeeping is news value. There is no absolute definition of "news value," but these words generally refer to editorial judgment of the relevance and worth of a news story for both the publication and the audience it serves. The Canadian House of Commons surmises that the "'news value' which working journalists assign to issues of concern to disabled persons is not always a fair reflection of their own rules, or the importance of the issues" (Boyer, 1988, p. 31).

Clogston connects the choosing of stories according to news value to sociological understandings of deviance and labeling theory, citing Goffman's idea of normative deviance as a mark of control over our sociological imaginations (Clogston, 1991, p. 11; Clogston, 1989, p. 3; Goffman, 1963, p. 130). Goffman argues that society tells the stigmatized "that they are 'different' to some degree, and that it would be foolish to deny this difference" (1963, p. 123). Yet, this deviance is necessary to grab the attention of journalists who are constantly harvesting fresh, new, *different* stories among an often already-established and diverse network of contacts. It is this difference that makes a story "sexy" and newsworthy and so it is that Canadian

journalists, allies and researchers must employ their sociological imaginations as they craft new stories (Henderson, personal communication, 2009; Haller, 1999, p. 5; Mills, 1959).

Further, agenda-setting can make messages ineffective for the disability community, as journalists repeatedly fall back on their own networks of non-disabled experts or elites (or one person with disabilities to speak for the disability community), giving a select few the authority to speak about disability while others are excluded from the conversation (Ross, 1997, p. 674; Haller, 1999, p. 3, 5). In the area of visual media, in particular, viewers have expressed concern that agenda-setting makes messages ineffective for the disability community, and non-disabled experts or elite sources already within the contact network a journalist has built for her/himself have a glorified role in discussions about disability (Ross, 1997, p. 674; Haller, 1999, p. 3, 5). However, Haller notes that many journalists are not aware of disability organizations and thus their attempts at "balanced" storytelling may weaken the "disability side" of the story because of the more powerful anti-accommodation messages from business public relations departments (Haller, personal communication, 2009).

Knowing that journalists communicate more than simple facts, news accounts cannot be entirely neutral or objective (Biklen, p. 46-47, 1986). Rather, the utmost fairness and accuracy are ideal: when journalists do not experience an event as it happens, but are left to tell the story afterwards based on "event-oriented" knowledge, the storytelling becomes difficult (Haller, 1999, p. 5; 2000, p. 60, 74). As an educator and theorist, Douglas Biklen points out that journalists cannot possibly gain expertise in each issue they encounter; official sources supply managed background information to journalists working on a deadline; and often there is neither time nor space to go in depth (1986, p. 47). These barriers present two sets of challenges for journalists: one intellectual and one structural (Glasser and Marken, 2005, p. 265). Therefore, it would seem as though the challenge for disability advocates and journalists is to encourage and produce fair

and accurate representations of disability, rather than rallying for ongoing coverage. As I will explore in greater depth below, Canadian disability groups might advocate for accuracy, collaborating positively with journalists.

Communication

The works surveyed for this literature review reveal a jarring communication gap between journalists and people with disabilities. This gap is tied to the performances of advocacy organizations and the performances of journalists (Boyer, 1988, p.1). Both groups tend to understand that for people with disabilities and disability allies, communication with journalists is often reliant on a spectrum of barriers including organization, the literacy required to contact journalists, and access to funding for spokespeople. Meanwhile, research shows Canadian journalists are unhappy with their relationships with people with disabilities, and complain that the material they receive from advocacy groups is not suitable for the news (Boyer, 1988, p. 37, 38).

So long as journalistic storytelling is tied to the liberal ideology of public forums, wherein speakers have a right to speak and be understood, journalists risk being charged with the task of "granting rhetoric" -- allowing particular voices into the public sphere -- by approving the concerns of disability allies who earn a journalist's attention (Lewiecki-Wilson, 2003, p. 156; Boyer, 1988, p. 2, 3). However, communicating entails an ability to convey ideas publicly in a manner that earns the attention of journalists, followed by an obligation to trust these journalists to seek out these stories and convey them fairly and accurately; a precarious paradox. In Haller's words, "people with disabilities must overcome a history in which they were either pitied or feared" and pass on their stories to journalists who, collectively, have scribed this murky history (2000, p. 277).

Journalism is not inherently emancipatory. People with disabilities are typically excluded from journalistic literature, particularly people with developmental disabilities and people with communication differences (O'Malley, 2008, p. 25-27). Gaps exist amid the research about opportunities for people with communication differences to participate in journalism, or conversations that degrade "listenability" -- meaning somebody on the radio is not clearly understood and thus the audience does not hear her or him with ease -- to make it to air, especially in radio. Researchers are unclear in asserting whether or not radio stands a chance at becoming an accessible medium[viii], and only the CAB report touches on the issue of barriers to media participation faced by people using assistive technologies for television consumption – whether it be journalists hoping to communicate, or people trying to interpret the news (O'Malley, 2008, p. 18, 22; O'Malley, 2009, p. 347; CAB, 2005, p. 56). Some researchers take the stance that the onus to communicate should fall on journalists; they ought to dig deeper to find stories that are overlooked and present traditional topics from a different perspective. So far there are no practical suggestions on how journalists ought to begin building relationships with people with disabilities, learning new methods of communication, and meeting their deadlines all at the same time (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 42).

Conversely, disability allies, in particular, lack a unified voice in reasonably communicating with journalists (Haller, Dorries & Rahn, 2006, p. 64). Shapiro calls the disability community's avoidance of the press "heresy," saying that "to grab the attention of the media is almost always the first step towards changing public policy" (para. 2, 3 1994; Hannon, 2010, p. 8). The message in the literature, simply, is twofold: stereotypical representations of disability in journalism are the result of disability allies neglecting to engage in interviews and conversations with journalists; Conversely, people with disabilities willing to interact with journalists struggle to reach them (Dajani, 2001). The literature suggests people with disabilities need to aggressively

pitch to journalists and make themselves more accessible to journalists rather than waiting for journalists to notice their stories because "a group must truly own a problem to push it into the public sphere" (Haller, 1999, p. 4, 22; 2000, p. 59; Shapiro, 1994, para. 36). In other words, for their own benefit, people wishing to push a disability-based message towards journalists must understand the process of journalism to better gauge what is newsworthy and what is not – accusatory discourse is not enough to gain journalists' attention.

Conclusion

When, in 1988, the Standing Committee on the Status of Disabled Persons reported on disability in the Canadian media, it did so under the assumption that journalists and people with disabilities struggle to find "common ground for dialogue" (Boyer, 1988, p. 3). Twenty-plus years later, even with public attitudes towards disability seemingly improving worldwide, this struggle still exists (Clogston, 1991, p. 48, 74; Hannon, 2010, p. 3, Government of Canada, 2004; Boyer, 1988, p. 3, 5). The research penned at that time produced messages aligned with certain themes, as outlined by this review, that highlight how and why disability appears in journalistic representations as it does. Unfortunately, a lack of updated research representative of Canadian perspectives on this topic exists. This gap in the literature is reflective of the gap between journalists and people with disabilities, and the representations of disability that stem from this space. This absence of seemingly acceptable disability representations in journalism are said to reinforce a "disability-denying" culture that persistently misrepresents or overlooks disability in the midst of a performance of democracy based on liberal ideologies of press freedom (Boyer, 1988, p. 46).

The most holistic Canadian research about disability in journalism is dated, such as the CAB Report at CRTC's findings. However, emerging research from DRPI, based on content

analysis, will likely add to the disability advocacy perspective on Canadian media (Biklen, 1986, p. 46; Shapiro 1994, para. 20). Looking forward, there is no prospective research specifically designed to assist journalists, disability advocates, and people with disabilities in effectively communicating with one another. Indeed, much of the literature excludes the opinions of journalists, who experience barriers in including disability in news coverage that may span beyond the scope of their attitudes towards disability (Clogston, 1991). Overall, research about disability and the media tends to review media representations on a quantitative, superficial level, which offers statistics on *what* sort of news Canadians may consume without asking *why* the news media represents disability as it does.

I remain optimistic, choosing to believe Haller's suggestion that, as journalism evolves, so can the research that follows it – and then that this research an influence journalistic ethics as well. The culture of journalism is changing rapidly in Canada, and journalism is emerging in a wider variety of forms than ever before: "No longer must people with disabilities put up with only the mainstream media defining their issues," Haller writes (2010, p. v). Professionally trained journalists and citizen journalists are employing new technologies for more independent reporting, such as uploading videos through YouTube and media sharing through social networks including Facebook and Twitter (2010, p. 8 – 20). While new media is not yet universal, somewhere within this new media scene, disability allies may have to stop relying on traditional media coverage (and the traditional content analysis that follows) and find new ways to tell their own stories themselves – a process that can be facilitated when disability advocates and journalists work together (2010, p. 6).

Overall, frequent gaps in the literature beg additional questions, hardly limited to these:

- Where are people with disabilities appearing in new media? What form do their stories take? Who tells these stories?

- What would an updated, large-scale study of journalists' beliefs about disability from various areas across Canada conclude?
- What do journalists need to know about disability to ensure their coverage is appropriate, accurate, and fair?
- Where can we find stories about people with developmental disabilities in Canada, and what are some effective ways to analyze these stories?
- What are journalists who currently write about disability in Canada saying about the themes above?
- What do people with disabilities and disability advocates need to know about journalism in order to appropriately present their stories to journalists and build relationships with the media?
- Studies specific to particular disabilities need to emerge or be updated. For example, radio is a fundamental medium for some people who are blind or some people who experience visual impairments (Boyer, 1988, p. 89). Meanwhile, radio generally excludes the d/Deaf community. What do these radio consumers think of the radio programming and services offered in Canada?
- Is there a need to update investigations about television news imagery of people with disabilities separately from news writing?
- Would a comprehensive history of disability-based journalism in Canada help journalists, researchers, and disability allies create a greater context for this topic?
- Would an inquiry into the current types of disability-based training journalism students receive, if any, as well as an investigation of this training in newsrooms have an affect on beginning journalists and the schools that educate them?

- Would conversations with media employers (including journalists with disabilities) to understand the challenges encountered in newsrooms help raise awareness about disability in the industry?
- Most of the Canadian research comes from large urban centers. Could a study of smaller, community newspapers in Canada and the cultural representations of disability for non-urban audiences help us build a more multi-regional understanding of this topic?
- Researchers have analyzed the history of disability media in the United States (Haller, 2010, p. 115, 116). While Haller Et. Al. study contemporary disability media in Canada in this issue of *CJDS*, what is the history of disability media in Canada? Who can tell the stories of this history?

As people with disabilities continue to face segregation from communities, the absence of their stories falls even further out of synch with Canada's liberal ideologies of democracy and press freedom. Now is the time to research media and disability to nudge journalism scholars, disability studies scholars, and media professionals towards an understanding of disability as an evolving reality worthy of journalistic attention, especially as there are so many more ideas waiting to be explored than those offered in the current literature.

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[i] Clogston also conducted a content analysis using 363 stories from 16 major newspapers in 1990. He saw traditional language employed in the headlines, while the actual stories to follow were moderately progressive.

[ii] Clogston differentiates between two types of societal attitudes about people with disabilities. The "traditional" attitude is based on deviance and stigmatization while the "progressive" attitude heralds people with disabilities as having ability and rights to participation in society (Shapiro, para. 20, 1994).

[iii] Clogston found that women held more progressive attitudes about disability than men, but did not find substantial evidence for a gender binary in this area (p. 137, 1991).

[iv] Also, Clogston defined journalism as the number of years one works in a newsroom (p. 92-93, 1991). However, journalism takes many forms outside of the newsroom, and as the craft becomes more eclectic so do the updated experiences of journalists who make a living reporting in increasingly evolving mediums – inside newsrooms or separate from them. Much research on the topic of journalism and disability, including Clogston's research, comes from a pre-internet era and journalism has since reshaped itself to fit the demands of an online audience.

[v] More adamant about the obligation for journalism schools and newsrooms to include people with disabilities is former Journalism professor Clark Edwards (1992, p. 85). Edwards says these institutions must integrate people with disability with the same furor they displayed during the civil rights movement and over the ongoing fight for gender equality (1992, p. 85). In contrast, some studies in the United States have sought to describe how to accommodate college journalism students, mainly with physical disabilities (Edwards, 1992; Lauffer, 1999; Popovich, Willis, & Blevens, 1988; Popovich, 1986). Yet there is no published research concerning the roles and dynamics of newsrooms or the independent workspaces of journalists with regard to access and accommodation, regardless of disability type (Popovich, Willis & Blevens, 1988, p.55).

[vi] A journalist with a beat is assigned to a specific topic. For example, a journalist regularly assigned to cover the events at her or his local city hall has likely adopted a city beat. There are very few media outlets with disability beats (Boyer, 1988, p. 37).

[vii] Titchkosky examines disability through headlines because headlines "frame a topic for the imagined reader," and they make meaning for someone who is looking for something sensible and interesting (2007, p. 120; Boyer, 1988, p. 15, 57-58). "[Frames] *govern* our ways of knowing, taking interest in [something] and explaining it," she writes (2007, p. 120).