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## ***Canadian Journal of Disability Studies***

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**Review:** Haller, Beth A. *Representing Disability in an Ableist World: Essays on Mass Media*. Advocado Press, 2010. 213 pp. ISBN: 0-9721189-3-4

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Beth A. Haller's *Representing Disability in an Ableist World: Essays on Mass Media* brings a scholar's expertise from communication and mass media to bear on a study of representations of disability. This collection of essays seeks to inform students, researchers and activists about representations of disability in the media as they pursue various research projects (v). The introduction asserts that the essays were "extracted from an academic format and the sometimes convoluted academic jargon and ... transformed into a more readable style" (viii). The collection thus actively reaches out to audiences who would not normally interact with disability studies. Each essay in the collection, furthermore, describes representations of disability in political cartoons, newspapers, television and advertising, shedding light on previously overlooked areas. It studies situations as diverse as disability in the legal system (Chapter 5) and disability on television (Chapter 8).

The collection includes several revised essays as well as new work. The revisions include personal anecdotes, contractions and colloquial speech. The collection further demonstrates its utility as a teaching tool, particularly for undergraduate students, through its detailed descriptions of basic analytical tools in communication and mass media studies (Chapter 2). In some cases, however, the collection struggles to bridge the gap between students and scholars already familiar with disability studies. For example, it occasionally fails to explain jargon. In this way, the collection points to disability scholars' struggle to identify and define their audiences.

Despite this, Haller's effort to reach both scholars and students is a valuable goal, one that few even attempt to reach.

Haller's essays come from almost two decades of scholarly work and the collection encompasses a wide temporal and methodological scope. The chapters discuss topics as wide-ranging as the Jerry Lewis telethons in the 1990s (Chapter 7) and newspaper comics that span the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Chapter 3). Each chapter's essay adopts a slightly different approach to analyzing disability in the media so that the collection's readers can appreciate various communications methodologies. For instance, Chapter 4 examines narrative frames surrounding assisted suicide in the *New York Times*, and Chapter 5, about *Hartmann v. Loudoun*, uses Walter Fisher's narrative paradigm (92). The collection demonstrates that a wide range of methodologies help us better understand disability in the media.

Haller's essays make unique contributions to disability and media studies. Two chapters are particularly significant. Chapter 6, "Disability media tell their own stories" studies minority media produced within the disability community alongside representations of disability in mass media. This chapter's analysis of such varied representations gives its readers a broader perspective. Haller's discussion of disability media in the 1990s, for instance, focuses on publications that sought to share information within the disability community. Later, "Media advocacy and films: The 'Million Dollar Baby' effect" studies portrayals of disability in film. This chapter shows that disability is portrayed diversely within and outside the disability community. Juxtaposing these struggles highlights that the disability community will need to come to terms with its heterogeneity as well as understand the potential of united advocacy.

Haller's final chapter, "Advertising boldly moves disability images forward" surpasses the other essays in the collection. Rather than criticizing advertizing for denigrating people with

disabilities, this essay proposes that because advertisers hope to sell their products, and must comply with truth in advertising laws, their representations are superior to others. That is, advertising is forced to portray disability as lived experience (203).

The collection concludes

“Hopefully, the more enlightened of the ad campaigns illustrate an ongoing trend that the pity-filled, sentimental images represented by telethons and charities and the exotic images of disabled people as freaks are no longer appropriate in 21<sup>st</sup> century societies that are trying to restructure themselves so disabled people can compete equally in all facets of life” (204).

Hopefully Haller’s assertion will be proven true.