

Thinking Critically About Media Images of Disability

Eli Clare

Images of disability abound—in the news and on television, in film and on the Web. In this class we will explore these images, learning to think critically about the many ways disability is represented in both mainstream and disability media. We will ask the following questions:

- How are systems of power, privilege, and marginalization embedded into these images?
- What ideologies and assumptions do they reveal?
- What is the relationship between disabled people and these images?

We will ask these questions and more of all the images we study. And because disability and ableism are intrinsically linked to other categories of identity and systems of power, we will also be studying class, race, gender, and sexual orientation.

Course Objectives

- View, watch, listen to, and read a wide range of media representing disability.
- Learn and hone critical thinking skills as they apply to media images of disability.
- Become familiar with some of the major themes in media representations of disability.
- Explore ways in which power, privilege, marginalization, and ideologies are reflected and created in media images.
- Understand connections and intersections among disability, race, class, gender, and sexual orientation.

Required Reading

- *Representing Disability in an Ableist World: Essays on Mass Media*, Beth Haller, The Avocado Press (2010) (referred to below as **RD**).
Note: You will be reading much of this book and can buy it through the Ryerson bookstore.
- You can find all other readings in the “Course Readings” content area on Blackboard.

Course Requirements

1) Lectures and Readings:

Each week, unless I notify the class otherwise, I will post a video lecture via xxx. Along with the lecture, I will also post my lecture outline, any PowerPoint presentations I use, and supporting documents. Students are required to participate in the weekly Lecture Forum in one of two ways. See page 10 of the syllabus for details.

The lectures and required readings as listed below in the “Readings and Assignments by the Week” will form the foundation for your weekly work in the Media Blog Groups.

2) Media Blogs:

The class will be divided into three small groups—Media Blog Groups or MBGs—(15 people per group). Each MBG will create a blog-based gallery of media images of disability. Through these galleries, we will explore a wide range of media, asking questions and developing critical analyses. This work will form the core of the course. See page 11 of the syllabus for details.

3) Papers:

You will be writing two papers for the course: a short paper analyzing in depth one image and longer paper comparing and contrasting two images. See page 16 of the syllabus for details.

Readings & Assignments by the Week

Week 1 (January 10-16)—Introduction

Required Reading:

- None

Lecture:

- Lecture: posted Monday, January 10 by noon EST
- Lecture Notes: post to Lecture Forum by the end of Tuesday, January 11
Note: I’m hoping that there will be two students who sign up early for note taking on this first week. See page 10 for more details.
- Lecture Forum: open Monday, January 10 by noon EST
- Lecture Forum: closed Saturday, January 15, noon EST

Media Blog Groups:

- None

To-Do:

- Read syllabus, ask clarifying questions
- Sign up for Note Taking (more info page 10) by Friday, January 14 (“Sign-up Sheets” content area in “Lecture Note Takers” folder)
- Sign up for due dates for Analyses I, II, and III (more info on page 11) by Friday, January 14 (“Sign-up Sheets” content area in appropriate “Media Blog Group Sign-up” folder)

Week 2 (January 17-23)—Stereotypes I, Pity & Inspiration

Required Reading:

- RD, Chapter 7, "Pity as Oppression in the Jerry Lewis Telethon," p. 137-152
- View the Foundation for a Better Life billboards 1-3 ("Lectures" content area in the "Week 2" Folder)

Lecture:

- Lecture: posted Monday, January 17 by noon EST
- Lecture Forum: open Monday, January 17 by noon EST
- Lecture Notes: post to Lecture Forum by the end of Tuesday, January 18
- Lecture Forum: closed Saturday, January 22 at noon EST

Media Blog Groups:

- Analysis I (students who signed up for Week 2): post to Blogs by the end of Thursday, January 20
- Blogs: open for comments end of Thursday, January 20
- Blog Comments for Week 2: closed Tuesday, January 25 at noon EST

Week 3 (January 24-30)—Stereotypes II, Intersections

Required Reading:

- "Unspeakable Offenses: Untangling Race and Disability in Discourses of Intersectionality," Nirmala Erevelles and Andrea Minear, p. 127-145
- Listen to audio file of Lynn Manning reading "The Magic Wand" ("Lectures" content area in the "Week 3" Folder)

Lecture:

- Lecture: posted Monday, January 24 by noon EST
- Lecture Forum: open Monday, January 24 by noon EST
- Lecture Notes: post to Lecture Forum by the end of Tuesday, January 25
- Lecture Forum closed Saturday, January 29 at noon EST

Media Blog Groups:

- Analysis I (students who signed up for Week 3): post to Blogs by the end of Thursday, January 27
- Blogs: open for comments end of Thursday, January 27
- Blog Comments for Week 3: closed Tuesday, February 1 at noon EST

Week 4 (January 31-February 6)—Stereotypes III, Interrupting Stereotypes

Required Reading:

- "Reading Across the Grain," Eli Clare, p. 119-140
- View image of Ellen Stohl ("Lectures" content area in the "Week 4" Folder)
- View Sins Invalid YouTube of Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha ("Lectures" content area in the "Week 4" Folder)

Lecture:

- Lecture: posted Monday, January 31 by noon EST
- Lecture Forum: open Monday, January 31 by noon EST
- Lecture Notes: post to Lecture Forum by the end of Tuesday, February 1
- Lecture Forum: closed Saturday, February 5 at noon EST

Media Blog Groups:

- Analysis I (students who signed up Week 4): post to Blogs by the end of Thursday, February 3
- Blogs: open for comments end of Thursday, February 3
- Blog Comments for Week 4: closed Tuesday, February 8 at noon EST

Week 5 (February 7-13)—Metaphor I, Language**Required Reading:**

- RD, Chapter 3, “Changing Disability Terminology in the News,” p. 49-66
- Second reading TBD
- View the Foundation for a Better Life billboard 4 (“Lectures” content area in the “Week 5” Folder)

Lecture:

- Lecture: posted Monday, February 7 by noon EST
- Lecture Forum: open Monday, February 7 by noon EST
- Lecture Notes: post to Lecture Forum by the end of Tuesday, February 8
- Lecture Forum: closed Saturday, February 12 at noon EST

Media Blog Groups

- Analysis II (students who signed up Week 5): post to Blogs by the end of Thursday, February 10
- Blogs: open for comments end of Thursday, February 10
- Blog Comments for Week 5: closed Tuesday, February 15 at noon EST

Week 6 (February 14-20)—Metaphors II, Villains, Victims & Heroes**Required Reading:**

- “From Freaks to Savants: Disability and Hegemony from ‘The Hunchback of Notre Dame’ (1939) and ‘Sling Blade’ (1997),” Fiona Whittington-Walsh, p. 695-707
- View any one of the following four versions of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*:
 1. 1923, silent film starring Lon Chaney, available at http://www.archive.org/details/The_Hunchback_of_Notre_Dame
 2. 1939, starring Charles Laughton
 3. 1956, starring Anthony Quinn
 4. 1996, Walt Disney animated film
- View “Shameless: The ART of Disability, watch the first 20 minutes (“Lectures” content area in the “Week 6” Folder)

Lecture:

- Lecture: posted Monday, February 14 by noon EST
- Lecture Forum: open Monday, February 14 by noon EST
- Lecture Notes: post to Lecture Forum by the end of Tuesday, February 15
- Lecture Forum: closed Saturday, February 19 at noon EST)

Media Blog Groups:

*****Note: Early deadlines this week due to Study Week next week.*****

- Analysis II (students who signed up for Week 6): post to Blogs by the end of Wednesday, February 16
- Blogs: open for comments end of Wednesday, February 16
- Blog Comments for Week 6: closed Sunday, February 20 at noon EST

Study Week (February 21-27)

- No Lecture, Required Reading, or Media Blog Work.

To-Do:

- Catch up if you're behind.
- Decide on the image that will be the topic of your short paper. See page 16 of the syllabus for details.

Week 7 (February 28-March 6)—Metaphors III, National & International Politics

Required Reading:

- RD, Chapter 2, "Researching Media Images of Disability," p. 34-47
- View TBD

Recommended Reading:

- RD, Chapter 2, "Researching Media Images of Disability," p. 25-34

Lecture:

- Lecture: posted Monday, February 28 by noon EST
- Lecture Forum: open Monday, February 28 by noon EST
- Lecture Notes: post to Lecture Forum by the end of Tuesday, March 1
- Lecture Forum: closed Saturday, March 5 at noon EST

Media Blog Groups:

- No work

Short Papers:

- Due by the end of Sunday, March 6

Week 8 (March 7-13)—Metaphors IV, Talking Back

Reading:

- RD, Chapter 6, "Disability Media Tells Their Own Stories," p. 115-136
- "Helen and Frida," Anne Finger, p. 255-263
- View "In My Language," A.M. Baggs ("Lectures" content area in the "Week 8" Folder)

Lecture:

- Lecture: posted Monday, March 7 by noon EST
- Lecture Forum: open Monday, March 7 by noon EST
- Lecture Notes: post to Lecture Forum by the end of Tuesday, March 8
- Lecture Forum: closed Saturday, March 12 at noon EST

Media Blog Groups:

- Analysis II (students who signed up for Week 8): post to Blogs by the end of Thursday, March 10
- Blogs: open for comments end of Thursday, March 10
- Blog Comments for Week 8: closed Tuesday, March 15 at noon EST

To-Do

- Start Analysis III (students who signed up for Week 9), see page 12

Week 9 (March 14-20)—Objectification and Sensationalization I, Bodies as Objects

Required Reading:

- “Public Stripping,” Lisa Blumberg, p. 73-77
- “Public Stripping Revisited,” Lisa Blumberg, p. 18-21
- “Finding My Voice,” David Roche, p. 1-7
- View medical textbook images (“Lectures” content area in the “Week 9” Folder)
- Sunaura Taylor’s art (“Lectures” content area in the “Week 9” Folder)

Lecture:

- Lecture: posted Monday, March 14 by noon EDT
- Lecture Forum: open Monday, March 14 by noon EDT
- Lecture Notes: post to Lecture Forum by the end of Tuesday, March 15
- Lecture Forum: closed Saturday, March 19 at noon EDT

Media Blog Groups:

- Analysis III (students who signed up for Week 9): post to Blogs by the end of Thursday, March 17
- Blogs: open for comments end of Thursday, March 17
- Blog Comments for Week 9: closed Tuesday, March 22 at noon EDT

To-Do

- Start Analysis III (students who signed up for Week 10), see page 12

Week 10 (March 21-27)—Objectification and Sensationalization II, Bodies as Freakish

Required Reading:

- “Freaks and Queers,” Eli Clare, p. 81-103
- View: TLC Channel, browse clips from “Little People, Big World” or “One Big Happy Family” (“Lectures” content area in the “Week 10” Folder)

Lecture:

- Lecture: posted Monday, March 21 by noon EDT
- Lecture Forum: open Monday, March 21 by noon EDT
- Lecture Notes: post to Lecture Forum by the end of Tuesday, March 22
- Lecture Forum: closed Saturday, March 26 at noon EDT

Media Blog Groups:

*****Note: Early deadlines this week due to no class next week.*****

- Analysis III (students who signed up for Week 10): post to Blogs by the end of Wednesday, March 23
- Blogs: open for comments by the end of Wednesday, March 23
- Blog Comments for Week 10: closed Sunday, March 27 at noon EDT

To-Do

- Analysis III (students who signed up for Week 11), see page 12

Week 11 (April 4-10)—Objectification and Sensationalization III, What are disabled bodies worth?

Required Reading:

- RD, Chapter 4, “Not Worth Keeping Alive?,” p. 67-86
- View “Ransom Note Campaign” (“Lectures” content area in the “Week 11” Folder)

Recommended Reading:

- “The ‘Ransom Notes’ Affair: When the Neurodiversity Movement Came of Age,” Joseph F Kras, (“Lectures” content area in the “Week 11” Folder)

Lecture:

- Lecture: posted Monday, April 4 by noon EDT
- Lecture Forum: open Monday, April 4 by noon EDT
- Lecture Notes: post to Lecture Forum by the end of Tuesday, April 5
- Lecture Forum: closed Saturday, April 9 at noon EDT

Media Blog Groups:

- Analysis III (students who signed up for Week 11): post to Blogs by the end of Thursday, April 7
- Blogs: open for comments end of Thursday, April 7
- Blog Comments for Week 11: closed Tuesday, April 12 at noon EDT

To-Do:

- Finalize your longer paper topic with me: by Sunday, April 10

Week 12 (April 11-15)—Objectification and Sensationalization IV, Familiar and Ordinary Bodies

Required Reading:

- “A World of Their Own,” Liza Mundy, p. 68-87
- “Reflecting on Frida Kahlo’s Birthday,” Mia Mingus (“Lectures” content area in the “Week 12” Folder)

Lecture:

- Lecture: posted Monday, April 11 by noon EDT
- Lecture Forum: open April 11 by noon EDT
- Lecture Notes: posted to Lecture Forum by the end of Tuesday, April 12
Note: Early deadline this week due to end of class.
- Lecture Forum: closed Friday, April 15 at noon EDT

Media Blog Groups:

- No work

Longer Paper:

- Due by the end of Friday, April 15

***** Assignments *****

You will be responsible for the following. See below for detail.

- all the above required readings
- participation in Lecture Forums
- Analysis I—an image and short critical analysis posted to your Media Blog Group’s (MBG’s) Blog for a Pass/Fail mark

- Analysis II—an image and short critical analysis posted to your MBG’s Blog for a letter mark
- Analysis III—two images and a critical analysis developed as a small group project, posted to your MBG’s Blog
- participation in your MBG’s Blog
- short 3-4 page paper
- longer 7-8 page paper

Lectures & Lecture Forums

The lectures and readings will form the foundation for your weekly work in the Media Blog Groups. The images you’ll be posting and analyzing will be connected to the themes and questions raised by the lectures and readings.

On Mondays, unless I notify the class otherwise, I will post a 10-15 minute video lecture via xxx to be viewed on your own schedule. When I post the lecture, I will also open a weekly Lecture Forum to discuss the lecture and readings. Participation in this forum is required and can happen in **two ways**. You can either:

1) Take notes:

Each week two people will sign up to take detailed notes on the lecture.

- By the end of Tuesday, the Note Takers will post Lecture Notes to the current Lecture Forum (create a Thread named “Lecture Notes”) where they will be available to everyone in the class as a resource and as an access tool for people who learn more effectively from written material.
- In addition to posting the Notes, e-mail me a copy as a Microsoft Word document, which I will post in the “Lectures” content area in the appropriate folder on Blackboard.
- Note Takers will receive full participation marks for the Lecture Forum for that week. If you’re a Note Taker, you do not need to post responses to the Lecture Forum for that week.
- You can be a Note Taker for **no more than two weeks** during the semester.

OR

2) Participate in the Lecture Forum:

I expect everyone, except the Note Takers, to post at least **two responses** to the Lecture Forum per week. These responses can be:

- Thoughts about the readings and lecture;
- Answers to questions I’ve posed;
- Explorations of the material that include your own questions and critiques;
- On-topic discussion with your classmates.

Work in Your Media Blog Groups

The work in your Media Blog Groups (MBGs) will consist of **three assignments** and **participation** in your MBG's Blog.

1) Assignments:

- Analysis I—an image and short critical analysis posted to your MBG's Blog for a Pass/Fail mark
- Analysis II—an image and short critical analysis posted to your MBG's Blog for a letter mark
- Analysis III—two images and a critical analysis developed as a small group project, posted to your MBG's Blog
- See below for details.

2) Participation:

- Making comments to Blog entries in your MBG's Blog
- Lightly facilitating of your MBG's Blog
- See details for below.

MBG Assignments:

1) Analysis I—Short critical analysis for a Pass/Fail mark:

Description: Follow these steps:

- Find an image connected to the topic or the questions explored in the week's lecture and readings. For instance, if you do this assignment during Week 2, which focuses on pity and inspiration, you'll look for images related to those themes or to the questions those themes raise.
- Follow the "Media Guidelines" below (page 13).
- Use the "Individual Short Critical Analysis Worksheet" below (page 14) to write your analysis.

Due Date: You will sign up in the "Sign-up Sheets" content area in appropriate "Media Blog Group Sign-up" folder during Week 1 of class for your due date. You will be assigned to MBG A, B, or C. Within those groups, you'll sign up for three due dates—one for each of the three analyses I, II, and III. This assignment is due on the first date you pick.

Grade: Pass/Fail (P=45 points, F=0 points)

2) Analysis II—Short critical analysis for a letter mark:

Description: Follow the same steps as above for Analysis I.

Due Date: You will sign up in the “Sign-up Sheets” content area in appropriate “Media Blog Group Sign-up” folder during Week 1 of class for your due date. You will be assigned to MBG A, B, or C. Within those groups, you’ll sign up for three due dates—one for each of the three analyses I, II, and III. This assignment is due on the second date you pick.

Grade: 60 points maximum

3) Analysis III—Small group project critical analysis:

Description: Follow these steps:

- Work in groups of two or three with students from your MBG. I’ll assign these small groups based upon which weeks students sign up for to do the this assignment.
- In your pairs or triads, pick two images to compare and contrast. Make sure these images are connected to one of the topics or the questions explored in the lectures and readings up to this point.
- Follow the “Media Guidelines” below (page 13).
- As a group, use the “Small Group Project Critical Analysis Worksheet” below (page 15) to write your analysis.

Due Date: You will sign up in the “Sign-up Sheets” content area in appropriate “Media Blog Group Sign-up” folder during Week 1 of class for your due date. You will be assigned to MBG A, B, or C. Within those groups, you’ll sign up for three due dates—one for each of the three analyses I, II, and III.

Grade: 60 points maximum

4) Participation in your MBG’s Blog:

Description: During weeks when you aren’t posting an analysis to the Blog, you will:

- Post a minimum of **five comments** per week. During some weeks (when students are working on Analyses I and II) that means one comment to each of five Blog entries in your MBG’s Blog. During other weeks (when students are working on Analysis III), it means spreading your five comments between two Blog entries
- Each critical analysis in a Blog entry will end with a prompting discussion question. Feel free to answer or explore that question in your comment.
- The purpose of your comments is to add to and deepen the analysis of the images being studied. This isn’t a time to judge or critique your classmates, although respectful disagreement is ok.
- I encourage you to browse in the other MBG’s Blogs, but you will only be able to post entries and comments to your MBG’s Blog.

AND

During weeks when you post an analysis to the Blog, you will:

- Be responsible for lightly facilitating your MBG’s Blog. I will step in as needed. By light facilitation, I mean:
 1. Making sure people stay focused on the images and analyzing them;
 2. Making sure disagreement is respectful; and

3. Answering any factual questions about the images.
 4. As the facilitator, you do not need to defend your analysis or the image.
- If you need help facilitating, let me know.

Due Date: Every week when there is MGB work.

Grade: 80 points maximum

MBG Media Guidelines:

- Your images can be news stories, advertisements, TV shows, radio interviews or stories, magazine articles, YouTube videos, blog posts, music videos, photos, etc.
- You need to find images in formats that you can post to your MBG's Blog (image files, video files, audio files, links to the Web, etc.)
- For your Analyses I and II, your images need to be from different media. (For example, a news story and a TV show, or a blog post and a TV advertisement, or a billboard and a movie trailer.)
- For your small group Analysis III, your two images can be from the same media or different media.
- You can't use the same image that someone previously posted in your MBG's Blog.
- Nor can they be images I've discussed in-depth in class lectures.

MBG Individual Short Critical Analysis Worksheet

- Complete Analyses I and II by answering the following questions.
- Your answers to questions 1, 2, and 3 need to be one or two paragraphs long. Your answer to question 4 can be a sentence or two long.
- The total length of your analysis should be no more than 400 words. This means you can't be exhaustive. Instead be focused.
 - 1) Describe your image. What details stand out to you? Be specific.
 - 2) Answer one of the following. Connect your answer back to your description of the image.
 - What are two assumptions or ideologies that your image depends upon? OR
 - What is one way systems of power, privilege, or marginalization are embedded into your image?
 - 3) How is disability connected to race, class, gender, and/or sexual orientation in your image?
 - 4) What question related to your image do you want members of your MBG to consider? In other words, develop a discussion question for your MBG's Blog.

Notes:

- Your analysis is not meant to be statement of like or dislike or a judgment of good or bad, but rather an exploration of the meanings inside the image and the impacts of those meanings on both disabled and non-disabled people.
- We will be talking a lot in class about what critical thinking is and how to do it.

- Writing is an important part of this assignment. You'll be marked on the clarity and focus of your writing, as well as your analysis. If you want help with your writing and live near Ryerson, I encourage you to utilize Ryerson's Writing Centre.

MBG Small Group Project Critical Analysis Worksheet

- Complete Analysis III by answering the following questions.
- Your answers to questions 1-4 need to be one or two paragraphs long. Your answer to question 5 can be a sentence or two long.
- The total length of your analysis should be no more than 700 words if you're in a group of two and 850 if you're in a group of three. This means you can't be exhaustive. Instead be focused.
 - 1) Describe your images. What details stand out to you? How do the details compare or contrast? Be specific.
 - 2) If you're in a group of two, answer one of the following; if you're in a group of three, answer both. Connect your answer back to your description of the images.
 - What are two assumptions or ideologies that your images depend upon? Compare and contrast. **AND/OR**
 - What are one or two ways systems of power, privilege, or marginalization are embedded into your images? Compare and contrast.
 - 3) How is disability connected to race, class, gender, and/or sexual orientation in your images? Compare and contrast.
 - 4) What have you learned by comparing and contrasting your images?
 - 5) What question related to your images do you want members of your MBG to consider? In other words, develop a discussion question for your MBG's Blog.

Notes:

- Your analysis is not meant to be statement of like or dislike or a judgment of good or bad, but rather an exploration of the meanings inside the image and the impacts of those meanings on both disabled and non-disabled people.
- We will be talking a lot in class about what critical thinking is and how to do it.
- Writing is an important part of this assignment. You'll be marked on the clarity and focus of your writing, as well as your analysis. If you want help with your writing and live near Ryerson, I encourage you to utilize Ryerson's Writing Centre.

*****Papers*****

Here are some guidelines that apply to both your papers:

- The images you choose for your papers cannot be images you've already written about in your analyses (or, in the case of your longer paper, the image you used in your shorter paper), but they can be images that someone else in your MBG or another MBG has posted. In fact I'd encourage you to use the MBGs as a resource.

- As with the analyses, writing is an important part of these two papers. You'll be marked on the clarity and focus of your writing, as well as your analysis. If you want help with your writing and live near Ryerson, I encourage you to utilize Ryerson's Writing Centre.
- In your MBGs, you may find it useful to have another student read your paper for clarity. Ask your reader to summarize your three main points. This feedback will help you figure out how well you've communicated your thoughts. This is NOT a required part of these assignments but may be helpful to you.
- I welcome papers in alternative formats—audio, video, creative writing, for instance—as long as they include the critical thinking that the assignment requires. Be in touch with me if you want to complete this assignment in an alternative format.

1) Short Paper

Description: Pick a media image connected to the themes and questions we've explored in the course so far. Write a 3-4 page paper analyzing the image. Include at least two references to course readings and/or lectures. You can use the questions from the Short Critical Analysis Worksheet as a starting point.

Due Date: Sunday, March 6

Grade: 85 points maximum

2) Longer Paper

Description: Pick two media images connected to the themes and questions we've explored in the course. Write a 7-8 page paper comparing and contrasting your two images. Include at least four references to course readings and/or lectures. You can use the questions from the Small Group Project Critical Analysis Worksheet as a starting point.

Due Date: Friday, April 15

% of Grade: 120 points maximum

Grading

Assignment	Maximum Points
• Lecture Forums participation	35 points
• MBG Blog comments	80 points
• Analysis I	Pass/Fail (Maximum=60, P=45, F=0)
• Analysis II	60 points
• Analysis III	60 points
• a short 3-4 page paper	85 points
• a longer 7-8 page paper	120 points
• Total points possible	500 points

***** Access & Accommodations *****

I want this class to be as accessible as possible. You can bring up access concerns and challenges on the Lecture Forums, the Logistics Forum, one-on-one with me via e-mail, and/or through the Access Centre. The contact information for the Access Centre is:

- accessfrontdesk@ryerson.ca
- <http://www.ryerson.ca/studentservices/accesscentre>
- Telephone: 416-797-5290

***** Late Assignments *****

I'll accept one late assignment without penalty. A second late assignment will NOT be accepted without prior approval from me, barring extraordinary circumstances (death in the family, major illness). If you need an extension on a deadline, e-mail me at least 24 hours BEFORE the due date. I won't negotiate extensions after the due date, except in the above-mentioned extraordinary circumstances.