

Writing Assignment #2: Rhetorical Analysis

- Step One: Read Chapter 12, Proposals. Pages 272 – 287. Also scan pages 288 – 293, “Guide to Writing a Proposal”.
- Step Two: Next read the essay “Disability and the Media: Prescriptions for Change” by Charles A. Riley II. Pages 527 – 535. Be sure to read the margin notes AND Appendix A pages 531 – 535.
- Step Three: Using parameters for categorizing proposals (pages 273-274) and the steps for “Developing Proposals” (pages 279-287), consider how Riley’s essay fulfills the requirements of a proposal (or not, if it doesn’t).

I Introductory Paragraph should include:

- title of article
- name of author- something about the author
- where published and when published
- A summary of the article
- Thesis statement that prepares the reader by stating the theme or main ideas of your paper.

II How would you categorize the proposal or would you call it a different kind of argument ?

This paragraph should explain how the the article proposes changes in either practice or policy. Use quotes from the article to support your claim

III How does the writer develop the proposal (See page 279 for suggestions).

1. Does Riley define a need or a problem (see p.279)? (Give examples that support your claim.)
2. Does Riley make a strong and clear claim?
 - a. State the following:
 - i. Riley’s claim
 - ii. His reasons for his claim.
 - iii. The warrant for the argument
 - iv. The evidence that Riley uses to support his reasons.

IV Find one or two examples of people with disabilities in current media and popular culture – in advertisements, television programs, or movies. Using Riley’s stereotypes, “the supercrip, the medical miracle, the object of pity” (p.529) write a short argument of fact showing how the image/s represent/s the stereotype. (Chap. 8, pages 151 – 166).

V Write a summary that:

- Restates your thesis in different words
- Lists the main points from paragraphs II and III.
- Discuss how the example you found helps to prove or disprove Riley’s claims.
- Do you think that the writer’s proposal is feasible? If yes, why, if no, why not?

Requirements

Format:

Paper should be double-spaced and 2-3 pages long

Font should be 12 pt. Times Roman, Calibri, or Arial or other standard font.

Due dates:

Electronic copy of rough draft due: _____

Bring hard copy to class for peer edit workshop.

What is a rough draft?

- A rough draft is not an outline. It is not one or two paragraphs hastily written an hour before class starts.
- A rough draft must be a carefully constructed representation of your final draft that contains an introduction, three body paragraphs and a conclusion.
- It should be printed out and **proof read before you bring it to class** and before you submit the electronic copy.
- If you know you have grammar, syntax, and spelling issues, you need to take your rough draft to the Writing Center or the Center for Learning Strategies to work out these issues BEFORE you submit it in Canvas and before you bring it to the peer edit session. I cannot be your proofreader. Your peer editor cannot be your proofreader. YOU must do this work for yourself.
- If your rough draft does not fulfill these requirements, I will not grade it – I will return it to you with the suggestion that you get help with it and submit it again.

Final Draft due _____

Create a portfolio (two pocket folder) with your name, the class number (Rhet102) and your section number and place in it:

- hard copy of final draft
- outline
- rough draft.

Your name
Rhet102 /sec #
(Front of folder)

Top right
corner

▼ Charles A. Riley II is a professor of journalism at Baruch College, part of the City University of New York. He also served as editor in chief of WE, a now-defunct national bimonthly magazine that focused on disability issues. During his career, he has received several awards for his writing on issues relating to disability. (Riley is able-bodied, a fact that he believes has important consequences for his writing on these issues.) Among his books are *Aristocracy and the Modern Imagination* (1980); *Disability and Business: Best Practices and Strategies for Inclusion* (1980); *Color Codes: Modern Theories of Color in Philosophy, Painting and Architecture, Literature, Music, and Psychology* (1995); *Small Business, Big Politics: What Entrepreneurs Need to Know to Use Their Growing Political Power* (1996); and *The Jazz Age in France* (2004). The selections featured here come from *Disability and the Media: Prescriptions for Change* (2005). These selections include the opening pages of Riley's preface as well as an appendix created by the National Center on Disability and Journalism in 2002 that offers guidelines for portraying people with disabilities in the media. As you read, note ways in which Riley marshals evidence to demonstrate a need for change and how the appendix constitutes a set of proposals to create that change.

Disability and the Media: Prescriptions for Change

CHARLES A. RILEY II

Every time Aimee Mullins sees her name in the papers she braces herself for some predictable version of the same headline followed by the same old story. Paralympian, actress, and fashion model, Mullins is a bilateral, below-the-knee amputee, who sprints a hundred meters in less than sixteen seconds on a set of running prostheses called Cheetahs because they were fashioned after the leg form of the world's fastest animal. First, there are the headlines: "Overcoming All Hurdles" (she is not a hurdler, although she is a long jumper) or "Running Her Own Race," "Nothing Stops Her," or the dreaded overused "Profile in Courage." Then come the clichés and stock scenes, from the prosthetist's office to the winner's podium. Many of the articles dwell on her success as the triumph of biomechanics, a "miracle of modern medicine,"



Aimee Mullins at the sixth annual L'Oréal Paris Women of Worth awards ceremony in 2011.
Eugene Gologursky/Wire Image/Getty Images

Coppélia: a nineteenth-century French comic and sentimental opera in which Dr. Coppélius creates a dancing doll that is so lifelike that a young man falls in love with her.

Six Million Dollar Woman: an allusion to *Six Million Dollar Man*, a late 1970s ABC television program about an astronaut who was "rebuilt" after a crash to become a cyborg, part human and part machine.

ur-narrative: the prefix *ur-* refers to the earliest, original, or most primitive or basic. Hence, the *ur-narrative* is the source narrative on which all others are based.

Warholian: a reference to Andy Warhol (1928–1987), American avant-garde artist who commented in 1968, "In the future, everyone will be famous for fifteen minutes," a critique of how modern media create instant celebrities.

Before he offers his proposal, Riley first explains how stereotyping causes problems for the disabled. For more on causal arguments, see Chapter 11.

LINK TO P. 240

turning her fairy tale into a *Coppélia* narrative (or a *Six Million Dollar Woman* movie sequel). From the local paper where she grew up (Allentown, Pennsylvania), to national exposure in *Esquire* and *People* and guest spots on Oprah, Mullins's "inspiring" saga is recycled almost verbatim by well-meaning journalists for audiences who never seem to get enough of its feel-good message even if they never actually find out who Mullins is.

This is the patronizing, trivializing, and marginalizing *ur-narrative* of disability in the media today. The mainstream press finds it irresistible, but this steady diet of sugar has its dangers. The cliché has excluded the mature, fully realized coverage that people with disabilities have long deserved. For Mullins, it has translated into well over her Warholian fifteen minutes of fame, bringing her the financial rewards of sponsorships, motivational speaking gigs, and modeling contracts at the expense of being turned into a latter-day poster child. Stories about her rarely get around to mentioning that she was a Pentagon intern while making the dean's list as an academic star in history and diplomacy at Georgetown, or that she is one of the actresses in Matthew Barney's avant-garde *Cremaster* film series.

Mullins is not the only celebrity with a disability to be steamrolled out of three-dimensional humanity into allegorical flatness. All the branches of



Early examples of poster children.
AP/Wide World Photos

poster child: a perfect representative. The source of the phrase is the image of a disabled child or one with a visible medical condition whose photo is used on posters to elicit sympathy and donations.

allegorical: the adjectival form of *allegory*, a moral story in which the characters, always one-dimensional in nature, suggest a meaning beyond the story. Thus, in Aesop's fable about the ant and the grasshopper, listeners are to understand that the wise person prepares for future needs, as the ant did, rather than wasting time, as did the grasshopper.

the media considered here, from print to television, radio and the movies (including advertisements) to multimedia and the Internet, are guilty of the same distillation of stories to meet their own, usually fiscal, ends. For example, even though her autobiography is remarkably ahead of its time in its anticipation of disability culture, by the time Helen Keller° had been sweetened for movie audiences in Patty Duke's° version of her life, little was left out of the fiery trailblazer. In much the same way, Christopher Reeve° and Michael J. Fox° have been pigeonholed by print and television hagiographers° as lab experiments and tragic heroes. Packaged to raise philanthropic or advertising dollars, they perform roles no less constrained than the pretty-boy parts they played on screen earlier in their lives.

What is wrong with this picture? By jamming Mullins and the others into prefabricated stories—the supercrip, the medical miracle, the object of pity—writers and producers have outfitted them with the narrative equivalent of an ill-fitting set of prostheses. Each of these archetypal narratives has its way of reaching mass audiences, selling products (including magazines and movie tickets), and financially rewarding both the media outlet and the featured subject. In some ways, as optimists point out, this represents an improvement. We have had millennia of fiction and nonfiction depicting

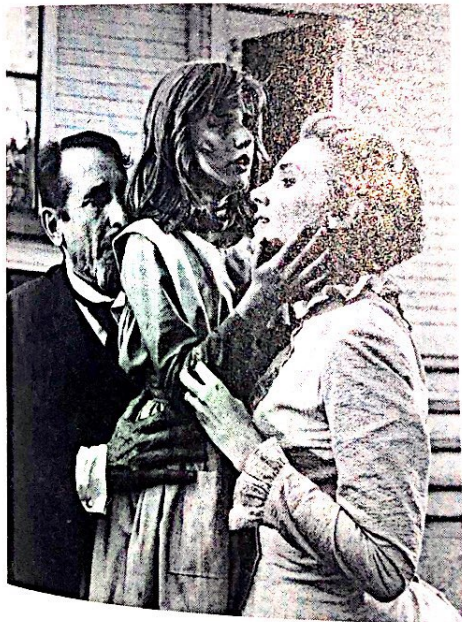
Helen Keller (1880–1968): the first American who was both deaf and blind to graduate from college, Keller was an author and activist for progressive causes.

Patty Duke (1946–): an American actress who played Helen Keller in the 1959 play *The Miracle Worker* and in the 1962 film version of the story.

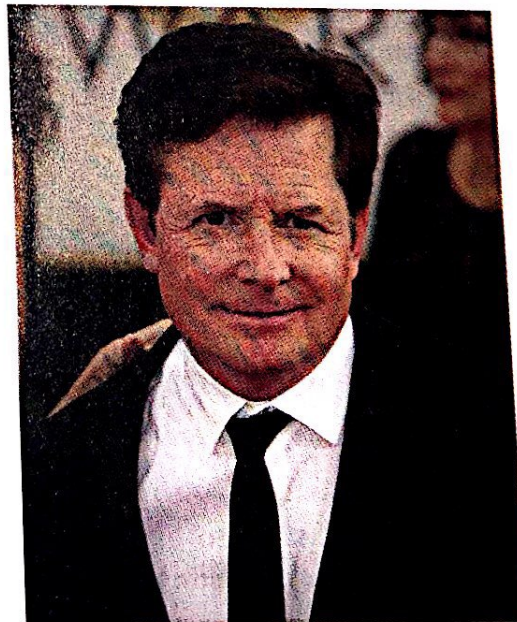
Christopher Reeve (1952–2004): an American actor who is best known for his four Superman films. In 1995, he was paralyzed in a riding accident and used a wheelchair for the rest of his life. After his accident, he became an activist for public issues related to spinal-cord injuries and stem-cell research.

Michael J. Fox (1961–): an award-winning Canadian-born actor. Diagnosed with Parkinson's disease in 1991, he revealed the condition to the public in 1998 and partially retired in 2000.

hagiographer: technically, one who studies saints. Here, hagiography is used to refer to the ways in which able-bodied individuals often portray people with disabilities as saints, thereby refusing to let them be fully human.



Patty Duke (center) as Helen Keller in *The Miracle Worker*. Everett Collection



Michael J. Fox, an actor and a Parkinson's disease activist. Hubert Boesi DPA/LANDOV

CHAPTER 23 HOW DOES POPULAR CULTURE STEREOTYPE YOU?

us: the mythical Greek king unknowingly fulfills a prophecy that he will kill his father and his mother. After realizing he has done, he blinds himself.

the captain of the whaling ship in Herman Melville's 1851 *Moby-Dick*. After losing a leg in an earlier effort to kill the whale, Ahab is obsessed with avenging the creature. His obsession leads to the loss of the ship and the lives of all onboard with the exception of Ishmael, whose narrative opens the novel.



angry people with disabilities as villains, from Oedipus^o to Ahab^o to Dr. Strangelove^o. The vestigial^o traces of that syndrome still occasionally recur, although with far less frequency, in current movies or television series and in journalists' fixation on the mental instability of violent criminals. However, today's storytellers, including those in the disability media, are more likely to make people with disabilities into "heroes of assimilation," to borrow a phrase from Erving Goffman's^o seminal work on disability, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*.

As Goffman knew too well, just as the stigmatization of the villain had its dilatory effects^o on societal attitudes, so too does relentless hagiography, particularly by transforming individuals into symbols and by playing on an audience's sympathy and sense of superiority. Those who labor in the field of disability studies point out that disability culture and its unique strengths are absent from this story of normalization. Others would simply note that the individual is lost in the fable, an all-American morality tale that strikes one of the most resonant chords in the repertoire: redemption. Like the deathless Horatio Alger^o tale, the story of the hero of assimilation emphasizes many of the deepest values and beliefs of the Puritan tradition, especially the notion that suffering makes us stronger and better. An able-bodied person falls from grace (often literally falling or crashing, as in the case of many spinal cord injuries), progresses through the shadows of rehabilitation and

depression, and by force of willpower along with religious belief pulls through to attain a quality of life that is less disabled, more normal, basking in the glow of recognition for beating the odds.

This pervasive narrative can be found in print, on television, in movies, in advertisements, and on the Web. Its corrosive effect on understanding and attitudes is as yet unnoticed. It is impossible to know the full degree of damage wreaked by the demeaning and wildly inaccurate portrayal of people with disabilities, nor is it altogether clear whether much current progress is being made. Painful as it is for me as an advocate to report the bad news, I cannot help but point out that the "movement" has slowed to a crawl in terms of political and economic advancement for 54 million Americans. The stasis⁶ that threatens is at least partly to be blamed on a reassuring, recurring image projected by the media that numbs nondisabled readers and viewers into thinking that all is well.

This study aims to expose the extent of the problem while pinpointing how writers, editors, photographers, filmmakers, advertisers, and the executives who give them their marching orders go wrong, or occasionally get it right. Through a close analysis of the technical means of representation, in conjunction with the commentary of leading voices in the disability community, I hope to guide future coverage to a more fair and accurate way of putting the disability story on screen or paper. Far from another stab at the political correctness target, the aim of this content analysis⁷ of journalism, film, advertising, and Web publishing is to cut through the accumulated clichés and condescension to find an adequate vocabulary that will finally represent the disability community in all its vibrant and fascinating diversity. Nothing like that will ever happen if the press and advertisers continue to think, write, and design as they have in the past.

APPENDIX A

GUIDELINES FOR PORTRAYING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN THE MEDIA

Fear of the unknown. Inadequate experience. Incorrect or distorted information. Lack of knowledge. These shape some of the attitudinal barriers that people with disabilities face as they become involved in their communities.

powerful influence over the way people
Americans

stasis: here, in movement.

content analysis: research method in the human sciences that content of "messages" in articles, movies, research into recurring themes across time and space. For example, content analysis from the use of disabled in the ways that abilities were twentieth-century novels.