Redefining “Normal:” Textual and Visual Rhetoric of Women with Disabilities

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Redefining “Normal:” Textual and Visual Rhetoric of Women with Disabilities

An Honors Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Honors in Writing and Linguistics.

By
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Under the mentorship of Dr. Lisa Costello and Dr. Christopher Garland

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ABSTRACT
The field of disability studies holds that disability is a political and cultural identity, not just a medical condition. The rhetoric attached to disabled bodies makes them seem negative, while the rhetoric attached to abled bodies is positive. This negative rhetoric applies to visual rhetoric as well, resulting in disabilities being largely ignored in the fields of advertisement. As they are now finally being incorporated, this brings up certain questions about the issues regarding the exploitation and representation of people with disabilities. The representation of bodies in advertising affects and alters how society considers and perceives the actual bodies that they encounter daily. This thesis rhetorically analyzes and contextualizes the textual rhetoric attached to disability and historical representations of disability in order to contextualize disability within our society. Contemporary examples of disability representation in still-image advertising are then analyzed to portray societal relationships, exploitation, as well as normalization. This thesis uses multimodality and plain language in the form of videos to reach a wide range of audiences that are affected by this research.
My abstract explains the form and purpose of this thesis. These scripts are accompanied by the videos that can be found at the YouTube channel **Hannah Sincavage**, which is cited in the Works Cited at the end of the document along with all of the other sources cited within. Referenced images are within this document so it can stand alone, but the best experience is watching the actual videos.

**Introduction**

I. **Context**

A. Hi, my name is Hannah Sincavage, and I am a senior Writing and Linguistics major at Georgia Southern University with a concentration in rhetoric and composition and a minor in economics.

B. Welcome to Redefining “Normal:” Textual and Visual Rhetoric of Women with Disabilities, my project on the intersectionality and representation of women’s bodies with disabilities in the forms of textual rhetoric and visual rhetoric of still image advertising.

C. I know that this form of a video isn’t typically what you expect for a complicated project that has fancy words like intersectionality and visual rhetoric, both things that we’re going to talk about and that are actually really cool. But I’ve chosen this form because these ideas and topics are important and affect every single one of us. That means that in order for us to comprehend and utilize them, the concepts have to be accessible and put into words that we understand. That includes using American Disability Association accessible font and captions, so that people with impairments can
access this form that is directly about them. This video also serves as an easier introduction of theories and concepts in plain language that will be the groundwork and context for the rest of the series. The goal is that you find this engaging and interesting rather than confusing.

II. Disability: This project is filled with interdisciplinary theories and frameworks, but first let's define what exactly disability is and who are considered to have disabilities.

A. The American Disability Association or ADA defines a person with a disability as “someone who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activity."

B. The field of disability studies holds that disability is a political and cultural identity, not just a medical condition and that it is rooted in society’s perceptions of disability itself.

C. Increasing positive representation of disabled bodies is important because it will inevitably affect every single person on Earth in some form. According to the United States Census Bureau, 1 in 5 Americans are disabled, and more than 375,000 Americans become totally disabled every year, meaning that a physical or mental impairment limits major life activities. It is not inevitable that we will become disabled, but the potential is certainly there. As one of my mentors put succinctly, you can’t change your race or your
ethnicity, but you could become disabled tomorrow. Cornell University further proves this, reporting that “In countries with life expectancies over 70 years of age, people spend on average about 8 years, or 11.5 percent of their life span, living with disabilities.”

D. So society’s norms and representations will directly affect us all. This creates a continuum of disability, since it is not linked to any single health issue or condition, and we could so easily go from abled to temporarily disabled or permanently disabled. Usually we see disability as a binary, or something that has two parts. Either you are disabled or you are not, which is extremely limiting for all bodies. But by increasing positive representation, we are able to reduce the binary between abled and disabled and see disabled bodies as “normal.” So, instead of seeing them as separate and different, they are just bodies. Ability is transitory and brief, but consideration for the human body lasts for a lifetime.

I. Normalization: Let’s talk about that binary for a second, though, because society likes to create this distinction.

A. It’s “normal” to think of someone as either abled or disabled and to see these groups in very strict ways.

B. In the book *Disability Rhetoric*, Jay Dolmage, who is the founding editor of the Canadian Journal of Disability Studies, notes, “The rhetoric attached to disabled bodies inherently makes them seem
negative and undesirable, while the rhetoric attached to abled bodies is positive.”

C. People are unknowingly upholding this binary, and the only reason why this is possible is because of the power that disability rhetoric maintains and represents. There is a clear power imbalance in society that favors the abled bodies, as shown through the lack of representation of bodies with disabilities in media, through older buildings that are not accessible to those with disabilities, and through the negative language attached to bodies with disabilities. Project researcher at Åbo Akademi University, Carolin Ahlvik-Harju describes the effect that the cognitive process of normalization has on the personal experience, noting that, “Our bodies and the stories we tell about them are shaped to fit the standard bodily forms and functions” (225). Disability doesn’t fall within that standard.

D. Societal pressure and power to isolate and reject disabled or “abnormal” bodies affects and alters how society perceives the real and physical bodies that they encounter daily. The textual and visual rhetoric in the forms of images, words, movies, and advertisements represent how society actually views the bodies that it portrays.

E. Obviously, this binary is complex, because we don’t live in these normalized boxes of either abled or disabled. We don’t want to exist
in a state of either/or that the binary creates, but many people struggle with it. One solution is to redefine what our normal is. The act of normalizing can lead to inclusion by incorporating bodies into areas that they have previously been restricted from, like adding wheelchair ramps outside of a building or having models with disabilities in magazines. By making these standard instead of unique, the bodies are better integrated into society. If one model with a disability was used for every model without one, our expectations for models will begin to include bodies with disabilities. The issue that comes about is that more often than not, bodies with disabilities are not pictured, staged, or given the same consideration as bodies without disabilities. Here’s an example:

![Image](image_url)

F.

a) Aerie

2. Here, we have the foreground and background. There’s no interaction between them. The woman in the wheelchair is
the active aspect as she does a trick, staring straight into the camera. The women in the back have literally no interaction with her, and the two on the edges are even closing their eyes. So right here, we have a binary, a definitive separation of us and them.

3. The model, her name is Samantha, is not being treated like the more “normal” bodies standing in the back, so even though this ad is technically inclusive, it’s not normalizing disability. Disability is still definitively separate.

II. Feminist Theory: Samantha not only has a disability, but she is also a woman. So now that we’ve talked about binaries and abled/disabled labels and their power, it’s time to really dig deep and talk about another overwhelming kind of power - the Patriarchy. Feminist thinking and theory try to understand gender inequality and imbalances by resisting present societal power structures. In this section, I will be using the term woman. I understand that this term is limiting and does not encompass groups of people this affects, including nonbinary and feminine-presenting queer people, but I am using this term in order to be generally understood.

   A. In her groundbreaking book, *Bodies That Matter*, philosopher and theorist, Judith Butler writes “’sex’ not only functions as a norm, but is part of a regulatory practice that produces the bodies it governs, that is, whose regulatory force is made clear as a kind of
productive power, the power to produce--demarcate, circulate, differentiate--the bodies it controls” (1). Everyone, including the women themselves, works to regulate what women do and how society treats them. The power of gender roles limits what women think that they can do, in turn limiting what they actually do. Because gender roles have been constructed by our society, women must fight to normalize many roles that they take. So both women and people with disabilities are put into separate spaces in order to control them, and this is seen as socially acceptable, normal even. Societal and patriarchal power is methodically confining these bodies and limiting their ability to thrive. But what happens when a woman is disabled?

III. Intersectionality: Intersectionality happens when identities overlap to create complex systems of discrimination or disadvantage. Remember that this project is incredibly complex, so instead of looking at just women or just disability, we need to look at their combined effects that occur because of societal pressure and power.

A. But the various identities that intersectionality is affected by could range from gender to sex to ability to age to socioeconomic status. It’s important to note that intersectionality is not the actual identities coexisting within the same person, but the discrimination that comes from this intersection. This term was coined by Kimberlé
Crenshaw for the purpose of law, who said that “Intersectionality was a prism to bring to light dynamics within discrimination law that weren’t being appreciated by the courts” (Coaston). This concept is instrumental in my research as I delve into the language and distributed images attached to disabled women’s bodies. An example of intersectionality affecting a disabled woman’s body is Nafisa Khanbhai, an Asian woman living in Kenya and disabled from a spinal injury. Khanbhai describes her life in her article, “Dear Diary: The Story of a Disabled Asian Woman,” where she faces discrimination from her family, teachers, and the general population of Kenya. This article takes the form of self-representation, showing that societal controls and power structures are not just outside influences. Khanbhai addresses this, admitting, “Thus rejected, I realized that I had no real choice(s) to make; they had all been made for me the moment I turned out disabled. I realized that the mindset problem is not really personal but universal in my cultural set up.” No matter Khanbhai’s personal abilities, her culture was set up to constrict her, to control her, based upon her intersecting identities. Her disability limits both what she can physically do as well as what society expects her to be able to do. Being of Asian descent in an African country separates her from the general population, making her a minority and an outsider. Her gender
limits her future prospects, like the fact that her father did not allow her to pursue a degree. That’s not what women do, but that’s especially not what women with disabilities do, because they assumed she did not have the physical ability to excel. By noting these discriminations and where they come from, we are resisting the power that is exerted by the societal norm. Through feminist theoretical critique, Pamela Cooper-White explains that, “feminism involves critical analysis, public advocacy, and community organizing around concrete manifestations of oppression of women” (19). Control only works if you allow it to, and through feminist theory and acknowledgment of oppression and discrimination, we can break those gender roles, controls, and societal pressures that have existed for so long.

IV. Representation: Representation is the depiction of a likeness of someone or something. Through increasing representation of disabled women’s bodies in images and media, we will be able to normalize the bodies so that they are not sequestered to the spaces that some people think they should stay in. Again, we’re trying to dissolve that binary between abled and disabled and the power that it wields so that we can normalize all bodies rather than oppress and discriminate.

A. One way to dissolve that binary is to change how we look at things. Visual rhetoric is the ability to analyze how images, both moving
and still, make arguments. Looking through this lens allows us to read images and get meaning beyond what’s simply shown. Sonja K. Foss asserts, “Once an image is created... it stands independent of its creator’s intentions” (147). By looking through a theoretical lens, we can apply other theories like intersectionality and feminist theories to determine meaning for our culture and society. And by analyzing the visual rhetoric and its approaches of an advertisement, we can consider the cultural repercussions. In terms of advertising, in “Effects of Women Representation in Advertising on Customers’ Attitudes” Jelena Stanković et al. write the effects that advertising has on society, saying, “Not only does advertising stimulate purchasing of products and use of services, but it also contributes to the consumers’ formation of social identity, frequently, influencing both their current attitudes and what they should be” (192). In that way, advertising exerts power over the bodies that we see and the way they are represented in order to influence how society sees and reacts to similar bodies that they encounter in their everyday lives. Stanković et al. continue, writing, “Through perfectly set images, advertisers strive to create a virtual reality and impose the idea of what is considered normal in society in its entirety” (193). So if in the media that you consume, the only thing you see is women who are “perfectly” proportioned, that’s
what you expect to see everywhere. Unfortunately, our society is not composed of only this type of body, but this is our society’s perception of “normal.” That is why representation of bodies with disabilities is so important.

B. The way that we look at images and the mindset that we look at them with directly affects how we interpret them. Sonja K. Foss asserts that there is “a set of conceptual lenses through which visual images become knowable as communicative or rhetorical phenomena” (145). For example, women are typically used in submissive positions in popular representations in order to appeal to the “male gaze,” as described by Philosophy professor A. W. Eaton as “the sexually objectifying attitude that a representation takes toward its feminine subject matter, presenting her as a primarily passive object for heterosexual-male erotic gratification” (878). For a picture like this, it is meant to draw men in because the female body is shown in a sexual position, and members of society are drawn to these depictions of sex, like that old comment that “sex sells.” But from my perspective as a feminist scholar, I find it objectifying and offensive to the feminine body. Who we are and how we think directly affects how we receive information and images.

V. Conclusion
A. The identity that we construct for others is based on the images and languages that we attach to them. In the following videos, I will rhetorically analyze the textual rhetoric of disability in the form of writing, the history of the representation of disability, contemporary advertisements featuring disabled women’s bodies for athletic brands, and advertisements for swimsuit and underwear brands. Through using the idea and theory of a stigmatizing normalized body that exists on a continuum of ability and disability, the bodies will be analyzed for discrimination based on their intersecting identities.

B. Disability has been misrepresented as well as underrepresented in our media. We are not either disabled or abled, but on a continuum, and the choices that we make in regards to representing disability directly affect us all.

1. It matters.
Textual Rhetoric of Disability in Policy and Media

I. Context

A. Welcome to the second part of Redefining “Normal:” Textual and Visual Rhetoric of Women with Disabilities, my project on the intersectionality and representation of female bodies with disabilities in the forms of language, rhetoric, and visual rhetoric of still image advertising. My name is Hannah Sincavage, and I am a senior Writing and Linguistics major at Georgia Southern University with a concentration in rhetoric and composition and a minor in economics.

B. If you are new and were pulled in by the great title, but have no clue what I’m talking about, you should watch the introduction first, which you can find by following the link in the description.

C. This video is going to analyze and scrutinize the language that is attached to people with disabilities, used by both abled and disabled people, and the government. The language attached to objects and ideas ultimately influences how we feel about them and represent them. Also, I am making this video in the United States, and all of my examples and artifacts are from and created by Americans, so that is the “society” that is influencing our rhetoric and normalized ideals used in today’s video.

II. Summary of the first video
A. In the last video, we contextualized disability itself as well as really set up the theory that we’re going to use for this project.

1. Notably, intersectionality is the discrimination that occurs because of intersecting identities. We also discussed the idea of the “normal” and normalization, which is society’s rejection of anything that they perceive as “abnormal.” Feminist theory of role taking and Patriarchal power have an effect in society. And visual rhetoric is finding meaning in images in their purpose, composition, and context.

   a) You can find that video here or there’s a link in the description.

2. Remember that according to the United States Census Bureau, 1 in 5 Americans are disabled, and more than 375,000 Americans become totally disabled every year. So chances are that what we talk about today directly affects either you or someone you know. There is no definite separation between disabled or abled, even though some people need to make this distinction. But these states exist on a continuum, and the choices that we make in regards to representing disability directly affect us all.

III. I wanted to start the content videos with textual rhetoric because there is so much power in how we refer to people and in what we call them.
IV. To give context on the structure that shapes the society that creates this language, let’s look at the language that academics and the United States government use to address and describe people with disabilities. Language is important in definitions, naming, and other aspects, so let’s start with the government, where definitions determine policies in terms of gender and disability, and policies determine the daily experiences of people with disabilities.

A. Phil Foreman, a professor at the University of Newcastle, tells us that the language associated with disability has changed over time, writing in the article, “Language and Disability,” that “Language relating to any concept will tend, over time, to acquire some of the concept’s emotional impact. Thus, words that were, at one stage, neutral become laden with meaning” (57). This changing emotional impact is shown in the Rosa’s Law, a law passed by Congress in October 2010 which, “changed references to ‘mental retardation’ in specified Federal laws to ‘intellectual disability,’ and references to ‘a mentally retarded individual’ to ‘an individual with an intellectual disability’” (“Change in Terminology: ‘Mental Retardation’ to ‘Intellectual Disability’”). Just take a moment and think about the fact that this was only nine years ago, so the change is glacial, considering that in our current society, it’s incredibly offensive to even allude to retardation. According to Mark Peters of the Boston
Globe, the word was first used in a medical context in 1909 and became an insult in the mid-1900s. Nevertheless, the fact that our laws are reflecting social norms shows this progression and the rejection of emotionally laden words with negative associations. The word handicapped is another word that is slowly being phased out of laws and society.

1. But back in the 1970s, words such as retardation and handicapped were being adopted to replace other words that had negative connotations, like mental deficiency, crippled, lame, imbecile, and invalid (Foreman 57, Okrent).

2. As time passes, these words that were meant to be optimistic and inclusive inherently become attached to negative connotations and ridicule, as seen with the word retardation eventually being phased out of our legislation because of its negative connotation. Normalization is society's tendency to force an ideal shape on all members. Carolin Ahlvik-Harju, from the department of Theological Ethics and Philosophy of Religion at Åbo Akademi University describes normalization, writing that, “The body is highly idealized and objectified in Western societies and the social pressure to shape, regulate, and normalize one’s body in order to fit a normative standard is strong. The normative
body standard is defined by deeply rooted conceptions of normalcy – the normalcy narrative – and governed by a normalcy structure in culture and society” (224). Every word that we use to describe disability and “abnormal” bodies inherently and eventually becomes negative because of this deep conception of normalcy. As Foreman reminds us, “Language...will ...acquire some of the concept’s emotional impact.” Because society’s normalcy narrative is so strict, any word that is associated with disability will pick up the feelings that are associated with what some see as “abnormal” bodies themselves. As depressing as that is, we have to recognize this cycle that is perpetuated by us and will continue to be upheld by us until we as a society choose to “see” differently, which is what this video is really about.

B. There are ways to work against this system. We can attempt to make these negative words and phrasing more neutral rather than divisive. Although language is inherently attached to its object or concept, person-first language allows for there to be a separation between a person and their disability.

1. An example would be saying “a woman with Down syndrome” instead of “a Down syndrome woman.” Although this may seem like the same thing to someone who is abled,
this is the difference between being labeled a person or being labeled an illness.

a) We see this use of person-first language exhibited in government documents, like this passage from the Social Security website, “Many of you work tirelessly every day to provide service to individuals with disabilities. I thank you for making a difference in their lives” (“A Message from Social Security”). The Social Security Administration manages the Social Security Disability Insurance, which provides income supplements to people that the administration determines to be disabled. By including this quote in their “Message from Social Security,” it is supposed to make people feel better about paying into social security, but it also is representative of the language and structure that we want to be using in relation to disability.

V. The government is setting the expectations for what we should see in society around disability through the language of its policies. Let’s see what the general public has to say about disability in the form of media. While the government policies and message discussed disabilities in a
A respectful way, the media we consume everyday is much more passionate in order to connect with readers.

A. The purpose is to compare the language of “normal” bodies and “abnormal” bodies in relation to “abnormal” bodies, so that we can truly understand representation and the effect of normalization, or society’s power to get bodies to fit into a very specific shape.

B. First, let’s look at what people have to say about Bethany Hamilton. Bethany is an American surfer from Hawaii who lost her arm in a shark attack when she was thirteen years old. To find these examples, I just typed her name into Google and looked under the news tab, so they’re all fairly recent and represent our current society.

1. Leah Scher wrote the headline “Who Is Bethany Hamilton? New Details On The Surfer Who Lost Her Arm To Shark Attack At 13 And The New Documentary About Her.” I automatically responded well to this headline, because not only is there clear person-first language, but Scher chose to use words that are not as loaded. Instead of calling Hamilton a one-armed woman, armless, or amputee like she’s advertising a freakshow and wants to get people to come in and see, she tells the story quickly and in as few words as possible. This is putting the disability in the background and
Bethany as the star, further shown when Scher writes, “She’s sporty. She’s literary. She’s the one-armed surfer mom, Bethany Hamilton.” Scher is using words that we can all relate to, like sporty, literary, and mom. This is normalizing who Bethany is and what her disability is, making the disability second to the person.

C. I found this particular rhetorical approach consistent as I researched Bethany Hamilton, like this example from Mackenzie Mueller: “Surfer, Shark Attack Survivor Bethany Hamilton to Attend Premiere of ‘Unstoppable’” which didn’t even mention the amputation until the third paragraph of the article. And this started to confuse me. Maybe I’m just a cynic, but this respectful rhetoric goes against the normalcy narrative. Then I remembered intersectionality.

1. Remember that intersectionality is the disadvantages or discriminations that are created from overlapping identities.

   a) Bethany Hamilton is a cisgender white woman born in the United States, who, though disabled with an amputation, is still extremely athletic.

   b) This is Mama Căx, a cisgender Haitian-American woman who is also disabled through an amputation,
but because she had osteosarcoma, a malignant type of cancer. Now she works as a model.

2. Now the question is if the rhetoric and language describing her is different from the rhetoric describing Hamilton because of their single differing identity of race. From Bored Panda, Vaiva writes, “Amputee Woman Who Was Given 3 Weeks To Live Becomes Famous Fashion Blogger.” Even though both Hamilton and Căx lost their limbs in their adolescence, Hamilton was described as a survivor and Căx an amputee. This is a clear example of using both loaded language and person-second language rather than person-first. Vaiva chose the loaded word “amputee” and put it before a mention of Căx so that that will be the first image that you hold for her.

3. This rhetorical approach is consistent, shown in this other headline from Metro, one of the biggest newsbrands in the United Kingdom. Miranda Larbi states, “This amputee fashion blogger was given three weeks to live and is now giving everyone serious life goals.” It doesn’t matter that she has become a famous fashion blogger and model, she is still the amputee first. This is in direct contrast to the Hamilton headlines that established her career and personhood
before mentioning her disability. The only noticeable
difference between the two women is their skin. Cāx’s
intersectionality of being a black disabled woman puts her at
a disadvantage compared to a white disabled woman,
epitomizing that whiteness is more normalized than
blackness and our rhetoric changes based on it.

D. Reaction to disabled: These examples with Hamilton and Cāx were
written for the purpose of getting people to read them. But the
desperate need to make Bethany Hamilton seem “normal” as well
as the urge to make Mama Cāx seem “abnormal” are tendencies
that are not limited to this form of media. The language that we say
and use in conversations also shows our need to normalize, so that
we can exercise some form of power through oppressing others.

1. Lauren Baldwin, a woman with hypermobile Ehlers-Danlos
syndrome, writes about her conversations with people when
she feels strong enough to walk instead of using her
wheelchair. She says, “It occurred to me today when five
people in one day expressed how happy they were to see
me on my feet again, that people equate healing with
walking.” People know what the “normal” body is supposed
to look like, and this regulates perceptions of health. As the
scholar Carolin Ahlvik-Harju asserts,
a) “The body is highly idealized...and the social pressure to shape...one’s body in order to fit a normative standard is strong” (224). Despite the fact that it could cause pain or discomfort to walk, it still looks “healthier” than using a wheelchair. This contributes to how people with disabilities see themselves, as Baldwin mentions,
b) “You see, I hated using a wheelchair at first. I saw being a wheelchair user the same as other people view me now, but [my wheelchair] is the reason I can still leave the house.” Our society is conditioned to vilify the “abnormal,” the bodies that don’t look or move exactly the way that we expect or want them to.

VI. Conclusion: So why does this matter?

A. The language attached and associated with bodies with disabilities is used in an effort to normalize “abnormal” bodies. Although our society changes and replaces the actual words that we use, they come to mean the same thing and have the same connotations, because of the way we feel and think about disability. Remember the loaded language of Mama Cãx’s headline, “Amputee Woman Who Was Given 3 Weeks To Live Becomes Famous Fashion Blogger?” I’m sure that purpose of this woman was not to offend
Cāx, but that does not change the fact that what she wrote is offensive. This rhetorical approach shows society’s need to point out what they see as abnormalities, and this can be avoided by educating ourselves on issues in terms of language. We can become aware of what can be considered racist or ableist or misogynistic and stop using it.

B. The language used to describe people with disabilities is not only dependent upon the person’s ability, but also their other identities, as seen with Mama Cāx and Bethany Hamilton. Through this distinction, it’s seen that some people can be more “normal” than others, even if they hold similar disabilities, just as Kimberlé Crenshaw’s theory of intersectionality predicts.

C. But what can we do about this, how can we change this system that feels inevitable? That question we will start to answer in the next three videos as we discuss the influence of image and representation on culture. The important thing that we must all understand is that words can make our culture seem more inclusive, but there will not be true change until our culture and the way that we see and represent people changes.
History of Representation of Disability

I. Context
   A. Welcome to the third part of Redefining “Normal:” Textual and Visual Rhetoric of Women with Disabilities, my project on the intersectionality and representation of female bodies with disabilities in the forms of textual and visual rhetoric of still image advertising. My name is Hannah Sincavage, and I am a senior Writing and Linguistics major at Georgia Southern University with a concentration in rhetoric and composition and a minor in economics.
   B. If you are new and have no clue what I’m talking about, but you think that this actually sounds pretty interesting, you should watch the introduction first, as well as the textual rhetoric portion in part two if you find that intriguing.

II. Summary of first two videos
   A. Just to remind you:
   B. In the first video, we contextualized disability itself as well as really set up the theory that we’re going to use for this project.
      1. Notably, intersectionality is the discrimination that occurs because of intersecting identities. We also discussed the idea of the “normal” and normalization, which is society’s rejection of anything that they perceive as “abnormal.” Feminist theory of role taking and Patriarchal power have an
effect in society. And visual rhetoric is finding meaning in images in their purpose, composition, and context.

a) You can find that video here or there’s a link in the description.

C. In the last video, we discussed how the language and textual rhetoric used to describe and name disability has changed over time because each term eventually becomes inherently negative. This negativity is derived from the way we feel and think about disability. But disability is not the only identity that affects rhetoric and rhetorical approaches, as we saw with Bethany Hamilton and Mama Câx. This intersectionality is going to be key in today’s as well.

1. You can find “that” video here or through the link in the description.

D. But, today, we are looking at historic and pre-contemporary forms of visual rhetoric featuring bodies with disabilities in order to create more of that context that is setting the stage for the representation of disabled bodies today.

1. Remember that according to the United States Census Bureau, 1 in 5 Americans are disabled, and more than 375,000 Americans become totally disabled every year, meaning that at least one major life activity is limited. So
chances are that what we see today directly affects either you or someone you know, and if it doesn't right now, it might in the future. There is also no definite separation between disabled or abled, even though some people tend to make this distinction. These states exist on a continuum, and the choices that we make in regards to representing disability affect both us and how disability is considered in our society.

III. Before getting into analyzing the representation of disabled bodies in advertising today, it's important to see where we have come from and how this industry has developed over time. The forms we're analyzing today are sideshow photographs and charity campaigns.

A. But in order to analyze and dissect these representations, we'll be looking at the visual rhetoric of the pieces. This means that we will look at the components of the images or examples, how they interact, and what opinion or thoughts they inspire in us as the viewer. This analysis is based on the power that rhetoric holds in society to influence us. Sonja K. Foss explains visual rhetoric, describing “Visual rhetoric as a theoretical perspective… is a critical-analytical tool or a way of approaching and analyzing visual data that highlights the communicative dimensions of images”
(145). These images were created for a specific purpose and intended for a specific outcome.

B. We will also be analyzing the intersectionality of these women with disabilities. Kimberlé Crenshaw, lawyer and creator of the intersectionality theory, emphasizes in the article, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,” that “Race, gender, and other identity categories are most often treated in mainstream liberal discourse as vestiges of bias or domination - that is, as intrinsically negative frameworks in which social power works to exclude or marginalize those who are different” (1242). Through analyzing the intersectionality of these images, we are able to see the effect of societal power on discriminated groups, like women and people with disabilities. Like Lauren Baldwin from the last video, the woman with hypermobile Ehlers-Danlos syndrome, identities dictate how people perceive and then speak to us. Like when they told her how happy they were to see her on her feet, because we don’t want people to look disabled. This doesn’t just apply to textual rhetoric, but also visual, and even though we are talking about historical artifacts here, you will see in the videos that follow this one that these phenomena still occur today and affect our current society.
IV. **Sideshows:** We’re going to start with side shows that started performing and marketing in the early 1860s. These were the first instances of using people with disabilities as advertisements in order to draw people in to the show.

A. **Context**

1. Sideshows were marketed under the banner of education and entertainment, meaning that they were operating under good intentions, like the headlines for Hamilton and Câx that we analyzed in the last video, but the intentions were still flawed. Shows could perform at fairs, with circuses, or just on the street. Acts ranged from displays of the “abnormal” body in the forms of people with disabilities or who look cosmetically abnormal as well as magic and illusion tricks. This was not limited to people; I remember going to the circus as a child and seeing a sideshow featuring a two-headed calf. The education aspect of the sideshow was based on pseudoscience and lies that the showmen concocted to earn more profit. This education was based on norms, what our bodies are “supposed” to look like, and policing those that don’t fit that standard. An example is the two performers, Maximo and Bartola, who were said to be “The Last of the Ancient Aztecs,” but really just suffered from
microcephaly. The brother and sister were made to go through several publicity stunts in order to hold the public’s attention, including being forced to marry each other. Their intersectionality of being disabled and immigrants from Central America allowed them to be aggrandized and exploited in the eyes of the public as being something completely “other,” and therefore inferior.
2. Robert Bogdan, Professor Emeritus of Cultural Foundations of Education and Sociology at Syracuse University, writes that “...the people on exhibit sold photographs of themselves to patrons both to supplement their income and to advertise their appearances” (7). These photographs are the artifacts that we will be analyzing, as they represent how the showmen and the performers chose to portray the performers to the public.

B. Frances O’Connor

1. Let’s look at this example of Frances O’Connor, known as the Living Venus de Milo.

2. According to James Mundie, in 1914, Frances O’Connor was born without arms. She performed in sideshows for the Al G. Barnes, Cole Brothers, and Sells-Floto circuses.

3. In her act, O’Connor was able to do things with her feet and toes that people would usually use their hands and arms for. Everyday actions such as drinking tea or smoking a cigarette became aggrandized when she did them.

4. So let’s analyze this image in terms of visual rhetoric and lenses that we use for this image, how it plays to our ideas of the “normal,” and how O’Connor’s intersecting identities affect public perception and discrimination.
a) (1) "Frances O'Connor"

b) She’s very feminine looking. She has on a nice dress, and has shapely legs that are fully in view because that’s what her act is based on.

c) She’s also holding a cup with her foot, which is part of her act, so by buying this postcard, you’re preserving not just her, but the experience.

d) And because we are rhetorically analyzing this, we’re going to look at the whole image rather than just our lovely focal point. Foss writes that in a rhetorical response, “meaning is attributed to the image” (145). Therefore, meaning is attributed to every aspect of
the image. So we have to look at the image holistically, not just O’Connor, in order to understand what it’s trying to convey to us.

e) To that point, she’s against a black background on a black seat so that your focus is completely on her and her pale complexion.

f) The circus is written on the corner of the postcard because there was no such thing as Photoshop back in the early 20th century, and it shows that even though she is a person and she is selling you a piece of herself, she’s still part of and defined by her act.

5. What this means:

a) Bogdan explains this, saying that the photo “paraded the exhibits’ alleged positive attributes: their talents, competence, superior status, and normal lifestyle” (Bogdan 15). O’Connor’s abilities, femininity, and sexuality are on display to make her seem superior or just “normal.” “Normal” people can drink tea, and so can she. Because she is female, her disability is also sexualized. In this sexualization, you can see intersectionality, where combined identities result in discrimination. In the first video, I mentioned the “male
gaze,” and that is what is dictating how O’Connor is pictured and staged. A. W. Eaton, an associate professor at the University of Illinois-Chicago, says that the “male gaze” “refers to the sexually objectifying attitude that a representation takes toward its feminine subject matter, presenting her as a primarily passive object for heterosexual-male erotic gratification” (878). This ties back to the feminist theory in the first video, where we discussed how the norm polices how women present themselves. Even though O’Connor is technically doing something, her body positioning creates a sexualized image meant for “male erotic gratification.”

b) Compare her to this image of Charles B. Tripp, a performer who was also born without arms but who identifies as a man.
(1) “Charles B. Tripp”

(2) Tripp’s gender is different from O’Connor’s, shown in the fact that he is fully clothed and performing with a tea set, but in a much less seductive fashion. The intersectionality of disability and gender shows that the genders were not advertised in the same way in this setting. By being both disabled and an
attractive female, those aspects of O’Connor were focused on rather than who she was as a person. Judith Butler, revolutionary gender theorist, explains this in her book *Undoing Gender*, proposing: “gender is produced in the scene of sexual subordination,” (54).

O’Connor’s disability makes her seem defenseless, so this subordination is particularly able to take place. O’Connor’s gender is only obvious because it’s exploitative: Mundie reports that she received marriage proposals after every performance because of her portrayal. She’s an object of sexual desire rather than a performer, like Tripp. Sideshow performers were defined by their appearances, and O’Connor’s beauty and disability resulted in her becoming overtly sexualized rather than buttoned up and awed at.

V. Charity: Like sideshow postcards sought to exploit the “abnormal” for money, charity organizations sought to exploit the “abnormal” for pity as well as money. The purpose was to educate the public, again, seeming to
have good intentions, but typically through dishonest or exaggerated representation. Charity advertisements show us the power that pity and sympathy have over both our reactions and actions.

A. The charities I discuss here were and still are infamous for using children in their campaigns. These children stand as symbols for the charity and what the donated money would be going towards. The charities had to use images that would connect to as many people as possible, because as Robert Bodgan writes, “Charity images were more prolific than any other genre of disability representation” (44). These photos and advertisements would be plastered on billboards, posters, magazines, collecting cans, and booklets. By using children tottering on crutches with their legs in braces, charities like the March of Dimes were able to garner both the public’s sympathy and their dollars.

B. March of Dimes

1. The March of Dimes was originally called the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis (NFIP), and was founded by Franklin D. Roosevelt. The organization worked for nearly twenty years to find a cure or solution to polio. According to an article written by David Rose on the March of Dimes website, the organization even funded Jonas Salk, the doctor who created the polio vaccine. After solving the
problem of polio, the organization focused on problems like birth defects, healthy pregnancies, and premature babies.

2. This example of an advertisement from The March of Dimes was published in 1959, four years after the polio vaccine was licensed.

3. (1) March of Dimes

b) What do we see here? Two children, a boy and a girl, who either have disabilities or are at least made to look like they have them. The female is Pam Henry, one of The March of Dimes’s poster children for polio, and Daniel E. Slotnik reports that she was unable to walk without crutches. I could not find information
about the boy. But both of these children are presumably disabled. Miss Henry with her crutches and braces is pushing the boy in the wheelchair, keeping the focus on them and their diseases rather than including a parent or caregiver, which would detract from the message. These children are supposed to spur the audience to act. Wendy Hesford, professor and Ohio Eminent scholar, states, “looking constitutes and is constituted by power relations” (56). By showing the children as helpless, it’s creating a power dynamic where the people who are looking at the poster are supposed to be helpful, not helpless like the children. This is also reaffirming the power imbalance between ability and disability, meaning that because we are temporarily-abled (or not disabled yet) we are obligated to help the disabled.

c) This theme is further shown by the children’s expressions as they look at the promises of The March of Dimes, specifically the slogan, “Give new hope!” These children are supposedly plagued by these maladies, and them being listed under the
command in front of them brings hope and smiles to their faces.

d) As an observation, we also have to remember that this is an advertisement for the charity, so the name and the command to join are front and center, implying that if you do join, you will be able to give these children with disabilities hope. Recognize that every aspect of this image is being used so that the charity will get more money from you.

e) And of course, if you are still wondering whether or not this charity is worth your dimes, Mr. President Franklin D. Roosevelt is listed as the founder. This presidential credibility is based on power relationships again. The same ones that control us are telling us to trust him. Although President Roosevelt has an abnormal body, something that inherently takes away power, he still has political power that garners faith in the intended audience. He was trusted enough to be elected four times, so obviously his charity is reputable. He also had polio as a child and sometimes used crutches in public, adding to that credibility.
C. Now what does this all mean? What is the significance of Pam Henry, FDR, and disability charities? It’s conflicting. The exploitation of children with disabilities epitomized the assumption that disabilities should be pitied and “fixed” rather than the actual disability being normalized. Polio left children permanently disabled, but the narrative created by charities like The March of Dimes made the disability seem like something that the child could overcome if you just join the march. This is not a disability-friendly message, but one that perpetuates the idea and the need of the “normal” body. But it is also conflicting. Through using children in their campaigns, charities were able to do great work with the money that was donated. Without poster children like Pam Henry, there might not be a polio vaccine today, but the societal harm that came from these specific depictions must be acknowledged because we see it repeated again today.

1.
(1) St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital

b) This example from St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital is from 2015, but shows the exact same themes as the March of Dimes poster. This is a children’s hospital, so obviously these are patients, but the phrase “Give to help them live” makes it seem they like are on death’s doorstep. We know nothing about these children except their names, and even those are small compared to the actual children, but we’re being led to believe that they are dying and will die without you. Even though they are smiling and don’t seem to be in pain at all. Their faces and the word “give” also take up a majority of the frame, so that is what you remember and take away from it. These are the same types of themes that we saw in the March of Dimes and show us that children with disabilities continue to be exploited for more donations.

VI. Conclusion

A. We have seen several depictions of female disability today, and these are not extensive. We did not discuss the exploitation of people with dwarfism for comedy, the normalization of disabilities
and prosthetics after the World Wars, or the horrors of asylums. I did this purposefully, in order to not push you away, but to pull you in. Sonja K. Foss notes that there is “a set of conceptual lenses through which visual images become knowable as communicative or rhetorical phenomena” (145). I already quoted this, but it’s true now. I’m creating a lens for you, a way for you to see these images. If I showed you soldiers with missing limbs or Munchkins from The Wizard of Oz, it would both take away from the representation of women with disabilities as well as not prepare you for the images that we are going to see in the next few videos.

B. O’Connor and Henry were both portrayed and exploited as disabled for a purpose: to make money. Their disabilities were put on display to attract more dollars, and they were defined by their appearances and their portrayed disabilities to be exploited. The Al. G. Barnes and Sells Flato combined circus as well as the March of Dimes created simplistic narratives of what it means to be disabled, thus exerting power over the women, children, and the audience. These power relationships restrict society’s opinion of disability and continue to be perpetuated today.
I. Context
   A. Welcome to the fourth part of Redefining “Normal:” The Textual and Visual Rhetoric of Women with Disabilities, my project on the intersectionality and representation of female bodies with disabilities in the forms of textual and visual rhetoric of still image advertising. If you haven’t seen the other videos and all of those words sounded like I was chewing up a dictionary, you should watch the introduction first, as well as the language and history videos if you find historical context and research interesting. You can find those links in the description.

   B. My name is Hannah Sincavage, and I am a senior Writing and Linguistics major at Georgia Southern University with a concentration in rhetoric and composition and a minor in economics. Similar to the last video, we are going to be rhetorically analyzing images of females with disabilities. The difference is that today we are looking at pieces of advertising that were created and distributed within the last ten years. These pieces represent our current culture and come from different countries including the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia.

II. Summary of first two videos
   A. In the first video, we contextualized disability itself as well as really set up the theory that we’re going to use for this project.
1. First, intersectionality is the discrimination that occurs because of intersecting identities. We also discussed the ideas of the “normal” and normalization, which is society’s rejection of anything that they perceive as “abnormal.” Feminist theory of role taking and Patriarchal power have an effect in society. And visual rhetoric is finding meaning in images in their purpose, composition, and context.

   a) You can find that video here or there’s a link in the description.

B. And in the second video, we learned that the language and rhetoric used to describe and name disability has changed over time because each term becomes inherently negative. This negativity is derived from the way we feel and think about disability. But disability is not the only identity that affects rhetoric, as we saw with Bethany Hamilton and Mama Câx.

   1. You can find “that” video here or through the link in the description.

C. In the third video, we finally saw some representation of bodies with disabilities through the forms of advertisements at the turn of the century for freak shows and charities. The women and children in those advertisements were exploited for both their disability and
gender, something that, as we saw, still happens in our current society.

1. “This” video can be found here or through the link in the description.

D. Please recall that according to the United States Census Bureau, 1 in 5 Americans are disabled, and more than 375,000 Americans become totally disabled every year, meaning that at least one major life activity is limited. So chances are that what we see today directly affects either you or someone you know, and if it doesn’t right now, it could in the future. There is also no definite separation between disabled or abled, even though some people tend to make this distinction. But these states exist on a continuum, and the choices that we make in regards to representing disability directly affect all of us and how disability is considered in our society.

III. Today, I will show society’s representation of disability in ads for Nike’s Air Jordans, ASOS, and Target. All of these advertisements feature disabled women and at least one other person.

A. I chose athletic wear for the overall theme of this video, because it’s one of the only types of clothing that uses models with disabilities at least semi-regularly. It also allows us to look at an important aspect of disability: athletics and sports. Intersectionality, or the events that occur because of intersecting identities, is clear in the diverse
bodies that are used, which is great, but as you will see, they can do better.

B. We’re going to look at the companies’ histories with disability representation, then actually rhetorically analyze and create meaning from the advertisements. Stanković et al. explain that “Every time we see an advertisement, it has an impact on our consciousness or subconsciousness” (192). Even if we think it does not. So these images that we see today have an effect and contribute to society’s overall opinion and both bodies with disabilities and disability in general.

IV. First is the advertisement for the AJ2009 from Nike’s Air Jordan featuring April Holmes from 2009.

A. (Air Jordan)
B. Air Jordan specifically is not very representative of disability, as this is the only ad campaign with Holmes in it, but Nike has been making great headway in terms of incorporation and representation.
1. In June of 2019, Nike installed a mannequin with a disability in their Niketown store in London. The back leg has a prosthetic.

   a) (Niketown)

   b) This mannequin normalized the disabled body by putting it right next to mannequins without disabilities.

   Sarah Kim verifies this inclusivity, reporting,

   “Sportswear brands notoriously only feature able-bodied mannequins, so the fact that a major company like Nike has promoted the visibility of disabled bodies is a major step forward.”

2. Nike also signed the first athlete with a disability for a pro contract in October 2018. Justin Gallegos was born with
cerebral palsy, but discovered his passion for running in high school, writes Gleeson.

3. The representation of bodies with disabilities is consistent across time, and April Holmes is not being used as a token or one attempt at securing the disabled market or just a ploy for profit.

C. April Holmes is an incredible human being herself though.

According to the Team USA website, Holmes is a four-time Paralympian and has won 3 medals. She had always loved track and field, but her passion for it was reignited after a train accident resulted in the amputation of her left leg below the knee (“April Holmes”). Being an athlete made her want to keep living.

D. Holmes’s strength and endurance led to her being the only Jordan Brand sponsored athlete and inspiring the AJ2009 sneaker. Let’s check out that advertisement and unpack it.
a) We have two people: April Holmes who inspired the shoe design and Michael Jordan who owns the brand. Both are dressed in black, making the effect seem cohesive overall. They are modeling the two different color designs of the sneaker: Black/Varsity Red-White on Holmes and White/Metallic Silver in Jordan’s hands. Now there’s a difference.

b) Holmes is wearing hers, and they are barely discernible to the degree that I couldn’t even tell if they were actually AJ2009s. But Jordan is holding his out proudly. What does that tell us? A lot actually. Disability writer, Thomas C. Weiss asserts, “Good images of disability and well-produced ads are designed to promote brand loyalty while making a product more popular.” The purpose of using Holmes was not to sell shoes. That’s Jordan’s purpose. The purpose of Holmes was to make the brand popular. By making her disability more recognizable than the supposed focus of the ad, we can see that in this advertisement, two products are being sold: the sneaker and inclusivity.
c) I can hear my comments sections filling up about it now: no, Hannah, she inspired the shoe. That’s why she’s there. And I agree with you: she should be there. But look at the color blocking. Her black shoes almost blend in with that black flooring. But you know what doesn’t blend in and is stark against that white background? Her prosthetic leg. Project researcher at Åbo Akademi University, Carolin Ahlvik-Harju explains this by writing, “the normalcy narrative as the dominant narrative hinders counter-narratives to be equally important in culture” (227). Rather than caring about Holmes’s face or even the shoe, our eyes are quickly drawn to her “abnormal” prosthetic leg. In order to be inclusive, Nike could have done different color blocking or have her hold the shoe like Michael Jordan. Unfortunately, these weren’t done.

E. Despite Nike’s steps to be inclusive in terms of disability representation, Holmes was not incorporated properly to make the advertisement seem completely cohesive and non-exploitative.

V. Air Jordan was not the best representation of disability because they tried but didn’t completely succeed. But please have hope for our next two examples. Now we’re looking at the company ASOS from the United
Kingdom. Chloe Ball-Hopkins is wearing the jumpsuit that she helped to design.

A. (Asos)

B. Per the article, “The History of ASOS: Fashion Facts” Asos was created in 2000 as the company AsSeenOnScreen, where people could buy clothing that they had seen in TV shows and in movies. The company has moved on from recreations to original products, and provided formal attire for many British Paralympic athletes at the 2016 Rio events and ceremonies. Unfortunately, that's the only other disability representation that I was able to find besides the jumpsuit, but let's discuss that further.

C. British paralympic athlete and BBC Bristol sports reporter Chloe Ball-Hopkins reached out to ASOS after experiencing a dreary and wet festival in her wheelchair. Ball-Hopkins wanted to be kept dry and warm but didn’t want the clothing to be exclusively for people with disabilities. In her “About” section on her website, she describes the jumpsuit as, “Something that was inclusive not exclusive.” The advertisement illustrates that.
D. (Asos)

1. This is the photoset that was used most often and the pair that Ball-Hopkins actually shared on Twitter. Here we have two women modeling the jumpsuit in two different styles to share the versatility of the garment. The women are laughing and interacting with each other so that the image is cohesive and there’s a relationship between the elements.

2. There’s a white background so that the pastel colors of the jumpsuit really stand out, and that is where the eyes are pulled automatically. Our eyes are not pulled to Ball-Hopkins’s wheelchair. If it were being showcased, she’d be turned to the side with the wheels in full view. Here, especially in the second one, it’s barely present. Through this photo set, ASOS was defying and redefining “normal” by putting historically “abnormal” bodies in spaces usually restricted to “normal” bodies. Ahlvik-Harju asserts that “Our
bodies and the stories we tell about them are shaped to fit the standard bodily forms and functions” (225). ASOS’s story is different than our normal, so it’s breaking the standard forms and functions of society. The jumpsuit is functional and so is Ball-Hopkins’s body and form.

a) My opinion is consistent with others’.

(1) GraceyRx tweeted, “@ASOS leading the way! This is honestly the first time I have ever seen a disabled model in a ‘normal’ set up, rather than a special one off to gain attention. So happy my ASOS addiction is fuelling a forward thinking, caring business 👋🏻 #equality #DisabilityRights.”

(2) Rhiannonmcgx tweeted, “thank you @ASOS for giving us representation! it is so important disabled models are used and clothing can be adapted to individual's needs!”

(3) These sentiments show that by incorporating Ball-Hopkins in such a genuine and precise way, ASOS is shifting the narrative to become more inclusive rather than exclusive.
VI. Our last campaign that we are going to look at is Australian Target’s “New season activewear” spread from 2016 featuring Robyn Lambird.

A. Target’s representation of people with disabilities is actually one of the things that inspired me to do this great project. One of the things that they have done is design and produce an adaptive wear line, which is a clothing line specifically for people with disabilities. The advertising campaign for this line featured model Jillian Mercado, whose muscular dystrophy requires the use of a wheelchair.
2. Target also features people with disabilities in their in-store displays. Author Jamie Sumner documented this particular one on Instagram, writing, “Thank you @target for this. It made my son smile and clap and sign for “more” and so you have my whole heart. ❤ Keep it coming. #specialneeds #specialkids”

3. (Sumner)

4. So Target’s representation isn’t, pardon the pun, targeted to one specific demographic of gender, age, or ethnicity, but is becoming representative of disability as a whole.

C. That representation reaches athlete Robyn Lambird, who was featured in Australian Target’s “New season activewear” spread from 2016 that we’re analyzing today.

1. Lambird was born with cerebral palsy and plays both wheelchair basketball and rugby (“Robyn Lambird”). She
models androgynous clothing and says that disability sports allowed her to connect with the disability community and realize what it means to be disabled (Kenny).

2. Lambird sees her modeling as an opportunity to normalize disability. In an interview, she says, “The media is a really powerful socializing agent. People learn from the world around them and from television, movies, and the Internet” (Kenny).

3. So let’s look at Lambird changing normal.

D. This image is different because it’s part of a spread, so we get to see exactly how it was used.

1. (Target)
2. This is the most conflicting advertisement we’re going to see today. So we have three images with women on this
advertisement, and two are of Lambird. The smaller image is a closeup and the larger one features her wheelchair. She’s alone, which is fine because the other woman is isolated as well. The difference is that Robyn got an introduction and a quote.

a) Her quote reads, “As a para athlete I practically live in activewear. That’s why I love Target’s range - it’s got me covered for the whole day. With plenty of options for working out, and fashionable pieces, that are perfect for busy days in between training sessions.”

b) After reading this is where I get concerned. If you take out the word para, this could be any other athlete. Which is good, that’s normalization, but then why do we need that quote? Why was it necessary when the other model didn’t need one to model the same clothing?

3. Speaking of the other model, let’s talk about the two women compared to each other. Here, we can truly see intersectionality, coined by law professor, Kimberlé Crenshaw, to describe the discrimination that occurs because of interesting identities. Both women are thin and white. The only difference is their ability. Why is the model
necessary, when the spread is clearly about Lambird?

Especially when you consider that Lambird *is* able to stand up. You see why this is so complicated. Stanković et al tell us that “It can be asserted that advertising sells values, images and concepts of what is considered to be normal” (193). The value Target is selling is obviously that this line is universal, but why show it in this way? And even if we don’t know the why, we can figure out the effect that it creates because as Foss tells us, “Once an image is created… it stands independent of its creator’s intentions” (147).

Whatever Target’s intentions were are lost in the audience’s comprehension. So the effect of the composition, the quote, and the different models is a sense of tokenism rather than normalism or inclusive representation.

4. If Target wanted to create the idea of “normal,” they would have treated these women in the same way. They would have had them posed in ways that the tone feels similar; they would have given them both quotes or included no quotes at all. This is essentially a spotlight on Robyn Lambird, which is fine, but a spotlight isn’t normal. It’s bright and starkly points out the differences.
VII. Athletes push their bodies to the limit to be better, to be the best. For paralympic athletes, they face even more challenges and adversity to be better and to be represented fairly. Holmes, Ball-Hopkins, and Lambird are all accomplished women that were used for advertisements. Holmes and Lambird were used to promote brand inclusivity by putting them apart, by compositionally separating them, by focusing on the disability rather than the products. Ball-Hopkins, on the other hand, shines in her ad. She looks accepted, she looks happy, she looks “normal.” Remember, Stanković et al. explain that “Every time we see an advertisement, it has an impact on our consciousness” (192). In the next video, we will analyze this impact through the advertising of swimwear and lingerie.

VIII. I want it to be clear that if you represent bodies with disabilities at all, you are helping the normalization process. You are putting the bodies out there. But Nike and Target did not represent these women accurately, did not give them the respect that they deserve as humans rather than tokens. But good news! ASOS did. So there is a right, representative, and respectful way to use models with disabilities. We just need higher expectations.
Rhetorical Representation of Lingerie/Swimwear

I. Context

A. Welcome to Redefining “Normal:” The Textual and Visual Rhetoric of Women with Disabilities, the fifth part of my project on the intersectionality and representation of female bodies with disabilities in the forms of textual and visual rhetoric of still image advertising. If you’ve been here since the beginning, welcome back, but if you got pulled into the video by the interesting title, I suggest watching the first four videos to get the proper context for this one.

B. My name is Hannah Sincavage, and I am a senior Writing and Linguistics major at Georgia Southern University with a concentration in rhetoric and composition and a minor in economics.

C. This video is going to be very similar to the last one, but instead of analyzing athletic wear or activewear we’re going to analyze lingerie and swimwear. And instead of comparing three companies, we’re going to be directly comparing two companies and how they approach the representation of females with disabilities.

II. Summary of prior videos

A. Before we get into the thick of it today, let’s reminisce a bit.

1. In the first video, we really got into the thick of the theory for this project. Remember that intersectionality is the
discrimination that occurs because of intersecting identities. We also discussed the ideas of the “normal” and normalization, which is society’s rejection of anything that they perceive as “abnormal.” Feminist theory of role taking and Patriarchal power have an effect in society. And visual rhetoric is finding meaning in images in their purpose, composition, and context.

a) You can find that video here or there’s a link in the description.

B. In the second video, we learned that the textual rhetoric used to describe and name disability has changed over time because each term becomes inherently negative. This negativity is derived from the way we feel and think about disability. But disability is not the only identity that affects rhetorical approaches, as we saw with Bethany Hamilton and Mama Câx.

1. You can find “that” video here or through the link in the description.

C. In the third video, we finally saw some representation of bodies with disabilities through the forms of advertisements at the turn of the century for freak shows and charities. The women and children in those advertisements were exploited for both their disability and
gender, something that, as we saw, still happens in our current society.

1. “This” video can be found here or through the link in the description.

D. And finally, in the fourth video, we saw contemporary examples of women with disabilities featured in advertising for Air Jordan, ASOS, and Target. All three advertisements worked to normalize bodies with disabilities by using them in campaigns, but Air Jordan and Target exploited the women. There is still hope, since ASOS was truly representative.

1. Feel free to find that video “here” or through the link in the description.

E. Disability is also very present in our current society. According to the United States Census Bureau, 1 in 5 Americans are disabled, and more than 375,000 Americans become totally disabled every year. So what we talk about and see today directly affects either you or someone you know, and if it doesn’t right now, it definitely will in the future. This means that there is no definite separation between disabled or abled, even though some people tend to make this distinction. These states exist on a continuum, and the choices that we make in regards to representing disability directly affect us all and how disability is considered in our society.
III. Context for advertisement

A. Today we are going to look at the image that inspired me to do this project back in August of 2018, and I am so excited to rhetorically analyze it with you. We’re going to look at the companies Aerie and Chromat. Both are very different, but both are revolutionizing the representation of women with disabilities. We’re going to look at the companies’ histories with disability representation, then actually rhetorically analyze in order to get meaning from the advertisements. I chose Lingerie and Swimwear because they cover about the same amount of skin, and I know that they are fundamentally different.

IV. Aerie

A. We’re going to start with Aerie, which is a brand of American Eagle. Its main competitor is Victoria’s Secret. It has become very popular since it was first announced on February 28, 2006, and it mainly focuses on underwear and lingerie. But Jennifer Foyle, global president of Aerie, describes the brand as a “lifestyle.” This brand has been devoted to creating a look of inclusion, and in 2014 launched its “Aerie Real” campaign, which promised no airbrushing on their models. In July 2018, Aerie released photos of female models with disabilities on their website.
B. I’m going to show you the photos first, and then we’ll talk about them.

1. 

2. 

3. 

C. So first thoughts: these women seem to be happy, they seem to be interacting with each other, and it seems to be representative of disabilities and intersectional women in general. We saw girls with an insulin pump, a wheelchair, and a colostomy bag. There are
women of every size and color. It seems representative of real people. But wait, with rhetorical analysis, we can dig deeper and see a different perspective.

1. 
   a) I started with this image, and that was purposeful.

   This is what we normally think of when we think of models: happy, beautiful, young, kind of perfect. This is our normal, and I wanted to establish that. So everything that I show you after this will either play into this “norm” or be “abnormal,” which is the exact binary that I want to dissolve. This photo was also released around the same time as the other ones, so Aerie established our normal.

   b) By putting the disabled bodies in the spaces that we reserve for normative bodies, Aerie is forcing us to work to dissolve that binary. Instead of “normal” or “abnormal,” they’re just bodies. This leaves room for
intersectionality, so that we must consider multiple aspects of the bodies, rather than just their disabilities. These identities include both race and body-size.

2. a) So now we go here, and obviously, this is different from the first picture slide. The women don’t look like the models in the previous ad, and we’re moving away from our established normal.

b) But I want you to look at the spacing. Each of the four women is in their own box, and these boxes are small. Close. There’s not much room to move, and the women don’t even fully fit. Sonya K. Foss says, “Visual rhetoric is a system of signs. A sign communicates when it is connected to another object.” These women are not allowed to be connected and are forcibly being separated. By figuratively putting the women into these boxes, we’re
containing them. We’re cutting off their arms, cutting off their legs, and deciding what is important. The focus isn’t on the women, but on the products that they are selling: the underwear and the idea of inclusivity that they are trying to portray. So we can see that ad creators and companies only care about their public image and getting people to buy their merchandise.

3.
   a) Now the last picture. Here, we have the women all together, no space between them, but if you pay attention, they aren’t touching. No one is looking at each other, no one is interacting. Let’s switch back
b) to the first picture, and see how they smile at each other, how their arms are around each other. None of this interaction is happening

d) in this picture. And as we talk about space, let’s consider the composition. If you notice, your vision is brought towards the center of the picture. This is both where the woman in the wheelchair is, so that you notice her, as well as the women who look the most “modelesque.” Remember that what we see and how we see is “constructed on the basis of viewers’ own experiences” (Foss). So, these women are comforting
for us, because we know models. We look up to models. We want to be beautiful like them and for society to see us as beautiful. We also expect models and advertisements to look like this, because that’s all we know. The woman in the wheelchair is used as a token in this picture because even though she is disabled, she still conforms to what we expect out of models. The plus-sized women are different. They are on the edges of the frame, so that we don’t spend as much time or effort considering what they are wearing or who they are. We aren’t drawn to them, unlike the women in the middle, and that’s purposeful. This is the only example with plus-sized women, and they are pushed to the edges. They are also being used as tokens because Aerie wants to be able to say they have them, but you aren’t supposed to look at them too long. This is false representation.

D. And if you wanted to know for certain that Aerie’s representation is false or misguided, user grwingpain shared her experience with Aerie on Instagram, writing, “today i was told there’s no real possibility of keeping my job as a bra expert with @aerie if i need to use a wheelchair at work… it’s easy to monetize inclusivity when
you don’t actually provide it.” Aerie tries very hard to make it seem like they are inclusive, but when it comes down to it, they’re just perpetuating normalcy. This is also shown in their swimsuit line. I browsed the entire collection online and could not find a single model with a disability sporting a bikini or one-piece. There were models with disabilities wearing shirts, leggings, and underwear, but there were none wearing swimwear. This perpetuates the spatial differences of the abled and disabled: there are spaces that are deemed as “normal” and not. Confinement to one or the other is a binary and is keeping bodies from being accepted. Everyone has to wear underwear and something that covers their torso, but apparently not everyone gets to swim.

V. Chromat, on the other hand, is a swimwear company that features female models with disabilities in all of their advertisements.

A. The company was established by Becca McCharen-Tran in 2010. The clothing is, according to the company’s Autumn/Winter 2019 Lookbook, “made with sustainable fabric that uses regenerated nylon spun from fishing nets recovered from the world’s oceans.” On every piece of clothing that you click on on their online store, they tell you where the product is made, where the fabric comes from, and what size the model in the picture is wearing.
B. Chromat has always been inclusive, but in July of 2018, they launched their “Pool Rules” campaign with models Ericka Hart, Denise Bidot, Mama Cāx, Geena Rocero, and Emme. You might remember the name Mama Cāx from the video on textual rhetoric that was in the second series. She is a model who had cancer in her lung and her leg and had to have her leg amputated at the young age of fourteen.

1. The rules are: “Intolerance Not Tolerated, Body Policing Prohibited, Scars and Stretch Marks Welcome, All Abilities Accepted, Food-Shaming Not Permitted, Body Hair Appreciated, Celebrate Cellulite, No Age Restrictions, Respect Preferred Pronouns, and Unrestricted LGBTQ+ PDA.” (Chromat)

C. This collection was supposed to connect directly to the customer by putting the designs directly where the customers are going to wear them: the pool.

D. Again, for this portion, we’re going to look at all of the images first, and then we’ll talk about them.
1. All abilities accepted

2. Scars & stretch marks welcome

3. Intolerance not tolerated
E. So first thoughts: this is very very different from Aerie. These women are out in the world instead of at a studio. They are unabashedly models and hold themselves as such. It seems representative but refined. Let’s take a closer look.

1.

a) Here we have Mama Câx in all of her glory as a woman with a disability at a public pool. She’s wearing swimwear outside of the water, showing that the outfit exists in multiple states, so Câx can as well.

b) The color blocking is interesting too. The swimsuit is very bright compared to the washed out background of the pool. Similarly, her prosthetic leg is washed out compared to the product. Obviously, the disability exists, but the rule epitomizes what was created. “All abilities accepted.” By not putting the focus on the objects that Câx uses to move, it creates that
normalism. A woman without a disability could have

done almost the exact same pose and the same
effect would be created. Stanković et al. tell us that,
“Through perfectly set images, advertisers strive to
create a virtual reality and impose the idea of what is
considered normal in society in its entirety” (193). By
putting Câx into a “normal” situation and focusing on
the actual product, which is what the advertisement is
supposed to do, Chromat is working to normalize her
body, to accept all abilities.

2.

a) Now we move to rule number four, which is “Scars
and stretch marks welcome.” Here we have Mama
Cāx again along with Ericka Hart, breast cancer survivor.

b) The women are wearing similar bathing suits showing unity between the two. This unity is strengthened by the visible presence of the scars. Hart’s scars are visible, but tastefully so. They are not fore-front of the image, but natural. Her breasts are also not objectified, so this image isn’t overtly sexual. Let’s look at the Aerie photo again.

c) Here the focus is so obviously on the disabilities themselves as the women are contained in their boxes. Guy Debord claims in his manifesto *The Society of the Spectacle*, “The spectacle is not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images.” The Aerie image is putting the women apart with their
disabilities, creating a sense of separateness rather than normality or holistic. Chromat is on the other end of the spectrum.

d) Everything about this image is normalizing and welcoming scars, marks that are distinctly “abnormal” for our bodies. From the phrase, to the holistic image, the women and the clothing are the focal point. Dirth and Branscombe remind us that “Researchers traditionally assume disability to be the most significant aspect of a person’s psychological experience, drowning out other more typical sources of psychological influence” (1301), but with this advertisement, Chromat is actively working against
this assumption to prove that these “abnormalities” are actually welcome.

3. a) Finally, we’re looking at pool rule number one, “Intolerance not tolerated.” Honestly, this is one of my favorite images that I have ever seen, especially in this project. It’s similar to the last Aerie image.
b) We have females of different body types, sizes, and shapes. The female with the disability is in the middle, and we have a range of races and ethnicities. But the thing that is really differentiating these is the relationship between the models. Aerie’s models are all separate and existing without touch, while Chromat’s models are touching, leaning on each other, acting like models.

c) You know where we saw that?

![Image](1)

d) Here. We saw that here. While Aerie treated the wheelchair and plus-sized models as tokens, Chromat treated them as models. Models who are completely real without having to be labeled as such, these women have stretch marks, pores, and scars, but they are “normal.” We are dissolving the binary between abled and disabled by putting them right next
to each other and taking away their differences. There is no “abnormal.” That binary is gone so both and all of their bodies are inherently normal.

VI. Conclusion

A. Aerie and Chromat are both working to represent bodies, and for that, I want to appreciate them. But just because a company represents disability, it does not mean that it is a positive representation. Wendy Hesford affirms, “looking is itself a rhetorically mediated act” (57). So what we see is influenced by who we are. In order to really change how society treats and sees disability itself, we have to look at the representation properly and expect more.

B. Looking at Aerie, again, it seems representative. They have models with disabilities, and they’re right next to models without disabilities, so it’s good representation! But the bodies are just as contained and separate as if they weren’t there at all.

C. Chromat, on the other hand, puts models with disabilities into spaces that were previously reserved for models without disabilities. By having Mama Câx model swimwear, clothing that she used to fear wearing due to the fact that she was never comfortable in her body (Regensdorf), Chromat is normalizing the female body in all forms.
D. By recognizing the difference, we can change our expectations and our perspectives. 1 in 5 people in the United States has a disability. These people wear underwear and swimsuits and deserve to have their bodies represented in the media that we consume everyday.
Conclusion

I. Context

A. Welcome to the sixth and last part of Redefining “Normal:” Textual and Visual Rhetoric of Women with Disabilities, my project on the intersectionality and representation of female bodies with disabilities in the forms of textual and visual rhetoric of still image advertising. If you’re new here and don’t know what I’m talking about, I suggest that you watch the other five videos first, unless you like to listen to the end of the story first.

B. My name is Hannah Sincavage, and I am a senior Writing and Linguistics major at Georgia Southern University with a concentration in rhetoric and composition and a minor in economics.

C. This video is going to wrap up everything that we’ve been theorizing and analyzing, and then we’ll look towards the future of disability representation of female bodies. This is everything that we’ve been working towards, and I’m so thankful that you’ve come on this journey with me.

II. Context for disability

A. Remember how important this research is. The Center for Disease Control reported in a press release that “61 million Americans – have a disability that impacts major life activities.” I can’t imagine 61
million of anything, let alone individuals that face different challenges and discrimination just because their bodies are different. And Cornell University reports that every year that you remain on this Earth, the likelihood of becoming disabled increases. So what we talk about and see today directly affects either you or someone you know, and if it doesn’t right now, it definitely will in the future. This means that there is no definite separation between disabled or abled, even though some people tend to make this distinction. These states exist on a continuum and the choices that we make in regards to representing disability directly affect us all and how disability is considered in our society. It is about what is present and not present. Shown but not shown. And this encompasses both images as well as text.

III. Textual Rhetoric: But how do we define disability? What do we say about it?

A. In the second video, we answered these questions. The textual rhetoric and definitions attached to people with disabilities have changed over time, inevitably becoming negative because of this attachment. Words like retardation, handicapped, and invalid were all positive at one point, but became negative because of the deep connection to what society defines as the “normal body.” Opinions
of disability are not created solely on the terms, but also by the other words and phrases used to describe the person.

B. This use of language is not limited to text. How we speak about disability in our everyday lives is dependent both on the person’s ability as well as their other identities. Remember Mama Cax, a Haitian American model, and Bethany Hamilton, a white surfer, are both women who lost limbs in adolescence but were described and defined differently.

1. Hamilton was described in a headline as “Surfer, Shark Attack Survivor Bethany Hamilton to Attend Premiere of ‘Unstoppable’.” She’s a survivor, she’s successful, and the headline focuses on these things instead of her disability.

2. While Cax was described as “Amputee Woman Who Was Given 3 Weeks To Live Becomes Famous Fashion Blogger.” It seems that her disability is the only thing that matters, because it was placed even before the word ‘woman.’ Cax was defined by her disability and not the fight that she lost her limb to, unlike Hamilton.

3. This difference and distinction allows us to see that some people can be more normal than others, even if they have similar identities.
C. The textual rhetoric attached to disability affects how we see disability. If we use negative words like retardation or handicap, we think negatively about disability. By being aware of the effects and indications of our language, we can change how we personally consider and how our society considers disability and the bodies attached to it.

IV. History of Representation: Along with textual rhetoric, representation in images affects how we see or consider what it means to be disabled. Visual rhetoric allows us to look at these images in a way to derive meaning about the surrounding culture.

A. In the third video, we saw that the history of visual representation of disability is long and comes in various forms, but I focused on advertising and show cards for side shows performers and charity advertisements. Remember Frances O’Connor, known as the Living Venus de Milo, and Pam Henry featured in The March of Dimes campaign.

B. O’Connor’s example showed overt sexualization and exploitation of the pity that is typically derived from disability in the public sphere. O’Connor was portrayed in a sexualized way because of the way her employer and audiences viewed her disabilities. She was also defined by her acts under both her stage name as the Living Venus
Through this, she lost her personhood.

C. Henry also inspired pity in her audience. People who saw her in her poster wanted her to have new hope, to be able to walk, to be cured. Only they could help her. While Henry is depicted as powerless and needing the help of someone else, O'Connor can be seen as independent as she daintily sips her tea without aid. Both of these females were characterized and simplified by their appearances and their portrayed disabilities in order to be exploited. This exploitation created simplistic narratives of what it means to be disabled.

D. Disability continues to be exploited in this way in order to get more money, making it a deeply ingrained aspect of representation in our society. Rather than normalizing disability, representation has sought to keep disability “abnormal” so that we can continue to abuse these bodies for profit.

V. Athleticwear: We saw a different kind of abuse and exploitation of bodies with disabilities through our analysis of athletic and activewear in the fourth video.

A. The companies of Nike, ASOS, and Target employed paralympic athletes to model their merchandise and create an image for the companies. April Holmes, Chloe Ball-Hopkins, and Robyn Lambird
are all talented and accomplished athletes that speak out for proper representation of bodies with disabilities.

B. In these advertisements, Holmes and Lambird were used to promote the idea of brand inclusivity by putting these bodies apart and separating them compositionally. There was a definitive focus on the disability rather than the products. This is not normalization, but the perpetuation of the “abnormal” and its separateness.

Ball-Hopkins, on the other hand, shines in her ad. She is the prime focus, and rather than being a separate aspect of the advertisement, the image is holistic and includes her. She looks accepted, happy, and normal. Nike and Target did not use these women accurately and did not represent them as humans rather than tokens. By using composition and color blocking, the focus is on the disability rather than the women themselves. But there is a more effective way to represent bodies with disabilities, and ASOS did it.

VI. Swimwear/Lingerie: We also saw accurate representation in the swimwear/lingerie section in the fifth video.

A. The brands Aerie and Chromat both used models with disabilities for their summer 2018 campaigns. They both have good histories with efforts at representation and normalization, but the execution was very different.
B. Remember, just because a company represents disability, it does not mean that it is a positive representation. One of the major points of this project is to learn how to see, to analyze, and to expect more, as well as learning about how rhetoric works.

C. Looking back at Aerie, again, it seems representative. There are models with disabilities, and they’re right next to models without disabilities, so it looks like good representation! But the bodies are just as contained and separate, indicating no effort to make it normal or typical, but every effort to create a sense of inclusivity.

D. Chromat, on the other hand, puts models with disabilities into spaces that were previously reserved for models without disabilities. By having Mama Cax wear a swimsuit in a group of models, Chromat is normalizing the female body in all forms. This created an aesthetic value to the images that isn't present in the Aerie ads. By having the women interact and connect, the image itself is more cohesive than just women all lined up.

E. The importance of representation of disability in lingerie and swimwear is that these are specifically two clothing types that are hidden or reserved for the perfect bodies. Just pick up a magazine or watch the Victoria’s Secret Fashion Show, and you can easily see what these bodies are “supposed” to look like. Aerie and
Chromat are both working to redefine that, although one better than the other.

VII. Future: But it’s time we expect more. It’s time that we expect effective representation in 2019 for a fifth of all people, where the bodies with disabilities are normalized and integrated rather than exploited. One way to do that is through self-representation.

A. Sins Invalid and Crip Beauty: Sins Invalid is a performance project that celebrates artists with disabilities, allowing them to be sexualized and beautified on their own terms in an experience called “crip beauty.” You can find the link to the project in the description.

1. The project was founded by Patricia Berne and Leroy Moore. Berne still works with the project and is a Japanese-Haitian queer disabled woman. Her identities provide grounding for her work creating ‘liberated zones’ for marginalized voices, for people that society considers “abnormal” and negative. All bodies are accepted and celebrated outside of the realm of normalcy.

2. An example of this performance is that of Nomy Lamm, a plus-sized amputee that identifies as female.

3. I couldn’t find pictures of this exact performance, but here is Nomy Lamm for reference:
One of her performances consists of her sitting naked against a pink background and holding a large piece of beige lace in front of her body. She sways back and forth as she sings about staying open to the world, before she finally drops the lace, showing her large, non-normative, nude body for all to see. Through the multiple intersections of being disabled, overweight, and female, society has tried to shame
her into covering her body that doesn’t fit into our normal. But through performance, Lamm is able to embrace what she is taught to hide, regardless of normativity or non-normativity (Kafai 233). The purpose is for those with disabilities to regain agency through deciding how they will represent themselves, rather than waiting for others to choose how they will be represented. Thus, positive representation of disabled female bodies is possible in our current society.

4. Shayda Kafai, a lecturer at California State Polytechnic University, explains that “Crip beauty fractures the ableist assumption that beauty is reserved for the nondisabled bodymind. It urges that there is pleasure and eroticism in bearing witness to disability, in cultivating a space where bodyminds that are traditionally forced into invisibility can gather together” (232). Bodymind is a term used to reference the whole person, because the body and mind are inseparable. Just like Chromat and ASOS were breaking the assumption that only able bodies can be used for advertising clothing, Sins Invalid is crushing the assumption that only abled bodies can be sexy, erotic, and visible. But the key
distinction here is that these people are representing themselves. They are choosing. It’s not like the freak show where Frances O’Connor was hired because she was beautiful in the eyes of society and also disabled. These performers are queer, people of color, different body sizes, different abilities, all bodies that society has decided are not the “norm” for beautiful, attractive, or worthy of praise. But we know that what’s “normal” isn’t what’s representative, and Sins Invalid is trying to prove that.

B. Instagram influencers: Another form of important self-representation is through the use of social media, specifically Instagram.

1. As you might have noticed, I’ve cited several forms of social media throughout this project, including Twitter and Instagram. These formats allow people to craft appearances of themselves and share their thoughts and feelings with the world and their communities.

2. Sofia P. Caldeira and Sander De Ridder observe that these platforms are even more important for females, reporting, “Departing from the one-to-many model of traditional media, Instagram allows ‘ordinary’ people greater access to the tools of media production, thus potentially democratizing
representations” (324). Rather than representing only specific body types or abilities, the social media platform allows users to not only put themselves out there but also find bodies similar to their own. Just take a second, pause this video, and search #disability on Instagram. Scrolling through, you see people living their lives. So not only are the people there, but they are being represented properly.

3. Sofia P. Caldeira and Sander De Ridder explain, “Self-representation thus offers an opportunity to avoid misrepresentations that often occur when others are in charge of creating one’s image” (325). The goal of these people is not to exploit their disability but to normalize it and share their experiences. They aren't trying to seem inclusive or create brand loyalty. They are themselves.

4. And I have some great examples of females with disabilities:
   a) First is Robyn Lambird @robynlambird, who is a paralympic athlete and model that has brand sponsorships who we highlighted in the activewear section.
   b) Then Ewa Harapin @harapinstory is a woman with an amputated leg that takes full mirror selfies and loves to post pictures of herself at the gym.
c) And finally, Annie Segarra @annieelainey, a woman who described herself as a queer, disabled, Latinx person.

5. By taking pictures and putting them on social media, in a space where thousands upon thousands of people can see them and interact with them, these women are working to normalize their bodies far better than the advertisements of Target, Aerie, and Nike.

VIII. Implications: As time goes by, we expect society to improve. We expect for justice to be served, for rights to be given to minority groups, and for representation to be inclusive. Unfortunately, the representation of disability has changed far too little since its creation in the early 20th century, and we need to do better.

A. I started this project because I wanted to bring to light the things that we see, read, and say everyday. I wanted to make you aware of the media that you are consuming so that you are now conscious of how you are contributing to societal pressures and power.

B. Angel Dixon assured blog readers that “What I have learnt is that it’s also tricky for the non-disabled people in our society. It can be confronting and confusing for some to see a person functioning in the world in a way that is so different from the way they do.” But since we perceive based on our experiences, widening our lens is
crucial to give us perspective of new experiences and wider representations of bodies.

C. If you take one thing away from this whole project, this whole argument, let it be that the way that you exist, the way you look, and the way that you move is in no way applicable to every single person on this Earth. I did this project about advertisements, because, as Stanković et al. remark, it “contributes to the consumers’ formation of social identity, frequently, influencing both their current attitudes and what they should be” (192). Representations in advertisements dictate how people see and perceive disability. Society will never talk about or treat disability as if it is equal and legitimate until we act like it is legitimate. Until we represent it “normally.”
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