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Arthur Blaser

Chapman University, blaser@chapman.edu

Beth Haller

Chapman University

Chelsea Jones

Chapman University

Sarai Urzua

Chapman University, urzua100@mail.chapman.edu

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Media Representation of Service Animals

Art Blaser, Beth Haller, Chelsea Jones, Sarai Urzua
Roosevelt Hall 120,
Chapman University, Orange, CA

Introduction

People with disabilities are often represented in a negative light in many distinct forms of media. Whether its representations that encourage pity or representations that create more distance between people with disabilities and people without disabilities. Along with these representations of the people themselves, service animals are also represented in the media in varying forms. To find more about the representations and analyze the images that are present in our society, different forms of media collected and put through an analysis.

Hypothesis

Representation in the media of service animals do not accurately depict the reality of their service, but place importance in either praising the service animals as heroes or depicting their owners as taking advantage of the American's with Disabilities Act (ADA).



Experimental Method

To analyze the research found, a code sheet was produced to analyze 100 articles that are from media representations of service animals. The code sheet analyzed a varying amount of factors of the representations.

The factors analyzed include:

- Legnth
- Type of story
- Type of service animal
- Type of disability
- Sources used
- Themes presented
- Animal organizations
- Representations of the service animals
- Representations of the people with disabilities
- Language used

Results

Through the research and analysis made in this continuing process, we have reached a temporary set of assumptions in which we can only offer impressions rather than research-based conclusions. These impressions are based on our overarching themes and consistencies that have been found through the analysis and coding of each article.

The Impressions that have been produced because of this research include, but are not limited to:

1. Service animals have a great amount of coverage in media sources.
2. There is a frequently local news interest in stories relating to service animals.

3. The trends that have been portrayed and found tend to look at social/political controversy such as the medical and social model of disability.

4. The sources available to the public vary. Some can often include disabled person, while others do not.

5. A major concern with service animals is fraud in order to allow for services or rights to be provided.

6. Many stories presented by the media are on disabled veterans and service animals.

Through the continuation of the analysis of the literature available, we hope to find a greater range and perhaps a pattern in the media representation of service animals that reflect changes in our current society, compared to past assumptions.



Conclusions

Because service animals are a service that is protected by the ADA, we as a society should make the changed needed to create a more welcoming environment in all locations for people with disabilities and their service animals. Through creating this welcoming environment, we are promoting equity and equality for people with disabilities and ending socially constructed stereotypes.

It is important to take into consideration how our society perceives people with disabilities through service animals in order to understand the issues that call for more social reform and advocacy. With the growing numbers of our population, it is important to take into consideration how the number of people with disabilities, including those with service animals, will continue to expand in the same manner. We as a society need to make the changes necessary in order to ensure an environment in which an individual does not have to prove their disability.

Future Research

In order to assure that the representations in media of people with disabilities and their service animals are accurately depicted in society, we need to see what trends are outstanding in the media. Some of the trends that would be vital in understanding the reasoning as to what representations are currently present in our society would be:

- People with disabilities as victims of abuse
- People with disabilities as heroes
- People with disabilities as inspirational beings

Along with these additional research options, the field of Disability Studies holds a variety of opportunity for further research such as: law, perceptions, identity, assistive technology, education, employment, transportation, community resources, and many more.

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