Disability is not so beautiful: A semiotic analysis of advertisements for rehabilitation goods.

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DISABILITY IS NOT SO BEAUTIFUL: A SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF ADVERTISEMENTS FOR REHABILITATION GOODS

by

Lorraine Thomas

A Thesis
Submitted to the College of Graduate Studies and Research through the Department of Communication Studies in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts at the University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada
1999

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ABSTRACT

This study presents a semiotic investigation of the representation of the 'disabled body' in advertisements for rehabilitation goods. Advertisements are utilized from two major Canadian disability-oriented magazines. The historical context is late twentieth century Canadian/North American advertising and society. The semiology of cultural production studies provide the tools for methodological analysis and the materialist theory of the production of disability is used to understand and explain the findings.

Analysis of these advertisements includes the way such images are shaped by the economic logic and social organization between advertisers and their clients (Slater, cited in Silverman, 1993: 70). To this end, three interrelated components are considered as being critical towards understanding the portrayal of the 'disabled body' in the advertisements. These include an assessment of the rise of a consumer economy which promoted the exclusion of disabled people from the workforce, the rise of advertising and its role in promoting images of physical appearance, and the continuous reinforcement of these images by the mass media (Hahn, 1987a: 556).

This study reiterates that the advertisements for rehabilitation goods both emanate and become translators of culture, in that they tell us something about the place of disability in western society (Biklen, 1987). Analysis of the dominant and negotiated meanings to be found within the advertisements led to the conclusion that the 'disabled body' tends to be portrayed and undermined via so-called able-bodied values. Overall, it was found that the results of the ad analyses were consistent with the anticipated themes. Several ads did relate specifically to individual productivity and others were clearly of a medical/professional orientation. The underlying concept of functionality emerged as a strong thematic concern but was always presented in conjunction with the notions of individual productivity, professional domination or aesthetic concerns. Almost all of the sampled ads held some message about aesthetic perfection whether it was through the blatantly obvious choice of 'picture perfect' models, the syntactic arrangement of the ad messages, the semantic emphasis on the importance of individual functionality or productivity, or even through the suggestion of the possibility of achieving a 'whole' body through technological innovation.
DEDICATION

I was told: "Choose your Moment. Aim High. Believe in Yourself."

My heart - felt gratitude to my parents and my sister for their unwavering support and encouragement over the years. Thank you for making what seemed impossible, possible.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The advertising samples that form the basis of this study were obtained largely through the assistance of my advisor, Professor Jim Linton. Thanks to his intervention, I was able to obtain the materials necessary for this study.

Mr. Jeffrey Tiessen, editor of Disability Today and Mr. Raymond Cohen, editor of Abilities, willingly agreed to provide all the requisite magazine materials. Their assistance is gratefully acknowledged.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ......................................................................................... iii
DEDICATION ..................................................................................... iv
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ....................................................................... v
LIST OF TABLES ............................................................................... viii

CHAPTER

I. INTRODUCTION
   Overview of problem: media portrayal of the ‘disabled body’ .......... 1
   Purpose and population of study ................................................ 2
   Defining the population of interest (I): Understanding the body of the ‘Other’ . 3
   Defining the population of interest (II): The ‘disabled body’ and the rehabilitation process .......... 5
   Outline of Chapters .................................................................. 7

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:
    A MATERIALIST APPROACH TO THE CREATION OF DISABILITY
    Introduction ............................................................................ 9
    Disability prior to industrialization ......................................... 10
    The emergence of the ‘disabled body’ in the late 18th and early 19th centuries . 12
    The emergence of the body as an advertising tool in consumer society .......... 15
    Advertising towards conformity in late 20th century industrial society .......... 18
    Cultural Production Studies ..................................................... 20
    Related Studies ...................................................................... 21
    Research Goals And Expectations ........................................... 24

III. METHODOLOGY
    Semiotics - Understanding the process of meaning generation in advertising . 26
    Outline of Steps Taken to Achieve Study Population ................. 28
    Description of Study Population ............................................. 29
    Overview of sampling process ................................................ 30
    Data Analysis - reading the ads .............................................. 33

IV. RESULTS
    Stage 1: Census of the ads in Abilities and Disability Today/Active Living: (Table in Appendix A) ........................................... 36
    Stage 2: Symbolically meaningful ads that provided basis for final sample (Table in Appendix B) ........................................... 38
    Stage 3: Semiotic analysis of 18 ads determined to be ‘aesthetically complex’ 40
V. DISCUSSION

The rehabilitation good as a means to an (productive) end ........................................... 82
The voice of the ‘expert’ in the rehabilitation ads .............................................................. 84
Sanitized images of the ‘disabled body’ ............................................................................. 86
Wither the ‘disabled body?’ .............................................................................................. 90

VI. CONCLUSION

Study Conclusions ............................................................................................................... 93
Limitations of the Study .................................................................................................... 94
Future Studies .................................................................................................................... 96

REFERENCES .................................................................................................................. 97

APPENDIX A : Census of Rehabilitation advertisements ................................................. 109

APPENDIX B : List of Evaluative Ads in Abilities and Disability Today/Active Living (Winter 1992 - Spring 1998) ................................................................. 121

APPENDIX C: List of ‘aesthetically’ richer ads sampled for semiotic analysis .................. 125

VITA AUCTORIS ............................................................................................................. 157
## LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1:</td>
<td>Chart Showing the Disability 'Range'</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2:</td>
<td>Category and Definition of Rehabilitation Goods found in Advertisements</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3:</td>
<td>Summary of Rehabilitation Goods Ads found in <em>Disability Today/Active Living</em> and <em>Abilities</em></td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

Overview of problem: media portrayal of the ‘disabled body’

In the last few years, the mass media has been undergoing a large amount of scrutiny with regard to its portrayal of disability. The sense is that disability is the ‘invisible issue’ in all forms of communication media (Ruffner, 1984: 3) and that the ‘proliferation of ‘able-bodied’ values and the misrepresentation of disabled people’ reflects a dominant able-bodied policy that discriminates against disabled people (Barnes, 1996: 56).

The mass media are viewed as being guilty of portraying negative stereotypes by presenting persons with disabilities as ‘pitiable victims of a tragic fate, as noteworthy only when they’ve done something extraordinary, and incapable of a fulfilling life’ (Christians, 1998: 6). They are also usually portrayed as being childlike or incompetent, needing total care, as non-productive members of society and a drain on taxpayers’ money (Nelson, 1994: 5). More importantly, many of the images of disability that are depicted are based on medical assumptions and unexamined views of normality. The disabled are thus left metaphorically confined, not to wheelchairs but to negative stereotyped labels which are both inaccurate and damaging (Nelson, 1994: 16).

Today, where the ‘importance and desirability of bodily perfection is endemic to western culture’ (Barnes, 1996: 56) the ‘disabled body’ is regarded as being non-eligible for portrayal. Faced with the impossibility of identifying themselves as ‘subjects’ in consumer society, disabled bodies occupy an anomalous position in the media:

Their bodies are not models, because they do not lend themselves to imitation, and at the same time, the role models they are offered as the ‘chosen’ are impractical as models of likeness, even a likeness constructed on the basis of self-exhibition, fashion or appearance. The empire of technologies that empower the body, the nomadism of identity, the possibility of being different and public
visibility are concepts that only reinforce disabled people's feeling of exclusion from, and not belonging to contemporary society (Fontes, 1998: 25).

Purpose and population of study

In its 1991 Health and Activity Limitation Survey, Statistics Canada estimated the total population of people with disabilities in the over 15 age group in Canada to be 17.7% of a total population of 30,286,000. This means that just over five million Canadians can be considered as having a disability and being in the market for rehabilitation goods. It is noted that some disabilities are visually obvious, others less or not so. Despite their large numbers, however, which conceivably constitute a sizeable consumer population within and outside the rehabilitation market, there is little depiction of people with visible disabilities in mainstream advertisements. Their portrayal is more prominent in medical and rehabilitation product catalogues, disability magazines and disability organization posters and brochures. In recent years, however, Canadian disability based magazines have emerged, among them Abilities and Disability Today (now known as Active Living), which feature disabled people in their advertising content.

This study, therefore, proposed to analyze the portrayal of the 'disabled body' in magazine advertisements for rehabilitation goods. These advertisements were sampled from the two above mentioned publications. In the context of this study, those described as 'disabled' formed a designated consumer group and became the primary although not necessarily the sole target of these advertisements.

Given advertising's concern with the "appropriateness and even morality of its representations" that must not offend the members of its audience, lest offense result in lost sales (O'Barr, 1994: 12), it is of interest to examine how the advertisements sampled for this study 'frame' the 'disabled body' in their promotion of rehabilitation or assistive equipment to
their consumers. It is suggested that analysis of the representations of persons with disabilities who appear in these advertisements [can] provide paradigms for relations between members of advertising’s intended audience and those defined as outside it. These paradigms constitute an ideological guide for relations between the self and others, between us and them (O’Barr, 1994: 2).

Defining the population of interest (I): Understanding the body of the ‘Other’

As previously stated, the disabled as a group are the target of negative stereotypes which are devalued in larger society, receiving disproportionately negative interpersonal and economic outcomes (Crocker and Major, 1994). The stigmatizing condition of disability is such that it is considered as being an ‘abomination’ of the body (Goffman, 1963). Such is the effect of the stigma that it appears to render the disabled unlovable as well as unacceptable; that the personal lives of many disabled people have been curtailed, and in many cases rendered nearly non-existent.

To a certain extent, disability can be paralleled to ethnicity where the salient features of many disabled people are ‘bodily traits’ that are socially devalued. The stigma of physical disability becomes similar to the stigma of race, where rejection of the disabled individual centres on a racism which transfers and projects the fears of an ‘ingroup’ upon a convenient ‘outgroup.’ Further identification to such a group, however, is complicated by two issues.

Whereas ethnic group members have a common cultural identity to draw upon, the disabled are perceived as having none, because of the wide range of disabilities which seems to preclude any sort of common ground (Havrenek, 1991). Furthermore, whereas ethnic groups are characterized by pride in their differences, uniqueness and diversity, the disabled typically have difficulty finding a source of pride. Henderson and Bryan (1984) additionally show how members of ethnic groups have defined masculine and feminine roles whereas those with
disabilities are often labeled "disabled" without regard to their sexuality, resulting in the perception that the disabled are asexual. These factors have effectively rendered the disabled the ‘invisible minority’: they qualify as a distinct sub-group by virtue of possessing identifiable bodily features, yet paradoxically, are not acknowledged within the larger society.

It is suggested that the attitude of the non-disabled majority towards the disabled as a group, arises from a subjective process of interaction that occurs when the disabled image meets the emotions of the users and the values of a particular culture (Hahn, 1987b). In Western society these values are based on widespread perceptions that disabled individuals violate important cultural norms and values (Hahn, 1987b). Emotionally, as a symbolically feared condition, disability becomes an unpleasant reminder about mortality, dependency, destiny and vulnerability; it is a fear resting on the myth of bodily and intellectual perfection:

The disabled [individual] symbolizes that which restricts the freedom to lead a normal life - hearing, speech, sight, thinking, sickness. [He or she] symbolizes the uncertainty of life. [The] lack of wholeness represents a loss of power (Strohman, 1982: 2).

To encounter a severely disabled individual may thus prompt thoughts of "there but for the grace of God go I" or complete rejection: “I would rather die than be blind, deaf or paralyzed” (Hahn, 1987b). The impairment thus becomes a significant stimulus in provoking a social judgement. Even if the impairment is invisible, knowledge of its existence alters the perception of the person:

The fact that [an individual] possesses an invisible handicap labels [him or her] with a stigma, an undesired differentness from what we had anticipated that casts [his or her] behavior and other social attributes into an entirely new and usually unfavorable light (Griedman and Roth, 1980: 21).

Again, as able-bodied 'social actors' we are able assume a posture appropriate for every situation and to don 'masks' with chameleon-like ease because our bodies are able to conform/perform to what is considered to be the norm, for example, two legs, two arms, eyesight
or speech, etc. (Schlenkar, 1980). A visibly disabled body, however, does not emit social cues the way a 'normal' body does; it speaks a 'language' that most able-bodied individuals do not understand (Gledman and Roth, 1980).

In any historical context, a particular community will react to a perceived deviant/deviance by applying its 'moral norms,' moral norms being the 'broad directives by which community members implement their institutionalized solution to the problems significantly affecting their valued way of life' (Stebbins, 1988: 2). It has been suggested that:

Powerful social groups seek to impose their own values, expectations and beliefs upon society as a whole. Their interests are codified in norms, which they aspire to promote to a more general, and ultimately universal social acceptance. Accordingly the concept of 'normality,' far from describing some natural or preordained state of affairs, instead represents an acknowledgment of the values which have come to dominate in a particular community at any given time (Drake, 1996:147).

As one of these cultural institutions, the mass media can thus have a significant influence on the social status and perception of particular groups; it becomes a source of information from which beliefs might be established and can portray a predisposition towards targeted groups (Byrd, 1989: 36). Powell and Williamson (cited in Hahn, 1988: 563) reiterate:

The negative stereotyping of socially disadvantaged groups such as the aged, the poor, women, the disabled, and minorities facilitates control over them by rationalizing their subordination, economic exploitation, and devalued status in the larger society.

Defining the population of interest (II): the 'disabled body' and the rehabilitation process

Given that the sampling frame of this study encompasses advertisements for rehabilitation goods, it becomes necessary to define the rehabilitation process and the accompanying concept of disability.
‘Disability’ can be described as being the impact of an impairment upon the ability to perform socially accepted or prescribed tasks and roles due to a medically definable condition (Berkowitz and Hill, in Thomas, 1982). Impairment is considered as being the “loss of psychological, physiological or anatomical structure or function” - anything which constitutes a hindrance to mobility, domestic routines, or occupational and communication skills (Bury cited in Thomas, 1982: 6). The range of socially accepted skills include the ability to perform activities commonly accepted as the basic elements of everyday living - walking, negotiating the stairs, getting in and out of bed, eating, using the lavatory, bathing, holding down a job or just being able to carry on a conversation (Bury cited in Thomas, 1982: 6). The following chart shows the disability range, where an ‘impairment’ is an objective description of one’s physical condition, a ‘disability’ is an activity restriction, and a ‘handicap’ the perceived negative aspects of the disability.

**Figure 1: CHART SHOWING THE DISABILITY ‘RANGE’**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impairment</th>
<th>Intrinsic situations: exteriorized as functional limitations e.g., impaired or reduced level of hearing. It is a ‘fact’ in that it exists objectively</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disability</td>
<td>Objectified as activity restriction: e.g., a hearing impairment becomes a functional limitation with a socially imposed label - “Hearing Impaired.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handicap</td>
<td>Socialized as disadvantage: e.g., a hearing impaired individual is perceived as being less socially ‘capable’ or functional in the workplace because he or she is unable to use a conventional telephone. They are therefore handicapped by attitudes and possibly by lack of access to adaptive equipment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Adapted from Bury, cited in Thomas, 1982: 7)

Arising from this, the rehabilitation process can be conceived of as the process of attempting to restore a person to an optimum state of health (Nelson, 1994: 215). It consists of any form of therapy or exercise that is performed on and by patients (Albrecht, 1992: 223).
Intervention and treatment are ideally designed to help individuals improve their medical condition, maximize their level of function, establish as independent a lifestyle as possible, and achieve an acceptable standard of well being (Albrecht, 1992: 248). By extension, rehabilitation goods, which are highlighted in the targeted advertisements, consist of equipment which can aid the rehabilitation process.

Outline of Chapters

This introductory chapter highlighted several issues, namely the perceived inadequacy of the media portrayal of disability (Barnes, 1996), the seemingly endemic acceptance of bodily perfection circulated in the media (Barnes, 1996) and the difficulty faced by the ‘disabled body’ in identifying itself as a ‘subject’ in a consumer society (Fontes, 1998). Based on these observations, the implication is such that a study that designates the ‘disabled body’ as a research subject cannot be analyzed independently of the social realities in which it exists. From this stance, it becomes possible to suggest that the concept of what it means to be disabled is very much a social construction and is shaped by cultural values and institutions; and that furthermore, institutions become the means by which a society’s values and norms are codified into social policy (Woodhill, 1994). To this end, therefore, this study will be conducted within a cultural production studies framework and the materialist theory of disability adopted to explain/understand the findings.

Chapter two outlines the materialist theory of disability. For the sake of context and perspective, it includes a brief description of the conceptualizations of disability prior to industrialization. The origins of today’s prevailing notions of disability are traced to the various stages of 19th and 20th century industrialization. Emphasis is placed on the rise of a consumer
economy and the proliferation of the mass media. In the context of this study, advertising is viewed as being involved in the construction and maintenance of disability as it is perceived in this culture. Studies considered as being useful to the development of this research are outlined. Chapter two concludes with a summary of the chapter and a statement of the research goals.

Chapter three describes the steps taken in acquiring the study population. Ads are sampled from two major Canadian disability magazines. The historical context is late 20th century Canadian/North American advertising and society. The research methodology adopted is semiotic analysis; its components are outlined briefly. An outline of the three stage sampling process is provided, the first two stages being a census and content analysis to narrow the sample range. The final stage uses detailed criteria to determine the ads to be used in the semiotic analysis, the findings of which form the discussion chapter of this study. Chapter three concludes with an acknowledgment of the importance of knowing which values and meanings should be used to 'privilege' the reading of the advertisements; which stance the researcher should adopt to understand the social status of the 'disabled body' as depicted in the ads.

The results of the ad analysis are found in Chapter four. ‘Results’ includes all three stages of the sampling process, with emphasis being placed on the final stage. The first two stages are viewed as a funneling process by which the ads for semiotic analysis were sampled, hence the findings are outlined rather than detailed. The bulk of this section rests on the eighteen ad analyzes which were chosen in the final sampling stage.

Chapter five discusses the findings and ties them together in relation to the materialist framework. It summarizes the findings, interprets them and places them in the context of the literature reviewed in chapters one and two. Chapter six acts as the ‘Conclusion’ and looks at the general implications the findings as regards their theoretical and research implications as well as an acknowledgment of the general limitations of the study.
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:

A MATERIALIST APPROACH TO THE CREATION OF DISABILITY

Introduction

In recent years, attempts have been made to develop alternative approaches to the definition of the 'disabled body' in western society. Prevailing and still dominant orthodox definitions of disability include the medical model which views disability as a sign of sickness and focuses on individually based functional impairments (Woodhill, 1996:214). From the medical perspective, people are disabled as a result of their individual physical and mental impairments and medicine attempts to cure or rehabilitate them.

By way of contrast, the materialist account of disability stresses the importance of attitudinal and environmental factors (Drake, 1996: 149). From this stance one does not "speak about "having a disability" in the sense that one has a particular condition but rather, the "emergence of physical differences" or "the invention of handicaps," which indicates that these conditions are the social creations of a given culture (Woodhill, 1996: 202).

More importantly, the materialist framework suggests that the basis of the present day status of disabled people in Western society rests in the material and ideological or cultural changes which accompanied the emergence of capitalist society (Barnes, 1996: 47). It therefore acknowledges the influence of the central values upon which Western capitalism rests - namely individualism, competitive free enterprise, and consumerism (Barnes, 1996: 45).

The materialist framework reiterates that while the cultural oppression of disabled people can be traced back to the foundations of western society, this phenomenon can be explained with reference to material and cultural forces rather than with reference to metaphysical
considerations and assumptions (Barnes, 1996: 57). Thus, “prejudice, in whatever form it takes, is not an inevitable consequence of the human condition, it is the product of a particular form of social development associated with western capitalism” (Barnes, 1996: 57).

Three critical interrelated components are necessary for understanding how the materialist theory of disability is to be utilized in the analysis of advertisements for rehabilitation goods. These include an assessment of the rise of a consumer economy that promoted the exclusion of disabled people from the workforce, the role of advertising in promoting images of physical appearance and the continuous reinforcement of these images by the mass media (Hahn 1987a: 556). However, before we chart the evolution of the ‘disabled body’ during the industrialization of Western society starting in the late 18th century, it is useful to get an idea of pre-industrial notions of disability when it was identified using criteria unrelated to the economy of production.

Disability prior to industrialization

Hahn (1988) contends that, during the Middle Ages, a dialectical image of physical attraction existed and deformities such as protruding bellies, enormous noses, or humps were viewed positively by the general population as symptoms of pregnancy or procreative power. This perception helped to link physical disabilities with relatively unrestrained social and sexual conduct during festivals. In response to this perceived licentiousness, ruling officials sought to develop an approach that would stress similarities rather than differences among human beings. The medieval church and secular leaders ‘moralized’ the body by promoting the slender and svelte figure that evinced commitment to the denial of the flesh:

These comparatively restricted bodily contours...not only...excluded persons with a wide range of so-called deformities or disfigurements such as visible
scars, scoliosis, amputated limbs, and readily identifiable orthopedic or sensory impairments, but. . also eliminated others perceived as too short, too fat, or too old from the category of those who might be considered aesthetically attractive (Hahn, 1988: 29).

The Christian church also played a role in this non-acceptance of physical differences by perpetuating the fear of the diabolic by making the biblical link between impairment, impurity and sin. People with impairments were now viewed as living proof of Satan’s existence and visibly impaired children seen as changelings - the Devil’s substitute for human children (Barnes, 1996: 55).

The Enlightenment period of the 18th century set the stage for the transition from the medieval concept of disability towards the notion of the body being linked with scientific rationality and social progress. The Enlightenment marked a point at which the body was ‘discovered’ as an object and a target of power (Foucault, 1975: 136). There was a move from the medieval ‘moralizing’ of the body to the ‘mechanization’ of the body, where the conception of nature/animal life as a gigantic mechanical system was extended to include viewing the human body as a machine. The focus was not on the group but on working and manipulating the individual body at “the level of mechanism itself - movement, gestures, attitudes, rapidity: an infinitesimal power over the active body” (Foucault, 1975: 137). The Enlightenment was also a period which emphasized a philosophy of secular individualism and rational self-interest. In political terms this legitimated policies favouring the majority at the expense of the few (Barnes, 1996: 56). Conceivably this meant that the stage was being set for a formal policy of legitimized discrimination towards those perceived as ‘different.’

As will be shown in the next section, the social changes effected by industrialization would refine Enlightenment philosophy into concrete notions of the ‘disabled body,’ as well as furthering the technology and technical knowledge used to control the human physical environment (Strauss 1981: 201).
The emergence of the ‘disabled body’ in the late 18th and early 19th centuries

Finklestein (cited in Barnes, 1996: 47) comments that just prior to industrialization in late 18th century Britain, the late feudal period featured cottage industries which possibly did not preclude the participation of persons with disabilities who were dispersed throughout the community. Within the unit of the home it is possible that disabled individuals might have been able to find some way of contributing to the economic survival of the household (Hahn, 1987a: 557). Even if infanticide was not unknown, many disabled people did acquire some sort of legitimised acceptance as beggars or otherwise. Furthermore, in a society where travel was already difficult and the clear delineation between the place of one’s place of work and home had not as yet taken place, disabled persons would not have been as openly exposed to discrimination (Hahn, 1987a: 557).

The advent of widespread industrialization in the late 18th and early 19th centuries brought the use of the factory system, whereby persons with disabilities were excluded on the basis that they were incapable of keeping pace with the production process:

The speed of factory work, the enforced discipline, the time-keeping and production norms - all these were a highly unfavorable change from the slower, more self-determined methods into which many handicapped people had been integrated (Ryan and Thomas, cited in Oliver, 1996: 33).

Additionally, both the design of work sites and the products that were manufactured gave no cognizance of the needs of persons with disabilities. The individualized wage labour system employed by the factories also served to place impaired people into the category of emerging social problems of industrialization.

The emergence of large scale industry with production geared towards the ‘able-bodied norm’ meant that persons with disabilities were now separated from their social origins into a socially devalued group. A consequence of this was that “patterns of avoidance and aversion
towards disabled persons were embedded in the construction of commodities, landscapes and buildings that would remain for centuries” (Hahn, 1987a: 557). Another significant social consequence was that the physical urban relocation demanded by industrialization meant that an individual possessing ‘deviant’ characteristics that might have been familiar or acceptable in a small isolated community became disturbing in an urban environment (Hahn, 1987a: 558).

The early industrial era was also the setting for several intellectual developments which had far reaching implications for the labeling and categorization of the ‘disabled.’ As previously indicated, it was a time of social change characterized by urban development and a large exodus of people from the country to the city. The “swarming masses” (Foucault, 1975) that formed the basis of the working class were viewed with no little anxiety by the established order and newly emerging bourgeoisie.

The propitious advent of the new science of statistics was used to develop the idea that a population and by extension, a human body, could be mathematically regulated (Davis, 1995). This concept of applying mathematical ‘norming’ to the human population rather than to factory output helped to elaborate ‘disability’ into a working concept. The use of the word ‘disability’ became conflated with the emergence of the word ‘normal’ which entered the English language around 1840. Now the word ‘norm/normal’ was defined as “constituting, conforming to, not deviating or differing from the common notion or standard”: previously the word had meant perpendicular, with its original meaning being the carpenter’s square (Davis, 1995: 24). Thus defined, the concept of ‘disability’ emerged as a contradiction to the official ideal of the ‘norm.’ It created the formal idea of the ‘deviant’ body and a range of words associated with it such as ‘abnormal,’ ‘deformity,’ ‘freak,’ ‘aberration,’ and ‘monster’ (Davis, 1995).

The later emergence of Darwinism and its notion of the evolutionary advantages of the fittest also served to give credence to the growing belief that the biologically inferior must
automatically be weeded out by a process of natural selection (Davis, 1995). It inevitably followed that the science of statistical averaging and the concept of biological evolution laid the foundations for eugenics and the notion of being able to create a perfectible body that underwent progressive improvement.

The term, ‘eugenics,’ in turn became associated with the elimination of the physically defective, who might be perceived as an undermining of, or a threat to the fabric of society. The understanding of ‘physical defects’ now encompassed an extremely broad category which included not only biological impairments but illness and income. So the pauper was grouped with the criminal and the professional tramp, since a low income was equated with relative inefficiency; the alcoholic and the tubercular with the deaf, the blind, the insane, the mentally defective; and the diseased from birth or from excess, those showing signs of brachdactyly (stub fingers) and polydactyly (more than five fingers), cleft palate, harelip were categorized with diabetes (Davis, 1995: 36-37). The State’s official response to this ‘disabled’ or ‘abnormal’ body was to implement an institution of control by “providing a range of specialist institutions whose overt aim was to provide treatment or shelter from a harsh world rather than punishment” (Oliver, 1996: 28).

By 1850 the notion of mens sana in corpore sano - a healthy mind in a healthy body - was unarguable doctrine in Victorian England to the extent that philosophers would refer to neglected health as a physical sin (Haynes, 1988). The disease-free and well-kept body was perceived as being a model for the well-formed mind and a soundly built character. There was a rise in morbid and practical physiology, morbid anatomy and the identification of diseases. It was believed that memory fell and rose with bodily condition, as did hearing and sight, mental depression and ‘enfeebled’ organs, and that good physical conditioning improved the quantity and quality of blood supplied to the brain (Haynes, 1988). This move coincided with the
growing prominence of the medical profession, which played a large part in the legitimation of categories of 'deserving and undeserving' people (Oliver, 1996).

As a group, therefore, those perceived as 'disabled' were labeled as 'sick' and were institutionalized. Their impairment/illness was viewed as a random, unfortunate occurrence which gave rise to the idea that impairment was a 'tragic' occurrence. The rise of the institution as a mechanism of both social provision and social control helped to individualize social problems under capitalism. In conclusion, the 19th century has been viewed by some as being linked with the emergence of disability in its present form which includes

the individualization and medicalisation of the body, the systematic exclusion of people with impairments from the mainstream of community life, and with the emergence of Social Darwinism and the Eugenics movement, scientific reification of the age old myth, that, one way or another, people with any form of physical and or intellectual imperfections pose a serious threat to Western society (Barnes, 1996: 56).

It can therefore be said that industrialization served to create literally and figuratively, a working definition of the 'disabled body'; it allowed for a concrete conceptualization of what entailed human 'difference.' The next section will examine just how these ideologies were reiterated and reinforced via an institution that in a sense was a unique product of capitalism - the advertising media (Hahn, 1987a).

The emergence of the body as an advertising tool in consumer society

Between the mid 19th century and the 1930's, the growth of mass production eventually generated an increased emphasis on mass consumption (Hahn, 1987a). Early capitalists sought to persuade workers that they should spend their wages on items that they had formerly produced themselves (Hahn, 1987a:557). This shift in the perception of the consumer group is described as the "marketing personality" which stemmed from a socio-historical phenomenon
that marked the shift from a competitive capitalist society to a more technologically based marketing society (Fromm, cited in Schlenkar, 1980).

Fromm notes that for 19th century capitalists, success was measured by the competitive advantage of producing a superior product for less money. Before mass production, industry had produced for a largely middle and upper class market. Modern technology, however, leveled the playing field and products and prices became more indistinguishable. Furthermore, an enhanced productive capacity meant that markets needed to become more dynamic horizontally in terms of numbers in order to absorb the increased output (Ewen, 1976: 24). The result was a “fundamental shift in the nature of labour and its composition,” where leisure and consumption were now recognized and “the labouring body [became] a desiring body” (Turner, 1996: 2). By the 1920’s “businessmen began to see the necessity of organizing their businesses not merely around the production of goods, but around the creation of a buying public” (Ewen, 1976: 25).

While the 19th century industrialist “coerced labour (both on and off the job) to serve as the “wheelhorse” of industry, modernizing capitalism sought to change “wheelhorse” to “worker” and “worker” to “consumer” (Viva Boothe, cited in Ewen, 1976: 26).

Again, this socio-economic shift corresponded with the social changes that had come with industrialization. With the erosion of social group supports for personal identity that had been provided by older cultures, the generation and maintenance of selfhood became a lifetime task for individuals: an endless series of exercises in self-improvement, personal development, self-expression, mental and physical tone, “selling oneself,” and cultivating approval (Leiss, Kline and Jhally, 1986: 52 - 53). Early industrialists were not only selling products to consumers but were also promoting a vision of satisfaction that could become available to those prepared to reshape themselves (Hahn, 1987a). The use value of notions such as ‘prestige,’ ‘beauty,’ ‘acquisition,’ ‘self-adornment’ and ‘play’ were placed in the service of advertising’s basis purpose - to provide effective mass distribution of product (Ewen, 1976: 35).
Ewen (1976) notes that in the 1920's advertising played a growing role in the industry's attempts to develop a responsive consumer market. Between 1918 and 1929 the total gross revenue for ads in general and farm magazines jumped from $58.5 million to $196.3 million (Ewen, 1976: 32). The emphasis shifted to attracting consumers through marketing skill. The salespersons sold themselves and the images of their products; substance gave way to skill at managing appearances.

The promotion of commercial production now attempted to focus consumer critique against the consumer (Hahn, 1987a: 558). Various tactics were used to influence and control segments of the population. Women were urged to confine their activities to the home instead of assuming a prominent place in the workforce. Immigrant groups were targeted by advertisers' assurances that entry to the American way of life could be purchased. Much effort was thus expended on encouraging the purchase of goods that would allow newly arrived urban residents to fit into a community of strangers and allow them to transform themselves (and their bodies) into socially acceptable beings. Ads directed towards this market segment were often geared towards making people ashamed of their origins and targeted the habits and practices which marked them as outsiders.

More importantly, the increasing use of human models was confined to the attractive representations of the White Anglo Saxon Protestant majority that excluded groups perceived to be non-dominant (Hahn, 1987a: 559). Other groups such as the elderly, visible minorities and persons with disabilities were completely and resoundingly ignored. It is noted that these images "communicated an overwhelming stress on beauty that seemed to provoke severe anxieties about supposed bodily imperfections" (Ellis, cited in Hahn, 1987a: 560).

Hahn (1987a: 555 - 556) asserts that capitalists of the early 20th century were responsible for furthering a rigorous set of physical standards that indirectly resulted in the exclusion of
certain groups from many areas of community life. Commercial imagery of approved body attributes also had an effect on the social and economic opportunities available to others with non-conforming bodily traits. Formerly viewed almost solely in the light of being a contributor to the production process, the individual body was now viewed as a potential consumer of those same goods. More importantly, the consumer body became a medium by which advertisers could target and sell their products, and in so doing, reinforce the cultural “myth of bodily and intellectual perfection or the ‘able-bodied’ ideal” (Barnes, 1996: 57).

Today, the desires and expectations of the labouring-cum-consumer body are reflected in a culture of a consumer hedonism that takes the form of ‘common sense’ notions that dieting, jogging, fasting, slimming and exercise are not merely aids to sexual fulfilment but are necessary features of self-development (Foucault, cited in Gordon, 1980: 56). The existing strong commercial and consumer interest in the body as a sign of the good life is, thus, paralleled and reinforced by “a form of advertising which places a specific focus on the body beautiful: on the denial of the aging body, on the rejection of death, on the importance of sports and on the general moral value of keeping fit” (Turner, 1996: 3).

**Advertising towards conformity in late 20th century industrial society**

The technological advances of the 20th century have meant that the pervasiveness of the visual symbols of an ideal appearance have acquired a social and economic power which is reinforced by the mass media. As mass imagery became overwhelmingly visual and non verbal, the reification of advertising and other commercial messages solidified a hegemony of appearance that accentuated conformist instead of heterogenous cultural propensities. . . They were both a product of economic forces and a profound influence on the operation of a capitalist economy (Hahn, 1987a: 563).

This “mediazation of modern culture” (Thompson, 1990: 4) describes a process
whereby the “transmission of symbolic forms becomes increasingly mediated by the technical and institutional apparatuses of the media industries.” The rise of the mass media has not only meant a widening circle of information dissemination, it has also made the communication process more asymmetrical (Thompson, 1990). The relative ‘anonymity’ of the image sources also means that feedback on the part of the receivers becomes more difficult and hence reduces their influence.

Shoham (1970) notes that a significant consequence of late 20th century capitalism has been the creation of a society that has become highly urbanized, specialized and bureaucratized, resulting in an astronomic increase in the pressures towards conformity. This conformity of individuals is geared not only to the existing normative system but to the image of the latter as created by the various image makers through the mass media:

The image industry must enlarge, gloss over and glaze the objects it has to build up or “promote.” The image makers cannot be of the multiple nuance brand. . . Complicated hues, subtlety, undertones and the rough edges of reality are suppressed or simply ignored. The language of the image makers is the Orwellian Newspeak which “was designed not to extend but to diminish range of thought (Shoham, 1970: 78).

Furthermore, the easy accessibility of mass media in late 20th century industrial society has meant that for the first time in history, the human race is being swamped with images that exist outside respective cultural borders (Hahn, 1988). A situation exists where

The virtual unattainable standards of youth and attractiveness portrayed in mass communications might not be the only forms of human appearance that people find valuable; but the massive omnipresence of these images has nearly eliminated alternative perceptions from public consciousness (Hahn, 1987a:564).

Media proliferation, therefore, has seemingly not resulted in diversity of choice. Rather, it has become a duplication of choices that encourage “homogeneity of thought” (Real, 1989) and which conceivably also narrow the criteria for socially ‘acceptable’ physical appearances.
Cultural Production Studies

It was thought that since the portrayal of the ‘disabled body’ is being considered within the advertising medium, cultural production studies might be an ideal forum from which to analyze its representation. The advantages engendered by the cultural studies discipline are such that it looks at questions and issues specific to particular social and historical circumstances (Blundell, Shepard and Taylor, 1993). Cultural production studies make the assumption that culture cannot be analyzed independently of the social realities in which it exists: there is a sense of “critical political involvement - in particular, a desire to understand and change structures of dominance in industrial capitalist societies” (Blundell, Shepard and Taylor, 1993: 3).

According to Hall (1974, cited in Wang, 1992) three basic theories exist about the production of culture: culture can be viewed as a reflection of economic relationships between the dominant and the dominated (encoding a text); culture can be explored through the ‘reception’ of cultural works or how audiences experience culture (decoding a text); or culture can be analyzed in terms of the text itself (content).

Regardless of the three ways by which culture can be produced, understanding the process and reinforcement of a particular ideology requires an investigation into the ways by which its meaning can be constructed and conveyed (Thompson, 1990: 7). To this end, cultural production studies utilize an approach based on the semiotic analysis of the social production of meaning via signs (Thwaites, Davis and Mules, 1995). This semiotic doctrine views systems of representation and communication that are pivotal in shaping our experience of the world, and in making our experiences meaningful... A signifying system, then, does not simply reproduce already constituted meanings, but actually produces meanings through the categories of inclusion and exclusion in which it codes reality (Tseelon, 1991: 303).

Hence, through a combination of various systems of representations, whether they be linguistic,
visual or written, the signs utilized in these cultural texts help convey a particular message (Hall, 1997b). These representations serve to communicate our thoughts, concepts, ideas or feelings in such a way as to enable others to ‘read,’ ‘decode’ or interpret the meaning in roughly the same way we do:

We give things meaning by how we represent them - the words we use about them, the stories we tell about them, the images of them we produce, the emotions we associate with them, the ways we classify and conceptualize them, the values we place on them (Hall, 1997a: 3).

In this study, the advertisements for rehabilitation goods represent a ‘node’ at which physical ‘bodies,’ bodies of discourse and discourses of bodies intersect (Halberstam and Livingston, 1995: 2). In other words, disability becomes a cultural reading of the body: it becomes a subject of a discourse that creates categories of exclusion and defines boundaries around particular subjects or social activities. These discursive formations define what is and is not appropriate in the development of our cultural practices, what knowledge is considered relevant or ‘true,’ and most importantly, what sort of persons or subjects embody its characteristics (Hall, 1997a: 6). Given all of these considerations, the process of representation thus becomes

a complex business and, especially when dealing with ‘difference,’ it engages in feelings, attitudes and emotions and it mobilizes fears and anxieties in the viewer, at deeper levels than we can explain in a simple, common-sense way (Hall, 1997c: 226).

Related Studies

Much of the literature on the presentation of disabled people has centered on their portrayal in the movies, telethons, news presentations, cartoons, art, newspapers, magazines, film and theater and literature (Woodhill, 1994). It is noted that visibly disabled persons did not appear in American advertisements (and by extension North American advertising) until the
(Longmore, cited in Hahn, 1987a: 561). In the main, advertising and disability have been restricted historically and predominantly to fund raising campaigns (Brolley and Anderson, 1986). It is only in recent years that attention has been focused on whether media advertisements could influence the attitudes of the general public towards disabled persons, and subsequently facilitate or impede their acceptance and integration in work, social, recreational and educational environments (Brolley and Anderson, 1986: 147).

As far as it has been possible to determine, a limited number of studies have been done with respect to the presentation of people with disabilities in advertising. Only two specifically related studies were identified: Brolley and Anderson’s (1986) study of media advertisements depicting various disability groups and Wang’s (1992) research on the inadvertent reproduction of the stigma of disability through health promotion posters.

Brolley and Anderson’s study focused on media advertisements depicting various disability groups which were obtained from agencies representing disabled people. They aimed at highlighting potential deficits in media advertising regarding disabled persons, as well as the influence mass media have on the attitudes of non-disabled persons towards disabled persons. Their study was based on open-ended questionnaire responses based on the decoding process of a specifically non-disabled audience. Two separate groups of subjects were asked to rank their responses to posters classified as being either positive or negative with regard to influencing attitudes towards people with disabilities.

Brolley and Anderson (1986: 149) found that effective advertising was curtailed by the deliberate manipulation of negative emotions such as pity, lengthy explanations of the disability involved, the absence of colour, and not demonstrating respect for those represented in the advertisements. Granted that this thesis focuses on the semantic as opposed to the pragmatic aspects highlighted by Brolley and Anderson, their conclusions aided in shaping the discussion/conclusion section of this study. It provided a tangential insight as to what might
constitute ‘effective’ presentation as far as persons with disabilities are concerned.

The second study, Wang (1992), examined the way in which cultural production studies could contribute to a theory of the production of stigma by public health professions. Wang looked at the ways in which injury prevention campaigns and public health campaigns could call for life saving interventions at the social expense of persons with disabilities and other stigmatized groups. Her study utilized the cultural studies perspective from three angles: the production of culture via the health professionals; the decoding process whereby she examined the theoretical and practical exploration of how audiences experience mass culture; and the exploration of culture as a text, in this case public health prevention campaigns.

Wang found that health promoters sought to prevent abuses by using advertisements that reinforced the negative consequences arising from, for example, drunk driving. Wang argued that such advertisements inadvertently reinforced the stigma of disability by the use of captions such as, “If you think seat belts are confining, think about a wheelchair,” or “Last summer, 1,057 teenagers got so drunk they couldn’t stand up. Ever. - Don’t Drink and Drive.”

Wang’s work provided a guideline as to how this study could be approached via a cultural studies framework, where culture was explored as a text in the form of advertisements for rehabilitation goods. Wang’s study also considered the texts used as being able to provide the prototypes from which to begin to theorize about the relationship between prevention efforts and the negation of social identity for people with disabilities or other stigmatized conditions (Wang, 1992: 1099). In a similar vein, analysis of the designated advertising text for this study could become a basis from which to explain the relationship between the presentation of rehabilitation goods / the ‘disabled body’ in the advertisements and the corresponding materialist production of disability.
Research Goals And Expectations

If we view the advertisements from rehabilitation goods as being emanations of a culture, we can use them to explore what they say about the disabled as a group. To this end, a semiotic reading of a sample of advertisements for rehabilitation goods was undertaken and a materialist theory of the production of disability utilized to derive and explore the findings.

As indicated earlier in this chapter, the materialist view of disability considers that social responses to impairment are "culturally produced through the complex interaction between the mode of production and the central values of the society concerned" (Oliver, cited in Barnes, 1996: 51). Consequently, the social responses to, and the experience of impairment were influenced by economic development, the changing nature of ideas and the need to maintain order during industrialization (Barnes, 1996).

This study's research perspective is based on three distinct yet interrelated ideas derived from the literature review. First, disability has been viewed as an economic problem because throughout the 19th and 20th century, work has been organized around the twin principles of competition between individual workers and the maximization of profit (Barton, 1996: 33). Second, the rise of the medical institution became a means of controlling individual bodies and attempting to reintegrate them into the larger social body. Last but not least, the economic dictates which enabled the use of the body as an advertising text/tool to validate cultural concerns and values with bodily perfection was, and is, aided by the technological development of the mass media.

Based on the literature reviewed, it was thus anticipated that a semiotic analysis of the advertisements would uncover a discourse/value system that stressed the importance of individual functionality and productivity as related to a capitalist economy. It was also expected
that there would be a strong medical/professional orientation in some of the ads that would act as an 'expert' voice to underscore the importance of functional bodies in a capitalist economy. Arising out of this, it was possible that given today's preoccupation with the aesthetics of body image, this functional concern would be reflected in the visual portrayal of the 'disabled body.'
METHODOLOGY

Semiotics - Understanding the process of meaning generation in advertising

In the process of analyzing advertisements, not only is it important for readers to identify and understand the images and values projected, but also to recognize the forms and structures in which they are contained (Williamson, 1978). These images and values are conveyed by advertising’s ability to take the signifier, the material object, and to transform it into a signified, a meaning that will hold relevance to a person or a group of people (Williamson, 1978: 17). The advertisement therefore provides a structure by which the reader can create and transfer meaning.

Following the example of Williamson (1978), this study adopts the techniques of semiology to act as a ‘tool’ by which to identify the means by which signs are created in advertisements for rehabilitation goods and the meanings they can generate. Three areas are distinguished in semiology/semiotics: syntactics, which is concerned with structure; semantics, which is concerned with levels of meaning transfer; and pragmatics, which focuses on audience response and interpretation (Dingena, 1994: 12). This study concerns itself mainly with a syntactic and semantic reading of the ads: to understand by what means a sign is created and what it could possibly mean. To a lesser extent, pragmatics are involved, in that as the researcher conducting the semiotic reading of the ads, I am also cast as the audience.

A syntactically-oriented description focuses primarily on the physical layout of an ad. It concerns itself with the interrelationships among the elements themselves as they combine to form larger meaningful units (Messaris, 1997: viii). It analyzes the ad structure by focusing on the relation between the signs in an ad message, for example, the verbal and pictorial signs. It
also considers executional stimuli such as the use of colour; the pictorial content, for example, the portrayal of the product and product users; and the use of metaphor to communicate abstract characteristics or benefits of the product or brand to the consumer, and which accordingly translate the direct advertising message into figurative terms (Dingena, 1994).

A semantically-oriented approach complements the syntactic description, in that it focuses on how the elements of a particular mode, in this case the ad, are related to their meanings. It involves the denotative and connotative levels of meaning transfer in advertising and concentrates on the objects referred to and the ways in which signs relate to their object. According to Dingena (1994: 29), three steps are contained in the semantic approach to analyzing advertisements.

The first step in semantic analysis is a consideration of the process of meaning transfer to certain objects, persons or situations within a culture. This constitutes the referent systems which form the body of the social and cultural knowledge from which advertisers and audiences derive their inspiration. It is based on the assumption that the objects and signs utilized already have a meaning within the context of a certain culture.

The second step includes a process of meaning transfer to the advertised product within advertising where the meaning of one sign is transferred to another (Dingena, 1994). For example, a race car can be portrayed in order to emphasize the speed of a wheelchair. The third and final step involves the process of meaning transfer to the consumer, who adopts the ‘image’ of the product. The implied characteristics of the good are then transferred to or adopted by the consumer into his/her self-image (Dingena, 1994).
Outline of Steps Taken to Achieve Study Population

A primary consideration in the process of determining the study population was the fact that mainstream advertising images utilizing disabled individuals are few and far between in mainstream media publications. For this reason it was decided to focus the analysis on disability-oriented magazines which contained a wider selection of ads containing disabled individuals.

A review was made of three Canadian disability magazine publications: Abilities, Disability Today, and Caliper. It was decided to focus on the publications Abilities and Disability Today, since they both featured a similar magazine content, advertising layout, and audience composition and size. The third magazine, Caliper, was excluded because it is specific to mobility impairments. It was felt that since the other two magazines represent issues from a multi-disability perspective they would carry a wider range of advertisements.

Once this had been achieved, a second concern was the fact that the disability magazines selected had a combined publishing history of eighteen years. During that period it could have been possible that changes in publication technology and economics would have led to increased use of colour, an increased number of ads, variations in ad sizes, etc. Additionally, given the advances made in biotechnology in the last few years, it was possible that ads featuring, for example, prosthetic goods, might significantly outnumber ads for other products. This would have constituted a possible bias in the final sampling process of the ads for semiotic analysis.

For this reason it was decided that the sampling process would utilize a ‘middle range’ option that combined both quantitative and qualitative strategies (Leiss, Kline and Jhally, 1986). It would be conducted in three stages (as described in detail below), the first two of a quantitative/content analysis nature and the third which would be strictly qualitative given the
semiotic nature of this investigation. A predetermined coding scheme (also detailed below) that determined the exact definitions and boundaries of what constituted an advertisement for a rehabilitation good was developed. Following this a census of the full span of the published issues for both magazines was conducted. When this had been accomplished, a secondary census would determine the range of possible ads that would lend themselves to semiotic/semantic analysis. From this a final sampling of ads was made for detailed semantic/syntactic analysis.

Description of Study Population

Abilities and Disability Today can be described as cross-disability, lifestyle-oriented magazines. The term ‘cross-disability’ indicates a wide continuum of disabilities from physical impairment to mental illness. ‘Lifestyle-oriented’ magazines focus on a wide range of issues that impact on daily living, and are distinguished from other specialized magazine categories such as medicine or athletics.

Abilities magazine originated in 1988. According to its editorial profile it is a magazine about the disabled community - not unable, just disabled...about knocking down barriers both within and outside of the disabled community...about relationships, about choice - and each individual’s right to excellence in lifestyle selections (Cohn, 1988: 5).

Disability Today emerged in 1991. It was described as a medium by which readers could become more informed about different physical abilities...The able bodied readers would have the opportunity to understand disability as it is perceived by disabled people, while persons with disabilities would be able to relate to the experienced, lifestyles and perceptions of others (Tiessen, 1991: 3).

In 1997, Disability Today renamed itself Active Living and its editorial content evolved to focus more on health, fitness and recreation. It became a news forum on ‘how-to’ improve health,
fitness and mobility, 'where-to' access it and 'what-to' look for in new recreational activities (Tiessen, 1997: 6).

Both these magazines target not only people with disabilities but also their families and professionals engaged in disability issues. They are distributed to institutions which include rehabilitation facilities and organizations such as the Council for Canadians with Disabilities (CCD), the Canadian Association of Independent Living Centres (CAILC), the Ontario March of Dimes and the Canadian Wheelchair Sports Association.

**Overview of sampling process: Stage One - Conducting a census of the advertisements**

A census was taken of the advertisements for rehabilitation goods in both Abilities and Disability Today/Active Living over their respective publication spans, i.e., Fall 1988 - Winter 1998 and Summer 1991 - Winter 1998 respectively. The ads examined ranged from 1/8 page to full page and included black and white and colour formats.

The following criteria were utilized in the selection of the ads. First, the advertisement must promote a specific rehabilitation good(s). For the purpose of this study, rehabilitation goods were identified as being mechanical aids that supposedly help achieve the same goals as therapy or exercise performed on and by patients, or support services that improve the level of functional independence for persons with disabilities (Albrecht, 1992: 223). This included modified vehicles, strollers, wheelchairs, architecture, prosthetics (artificial limbs), orthopedics (the surgical correction of physical deformities) and pharmaceuticals (drugs and pain relief).

A distinction was made between ads promoting services as opposed to a concrete good. It was decided not to include advertisements for services since they were narrowly focused on
medical concerns and were marketed differently from products, for example, their promotion would be conducted more through the reference of medical doctors. Thus institutions providing rehabilitation services/programs, for example, “When you can’t see the forest for the trees, call us - Rehabilitation Management Inc.,” were excluded. Also excluded were ads which featured businesses or companies that sold services related to rehabilitation goods rather than the goods themselves, for example, “Frontier Computing - Specializing in Computer Assistance to the Blind and Visually Impaired,” or the Chrysler financial assistance program for adaptive equipment: “Chrysler is making Driving less of a Challenge.”

In addition to the first requirement, the ads also had to contain a ‘disabled body’ in the advertisement. The definition of ‘disabled body’ was not restricted solely to iconic images, such as a photograph of a person in a wheelchair, but could include the indexical, as in a photograph of a wheelchair or prosthetic limb, or be symbolic, such as the universal symbol for handicapped parking. The assumption was that once the ad was identified as featuring a rehabilitation good, the ‘body’ featured was ‘disabled,’ unless explicitly stated or viewed otherwise.

The identified rehabilitation ads were then organized by issue and year into the following product categories (See Figure 2 for category of goods and Appendix A for a table showing information on the number of ads per issue, etc.). Each issue was examined as a separate unit, which meant that even if the same ads were duplicated in subsequent issues, they were re-counted and recorded for that particular issue.
Figure 2. Category and Definitions of Rehabilitation Goods Found in Advertisements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prosthetics/Orthotics</td>
<td>artificial limbs and related products, e.g., prosthetic liners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport</td>
<td>adaptive equipment for driving motor vehicles, e.g., motor vehicle mobility lifts, hand controls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wheelchairs</td>
<td>manual and motorized wheelchairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drugs/Pain Relief</td>
<td>natural medicine/medical drugs, muscle stimulators, therapeutic pads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fitness/Exercise/Lifestyle</td>
<td>gym equipment, wheelchair 'bicycles,' adaptive ski equipment, e.g., mono-skis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Architecture</td>
<td>equipment designed to facilitate access. e.g., elevator and stair lifts, shower rails</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td>'personal' products not fitting into the above categories, e.g., incontinence products, strollers and walkers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Stage Two: Distinguishing the ads for rehabilitation goods

At this stage all the advertisements for rehabilitation goods had been identified. They were now further distinguished by being placed into two categories: ads that were mainly factual, and which focused more on physical product attributes and functional benefits (Dingena, 1994: 45); and those which were evaluative, and tended to focus on the more abstract attributes and perceived emotional benefits of the advertised products (Dingena, 1994: 45).

An example of factual advertising would be an ad that featured Brand A wheelchairs, and which described them solely in terms of having sturdier frames and an ergonomic design. In contrast, an evaluative ad might highlight the functional advantages of Brand A wheelchairs by appealing to the instrumental values and lifestyle of the consumer. Hence Brand A
wheelchairs might be described in a way which implied that their use enhanced one's physical attractiveness, placed one 'ahead of the competition,' or were the way to 'adventure' road.

Those ads that dealt strictly with physical product characteristics, and which were consequently less subject to symbolic meanings, were excluded. This left the so called 'evaluative' ads which could be described as being imbued with more socio-cultural meanings and were therefore more amenable to semiotic analysis. (See Appendix B for the list of such evaluative ads) A total of 130 'evaluative' ads were found, with 72 being sourced in Abilities and 58 from Disability Today/Active Living.

**Stage Three: Selecting ads for semiotic analysis**

Out of the remaining ads from the second sampling stage, a total of 18 ads, nine from each magazine were highlighted for detailed analysis. This was accomplished by selecting those that were determined as being more 'aesthetically complex.' Determination of 'aesthetic complexity' involved a consideration of the overall nature of the ad in terms of the following characteristics: the number of pictorial and textual elements; the degree of sophistication of the arrangement of the pictorial and textual elements; the use of notable camera angles and other photographic effects; the artistic utilization of light and shadow, and of colour, where applicable; and the graphic quality and variety of the textual elements.

**Data Analysis - reading the ads**

An important aspect of the ad analysis was deciding as to which values and meanings this researcher was to privilege in the texts. Hall (cited in Fiske, 1982: 111) identifies three ways
of decoding mass media messages: the dominant system/code, which conveys the dominant values of society; the negotiated code which acknowledges the existence of the dominant values but is also prepared to argue that a particular group's place within that structure needs improving; and the oppositional code which recognizes the dominant reading but rejects it as being false and supplies a contrasting interpretation.

It was realized that the connotations arrived at were dependent on a reader's social position, such as class, gender, race and educational background. It was also acknowledged that the signs' connotations were always related to codes of social values and meanings, where codes equaled a set of values and meanings shared alike by users, producers and readers of the text. For those reasons this study utilized a combination of a negotiated/oppositional reading of the ads. It was a compromise between the fact that as an academic reader and researcher, I brought an activated prior knowledge to my analysis (Dingena, 1994), but was also a member of the group known as 'disabled' that constituted the research subject. This stance was an attempt towards being as objective as possible in the ad analysis, while recognizing that no research is ever completely 'value free.' As Dey (1993: 37) notes: "Analysis often proceeds in tandem with data collection, rather than commencing on its completion...Meanwhile the researcher becomes a participant in his or her own research subject."

Utilizing the negotiated/oppositional viewpoint, the primary consideration in the ad analysis was to understand what was the social status of the 'disabled body' as depicted in the ads. It also considered how the 'disabled body' related to the able-bodied hierarchy. In this way it was made possible to highlight the recurrent themes in how the sampled ads portrayed the disabled as a group. This reading included three main considerations:

i) **What dialectics are present in the ads?** Is the 'disabled body' contrasted with a 'non-disabled body'? Who dominates within the non-verbal communication within the frame
of the ad? What might this ad be implying about the nature of relationships between
the able-bodied and disabled as a group? How is the group under study depicted in
interaction with other categories of persons - family members, doctors, etc.? What is the
ad conveying about social status or class?

ii) **How is the ‘disabled body’ presented?** Is it passive or active? What sort of role does it
assume, for example, professional, parent, athlete? Is it contrasted with an able-bodied
individual? What might this ad be saying about what it is to be disabled? A disabled

iii) **Do the ads directly or indirectly promote the cultural beliefs / ideological tenets
associated with the outlined materialist view of disability?** What is the prevailing
concept of the disabled body? Is it viewed as a functional entity, not unlike a machine?
Are other related values promoted or implied, such as the notions of an ‘exciting life,’
‘freedom,’ or ‘adventure,’ all of which seemingly cannot be accomplished without a
‘functional body’?
RESULTS

Stage 1: Census of the ads in Abilities and Disability Today/Active Living

The total number of rehabilitation product ads found in the magazines over their entire respective publication spans (as compared to the common publication spans dealt with in Figure 3) was 914. Of those, 295 were found in Disability Today/Active Living, and 619 in Abilities, the difference in numbers being partly attributed to Abilities’ additional three year publishing history.

It was noted that Disability Today/Active Living carried significantly greater number of advertisements for rehabilitation services, such as therapy and residential medical centres, which are distinct from the rehabilitation goods in Figure 3. More precisely, 103 ads for rehabilitation services were found in Disability Today/Active Living compared to the 17 found in Abilities. The reason for the stark difference between the two magazines in this regard was not readily apparent in relation to their stated objectives and target audiences. It would require additional investigation to explain. More generally this frequency of service ads might be a reflection of the changing role of the medicalization of disability and its accompanying service industry.

There was no discernible trend in terms of rehabilitation goods ad development in terms of aesthetics, size, numbers etc., over the ten and eight year period of Abilities and Disability Today/Active Living, respectively (See Appendix A for complete list of ads per magazine issue).

Other similarities rest in the fact that both magazines did become more sophisticated in terms of layout over the months of publication. While both magazines featured a similar advertising content, it was noted that Disability Today/Active Living featured significantly more ads for
prosthetic goods than Abilities. It was not uncommon for the same ads to be duplicated in both magazines.

While the total number of ads for each rehabilitation goods category was far greater in Abilities as opposed to Disability Today (with the exception of prosthetic goods), it has to be considered that the former was in production a full three years before the latter. Nevertheless, there was no discernable trend in terms of the total number of such ads per issue for either magazine over their respective publishing histories. Neither was there a comparative discrepancy in the average number of these ads found per issue for the two publications over the same time period.

Given these results it was decided that it was appropriate to confine the population of the ads to the full six-year span for which the two overlapped completely, from Winter 1992 to Winter 1998 (See Figure 3). Overall, the greater percentage of ads in the different categories was found in Abilities, with the exception of prosthetics goods. The largest overall category was 'Transport,' which constituted 26% of the total. The 'General' category followed at 22%, then 'Fitness/Lifestyle' (16.3%), 'Wheelchairs' (14.5%), 'Architecture' (10.9%) and 'Prosthetics' (10.6%). 'Drugs/Pain Relief' was the smallest category, forming 1.6% of the sum total of all the rehabilitation goods/ads found in the six year period.

**Figure 3. Summary of Rehabilitation Goods Ads found in Disability Today/Active Living (DT/AL) and Abilities, Winter 1992-Spring 1998.* (N=824)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Prosthetics</th>
<th>Trans./ Car</th>
<th>Wheelchair</th>
<th>Drugs/ Pain Relief</th>
<th>Architect.</th>
<th>Fitness/ Lifestyle/ Exercise</th>
<th>General</th>
<th>TOTAL # of ads</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DT/AL</td>
<td>80 (9.7%)</td>
<td>63 (7.6%)</td>
<td>16 (1.9%)</td>
<td>3 (0.3%)</td>
<td>33 (4%)</td>
<td>29 (3.5%)</td>
<td>70 (8.4%)</td>
<td>287 (34.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abilities</td>
<td>8 (0.9%)</td>
<td>152 (18.4%)</td>
<td>104 (12.6%)</td>
<td>11 (1.3%)</td>
<td>61 (7%)</td>
<td>97 (11.7%)</td>
<td>112 (13.5%)</td>
<td>537 (65.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>88 (10.6%)</td>
<td>215 (26%)</td>
<td>120 (14.5%)</td>
<td>14 (1.6%)</td>
<td>90 (10.9%)</td>
<td>135 (16.3%)</td>
<td>182 (22%)</td>
<td>824</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The number of ads for Rehabilitation services for the same common six year period was 100 for Disability Today/Active Living and 15 for Abilities, a similar imbalance noted for the complete runs of both publications.
Stage 2: Symbolically meaningful / Evaluative ads that provided basis for final sample

A total of 130 'Evaluative' ads were found in the six year span of the magazines surveyed, with 58 being found in Disability Today/Active Living and 72 in Abilities. 'Evaluative' ads therefore formed a possible 15.7% of the total 824 rehabilitation goods/ads for the designated six year span. This meant that the remainder could be considered as falling into the category of 'factual' ads (See pg. 29 For the definition of evaluative and factual ads).

This disproportionate imbalance of 'evaluative' versus 'factual' ads is significant when one considers the historical patterns of meaning in advertising. According to Leiss, Kline and Jhally (1986: 224 - 226), advertising formats shifted during the 20th century. Up to the 1920's magazine advertising was dominated by a product information format, where the concern was on highlighting the implied utility of the product. Throughout the 1920's the influence of the new media of film and radio development furthered the visual representation of advertising. There was now a shift from emphasizing what a product did and an increasing exploration of what the product could mean for consumers (Leiss, Kline and Jhally, 1986:233). After 1945 and up to the beginning of the 1960's, advertising facing a new challenge: that of re-directing war productivity to the purposes of the consumer market. Focus was now placed on a more personalized format "where the product was being registered within a complex matrix of human emotional responses" (Leiss, Kline and Jhally, 1986: 233). The most recent phase of advertising is recognized in the appearance of lifestyle ads and the highly segmented market of the 1960's and onwards. Emphasis is now on the social context generated by the product. Dingena, (1994:45) notes that it was anticipated that advertising in the 1980's would make greater use of figurative description and continue the evaluative trend in terms of focusing on psychosocial consequences and values.
In tracing the history from the emphasis in advertising and product utility to product image, Leiss, Kline and Jhally (1986: 232) note that

the shift to product image formats opens up advertising's discourse about products to include images of status, glamor, beauty, health, and respectable middle class mores among the images of product quality.

In other words, there has been a significant shift from factual to evaluative ads.

The disproportionate number of product as compared to evaluative ads in the two disability magazines under study could seem to be at odds with the development of advertising appeals in the advertising industry in general. This may suggest that cultural reactions to disability are being reflected here: it is less discomfoting and distressing to present the 'disabled body' by focusing more on product attributes than the product users.

Some additional observations about the rehabilitation goods ads include the fact that of all the ads identified as symbolically meaningful (i.e., evaluative) only one depicted a visible minority in the selling of a particular product: Abilities, Spring 1995, featured an Asian model promoting an incontinence device/system. Additionally, very few of these ads directly utilized children for promoting a product, although they were featured as a backdrop in many cases. The only explanation I can venture is that while children make cute 'mascots' for disability organizations, in terms of actual promotion for rehabilitation goods, their appeal is not perceived as significant. Perhaps this is because they are viewed as not having purchasing power or because the concept of a disabled child is considered more repugnant in terms of visual advertising for a commercial product.
Stage 3: Semiotic analysis of 18 ads determined to be ‘aesthetically complex’

AD #1
Ad Caption: “A Walk in the Park”

The dis-embodied image of a life-like prosthetic foot/shoe insert is superimposed over a backdrop of the green slopes and trees of a park. A gently winding path leads off into the distance, away from the viewer. The overall colours are muted and dream-like with the primary colours being the soft green of the grass, and the light flesh-coloured tones of the prosthetic foot. In a way, the visual soft focus reinforces the name of the prosthetic good - the “Kingsley Steplite foot” (italics mine). It relates the visually airy and light impact of the scenery to the name of the good with the implication that the user will be able to ‘step lightly’ in it.

The use of a park as a backdrop creates two levels of reference for the ad as a whole. First, there is the juxtaposition of what is patently artificial and what is presumed to be natural - the prosthetic foot and the park. It suggests a strong ‘nature’ versus ‘natural’ contrast whereby the artificial foot replaces nature and is rendered ‘natural’ within a so-called ‘natural’ environment, the park. On a secondary level, however, the contrast between the two is not so great. A park is a man-made composition based on the artful selection of vegetation and rendered in a way that is considered aesthetically pleasing. Similarly, the prosthetic foot is rendered lifelike and natural thorough bioengineering technology. This idea is reinforced by the mechanical/engineering jargon utilized in the written text:

Employing a unique response to Dynamic Elastic Response, the keel design of the Steplite foot offers extremely smooth rollover characteristics while the composite spring plate fabricated in the low to mid flexion resistance range, gives a forward momentum during the transition from midstance through toe-off. Exactly what most amputees desire during a relaxing, comforting walk.

The written text suggests that bioengineering technology can replace the non-existent or non-
functioning aspects of the body. In this way the 'disabled body' is objectified and rendered into
distinct body parts. Through the process of technology, the 'human' is divorced from the
'body'; it becomes a case of discussing not the human body, but the 'body human'.

Continuing this line of argument, it is noted that this ad does not physically feature the
'disabled body' as a whole or entire entity. The image of the prosthetic foot acts as an
indexical representation of the amputee. Nor is the 'disabled body' directly addressed through
the written text. Instead, all the references are oblique, with the ad text being directed towards
the prosthetist/medical professional. This sub-text is revealing of the dynamics of the
relationship between medical professionals and their patients. The professional body becomes
the intermediary between the rehabilitation good and the 'disabled body.' This professional
voice presumes to know "exactly what most amputees desire during a relaxing, comfortable
walk." This 'knowledgeable' professional voice must recommend the good to its
patients/clients:

Join in the enthusiasm being generated by the Kingsley Steplite by
recommending it for your patients (italics mine) so that they can experience the
comfort of a design specifically aimed at the majority of amputees who enjoy a
walk in the park...

The 'disabled body' becomes caught up in the knowledge/power spiral by becoming the
object of both the discourse and the practices of the profession of rehabilitation (Woodhill,
1996:208). The disembodied prosthetic foot/amputee, floating in the undefined space of the ad,
has been 'marked' by the professional 'eye' in an anonymous and functional sense, with an
inclination towards conformity. Here, the medical and rehabilitation forces behind the
'Kingsley Steplite' seek to re-integrate the non-conforming body into the larger social body.

In conclusion, the voice of the 'disabled body' is rendered passive by the ad's direct
appeal to the professionals. This ad aptly illustrates how the human body can become directly
involved in a political field that "invests, marks, trains, tortures and forces it to carry out tasks, perform ceremonies and to emit signs" (Foucault, 1975: 26). In this case the "tasks," "ceremonies" and "signs" are related to the relaxing "walk in the park." The park becomes the social and very public arena where the body is put on display. The quasi-natural setting becomes the stage for the triumph of biotechnology; the amputee must integrate into the wider social body that extends beyond the "majority of amputees who enjoy a walk in the park."

AD #2

In terms of layout this ad is divided between written text and a visual picture/photograph. The caption, "Motion Technology," is prominent in the upper left hand corner. It is balanced by the bright yellow shorts of the runner in the lower right hand corner. The image of a prosthetic foot and leg, slanting from the top right hand corner toward the bottom left hand corner, acts as a visual divider for the text and photograph. The blurred image of the foot also contributes to linking the image to the wording of the ad caption, "Motion Technology." This ad thus becomes a composition of diagonal lines, whereby the eye of the viewer is forced to move from top to bottom and crosswise.

The focus is on male runner in a light blue vest and yellow shorts crossing a finish line race tape, with arms thrown up in triumph. His head is flung back, face grimaced with effort, and perhaps a sense of accomplishment/achievement as well. The runner's entire body yearns upwards, towards an invisible point above his head. The only indication we get that this athlete might possibly be disabled is the juxtaposition of the 'larger than life' prosthetic foot next to his figure. The runner is young, good looking and obviously athletic. The fact that he is shown brushing against an intact race tape suggests several things. The more obvious one is that the
product is of such a quality that it will allow the user to be first: it is a winner. Another understanding, however, is that not only is this particular product ‘first’ among similar products, but also that the benefits that it will confer on the consumer will also enable him or her to be the first/best, not necessarily in running races but perhaps other endeavours. The implication, therefore, is that this man could be a winner, not only on the race field but conceivably in other activities.

The combination of the two words “motion” and “technology” in the ad caption relates two significant concepts. The very fact that “motion” is linked with technology serves to emphasize the importance of body movement in the wider socio-cultural context. Conceivably, the ad could have used the phrase “Comfort technology” instead. Technology thus becomes not only the means of regaining a lost body part but also the means by which movement and physical activity can be regained. The phrase gains greater significance when we explore the words which follow immediately after it.

On the surface, the words “Comfort. Function. Value” are innocuous. One could conceivably read them as saying something to this effect: “This product is comfortable to use. Its performance factor is high. You get good value for your money.” On a secondary level, however, “Comfort” does not only refer to the engineering technology which can “provide the most comfortable socket interface possible” for the user. Comfort becomes a state of being that is available through technology. The prosthetic limb’s ability to replicate natural functions as closely as possible becomes not only a functional concern but also an aesthetic one. The very fact that the runner was not shown with the limb suggests that the emphasis here is on appearances.

Likewise “Function” is also related to technology where a “state of the art design” will strive to make the user as functional as possible. In this ad, ‘function’ becomes a statement about
the body as a functional entity and is related to one's ability to run races and to participate in potentially grueling activities that require much physical effort. It is significant that although the product does not purport to target only disabled athletes as such but could conceivably target disabled non-athletes, the advertisement chooses to highlight the athletic figure. Again, physical activity is highlighted as being a culturally accepted pastime that confers a certain status on its participants.

Last but not least, the word "value" when used in conjunction with "comfort" and "function" is loaded with secondary meanings. Does "value" refer to the cost value of the product which has been made valuable because of superior engineering? Or does the word refer to the other type of value: the value judgements that certain groups confer upon another using a physiological standard that excludes and discriminates? In this context the missing body part becomes an increment of that value. Value thus becomes a matter of functional prosthetic limbs that can replace a missing body part and confer the illusion of wholeness.

In conclusion, although this ad presents the 'disabled body' in a positive light via the active figure of the athlete, it would also seem that this 'body' is viewed as a site of contention: it becomes a meeting place of technological expertise and socio-cultural notions of what constitutes physical activity. To illustrate: the highlighted 'qualities' of "comfort" and "function" will make the prosthetic limb valued, not only for its superior concrete benefits but for the culturally approved values it can confer upon the user. In the context of this ad, those values revolve around that of an active/athletic lifestyle. More importantly, the figure of the modern day prosthetist is interposed as an active agent in defining the 'disabled body': the former are engaged not only in a process that attempts to duplicate the body but also to create a product that performs, provides comfort and more importantly, pleases the eye (Tiessen 1996b).
AD #3
Ad Caption: “The most comforting part of this picture is the TEC Liner”

At first glance, the models in the ad are that of a modern day ‘Mom and Pop’ couple, complete with a ‘cute as button’ grand-daughter. The setting is in what is commonly accepted as the heart of a home - the kitchen. The blue and brown colours, reflected in the denim clothing of the actors and the wooden grain of the kitchen cabinets, convey a sense of hominess and down-to-earth folksiness. Overall, this particular ad is at pains to convey a sense of domestic comfort. The picture shot is reminiscent of a Norman Rockwell illustration where the artist depicted the familiar scenes of North American life via carefully constructed and picturesque tableaus.

This ad links the state of the art rehabilitation good with traditional images of well being. Tradition here is entailed by the various roles assigned to the models and the associated images. The very familiarity of the setting includes the comfortable give and take between the older couple. The older woman is cast in the role of ‘Grandma.’ She is engaged in baking cookies: a traditional female activity by which means she can show her love for her family. ‘Grandpa’ also plays along, appreciatively smelling the freshly baked cookies offered up for inspection in the time honoured pose of the eager little boy/swain. Their mutual gaze excludes the viewers and reinforces the impression that we are outside, looking inside. In contrast, the little girl, complete with a pink bow in her hair and presumably the grand-daughter, looks towards the viewers with a mischievous sparkle in her eyes while reaching for a cookie. Her gaze engages the viewer and creates an act of complicity whereby he or she is drawn into the domestic tableau. We are thus forced to acknowledge the intimacy of the setting but at the same time are excluded from it.

In this ad the happiness of loved ones is conveyed in a close family setting that includes multiple generations. The overall image idealizes the all-American grandparents where senior
citizens are well-off, active and self-reliant. By creating such an impression, the ad effects a transfer of the positive feelings evoked by the imagery to the product. The several lines of text at the very top of the ad complements and reinforces the familiar associations linked with the charming domestic tableau: "There's nothing like a good ol' recipe for happier lives. Comfort is the key ingredient."

By juxtaposing two sets of actors, each at the opposite end of the age groups; senior citizen and juvenile, the ad reinforces that the "patented urethane technology of the TEC Interface System is ideal for amputees of all ages and activity levels."

The issue of cosmetic aesthetics arises in the context of this ad. The innocuous statement, "There's nothing like a good ol' recipe for happier lives," raises several questions. It begs the question: What is the recipe for a happier life? Conceivably, it could be the loving family unit portrayed. However, the use of the word "comfort" in the next sentence, answers the question: "Comfort is the key ingredient." In this context 'comfort' is defined as being physical - it is embodied in a prosthetic liner that can be adapted to all lifestyles and ages.

On a secondary level, however, could 'comfort' not also refer to the visual comfort that is derived when one's sighting is not disturbed by that which is unfamiliar or frightening? The very innocuousness of the ad, its near saccharine sweetness in the portrayal of traditional images, suggests this. Furthermore, the written ad text touts the TEC liner as being able to "protect and provide total environment control." One could read this statement to mean that it can provide comfort for the limb in question and allow its user to function in all situations without physical discomfort.

On the other hand, "total environment control" could be extended to include the concern with body aesthetics for the simple reason that there is no 'disabled body' visibly evident in this ad. With the exception of the small label and picture placed at the bottom right hand corner of the page, the prosthetic product in question is not made visible within the kitchen frame of the
three actors. Without careful scrutiny we are unable to tell which of the three actors is in fact using a "TEC liner." As an aside, it would appear to be the woman since her left lower leg/ankle is thinner than the right but that is the only indication. Since we cannot immediately discern which of the three models is disabled, there is no issue of domination or unequal relationships between able-bodied and disabled bodies. By using the caption: "The most comforting part of this picture is the TEC liner," this ad invites the viewer to search for a visible manifestation of disability. Finding none, one is forced to conclude, perhaps, that the ideal of any prosthetic device is its invisibility. Comfort, then, is to be achieved only when that which is unpleasant is put away and rendered as undisturbing as a plate of cookies.

AD #4
Ad Caption: “For Everyday People Doing Everyday Things”

In this ad, a casually, yet stylishly dressed young man with artificial legs is depicted standing on what appears to be a flight of stairs, talking into a cell phone. We are uncertain if he is in the act of going up or down the flight of stairs. He is obviously going or coming from somewhere, if the laundry basket on the stairs behind him is any indication. His speaking into the phone creates the suggestion that the phone call is an interruption of some activity. Yet because no distinguishable landscape forms the background, the model’s location is open. The very indefiniteness yet purposefulness of his actions serve to imbue his figure with some sense of energy. In a way this pose also reinforces the ad caption: “For everyday people doing everyday things.” Its vagueness leaves the viewer free to construct different scenarios, and widens the range of activities and choices that might be available to the ‘disabled body’ featured in the ad.
The overall colour composition of the ad consists of green and white ‘blocks’ of colour, interspersed with brown and beige. Again, the out of focus background allow some degree of viewer license in deciding the context of the model. This spatial composition is reinforced by the four boxes of text which frame the model and forces the eye to read the written text in a clockwise pattern. The most visible written text is the line, “For Everyday People Doing Everyday Things.” The eye is then directed towards the bottom right hand corner, where there is a partial image of the prosthetic limb in question and the wording, “Stratus-Impact Reducing Pylon.” This is followed by the main body of the text which outlines the merits of the “Stratus” which can “absorb the jolt of every step” and reduce the “trauma to the residual limb.” Last, but not least, is the blocked line, “Ask your Prosthetist About the Stratus Today.” The fact that the model is already talking into a phone becomes a subliminal lead to make contact with one’s prosthetist.

In some ways this ad is positive, in that it contains a visibly disabled model. However, several issues are raised by the written text. First, the wording of the text is such that it serves to insert the figure of the prosthetist between the ‘disabled body’ and the rehabilitation good. Not only is the phrase, “Ask Your Prosthetist About The Status Today,” made prominent, but the fine print at the bottom of the largest body of text urges: “This is a device which requires proper fitting and follow-up care by a prosthetics professional. Ask your prosthetist if the Stratus is right for you.” The potentially active figure of the ‘disabled body,’ as represented by the young man, is thus neutralized by the incorporation of the omniscient professional voice.

Additionally, a slightly dissonant message is created by the phrase utilized in the main body of the ad text: ‘A step up in comfort even stepping down.’ While it can be viewed as referring to the merits of a prosthetic limb that will “reduce trauma to the residual limb,” it also serves as a reminder as to how written language can be used to embody and reinforce what are
perceived as being the ‘acceptable’ social practices of the body. The advantages engendered by this particular prosthetic limb are such that it will allow the user to “walk, stand, shop and work longer.” The phrasing of the ad, however, subliminally suggests that the accomplishment of such tasks necessarily requires two legs. Again, while the ability to walk/to climb up and down stairs may be a potential capacity of a biological organism, it is also very much a human creation (Turner, 1996: 222). For example, the model in the ad is pictured standing on the stairs, which incidentally are one of the most common barriers to the physically disabled.

In conclusion, therefore, within the context of this ad, the ‘disabled body’ becomes defined and understood through a physical object, the stairs; it becomes ‘framed’ by its ability to climb or descend stairs and is embodied by the prosthetic limb. It would seem, then, that everyday activities must become imbued with, and articulated by culturally defined notions of purposeful action and movement before they are acknowledged.

AD # 5
Ad Caption: “Stairs can become a step up to freedom”

This ad features a smiling and well-dressed young blond woman seated on a stair lift. She is positioned in such a way that while her body is seated squarely on the lift, her head is turned so that she is directly facing the viewer. The line of the stair rails/stairs serves to train the eye upwards, from the bottom right hand corner to the upper left hand corner of the page. The visual impression of upward movement therefore complements the ad caption: “Stairs can become a step up to freedom.”

The setting is obviously inside a home/house, as suggested by the general air of domesticity and accompanying written text in the fourth line, which states: “[It will] allow you
to enjoy the home you love, just the way you used to. There is no need to move, no need to think about selling.” Taken all together, the visual elements of the ad photograph serve to enhance the impression of the pride of home ownership as well as the house: the sense of ‘warmth’ created by different wood grains, the neutrality of the wall paint which enhances the beige carpeting, and the near invisibility of the “Electra-Ride II” stair lift.

The model’s contrived and artificial pose renders her inert and docile. She is carefully coiffed and posed on the stair lift. She even seems rigid or ‘wooden,’ an extension of the woodwork. She is merely being used to demonstrate the use of the product as opposed to being an active element in conveying the ad message and has become part of the carefully arranged furniture and matching walls and carpeting. Even the absence of another figure which might have provided a point of contrast, does little to aid in extending the given ‘disabled body’ into a more prominent and meaningful role. Furthermore, analysis of the pictorial image and written text does not reveal what the status of the woman might be. No clues are available as to whether she is a professional career woman and/or a mother, or what other interests she might have, as opposed to merely being a figure on a stair lift. In a sense she seemingly exists in a social vacuum although we can get some sense of middle class or better from the clothing, grooming, furniture of the home and her appearance.

Additionally, the frozen appearance of the model also serves to contribute to the impression of an uncanny resemblance to advertisements of an earlier era. These ads often featured a prettily posed ‘housewife’ and a detailed spiel about the product in question. Perhaps the model’s appearance of passivity and ‘showpiece status’ can be viewed as underlining the merits of a product that is “smooth and reliable,” “less maintenance prone” and “affordable.”

The wording of the caption at the very top of the ad: “Stairs can become a step up to freedom,” raises two issues. First, it contradicts the popular image of stairs as being a negative
barrier to those with physical disabilities and inverts the concept of ‘stairs’ into something positive. Again, the ad links these abstract concepts of ‘freedom’ and ‘independence’ into the concrete symbol of the home. Here, the home becomes the embodiment of material comfort and an index of one’s economic success and social status. It also becomes linked with financial security and personal comfort: “There is no need to move, no need to think about selling.”

On the other hand, the wording of the ad caption also illustrates the way in which written language can reinforce the dominant able-bodied voice at the expense of those with physical disabilities. In the context of this ad, one’s ability to be able to surmount stairs is linked with the ability to “step up to a better way of life,” and in the process, gain one’s “freedom” and achieve a level of personal “independence.” Examination of related metaphoric ‘stair’ expressions reveals that the concept is also positively related to other statements of success. For example, one climbs the ladder of success, there is a stairway to heaven and he stepped up to receive the award. Note that it is commonly accepted that the action of ‘stepping up’ requires two legs. No alternative expression exists that will encompass the actions of an individual unable to use his or her legs, for example, a ramp to heaven, or he rolled up to receive the award.

In conclusion, the conceptual ‘inversion’ adopted by the ad caption creates a contradictory message. The potential implications of a negative barrier are ignored while reinforcing its ‘positive’ aspects in the context of the ad message. The very existence and acceptance of the stair metaphor, therefore, provides grounds for certain inferences about what the body can and should be able to accomplish physically. The ad caption inadvertently reinforces the supremacy of the able-bodied over the ‘disabled body’ in their dialectical relationship and renders even more passive, the inert and rigid figure of the ‘disabled body’ as represented by the woman.
AD # 6

Ad Caption: “Darrell Gwynn lives in the fast lane. Get out there.”

This particular ad juxtaposes symbols connected to the world of racing to promote the rehabilitation good, in this case a wheelchair. At first glance, a man in a wheelchair is placed next to a race car. The ad caption identifies the model as being Darrell Gwynn, a “former top fuel driver and current drag racing team owner.” He is wearing headphones and a speaker device. His body orientation: head tilted slightly to one side, right hand at the mouthpiece, suggests that he is listening to a message being relayed to him or in the act of conveying one. Whichever way, it succeeds in placing him in a position of action and command; he is portrayed as having the ability to control events not being depicted within the frame of the picture. His positioning next to the race car and on the race track, suggests that this control extends to the powerful and dangerous world of car racing.

In greater detail, starting from the left hand side of the picture are the yellow, green and red of a traffic signal light. We know from our built in referent coding system that this combination of colours is indicative of a traffic light. We also know that the sequence of colours carry the meaning of ‘ready, get set, go!” The blurred appearance of the lights also helps to create the impression of speed and movement; they literally become a blur when in a race car. By positioning the advertised product, the “Quickie P200” wheelchair, next to the racing car, the ad subtly links the speed and power associated with drag racing to the wheelchair. The plentiful use of the colour red throughout the ad helps to contribute to the overall impression of energy, excitement and danger; the traffic light, the race car, the wheelchair, and the individual’s clothing.

The model’s position as a ‘disabled body’ is counteracted by the fact that he has been identified first and foremost as a former top fuel driver and drag racing team owner. Furthermore
his jersey, which is covered with corporate logos/sponsors, serves to associate him with the capitalist echelon. Not only does he work with corporate sponsors but he is also, in a matter of speaking, an owner of bodies, i.e., a drag racing team. Looking at the car more closely, one can detect the head of the driver inside the car. Assuming that the driver is able-bodied, the dynamics of the relationship between the able-bodied and disabled is such that the latter becomes the dominant figure, not in the spatial sense, but in terms of control. The driver may control the movement of the vehicle, but Darrell Gwynn as owner, controls the action of his driver in the car that he owns. He is therefore presented as being wholly in control of his 'world' of drag car racing. Even his visible disability works for him in this ad. While his missing left arm becomes a sobering symbol of the penalty paid for participating in a dangerous sport, it also becomes an honorary badge of masculinity and courage.

This ad plays upon the fact that there are differing responses to disability, depending on the severity, degree and circumstances of its occurrence. The fact that Darrell Gwynn's missing limb and identification as a wheelchair user are linked to the daredevil and macho world of drag car racing makes the disability more acceptable. His masculine virility and macho status remain intact. As a former member of the world of the able-bodied, his status as a disabled individual is mitigated by his status as an 'owner' and by his determination to live in the fast lane. He is literally described as a "guy who's done a quarter mile in 4.90 seconds in a dragster who needs a chair with serious power to keep up with him."

In conclusion, this ad illustrates how the 'disabled body' can assume different nuances of meaning when presented in the light of certain activities. In this case, it happens to be an activity which has been positively related according to existing socio-cultural norms. Darrell Gwynn is pitted against a world that is fast-paced, hectic, competitive and above all, dangerous. This world, however, is also presented as being the ideal and is also one where qualities such as
independence and individuality are respected: The ad caption uncompromisingly admonishes the viewer: “Darrell Gwynn lives in the fast lane. Get out there.”

AD # 7
Ad Caption: Life is an open road/You have the freedom to go as far as you want.”

This ad consists of four main interlocking pictorial and written text ‘blocks’: the word “Life” which is placed in large blue font at the very top of the ad (about which more will be said shortly); a landscape photograph of a road/highway leading into the horizon; a much smaller picture which features a man in the act of getting out of his pickup truck using the pilot life; and the phrase “Life essentials” and other text placed below the secondary picture and occupying the block of the ad that anchors the other blocks. The colour blue dominates and acts as the primary background colour.

The visual arrangement of the ad is such that it unfolds outwards, and thus reinforces the words “open road” and “freedom” contained in the written text. Starting with the most obvious, the ad caption, “Life,” is superimposed in extra large blue font over the body of the ad. The larger than life, “Life,” spills out exuberantly over the margins of the picture frame. Artistic license has been taken with the word “life” so that the letter ‘i’ becomes the image of a person with outstretched arms in the shape of a ‘y.’ The outstretched ‘arms’ can also be viewed as the branching arms of a road. It creates a range of emotional associations including an upbeat mood, choice and action.

The next three descending ‘blocks’ of text serve to reinforce the suggested implications of the above described ad caption. First, the words: “Life is an open road. You have the freedom to go as far as you want,” are accompanied by an image of a man in the act of getting out of his
truck and onto a snowmobile. The subsequent phrase, “Life essentials,” serves to reinforce the notion of the Pilot Lift as being a primary contributor to the notion of individual ‘freedom.’ So, when the ad is viewed bottom up, the narratology suggests that the Pilot Lift is one of “life’s essentials,” and with its use, the individual gains the freedom to “go as far as [he] wants.” The state of ‘being,’ embodied by this freedom, is then reinforced by the outstretched ‘arms’/branching roads of the ad caption.

Overall, this ad plays on the concept of freedom/independence: “Life is an open road. You have the freedom to go as far as you want.” It makes use of the frontier theme, a very common concept in North American culture. This metaphor is embodied by the idea of unlimited physical space and the freedom provided thereby. The frontier is viewed as representing an escape from the trammels of civilization, as being a place where individual restraint does not exist, and where the open space remains to be discovered and conquered. Here, intimations of the frontier are to be found in the road/highway leading into the distance. Furthermore, the road is placed within a setting suggestive of the stubble of a wheatfield, blue sky and clouds and, by extension, the vast prairie land.

Other aspects of the written text also relate to and enhance the frontier concept suggested by the ad caption. The rehabilitation good in question promotes the user’s ability to perform certain outdoor activities: “The custom built, operator-controlled lift that gives you access to your truck, tractor, combine, boat, R.V., airplane - even horseback.” These are all activities that require some sort of physical effort. They also trigger traditional associations, namely the truck/tractor and combine suggest the farmer who is by necessity a risk taker; horses are associated with rugged cowboys; airplanes enable men to conquer the aerial spaces; and boats, and even the snowmobile shown in the smaller picture, are status symbols associated with speed and power. It should also be noted that in the context and setting of the ad, these are also
activities linked with masculinity.

However, while the ad message may suggest freedom, the ‘freedom’ entailed is also paradoxically circumscribed by physical limits. The highway in the picture may seem to go on forever, but it is also man-made and must consequently lead somewhere. Furthermore, it is not just set anywhere, but flanked by cultivated fields. So while one may read the ad message as about getting off the beaten track, it is also suggestive of the idea that one gets away from it all, only within the set boundaries of the yellow and white lines of the highway. A push/pull tension is thus created between unrestrained freedom/escape and constrained ‘civilized’ setting; between freedom from (civilization) as opposed to freedom to (do things).

Overall, the presentation of the ‘disabled body’ is rather ambiguous as there is no clearly stated conflicting dynamic between an able-bodied and ‘dis-abled body. On the one hand the fact that all the activities listed are for seated positions does serve to inject a positive note: nowhere in the ad is it suggested that legs are needed to perform these activities. Given the above, however, those same options are limited by activities which have culturally distinct roles and meanings assigned to them, i.e., physical activity typically associated with masculinity and ruggedness.

AD #8
Ad Caption: Ready, Willing and Able to be Productive Again”

There are two main focal points in this ad: the written ad caption, “Ready, Willing and Able to be Productive Again” and the black and white photograph of the head of a young man wearing a mike/speaker headphone. Let us proceed with the photograph. The young man is looking solemnly, even pensively into the distance, head tilted slightly downwards and in a slight
oblique angle, towards the camera. The lighting is such that the front of his face is imbued with a glow. The photographic shot is reminiscent of the slightly romanticized high school or university graduation photographs where the glow can be the glow of anticipated success or of youthful idealism. An initial reading of the ad text reveals that the word “productivity” becomes the main catch phrase: “Today people with disabilities can take advantage of a remarkable new technology to lead a fuller, more productive life.” Again, it reiterates that “when you buy PowerTALK, Kolvox provides you with all the tools, training and support you need to be productive and on the go again.” A quote from the customer is featured in the photograph, and placed as a cut-line at the bottom of it, states: “PowerTALK helped me to become productive again.”

The ‘disabled body’ featured in the photograph is identified as “Dan Thompson” who became a quadriplegic at age sixteen. He is quoted as stating “PowerTALK helped me become productive again” (Italics mine). The implication is that after his accident and prior to the advent of Power TALK, Dan Thompson was non-productive. A suggestion is thus made that one’s ability to work, to contribute to the wider capitalist enterprise outside, becomes an incremental measure of one’s worth and self-image. It becomes a dollars and cents notion where individual worth is judged by socially determined concepts of productivity.

Linking this idea to the larger body of the ad, the caption of “Ready, willing and able to be productive again” suggests that the technology in question becomes the means by which a formerly functional body that was rendered dysfunctional can be reincorporated into the world of work. The use of the word “willing” suggests/assumes that all ‘disabled bodies’ want to be rendered productive and be re-integrated into the larger economy, hence the closing words of the ad text: “and on the go again.” The “fuller, more productive” life referred to in the second line of the written ad text is thus linked to the highly commercial activities related to capitalist
enterprise.

The underlying premise of the ad is such that through this particular technology the ‘disabled body’ can be restored to functionality so that it can regain its place in the wheels and cogs of capitalist enterprise. It is significant that the “everyday tasks” listed by the ad are only inclusive of those related to business interests: “You can do letters, reports, mailing lists, envelopes, charts, purchase orders, invoices, even financial statements without ever typing a single word.” These all herald highly commercial activities outside the frame of the ad.

In conclusion, this ad reinforces the perceived importance of linking individual productivity with individual worth; technology becomes a means to a productive end. Here the ‘disabled body’ is related to the highly specialized production process entailed in a capitalist economy. A social service metaphor towards disability becomes implicit here, where disability is viewed as being non-functional in a capitalist economy. The rehabilitation good in question becomes a response to economic forces and the desire to prevent people from becoming unproductive or even dependent on the social welfare system (Woodhill, 1996).

AD # 9
Ad Caption: “Adjust the foot, not the lifestyle”

This advertisement shows a lateral view of a man with a prosthetic limb sitting on a bench in a locker room. He is not looking at the viewer but has his attention focused on making adjustments to his prosthetic limb. As the written ad text explains in the second paragraph, the user “fine tunes the Air-Flex by adjusting the pressure within a urethane air cell...inflating the air cell increases toe stiffness for greater energy storage during high impact activities.” The ‘disabled body’ is identified as being that of Jim MacLaren, “a leading tri-athlete, Boston Marathon amputee world record holder, Air-Flex wearer.”

58
In studying the dynamics of the photography, one notes that the source of lighting in the ad seems to stem from the prosthetic good in question. The model’s face is lit up with a soft ‘glow’ while the outskirts of the photograph seems to be in relative darkness. The predominant colour is red. Red is a strong and warm colour. It suggests vitality. In the context of the photograph of what is obviously an athletic, and to all intents and purposes, a handsome man, the colour now becomes suggestive of ‘red blooded’ males/ ‘real’ men.

The written ad text targets two different yet closely related groups. On one hand the caption, “Adjust the foot, not the lifestyle,” appeals to the disabled individual/consumer but the sub text targets the prosthetist/medical professional. Although the ‘disabled body’ is physically represented, the disabled ‘voice’ is rendered silent by the fact that the entire written text reinforces the importance of gaining the interest and cooperation of the medical professional: “The Air-Flex also makes your job easier...One prosthesis can’t fit all your patient’s activities and energy requirements.” Additionally, the advertisement makes constant reference to the consumer as a “patient”:

An adjustable prosthesis that gives the patient maximum comfort and performance around the office, on a basketball court, and anywhere in between...The patient fine tunes the Air Flex...the air cell also lessens shock to residual limbs, maximizing patient comfort...One prosthesis can’t fit all your patient’s activities and energy requirements...Call now to learn more about it (Italics mine).

If one wants to carry the analysis to another level, the prosthetic limb also becomes the means of protecting and reinforcing the male model / ‘disabled body’s body image: The slightly sexual undertones of the second paragraph suggest that the prosthetic good becomes an symbolic extension of the male ego. The “Air Flex” ‘protects’ - it is composed of a “urethane air cell covered with durable ballistic nylon for protection.” Also note the use of the words ‘inflate’ and ‘deflate’ in relation to describing the action of the prosthetic device.
On another level, the advantages entailed by this rehabilitation good are closely linked to the concepts of functionality and by extension, productivity. In order to reinforce this, the photograph includes two visual cues for deciphering: the business suit hanging up next to the disabled individual, and the partial view of the open business planner in the bottom left hand corner.

Success is naturalized as the output of a poised male individual. The model's relaxed yet controlled pose, leaning forward in concentration, becomes an authoritative figure connoting both mastery and expertise. The "disabled body" is presented as being an expert in two settings: the gym and the world of work. The model is initially pictured in the locker room of the gym wearing the shorts and vest of the athlete. His suit, however, is shown hanging up next to him. The business suit is symbolic of the office worker/businessman in a capitalist society. It acts as a visual social register of the white collar professional. The presence of the two uniforms suggest that he maneuvers between two worlds, both of which are presented as being essential elements of a particular lifestyle. The partially viewed page of his business planner serves to combine the two worlds together and in so doing, lists the components of a full and productive week.

According to the information given by the planner, the "lifestyle" suggested by the ad caption revolves around staff meetings, sales calls, golf, basketball at the gym, even lunch with a woman called Carol. This man is thus presented not only as being successful in work and play but in the interpersonal dating rounds of the social game. We do not know who "Carol" might be but because it is left purposely open to interpretation we are free to make that association.

In conclusion, in this ad, the "disabled body" is viewed as the site of engineering fine-tuning: the "Air Flex" is described as an "adjustable prosthesis that gives the patient maximum comfort and performance around the office, on a basketball court, and anywhere in between...The
air cell also lessens shock to residual limbs...ultimately, this increased comfort improves performance.” The ‘disabled body’ is thus required to be able to accomplish some level of functional activity before it can be considered as being able to perform productively in the workplace and other social endeavours.

**AD #10**

**Ad Caption:** “The Possibilities are endless”

A woman is shown seated in her wheelchair next to the exercise equipment in question. She becomes the main focus of the ad by virtue of being the most visibly prominent in terms of colour and her pinpointed central location within the frame of the ad. Her bright blue and white tracksuit contrasts with the neutral grey background and the black and white bars of the exercise machine. She is smiling slightly, head tilted partially downwards, towards the weights that she is adjusting on the exercise machine. Her body and wheelchair are positioned sideways so that the viewer sees her mainly from a lateral position. Her bearing is relaxed and conveys the impression that she is seemingly much at ease. In terms of physical appearance she is young, blond, fit and attractive. The model’s bodily stance does not address us. Dressed for action in a blue and white track pants outfit and sneakers, she does little more than adjust the weights of the machine. She is frozen in space, in a pose that is essentially coy and non-confrontational.

Within the confines of the ad the model is visually ‘framed’ by both physical objects and written text. The white bars of the exercise machine surround and enclose her securely on all three-and-a-half sides with only her head protruding above their limits. Her wheelchair seems to form an almost integral part of the machinery by blending in so that one is hard put to decide which piece of equipment is to be distinguished from the other. She is also physically boxed in by the ad caption at the top: “The Possibilities are Endless - Uppertone: Sixteen

61
Unassisted Exercises for Quads.” Additionally, she is flanked by two written phrases printed in a smaller white font. They are ostensibly from “satisfied customers.” They are placed on either side of her head and read: “Improved my sexuality” and “The use of UPPERTONE created new experiences like water-skiing.”

On the one hand, the enclosure of the gym bars could be perceived as providing a sense of enveloping security as opposed to confinement. Further analysis, however, reveals otherwise. There is a contradiction between the visual presentation of the ad and its message. It talks about the ‘endless possibilities’ entailed by the gym equipment, yet spatially confines its model by the same equipment. The tension in the two readings thus creates a dissonance in the connotation derived.

The two phrases placed on either side of the model’s head serve to undermine her status as a disabled woman. They suggest that use of the equipment can improve her sexual attraction and physical well-being. Framed on three sides by a piece of technology that purports to serve her with “endless possibilities,” the woman is instead served up as an object with limited possibilities. Her passive, non-resisting pose completes the image. It belies the underwritten notion that physical fitness is associated with “strength, independence, and confidence.” It is also noted that her professional qualifications and disability causation as “Becki McCafferty, MBA UC Irvine, C5-6 quad,” do not come into play as part of the ad endorsement; the information is relegated to secondary importance at the very bottom of the ad.

Overall, this ad reinforces existing cultural value systems relating to the body. First, a woman’s sexuality (and identity) is linked to physical appearance and fitness. Secondly, on a larger scale, the ad’s thematic preoccupation with physical fitness is linked with defining one’s sexuality. The product is primarily presented as holding the ability to make the user sexually attractive: it chooses to capitalize on its ability to improve the user’s sexual attractiveness.
independence and confidence. Nothing concrete is said about the product’s ability to improve the user’s physical health in terms of muscle tone, blood circulation or heart rate. The ‘disabled body’ is therefore asked to conform to the aforementioned values. The fact that the model used is ‘physically’ intact, she does not disturb the aesthetics of body image and adopts the classic passive female/feminine pose, only serves to reinforce the message.

AD # 11
Ad Caption: “A New Way to Work and Play”

There are two main pictorial layers in this particular ad. The first consists of a background photograph of a young woman in a wheelchair. It is positioned in the upper left hand corner of the page. She is sitting by a computer with her back to the viewer. The entire image is cast in dark green shadow so that only her outline is visible, and not specific details. The green also forms a colour backdrop for the rest of the ad. At the bottom left hand corner is the spotlighted picture of the product in question, the E&J Lancer wheelchair. The upper right hand corner is dominated by the ad caption, “A New Way to Work and Play.”

Superimposed over the first set of images is a series of four more brightly illuminated photographs that are placed across the middle of the page. The photographs increase incrementally in size from left to right and are shaped and juxtaposed to suggest a transition from a sitting to a standing position of the chair’s occupant. They demonstrate the mechanical ability of the wheelchair which allows the user to move from such a seated to an upright position.

The main source of the backdrop lighting comes from the bottom of the page, not unlike a sun rising. This is reinforced by the proximate placing of the phrase “Your Single Source” just above the ‘glow.’ It should be noted that when the phrase “Your Single Source” is placed next to
the wheelchair, it creates two sets of meanings. It ostensibly refers to the wheelchair manufacturer Graham -Field. However, it also leads the viewer to draw the inference that without this particular product, the woman in the upper left hand corner is left in lightless and anonymous obscurity. In terms of overall visual presentation, therefore, the ad moves upwards vertically: the lighting starts at the bottom of the page, and the picture sequence unfolds and enlarges vertically and horizontally.

In terms of visual presentation the ‘disabled body’ in its normal position, i.e., seated in a wheelchair, is presented literally in a non-positive light. If we examine the sequence of photographs with particular reference to lighting, the final photograph is actually somewhat over exposed and ‘washed out,’ compared to the slight underexposure at the extreme left. The first one shows the seated model looking upwards at the book shelves. The second has her looking down towards the wheelchair in order to activate the machinery. The third shows her partially raised to a standing position. The last presents her in the light of a fait accompli, folder in hand. This technique of non-illumination is duplicated in the shadowed photograph of the woman in the upper left hand corner, and the spotlighted “E&J Lancer 2000” which is prominently highlighted with a lighter shade of green backdrop in the bottom left hand corner. On a very visual and metaphorical level, therefore, the phrase “Your Single Source” credits the wheelchair as being a ray of ‘hope’ for its potential consumers.

It is not without some irony that we note that the “new way to work and play,” that is, standing, is not new at all, but merely a reinforcement of culturally determined notions of body image. One is also forced to beg the question whether anyone ever stands while working at a computer. Furthermore, nowhere in the ad is it made clear just how standing will allow the user to perform more efficiently than when seated. The contradictions inherent in this ad are such that one’s ability to stand up, or approximate the action of standing, is positively related to
allowing one a “new way” of working and playing. Here, the model is presented as ‘helplessly’ looking up at the bookcase, unable to accomplish anything significant except through the vertical action of the wheelchair.

In conclusion, this ad does not present the ‘disabled body’ in a positive light. The ad caption, “A New Way to Work and Play,” carries the subconscious message that whatever ways that the ‘disabled body’ might have found to ‘work and play’ via a seated position are not acceptable. In turn, the ad’s visual presentation clearly delineates what actions are considered desirable or suited to the process of everyday activity. One might conclude, then, that the disabled individual as a seated entity is not only less productive and efficient, but ultimately less of a person.

AD # 12
Ad Caption: “Opening the Doors to Freedom”

Technically speaking, this is a three page ad. The first page features a young man on a wheelchair. The second page consists of two attached flaps which fold inwards to create a whole page and which include an order form, an offer of a free water bottle and a brief point form rundown of the advantages of the “Bladder Manager Personal Care Instrument.” The flaps then open to reveal the third/inner page of illustrated, written text which provide further details on the given product.

Approaching the ad in the given order of pages, the viewer is first confronted by the image of a young man seated on a racing wheelchair, vigorously propelling himself forward. He is dressed in bright yellow waterproof racing gear, wearing sunglasses. The backdrop of his efforts is suggestive of a road leading off into the distance, perhaps in the country, as suggested by the presence of the indistinct greenery. The play of the light and shadow create the
impression that the man is following the road as it winds upwards towards the viewer.

The model is seemingly directed on a head on collision course with the viewer. His movements are forceful: the hunch of his shoulders, the angle of his arms, the grip of his hands on the rim of the wheels of the wheelchair, even the forward thrust of his chin, all serve to convey a sense of great energy. His sun shades remove him from direct eye interaction and his gaze focuses on a point beyond the viewer. This visual detachment serves to make him appear self-contained. The fact that the road appears to be on an upward course, makes his physical effort even more impressive. Artistic license has been taken to represent visually the ad caption “Opening the doors to freedom.” A trompe d’œil is created whereby the eye is momentarily deceived: the two doors swing outwards and frame the model, who will seemingly propel himself onto, and beyond the ad page.

Two levels of meaning are now created, concerning the ad caption, “Opening the doors to freedom.” If we focus on the model, he becomes a powerful figure indeed. Given his positive rendering within the pictorial frame, he becomes a visual representation of ‘freedom’ and all that it entails: he is athletic, independent, powerful, and determined, etc.

Again, because the nameplate of the company, “Diagnostic Ultrasound - More than just Ultrasound,” has been attached to the left hand door, the company effectively becomes identified as being the concrete means to accomplishing individual ‘freedom.’ As an aside, the fact that the model ‘happens’ to be wearing water proof gear, could be a further subliminal lead. In the context of an ad for an incontinence device, he is protected; the company can provide the protection.

At this stage, the effectiveness of the ad’s technical design becomes more evident. The open/close action of the flaps mimic the action of doors opening and closing and parallel the cover page ad caption, “Opening the doors to freedom.” The viewer is invited to “Learn more
about the Bladder Manager Personal Care Instrument” and to receive his complimentary “‘The Drink’s on Us” water bottle.’ ” The eye moves across to the second right hand flap and is greeted with a brief outline of the advantages of the “Bladder Manager” as a product. This accomplished, the opening of the flaps reveals the third inner page. This artistic rendering allows the effective movement of the reading from the first page of the ad, to the more narrative, illustrative inner page.

Examination of the written text of the third page of the ad reveals that the word ‘freedom,’ appears to be a key issue. It is a concept that resonates around core and abstract values held dear in North American society. The concept of ‘freedom’ is emotive, and linked with ideals such as ‘freedom of speech’ or ‘freedom from fear.’ In this case, freedom becomes linked to one’s ability to control one’s bodily functions: “Bladder Manager gives you more time and the freedom to enjoy life...Either way, you are robbed of valuable time each day - time that could be better spent soaking up every moment of life.” Here, the words “soaking up” become a subliminal lead to the side-effects of incontinence. The Bladder Manager is thus credited with providing its user with ‘freedom from’ the restrictions of incontinence and the ‘freedom to’ live life more fully.

Again, the degree of importance attached to the professional voice renders it the dominant voice, in the body of the written text. The bolded sub caption urges the reader to “Ask your physician about the benefits you can expect “ then goes on:

During our ongoing clinical studies, users repeatedly tell us that knowing their bladder volume has given them increased confidence and added personal independence...We encourage you to discuss with your physician the advantages you can expect using the Bladder Manager system.

One notes that the abstract concepts of accomplishing ‘freedom’ become intrinsically entwined with the issue of control. In a sense, it is a reflection of medical science’s preoccupation with controlling aspects of the individual body. Incontinence is seen as a process whereby the
individual can no longer control his or her actions and thereby becomes dependent. Control over one's bodily activities will therefore enable one to achieve one's freedom to live one's life as one wishes. The body thus becomes invested with 'power' only by controlling it.

In conclusion, the purposefulness and powerful image created by the depiction of the 'disabled body' is undermined by the ad’s reliance on an omniscient professional voice. In a very real sense, while the model may 'possess' his body, as indicated by his obvious command of his actions, the professional voice ultimately exerts full ownership over the non-functioning or 'disabled body.'

**AD # 13**
**Ad Caption:** "Experience the Freedom"

This ad consists of a photograph of a young man in a wheelchair, in a lush outdoor wooded setting. He is leaning slightly forward in his wheelchair propelling himself forwards. He is not looking towards the viewer but is gazing steadily ahead at an unknown point beyond the frame of the ad. Behind him, but not entirely visible, is a young woman following him on a bicycle. In all probability they can be regarded as being a couple.

The model's actions are strong and purposeful. The tilt of his elbows and grip on the wheelchair indicate a degree of physical strength. The forcefulness of his movement serves to create a sense of energy that continues outwards from the frame of the ad. This is not a body 'frozen' in space but one that is moving vigorously across one's line of view. The deliberate non-contact of the model's gaze which is focused steadily away from and beyond the viewer, only heightens this impression. We, as the viewer, don't know what he is going towards. In this case, because his gaze refuses to engage the viewer but is kept solely to himself, he comes across as being independent/self-reliant and determined/forceful. The unknown aspect of his
intended destination serves to reinforce the ad caption, “Experience the Freedom.”

The choice of geographic locale for the ad is also significant. The woodland setting serves to convey primary notions of outdoor activity and relaxation. But the very lushness of the green vegetation also evokes images of uncharted territory, of a mini-wilderness that must be conquered. It suggests that one can ‘get away from it all,’ off the beaten track to a place that has not been explored or charted. The absence of an obvious trail only heightens this impression. Within the frame of the ad, therefore, experiencing the “freedom” becomes associated with the geographic setting.

This particular ad setting also serves to reinforce the masculinity of the man in the wheelchair. The very absence of a clear trail for the wheelchair, and the fact he is leading the way ahead of the woman, casts him in the role of a rugged trailblazer. Thanks to the forceful presentation of the wheelchair and its user, the overall presentation of the ad falls within the lines of a traditional gender reading. The man leads; the woman follows. He is strong and athletic and obviously capable; she becomes an accessory to his masculinity, thanks to her ‘passivity’ and secondary visual role in the overall ad composition.

This particular ad places emphasis on the ability of the wheelchair to enable the user to adopt a certain lifestyle. “Terra Trek All Terrain Wheelchairs [become] the solution...[and] can meet the challenges of any terrain.” In so doing, this ad also reinforces certain socio-cultural values related to what constitutes an ideal lifestyle. The ad text describes the wheelchair as being the means by which the user can be “a weekend trail blazer who loves the outdoors and refuses to give it up”; “the architect who has to visit the job site,” or “the farmer who can’t wait because the weather won’t.” Incidentally, all these are outdoor activities suggesting vigour and energy on the part of the participants. Socially they are also considered as being traditionally masculine endeavours. By linking these associations with the man in the wheelchair, they also
become indirect expressions of masculinity.

Overall, this is a positive portrayal of the ‘disabled body.’ It should be noted that the interjection of the phrase, “Can’t stop us now!,” serves to re-emphasize the strong portrayal of the ‘disabled body.’ By using “us,” the ad hails those who are members of that group, in this case, wheelchair users. It enlarges its focus from the model in the wheelchair to make the range inclusive of “the independent self-propelling child” and to “open doors for the whole family.” Furthermore, through the arrangement of the various signs in the ad, there is no longer a concern with the dichotomy of the presentation of the disabled/able-bodied individual. The language of the wheelchair is thus transformed from its traditionally culturally assigned status of endowing the users with qualities such as being helpless and passive to something that imbues its users with energy and a sense of movement.

**AD # 14**
**Ad Caption:** “It’s new. It’s hot. It’s like nothing else on wheels. And the car’s pretty nice too.”

In this ad a young man is seated on a wheelchair, next to a car. He is in the act of opening a car door, preparatory to getting inside it. This gives him an air of clear proprietorship. As he does this, he smiles genially and confidently at the viewer. His relaxed stance notwithstanding, he creates the impression of being very much in control of the situation. His dress is elegantly casual: beige shirt and pants, brown loafers, his hair neatly coiffed. The positioning of the car and the wheelchair ensures that the eye moves diagonally across the ad from the upper right hand to the lower left hand corner.

This ad becomes an excellent example of the conflation of several referent systems. To begin with, it deliberately uses a bright red sports car which stands out as the most prominent object in the entire ad. It furthers the deception with the ad caption: “It’s new. It’s hot. It’s like
nothing else on wheels...” Up to this point one assumes that the words refer to the car. The rest of the ad caption continues “And the car’s pretty nice, too.” When we finally realize that the spiel is all about a wheelchair and not the car, we have already been drawn into the ad.

What does this accomplish? To begin with, the colour red connotes danger, excitement and virility/fertility depending on the gender context. Added to the symbol of a sports car, it now becomes aimed at the young and young at heart, conveying power and speed, and in the context of this ad, a macho image. Carrying the association to a deeper level, in North American society the car as a piece of machinery is often viewed as an extension of the masculine ego. It is not unusual to refer to a vehicle, whether a boat or car, as being female: ‘she runs nicely.’ A ‘desirable’ car, i.e., a car with ‘status,’ revolves around the ideas of masculine domination and control.

Even more significantly, the fine print at the bottom of the picture identifies the make of the car as a Ferrari, which is touted as being an expensive and superior brand of vehicle. Owning a Ferrari places one at the upper end of the income scale and by extension, distinguishes the owner as an individual of discerning taste.

When these three signs: red, a sports car and the Ferrari name are conflated with the image of a wheelchair, they transfer their associations onto the wheelchair. It not only leads to the conclusion that any individual with a red Ferrari sports car is a person who is out of the ordinary but that the wheelchair itself, and its owner, are something special. Indeed, this is what happens. The ad text unequivocally asserts:

Don’t waste your time comparing the new Action FX to anything ordinary. It sets the standard and - breaks the mold. It’s sleek. It’s hot. It runs in very fast company...If Ferrari built a wheelchair, we think it would look something like this.

The association becomes clear - the Action FX is the Ferrari of wheelchairs.
Placing the ‘disabled body’ in this context contradicts the conventional image of the wheelchair and wheelchair user. Instead of being ‘wheelchair bound,’ the young man in the picture is imbued with the persona and the status that are usually assigned to the owners of Ferrari cars. The status of the car is thus transferred to the wheelchair and the model. His ownership of the Ferrari places him in the category of a consumer of discerning taste who can appreciate quality when he sees it. He is presented as being socially successful, sexually intact and able to compete in the “fast lane,” as suggested by the ad.

Overall, this ad presents a positive portrayal of the ‘disabled body.’ It creates a narratology whereby the model is presented as having already attained a certain lifestyle. In a sense the wheelchair becomes secondary. Indeed it is presented as more of an accessory as opposed to becoming an essential component of body and self-image. The concluding phrase, “For people who can sit wherever they want,” becomes a very assertive statement. The commonly accepted notion that sitting is a passive action is transformed into a metaphor of action and power. The act of being seated thus becomes a deliberate choice. It defiantly rejects the notion that wheelchair users are wheelchair bound.

AD #15
Ad Caption: “Ultragater, The new lift for people who demand high performance in every aspect of their lives.”

This ad is dominated by a prominent ad caption in heavy black font in the top left hand corner of the page: “Ultragater, the new lift for people who demand high performance in every aspect of their lives.” Two models are featured, a standing able-bodied woman and a man sitting in a wheelchair. They are dressed professionally in dark business suits and the woman holds a briefcase. The man in the wheelchair is sitting upright, body squarely facing the viewer
but his gaze is directed at the woman standing next to him and his upper body turned slightly
towards her. Their respective stances are relaxed - she is gesturing with her free hand, perhaps to
demonstrate some aspect of her conversation. He has his hands placed on his lap. The mutual
gaze of the two models encompasses each other and excludes the viewer. It is not clear what
the relationship between the two is, although given the context of the ad heading and setting, it is
almost certainly professional.

The logistics of the physical arrangement are not flattering to the man in the wheelchair.
This is despite the fact that they are initially placed on the same social footing by virtue of
wearing the uniform of the business professional. To begin with he is already spatially
disadvantaged in terms of vertical height positioning. Not only is he forced to look up towards
the object of his conversation but the sun is shining directly into his face, while hers is in
shadow. Furthermore she is the one who is holding the badge of the professional, the briefcase,
while his hands rest passively in his lap. She is also the one doing the talking while he listens
attentively. Even her arm gesticulations serve to add emphasis to whatever she is saying. In
terms of physical space it is therefore the able bodied person who dominates.

The backdrop of what appears to be an office building acts as a visual symbol of the
world of commerce. It becomes representative of the site where commercial transactions take
place. The combination of the open sky and the tall office building in the background reinforces
the “high performance” wording in the caption. The fact that the ad chooses to demonstrate the
product in the context of an office environment is significant. The models automatically assume
the mantle of the white collar professional engaged in capitalist enterprise. They too are engaged
in the creation of money; in this case as hinted by the written ad text, the process of
salesmanship.

The malfunctioning lift becomes an extension of the malfunctioning body: “Time waits
for no one. The last thing your 10 o’clock sales prospect wants to hear that you’re late because your lift malfunctioned.” The lead phrase “high performance,” therefore, not only addresses the ‘disabled body’ which might make those demands of itself but also becomes a reinforcement of societal notions about what the body should be able to do in order to be acceptable. It is the dominant non-disabled body that creates those demands that the ‘disabled body’ be “more stable, faster, tougher and [re] designed for the high performance” demanded of it. Malfunctioning bodies thus become a hindrance to the smooth operation of commercial activities where time is viewed as being of paramount importance. The written text reinforces this in the first and second last lines - days are measured by how “busy” they are. “Busy” is in turn classified as including a “10 o’clock sales prospect”; it encompasses the commercial world of buying and selling.

In conclusion, this ad seems to demonstrate that an individual’s economic worth is linked with the extent to which he or she can be integrated into the highly mechanized world of work. The ad has chosen to illustrate the effect of increased functionality on “every aspect of their lives” (“their” referring to the wider disabled body addressed by the ad) by using the context of a business person’s work day. It thus becomes a reinforcement of the dominant values that surround the measurement of individual worth in a capitalist-oriented society.

AD # 16

Ad Caption: “Enjoy life’s simple pleasures with New Jay Care Seating”

In terms of visual presentation this ad is aesthetically pleasing. The use of soft pastel and complementary colours ensures visual harmony both in reading and viewing the text. The colours pink, beige and green predominate. Every object within the frame of the ad adheres to an overall flowered theme: the patterned fabric on the cushions, the floral print of the child’s dress, and the plant and the vase of flowers, to the left of and behind the seated woman. Even the
texture of the woman’s pink knit sweater suggests a floral design. Aesthetic enjoyment is further enhanced by the sliver of sunshine on the edge of the sofa, the large panes of glass which let in the light and convey a sense of spaciousness, and the opaque yet translucent drapes which reflect and create a glow. Possibly, the rose pattern repeated throughout the textual elements of the ad is meant to paint a ‘rosy’ picture of the featured subjects.

The subject matter of this ad is designed to create a correspondingly favourable emotive response in the viewer. The pleasing juxtaposition of ‘Grandma’ reading to her ‘granddaughter’ cannot but fail to evoke some sort of approving response on the part of the viewer. Pleasure is evident on both subjects’ faces. The granddaughter’s charmingly gap-toothed smile is meant to evoke a ‘mental’ chuckle on the part of the viewer: her cuteness is tacitly acknowledged. Grandmother and grandchild are seemingly wrapped up in each other. Yet their mutual gaze does not exclude the viewer because the domestic cosiness presented by the ad is such that it invites the viewer to be part of the tableau.

Every word in the ad caption, “Enjoy life’s simple pleasures with New Jay Care Seating,” is reflected and reinforced in the visual imagery used in the ad. The reference to “life’s simple pleasures,” ostensibly refers to the value systems evoked by the two models in the ad: familial relationships, a patently nurturing and loving environment, and a physical and even luxurious comfort. It also, however, extends to the good in question—a wheelchair seat and back cushion. Again, the floral theme and the incorporation of natural lighting into the room help to contribute to the impression of the ‘naturalness’ and simplicity, albeit contrived, that resonate throughout the ad. The concept of “New” is reinforced by the freshness and ‘naturalness’ evoked by the innocent glee on the face of the child. “Care” is represented by the grandmother’s loving act of reading to her grandchild. The mutual warmth of their physical stances—granddaughter leaning cosily against grandma, also conveys this impression. Last but
not least, the physical advantages and comfort, engendered by the "Seating" of the Jay Care, are explained in concise detail in the written ad text.

In terms of physical portrayal, the 'disabled body' does not necessarily have to be viewed as being passive, perhaps because it is shown being engaged in an activity that necessitates sitting: reading to a child. In one sense, this portrayal can be considered positive because it utilizes a context and task that both able-bodied and disabled can share, and where physical ability is not important. From another angle, this activity is linked with nurturing, a traditionally female role that is acceptably 'passive' in the social sense and reinforces gender stereotypes that apply to both able-bodied and disabled women. In this regard, therefore, because it reproduces built in cultural values about family, gender and normality, one might conclude that the portrayal of the 'disabled body' arouses no great complexity nor depth of feeling.

In conclusion, this ad is very much a 'soft sell' visually and thematically. Although the model's wheelchair is very visible, it is done in such a way that it becomes secondary to the overall image: the 'disabled body' creates no visual dissonance. In some ways this ad can be considered as being very contrived. By literally blending in the 'disabled body' with the rest of the furniture, it subtly takes great pains to reassure the viewer that the 'disabled body' is capable of being rendered innocuous. From this angle, physical ease is not only to be derived from the said rehabilitation good's ability to "provide excellent pressure relief" or to "help increase sitting tolerance," but in its ability to render the disabled user at one with the environment.
AD # 17
Ad Caption: “Power Assist Redefined”

This ad is a composition of a photographic image and written factual data. The photograph features a full body shot of a young man on a wheelchair, going up a ramp. The viewer sees only three quarters of his profile. His gloved hand, although covered for protection, nonetheless helps convey a sense of the manual labour involved in maneuvering such a piece of equipment. His upright posture conveys tensile and tactile strength; his arms firmly grip the rim of the wheels of his chair. Furthermore, the ramp slopes slightly upwards, which reinforces the impression of the physical effort entailed in moving the wheelchair.

The model is isolated both in an interactive and a spatial sense. The uncompromising position of the shot is such that he is shown moving away from the viewer, without even a backward glance. Consequently, no opportunity arises for any degree of viewer/object interaction; his gaze remains forever disassociated, and he appears remote and self-contained.

While the presence of a ramp does suggest the nearby existence of an architectural structure, there is no indication of the existence of other people in the background, nor are we even sure of the geographic setting. What it is, however, we are left to guess: perhaps a library, a campus, or a museum; the possibilities are endless. The very vagueness of the backdrop serves to expand the range of physical possibilities in which the wheelchair user can find himself. Again, this double isolation serves to reinforce the wheelchair user’s personal independence, and by extension, the self-reliance that is engendered by use of “The Booster Power Assist.”

The language of the text is as spare and uncompromising as the visual image. The jargon is mechanical and revolves around the Booster’s flexibility and transportability. It is very precise and even detached - the emphasis is on what the Booster can do. Even the reference
made to the Booster's ability to increase the user's freedom is terse. It does not presume to suggest what aspects 'freedom' could conceivably take or attempt to link it to a lifestyle activity: "Increasing mobility and independence, the Booster is simple to operate and gives the user complete control to access power when wanted."

The combination of the 'uncompromising' photographic shot and written text, serve to reinforce the ad caption: "Power Assist Redefined." When these two seemingly dissonant words "Power" and "Assist" are combined, they create a new metaphoric image. The word "Power" usually evokes images of physical strength: force, prowess, stamina and energy. It is certainly not a word associated with the 'disabled body,' which is burdened with a baggage of generally negative metaphors such as feeble, weak and dependent. Again, the concept of "power" not only refers to the mechanical ability of the "Booster Power Assist" but also becomes a reference to the independence engendered to the user by its use. In this context "Power" becomes related to the concept of "freedom with control": "Increasing mobility and independence, the Booster is simple to operate and gives the users complete control to access power when wanted."

Conversely, the word "Assist" gains a new dimension: commonly linked with the 'disabled body,' it normally evokes images of dependence, charity and helplessness. Here, however, the word has come to have an entirely new meaning. Assistance is not provided by others but by a machine. Furthermore, it is a machine that has 'power': it is described as being "simple to operate," "compact and lightweight," "heavy duty," and of "sturdy precision".

In conclusion, the 'disabled body' is cast in a positive light. Power in its most positive sense has been re-invested in the 'disabled body,' as represented by the model. The model is placed in a position where he becomes the primary, and even sole determinant of his actions. Furthermore, the absence of able-bodied actors means that issues of power relations or domination by one 'body' over another never arise.
AD # 18
Ad Caption: “Action speaks louder than words”

This two page ad features a young man in a wheelchair, holding a cross bow. The angle of the shot is such that the viewer looks down on the model. The man’s upper body and head are slightly inclined towards the viewer. His arms are strongly braced, preparatory to releasing the arrow. The amount of white ‘space’ in the ad creates the illusion of physical space, which is in turn spatially dominated by the man in the wheelchair. Any implications that the commanding photo shot renders the subject subordinate is balanced by the counter-positioning of the model. He deliberately aims his cross bow upwards at an unseen target outside the frame of the ad.

The model’s body language is taut and calculated, and matches the diagonal and precise lines of the crossbow equipment. The wording of the ad text plays upon the bow and arrow imagery evident in the ad: “...and enough options to customize to the hilt. And every frame and crossbrace has a lifetime warranty.” (italics mine). The mainly black and white tonal composition of the ad creates a sense of austerity. Words are kept to a minimum and the sentences in the ad text are purposely brief. Everything is clearly and cleanly delineated.

On the opposite left hand page, framed on three sides by five wheelchairs, is the ad caption, “Action speaks louder than words.” At first glance, the word “Action” refers to the make of the wheelchairs. Again, the blank open-ended space above the phrase adds to the impression of visual roominess. Also, the appearance of so much space serves to create the impression that the wheelchairs cannot be contained. They are positioned in such a way so as to suggest that they are about to move off the page or were interrupted in their movements. Everything in this ad is in a state of arrested mobility.

The importance of first impressions to one’s personal image is stressed. The ad text
suggests that by using “Action” wheelchairs, the user will “turn a few heads. Make a vibrant impression. You’re getting there in style.” The appearance of the wheelchair is thus transferred to the user. The wheelchair becomes a status symbol: a process of acquisition that will allow the user to be “Sleek. Superlite. Sensational.” Incidentally, the use of the obviously athletic male model cannot but help reinforce those words and steer their meaning in the desired direction.

While the ad caption makes a play upon “Action” which is the brand name of the product being advertised, it also recalls the common sense notion that, “Actions speaks louder than words.” This phrase is reminiscent of the expression “Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me.” Read in this context, ‘words’ convey a sense of passivity, and only physical movement, i.e., action, will create any sort of lasting impact. This phrase could be viewed as reinforcing cultural attitudes about body image and what is necessary for personal accomplishment. Movement becomes paramount for “Getting there in style” and is associated with individuality and accomplishment.

Conversely, if the meaning of the word is confined to the wheelchair, i.e., “Actions speaks louder than words,” a different reading emerges. The wheelchair becomes positively associated with movement, with a sense of purposefulness on the part of the user. This directly contradicts the social image of wheelchairs and their users as being essentially passive. In this context, the ‘disabled body’ is cast in an assertive and energetic light. Several techniques are used to ensure this positive portrayal.

First, the model’s use of a crossbow suggests that the user must possess a steady hand and a good eye. Symbolically, the crossbow also becomes representative of the accuracy of an individuals’ personal purpose and goals. In order to hit the target, one must know what one is aiming at (although we can’t see it here). The upward slant of the weapon indicates metaphorically, that one’s reach must exceed one’s grasp. That the sky is the limit...but with the
right accessories. In this case, the product, "Action wheelchairs," provides the means to move upwards and outwards. Paradoxically, this gesture and connoted meaning can also become a reminder of barriers: without action/Action, many things can remain out of the grasp of people with disabilities.

In conclusion, this ad can viewed as presenting the 'disabled body' simultaneously in a positive and negative light. It is a case where the physical gestures of the model in the wheelchair are inadvertently undermined by the written words of the ad text. Nonetheless, the ad does allow for a strong portrayal of the 'disabled body,' and more significantly, the wheelchair becomes a symbol of positive and purposeful action.
DISCUSSION

It was anticipated that analysis of the ads would reveal a discourse/value system that stressed one or more of three ideas. One, they would emphasize the importance of individual functionality and productivity as related to a capitalist economy. Two, they would reveal a strong medical/professional slant: this professional discourse would act as an 'expert' voice that would underscore the importance of functional bodies in a capitalist economy. Last but not least, it was projected that the 'disabled bodies' used in the advertisements would be 'picture perfect,' a portrayal concomitant with today's preoccupation with body aesthetics.

The rehabilitation good as a means to an (productive) end

Out of the 18 ads analyzed, four could be viewed as explicitly reflecting a clear concern with the potential economic productivity of the 'disabled body.' Ads 8, 9, 11 and 15 promoted their particular product by making use of the workplace as a context, whether by oblique reference or by purposely placing their models in a simulated office setting. Ads 9 and 15 actually place the product within distinctively identifiable office contexts: in ad 9 the models are in business suits and placed against the backdrop of a downtown 'office building' and ad 15 utilizes a business suit on a hanger and the highlighted page of a open desk planner.

In these four ads the rehabilitation good is viewed primarily as the means to a productive end; emphasis is placed on personal productiveness and achievement. Furthermore, technology is clearly presented as being the means by which a formerly functional body can be reincorporated into the world of work; it will allow the 'disabled body' to become productive. For example, in ad 8, the model clearly states: "PowerTALK helped me to become productive"
again.” Similarly, ad 11 attempts to show how the ‘disabled body’ can find “A New Way to Work and Play,” with the implication that the disabled individual as a seated entity is viewed as being less productive and efficient. As was implied in ad 15, the ‘disabled body’ is regarded as being non-functional in a capitalist economy: mal-functioning bodies seem to be considered as being a hindrance to the smooth operation of commercial activities.

In a related development, several of the ads showed a distinct preoccupation with functionality but were also indirectly linked to individual productivity per se. For example, ads 2, 10 and 18 ostensibly promote the idea that purchase of the rehabilitation good would aid the user in restoring or supplementing lost function. They also reveal underlying societal notions about what the body should be able to do in order to be acceptable. Following on the heels of this, however, is a meta-message: the restoration of an individual’s performance factor will result in a positive redefinition of the social status of the person involved. Hence, analysis of ad 2 reveals that while it reiterates the notion of the “comfort, function and value” to be derived from using its prosthetic product, the concept of “value” becomes applied to the individual. Ad 10 hints at “improving” the user’s sexuality and range of possibilities open to him or in this case, her, and ad 18 promises a product to enable the user “to arrive there in style” indicating some sort of individual accomplishment.

It is suggested that this perceived pre-occupation with individual functionality and productivity/accomplishment can be explained by the fact that individuals, in most Western societies, seem to be judged on the basis of their ability to be socially and economically competitive (Livneh, 1984). People are praised for their ‘energy,’ ‘stamina,’ and ability to work for long hours, and health and physical vigour are regarded as being almost moral virtues. The public world thus becomes the world of strength where the ‘positive’ and valued body revolves around performance and production, the able-bodied and youth (Wendell, 1997: 266).
It is noted that the concept of what constitutes an individual’s functional capacities and the corresponding pursuit of what might be determined a ‘good’ life is of course influenced by a culture’s particular ideology. In the case of Western society, that ideology is one that appears to prize liberty more than equality and that tends to equate freedom with personal autonomy rather than with the opportunity to exercise meaningful choice... The apprehensions aroused by functional restrictions resulting from a disability often seem overwhelming (Hahn, 1987b:100).

The voice of the ‘expert’ in the rehabilitation ads

A number of the ads were noted for the use they made of ‘expert’ appeal. They based their argument not only on the product’s qualities and benefits, but on the qualifications of an ‘knowledgeable authority’ to certify the good (Leiss, Kline and Jhally, 1986). The ‘expert’ voice was found in two categories. The first was where a known athlete or sports person, albeit disabled, was used to confirm the product’s trustworthiness. Hence, ad 9 features “Jim Maclaren, tri-athlete,” to promote a prosthetic limb, and ad 6 highlights a wheelchair through the know-how of Darrell Gwynn, a former race car driver.

In other cases, however, the voice of authority is identified as being that of the medical professional. In ads 1, 4, 12, and to a lesser extent, ad 9, the narratology refers and subscribes to a seemingly omniscient medical/professional voice. Ads 1 and 12 are particularly outstanding in this regard; emphasis seems to be placed on controlling specific functional aspects of the body, by which process the ‘disabled body’ can be re-integrated into the wider social body. Hence, one’s ability to take a ‘walk in the park’ (ad 1), and controlling one’s bodily functions will ‘open the doors to freedom’ (ad 12). In a different approach, ads 4 and 9 utilize the technique of directly addressing the reader and encouraging him or her to “Ask [their]
prosthetist today" (ad 4) and to “Call now to learn more about it” (ad 9).

It should be noted that in the ads which reinforce the dominance of the professional ‘voice’ over the ‘disabled body,’ the ‘disabled body’ seems to be portrayed being not unlike a mechanical product that can be rendered ‘functional.’ The engineering jargon used, for example, “smooth rollover characteristics” (ad 1) and comments such as “Stratus can replace your existing components” (ad 4) contribute to this impression. In a figurative sense, therefore, it is possible to derive certain inferences, such as the body as being not unlike a ‘product’ that can be standardized. In this light, the medical/professional voice can be deemed as contributing to the societal notions of the importance of individual productivity: through its maintenance of standardized, functioning bodies, a capitalist society is maintained.

This omniscient professional voice presents itself as knowing what is best for the ‘disabled body.’ Its discourse is based on conceptions of what is proper and desirable behaviour for the average person (Friedson, 1965:71). By reinforcing the importance of restoring functionality via technology, independent performance in such activities as communication, mobility, self-care, and intellectual and emotional adaptability is perceived as being an accepted functional value in Western society (Meyer, 1982). From the perspective of the professional, the onus is thus placed on the client or patient to assume a rehabilitation ‘role’ whereby he or she is obligated to maximize existing abilities, as well as assuming as many ‘normal’ functions as possible (Safilos-Rothschild, 1970). It becomes a situation where

If individuals fail to achieve the anticipated professionally determined rehabilitation goals, then this failure can be explained with reference to the disabled person’s perceived inadequacy...the ‘expert’ is exonerated from responsibility, professional integrity remains intact, traditional wisdom and values are not questioned, the existing social order remains unchallenged (Barnes, cited in Oliver, 1996:21).

In itself, this finding becomes a commentary on the continuing dominance of the
medical/functional aesthetic in the construction of the ‘normal’ “healthy” body in today’s Western society (Urla and Terry, 1995). From what was expressed in the ads, the medical profession seemingly continues to view disability as a deficit or an illness and the individual in need of medical fixing: its habitual response is to cure or rehabilitate disabled people and return them to the ‘normal’ condition of being able-bodied (Felske, 1996).

Sanitized images of the ‘disabled body’

One recurring impression is that almost all of the ads sampled portrayed ‘sanitized’ images of the ‘disabled body.’ By ‘sanitized,’ it is meant that the disability was portrayed in a way that did not intrude upon the viewer’s aesthetic consciousness. In several cases, the models used are not obviously physically disabled, unless by virtue of being associated with the product, for example, as in ads 2, 3, 5, 10 and 16. Even if the disability is prominent, as is in the case in several ads which feature prosthetic goods, such as 4, 6 and 9, there is still no threat to the integrity of body image because there is no great disparity between the actual perceived reality and an expected ‘normal’ body. This is further reinforced by the fact that all of the eighteen ads sampled contain underlying concepts such as youth, health, athletic prowess and wholeness (Livneh, 1984).

In several cases there was the perception of an underlying message that the promoted good holds the ability to project and protect the individual’s image of the physical self as ‘whole’ and ‘inviolate.’ In cases where the aid in question is visible, for example, ad 4 and again, ad 9, they reinforce the product’s ability to allow the user to regain or replicate ‘natural’ functions such as walking, standing or running with ease.

The above mentioned concepts of youth, health, athletic prowess and wholeness are
conveyed in several ways. One way is to link the product with an activity which becomes the 
central cue in relating the person and the product. For example, ads 3 and 6 respectively, feature 
a ‘disabled body’ in the process of running/completing a race and being involved in the world of 
motor car racing. They make use of activities that trigger associations of athleticism and 
courage. This serves to imbue the ‘disabled body’ with the identity of an athlete. Another 
example can be found in ad 6 which features a person with multiple disabilities. The model is 
missing his left forearm and in a wheelchair, yet because he is cast in the light of a ‘dare-devil,’ 
in the world of car racing, the disability becomes an accessory to his portrayal - it becomes a 
‘badge of courage.’

Other ads place the rehabilitation good around a consumption style which creates a 
range of positive associations. For example, ads 3 and 16 are cast in domestic tableaus which 
feature grandparents and a granddaughter. These are settings that trigger a link with values such 
as family, closeness and comfort: grandma bakes cookies (ad 3) and reads to her grandchild (ad 
16). More examples include ad 14 which is notable for its reliance on an already established 
status symbol, the Ferrari car, to promote a wheelchair, and ad 18 which promotes the wheelchair 
as allowing the user to “get there in style” via a visually arresting picture of a man with a cross-
bow. It is noted that of all the ads sampled, ad 3 is unique in that it seemingly contains no 
‘disabled body’ at all and reinforces this by stating the non-visibility of the product in question 
as being the “most comforting part of the picture.”

Given these findings, it is possible to come to the tentative conclusion that there is a 
positive link between rendering a rehabilitation good ‘socially’ acceptable and the perception of 
the person using the good. The good is promoted in such a way that it renders the user 
attractive by so called everyday cultural standards (Malone, 1980). These cultural standards 
revolve not only around the concept of functionality/functioning bodies, but are linked to specific
cultural values such as productivity, performance and competitiveness. Other thematic
considerations in the ads are those which reinforce the personal independence of the individual
and an active lifestyle. These are related to values such as freedom/adventure, individuality and
personal fitness/sports.

It becomes useful to refer to a research study by Blood, Blood and Danhauer (cited in
Blood, 1997) to understand the possible link between the positive portrayal of a rehabilitation
good and the perception of the user of that good. Their study reveals the that the mere
presence of a hearing aid encouraged viewers to evaluate individuals more negatively on the
dimensions of intelligence, achievement, personality and appearance. They label the stigma
associated with wearing a hearing aid, the "Hearing Aid Effect." By contrast, people with poor
vision are free to display their problem openly without fear of stigmatization simply because a
profession has grown up that has 'elevated' their provision to the level associated with cosmetics
and jewelry (Sigelman, Vengnon and Spanel, 1984).

In view of what has been demonstrated in the overall findings as regards appearance and
functionality, it may not be incorrect to state that today's rehabilitation good manufacturers are
seemingly engaged in a process of duplicating functions of the body and creating products that
perform, provide comfort and more importantly, please the eye (Tiessen, 1996b, italics mine).

In their use of such 'sanitized' models, therefore, these ads seem to be encouraging
their potential consumers (the disabled individual) to 're-create' an image of the self that is
culturally defined (Fallon, 1990: 80). Of course, the notion of what constitutes physical beauty
is a reflection of the ideological, political and cultural norms of any particular society.

Another related observation was the projection of a concern with 'normality,' not only
in appearance but in the choice of lifestyle activities. Corbett (1991) comments that the concept
of normality contains a paradox: it engenders a fear of difference but is also linked to the idea of
individuality as a desirable commodity. In several ads, the achievement of individuality is expressed in the adoption of a particular lifestyle. ‘Lifestyle’ is defined as that which is considered as being daring, out of the way, or simply by distinguishing oneself through acquiring a ‘status’ product. For example, in ad 6, the model is cast against the backdrop of the daredevil world of car racing, ad 7 reiterates the need for an individual to be ‘free’ and the notion that life should be “an open road,” and ad 14 draws upon existing referent systems which are based on the product of a Ferrari car.

This pursuit of individuality is also reflected in personal efforts to excel in culturally accepted and valued endeavours such as sport. True to form, a number of ads use a sports/fitness oriented theme in their presentation, for example ad 2 which features a disabled runner and ad 18 which presents a model using a cross bow. Other sports/fitness oriented ads include 9, 10 and 12.

Last but not least, several passing observations hold potential for tangential discussions and possible future studies. First, is the fact that all the models utilized are of a distinctly Caucasian appearance. As this study is based on a limited sample population, this observation cannot be taken as being conclusive. It does, however, present the possibility of an ironic observation, that in a study which considers the under-representation of a minority group often excluded on the basis of aesthetics, the self-same ads fail to be representative visually of the cross-ethnic aspects of disability.

Secondly, in a sample population of 18 ads, only five feature ‘disabled’ women, namely, ads 3, 5, 10, 11 and 16. More significantly, the women are placed in positions of relative passivity: they are not presented as athletes nor as part of any particular lifestyle. Instead, they are either placed in ‘domestic’ settings as in ads 3, 5 and 16 as the ‘grandmother’ or ‘proud homemaker’; or as ‘objects’ for the rehabilitation good to ‘activate’ as was done in ads.
10 and 11, which metaphorically speaking, showed a woman ‘with possibilities’ and a woman being given a ‘new way to work and play,’ respectively. By contrast, the ‘disabled’ male body is often placed in a position of mastery and expertise - success is naturalized as the output of a poised male individual. This provides room for speculation about the perception of women with disabilities, both in terms of gender stereotyping and perceptions of their sexuality.

**Wither the disabled body?**

Overall, what can one conclude on the findings of this study as they relate to the ‘disabled body?’ Given the strong evidence of the thematic concerns with individual productivity, functionality and body aesthetics in the ads, one can speculate that the presentation of the disabled body is linked to the dynamics of advertising and economic profit. Conceivably, the image of ‘damaged goods’ is transferred from products to people, where the ‘disabled body’ is viewed as being ‘damaged,’ ‘defective’ and less ‘socially marketable’ than the non-disabled body (Susman, 1994). For example, in ads 2, 3 and 16, the suggested concept of ‘comfort’ as engendered by the rehabilitation good in question can also on a secondary level refer to the visual comfort that is derived when one’s sighting is not disturbed by that which is unfamiliar and frightening. The ‘disabled bodies’ presented in the noted ads are highlighted or placed in such a way that the disability is rendered insignificant, not on the basis of the performance of the disabled model, but in order to enhance the good’s ability to render the disability invisible.

The following two commentaries prove useful by way of further demonstrating a possible connection between advertising and the importance of socio-cultural standards on physical images. The first reference concerns a reader’s response to a cover design used by *Time* magazine in October 1996. *Time* published an article termed the “Diet Pill Mania”
featuring a new ‘wonder’ drug Redux. Its choice of cover design drew criticism from one reader (italics mine):

Your choice of body type for your cover photograph perpetuates the message that svelte sells. That slim, shapely body needs no Redux. My challenge: exhibit a “before” body, not an “after” one. And it should not be one held in by spandex or waiting to exhale. Make a statement. Be bold. Sacrifice the visually attractive for the normal, average, real. Were you afraid that a before shot might impact your newsstand sales figures? (Simonson, 1996).

To illustrate further how strong are the dominant cultural notions of physical attractiveness and individual worth, it is perhaps fitting to consider the implications of the words of Curtis Gunn, President of SHOT Model Management. SHOT is described as the first modeling agency in America to exclusively models with physical disabilities (italics mine):

Our goal is to focus mainstream advertisers, and ultimately society’s attention on beauty, not disability. . . Whether physical disability is creatively exposed or discreetly ignored, all images presented will have one thing in common - striking beauty . . . the kind of beauty everyone will want to identify with regardless of disability (Tiessen, 1996a: 30, 31).

Considering all that has been gleaned from the analyses, it is difficult to state whether the overall portrayal of the ‘disabled body’ has been positive or negative. Positive portrayals of the ‘disabled body’ include placing it in position where there is no opportunity for an unfavourable dialectic between able-bodied and disabled bodies; for example, in ad 6, the ‘disabled body’ is presented as being in control of both the car as a machine and its driver. Positive portrayals also include presenting the ‘disabled body’ in such a way that it contradicts prevailing myths of being physically inadequate; for example, in ads 12 and 17, it is visually ‘powerful,’ with the wheelchair users actively and forcefully propelling their machines up a slope.

It was also noted that while the creative use of metaphor can aid in developing a positive range of associations when linked with the ‘disabled body,’ analyses of ad captions and written
texts revealed an inadvertent creation of dissonant messages about the ‘disabled body.’ For example, in ad 17, the seemingly contradictory notions of ‘power’ and ‘assist’ are combined to create a range of positive associations as far as the ‘disabled body’ is concerned. In other ads, however, written language was used to reinforce perceived ‘acceptable’ social practices of the body. For example, in ads 4 and 5, respectively, the phraseology reiterates: “A step up in comfort even stepping down,” and “Stairs can become a step up to freedom.” In the context of the ad message the potential implications of a negative barrier, stairs, are ignored while reinforcing it in terms that reflect an able-bodied aesthetic, such as “stepping down” and “stepping up.”

In conclusion, it would seem that quite a few of the ads do present the ‘disabled body’ positively in several ways - as an active figure involved in athletics, the outdoors and the workplace. It would also seem, however, that this ‘body’ remains a site of contention in that it becomes a meeting place of technological expertise and socio-cultural notions of what constitutes everyday physical activity and abilities. Often, the strength of an affirmative portrayal was undermined by a diminishing narratology which inadvertently contradicted the positive presentation. A clear example of this would be the professional voice, which in effect not only becomes the intermediary between the rehabilitation good and the ‘disabled body’ but also between the ‘disabled body’ and the larger society. For example, in ad 9, the last paragraph in the body of the written text directs itself not at a potentially disabled viewer but at the prosthetist: “One prosthesis can’t fit all your patient’s activities and energy requirements.”

We now move to the “Conclusion” section and see how comprehension of the ‘disabled body,’ within the context of the advertisements for rehabilitation goods, can lead to developing future theory and research.
CONCLUSION

Study Conclusions

If one were to infer a generalization based in the context of this study sample, it could be suggested that, in North America, not only are the ‘disabled bodies’/consumers viewed as purchasers of services and goods, they also, paradoxically, become the raw material and finished products of the advertising industry (Albrecht, 1992). As potentially consuming ‘bodies,’ they can become the focus of socio-cultural forces. They become ‘embodied’ in such a way as to sell goods but they are also bodies that have been inscribed with attendant socio-cultural myths of what it means to be ‘disabled.’

Furthermore, it could be concluded, from the overall findings and the literature put forward, that because industrial societies such as ours are founded upon the “liberal ideals of individual responsibility, competition and paid employment,” those who are perceived as being unable to meet these ideals are regarded as deviant.

In a capitalist society, the response to disability involves recasting the problem in economic, as well as social, terms. . . The response to persons with disabilities is [thus] shaped by the social meanings and interpretations that are given to the conditions and people who have them (Albrecht, 1992: 35, 87).

This study tended to underline the importance of cultural institutions in determining and reinforcing aspects of what it perceives to be the ‘normal’ body. It was essentially a media investigation that explored how these advertisements as a cultural text reproduced and reinforced cultural notions of the ‘disabled body’ - they seem to act as a repository for certain beliefs and ideologies. It allowed this researcher to consider critically how mass culture might subordinate perceived deviant groups to non-deviant groups (Rubin, Rubin and Piele, 1990). Not
unlike mainstream advertising, their models and messages reflect a distinct commercial imagery of approved body attributes such as the body beautiful, the importance of sports and of keeping fit, all of which are perceived as being essential features of self-development.

Limitations of the study

With regard to coming to definite conclusions about the findings of this study, several factors must be considered. The first is that the results of this study are based on the semiotic analysis of a limited number of ads. This study, therefore, cannot claim to make any conclusive statements about the portrayal of the 'disabled body,' or to presume that this is a satisfactory representative sampling that could be applied across the board to all disability magazines. Again, the limited basis of the sample population can also affect the strength of a hypothesis if the context and conditions are changed.

Another perceived shortcoming in a qualitative research report, as noted by Berg (1998: 260), is that the findings are not so easily explained as in a quantitative study. Again, because the semiological approach stresses individual readings of messages, it does not lend itself to easy organization of data. Sometimes data has to be organized according to various thematic subheadings or interspersed throughout the research report in order to illustrate various patterns and observations (Berg, 1998). By contrast, in quantitative studies, a single distinct findings or results section can more clearly summarize all the data in the form of charts, percentages and/or tables (Berg, 1998).

In response to the above criticisms of semiology as a research method, it should be noted that the strength of semiotic/qualitative analysis lies in its insistence on identifying the context in which the inferences are made. This in-depth focus gives the researcher an opportunity to do
a thorough analysis. The approach also serves to provide a solid base for ‘inference’ which can be useful in outlining the conditions under which a generalization can be expected to hold (Dey, 1993: 263). For this reason, the semiotic/qualitative analysis of the ads is more suggestive than conclusive when it comes to generalizing beyond the data. On the other hand, once the inferences are “well grounded in our analysis of the data, at least we can be more confident that our suggestions are worth pursuing” (Dey, 1993:263).

It is possible that a more rigorous ‘middle range’ option than the one utilized in this study might accomplish more in terms of facilitating the link between individual semiotic analysis and broader generalizations. This must be a methodology that is more systematic while also being sensitive to the multiple levels of meaning and the multiple codes that the ads employ (Leiss, Kline and Jhally, 1986: 175). For example, perhaps by adopting a stricter unit for analysis throughout the semiotic analysis of the ads, it might have been easier for this researcher to draw conclusions and to collate the data in a research report. Berg (1998: 232) offers the possibility of using concepts as ‘units’ to regulate analysis. Concepts involve words (and in this cases, images as well) grouped together into conceptual clusters (ideas) that can make up variables in a typical research hypothesis. For example, a conceptual cluster might form around the idea of productivity: words and images related to ‘work’ and ‘time’ might cluster around the idea of productivity. Such clustering could proceed on both a deductive and inductive basis: i.e., identifying clusters from pre-existing concepts in the case of the former, or recognizing connections among words and images in the study which could constitute a concept, in the case of the latter.
Future Studies

This study can possibly act as a springboard for continued research on the portrayal of disability in advertising. As was commented in the literature review, there were only two specifically related studies to be found: namely, how people with disabilities in disability posters were perceived by non-disabled people (Brolley and Anderson, 1986) and how health promotion posters could inadvertently contribute to the stigma of disability (Wang, 1992). It was acknowledged that this study contained elements of the two in that it took a semantic (as opposed to pragmatic) analysis of how people with disabilities were portrayed in the advertisements, and how existing cultural notions of disability could be reproduced in these portrayals.

Analysis of how the ‘disabled body’ is represented in advertisements allows us to understand more clearly: how capitalism’s ideologies are replicated in the body, and how advertising as a medium revolves on the aesthetics of body image. To a greater extent, the materialist theory of disability adequately explains the portrayal of the ‘disabled body’ in the advertisements. The usefulness of the materialist framework in this study is such that it recognizes and explains disability as a social construction. It takes into account the influence of capitalism and the mass media in developing and conveying cultural notions about the body. The creation and representation of the ‘disabled body,’ thus, becomes a reflection of the relationship between an individual and the social and physical environment around him or her:

Are the deaf, deaf; are blind persons really sightless? Or is it the social setting we place them in? In their social relations they communicate, they ‘see’...we place them in specific social relations that make them deaf (Gadacz, 1994: 5).

Furthermore, because the materialist theory places emphasis on the collective generation of meaning as shaped by conventions, language and other social processes, it gives rise to the
possibility that the term "disability" can be redefined:

If the meaning of the word is viewed as a social creation rather than as a fixed natural condition, the way is open for a change in the current meaning of disability through an analysis and re-invention of the way that disability is portrayed in this culture (Woodhill, 1994: 202).

Based on observations and conclusions made during the final stages of this study, several options present themselves for future research. One possibility is based on the observation that very few minorities and children were represented in the advertisements, and that women with disabilities tended to be cast in passive roles. A revised study could focus on the actual composition of the disabled people portrayed in terms of age, gender and race within these advertisements. One option would be to look at how the presentation of individuals in the outlined categories conceivably parallel similar groups in mainstream advertising. For example, with respect to women, one could ask whether disabled and non-disabled women are portrayed differently in terms of sexuality and profession/activity in advertisements. A possible supposition could be that, whereas both groups are portrayed according to existing social stereotypes, women with disabilities are further undermined in terms of the range and context of their representation.

Another angle would be to consider a semiotic reading of the other categories of ads to be found in the sampled disability magazines, such as those for rehabilitation services as opposed to rehabilitation goods. This might be even more revealing of how the medical profession as an institution views disability.

This study could also be re-done as a content analysis as opposed to a semiotic reading. Analysis of the amount of representation of products for certain disabilities might lead to findings as to what disabilities tend to be most represented/under-represented, and which may carry the least amount of stigma, for example, prosthetics versus incontinence products.
Another form of content analysis might confine itself to the actual ad captions and their content, for example, the number of ad captions which use the word ‘independence,’ or ‘freedom.’

Last but not least, there are many other North American disability-oriented magazines, all of which can provide a wider arena for analysis. For example, in chapter three of this thesis, it was noted that *Caliper* magazine, while a Canadian publication, focused solely on paraplegia. However, unlike the other two magazines utilized in this study, *Caliper* has been circulated for over fifty years as opposed to the eight years for *Disability Today* and the ten years for *Abilities*.

It would be interesting, therefore, to sample the advertising content for the rehabilitation goods featured over the years and actually trace the changing attitudes towards disability as reflected in the advertisements.

Casting the research net even wider, we can consider the underlying implications of considering how the disabled body is presented in advertising, commercial and otherwise. This might conceivably follow the call for a research focus that deconstructs ‘master discourses’ of the body. This focus rejects the idea that individuals who deviate from the authoritative and dominant discourse are morally and socially inferior, and that their social or moral disruptiveness is always somehow embodied (Urla and Terry, 1994: 4). As was noted in this study, the findings seemed to point towards a portrayal of the ‘disabled body’ that was essentially conformist in terms of cultural expectations and standards of what was an acceptable ‘body.’

At the very beginning of this study, it was noted in the introduction that the ‘disabled body’ was not a model because it did not lend itself to imitation, and at the same time, the role models offered were impractical as models of likeness (Fontes, 1998: 25). The fact that the growing proclivity of modern civilization to study and discuss human appearance (and sexuality) has not been extended to the ‘disabled body’ means that the development of an acceptable and alternative body aesthetic continues to be ignored:

98
Most relevant studies have imposed an unacknowledged taboo or censorship on the discussion of this topic, and even the burgeoning literature on sexuality and disability has not provided a means of transcending the supposedly unattractive qualities of obvious physical differences (Hahn, 1988: 27).

This perceived reluctance of researchers to focus on the aesthetics of disability can be linked to the fact that within traditional research, a professionally dominated functionalist theory has been utilized to explain the concept of disability. Prior to the 1950's medical biological research sought to prevent disability (Rioux, 1994). Although the field of rehabilitation opened up in the 1950's, the emphasis was on ameliorating a problem that continued to be defined as resting on the individual.

Based on the conclusions derived from this study, one has to ask whether it is possible for the 'disabled' body to reassert and redefine itself through a process of dis-articulation and re-articulation so as to be able to state unequivocally that 'Disability is Beautiful' (Hahn, 1988). This redefinition of what constitutes 'beauty' calls for a rejection of the cultural borders which are seen as "historically constructed and socially organized maps of rules and regulations that limit and enable particular identities, individual capacities and social forms" (Peters, 1996:119).

Lalonde and Cameron (1994) suggest that, by stressing the innate appeal of physical differences, researchers will be able to contribute to the richness and diversity of human perceptions. Just as demographic variables such as age, gender, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, language and religion are considered part of a culture, there is also need to focus on other equally salient characteristics that simultaneously celebrate individual uniqueness and human universality apart from ethnic or racial classification. There is thus a need for greater self-reflection and a deeper understanding of the research situation by the research subjects themselves as well as enabling researchers to identify with their research subjects:

In short it is not only a case of educating disabled and able-bodied people for integration but of fighting institutional disablism; it is not disability relations
which should be the focus for study but disablism (Oliver, 1996: 37).

Again, given the overall ‘glossiness’ of the representations, it is not impossible to consider that these ads contain what Strauss (1981: 208) terms “an indirect mandate to protect the aesthetic standards of North American culture.” In themselves, the ads become a visible expression of cultural policy; they encode and encapsulate what western culture defines as ‘beautiful.’ However, reducing the visual portrayal of severe disabilities, or failing to show the ‘normalcy’ of handicap, can only lead to a reduced level of awareness about the true nature of disability and the acceptance of visual ‘difference.’ There is therefore a tension/contradiction between the need to be more realistic in the portrayal of disability and advertising’s concern about make ‘goods’ attractive enough in order to sell them.

Suggestions such as changing the policies that govern the presentation of visual images to the general public, promoting education on the salience of diversities of personal appearance and even increasing taxes on the products designed to enhance attractiveness, have been put forward (Hahn, 1988: 31), along with focusing on disabling and enabling environments (Schwartz, 1990). More important, however, is the assertion that disabled people can play a significant role as the critics of a culture that places an inordinate stress on a rather conformist vision of external attractiveness and a vain search for the ‘body beautiful’ (Hahn, 1988: 31).

Arising out of this disabled people can offer an “alternative model of attraction” that will permit both the disabled and non-disabled to discover enhanced aesthetic satisfaction of the ordinary men and women they encounter in everyday life. Thus, it is the actions undertaken by the victims that are most likely to bring about a change in their status as members of a disadvantaged group (Lalonde and Cameron, 1994).
REFERENCES


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Cohn, R. (1988). My word! *Abilities*, (1)1, Fall, 5


## APPENDIX A: CENSUS OF REHABILITATION ADVERTISEMENTS FOUND IN DISABILITY TODAY/ACTIVE LIVING AND ABILITIES

**DISABILITY TODAY**: June 1991 - January 1998, Quarterly

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<th>Transport/Car</th>
<th>Wheelchair</th>
<th>Drugs/Pain Relief</th>
<th>Architect.</th>
<th>Fitness/Lifestyle/Exercise</th>
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<td>We fit your lifestyle like no one else can</td>
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<td>“If the Socket Fits...Wear it!”</td>
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<td>Nova Care Sabolich Prosthetic Centres</td>
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<td>Winter 1997, 6(2)</td>
<td>“Cirrus...As Unique as your own footprint.”</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Second Nature</td>
<td>1/2</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“The Finishing Touch”</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Sandberg</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“When It’s Gotta Feel Right!”</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>TEC Interface System</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>“Be your Best!”</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>College Park Industries, Inc.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“Stairs can become a step up to freedom.”</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>Bruno Independent Living Aids</td>
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<td>“Climbing Stairs can be a Thing of the Past.”</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Flinchbaugh</td>
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<td>“Activan Accessibility with Style”</td>
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<td>Active Living</td>
<td>“Ask me How I Improved my Handicap”</td>
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<td>E-Z Play, Inc.</td>
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<td>May/June 1997, 6(3)</td>
<td>“An Innovative Solution for Support and Comfort”</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Otto Beck Reha</td>
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<td>“Muscle Up to Feeling Great with Saratoga Colorado Fitness”</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Saratoga</td>
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<td>August/Sept 1997 6(4)</td>
<td>“Gone Fishin’, Gone Bowlin’, Gone to Lunch Etc., Etc., Etc.”</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Quickie, a division of Sunrise Medical</td>
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<td>“The most comforting part of this picture is the TEC liner”</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>TEC Interface Systems</td>
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<td>“Life Begins where the Road Ends”</td>
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<td>Natural Access</td>
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<td>“Mobility Management means freedom’”</td>
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<td>“What ever you do in life, take advantage”</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Otto Bock Reha</td>
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<td>“Luxury Liner - The maximum comfort sleeve”</td>
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<td>United States Manufacturing Company</td>
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<td>“Motion Technology. Comfort. Function. Value”</td>
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<td>Ohio Willow Wood Company</td>
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<td>“Got suspension?”</td>
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<td>TEC Interface Systems</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“Cirrus. The Choice to live with.”</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Cirrus</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“There is no mobility without transportation.”</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>Bruno Independent Living Aids</td>
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<td>January/February 6(6)</td>
<td>“A Walk in the Park.”</td>
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<td>OBC</td>
<td>Kingsley</td>
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APPENDIX C: List of ‘aesthetically’ richer ads sampled for semiotic analysis

AD #1
Active Living, 1997, 6 (5): Back cover, full page, colour
Ad Caption: “A Walk in the Park”
Rehabilitation good: Kingsley Steplite Foot

AD #2
Active Living, 1997, 6 (4): pg 40, full page, colour
Rehabilitation good: prosthetic leg

AD #3
Active Living, 1997, 6 (3): pg 50, full page, colour
Ad Caption: “The most comforting part of this picture is the TEC Liner”
Rehabilitation good: prosthetic liner

AD #4
Disability Today, 1997, 6 (2): pg 24, full page, colour
Ad Caption: “For Everyday People Doing Everyday Things”
Rehabilitation good: “Stratus” prosthetic limb

AD #5
Disability Today, 1997, 6 (2): pg 47, full page, colour
Ad Caption: “Stairs can become a step up to freedom”
Rehabilitation good: Stair lift

AD #6
Ad Caption: “Darrell Gwynn lives in the fast lane. Get out there.”
Rehabilitation Good: Quickie P200 Wheelchair

AD #7
Disability Today, 1995 4 (3): pg 30, colour, ½ page
Ad Caption: “Lyfe/Life is an open road/You have the freedom to go as far as you want.”
Rehabilitation Good: Car Lift

AD #8
Disability Today, 1993, 3 (1): pg 59, half page, black and white, some colour
Ad Caption: “Ready, Willing and Able to be Productive Again”
Rehabilitation good: Speaker/headphone device

AD #9
Disability Today, 1992, 1 (3): pg 29, full page, colour
Ad Caption: “Adjust the foot, not the lifestyle”
Rehabilitation good: “Air-Flex” prosthetic limb

125
AD #10
Abilities, 1997, #32: pg 63,1/4 ad, colour
Ad Caption: “The Possibilities are endless”
Rehabilitation good: Uppertone exercise machine for quadriplegics

AD #11
Abilities, 1997, #31: pg 5, full page, colour
Ad Caption: “A New Way to Work and Play”
Rehabilitation good: E & J Lancer 2000 wheelchair

AD #12
Abilities, 1997, #27: insert, full page (3), colour
Ad Caption: “Opening the Doors to Freedom”
Rehabilitation good: “Bladder Manager” incontinence device

AD #13
Abilities, 1995, #23: pg 76, half page, colour
Ad Caption: “Experience the Freedom”
Rehabilitation good: Terra Trek wheelchair

AD #14
Abilities, 1993, #16: pg 83, full page, colour
Ad Caption: “It’s new. It’s hot. It’s like nothing else on wheels.
And the car’s pretty nice too.”
Rehabilitation good: Action FX wheelchair

AD #15
Abilities, 1993, #15: pg 21, full page, colour
Ad Caption: “Enjoy life’s simple pleasures with New Jay Care Seating”
Rehabilitation Good: wheelchair cushion

AD #16
Abilities, 1993, #15: pg 77, full page, colour
Ad Caption: “Ultragater, The new lift for people who demand high performance
in every aspect of their lives.”
Rehabilitation good: electric car lift

AD #17
Abilities, 1992, #13: pg 10, full page, colour
Ad Caption: “Power Assist Redefined”
Rehabilitation good: “Booster power assist” for wheelchairs

AD #18
Abilities, 1992, #10: pg 12-13, full page (2), colour
Ad Caption: “Action speaks louder than words”
Rehabilitation good: “Action” wheelchairs
The Steplite

A Walk In the Park

The Kingsley Steplite foot is designed specifically for the moderately active amputee desiring maximum comfort while walking. Employing a unique approach to Dynamic Elastic Response, the keel design of the Steplite foot offers extremely smooth rollover characteristics, while the composite spring plate, fabricated in the low to mid flexion resistance range, gives a forward moment during the transition from midstance through toe-off. Exactly what amputees desire during a relaxing, comfortable walk.

The Steplite foot is stocked in three styles, the Low Profile 3/4”, Strider 1/4” and Flattie 3/8”. The dimensions and heel cushion durometers are identical to the Kingsley SACH. The Steplite is also available as a “KC09 Litefoot.”

Join in the enthusiasm being generated by the Kingsley Steplite by recommending it for your patients so they can experience the comfort of a design specifically aimed at the majority of amputees who enjoy a walk in the park.

When ordering, specify style and shoe size (in centimeters).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Style</th>
<th>Sizes</th>
<th>KC01</th>
<th>KC08</th>
<th>KC051</th>
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<td>Low</td>
<td>6 (23cm) through 13 (30cm)</td>
<td>Low Profile 3/4”</td>
<td>Strider 1/4”</td>
<td>Flattie 3/8”</td>
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<td>Strider</td>
<td>6 (23cm) through 13 (30cm)</td>
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KINGSLEY
COSTA MESA, CALIFORNIA, USA

714/645-4401 • 800/854-3478 • (CA) 800/924-8704 • (FAX) 714/645-0805
Darrell Gwynn lives in the fast lane. Get out there.

Darrell Gwynn isn't into spectator sports. A former top fuel driver and current drag racing team owner, he likes to feel the road for himself. And he knows a thing or two about high-performance machines. A guy who's done a quarter mile in 4.90 seconds in a dragster needs a chair with serious power to keep up with him. Darrell can get the job done from his Quickie P200. So don't bother telling him he can't go somewhere – the road is his.
Ostafi Huk, who was raised to deaf parents, decided to create a bill in 1992 after attending Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Corporation hearings on captioning. Her goal is to increase the amount of captioned television programs by making the process easier for broadcasters.

Closed captioning can be unpopular with TV broadcasters because of the cost involved ($1,000 per hour) and because of the responsibility for the actual captioning which is usually left to them. CCI changes this process. Instead of handling the bill to broadcasters, CCCI funds the captioning by approaching corporations to

...
Adjust the foot, not the lifestyle.

The Air-Flex. It's a simple idea. An adjustable prosthesis that gives the patient maximum comfort and performance around the office, on a basketball court, and anywhere in between. Just like today's athletic shoes, all it takes is a few pumps.

The patient fine tunes the Air-Flex by adjusting the pressure within a urethane air cell covered with durable ballistic nylon for protection. Inflating the air cell increases toe stiffness for greater energy storage during high impact activities. Deflating it provides a smoother, more cushioned rollover for less strenuous activities. The air cell also lessens shock to residual limbs, maximizing patient comfort. Ultimately, this increased comfort improves performance. According to triathlete Jim MacLaren, the Air-Flex enables him to "run longer distances with greater ease."

The Air-Flex also makes your job easier. Its cylindrical carbon graphite pylon is compatible with standard 30mm endoskeletal connections. One prosthesis can fit all your patient's activities and energy requirements—unless it's adjustable. Only one boot is necessary. The Air-Flex. Call now to learn more about it. 617-834-9271.
Rediscover Pleasure of Movement!

AFFORDABLE HOME THERAPY

EX N' FLEX
Passive/Active Exercise with Biofeedback Display
- Retain flexibility of muscles, joints and tendons
- Improve bowel and bladder control
- Increases energy level

- Compact
- Height Adjustment
- Transportable

Ideal for individuals with MS, CP, Para and Quadriplegics, Strokes, Parkinsons and Arthritis; develop your own home based exercise therapy program

Call now for your free information package
1(800) 541-0002

Tecogics Scientific Limited
Unit #4, 72 Pretoria Avenue, Ottawa, Ontario  P1H6J3

The Possibilities Are Endless
UPPERTONE: Sixteen Unassisted Exercises for Quads

Improved mobility satisfied customer

The use of UPPERTONE created new experiences for skiing satisfied customer

Becki McCafferty, MBA, UC Irvine, CA quad, adjusting assistant on UPPERTONE
If you want to develop the strength, independence, and confidence you need to explore your possibilities call for a free detailed brochure on how you can do sixteen upper-body exercises such as chest press, lifting and backswing, without assistance or casts.

GPK Inc., 7942 Calle Posada
Carlsbad, CA 92009
Tel 619-456-0954  Fax 619-456-3138

Call 1-800-468-8679 for brochure, U.S. & Canada

HOW YOU GET TO WORK ISN'T THE ISSUE

The issue is what you bring with you. Your talent. Your training. Your ability to do the job and do it well. Working with our Advisory Council on the Equitable Workplace, Bank of Montreal Human Resources managers are trained to see your potential above all else. So if you believe you’ve got something to contribute, please send your resume to National Manager, Initiatives for People with Disabilities, Bank of Montreal, Workplace Equality, 55 Bloor Street West, 6th floor, Toronto, Ontario M4W 3N5.
Opening the Doors to Freedom

BladderManager™
Personal Care Instrument
Learn more about the BladderManager™ Personal Care Instrument and receive your complimentary “The Drink’s on Us” water bottle.

☐ YES, I want to learn more about the BladderManager™ Personal Care Instrument and receive my complimentary “The Drink’s on Us” water bottle.

☐ Mail this information to the address shown below.

☐ Call me at ( ) ___________________________ between the hours of ___________ and ___________.

☐ I think the BladderManager Personal Care Instrument could meet my needs, but I would like to speak with an end user first. Please have them call me at:

( ) ___________________________ between the hours of ___________ and ___________.

Name ___________________________
Address ___________________________
City/Province/Postal Code ___________________________
Phone ___________________________

☐ Please send my physician information about the BladderManager Personal Care Instrument:

Dr. ___________________________
Address ___________________________
City/Province/Postal Code ___________________________

For the fastest service, call Diagnostic Ultrasound directly at 800 765-7733 (Western Canada) or 800 252-1021 (Eastern Canada).
BladderManager gives you more time and the freedom to enjoy life.

For those without bladder sensation, every day presents limitations. Restricted to a program of time-dependent catheterizations, you’re forced to accept the uncertainty and discomfort from unneeded catheterizations. Or deal with bladder overfilling and significant bladder or kidney complications. Either way, you are robbed of valuable time each day—time that could be better spent soaking up every moment of life.

The BladderManager Personal Care Instrument has been designed with input from those with illness or injuries resulting in loss of bladder sensation. It replaces the feedback needed for the basic bodily function you had before your illness or injury—quickly, silently telling you how much urine is in your bladder. You’ll know when to catheterize or void without any complicated or invasive procedures.

In short, you regain the right to enjoy life with greater freedom and more certainty.

A fast, easy way to measure your bladder volume.

Using the BladderManager system, your condition doesn’t direct your life—you do—gaining control of the issues surrounding bladder dysfunction, including:

- Eliminating the constraint of fixed-catheterization schedules
- Minimizing incontinence
- Helping you protect your kidneys
- Increasing your freedom to drink more liquids
- Minimizing urinary-tract infections

There’s nothing like the BladderManager monitor. Just push the Scan button to accurately measure your bladder volume in only a few seconds. A small sensor uses low-level ultrasound (less than 1/10th the intensity of fetal ultrasound equipment) waves to go through your tissue and reflect off your bladder’s walls. This sensor—small enough to be worn inconspicuously under your clothing—then sends this information to the battery-powered control unit where your bladder fullness is calculated and displayed. You’ll catheterize only when needed. Saving you time and discomfort.

Ask your physician about the benefits you can expect.

Most individuals without bladder sensation will readily benefit from the BladderManager monitor. During our ongoing clinical studies, users repeatedly tell us that knowing their bladder volume has given them increased confidence and added personal independence.

We encourage you to discuss with your physician the advantages you can expect using the BladderManager system. Or, if you prefer, we can put you directly in touch with a BladderManager end user to learn first-hand how the system can make a difference. To find out more, please call toll free 800 765-7733 (Western Canada) or 800 252-1021 (Eastern Canada).

Special Bonus!

In addition to sending you our material, we’ll also send you our convenient, durable “The Drink’s on Us” water bottle—our way of saying thanks for taking the time to learn more about the BladderManager Personal Care Instrument and how it can have a profound impact on your life. Don’t put off this right to a better quality of life. Call or write us today.
FOR PEOPLE WHO CAN'T WHEEZE ANYMORE!

The rest lane is now open. Our unique uncoupled adjustable system means you can fine-tune your fit. It's so maneuverable, so quiet by the time they hear you coming, you're already gone.

Don't waste your time comparing the new Action RX to anything ordinary. It sets the tone. It's new. It's hot.

ACTION RX

IT'S LIKE NOTHING ELSE ON WHEELS.
For more information, please call 800-263-3390.

- Are ADP approved.
- Are economical, easy to fit, and virtually maintenance-free.
- Improved visual field and better interaction with the environment.
- Accommodates and supports the individual's current posture, resulting in
  rather than time spent in bed.
- Help increase sitting tolerance, encouraging mobility and independence.
  particularly for those with a kyphotic (stouched) posture.
- Provide excellent pressure relief on the seat bone, tail bone, and spine.

Together, this new Jay Care Cushion and Back:

*Seating System*
Power Assist Redefined.

The Booster Power Assist
An innovative, modular accessory for manual wheelchairs, the Booster offers power when it is needed on ramps, grades and longer distances.

Freedom with control
Increasing mobility and independence, the Booster is simple to operate and gives the user complete control to access power when wanted.

Flexibility
The Booster fits nearly all manual chairs including children’s, and offers a choice of two speed selections for safe operation – low speed to help overcome grades and ramps or to slow descent on a grade – higher speed for level surfaces.

Transportability
Easy to remove, the Booster is compact and light-weight. Its battery charger is conveniently built into the hand-control and can be plugged in anywhere to recharge.

Features
• Retracts when not in use
• Provides power for up to 2 hours of constant driving on level grade
• Heavy duty, non slip urethane filled tire for traction on all surfaces
• Recharges in 4–8 hours
• Sturdy precision – cast aluminum construction
• UL/CSA approved electronic components

Products that we’re proud of – from a team you can rely on.

For more information on Genus Medical Inc. or our products please contact:
Don Hovis, President at 1-800-567-9153 • Pat Suda, US National Sales Manager at 1-800-472-2549

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customize to the hill, and every
package. And enough options to
colorful design frame and fabric
where in style. Choose from 23

Turn a few heads, Make a

ACTION STYLE.