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Veiled

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Veiled

Amelia Walker

Amelia Walker is a Senior Electrical Engineering Major. When she isn't dancing or solving Rubik's Cubes, she enjoys writing short stories and essays on social issues.

Thousands of Americans sit themselves in front of their televisions each evening, watching the nightly news, commercials and sappy soap operas. However, do viewers consider how the media could be affecting their view of others? In her essay *Disability*, Nancy Mairs exposes media's negative effect on the perception of the physically disabled. She accomplishes this by relating her observations of media to her personal experience.

As a woman who has multiple sclerosis, Mairs knows well the lack of any fair media portrayal of the physically disabled. She recounts seeing a show where a woman diagnosed with MS attempted to take a journey before the disease's effects took over, only to be pursued and stopped by her young, love-struck doctor. The concept Mairs (2005) takes issue with is that the show took the disease and made it the "determining factor of a woman's existence" (p. 221). It seems that the show did little to indicate the woman character, hobbies or interests outside of the over-arching knowledge that she was now disabled. As detrimental as this kind of disease is, it does not "devour one wholly" (Mairs, 2005, p. 221). Even so, the depiction on the show completely defined the woman by her disease, encouraging viewers to do the same.

Commercials tend to show the ideal; handsome men, cute little girls and the perfect American white-picket-fence homes are the stars of today's advertisements. It is extremely rare to see a disabled person selling a consumer product on television. Mairs believes this is so because advertisers do not want disabilities to appear normal, or rather, something that "may enter anybody's life" (2005, p. 221). People gravitate towards what is known, comfortable or ideal; to depict a product used by the disabled would be to assert

that disability is comfortable and known as well. However, no one desires disability. In fact, it is a terrifying reality that no person can escape the possibility of becoming disabled. However, this is far from ideal, thus the media places disability in a category that is deemed unrelatable to the common American.

The media encourages the common American to view the disabled as both defined by their disease and inherently abnormal, but how do the disabled view themselves? Mairs describes the feelings of the disabled as “self-alienation not unlike that experienced by other minorities” (p. 221). Views encouraged by the media are received by the disabled in such a way that they feel as though value as been removed from them, that they are unwanted and that no one is like them. Mairs (2005) challenges the reader to picture themselves in the shoes of the disabled, where “others you can hope to be like - don’t exist” (p. 222). This view of the one’s self breeds isolation, shame and the feeling that the media’s reflection of the disabled could be true.

The media is a powerful tool which shapes people’s perception of the world around them, including a largely negative view of the disabled. Mairs (2005) pleads that we change this perception by integrating disability into “the small and common scenes of our ordinary lives” (p. 222). Perhaps this could be accomplished by the personal effort to change our perception of the disabled, working to remove the veil and see the true person behind the disability.