

Public Abstract  
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Journalism

“Disease as Drama: Dramatistic constructs and modes of redemption in covering illness in *Glamour* magazine”

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Women rely heavily on media, in general, and on magazines, in particular, for their health and medical news. Therefore, studying the rhetoric of disease narratives in women’s magazines might help shed light on several important issues. For example, the rhetorical depictions of disease in magazine narratives might have implications on readers’ attitudes toward disease, as well as on readers’ attitudes toward risk and personal responsibility.

This study sought to explore how personal medical crises are narrated in and covered by *Glamour*, a popular women’s magazine. This study attempted to shed light on how these personal narratives of coping with a disease are constructed rhetorically and dramatically. The analysis found that:

- The disease narratives explored, although secular in nature, are structured along the lines of religious tales of struggle and salvation.
- Suffering and disease are represented as cathartic and revelatory and thus somehow justified
- The majority of articles place responsibility on the individual person rather than the medical establishment or public health system
- Medical nuance is largely lacking in favor of predictable conflict-resolution, fable-like structures.
- The medical information presented in these articles is basic and minimal and serves a scene-setting purpose (a prop) against the background of which the drama develops.

Understanding the rhetorical construction of disease might also shed light on newsroom routines and whether the narratives reflect the complexities of each separate condition or gravitate toward predictable conflict-resolution scenarios regardless of the medical specifics of a disease.

Beyond understanding editorial choices, metaphor and rhetoric are particularly important when it comes to understanding how depictions of disease and health might affect the way audiences perceive illness and health, which can ultimately shape attitudes toward diseases. The implications of public attitudes toward disease and health extend beyond the purely medical and well into the realm of public health and public health policy.