Book Information

Title

Illness Politics and Hashtag Activism

Creator

Lisa Diedrich

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Reviewer Information

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Critical Review

Illness Politics and Hashtag Activism is part of the series Forerunners: Ideas First from the University of Minnesota Press. The general goal of this series is to release shorter volumes that introduce readers to various potentially complex topics. In the case of Lisa Diedrich's work, she examines the use of hashtags in social media as it relates to illness. The first two chapters examine illness-related hashtags during the 2016 and 2020 elections. Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump both had illness hashtags in those

election years, and Diedrich critically analyzes how they were created and then used to hurt or help the candidates. But, after the first two chapters, Diedrich takes a bit of a left-hand turn. She focuses on American Disabled for Attendant Programs Today (ADAPT) and their use of social media, but in order to do so, we are provided with a significant history lesson on ADAPT. I am unclear as to whether or not the history lesson was actually needed. It is interesting, but a much shorter version would have sufficed. She also delves into an internal politics issue that played out on social media. Again, I am not sure that this was really all that useful when the rest of the book is focused on outward facing activism, especially in regards to US politics. Diedrich herself reminds us in the ADAPT chapter that,

> My works explores illness as performative, "performative" understood here through the lens of both social interactionist theories, which explore the constitution of the self in the practices of everyday life, and speech act theories of performative utterances, which explore how saying can be doing. (p. 63)

It is as if she needs to remind herself and the reader that while her chapter on ADAPT only lightly touches on what she studies and is therefore tangential, ADAPT and her research are copacetic. Chapter 4 is dedicated to #CripTheVote, a fairly well-known hashtag that had its start during the 2016 presidential campaign and then continued afterwards because of its success in getting awareness of disability concerns out into the public and specifically into the minds of political candidates. Chapters 5 and 6 focus on more esoteric movements, with Chapter 5 dedicated to #TimeForUnrest, which focuses on a film made by a disabled activist. Chapter 6 examines #LongCOVID and how those with long COVID have used social media to find each other, compare symptoms and treatments, share strategies for dealing with health professionals, etc. Chapter 3 on ADAPT aside, the book is a tight examination of the myriad ways that social media can be used by disability activists to educate and advocate for better treatment by the government and society but can also be used to discredit those with illness as in the case of Clinton and Trump. In short, social media, and especially #HashtagActivism, is a double-edged sword.

In sum, this book is

Recommended