



Tracking changes in everyday experiences of disability and disability sport within the context of the 2012 London Paralympics.

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Executive summary

Within this report, we consider everyday experiences of disability and disability sport within the context of the London 2012 Paralympics and televised coverage of the Games. The analysis is based 140 in-depth interviews that took place in the UK over a period of eighteen months, during the lead up to, and immediately after, the Games: between January 2011 and September 2012. The key headline findings are as follows:

The Paralympics had a noticeable impact on the way that disability sport was talked about. This included:

- There was a clear understanding that the **Paralympics had a social agenda to influence public attitudes towards disability** and, around the time of the Games, awareness of disability sports became markedly higher.
- **Genuine and palpable surprise at the emotional reactions** generated by watching the Paralympics – as an ‘inspiring’ part of the summer of British sport. Through their stories, there was a sense that audiences were genuinely amazed at just how emotive and thrilling the Paralympics was. Several sports enthusiasts made references to a metaphor of addiction, describing how they became ‘hooked’, ‘caught up in it’ and ‘swept along’ when viewing the television coverage of the Games.
- **A shift from expecting to see only the disability to primarily seeing sporting excellence.** This was accompanied by a shift away from narratives of sympathy and pity, to those of thrill and excitement associated with watching live sport, suggesting that audiences held a prior belief (not openly discussed) that the Paralympics would be less competitive than ‘able-bodied’, ‘elite’ sport.
- **A reduction in expressed senses of discomfort when watching disabled people on screen.** This was shaped by regarding such sportspeople as ‘athletes first and foremost’ (rather than failing to see beyond ‘difference’), and by the media focus on the ‘incredible technology’. Some participants spoke of the relief they felt at the tone of the television coverage, assuaging fears that it might have been patronising.
- This resulted in **greater confidence and less anxiety in talking about disability sports** but this was primarily communicated through a single narrative of ‘triumph over adversity’. This is important when considering previous studies which identified this as an important obstacle to overcome.

There are, however, some caveats to this central finding. For example:

- Many participants claimed that their own **attitudes had not changed (because they did not need to) but they were, however, convinced that attitudes more generally had changed.** This sort of response speaks to a third person effect, which we often see in media effects research.
- Whilst we observed an **increase in interest in disability sport, this would not necessarily translate to greater intention to watch disability sports in the future.**
- Indeed, in many narratives, there was an underlying sentiment that the **Paralympics were ‘the second rate games’;** an afterthought to, and overshadowed by, the incomparable spectacle of the ‘real’, or the ‘proper’, Olympic Games. The names of sporting champions from the Olympics were easily recalled whereas the names of far fewer Paralympians were as readily accessible.
- Furthermore, a small section of our sample confessed to being **sceptical of the standard of Paralympic sport.** Many of the disability sports included in the Games were seen to be insufficiently competitive, slower, and less exciting. For these individuals, often not particularly knowledgeable of sport, the classifications system was also a barrier of confusion which added to this sentiment.

Amongst disabled people, the Paralympics represented an attempt at increasing understanding but brought concerns about the longevity of any change in public attitudes, and unrealistic expectations versus the reality:

- Disabled participants were acutely aware of a **‘buzz’ generated that made disability momentarily ‘trendy’ and ‘fashionable’.**
- In everyday experiences in public environments, **a general sense of ‘admiration’ appeared to have displaced sympathy, pity or fear in everyday talk about and interactions with disability.** Whether this would last long-term was greeted with a degree of scepticism, however. For disabled people, this narrative of vague ‘admiration’ could be experienced as a move from general impatience to unrealistic expectations or, at times, simply as inappropriate and patronising praise.
- **For some, this transient change was uplifting; for others, it was a source of deep frustration because the Paralympics represented something distant from their everyday reality.**

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1.0: Introduction

The purpose of staging an elite disability sports competition such as the Paralympics is to 'inspire and excite' and to 'enable Paralympic athletes to achieve sporting excellence', (International Paralympic Committee (IPC) 2008). Yet, until now, the emphasis placed upon elite sport has often led the Paralympics to be thought about and referred to as the 'poor cousin of the Olympics' (Ellis 2008: 28); consequently, receiving less funding and media attention. In turn, media coverage of the Paralympic Games is considered to be a key indicator of the dominant public representations of and attitudes towards disability and, more specifically, disability sport (Schantz & Gilbert 2001). And there is historically little coverage, reference.

The 2008 Beijing Olympics hosted over 11,000 athletes who were supported by nearly 7 million ticketed spectators and 24,562 journalists and broadcasters (International Olympic Committee (IOC) 2008), alongside a television and online audience of approximately 4.7 billion people (Nielsen 2008). In contrast, the Beijing Paralympics hosted slightly fewer than 4,000 athletes, selling 1.82m tickets. Approximately 5,600 media representatives and broadcasters were present at the Games, though a record 3.8 billion people worldwide engaged with, at least, some of the competition on television or online (IPC 2011; IPC 2008; IOC 2008).

Four years later, a new record was set for number of tickets sold for a Paralympic Games. At around 2.75 million, London 2012 was virtually a sell-out. In addition to those spectators who experienced the Games live, an audience of nearly 40 million people (70 per cent of the UK population) watched some of the Paralympic Games on television. Channel 4, a publicly-owned, commercially-funded public service broadcaster, was awarded UK coverage of the Games, marking the first time this broadcaster had covered the event.

The Paralympics, and related media coverage of the Games, provides significant opportunity to influence public attitudes regarding disability and disability sport; challenging dominant stereotypes and encouraging a continued move away from disability sport as therapeutic value, towards prestigious elite-level competition. The vision of the Paralympic Movement and the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) is to build a bridge which links sport with enhanced social awareness, thus contributing to greater respect and equal opportunities for all (IPC 2012). The London 2012 Candidate File (LOCOG 2007: 189) proposed that the 2012 Paralympic Games would 'build respect ... for disabled people by changing society's perceptions' and motivate young people to become more involved in disability sports at the level of 'elite' professional sport. Furthermore, the UK Government proclaimed that the London 2012 Games would help to drive forward disability equality by influencing attitudes, improving access, and opening up new opportunities across sport, culture and business. Studies prior to 2012 suggested that the Paralympics had limited impact upon the everyday lives of disabled people in the UK. Whilst there was evidence of support for the IPC's view that the 2012 Games could be a conduit for change in terms of improving equality and understanding, there were also protests by disabled activists suggesting some disabled people saw the Games in more critical terms (Braye, Gibbons & Dixon 2013). Within this context, understanding the reach and measuring the impact of the Paralympics upon audiences presents some significant challenges.

Greater understanding of disability within the context of sport can provide us with a better appreciation of how we socially construct our understandings of what 'disability' and 'sport' mean, and represent, within our society (Purdue & Howe 2012: 202). In this report, which documents findings from an almost 2-year longitudinal study during the build-up and immediately after the Paralympic Games hosted in London in 2012, we analyse the varied ways in which UK television audiences engaged with mediated coverage of the Paralympics. By way of stories and everyday talk about disability and sport, we explore the tensions that arise in the ways individuals made sense of these experiences, with specific focus on issues of distance and distancing and knowing how to engage in such talk.



2.0: Review of the Literature - Disability, Sport and the Media

As scholars - and indeed many of the participants we talked to during our research - have suggested, disability remains something of a 'taboo' to talk about (Wardle, Boyce & Baron 2009). In the following review of the literature, we consider the strands of scholarship most relevant to our study of everyday experiences of disability and disability sport within the context of the UK mediated coverage of London 2012 Paralympics. Our aim is to outline in broad terms the following areas: barriers to participation in physical activity for disabled people; dominant media representations of disability and disability sport; public responses to such representations of disability, and public attitudes towards disability in sport.

2.1: Representations and Stereotypes of Disability

Disability has been defined as "fundamentally a struggle over 'representation'" (Williams 1996: 194). Scholars have argued (Despouy 1991; Shildrick 2012; Swain & French 2000; Fitzgerald 2012; Hughes 2012, amongst many more) that the greatest barriers facing disabled people today are those of prejudice, discrimination and social isolation. Part of the reason for this has been attributed to the persistence of the discourse of the 'Medical Model' of disability which emphasises impairment as a 'problem' that is 'expertly' diagnosed and legitimated, and focuses on ways of 'fixing', or 'repairing', physical limitation (Barnes, Mercer & Shakespeare 1999; Oliver 1996), as well as dominant media representations which perpetuate the 'Personal Tragedy model' that regards those with non-normative abilities as unfortunate victims; thus, depicting disabled people as "vulnerable", and "strange". Such discourses of "difference" produce a binary social relation of "Othering" i.e. "Us" and "Them" (Despouy 1991).

In response, disabled people have increasingly called for more inclusive approaches to difference. Those more align with the 'Social Model' of disability, which advocates that disability is socially-constructed and, therefore, a consequence of the way society is organised, rather than an individual's impairment or difference, as well as the 'Affirmative Model', which developed within the disabled people's movement and the disability arts movement. Whilst the affirmative model, recognises impairment as a core part of one's lived experience and challenges what are regarded as oppressive and disabling social relationships, discourses and representations (as does the social model), it does not seek to define someone through their impairment but, rather, is concerned with considering disability in terms of what disabled people might be required to do and be (shaped and structured both by the physical world and by relationships with other people), therefore, celebrating difference and promoting a diverse range of disabled identities, experiences and ways of being (e.g. Swain & French 2000; Goodley 2011; Peers 2012; Dupré 2012). The adoption of the Social Model as an "organising principle" by disability groups has enabled a start to be made in transforming the social world in terms of the opportunities for disabled people to participate in everyday life (Cameron date unknown: 7).

2.1.1: Representations of disability in popular culture

There remains a shortage of research to document some of the issues associated with the representations of disability (Darke 1998; Haller 2010; Kent 1987; Klobas 1988; Kriegel 1987; Longmore 1987). The relative lack of visibility of disabled people within the media has been well documented and, despite some encouraging progress, still persists (Wardle Boyce & Baron 2009). Dominant media representations of disability have been criticised for being too simplistic, crude and one-dimensional (Shakespeare 1999), reinforcing stereotypes of disabled people as weak (Ellis 2008: 25; Wardle, Boyce & Baron 2009; Brittain 2004), treating disability sports as little more than “human interest” (Berger 2008), and encouraging audiences to view athletes, actresses, television personalities and so on, through their impairment, rather than as people; thus erecting and reinforcing a perceived distance between the audience and the objectified disabled character. Key studies (Berger 2008; Ellis 2008; Black & Pretes 2007; Sancho 2003; Barnes 1992; Cumberbatch & Negrine 1992) that have analysed representations of disabled people within the media and popular culture have identified frequently used stereotypes summarised here as:

- Vulnerable and pitiable: portrayals of disabled people as childlike dependants who need help and charity from others;
- ‘Supercrip’ – inspirational stories of determination and personal courage to overcome ‘adversity’;
- Portrayals of disabled people as less than human e.g. villains, ‘freak shows’, ‘exotic’;
- Characters primarily defined by their disability rather than other aspects of their identity;
- Disabled people presented as unable to participate fully in everyday life.

Although there is much dissatisfaction regarding the representation of disability within popular culture, Alison Wilde (2010) suggests that there remains disagreement on what the major problems of representation are, and what comprises a “good” portrayal of disability. For example, a report on the media representations of disfigurement published in 2009 (Wardle, Boyce & Baron 2009), recommended greater visibility of ‘ordinary and everyday’ representations of disability and more opportunities for disabled people to have their own “voice”. Wilde (2010: 41) goes on to argue that the avoidance of certain stereotypes, suggested in some broadcasting manifestos, might further limit disabled people’s roles and viewing opportunities. Instead, she advocates a range of representations of disability (more in line with the affirmative model of disability):

“Disabled characters should float freely between stereotypes and multiple roles, interwoven on all narrative roles, just as non-disabled people do. Our place within media narratives should be everywhere, affording us the same range of stereotypes as non-disabled people, as angels, heroes, villains, and so on.”

Given the narrow range of language, categories and images used, there is continued debate surrounding who has the legitimate ‘right’ to represent and talk about the disability experience. Within the context of the Paralympics and disability sports more generally, the stories of elite sport and Paralympic ‘super humans’, for example, can often divert attention away from the real issues faced by disabled people in their everyday lives, leading to further marginalisation (Goodley 2011; Dupré 2012), as will shall come to appreciate in later sections of this report.

2.1.2: Attitudes towards representations of disability in the broadcast media

A landmark report by Jane Sancho (2003) on behalf of the BBC, BSC and ITC, based on interviews with media professionals, television viewers with a physical disability, and a survey of 4000 members of the public, suggests that many people show a high degree of acceptance of the principles for increased inclusion, and want to see increased representation of disabled people on screen. 61% of those who took part in the study agreed that there should be more portrayals of disabled people on television in a wider variety of roles. Of course, the motives behind why participants held such views is not clear. It may have been that some attributed a significant socialisation role to the media in order to personally distance themselves from such. For the less progressive groups, who form a significant proportion of the viewing population, a key resistance to overcome was that of low interest. Two main psychological barriers were identified as being behind such a resistant mind-set. The first, that of cultural conditioning and society's long-standing obsession with physical attractiveness, which is manifest in the belief that viewers expect actors and television presenters to be 'good-looking': disabled people were described as 'untelevisual'. The second barrier was that which emerges when some people are confronted by something other than a reflection of themselves and their initial response becomes one of discomfort or even fear. Rather than seeing past the difference, the perceived difference becomes so prominent that they reject the whole experience.

Sancho's audience research identified some of the themes previously discussed in studies of media representation. Avoiding negative stereotypes was important for those for whom television was primarily concerned with entertainment. Emphasising a disabled person's bravery, however well intentioned, can serve to exacerbate difference and, therefore, reinforce a perceived sense of distance. The more progressive audience groups identified in Sancho's report were sensitive to stereotypes and wanted to see greater 'realism' in media representations (Sancho 2003). The report revealed five triggers that were suggested to have the potential to increase acceptance across all attitude types:

- *Matching* – Showing characterisations that go beyond disability to indicate that disabled people are, in most respects, just like everyone else.

- *Likeability* – Creating emotional connections through the use of universally shared qualities e.g. engaging personality, achievement, sense of humour.
- *Celebrity* – Use of a famous actor to play a disabled role. This has proven controversial but, it has been argued, attracts attention to a programme and offer certain assurance that it is likely to be watchable.
- *Incidental inclusion* – programming with characterisations and storylines that feature a disabled character, but which do not highlight or focus on the character's disability.
- *Educational/information 'shorts'* – the use of short, educational or information programming to tackle a particular issue and to convey it from a disabled person's perspective in palatable chunks.

The findings from Sancho's study are partially echoed in the academic literature. A qualitative audience study on physical disfigurement in the media found tensions around political correctness and terminology reflecting a lack of confidence and understanding of disability issues (Wardle, Boyce & Baron 2009). For example, the term 'normal' was problematic for most audiences: although most people were aware of the need to use the 'right' politically correct terms and labels, they struggled with the lack of descriptive terms for disfigurement which did not juxtapose experiences with 'normalcy'. In focus groups undertaken as part of the same study, participants were nervous about saying the 'wrong' thing, and appearing insensitive or callous. The researchers compared these responses to the less than politically correct 'anonymous' online comments posted in response to clips of documentaries about serious disfiguring conditions which are often posted on YouTube. Much of what these authors found can be made sense of in the context of familiarity and comfort with language that can (dis)connect people.

Studies that have employed more holistic, depth approaches to research audiences have argued that far from presenting a coherent picture of audience types; such as those proposed by Sancho (2003) and decoding practices (Hall 1980), there are, in reality, many ambivalent and often contradictory interactions between media content and audiences (Wilde 2010). Indeed, these same contradictions can be found within the context of disability as lived experience; as many disabled people do not regard themselves as part of a 'minority' group, collective or movement, and those who do, often struggle with the tensions associated with forms of identification and identity work: the simultaneous tension between being oneself i.e. a unique individual, and being a member of a group (Kuppers 2009: 221). In a study that examined the viewing performances of soap operas amongst disabled

and non-disabled audiences, Wilde (2010) found that the issue of representation was not just a matter of 'negative' stereotypes. Her analysis of the interactions between media texts and viewers suggested that issues of diversity and multi-dimensionality were of far greater significance in the forging of emotional attachments to portrayals of disabled people. Viewers did not make simple identifications on the basis of disability, or indeed, by gender, class, ethnicity or sexuality. Few, if any, engaged with soap opera depictions of disabled characters, due to narrative inequalities. Rather, participants engaged more with characters who reflected recognisable aspects of themselves, particularly as changeable personalities, adapting to a fluctuating range of circumstances.

2.2: Media Representations of Disability Sport

It has long been understood that the media has the power to shape the representation of social issues and to influence the understanding that publics have of the world (Howe 2008a: 35; Ellis 2008). DePauw (1997: 424) offers a useful three-tiered typology to help explain the low profile of disability within sport, stating that disabled people might have (a) been largely invisible or excluded from sport (invisibility of disability in sport), (b) become visible in sport as disabled athletes (visibility of disability in sport) and, (c) increasingly become visible in sport as athletes (the '(in)Visibility of disAbility in sport'). DePauw (1997: 425) defines the '(in)Visibility of disAbility' in sport as a situation whereby disabled athletes are "visible in sport as athletes or a time when an athlete's disability is no longer visible." As Purdue and Howe (2012: 193) suggest, the resultant invisibility of disability might, at first, seem positive but, to do so, they advocate, could result in a barrier developing between disabled athletes deemed "worthy" of the name "elite athlete" and other disabled people who do not regularly engage in physical exercise. Furthermore, the Paralympic community could itself become fractured, the authors go on to argue, as a divide emerges between those with less severe disability who might gain acceptance as examples of "elite athletic performance", and others who would not fit the model.

As we suggested earlier in this report, the Paralympics is often regarded as inferior to the Olympics (Fitzgerald 2012; Thomas & Smith 2003; Gilbert & Schantz; Ellis 2008), as sport has historically been a place where physicality is admired (DePauw 1997: 423; Fitzgerald 2012: 249) and the symbolic representation of the "strong, well-formed, non-disabled, masculine body" continues to dominate as the perceived epitome of elite sporting prowess (Hughes 2009: 400). This has led the media to typically frame the performances of elite disabled athletes in ways that may reinforce certain stereotypes of disability. In particular, the emphasis placed upon the therapeutic qualities of Paralympic sports by journalists during the 2004 Paralympic Games in Athens, suggestive of a belief that the Paralympics was less serious than the Olympics (Howe 2008a) or, alternatively, representations of Paralympic athletes as possessing extraordinary and heroic qualities; the so-called "inspirational supercrip" athlete, identified in the sports sociology literature, which serves to glorify "special achievements" (Gold & Gold 2007; Hardin & Hardin 2004; Darcy 2003). Such portrayals are regarded by many as "patronising" (for example, Brittain 2009; 2010), due to their inspirational stories of overcoming the odds through courage, dedication and hard work which, it is claimed, foster unrealistic expectations about what disabled people can or should be able to achieve (Duncan 2001; Hockenberry 1995; Shapiro 1993; Wendell 1996).

According to critics, the supercrip mystique encourages the public to adopt "self-made wo/man" and "blaming-the-victim" ideologies (Ryan 1971) that work against progressive social change (Smart 2001). However, research with disabled people has found mixed support for the supercrip critique. Qualitative research with wheelchair athletes has illustrated an awareness of the supercrip in media coverage, but varied acceptance of the assumptions embedded within the term (Berger 2008). Other research found that some disabled people identified with Olympians and Paralympians in whom they saw achievement and social connectedness personified (Gaskina, Andersen & Morris 2010). It is important to note again here that whilst debates surrounding disability sports continue, many elite athletes are not necessarily preoccupied with their place in the disability movement (Huang & Brittain 2006; Thomas & Smith 2003). Their identities may not be substantially invested in positioning themselves in the vanguard of disability rights, and in their day-to-day lives they may not think much about oppositional disability consciousness (Berger 2008; Deal 2003; Galvin 2003; Watson 2002).

The complexities of the Paralympics classification system is not often discussed in the media reports of the Games, leaving audiences with little meaningful understanding of Paralympic sport (Howe 2008b). There can also be a tendency to downplay disability and difference. Instead, we might find the media embracing of a “hierarchy of acceptability”, placing emphasis upon those representations of disability considered to be most ‘normal’ or least ‘different’ or ‘unpalatable’; focusing on wheelchair users and individuals who have acquired disability following an accident or illness, rather than on athletes with cerebral palsy, for example (Hodges, Jackson & Scullion 2014a; Bush, Silk, Porter & Howe 2013; Ellis 2008; Thomas & Smith 2003; Schell & Duncan 1999). Furthermore, whilst news stories focused on non-disabled elite sport might highlight both positive and negative attributes associated with sports and the sporting personalities who practice them, Howe (2008a) suggests that Paralympic sports are “not yet ready to embrace the old adage that ‘any publicity is good publicity’.” As such, Howe proposes, greater control is placed upon journalists “to present positive coverage within the limited Paralympic spotlight” (p. 148). As Howe (2008a: 139) maintains, by allegedly leveraging a certain amount of control over how coverage of the Paralympic Games is presented, the International Paralympic Committee (the IPC) might not be able to “provide the public with an understanding of the distinctive culture of the sport that is closely tied to the process of classification. This means that the public gain little knowledge about the relationship between impairment and the practice of sport.”

Summarising Howe’s (2008a) argument, the media has framed Paralympic sport as a (sub) culture, with established boundaries, but seldom does coverage explore what makes it culturally distinctive. There is some evidence to suggest that in the UK, Paralympic events can be reported in ways that are broadly consistent with sports reporting more generally (Thomas & Smith 2003). In the process of emphasising what is perceived as the sporting achievements of elite disabled athletes, however, such events can often be juxtaposed with those of non-disabled athletes, which may inadvertently reinforce “what might be considered as a stereotypical perception of disability and a preoccupation with able-bodiedness” (Thomas & Smith 2003: 180). In other words, disability sports still struggle to gain acceptance in their own right.

There exists a palpable tension for broadcasters in terms of balancing their framing of disability, and disability sports, in particular. The social appraisal of a disabled individual and that of an elite athlete within the same body at the same time is regarded as contradictory and incompatible (Purdue & Howe 2012). Purdue and Howe (Ibid.) attempted to explain this by way of the concept of the Paralympic paradox i.e. the fundamental need for non-disabled audiences to be able to identify a Paralympian as possessing some form of disability to perceive of them as a credible and justified member of a disability sport competition, whilst, consequently, the more a Paralympian’s disability is de-emphasised (the desired reception of a non-disabled audience), the more disabled audiences may become further alienated from, and fail to identify with, disability sport. Purdue and Howe (Op Cit: 199 - drawing on Bourdieu 1977, 1984) argue that it is possible for the same Paralympic Games to be perceived to possess different purposes at the same time, as individuals who have different “habitus”, occupy different vantage points from which they interpret and make sense of the Paralympic Games and society more broadly. If the media attention is focussed upon disability, then it may be patronising Paralympians as well as disabled audiences. If the focus is placed on athletes, then it may be difficult for some audiences to follow, thus leaving prejudice, at least overtly, unchallenged.

2.3: Audience Responses to Representations of Disability and Attitudes towards Disability Sport

“Never before have an Olympic Games and Paralympic Games been more integrated in their delivery from the outset. Our vision is to use the power of the Games to inspire change: in people’s lives, in attitudes to disability issues and in the way sporting events are delivered” Sebastian Coe (LOCOG 2007).

As discussed above, historically, sport has been designed to showcase physical perfection (Brittain 2004: 438). Coakley (2004) notes that the “performance ethic” of competitive sport, in particular, has incorporated a particular set of symbolic meanings associated with what it means to be an “athlete” such as striving for distinction, playing through pain, and refusing to accept limits in the pursuit of excellence. As a consequence, Fitzgerald (2012: 249) argues, the differential value offered to disability sports by the perceptions that ‘Paralympic sports are “easy” to play’ and a lack of media coverage of Paralympic or disability sports confirms the lack of familiarity and perceived low status of the sports. What members of the public know and, consequently, how they

talk about disability largely echoes 'restrictive medicalised conceptions' of disability (Op Cit.: 253) or what Smith and Thomas (2005: 53) have defined as the "awww factor", wherein sporting achievement is trivialised and pity and human interest emphasised.

According to quantitative research commissioned by the London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games and Paralympic Games prior to the build-up to the 2012 Games (LOCOG 2008), the UK public was open to the aims of the Paralympic movement: almost all agreed (93%) that disability sport required as much skill as non-disability sport; 93% saw Paralympic athletes as good role models for young people; and 69% said that there should be more media coverage of Paralympic sport. 85% believed that Paralympic athletes were as professional as non-disabled athletes. In contrast, whilst 94% of the UK public had heard of the Paralympic Games, 69% of respondents could not name a single Paralympian. Such findings suggest that, whilst there was considerable goodwill towards the Paralympics prior to London 2012, levels of interest and understanding remained low. Further qualitative research with young people (MORI 2008) appeared to confirm this, with conscious engagement with the Games low at that point, coupled with poor understanding of the Paralympics. This was typified by a common assumption based on the word "Paralympics" itself, that Paralympians are "paralysed" as opposed to encompassing a broader range of disabilities. Once explained to them, the young people found the Paralympics motivating and emotionally engaging. Nonetheless, it must be remembered that this was an expression of abstract ideals not necessarily translated into actual experiences.

2.4: Synopsis of the Literature

Prior to the 2012 Paralympic Games, both disability and disability sports had a near-invisible status exacerbated by the relatively low levels of participation in sport by disabled people. This might be conceptualised as a kind of vicious circle made more complicated given that one specifically identified benefit of disability sport is that it serves as an important vehicle for social and cultural inclusion. The lack of direct experience many disabled people are thought to have of participating in sport, coupled with an insufficient level of familiarity with disabled athletes, is set within the context of the marginalisation of both disability sports and sportspeople within the media, and the persistent marginalisation of disabled people within society (Hahn 1984). The research consulted prior to the 2012 Paralympics on public attitudes towards disability and disability sports, revealed a series of disparate, fragmented and often contradictory views.

Media representations were largely considered negative due to their rarity and because the characters used were often simply stereotypes. Coverage of disability sporting events may emphasise the perceived distance between 'elite' Paralympic athletes and the realities of life for many disabled people (Weed & Dowse 2009; Thomas & Smith 2003). Despite much dissatisfaction with dominant representations of disability within the media and popular culture, there is continued disagreement as to what the major problems of representation are, and what would comprise a 'good' portrayal of disability.

A core dilemma or tension has been identified - focus placed upon disability may be perceived as patronising, whilst emphasis placed on athleticism may be difficult for some audiences to follow, therefore, perpetuating existing prejudice. Caution should be taken in making any assumptions about how media coverage is received and made sense of by audiences. A trajectory of media effects research has told us that the same image or message can be interpreted and assimilated in varying ways by different members of an audience, as will become clear as we move on to discuss the key findings from our empirical research.



3.0: Method

This study sought to understand the varied ways in which people's reactions to representations of disability and disability sports on television are embedded within, and shaped largely through, lived experience (Wardle, Boyce & Baron 2009) which, for scholars such as Susan Wendell (2001), offers a more nuanced understanding of disability, by exploring the interrelationships between language, experience and the physical, mediated and virtual worlds. Such an approach is significant as, "[k]nowing more about how people experience, live with, and think about [disability] could contribute to an appreciation of disability as a valuable difference from the medical norms of body and mind" (Op Cit: 22).

We conducted a total of 140 in-depth, unstructured interviews in the Newcastle area, the Bournemouth area, and in London, in order to collect personal stories about actual experiences. The interviews took place at four stages over a two year period - in the lead up to, during, and immediately after the Paralympic Games, in order to capture a range of different stories. Over half of all participants were interviewed at least twice and each interview lasted, on average, one hour and ten minutes. Participants were recruited to ensure we spoke to people with and without personal and direct experience of disability. In all cases, participants had watched at least some of the Games. Our sample comprised the following:

1. People with direct experience of disability (disabled people; those with close family members or friends who were disabled; carers).
2. Sports enthusiasts (as indicated by active participation, and/or club/association membership).
3. Armchair fans who showed an interest in watching sporting events but didn't participate directly in sport themselves.

Based on our review of the literature, the following research questions were defined to underpin our study:

- How did participants talk about disability within the context of their daily lives?
- How did participants engage with televised representations of disability, and disability sport, in particular, and what meanings did they associate with such engagement?
- How did participants experience the Paralympics and how did they make sense of that experience?
- What impact did the Paralympics have upon participants' attitudes towards disability and disability sports?



4.0: Analysis and Interpretation

To respect participants' anonymity, all names that appear in the following discussion have been changed. The varied ways in which participants made sense of, and engaged with, the Paralympics was shaped by and through personal experience. All of the participants we interviewed had direct and readily accessible experiences of the London 2012 Paralympics to draw upon. They had watched the Games on television; or, at least, relevant news coverage. Some had also been spectators at a live Paralympics event. Each of the accounts we listened to communicated very clear tensions between issues of distance, distancing and 'difference' (Fitzgerald 2012; Fitzgerald & Stride 2012; Hughes 2012), and knowing how to talk about disability. In this context, six core themes emerged from our data: *Disability on TV as a 'good thing'*; *Unexpected emotional engagement of the (mostly) sporting occasion*; *Changes in 'seeing' - from 'disability' and 'difference' to 'just sport'*; *Sport but not 'proper' sport*; *'Normalcy', 'dis/ability' and 'discomfort' in everyday language and interaction*; and *Social spaces and scepticism – views on the 'Paralympic legacy'*. We will analyse each of these themes in turn.

4.1. Disability on TV as a 'Good Thing'

The empirical research began in early 2011, 18 months prior to the London Paralympic Games held in September 2012. The interviews carried out during the lead-up to the Paralympics explored participants' television viewing habits and, in particular, the types of programmes they chose to regularly engage with and why. This was an important way to begin to understand participants' awareness of, and engagement with, disability within the context of their everyday media consumption habits.

Overall, participants were interested in television programmes concerning topics that resonated with their own experience, reflecting earlier findings from Sancho (2003). However, a theme not given sufficient attention within Sancho's analysis is that of audience curiosity regarding issues of disability and difference. Several participants expressed a keen interest in "Reality TV" and human-interest documentaries, which, as some suggested, helped them to 'learn new things'. Many of these programmes focused on issues associated with health and disability; including those with such sensational titles as: "Born to be Different", "Body Shocks: 'The Real Elephant Man'" and "Katie: My Beautiful Friends." For one participant, 'Carol', these programmes were entertaining because she was 'nosy', and because she found them 'fascinating' and 'different'. Whilst, for some, these programmes helped to 'broaden their horizons'; for others, it was almost the voyeurism of being able to gaze at 'unusual others' that made them interesting. The 'extremes' in disability presented on screen were in contrast to the situation of many of the athletes who participated in the Paralympics who, as one participant remarked, experienced more 'usual' disabilities (such as being in a wheelchair) and who, as another commented, didn't seem 'to have a lot wrong with them'. As 'Max' who had direct experience of disability himself suggested, such perceptions were not surprising as people were naturally 'curious' and 'tended to think in extremes' when it came to disability.

One of the most consistently communicated views amongst those we interviewed was that the inclusion of disabled people on television was considered worthy. Again, echoing the findings from existing studies (e.g. Sancho 2003; LOCOG 2008; MORI 2008). There was a widely shared perception that programming in general did not include sufficient coverage of disability and that it was morally 'right' for there to be more. This discourse seemed to reflect the belief that disabled people might be ignored, rejected or treated unfairly in society. This common sentiment was best expressed by 'Mick', a recent retiree from Newcastle, who was registered as disabled following spinal surgery:

'I'm totally at ease with the disabled. I do appreciate their problems. [They] don't get enough coverage on television; in fact, they don't get enough facilities for them in local leisure centres and the likes. They seem to be classed as they're a lower class of being to be honest. They're a forgotten species because they're in a wheelchair or they're disabled to some degree. And it's totally wrong. They're just... You used to have the same sort of problem with racial prejudice but I think you've got more of a disability prejudice really now than what you have racial in this country now... When people are out in chairs they tend to be ignored. And I don't know what it is, why people will not talk to somebody in a wheelchair. Why they talk to the people who are pushing them around or with them while they're talking about that person... I don't know if people are frightened of the disabled in the wheelchair or amputees or whatever. But they don't treat them the way they treat able-bodied people. And you don't see enough disabled people on television. The only time you really see them is when the Paralympics come on or if there's a charity event where there's a load of people in wheelchairs doing something to raise awareness but they're just... They're just missing from life on television.'

Other respondents also believed that disabled people were under-represented and shared the view that the inclusion of more disabled people on television would be enlightening to most for whom disability simply did not feature in their everyday lives. Indeed, few of our participants could name a disabled actor, Paralympian, or soap opera character. This suggested a clear paradox prior to the Paralympics - wide use of a political discourse of inclusion i.e. that there should be more disabled people on TV and they have a right to be treated equally, in stark contrast with little interest or enthusiasm in watching such dedicated programming. This 'moral narrative' seemed to be used by those who had no particular opinion or very little direct experience of disability. At times, discussions of disability sport took on a rather patronising tone, as

some suggested that disabled people deserved the opportunities offered and that they had every right to be 'out in society'. This sentiment of 'it' being a 'good thing' was, in effect, being used in the place of any meaningful engagement with disability.

In line with existing research that suggests the media tends to distance disability and disabled people by perpetuating existing stereotypes (Berger 2008; Black & Pretes 2007; Sancho 2003; Barnes 1992; Cumberbatch & Negrine 1992), several participants argued that disabled people were deliberately highlighted on television and made to 'look obvious'. 'Marcus', a participant who had watched some of the late-night dramas with disabled actors upon returning home from a night out, thought that it was often because such programmes were 'low budget'. Ultimately, this served to 'distance' disability programming and disabled actors were overshadowed by mainstream broadcasting (Wilde 2004). A commonly held view was that a cultural change would be needed for people to become more accepting of difference and for disabled people to no longer be marginalised on television. The views of others who had 'stumbled across' television programmes about disability sports suggested that representations of disabled athletes were always focused on the same types of emotions i.e. stories of triumph over adversity (Gold & Gold 2007; Hardin 2004; Darcy 2003), 'something that will make us reflect upon how lucky we are', and these emotions were echoed in the ways that participants communicated their own understandings and experiences of disability. In the future, 'Max' suggested, perhaps disability would not be made to be as 'obvious' on television. As the public became increasingly used to disabled people being incorporated into mainstream programmes, he explained, it would seem more 'normal' and less of an 'event'. Looking forward, it was generally agreed that documentaries which drew on Sancho's (2003: 10) trigger of *matching*, to reflect the everyday experiences of people with a diverse range of disabled people, would be one way to show audiences that disability did not affect only a 'small part of the population'.

In our post-Paralympics interviews, almost all of the participants we spoke to had something to say about the television coverage of the Paralympics and the Olympics with little prompting. Overall, attitudes towards the coverage were positive. The ‘Superhuman’ advertising campaign used by Channel 4, in particular, was described as; ‘brilliant’, ‘modern’, ‘upbeat’ and ‘shocking’, creating an exciting build-up to the Games. Two of our interviewees talked about how much they ‘loved’ the associations with the ‘X-Men’ and becoming ‘bionic’ that they had so often ‘dreamed about’. The broadcaster’s decision to employ disabled presenters was also commended; though as one participant wryly observed, ‘they would have missed a trick if they hadn’t’.

Sensitivity to the political dimension of broadcasting the Olympic and Paralympic Games was also clear in several of the participants’ stories. For instance, there was some surprise and dismay that the Paralympics were not broadcast by the BBC – a decision that was seen to segregate and relegate the importance of the Paralympics to a ‘nothing’ channel. Since Channel 4 was considered not to be a ‘prime channel’, there was a general feeling, as one participant put it, that ‘something as apparently big as the Paralympics should have been broadcast on the BBC’, which seemed to reinforce a perception of the Games as being of minor sporting status (Fitzgerald 2012):

‘I didn’t watch the opening or closing ceremonies but I didn’t feel perhaps they weren’t given as much of the spotlight. The other major thing was, that I just felt that- for the Olympics; BBC1 had it on from morning ‘til evening. And I don’t know why I felt that the Paralympics had been pushed to Channel 4...I mean it’s not usually a channel that I would turn to...maybe it’s just me but I think it being on Channel 4, it seemed to get downgraded.’

Many participants agreed that Channel 4 ‘did a good job’ with their coverage, though sometimes this was qualified by ‘considering’ such issues as, the smaller budget, lack of sporting ‘pedigree’ and range of sports presenters, the fewer channels and multimedia services offered, etc. Other participants, though only some of those with direct experience of disability, thought that separating the coverage of the Paralympics from that of the Olympics allowed for the Games to be properly ‘showcased’ and provided what another participant described as, ‘the best coverage I’ve ever seen’. Importantly here, our participant used other Paralympic Games as his ‘yard-stick’ to make his judgement.

In summary then, participants expressed a generally progressive desire (Sancho 2003) to see disability portrayed more authentically on television. Those who identified most strongly with a progressive orientation decried the more extreme representations of disability as ‘unusual’ or ‘hard’, which suggested that disability was somehow ‘bad’. As the name suggests, however, the *progressives* are most often early adopters of changing attitudes and behaviours (Sancho 2003); a more profound social transformation would be needed in order for disability to become fully integrated into the everyday experiences of the wider public. There is an obvious tension here between the suggestion from participants that documentaries on disability should reflect the broad range of everyday experiences of disability, and their enjoyment of documentaries given such sensational titles as “The Undatables”. Despite the Paralympics not being broadcast by one of the two main players in UK TV broadcasting, overall, attitudes towards Channel 4’s coverage were positive. The disabled presenters and the ‘Superhuman’ advertising campaign, in particular, were praised by both disabled and non-disabled spectators.

4.2 Unexpected Emotional Engagement with the (mostly) Sporting Occasion

Prior to the 2012 Games, whilst there was considerable goodwill towards the Paralympics, with few exceptions, disability sport was not integral to participants’ lives and did not form a part of their identity, unlike other sports. In the build-up to the championships, participants had few stories to suggest that watching disability sports was as inherent a part of their lives. Whilst several references were made to sporting championships such as World Cup football as a source of solidarity and national pride - a ‘typically British thing’, disability sports and the Paralympics, in particular, were rarely referred to in this way. Furthermore, as other studies have found (EFDS 2013), the names of few Paralympic athletes were top of mind. Those who could recall the names of some of the athletes, and who had little or no direct experience of disability themselves, believed they were able to identify with Paralympians in whom they saw achievement personified (Gaskina, Anderson & Morris 2010), some were able to ‘match’ (Sancho 2003) those athletes’ experiences with their own experiences as sportspeople. Sports fanatic, ‘Brian’, who found the social aspect of sport subsidiary to the sense of achievement it offered, didn’t perceive a difference between non-disabled and disability sport, as both were fundamentally about achievement and competition:

'I love sport and if I'm gonna do sport...I don't wanna...I don't see what's the point in doing it if you don't want to achieve, you know. Otherwise, well, why bother? In my opinion, you know? I mean, lots of people do sport for lots of different reasons, I know some people who do sport as just a social thing, which is good, but for me that's not what sport's about. It does give you the social bit and it does give you those sorts of things, but it's like the by-product if you like. For me, sport's all about competition, getting fit, being healthy, you know, for me, that's what it's all about.'

He later added,

'I love to see people achieving. I know what goes into it, to get there [...] I just love sport, you know, so, for me, I don't care whether it's Paralympics, I don't care whether it's normal Olympics, I don't care if it's just a local club down the park...'

In the interviews that took place **during and immediately following the Paralympics**, participants did not necessarily try to distance disability sport from other sporting experience; some believed that disability sport should and could take on an important social and cultural role in fostering inclusion (Schleien, Fahnstock, Green & Rynders 1990; Devine & Wilhite 2000) and encouraging the country to unite behind a common feeling / experience. Prior to the Paralympics, many of those we talked to associated disability primarily with injury and war. Stories such as 'Melvin's', suggested that recent armed conflict and military events had made disability a fact of life. When 'Melvin' saw disabled sportspeople on television he felt a 'sense of pride for humanity'. He thought that he had subconsciously started watching the Paralympics once it began getting greater publicity as a consequence of the Army's activities overseas. People saw what the injured soldiers could achieve, he said, and that captured their imagination.

As previous studies have found (Ellis 2008 amongst others), 'amazement' and 'admiration' at Paralympians' triumphs over adversity remained the clearest and most confident narrative with which to understand and articulate experiences of the Paralympics. Such a narrative is clearly articulated here by 'Jane', whose mother and sister had both lost legs at a young age:

'They [the Paralympic athletes] must have twice the determination that an able-bodied person does. [It makes me feel] quite proud in a way. I think we've got a good Paralympic team. They've got the funding...I think that's a good use of taxpayers' money... You're proud to think of anybody overcoming a disability. I mean overcoming it and accepting it is bad enough, but then to use it... perhaps that's the wrong word...to use that to accomplish something. They must have very strong minds, you know... to go out there it must take a lot out of them as well. If they've only got half a body, for example...It's quite humbling for able-bodied people.'

Both disabled and non-disabled audiences described positive responses to watching the 2012 Games. For most, this was more than simply a superficial statement of encouragement, it also served to support the moral position previously identified that disability sport 'deserved' to get more coverage and recognition. Through their stories, there was a sense that viewers seemed surprised by just how emotive and thrilling the Paralympics was. Several sports enthusiasts made references to a metaphor of addiction, describing how they became 'hooked', 'caught up in it' and 'swept along' when viewing the television coverage. This bares similarity to the findings of previous studies about watching sport that, once engaged, the unfolding of the event grips the spectator (Thomas & Smith, 2003). 'Mary', a participant who identified as having no prior interest in sport or experience of disability, summed it up as 'the more you watched, the more you wanted to watch'.

The Paralympic Games were described both by the media and by interviewees as being as emotionally engaging as the Olympics. One participant explained how he had been 'trembling' with excitement, whilst others described how they felt shocked, surprised and even 'flabbergasted' at the abilities of the Paralympians and their 'sheer determination'. For several, watching the Paralympics was a very moving and inspiring experience, which was articulated by 'armchair enthusiast', 'Keith':

'[There] were...things that fascinated me, absolutely, yes. Many emotions combined in one, to be honest. Admiration. Unbelievability at times, thinking "How can they do that?" Almost being in tears at times when you saw. Especially if they either won an event or lost an event and were showing emotion themselves, either the joy at winning or the sheer disappointment of losing. Or even being disqualified, as some of them were. The empathy that I was feeling towards them - There was a guy who was disqualified from the cycling...he just fell on the track and began crying...It was feelings like that that just make

you as a spectator, or made me as a spectator, just choke myself really. It was feeling for them... [It was] emotionally overwhelming and awe-inspiring I'd say, is how it's left me. Awe inspired, that's how it's left me, yes. Optimistic about human life I think really, yes. I think that would be... I mean I know they sound very high and noble words, but certainly that's how it affected me. Yes, it left me thinking better of people than I had previously.'

Stories seemed to focus on the apparent impossibility of the achievements of Paralympic athletes, respondents described how they thought they 'couldn't do it', and so their discussions with colleagues at work, or with friends at the gym, rehearsed safer 'supercrip' discourses of 'amazement' and 'admiration'. In this way, perhaps, some of the people we spoke to recognised their own low level of knowledge and empathy with disability sport and sensed its political sensitivity, avoiding more critical commentary in everyday contexts.

The feeling that the Paralympics was even more 'impressive' and 'inspirational' than the Olympics, because of a general low awareness of 'everyday challenges' disabled people face, was frequently expressed. This appeared to be a comfortable discourse, a safe way to talk publicly about the Paralympics without having to delve too deeply into the nature of disability itself. This was also apparent for several of those participants who self-identified as disabled. For example, 'Martin', who had restricted mobility following a stroke, explained his admiration for the Paralympians despite some initial scepticism:

'I think it's amazing actually how these guys and girls have actually come so far with their sports. I was pretty gobsmacked actually. Yes, I'm disabled, but I use my right hand. I used to swim a lot but I'm not really so well balanced up. I don't think I could manage it now. The thing is, again, there are things you wouldn't even think about [like swimming]. I'd have to have somebody with me to help me get changed, and get dressed afterwards, and dry my back, and then lead me through the wet area, which I would find a bit tricky. [...] I was looking at the Olympics, because that's a thing that we've all seen before really. But the Paralympics I was a little bit sceptical about. But I thought, "No, it's going to be good. I should watch it and see what these guys can achieve." But when you see the sort of people who are actually in there...I was quite surprised at how well they do. When you see these guys with their springy sort of...What's his name, Oscar... [Pistorius]? It's just here's a guy who has actually overcome a lot of adversity to achieve what he's achieved. [And] That little girl, she's a dwarf, [sic] the swimmer, Ellie...

[Simmonds]. I think she's amazing actually. It's the spirit, the heart.'

Many participants were surprised by their emotional reactions to viewing; several said they cried at times, both with joy (when the swimmer Ellie Simmons won gold, for example) and when empathising with athletes' disappointment (such as Paralympic cyclist, Jody Cundy's, disqualification). Others admitted that they found the Paralympics 'awkward to watch' but were so impressed with the achievements that they felt 'ashamed about their own whingeing'. Supporting Ross' (2001: 426) earlier findings, for some spectators, 'exaggerated praise' and surprise at their enjoyment and emotional engagement was linked to their astonishment at the high standard of sport on display and the skill of the athletes, suggesting that they had previously held a belief (not openly discussed) that the Paralympics would be less competitive.

For some of the sports enthusiasts with little or no direct experience of disability, the emotional experience of watching the Paralympics was likened to supporting their beloved football or rugby team. One participant, for example, described feeling the same 'buzz, like watching Newcastle play', whilst another believed both the Olympic and Paralympic 5000m races were 'better than any football game [he'd] been to'. This unexpected (re)valuation of the Paralympics suggested that, despite vaguely positive sentiments expressed in earlier interviews during the build-up to the Games, there was an implicit assumption that the Paralympics would not be 'up to the same standards' as the 'proper' Olympics. Comments that, overall, the standard was 'higher than expected', whilst meant as a positive statement, allowed the Paralympics to be viewed primarily as a sporting spectacle, and may have inadvertently allowed for the disability message, central to the London 2012 Candidate File (2007) to be more easily overlooked.

4.3 Changes in 'Seeing' - from 'Disability' and 'Difference' to 'Just Sport'

"Disability is the negative social reaction to [impairment]" (Sherry 2008: 21 cited in Ellis 2008: 25). In their stories of emotional engagement with the Paralympics, several participants described a shift from, at first, expecting to see 'only' the disabilities, to primarily seeing not just ability, but elite sporting excellence. When first watching the Paralympics, several interviewees talked about seeing different 'types' of disabled people, of their back stories, and of the various forms of technology involved – all potentially eclipsing the Paralympics as primarily a sporting event. Twenty-one year old 'Steve', exemplified what Mitchell and Snyder (2001: 10) refer to as a 'fascination with spectacles of difference', describing how his initial reaction was to 'look to see what's wrong with them'. Others explained how curiosity was part of the appeal of the viewing experience; they were 'fascinated' by the stories of the athletes and wanted to know the precise details of each Paralympian's disability and how that came to be. For 'Magdala', who when we first met her had limited direct experience of disability other than through her work as a trainee teacher, these stories helped her to 'empathise' with the Paralympians, others felt it aided their understanding of the fairly complicated classification system. Though wheelchair basketball player 'Paul' chastised his girlfriend for her 'morbid fascination' with athletes' disabilities, other disabled spectators like 'Caitlin' felt that the short films and pre-Paralympic documentaries were informative, enabling them to respond confidently to their children or grandchildren's questions.

After a short period of time, several participants described how this intrigue with individuals' disabilities receded into the background and any differences in spectating disability and non-disability sport began to dissolve. For sports enthusiast 'Steve', who won tickets to one night of the Paralympic Games, increasing familiarity with the 'visual shock' of disabled sport engendered a change in affective experience; this change in 'seeing' involved a shift away from sympathy and pity, to the same thrill of watching any other competitive sport and associated feelings of patriotism or pleasure:

'When you first get there, I went with my family, and me and my mum were saying, you sort of look at them and think 'what's wrong with them, what disability have they got?' and then after that you don't think about it. When they're running or doing whatever in their wheelchairs, you don't think about it. It just becomes another athlete, if

that makes sense. It's not like you're looking at them going 'oh he's got no leg, I hope he does well', d 'you know what I mean? It's like, it's like you don't care what they've got, you just want the fastest one to win. It's like watching Usain Bolt running; you just want Bolt to break the world record. It's the same in that; you want the fastest person to win or the English person to win.'

Several interviewees considered this shift from the Paralympics as primarily defined by disability to regarding it as 'just sport' to be a good thing. The athletes were no longer to be classed as 'disabled people' and associated with pity and vulnerability, but, instead, 'elite athletes' with associations of world-class skill, ruthless determination, strength and 'winning gold for GB'! As we have discussed elsewhere, (Hodges, Jackson & Scullion, 2014a) the "binary normal/abnormal opposition is often central to the structure of discourses of disability" (Wardle, Boyce & Baron 2009: 14), yet some participants communicated a sense of amazement and delight when, during conversations with friends, a Paralympian's disability was no longer the focal point of the discussion. 'Lionel', who has cerebral palsy, noticed that his friends talked about athletes without using the disability 'label', explaining that 'they saw the ability first not the disability and they were just cheering them on'. 'Jenny' told a similar story:

'I mean one of my friends isn't really sports mad or anything like that but I mean, it is nice that she wasn't talking about the man who hasn't got a leg. She was talking about that man who does this but doesn't have a leg. So suddenly it's not about what's wrong with him, it's about what he can do. We're not talking about them [Paralympians] as in 'oh they haven't got this' or 'they haven't got that'. We're talking about them as a person, as opposed to what's wrong with them. Sport has brought that sort of thing together.'

This reframing of disabled people as top athletes or, in a few cases, celebrity sportspeople, also seemed to reduce a certain sense of discomfort when viewing, as increased exposure made disability more 'normal' by being less prominent. Whilst armchair enthusiast 'Mick' described the Paralympians as 'beautiful to watch', 'Imra', in his fifties, with what might be defined as 'traditionalist' (Sancho 2003) views, repeatedly told us in interviews that he found coverage of disability sport 'horrifying' due to his fear that the disabled athletes would be injured. 'Imra' explains:

'I have a problem; when people get injured, I feel it in me. So when I saw those people with all legs and all this, it is kind of traumatising me, for whatever reason. If I see somebody injured, I feel their pain more than – as much

as they probably would. So when I see them without a leg, or a limb, or some- I just, you know. It affects me differ- so I can't enjoy the thing, as I'm watching. That's my problem... Because some of those guys run with these new things on them. So yes, and I was thinking "Isn't it hurting them more?" Probably not, but it's just me... I liked the athletics in [the Paralympics], as well. But it's a bit harrowing for me to watch it, just in the case they fall, you know. Like, normal people with all their limbs, they can – these guys when they fall it would be like a crab without claws, kind of thing. That's one of my biggest fears, of watching them when they do things. They'll hurt themselves and then it becomes a bigger issue than they started off with.'

Derek, who might also be considered as adopting a 'traditionalist' (Sancho 2003) way of thinking, explained that he did not like watching disabled people on television because it made him feel 'sick',

'I like to help them, but when I want to help them. I don't want to be subjected to it... it makes me physically ill.'

As Woodward (1991 cited in Wardle, Boyce & Baron 2009: 17) has argued elsewhere, referring to particular media images or television programmes as 'unwatchable' can be bound up with a reluctance or refusal on the part of an individual to accept one's own mortality and vulnerability (also Ellis 2008). Furthermore, as Hughes (1999: 171) asserts:

"[p]erhaps there is some awkwardness and discomfort in watching athletes with some obvious disability perform. They pose the issue of otherness, reminding the sporting public that not all elite athletes have ideal physiques and attractive body shapes."

What was interesting in the case of 'Imra', however, was that rather than completely 'blocking' the Paralympics and refusing to engage with the coverage entirely, he took an almost strategic approach to gradually familiarise himself with disability; watching the 'extraordinary' coverage in 'small chunks' and taking a break if he found it getting 'too intense'.

The relative emotional comfort of this shift from seeing 'disabled people', to seeing 'elite athletes' appeared in stories from other participants. 'Mary', who had little interest in sport and no direct experience of disability, was extremely positive about the Paralympics but explained that she had been troubled by the players' eye masks:

'The only thing I wasn't terribly keen on was the blind football. I was a little bit- because I didn't like the um, the eye masks that they were wearing. I thought they looked like bandages, and I thought that was a bit [wincing]...I don't know. I think they could've done something else for that. Perhaps had Union Jacks round their heads or something. That was the only thing I wasn't mad on.'

For 'Mary', it appeared, since the eye masks 'looked like bandages' they reminded her too much of injury and illness and such associations made viewing unpleasant. The eye masks prompted her to see the players as weak and helpless. Disability had been framed in a way as to trigger pity from her, rather than allowing her to appreciate the athletes' elite sporting skill. By designing eye patches like a Union Jack, she thought, the symbol of vulnerability might have been appropriated in a way that, instead, emphasised patriotism and collective pride.

4.4 Sport but not 'Proper' Sport

When disability is understood as making simple everyday tasks difficult and tiring, the therapeutic and rehabilitative effects of sport are often emphasised (Purdue & Howe 2012), and world-class sporting achievements only add to the 'admiration' felt by non-disabled and disabled viewers alike. As we have argued elsewhere (Hodges, Jackson & Scullion 2014a), whilst 'super human' athletic qualities are attributed to all sportspeople regardless of (dis)ability, it is within the context of the Paralympics that the concept of 'the elite athlete' is, perhaps, most pronounced (Ellis 2008; DePauw 1997; Schell & Duncan 1999). The following account from 'Steve', a semi-professional footballer, reflects this. 'Steve' offered this description of the 'awe' and 'respect' he held for the dedication and skill of disabled athletes:

'I find it incredible that blind people play football, I mean not just blind people, people in wheelchairs play football and they're actually good at football, I mean they can play football, and I find that incredible. I was actually talking about this last night with one of my friends and it is incredible. I find that, I've got so much time for that, I find it incredible how they do that. I think it's a massive achievement for them... I did see some amazing thing on YouTube the other day, this guy who- a samba dancer on one leg. I can show you, it's brilliant!'

This sporting focus is, for many, deemed a more appropriate and desirable form of sporting spectatorship (Purdue & Howe 2012). 'Mick', offered both a sporting and an explicit corporeal focus, as Paralympians' achievements and physicality were made central to his narrative (Purdue & Howe 2012: 201-202). 'Mick' commented enthusiastically:

'I love watching the racing, whether its 60 metre sprints or ... they go like hell, I don't know where they get their muscles from ... them arms to pump the wheels the way they do! Basically I just like to see them go fast. They do a Paralympics marathon too, as well, don't they? The shape of some of the wheelchairs they've got now, especially the racing ones ... with the elongated front, they getting more streamlined. They're great to watch, I admire them. The fellow, he's just lost his first race since competing on these artificial false leg sprint things – I think he's remarkable. I don't know if he does gain an unfair advantage or not ... But I do admire him. His willpower ... as a double amputee ... the basketball, they're very manoeuvrable ... they're very clever ... the way they keep their balance ... I've always watched the Paralympics. They're just as exciting and competitive [as the Olympics]... the spirit to get out and compete. It's probably a stronger ambition than what it is in able-bodied people.'

Sport was found to be of the greatest salience as an experience for bonding, social interaction and maintaining relationships (Schleien, Fahnstock, Green & Rynders 1990), through both active participation in sport, and as a live or armchair spectator. London 2012 provided an opportunity for family, friends and work associates to interact around and unite behind a common interest. Champion athletes and sports personalities served as icons salient in the creation of a sense of belonging to a larger community of 'fans', and were regarded by many as significant ambassadors of their sport, as well as the particular communities with whom they identified, and who identified with them.

However, not all participants were entirely positive in their response to the Paralympic Games and the related coverage on television. Indeed, reflecting arguments presented in existing literature (for example, Fitzgerald 2012, Gilbert & Schantz 2008; Thomas & Smith 2003, amongst others), in many narratives there was an underlying sentiment that the Paralympics were 'the second rate games'; an afterthought to, and overshadowed by, the incomparable spectacle of 'real' or the 'proper', Olympic Games. The names of sporting heroes from the Olympics, such as Jessica Ennis and Mo Farah, were easily recalled whereas far fewer

Paralympians' names were as readily accessible, tending to be vaguely referred to in terms that foregrounded their disability such as 'the little swimmer' (Ellie Simmons) or 'the one with the blades' (Oscar Pistorius). Some of the interviewees easily rationalised their lack of engagement with the Paralympics. For example, sports enthusiast 'Cassandra' told us how she watched 'all' of the Olympics but 'probably about an hour' of the Paralympic coverage because of work commitments. Others, such as those with children, explained that the start of the new school year meant they watched less of the Paralympics; another narrative evident was that that 'people' were 'exhausted after being glued to the Olympics'. This sentiment was recognised by many of the so-termed 'armchair enthusiasts', who commented that the Paralympics were widely considered to be 'not as established', 'not as celebrated as the Olympics' and 'left 'til last' again echoing findings from other studies (e.g. Fitzgerald, 2012). Indeed, the fact that the Paralympic Games was broadcast by Channel 4 and not by the BBC reinforced the view for many that the Paralympics were of secondary importance, and not really on a par with other 'national occasions'.

In addition to the comparative 'downgrading' of the Paralympics when compared with the Olympics, several interviewees and particularly those interested in sport but without much direct experience of disability, did not consider disability sport to be 'proper' sport. They considered many of the Paralympic sports to be insufficiently competitive, slower and less exciting. Though these sentiments were generally voiced by those without direct experience of disability, 'Paul', who is disabled and played wheelchair basketball competitively, also felt that some sports in the Paralympic Games were simply too low a level to be considered an elite sport and shouldn't be included. It seemed that, for these sport fans, sport was an almost sacred domain - understood to be about human physical perfection, exceptional skill and the limits of human ability; reflecting the earlier arguments presented by Brittain (2004), Fitzgerald (2012) Ellis (2008) and DePauw (1997). 'Proper sport', they believed, was fiercely competitive, even aggressive, and, as such, aspects of the Paralympic competition simply didn't live up to this definition. The sheer brutality of some of the sports included in the competition did, however, award them considerable credibility from some of the participants who, therefore, regarded them as 'serious'. The aggression and 'viciousness' of 'Murderball' (wheelchair rugby) and wheelchair basketball, for example, was mentioned as highly competitive and thus worthy of attention as 'real' sport. Similarly, the advances in technology were admired as they allowed Paralympians to improve their times, get closer to standards set in the Olympics and, therefore,

move closer to sports fans' implicit definitions of elite sport (Purdue & Howe 2012).

The Paralympics were regarded by a segment of the sample group to be masquerading as a world-class sporting event and, therefore, subject for ridicule. This view was expressed by 50-year-old 'Matthew' who likened the Paralympics to a 'child's football game' and felt, after watching some of the coverage, that the Games should not be televised:

'For me personally, I don't think it's a spectator sport, for the public, for the general public. I'm not a sports fanatic anyway so...I did watch some of it. It's amazing how they do it but it just hasn't got the appeal...and I also thought 'this shouldn't be on the telly'. It's a great thing, it's a fantastic thing, but I don't think it should be shown on the telly. I don't mean that in a horrible way. I mean, a lot of the stuff I watched and thought 'well that's just stupid', d'you know what I mean? [...] I know it sounds terrible, but I was thinking 'do we really need to see this?' D'you know what I mean?...The best way to describe it is going and filming a kid's football match and putting it on *'Match of the Day'*. It's football, but it's not football like the Premiership. It's not good enough to be on telly. Some of it brought a tear to my eye...[but] the hammer-throwing and the javelin; I thought it was pathetic to be fair. I watched it four year ago; the only thing that's different [to then] is I thought 'this shouldn't be shown on telly'. I'm not trying to be harsh or... it's not a case of 'I don't wanna see that' it's a case of 'who would want to watch that?' I keep thinking, 'well no one really'. It's pathetic, you think 'that's stupid that'. For the people doing it, it's fantastic. Travelling all over the world to compete - brilliant! I would never ever stop it, but to me I think some of it, it's not worth televising. The swimming's not too bad...but I remember watching one race where there was somebody like two lengths behind like, and I'm thinking 'that's pointless'...The commentary was getting on me nerves, saying 'oh and it's great la-di-la-di-la' and I'm thinking 'it's not, it's crap'...As I say, it's not sport.'

Some of our participants were also critical of there being 'too many' Paralympic world records broken, raising doubts about the legitimacy of the events. Given that some of the sports included in the Paralympics were considered to demonstrate too low a standard of achievement to be classed as 'proper' sport, the wonder and spectacle expected of televised sport seemed to be missing. This echoes the findings from Fitzgerald's (2012) recent study into the ways in which the 20 non-disabled young people understood the Paralympic athletes and the disability sports they played. Indeed, some interviewees, such as 'Camille' who attended the Paralympic park as

a spectator, talked about the Paralympics in a way that positioned the athletes as victims of exploitation and suggested that the Paralympics was in some way 'cruel', 'pathetic' and in 'bad taste'. A minority of those we talked to shared a fundamental belief that, ultimately, disabled people were not capable of 'proper' elite sport. The following account from 'Sebastian' captures this when he attempts to differentiate between 'sport' and 'their sport':

'I wouldn't really say I had any emotions [when watching the Paralympics]...just a bit of intrigue, erm, and if it was entertaining, like good sports then I'd feel inclined to keep it on. Because if it wasn't interesting in the first minute, it would just be...because it is like the top of their sport but it isn't like the top of sport, if you know what I mean? Erm, and therefore I'd be less...less inclined to be bothered about watching it.'

As he reflected upon the Paralympics, 'Sebastian' also referred to the diversity of sports included within the Games as 'random'. He told us he preferred to watch the 'main' i.e. more familiar and established, sports. This view was echoed in the responses from other participants who similarly described some of the sports as 'very abstract' meaning it was 'very easy to drift away' when watching the Paralympic coverage.

Experiences of confusion and ambiguity seemed to exacerbate the view that the Paralympics Games was not 'proper' sport. Many participants were confused by the classification system used to ensure a level playing field for the Paralympic events. At times, some sports enthusiasts seemed to regard the use of the classification system with suspicion, wondering why some Paralympians were competing together. The lack of engagement in discussion of classification within media coverage of the Paralympics can leave readers with little understanding about Paralympic sport (Howe, 2008a: 135). For example, 'Sebastian' described how he would watch a race and think 'what's wrong with you, you're running normally?' Others commented that they felt some athletes seemed an odd mismatch in the sport they had chosen to partake in and this perceived incongruence produced discomfort. Paralympic swimming events, in particular, seemed to be thought of in this way. Since swimming, they believed, required two arms and two legs; for some, there was an implicit belief that athletes without all four limbs were unable to swim 'properly'. This led one participant to openly question why these athletes hadn't chosen another sport. In this way, some of the Paralympic events were experienced as 'not making sense' and conflicted with participants' understanding of what could / should be defined as sport.

4.5 'Normalcy', 'Dis/ability' and 'Discomfort' in Everyday Language and Interaction

Participants shared general feelings of inadequacy in talking about both disability and disability sports. These feelings were based on a perceived sense of distance and discomfort about how to 'do' such talk, as well as difficulty in making sense of what was to be defined as 'disability' and what was considered 'normal'. Whilst talking about dis/ability within the context of sport was something most participants could attempt, even if it was not based on actual experience, recalling personal examples of disability was more challenging. It was clear that, for many, disability remained what one of our participants referred to as a 'bit of a taboo-type subject.'

When talking about Paralympians, 'Brian', who actively engaged in sport himself, did not find it easy to articulate his thoughts and, instead, his language was restricted:

'...people who...through...no fault of their own have ended up in up in a situation which in a lot of circumstances makes them...pfff...I don't want to say deprived or anything like that, coz it's not like that, but they're in a situation which puts them in a difficult place shall we say, erm...'

Several interviewees talked about disability in the 'third person', in order to distance disability from the 'self', and their words echoed a broader social context of fear and denial and a culture of political correctness. In general, those without direct personal experience of disability, the 'voice *between*', communicated a sense of 'pity' for others who did. Disability still carried taboos that were hard to break by talking about them; in part, because there was no clearly acceptable language. Interviewees struggled to find a comfortable way to talk about some of the issues relating to disability and disability sports. Indeed, respondents with direct experience of disability encountered difficulty here. In describing their experiences, participants were anxious to use the 'correct' language and many, at times, struggled. The majority of participants appeared worried about saying the 'wrong' thing and were quick to qualify any comments they made (as was previously found in the study undertaken by Wardle, Boyce & Baron 2009). For example, one of our interviewees, 'Brian', shared a story about someone he knew who played top-class hockey with only one arm. This same person was also a number 2 or 3 European disabled golfer for his age-group,

'My God, you know, if the guy had two arms what would he be like? You know, and it's funny coz, in a way, if he had

two arms he may not have been as good, I don't know, you know [...] and I find it fascinating and interesting, and I don't mean that in a discriminatory sort of way. I mean that in a positive sort of way, you know.'

Several of those we talked to seemed to be aware of their own lack of familiarity with disability and were uncomfortable discussing it, with some noticing when they inadvertently invoked a narrative of 'us and them' and 'normal' as opposed to 'disabled' (Brittain 2004; Despouy 1991). In explaining the moral and apparent educational worth of representations of disability on television, 'Dan', a police community support officer, who was involved in disability sport coaching, struggled to avoid reiterating a narrative that positioned 'us as normal' and disabled people as *like*, but not the same as, 'us':

'On television, the one that springs to mind is the one in "Coronation Street" in a wheelchair...It's part of the show, sorta thing. It's good that they've got them in...I know it sounds terrible the way I said that – '*them* in', instead of saying '*her* in'...I think it's good they have them in the programmes. I think it's good for disabled people. Everybody's like, if they're in a wheelchair, people are sort of frightened of them, they'll go 'I'm not gonna go near him or her'. Where if you see them in everyday life on the television, it shows that they're just normal people, with a disability, there's nothing frightening, big, scary about it, do you know what I mean? Her in "Coronation Street", she's got a boyfriend, and she goes to the pub it's a normal life, the only difference is she's in a wheelchair... she works in a factory so she's got a job, she goes out and has a drink just like a normal person would.'

In this way, 'Dan' began by drawing upon a dominant narrative about disabled people that often positions disability as a central, defining feature in their life (Sancho, 2003).

The term 'normal' was problematic for most as they struggled to find descriptive terms which did not juxtapose experiences of disability with those of being 'normal'. Some referred to disabled people as being 'unlucky' and communicated a 'respect' for Paralympic athletes 'trying to have a normal life'. One of our participants, 'Carol', endeavoured to make sense of 'difference' and 'normal' when talking about a television programme she couldn't remember the name of, which involved someone 'pretty' and someone else with a disability. She said that when the person with the disability started speaking, he/she just became 'normal'. If she met this person in real life, 'Carol' explained, she would think 'good for them,' as they didn't hide away from everyone and, instead, just got on with life.

The fear of 'being patronising' was reflected in the way that participants explained both theirs and others' actions towards disabled people. It was also evident in the way they described their experiences and the tone used by some to explain disability. 'Adam', for example, pointed out that a lot of people become over sensitive about the issue of disability. As he saw it, people could become almost 'patronising' in asking a disabled person whether they needed assistance. Yet he went on to suggest, almost patronisingly himself, that he and his friends were very 'inviting' so 'wouldn't mind hanging out' with disabled people. 'Steve', another young participant in his early twenties, used phrases such as 'we take him out', 'we'll take him out for lunch' rather than 'we go out with him', when referring to socialising with a member of his group who was disabled, as though they were doing a good deed. When talking about how she had seen groups of disabled people coming out of the theatre in Bournemouth, student 'Daisy' paused to find the right words. She used an unintentionally patronising tone when describing this:

'you see them often on the beach front on their trips out in the summer which I think is really, really sweet, and it melts my heart a little bit.'

This act of distancing was also apparent with some participants who had experience of disability or who were themselves disabled. 'Rose', a care-worker for disabled people in London, described how she imagined, and attempted to empathise with, the everyday struggles faced by disabled people and how distant the disability experience was from her own life, including the achievements of disabled athletes:

'I am trying to understand the challenges [disabled people] go through...because when you look at - and

the obstacles they go through. Like for instance, take for instance this young man and his Siamese twins. You see – you can't even put, start thinking to put yourself into their situation whereby every day in life. Every day coping. You have got the social issues there you know how human beings are. The reaction to them. Sometimes I tend to take that really in my spirit and I just ask myself "How do they feel inside?" You know? Being rejected in the society. Struggling so hard even just to do simple things. You know? Sometimes I think the world is so unfair. So it's just that, trying to understand their life and the challenges they meet. But obviously I couldn't ever understand it because I am not in that position.'

In the case of those like 'Magdala', however, an example of the emerging generation of '*transformers*' (Sancho 2003) who offered a 'voice *for*' disability and did not regard disability as determining an individual's identity, both the Paralympics and the increasing visibility of disability within the media and popular culture, was associated with a feeling of 'hope' and that disability was now just 'a part of life.' Yet, even when talking about the Paralympics as a voice for change, an underlying tone of 'difference' (i.e. 'I' / 'Them') remained in her account:

'I think that's what the Paralympics makes you feel like. It's feels like, do you know what? I'm not perfect. I haven't, I'm not, you know, but I've still got the opportunity.'

As has been suggested, the media can play a significant role in negotiations and performances of identity (Hodges, Jackson & Scullion 2014b). Stories of (dis)engagement with the Paralympics brought to the fore some of the tensions between discourses of "normality" and "disability" and feelings of discomfort, as well as a lack of any clear 'authentic' voice for disability (ibid). As one of our participants, 'Max', explained, the word 'disabled' was 'very, very broad'. He did not feel disabled, even though he was on paper. He did not regard disability as part of his personal identity. These feelings were echoed by others who chose to distance their 'self' from disability as an identity.

'Martin', who became disabled following a stroke, explained his admiration for the Paralympians despite some initial scepticism,

'... I think it's amazing actually how these guys and girls have actually come so far with their sports. I was pretty gobsmacked actually [...]

...the Paralympics I was a little bit sceptical about. But I thought, "No, it's going to be good. I should watch it and see what these guys can achieve." But when you see

the sort of people who are actually in there...I was quite surprised at how well they do.'

In the run up to the Games, 'Martin' communicated a very real fear that the Paralympics would make things worse for him, encouraging people to patronise and pity him and others in his situation. As Brittain and Green (2012: 247) argue, disability acquired suddenly can have a "huge psychological and social impact upon any individual [...], as their newly defined role as a person with a disability brings with it a variety of possible impacts." Those of Martin's generation had grown up in a society in which the prevailing perception of disabled people was that of "useless" and "worthless" individuals (Ibid). As Hargreaves (2000, cited in Brittain & Green 2012: 248) argues, when continuously confronted with negative media images of disability contrasted with those of 'physical perfection' that most of the general public could not live up to, it is, perhaps, understandable that many people who have acquired disability might consciously or unconsciously not identify with the disabled experience and regard it as 'other' (Ellis 2008 & Cameron date unknown, are also useful here).

Furthermore, as a retired health professional himself, 'Martin' had previously performed a clearly defined role of 'expert' in diagnosing and treating others. Not surprisingly, then, his narrative reflected the Medical Model of disability as he found himself now doing 'the eternal triangle': having been a student, a teacher and now a patient.

We heard further stories from individuals with direct personal experience who deliberately chose to distance themselves from programmes that 'reminded them of their disability.' 'Caitlin', who generally used two crutches to walk about, and a wheelchair for moving greater distances, sometimes found it difficult to identify with programmes relating to disability and disabled sports,

'I don't know whether it is because I haven't made the transgression (sic) from being a disabled person, or an able bodied person. I am caught in a trap, I am both. Do you know what I mean? I am not confined to a wheelchair, and I don't have to do just disabled things, you know? It is a – for although I am in a wheelchair, I am kind of like, when I dream, I am walking around. If you know what I mean, I am there.'

Even if disability issues and disability sports were to be given greater exposure on television, not all participants (disabled or non-disabled) would tune in.

'Cybil', one of our participants who self-identified as disabled, believed that a lot of the discrimination and hate crime against disabled people came from younger people. Whilst 'Magdala', who communicated some strongly 'progressive' (Sancho 2003) attitudes towards disability, suggested it was 'us adults that are more judgemental'. The significance of direct personal experience and self-reflection in transforming attitudes towards disability comes into the fore in the account that follows, as 'Magdala' shared the story of an experience about five years ago in which she identified her younger self as once being part of this group of judgemental 'others':

'I was on the train [...] about five/six years ago. And there was a man on the train and he was with his wife and they were sitting down nicely and then he was acting really weird. And I was young and naïve and I was like "Mum why is that man so drunk? Like, why would he drink so much and not control himself?" And he started having a fit but he was having an epileptic fit and I didn't know anything about epilepsy [...]'

[...] I thought that [his wife] was crying because he was having, he was an alcoholic and was being like aggressive. But she was crying because he was having a fit on the train and obviously she's probably used to the fact that he's epileptic but she couldn't handle the fact it was on the train.

And then she'd be ringing somebody and when I heard her say "His epilepsy has started." I kind of thought "Oh my god I'm such a bitch." I can't believe I was judging him. I'll always remember that day.'

Although she had always, in some way, tried to empathise with disabled people, the summer of 2012 provided an important turning point in transforming 'Magdala's 'awareness' of disability. The Paralympic Games and the time that she spent travelling with a close friend who worked with children with learning disabilities, had taught her much more about it. Talking to her friend about disability and seeing what she referred to as, 'profoundly disabled people' when out in nightclubs in Budapest, made her more consciously aware and made disability somehow seem more 'normal'. 'Magdala' added,

'when you're at school, they don't teach you about inclusiveness, that there are going to be disabled people, gay people, so a lot of people don't get exposed to that. There's not enough of it. The only way you become knowledgeable about something until you become exposed to it.'

Adam, a sports enthusiast who had recently finished school, shared a similar experience:

'I don't really know that many people with disability, but there's one man at work who was in a motorbike accident and at first when I went there I felt really awkward because he's in a wheelchair now, he can't drive, he lost all feeling from his legs down. He lived across the road from us before he had the accident...And I felt really awkward, I didn't know what to say to him, but he's made me more relaxed around, 'cause he said it's nothing to do with me, I've just got to act normal and it's fine for him, that he can do whatever he does and if he's got a problem he'll ask for [help].'

Both 'Magdala' and 'Adam's' stories offer an 'observer's' account of such moments when difference is recognised and reflected upon. As Koppers (2009) suggests, these moments might happen in the doctors' surgery, in the supermarket, or in staring encounters in the street, and are characterised as those in which difference, in its many varied forms, becomes experiential and felt. 'Magdala' suggested that, as she had grown older and had more exposure to disability through her work, she was able to reflect on her earlier attitudes and undergo a sense of personal transformation in the way she thought about, performed, and engaged with dis/ability.

There were further glimpses of those with personal or professional experience of disability or social marginalisation able to draw on this to empathise and connect with others. 'Cybil', for example, was a disability activist who felt very strongly that she had been let down by the NHS and now wanted to give something back to others like her. She believed that her experiences enabled her to empathise with others in her work for a local disability support charity. 'Max' also believed that his experiences of arthritis had allowed him to connect with the young children he looked after as a volunteer at a local playgroup for disabled children. He tried to encourage the children, commenting:

'I don't know what they're going through but I understand... [pause] their struggles... because I've had, not similar struggles, not to the same degree, but I understand that aspect of where they're coming from.'

Finding an appropriate language to talk about, and interact with, disability was a persistent concern for many participants. The Paralympics tended to be compared to 'the normal Olympics' or 'proper Olympics' though use of these terms did not always go unrecognised by the interviewee; with one participant actively correcting

himself, 'not normal, that's the wrong word, able-bodied'. Conversations about the Olympics were frequent and easy in the workplace or with friends but the Paralympics remained a more difficult subject to discuss when socialising. Of the few participants to watch the late night comedy review of the Paralympics broadcast on Channel 4, "The Last Leg", feedback was mostly positive; 'Marian', who self-identified as disabled, described the show as 'the best part of both Games because it was so irreverent', and 'Marcus' claimed that it helped him talk more confidently about disability, addressing questions he was too afraid to ask. However, those with little direct experience of disability expressed their continuing sense of unease about offending a disabled person when interacting in everyday, public situations - perpetuating the binary oppositions of 'us' and 'them'. Whilst many participants lauded Paralympians for their achievements, the language of sporting success remained insufficient to deal with talking about wider issues of disability.

4.6 Social Spaces and Scepticism – Views on the 'Paralympic Legacy'

Many of our participants were aware of the social agenda associated with the Paralympics i.e. the hope that positive attitudes towards disability sport would reduce much of the discrimination faced by disabled people in everyday life. Whilst hardly anyone we interviewed admitted to having experienced any change in attitude themselves - claiming that they had 'always' had very positive attitudes to disability, for instance; it was apparent that several of those we interviewed with direct experience of disability had experienced *some* change in the way strangers interacted with them in public spaces. Additionally, several non-disabled participants with little previous experience of disability sport suggested they were more interested in, and knowledgeable about, disability after watching the Paralympic Games. However, it was clear that some of the disabled people we spoke to were sceptical of what they perceived to be a momentary 'buzz' surrounding disability; one that would quickly fizzle out once people woke up to the realities of the costs associated with bringing about any real and lasting change. Several of those we interviewed who self-identified as disabled recognised a gulf between their own struggles to live within the constraints imposed by wider social structures and related infrastructures (such as access to facilities and transportation) and the financially-supported achievements of elite Paralympians; a disconnect they worried would largely go unnoticed by the general public. Several participants also side-stepped their own lack of engagement with the Paralympics by suggesting that the

Games were 'probably' more interesting and inspirational to disabled people, whilst one likened the Paralympics to the Royal Wedding, a 'one off event' that would be enjoyed at the time but that soon after 'nobody cares'.

The London 2012 Paralympics was thought to be successful in shifting short-term perceptions surrounding disability. Disabled participants 'Len', 'Jenny', 'Lionel' and 'Marian' each told us stories of changes in the way people approached and interacted with them since the Paralympics. Thirty-four year old 'Len', who uses a wheelchair, was enthusiastic about the Paralympic coverage within the context of what he explained had been previously unhelpful, impatient and negative reactions he had experienced whilst using public transport around London. During the Paralympics, 'Len' believed he had detected a change:

'There was like a two-week or something period when it was very positive to be disabled. It wasn't a negative. You could feel the buzz, people talking, and the way people approached me in the street that I've seen before, sometimes it felt like they were approaching me in a more interested way. Suddenly they realised it's not a scary thing to talk to me. A lot of people, young and old, they see you and they want to walk the other way or they cross the road and you can feel the fear, because that's what it is. They've never interacted with you or maybe never interacted with anybody with a disability before. And the fear is so overwhelming, it's really sad. So suddenly people are embracing you and are more interested in you and they're OK, and you think 'so have they been watching the Paralympics?' You know, 'cause suddenly you see a difference in them. 'Cause it's educated them.'

Participants also considered the media had a role to play in promoting inclusivity and some highlighted the influence of Paralympic sporting personalities thus echoing Sancho's (2003) suggestions for improving acceptance of disability through the use of 'celebrity' and 'likeability' triggers. However, the stories we heard were supported by findings from a report published shortly after the Paralympics (EFDS 2013: 88), which suggested that although some people, particularly parents, might regard Paralympians as good role models to promote sport, the majority of disabled people were unlikely to personally identify with a successful disabled athlete. Furthermore, the sentiment expressed by some of whom we talked to that the excitement surrounding the celebrity status of a small number of Paralympic athletes did not mean that attitudes towards disabled people had fundamentally changed, was reflected in a comment later shared by 'Len' who suggested that Paralympians were 'chauffeured

everywhere' and didn't have to suffer the prejudice and aggression that he had to experience travelling around London. For others like 'Marian', the potential transformation from admiration for Paralympians to less discriminatory attitudes towards 'regular disabled people' was also less straightforward. 'Marian' worked tirelessly with disability charities and 'really got into' the Paralympics as a sporting event, despite some initial scepticism, as she loved sport. However, she became increasingly frustrated by the monumental gulf she perceived between the support garnered for the Paralympics and the social obstacles that she and the disabled people she mentored had to deal with every day. 'Marian' was irritated by the hypocrisy of a government that was restricting and cutting disability benefits whilst spending money 'the country doesn't have' on elite athletics. In this way, she saw the Paralympics as distant from the everyday lives of disabled people.

The change in 'seeing' that was discussed as a theme above, seemed to be experienced as a double-edged sword for several of the disabled people we spoke to. Because many watched the Paralympics in ways that framed disabled athletes as both 'elite' and 'sportspeople', disability as the defining feature of the viewing experience slipped into the background. Some disabled people, therefore, saw the Paralympics as largely irrelevant within the broader context of the social issues that affected them. The shift away from a narrative of sympathy or pity, which might, on the face of it, be perceived as positive, produced some expressions of over-zealous felicitation by non-disabled strangers when disabled people were 'simply living' their everyday lives. Whilst 'Marian' had observed a more communicative attitude amongst the general public, she described how the carry-over of a narrative of admiration might be experienced as inappropriate and intensely patronising:

'The general public might view us differently. I've been approached more in the last month than I ever have in my life, people have been asking me things like, just generally, 'oh that's a nice wheelchair' something like that. Yeah! It was an old man the other day in the garden centre. And then somebody else comes up and says 'I think it's marvellous', he tapped me on the shoulder, 'I think you're marvellous', you know, 'Do ya?'. I mean, I'd only come to buy some plants! What's bloody marvellous about that?'

Furthermore, 'Len' echoed the arguments presented in previous studies (Duncan 2001; Hockenberry 1995; Shapiro 1993; Wendell 1996) when communicating his concern that the admiring, and somewhat stereotypical, narrative of 'triumph over adversity' could backfire if non-disabled people came to hold unrealistic expectations of disabled people, and fail to see that the gap between disabled people and Paralympians was as wide as that between Olympians and everyone else:

'Truthfully, one of my friends, and this is quite sad, she said to me 'oh so now we've achieved so much in the Paralympics everyone's gonna look at the everyday disabled person and be "why don't you bloody do it?"' And I'm like yeah I can see what you're saying but it wasn't about that. It wasn't about you know, like, putting the best kind of yourself in one place and then sort of like pointing your finger at the rest. We all are special, you know. We didn't all compete in any Olympic Games whether able-bodied or not. So it was about humans coming together, different cultures, different kinds of people and having a world celebration.'

Not everyone shared such cynicism, suspicion or caution, however. Wheelchair basketball player, 'Paul', explained that he was currently setting up a local team on the back of the interest and enthusiasm garnered during 'the big year':

'I have to be honest, we've put our heads together and we've all agreed, if you're going to do something, this is the year to do it in wheelchair basketball or wheelchair sport. We think, like you've just said, strike while the iron's hot. Because in a year's time, if we haven't set anything up, we might not even be here anymore.'



5.0: Participant Profiles: Five Participant ‘Stories’ Emerging Through the Duration of the Research Project

Critical analysis of the impact of the Paralympics upon how disability and disability sport was experienced and talked about comes alive when we immerse ourselves in the detailed ‘stories’ from our participants. In this section, we offer a glimpse into the life worlds of a small sample of the participants we spoke with during the almost two year longitudinal study. We have tried to articulate the role of, and meanings attributed to, disability and disability sport over this period within the rich context of participants’ everyday lives. Again, all names have been changed here to protect the anonymity of those who shared their experiences with us.

5.1: ‘Magdala’: Opening Her Eyes to a Broader Perspective on what ‘Disability’ Means

When we first met her, Magdala was a trainee teacher in her early twenties living in North London with her mother and one of her three brothers. She was bubbly and articulate, with a keen interest in the world around her. Her weekend routine typically comprised meeting friends for coffee or dinner or going clubbing. She used to be a member of a gym but quit as she found it ‘depressing’; she now had her basic fitness equipment (cross-trainer etc.) at home. Magdala confessed that she was not a fan of sport as she didn’t like the competitive element to it. She found it ‘quite stressful’. This stemmed from her youth when her elder brothers made every game a sport and took the fun out of it. Her real passion was travelling and, when we first met her, she was learning Spanish. Magdala planned to spend a couple of months in Spain improving her Spanish before travelling to South America to experience a ‘complete change of culture’. Magdala was not a fan of backpacking, however, as she didn’t like the ‘instability’. Instead, she would prefer to live in another country, like Colombia, for a year.

TV habits

Magdala watched some TV but was not overly interested in it – probably because she had so many other things going on in her life. When she did tune in, it was usually to watch ‘trashy TV’ such as, “The Hills”, “Glee”, “Gossip Girl”, “Geordie Shore” and soap operas. Magdala referred to this as ‘feel good TV’ that was entertaining and helped her to switch off. She might also watch some documentary programmes because of their value to her teaching activities. She always tried to watch lifestyle programmes such as “Embarrassing Bodies” and “Supersize Vs Superskinny” but watched these mostly online in her room either on her own or with her boyfriend. In the living room she sometimes watched films with her Mum.

Limited experiences of disability

During her teacher training, Magdala worked in a variety of challenging school environments, which she described as being more like ‘social work’ than teaching. One of the schools was in a deprived area of London. Several of the children had behavioural issues, and a few of the children were disabled. In another school, she had a student in her class with cerebral palsy. Magdala’s early engagement with the Paralympics and interest in disability, therefore, was what one might expect from a teacher – she regarded both as issues that formed a significant part of the learning experience of young children, and she could see the value and importance of her pupils engaging with such issues. Despite communicating an enthusiasm for events such as the World Cup and Olympics because of the sense of occasion they brought, Magdala did not appear initially to engage personally with the Paralympics. In early interviews, she seemed unaware of what the Paralympics consisted of, enquiring what ‘types’ of disability were included in the Games.

Learning about disability and disability sport

The second time we met Magdala she had recently been affected by temporary disability herself following an injury - a piece of glass cut through one of the tendons in her arm. The accident left her unable to use her arm for three months and this meant she could not complete her teaching training placement. Magdala explained how she learned to do things differently and just 'got on with it'. In later interviews, unashamed of the scar on her wrist, she remembered that the injury, and her experiences of a lack of mobility, in part influenced her perceptions of disability. Magdala tended to associate disability primarily with injury and war, with the missing limbs of athletes a common theme during our discussions of the Paralympics.

A year later in June 2012, there had been some changes in Magdala's circumstances. She no longer enjoyed teaching as much as she had anticipated and she didn't believe she was passionate enough to continue. Instead, she wanted to do a Master's degree. She planned to visit Morocco the following week and to go inter-railing around Europe during the summer. Magdala would, therefore, miss the Olympics; however given the 'hell' she thought there would be in London, she was quite glad she would be missing it. By this stage, Magdala had not seen any of the Paralympics-related programmes on Channel 4, but she was looking forward to the Games because they would be more interesting to watch than the Olympics. Her interest in the Paralympics was more a 'fascination', almost a learning experience, finding out about the people, their disabilities and 'how the fake limbs are attached'; 'is it painful when they run?'

Following the Paralympics, Magdala commented that the opening ceremony was both shocking and emotional, with people from around the world 'no matter what state they are in [...] grouped together because they are athletes, but mainly because they are disabled.' Although she had always empathised with disabled people, summer 2012 was important in raising Magdala's 'awareness' of disability. The Paralympics and the time she spent travelling with her friend who worked with children with learning disabilities, had taught her more about it. Talking with her friend about disabilities and seeing 'profoundly disabled people' when out in nightclubs in Budapest, made her more aware and made disability seem more 'normal'. Magdala also felt that the Paralympics had led to disabled people being seen as less vulnerable and weak.

Magdala and a friend had been to watch some of the Paralympic events at the Olympic Park, which she found fun and inspiring. Both had injuries at the time, which they considered to be temporary disabilities (Magdala's severed tendon and her friend's broken leg). The realisation of seeing disabled people carry out such impressive feats made her think that maybe she should try more, saying 'we can do anything really.' Magdala described it as a very surreal experience, commenting that often it was hard to 'work out why people are in the Paralympics.' She suggested that, in many cases, the prosthetics were hardly visible and it led her to think about how they organised athletes into competitive categories.

Magdala watched the athletics at the stadium, but didn't watch much of the Games on TV. She was more interested in the documentaries before the event, to find out: 'Who are these people?' and why are they in the Paralympics? She was not particularly interested in the sport, but the competitors amazed her. Disability in sport was like an 'emotional rollercoaster', she said, as it was both 'quite sad' yet also 'quite uplifting' and it was the emotion that made the Paralympics 'much more touching' than just watching someone compete in the Olympics. The Paralympics, for Magdala, was 'less of a competition and more of a statement to raise awareness.' She said that she 'knows she *should* call it a competition but she sees it as more of an opportunity.' She found it hard to consider the Olympics and Paralympics as the same thing because they had been divided into two events reflected in the coverage and timings.

Magdala talked about her thoughts regarding cultural perceptions of disability. She commented that she found it 'amazing' to see people from third world countries in the Paralympics. Whilst the UK and US were much more 'politically correct', other countries such as India and China were less sensitive of disabilities and may even consider those with disabilities to be 'evil and not worthy.' She 'learnt' about this through reading and meeting different people from different cultures. She said she thought it was more of an achievement for the less supporting countries athletes to be there, against the odds. Magdala found the Paralympics more interesting than the Olympics as it was not just about winning, the event was more about showcasing success: 'look at me I'm alive, look what I've done. I can still move and compete in a competition with millions of people watching me.' For Magdala, the Paralympics were inspirational to everyone, regardless of disability: 'Reminding you to never give up, you can do what you like.' The key message she took from the summer of sport was

'how clever the human body is, and that you are always able to increase your fitness. And you are always able to try hard ... You can do anything ... Don't write off disabled people.'

That said, Magdala commented that, whilst she would watch the Paralympics again, she wouldn't go out of her way to keep up with the news.

Summary

Over the course of the 2 years, Magdala's engagement with the Paralympics changed from being largely apathetic (she didn't appear to engage personally with the Paralympics or sport more generally) to empathy and an attempt to 'bridge' experiences after having direct, albeit temporary, experience of disability herself when she severed a tendon in her arm. That injury, and the time she spent with limited mobility; in part, influenced her perceptions of disability, which she tended to associate (at a distance) primarily with injury and war. Her engagement with the Paralympic Games became more personal when she attended some of the events together with a friend. Magdala described this as something of an 'emotional rollercoaster' and reflected a narrative of 'admiration for achievement against the odds.'

5.2: Martin's Quest to Recover and Rediscover his Sense of 'Normality'

Martin is a 65-year-old retired health professional who lives in a large detached house in a leafy suburb with his wife. He had grown-up children and a grandson who lived a distance from him. Over 10 years ago he had a stroke that resulted in him having significant disability; Martin described the experience as follows:

'I didn't believe it actually, at the time. Right in the middle of it all starting I was painting a black line, round the house. And I couldn't paint into that corner there. Because I couldn't actually ... couldn't hold the brush with my left hand ... I tried to work out what's going on ... I ended up walking to the gate, looking around to see who was about, then I thought well I'll have to see what's going on so went through to the back yard to see if I could find a tennis ball to throw with my right hand, try to catch it with my left ... and I thought well, if I'm having a stroke ... but I'm too young to have a stroke ... So I came round, walked round to the back door ... walked down the corridor to the lounge. My wife's a chiropodist and she had a string of patients all sat outside her surgery. I thought I'll just go in the lounge, if I'm going to fall then I'll put myself in the floor in the recovery position. And that's how my wife

found me ... so my wife's going across to the kitchen to wash her hands between patients and she can see my legs on the floor and came in and said 'Whatever's the matter' ... by which time my face had dropped a bit, so I said 'I think I'm having a stroke. Call an ambulance' ... so they took me away ... and 4 months later I came back ... It took a while for it all to sink in really.'

Throughout the duration of the research study, we talked to Martin about this dramatic disruption to his life - and the subsequent slow recovery to get his life back to what it was like before his 'recovery' pervaded all else. Being a strong-willed individual it was an important part of his efforts to push and test himself. He needed to make these efforts and to talk about them, in order believe in his own narrative of 'gradual improvement'. As reflected in one such conversation:

'I decided to get as better from it as I can from my own resources, and that's how I have been...

- How has this been put into practice?

It's a bit tricky, some people would be mortified, but that's not my sort of way... You can't go back in time ... but actually the chiropractor asked me to come back to teach but the building couldn't be changed so I couldn't, I tried it, played around with it for a month but it didn't work out ... wasn't really a goer ... So it's a question of finding something I can now do that and I'm going to capitalise on my medical training of chiropractor and naturopath.'

Engagement with sport and TV

Prior to this 'disruption', Martin had an active career-oriented life where both issues of a medical kind and healthy living (along with sport) were important to him. Now he was very overtly a passive, reflective observer of issues related to his former profession. Sport had become far less resonant. Linked to this, he had changed from an occasional TV viewer to a meticulous planner and watcher of quite a lot of television. For example, he circled 'must watch' programmes, (he was programme, not channel loyal), he used *TiVo* to reduce missing programmes, and was a self-confessed 'news junkie'. Importantly though, he distinguished himself from people who watched 'any old stuff' on TV just to pass the time.

'I have to discipline myself now, I come in here in the morning read the papers stay in here to lunch time then go in there and have lunch and then watching the TV in the afternoon - not the daytime TV but stuff I have

recorded in the week ... I like the intellectual stuff ... well that's my excuse.'

Martin's television viewing was well coordinated and reflected his broader lifestyle now: well marshalled by himself. He particularly enjoyed watching medical shows especially where it allowed his previous occupation - as someone who diagnosed people's ailments - to be re-enacted. Such programmes became major conversational pieces with his wife. Until more recently, he tended to consciously stay clear of programmes about disability:

'... I guess it's an inverted snobbery probably; I try to live as normal a life as I possibly can you see ... But I might watch the Paralympics on Channel 4 ... since there seems to be a broad spectrum; with some there don't seem to be very much wrong with them.'

This is typical of Martin's attempts to avoid too much reflection on his past life in order to not feel disappointment, an emotion that might jeopardise his sense of progress and a self-perception as someone who was coping, not sinking. He repeatedly talked throughout the period of our conversations about a project to write 'e-books'. This was one of many tactics he employed so that he could focus on the 'what next' rather than 'what was' aspects of his life. Soon after returning from his extended stay in hospital, he joined a local club for people who had experienced a stroke, he did not stay long:

'You go to a club with other people, all with the same thing, and that's all they talk about; it's not for me, it gets boring and limiting.'

His quick rejection of the club was symbolic of his sense of self: a strong view that he had experienced an accident rather than become disabled; and his battle was an internal one, more than an external one. His priorities were to improve his own condition far more than to get others to view disability in a different way.

Coming to terms with disability

To better understand this tension he holds about disability itself, Martin talked about his prior experiences of disability as almost entirely made up of treating a few people with Multiple Sclerosis. He had a clearly defined role as somebody who looked from the outside at others' disability and used his professional expertise to help.

Not surprisingly then, his narrative reflected the Medical Model of disability and he now referred to himself as an 'encourager not a detractor':

'I've done the eternal triangle: been a student, a teacher and now I'm a patient there. I recall bumping into an ex-college friend who said "why don't you come to a session here?" so I did ... after the NHS got me to some semblance of normality – they could do so more but they don't so that's when I thought I need more (to continue the progress). So I get two free sessions a week free as an ex-member of staff.'

In talking about his sense of anticipation before the Olympics began, Martin thought of it as a possible vehicle for encouragement for people to self-improve. He very much looked forward to them as a one-off. A sense that it offered legitimacy to watch a lot of daytime TV to pass the time, without it feeling like he was giving in to being a 'typically restricted person with disabilities' emerged in our conversations. Here was an event that gave him permission to be a bit of a 'couch potato' without any negative consequences for his self-worth.

'The Olympics, well I sort of got into, watch a stream of things in the Olympics, the velodrome, rowing, sailing and the kayaking I thought was very good.'

Experiencing the Paralympics

Martin had not seen any of the Paralympics promotional shows televised immediately after the Channel 4 news (even though he regularly watched the C4 news broadcast). Indeed, he could not recall any other such programmes promoting the Paralympics. Talking about them made him say he might now 'keep an eye open for them' (he subsequently did not watch any). He went on to watch a lot of Olympics, seeing it as a huge national spectacle where he was able to enjoy the sheer occasion and variety on offer.

A highly pertinent experience for Martin whilst he was in hospital helped us to understand his broad approach to disability:

'I do not want to be seen as in need of special care or feeling sorry for.'

And this had directly and overtly influenced his anticipation of, and subsequent watching and making sense of the Paralympics. He talked about having very different kinds of anticipation as the Paralympics were about to start compared to his emotional reaction to the Olympics:

'I was mostly looking forward to the Olympics really, as they are the ones we know all about. I was sceptical about the Para's but thought I'd watch and see how they do - What do you mean by sceptical?

With my condition I sometimes lose a word so hold on a minute ... ah yes patronising that's the word. I thought it might be rather patronising ... due to my experiences really ... when I was in hospital a nurse came round and asked my wife if she wanted a cup of tea – she passed the tea over then asked my wife “does he take sugar?” I said “excuse me, how bloody rude, if you ask me I'll tell you” ... and that was in hospital you know ... And while I was being wheeled around we'd bump into friends and I'd notice they were talking to my wife, not me ... they'd say “how is he?” Ask me then I'd say! I was quite upset when she said “does he take sugar?” Cripes if it's like this in hospital what's it gonna be like outside?

Powerful fear that it would be patronising, seen as 'rubbish compared to the real Olympics', have no sense of spectacle, and so reinforce disability as full of victims, fed very real concerns that the Paralympics would actually make things worse for him, by encouraging people to pity him and others in his situation. BBC coverage of the Olympics, considered hugely impressive, fed into his anxiety about Channel 4 and the Paralympics.

Undoubtedly, Martin's prior experiences of Channel 4 played a role here too. He watched Channel 4 a lot for its alternative take on things, but its reputation fed his strong doubts about the Paralympics being covered only on that channel; concerns exacerbated by him not understanding why BBC did not cover both.

'The Channel 4 slant on the Paras was interesting and caught the imagination of the world I think ... when I first thought of the Paralympics I was looking out for the one legged arse kicking competition - amused me that - but it was amazing how far they had come in their sports. Gobsmacking really. ...Having said all that the paras did a power of good for people like me I think.

- Why do you say that?

Well when you see those guys with what do you call them, blades that Oscar person ... there's a guy who's overcome a lot of adversity to achieve what he's achieved ... then there's that little girl, Ellie - she's a dwarf - amazing really, showing such heart.'

Relief at the tone of coverage

Martin was hugely relieved that what he saw and read about Channel 4's coverage of the Paralympics exceeded all of these low expectations. Indeed, he thought it was very well covered by Channel 4. He went on to talk about starting to enjoy the actual sport too and was surprised at the high standard in some of the events; for example cycling and swimming. Nonetheless, the Olympics framed his experiences, as they do here:

'They had Claire Balding. She was pretty good and she was also in the actual Olympics too – nothing particularly leapt out at me than annoyed me about it – I thought that within what they can do they were very successful really (Channel 4) ... what I often do I didn't do this with Paras is record something and then sit down later and watch it and fast forward through the ads ...I did record certain things, can't recall, think I recorded the cycling, yes, but nothing from the Paralympics.'

As he began to recall his overall experiences of the Paralympics, some encouraging reflections emerged:

'I think it's actually made people sit up and notice ... psychologically on the rest of the people really who are not disabled, well I think, what do I mean ... I come up with all these wonderful phrases then I have to justify them don't I?! It's, well I think the attitude of many people do really appreciate what disability is but they have seen guys horrendously injured and they have become athletes again ... because its bound to cause some re-evaluation by significant parts of the population.'

The Olympics were still a 'bigger' experience for him in the sense that there was more to talk about, and it was a truly international event 'we' put on in style – a fondly held component of the nation's collective memory. However, the Paralympics ended up being a pleasant relief that reinforced and fitted well into his own view of disability: something to be challenged.

5.3: 'Mick's high hopes ... partially realised'

Mick is 60 and lives in the solidly working class suburb of Newcastle. He was born in the city, and has lived in the same area for most of his life. He was retired now, but was formerly a steelwork draughtsman in the shipyards, and more latterly a continental coach driver. He had a large family and many grandchildren. His mother was still alive. Family was obviously important to Mick, and caring for the elder members of his family had become an increasingly overwhelming part of his life during the course of the time we interviewed him. His grandson was heavily into gymnastics, and competed nationally and internationally. His instructors were confident that he would make the 2016 Olympic team; something Mick clearly took huge pride in (he mentioned it in every interview).

TV habits

Mick loved driving and watching films on TV. He used to enjoy DIY and gardening but this had become difficult due to arthritis, which has affected his mobility. He used to play rugby at school, but had not been involved much since playing sports. He enjoyed watching cricket and golf, and would happily watch these all day. Mick had always followed the Olympics: he remembered watching them from Rome 1960 onwards.

He didn't particularly enjoy Wimbledon or The World Cup – in the third interview he said that he hoped England didn't qualify (for the Euros) because he didn't like all the crowds shouting 'Engerlandddd' outside the pubs locally. In terms of football in general, he liked to support the local teams and hoped they would be successful but, on the whole, he was not that interested. He'd rather do DIY than watch the football, and his friends often joked about that.

Disability as a fact of life

Mick had direct experience of disability from a very young age. He described it as something very commonly experienced by his generation. Mick and his wife were both registered disabled:

'Basically because I had spinal surgery in 1998 which left me with quite a bit of nerve damage, especially down this leg. I've got fallen arches, lumps of arthritis on my big toes, coming out through all my joints and vertebrae now, which they put down to wear and tear from driving ... My uncle had lost an arm from below the elbow from the Second World War. So I grew up basically accustomed to a fellow with an artificial arm and hand. It was never a disability to him. The biggest laugh we'd get was when we'd go out

somewhere and he'd say "Do you want a hand with that? Here you are then" - give them the hand! He would laugh at his disability ... I had other family members who couldn't walk, or who were in accidents, or were wheelchair bound ... In my apprenticeship I saw people with accidents. Saw people who'd had Thalidomide ... I've seen people crushed and lose legs, and killed [in industrial accidents] ... on the shipyards.'

He commented that his own experience of disability had given him a better understanding of, rather than perspective on, the problems of disabled people:

'I look at my disability from the point-of-view of I have everything ... it's just a bit slower and more painful ... You know when you stand too close to a fire and you get a burning sensation? That's what the nerve damage does to my thighs ... I can relate to other people's difficulties ... I can relate more to the elderly when I see them on television ... the everyday difficulties of carrying shopping ... and keeping balance. When I see people doing these things on television I can sympathise with them fully because I know what they're going through.'

Experiences of Paralympics

It seemed this understanding greatly informed his approach to the Paralympics, which he had always tried to follow in the past. Mick believed that the physical challenges he had to face had enabled him to appreciate and admire the athletes' ability to push beyond their limitations, and what people expected of them, 'and that's how they become champions.' In his first interview, he expressed his awe and admiration of Paralympic athletes:

'I love watching the racing, whether its 60 metre sprints or ... they go like hell, I don't know where they get their muscles from ... them arms to pump the wheels the way they do! Basically I just like to see them go fast. They do a Paralympics marathon too, as well, don't they? The shape of some of the wheelchairs they've got now, especially the racing ones ... with the elongated front, they getting more streamlined. They're great to watch, I admire them. The fellow, he's just lost his first race since competing on these artificial false leg sprint things – I think he's remarkable. I don't know if he does gain an unfair advantage or not ... But I do admire him. His willpower ... as a double amputee ... the basketball, they're very manoeuvrable ... they're very clever ... the way they keep their balance ... I've always watched the Paralympics. They're just as exciting and competitive [as the Olympics]... the spirit to get out and compete. It's probably a stronger ambition than what it is in able-bodied people.'

Mick believed there weren't enough disabled people on television, apart from the Paralympics, the occasional charity marathons to raise awareness of disability, and the occasional participation of disabled people in quiz programmes such as *Deal or No Deal* (also broadcast on Channel 4). He had noticed that the Paralympics had received more coverage in recent years, which he thought was great.

No real attitude change in 2012. None needed

Upon experiencing the 2012 Paralympics, there was much continuity in the way that Mick talked about disability sports. 'Amazement', 'fascination', 'enjoyment', 'admiration' and 'exhilarating' were adjectives he frequently ascribed to the experience. Importantly, there was no real difference in the way he spoke about the Olympics and Paralympics: they were both elite sporting events to him. The Paralympics was not distanced in the same way as for some other participants. When asked directly, he did not confess to any attitudinal change in himself. However:

'It's opened my eyes to different classes of disability, I'd put it that way ... I didn't know there was all these different classifications until I saw it. I've watched the Paralympics in the past, but I'd never really taken any notice of how many times they break down things into classifications of disability. There were fifty odd different categories. I found it quite fascinating. I look forward to the next ones to be honest.'

Mick watched many of the Channel 4 short programmes leading up to Paralympics, and they seemed to leave an impression on him. He found them fascinating, particularly what he learned about the work many Paralympic athletes do with local communities. He remarked how they got 'bugger all' money for it. He contrasted this to footballers who do very little and get £150k a week. 'But then whoever said that life was fair? It isn't'.

Hopes of social progress

This feeling of injustice (which he seemed resigned to) links to broader perceptions of disability, which Mick had experienced throughout his life - from both sides. He thought often people didn't see a disabled person as a full person. He thought that often people went so far as to avoid looking at disabled people out of awkwardness and not knowing how to behave around them because they weren't used to it and did not perhaps know what was acceptable.

'I've also got friends who ... have been wheelchair-bound ... The most annoying thing I find about it is ... we used to go down and see my uncle. His wife before she died, 15 months ago, when she went out we used to have to take her everywhere in a wheelchair. The most annoying thing is that people don't talk to the person in the wheelchair, they talk about the person in the wheelchair to the person who's pushing the chair ... I find a lot of people are uncomfortable with the disabled.'

Mick hoped for progress in this area. Our fourth interview came soon after the Paralympics, so it was too early to tell, but he thought that the Paralympics would help with the ways that people generally perceived of disabled people, and would help educate those who (unlike him) hadn't grown up knowing anyone who was disabled. Nevertheless, a personal experience tainted this optimism. In the final interview, Mick told us how the combination of the Paralympics and his own family links to disability inspired him to find out what facilities existed at his local leisure centre for the disabled: pitifully few.

'But I was amazed that you cannot go to a sports leisure centre and have an area where they have wheelchair netball or anything, or basketball. They have absolutely no facilities generally for the disabled.'

Mick wanted to see a society where disabled people were nurtured in what they *are* good at and what they *can* do. Mick saw the Paralympics as the embodiment of this attitude. Therefore, whilst experiencing the 2012 Paralympics did not produce an attitude shift for Mick, it did appear to have fuelled a desire to see more (informal) activism on behalf of disabled people.

5.4: 'Brian': 'Sporting Superheroes' reinforce the awe he holds for those whose achievements he admires

Brian is in his forties. He lived in a semi-detached house on the outskirts of Poole in a fairly quiet housing estate with his wife and their two sons. Brian worked for an insurance firm and described his job as fairly stressful and hectic, because he was essentially a team of one and, therefore, often ended up working long hours. Nevertheless, he found his job rewarding. Brian was also very committed to spending time with his family, but he admitted that often the family lost out in that respect; due to the long hours he frequently worked. Sports were a major part of Brian's life; he and his whole family were very sporty. Brian was interviewed four times throughout the duration of the project and his experiences and attitudes towards sport and disability remained fairly

stable and unchanged. Much of this seems to stem from his own direct experiences with disabled people and sport (which are addressed later in his story). That said, the London 2012 Paralympics certainly made him think more about disability and the things people could achieve. Whilst Brian suggested watching the Paralympics didn't change his attitude towards disability, he acknowledged that watching it 'properly' – that was understanding it and being passionate about it like he and his family were – reinforced a sense of awe and inspiration, and he felt the athletes and their achievements wouldn't be forgotten in a hurry.

TV habits

Brian didn't tend to watch a lot of TV, but when he did, he often switched off from things around him, and became absorbed by what he was watching; though he admitted to being equally likely to fall asleep if something did not capture his attention. Brian usually opted to watch sport on TV, and he was happy watching any sport. In fact, he had organised their Sky subscription to include sports channels so that they – as a family – could follow it more. Over the summer of 2012, Brian said there had been little else but sport on the TV in their house, and it had been on all the time. All the family liked to watch different sports but they would all watch each other's' and take an interest. Generally, he liked to watch rugby, football, and the Grand Prix. With his wife he watched ice-skating and gymnastics. They also always watched the Olympics, whatever sports were on. He loved the athletics, and he got very passionate watching rugby on the television, saying that his family avoided sitting next to him due to all the histrionics.

Engagement with sport

Brian had always been quite heavily involved in sport. At school he excelled at all manner of sports, and regarded himself as 'one of those annoying people I would suppose you would call it, where you just have a go at a sport and you pick it up really quickly'. Brian had been fortunate to attend a large private school in the UK where they had the resources to really hone the students' skills and talents. He played hockey (for which he represented the county), rugby, cricket and squash. He represented several counties in rugby, which was his 'number one sport'. Brian embarked on a P.E. degree and played in the First Team for Rugby at college. His coaches thought he was good enough to play elite rugby professionally but he sustained a major injury, after which he accepted that he didn't have the time to devote enough attention to pursuing rugby as a career. Instead, he moved his focus onto hockey, and he

continued to play home games for his local club. Because his family were the priority at the weekends, he couldn't do training or away games.

For Brian, sports were a way of giving him the 'release' that he needed after the stresses of work:

'I have to have my own time – it's my release. I do feel ... exhilarated. It does feel like a weight off my shoulders ... having the adrenalin pushing through my body. And I do want to live longer!'

But whereas sport used to *be* his life, sport was also now how he kept fit:

'At the end of the day I do my sport now, but it is my exercise ... It is just that I was so sporty before, that to just go down to the gym for an hour a week, it is not enough ... I just have that drive to do something, or achieve something.'

Brian is a keen cyclist; he purchased his first road bike in March 2012 and has taken part in a number of cycle rides, the longest being 75 miles. He rode with several neighbours and found that cycling fit in well with family life.

Brian's sons were also talented when it came to sport. His eldest played for the county junior badminton squad and his youngest son had recently been chosen for a local golf academy (a year earlier than they are normally taken on) and a local football academy. Brian believed that sport had an important role in broader development and said that although he did not consider himself to be a pushy parent; he was pushy about the boys engaging in sport:

'The only thing that my wife and I will both be very pushy on is that both boys must do a sport. We don't care what they do, as long as they are doing a sport, because for us, it just means so much for you. In terms of your physical development, your mental development, your social skills, all those kind of things. It just creates and helps and works and builds all of that stuff.'

Experiences of disability

Brian had several stories to tell regarding direct and indirect experiences with disability and disability sport. Born in the Caribbean, after a year, Brian spent 13 years in Nigeria. There he saw a lot of sickness and even death. According to Brian, this had meant that when he saw disabled people it didn't appear strange to him.

He had a deep appreciation of what people could do 'considering their disabilities' and expressed this when talking about a sporting experience:

'There was a guy [at university] that I used to play hockey against, he played Premier League hockey, with one arm ... And he was amazing. He was a striker as well. One arm, and he just wiped the floor with people. Amazing guy, he also was the number three or four in the UK for handicapped golf ... He was the kind of guy as well, that you never felt uncomfortable with, because he completely put you at ease as soon as you met him. He was that kind of person. His disability was never a hindrance to him, never. He was completely positive about it all. I think we all have so much to learn from those kind of people, because, for want of a phrase, nature's dealt them a really nasty blow, one way or another. Yet, they're doing better than what we can do, and stuff like that. We were inspired.'

When asked if the Paralympics had done anything to change his attitude towards disability, Brian was quite clear that it had not. Brian regarded himself as an open person when it came to issues of race, religion and disability:

'No, because I've always been quite open to stuff like that ... I don't prejudice people, and stuff like that. I'm quite open-minded; I deal with things in a very open kind of way. For me, it's the same with somebody who's disabled. It's not that they are somebody that's not my equal, or somebody that's not worthy to be in my presence, or those kinds of things. At the end of the day, they are just as human as I am. So, I'm quite open really. I don't have any issues with disabled people, or anything else. We try to bring up the boys that way as well.'

Watching the Paralympics

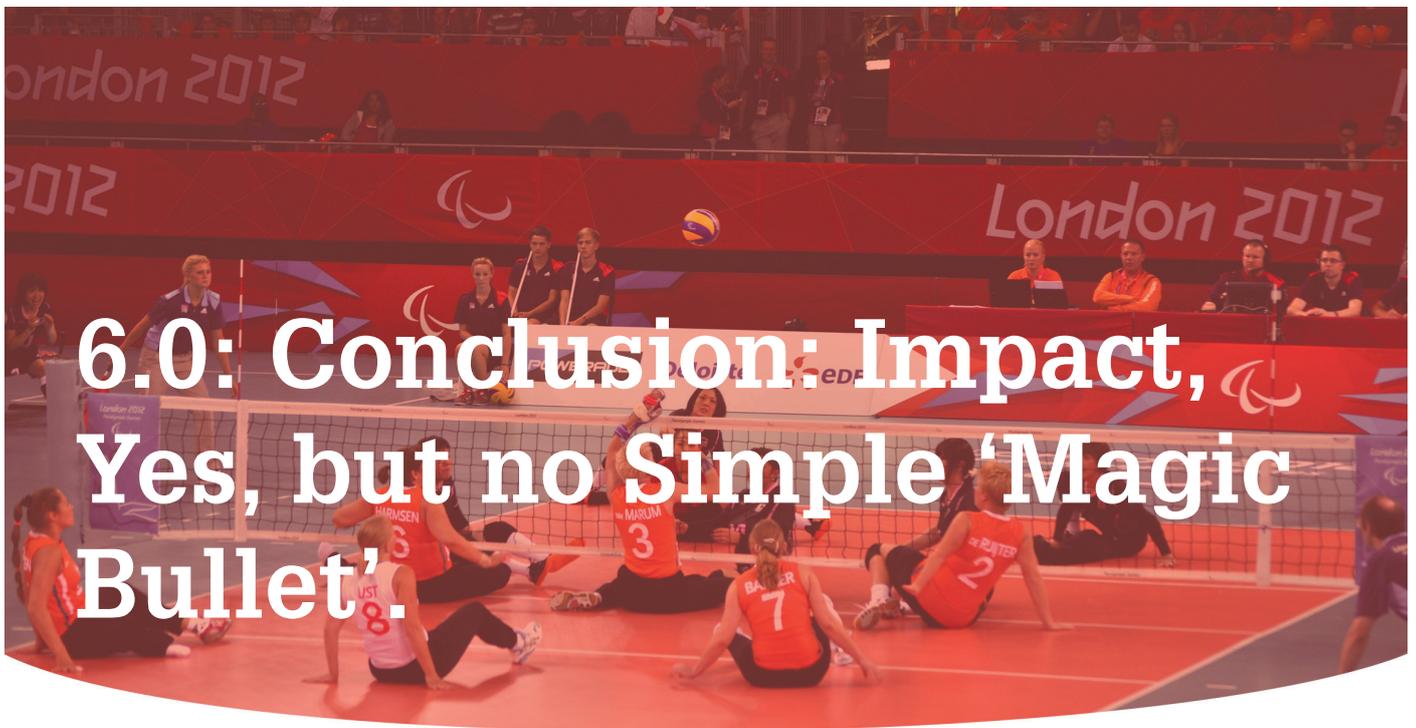
When it came to the Paralympics, Brian had a more 'generalist' approach to watching it, in terms of not opting to watch specific events but watching whatever was on: 'I find it amazing what any of them are doing, if I'm honest'. This approach meant he was introduced to several new sports:

'I'd never seen wheelchair rugby before in my life... To be honest with you, we were watching it and we were thinking, "What sport is this?" Because we joined it in the middle of the game, and we were just thinking, "What on earth is this?" We were trying to work it out, because it kind of looked like it could have been football, but then they were picking the balls up.'

Brian felt the Paralympics was more inspiring than the Olympics because of the achievements of the disabled athletes. He referred to the advertising strap line when he discussed this:

'For us the Paralympics, the adverts talk about, "Bring on the super humans". For us, that was just so true. In terms of... The Olympics, I think their strap line was, "Inspire the next generation", or something like that. As far as we were concerned, the Paralympics did that. Because if you take on board what they've been through, what they're going through, and then they can do that, then actually that's an inspiration whether you're able bodied or not. As far as we're concerned.'

This sentiment was also mirrored in Brian's first-hand experience of playing sport with a guy who was disabled, who Brian said he was 'in awe of', and he felt we all had a lot to learn 'from people like that'.



6.0: Conclusion: Impact, Yes, but no Simple 'Magic Bullet'.

As argued previously, greater understanding of disability within the context of sport gives us a better appreciation of how we socially construct our understandings of what disability and sport mean, and represent, within our society (Purdue & Howe 2012: 202). Based on our review of the literature and the key findings from this qualitative study, four main issues have been highlighted:

- Firstly, there was much comment on **media representation of disability being criticised for 'its rarity and the limited number of stereotypes used'**. Coverage of the Paralympics clearly resulted in 'disability' becoming, at least temporarily, a mainstream media item with newsworthiness. Our analysis suggests the narrative post-Games was largely positive, though often recreating the dominant discourse of 'astonishing individual achievement against the odds'. The Paralympic coverage did not seem to have adequately tackled concerns about the limited variety of ways disability was engaged with by the media outside of a sporting context. **Disability on TV as a 'good thing'** remained pertinent with participants. Indeed, the Paralympics was not only one such 'worthy' programme but also one that, because its focus was on something more mainstream (i.e. sport), could be viewed without any accompanying sense of being 'preached to'. A sort of politically correct message without being politically correct in the way it was conveyed.

- Secondly, and building on the above, **disability sport evoking 'admiration as a spectacle'** emerged as a dominant narrative early on in the study but this was a highly qualified sentiment as it was almost entirely based on no actual viewing of such television. After having watched the Paralympics, this attitude was strongly reinforced. Participants struggled to find words strong enough to express their sense of wonder at the feats and achievements witnessed on their screens. However, the incredible nature of the Paralympics - whilst inspiring a range of positive emotions - served to reinforce other subtle distancing mechanisms of two types.

Firstly, disability was, it might be argued, 'compensate[d] well enough' that audiences became able to tolerate or ignore impairment (Cameron date unknown: 1). As an elite sporting event, the Paralympics was categorised alongside other high-profile media spectacles, with less attention given, therefore, to challenging attitudes regarding disability; and, secondly, this spectacle was about brilliant performance overcoming disability and, therefore, the everyday social experience of disability was not given attention (Op Cit: 8). As we saw in the review of the literature, a key barrier limiting disabled people from participating in sport is a widespread view that it is 'not for them'. The overriding positive view of the Paralympics immediately after the Games had gone some way to reducing this barrier; however, somewhat ironically, there was more evidence of such changes taking place amongst the non-disabled than disabled people. This may be due, in large part, to disabled participants' recognition of a huge gulf that existed between the experiences of elite athletes and their own lives.

- Thirdly, the literature pointed to **'disparate, fragmented and often contradictory' voices from disabled people rather than a cohesive sense of collective voice**. Throughout our research this has consistently been evidenced. The Paralympics, as part of the 'great summer of sport', did contribute to galvanising some views i.e. being proud of British achievements and about the awe-inspiring performances of individual athletes, but it did not appear to have brought the different voices together in any meaningful way over issues beyond sporting achievement. Indeed, we have reported on cases where the Paralympics were a catalyst for disagreement; the most obvious examples of this being in relation to views polarised around spending on a grand event whilst cuts to incapacity benefits were being made.

- Fourthly, the significance of **language as a barrier to engagement and interaction with disability**. We originally noted much difficulty amongst participants in being confident in the language they could/should use when referring to disability. Whilst, throughout the research, there were instances of individuals referring to the ‘proper’ Olympics and to disabled people as, what Johnson (2003: 124) defines as, *‘just like us – but less’* [italics added] ‘[a] disabled person (is) nobody but our uncle who had the bad luck to be injured on the assembly line, our sister (with) multiple sclerosis’; immediately following the Games, participants were more comfortable and willing in talking about the Paralympics and Paralympians in different terms. This extended to television presenters and on some occasions to participants recalling approaching a stranger on the street - for example a wheelchair user - and talking to them ‘because of the Paralympics’. At one level, this is an encouraging finding in relation to a possible reduction of a key barrier for engagement. It must be pointed out, however, that there is little evidence to suggest that non-disabled participants had acquired a new or detailed vocabulary for talking about disability (i.e. Ellie Simmons was frequently referred to as ‘the little girl’). Nonetheless, many did talk of greater awareness of the range of disabilities (and their classifications) and, even more so, about the incredible technological apparatus many of the athletes displayed.

Finally, what can we draw from the six core themes that emerged from the data when considered holistically? These themes being: *Disability on TV as a ‘good thing’; Unexpected emotional engagement of the (mostly) sporting occasion; Changes in ‘seeing’ - from disability and difference to ‘just sport’; Sport but not ‘proper’ sport; ‘Normalcy’, ‘dis/ability’ and ‘discomfort’ in everyday language and interaction; and ‘Social spaces and scepticism – views on the Paralympic ‘legacy’*. The Paralympics tended to exceed the expectations of most in terms of creating inspirational sporting experiences, to the extent that the focus on disability began to recede into the background. A powerful legacy, which remained top-of-mind at least in the immediate aftermath of the Paralympics, was concerned with a change in ‘seeing’ Paralympians as top athletes, albeit, for some, athletes with a ‘difference’. This had allowed a significant degree of comfortable, ‘safe’ engagement with the Games primarily as sport; reinforcing a dominant cultural view, which seeks to measure impairment against non-impairment and, subsequently, categorises impairment as ‘useless difference’ (Cameron date unknown: 1-2). Cameron (ibid.) draws on Michalko (2002) to propose that this describes as ‘person-first’ ideology, wherein “impairment is downplayed and regarded as distinct from

primary experience as a person, as a secondary feature of identity.”

Depending on the primary yardstick used to situate the Paralympics as sport, it was either considered an afterthought to the ‘proper’ Games (i.e. the Olympics) or the best and most successful Paralympic Games ever (part of a proud British summer of sporting success). One very clear consequence was increased awareness of what disability sport was, what it involved and that it deserved credit. This coupled with a general sense of increasingly ‘noticing disability’ and considering it less as cause for sympathy, and more as a celebration of human achievement. As highlighted in the literature, disabled people do not universally welcome these changes as they can replace one stereotype with another: one form of being patronised - as ‘ill’ and ‘dependent’, with a different form - that of ‘hero’ / ‘supercrip’. Furthermore, much of what our participants “knew about disability” and disability sports was largely expressed through the deficit medical model constructions of disability (Fitzgerald, 2012).

Whilst there were glimpses of what might be associated with ‘talking to’ or ‘acceptance of’ an affirmative model of disability i.e. an understanding of impairment as an essential characteristic of difference, not inferiority, and that disabled people don’t want pity or charity but rather to be fully accepted and recognised for contributing to the enrichment of society (Swain & French 2000); this sentiment was largely expressed by some of the younger generation of ‘transformative’ (Sancho 2003) individuals (both disabled and non-disabled), as well as self-identifying disability activists. This may, in part, be attributed to a weakness in our sampling and recruitment strategy, as several of those we talked to with direct experience of disability had acquired disability later in life as a consequence of illness or injury. Had we obtained a broader and more diverse representation of disability ‘voices’, we might have identified a more varied set of discourses. Colin Cameron has argued elsewhere (date unknown) that disability identity is an individual choice, a series of decisions and narratives concerning how disabled people respond to everyday situations, as well as assertions about both the right to be different and the ordinariness of difference. As emphasised earlier in our report, many disabled people do not identify as part of a disabled ‘community’, and for those who do, there is the constant tension between being oneself i.e. the multiple identities which make an individual, and being a member of a group defined primarily through one central identity.

Several of the key themes highlighted in our research seem to corroborate findings from other surveys undertaken following the 2012 Paralympics. For example, research by the Office for National Statistics and the Department for Work and Pensions (Department for Work and Pensions 2014) suggested that 68 per cent of 1,890 respondents surveyed in March 2014 said their view of disabled people had been changed positively by the Games; this was down one per cent from a previous survey carried out during the immediate aftermath of the Games. The latest report on the Paralympic legacy from the Cabinet Office (UK Government & Mayor of London; 2014) suggested an increase from the previous year as 98% of people surveyed in 2014 indicated that they would attend any future Paralympic sport event. However, there remains a significant divide between the number of disabled people and non-disabled people playing sport. Furthermore, whilst there was evidence of support for the IPC's view that the 2012 Games would be a positive vehicle for improving equality, there were also protests by disabled activists suggesting some disabled people saw the Games in more critical terms (Braye, Dixon & Gibbons 2013). A poll released in August 2013, conducted by the charity Scope, surveying the opinions of a 1,014 disabled people, including Paralympians, experts and 'ordinary disabled people', proposed that 81% of disabled people had not noticed that attitudes towards them had improved since London 2012, just over a fifth believed matters had, in fact, deteriorated. Furthermore, many felt stigmatised as 'benefit scroungers'; whilst nearly one quarter of those living in London reported they had suffered hostility and abuse since the Games (Disability Rights UK 2013).

6.1: Considerations for further research

Being the home games, there was certainly greater media interest for ParalympicsGB going into the 2012 Paralympics. 2.75 million tickets were sold, whilst 40 million people (70 per cent of the population) watched some of the Games either on television or online, making them a record-breaking virtual sell-out. The Paralympics was successful in shifting short-term perceptions on disability, but what about going forward? As we put the finishing touches to this report, the Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games are drawing to a close - the 12-day 'completely integrated' (BBC Online 2014) sporting competition was covered on BBC1 -, and we look forward to a packed programme of para-sports events throughout the month of August - the coverage of which, will feature on Channel 4. The impact of, and level of audience engagement with, the 2014 summer of (disability) sport is yet to be realised. Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson has praised the para-sports programme at the

Commonwealth Games in Glasgow, but commented that some Commonwealth nations still "need[ed] to do more" (BBC Online 2014), whilst the President of the International Paralympic Committee (IPC), Sir Philip Craven, hailed the Glasgow 2014 Games as a "tremendous success" as disabled athletes, once again, made the front and back page of newspapers, making the headlines (IPC, 2014). It will be interesting to monitor research carried out during or immediately following these events to ascertain the extent to which the 'thrill', 'excitement' over disability sports, and a 'greater respect for disabled people' associated with the London 2012 Paralympics legacy, has carried over to discourses associated with these elite sporting events, two years later.

Looking towards the 2016 Paralympic Games in Rio de Janeiro, some questions remain to be answered:

- Experiences of disability are all around us, how can broadcasters create less 'extreme' representations of disability and yet still 'entertain' and educate their audiences?
- Can such programmes be a substitute for direct experience in helping inspire people to draw upon a broader repertoire of experiences when talking about disability?
- How might programming give viewers more confidence to talk about disability and disability sport without qualifying what they say - as in, 'I don't mean that in a discriminatory sort of way', or using language that sympathetically distances disability?
- How might future Paralympic Games come to be seen as an important sporting event and, therefore, a worthwhile viewing experience, when it takes place outside of the UK?
- How might broadcasters continue to enhance the 'likeability' of Paralympic athletes fostering in them the recognition given to Olympic champions?

For several reasons, we advocate further research linked to the outcomes of this work. Firstly, research has shown us that many of the prior attitudes we hold tend to be deeply entrenched and so shift only over a sustained period of time; for that reason alone, it would be important to return to the field to see how enduring any changes have been. Secondly, and much more specifically, although not as clear-cut as might have been hoped, our analysis *does* demonstrate a number of changes in attitudes and perceptions linked to disability and disabled sports. It would be worthwhile tracking these areas further. Our analysis illustrates that simply asking people about their attitudes towards a socially sensitive subject like disability is fraught with issues related to an individual's

desired self-perception and how they want to project this to others. In other words, many participants claimed that their attitudes had not changed (because they did not need to) but they were convinced attitudes more generally had changed; a classic 'third person effect'. Thus, a more nuanced way of 'seeing' any legacy changes might be to focus on asking a smaller sample of disabled people whether their social experiences have changed as a consequence, and in what ways. We have already seen some interesting stories in this regard, but recognise the potential for further qualitative work that could assess and potentially showcase the impact of televised coverage of the Paralympics over the longer-term. Finally, follow-up data collection and research with groups with varied participant profiles should take place to ascertain whether effects are sustained across a wider population.

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