RE-PRESENTING PARA-SPORT BODIES:

DISABILITY AND THE CULTURAL LEGACY OF THE PARALYMPIC GAMES

Bournemouth University

Arts & Humanities Research Council

Professor Michael Silk (Bournemouth University)
Dr Emma Pullen (Loughborough University)
Dr Daniel Jackson (Bournemouth University)
Dr Emma Rich (University of Bath)
Dr Laura Misener (Western University)
Dr David Howe (Western University)
Dr Richard Scullion (Bournemouth University)
Dr Carrie Hodges (Bournemouth University)
Dr Rafaelle Nicholson (Bournemouth University)
Dr Carla Filomena Silva (Western University)
Professor Kerstin Stutterheim (Bournemouth University)
Stephanie Farmer (Bournemouth University)

AHRC (ahrc.ukri.org)
Bournemouth University (www.bournemouth.ac.uk)
University of Bath (www.bath.ac.uk)
Loughborough University (www.lboro.ac.uk)
Western University Canada (www.uwo.ca)

RE-PRESENTING PARA-SPORT BODIES:

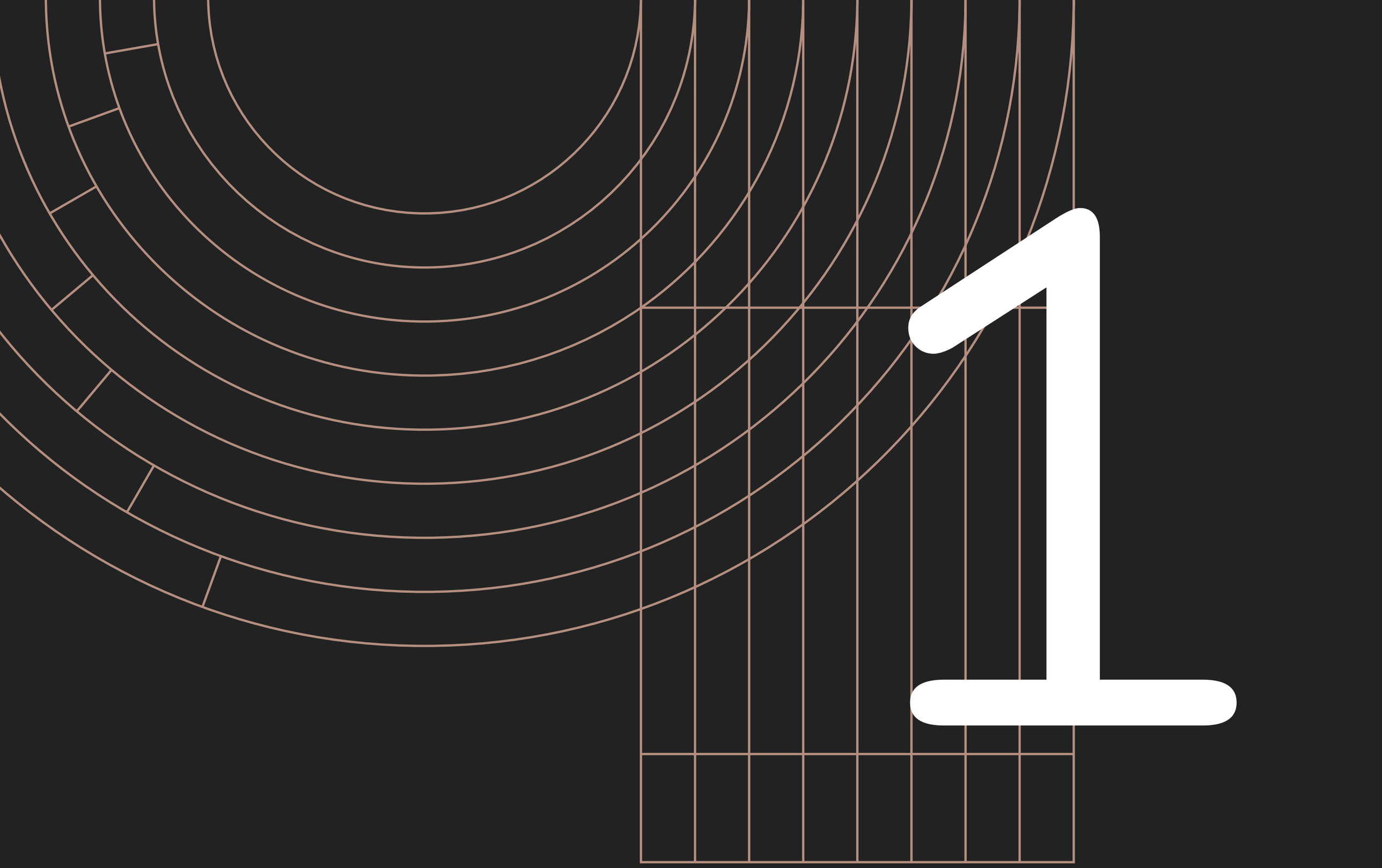
DISABILITY AND THE CULTURAL LEGACY OF THE PARALYMPIC GAMES

Professor Michael Silk (Bournemouth University)
Dr Emma Pullen (Loughborough University)
Dr Daniel Jackson (Bournemouth University)
Dr Emma Rich (University of Bath)
Dr Laura Misener (Western University)
Dr David Howe (Western University)
Dr Richard Scullion (Bournemouth University)
Dr Carrie Hodges (Bournemouth University)
Dr Rafaelle Nicholson (Bournemouth University)
Dr Carla Filomena Silva (Western University)
Professor Kerstin Stutterheim (Bournemouth University)
Stephanie Farmer (Bournemouth University)

Table of Contents

"The values of the Paralympic Movement and the values of Channel 4, they come together in almost a total eclipse of the sun … Be different, stand up to diversity, represent an alternative point of view, champion young people, champion new talent. You can see how the Paralympics is just a bull's eye on many of those things."

A C4 Senior Executive
Page 27, 4.1 Production Interviews



Executive Summary

1.

This report details the findings of the AHRC project entitled ‘Re-presenting para-sport bodies: Disability and the cultural legacy of the Paralympic Games’. (AH/P003842/1). The project explored media constructions of disability through Paralympic sport and the impact on public attitudes and perceptions of disability.

This report provides data and recommendations drawn from the first funded academic project to examine the implications of the rapid commercialisation of the Paralympic Games and the increasing visibility of disability in the media; influenced by the success of Channel 4’s entry as the United Kingdom’s official Paralympic broadcaster in 2012.

Through an integrated methodological approach, we provide a joined-up evidence base that captures the intentions and practices of Channel 4’s (C4) broadcasting of the Rio 2016 Paralympics; the influence of this on the content of Paralympic coverage and mediated forms of disability representation; and the wider impact on public attitudes toward disability. This approach allowed us to examine the important and influential relationship between Paralympic production practices, progressive social change and cultural legacies.

The report demonstrates the important cultural impact of the Paralympic Games and the extent socially progressive forms of disability representation can and do effect positive social change with respect to disability awareness. Both the quality and quantity of Paralympic coverage by C4 has been an important vehicle in progressive forms of disability representation marked by greater inclusion, education, and visibility of disability. Here, we highlight some of the complexities and contradictions in the Paralympic legacy with respect to issues of inclusion and exclusion, empowerment and disempowerment, and forms of marginalisation. Through the report we provide a number of empirically-driven insights for progressive and sustainable Paralympic cultural legacies.

With this report we intend to inform a range of national and international organisations, and encourage readers to engage with the evidence base and wider academic publications of the project. In particular we intend for this report to be of value to Paralympic stakeholders (including those from future host cities), Paralympic governing bodies, disability organisations, policy makers, charities and activists, and media organisations committed to greater diversity, inclusion and equality in coverage of marginalised groups. We welcome continued collaboration and ongoing discussion across the range of stakeholders in a shared commitment to progressive social change and sustainable cultural legacies.

This approach allowed us to examine the important and influential relationship between Paralympic production practices, progressive social change and cultural legacies.

2

An Introduction

These research questions address the issue of cultural legacy and provide important empirically-driven contributions to the study of Paralympic broadcasting, disability equality, and meaningful social change.

2.

Despite a surge in media coverage in Paralympic sport in the UK and the International Paralympic Committee's (IPC) vision in achieving a more equitable society, there remained a pressing concern to examine the cultural legacy of Paralympic coverage within the context of public attitudes and understandings toward disability.

This was especially important following the entry of Channel 4 (C4) as the UK's official Paralympic broadcaster whose statutory remit included reflecting cultural diversity, elevating marginal voices and inspiring progressive social change, reflecting a concerted effort by both the IPC and C4 in achieving disability equality and empowerment. This report provides the first joined-up, interdisciplinary evidence base from a publicly funded study detailing the impact - and cultural legacies - of the broadcasting of the Rio 2016 Paralympic Games.

Scholarly work has highlighted the important role of the Paralympic Games in shaping everyday public perceptions, attitudes and understandings of disability as the most culturally visible and celebrated display of disability on television (Schantz and Gilbert, 2001). Previous research has been attuned to issues of disability representation in Paralympic coverage, highlighting the 'hiding' of para-athletes' disability - especially those with more severe forms of disability - through accepted, normative production practices and the reinforcement of disability stigma hierarchies which marginalises some para-athletes and feeds the underlying public reactions and attitudes to different forms of disability (Jackson et al., 2014). Yet, the entry of C4 and the subsequent elevation of the Paralympics to mega sporting event status demanded new research to understand both its production, content and impact. Building upon extant academic research and using an innovative methodological approach to the study of Paralympic sport, we asked:

1. How is Paralympic sport produced and what are the dominant representations and meanings ascribed to Para-athletes through televisual representations?
2. How do audiences (those that identity as non-disabled and disabled) interpret such meanings?
3. And how do interpretations influence understandings of disability and disabled people in everyday life?

These research questions address the issue of cultural legacy and provide important empirically-driven contributions to the study of Paralympic broadcasting, disability equality, and meaningful social change.

3

Data Collection

> Together, these methods provided a robust and rigorous dataset that allowed for a holistic and contextual analysis of cultural legacy.

3.

The methodological approach was integrative, enabling a joined-up evidence base centred on the production, content, and interpretation of Paralympic sport. Four main datasets were developed using the following methods: (i) Production interviews; (ii) content analysis; (iii) audience focus groups.; (iv) a national attitudes survey. Together, these methods provided a robust and rigorous dataset that allowed for a holistic and contextual analysis of cultural legacy.

18 focus groups lasting between 60 and 90 minutes were conducted with 216 members of the public between June and December 2016. This resulted in approximately 1000 hours of qualitative audience data.

3.1. Production Interviews (WP I.)

In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with 23 senior production staff between February and March, 2017. This included commissioning editors, creative diversity managers, senior marketing and PR executives, stakeholder relations professionals, TV presenters, executive producers and pundits from C4 and their commissioned broadcast partners.

3.2 Content Analysis (WP II.)

Quantitative content analysis was conducted on 90 hours of live sport (broadcast 1-7pm and 9pm-1am GMT daily) that Channel 4 broadcast over eleven days (8-18 September 2016) on its main channel during the Rio 2016 Paralympics. This sample therefore excluded the 30 minutes daily highlights programme (broadcast 7.30-8pm GMT daily) and the Last Leg (a comedy talk show hosted live in Rio and broadcast 8-9pm GMT daily). The unit of analysis was the broadcast segment. The live broadcast data was coded into three types of segment: live sport (resulting in 274 unique segments), backstory feature (50 segments) and studio chat (229 segments), which capture the main ways in which Paralympic sport is brought to viewers. For the latter two segment types, broadcast segments are quite discrete (e.g. backstories are high production value, pre-recorded short films), but for live sport, broadcast coverage occasionally jumps quickly from one sport to the next. Here, we coded a new entry for each unique sport with the exception of track and field live sport, where there are sometimes multiple events in the segment (e.g. long jump in between track events). On these occasions, we coded for the dominant sport in the segment (based on amount of airtime). For coding disability classifications, where multiple events within the same sport featuring different disability classifications were present (e.g. 50m S6 breaststroke followed by 100m S9 freestyle) then we coded for the dominant classification in the segment (again based on respective airtime). Where they were relatively equal we coded them as 'multiple'. Our disability classification codes were drawn from the IPC classification system.

3.3 Audience Focus Group and Survey (WP III.)

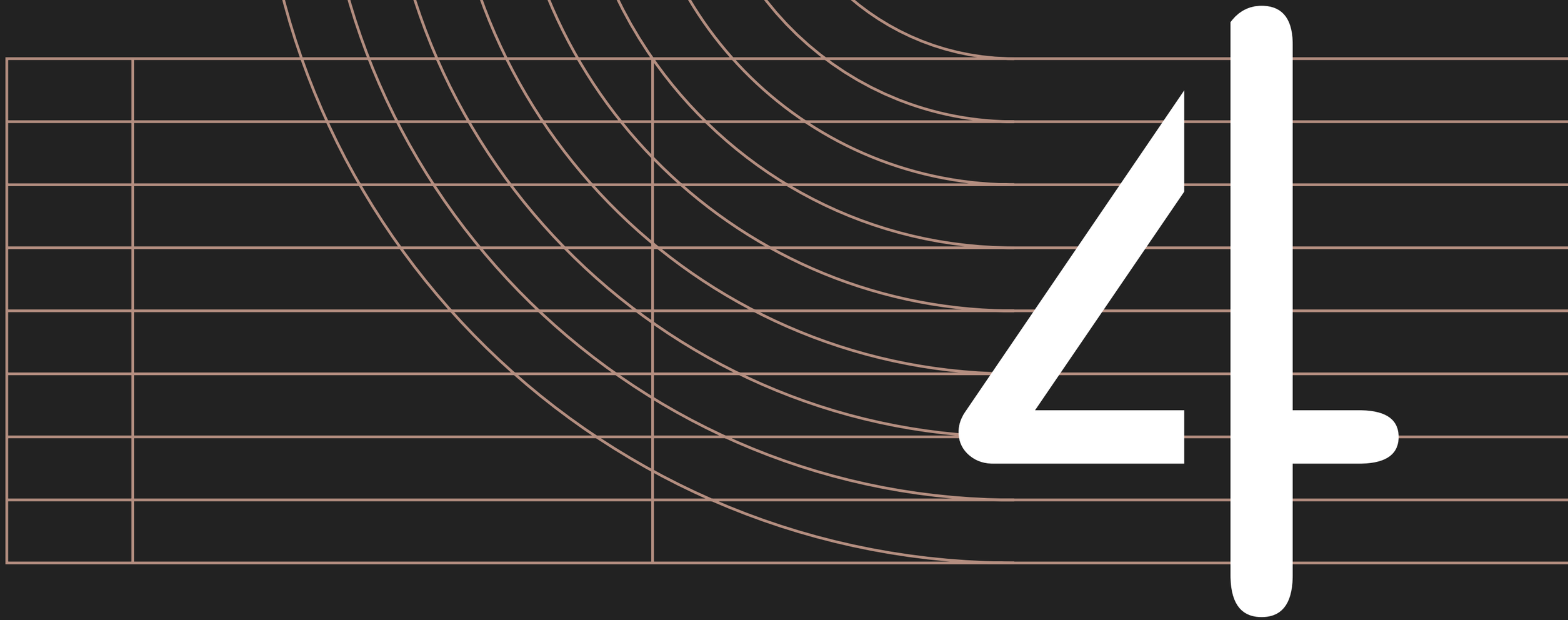
18 focus groups lasting between 60 and 90 minutes were conducted with 216 members of the public between June and December 2016. This resulted in approximately 1000 hours of qualitative audience data. Focus groups took place in London, Bristol, Cardiff, Liverpool, Bournemouth and Nottingham and were held in public meeting rooms (e.g. university seminar rooms, hotel meeting facilities). Approximately 30 participants were recruited in each city against an inclusion criterion that required the following: for participants to be aged over 18 years; able to provide full informed consent; and have watched the Rio 2016 Paralympic Games. At each location multiple focus groups were conducted with up to 10 participants per group, split equally between those who self-identified as disabled and non-disabled. Approximately half of the participants self-identified as disabled. The demographic (age, gender, class, race and ethnicity) and geographic spread of participants was intentionally wide-ranging in order to capture varied 'voices', however, the dataset contains self-selection biases that result from the inclusion criteria.

The focus group guide was structured around three topics. This included: audience backgrounds and experience of disability; attitudes toward Paralympics coverage (i.e. most watched events and memorable moments); wider attitudes toward disability and impact of Paralympics on their perceptions of disability. Focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Transcripts were entered into QSR NVivo data management programme for analysis.

Further to the focus groups, in February 2019 we collaborated with UK Sport and DJS Research on a survey of UK adults (n=2,011), which explored their attitudes towards para-sport, the Paralympics, and media coverage of such events. This survey set quotas on age, gender, region and social grade. The data was subsequently weighted to reflect a nationally representative sample of the UK population in terms of age, gender (50% male and 50% female), region and social grade.

3.4. Ethics

All research was undertaken in accordance with Bournemouth University's Research Ethics Code of Practice policy and compliance with General Data Protection Regulations. Informed consent was sought from all project participants and full confidentiality and anonymity has been provided throughout the research process and in this report.



"Yes, we were unashamedly focused on Paralympics GB, we were unashamedly focused on the two biggest sports, athletics and swimming because they were going to deliver so much of the quality sport and the success for that British team and even outside that British team they tend to be the most accessible sports, people are so used to watching them at major events."

A C4 Senior Production Executive
Page 36, 4.2 Content Analysis

Findings: Production Interviews

These research questions address the issue of cultural legacy and provide important empirically-driven contributions to the study of Paralympic broadcasting, disability equality, and meaningful social change.

4.1

Within this section of the report we draw out the key themes from across the differential work packages (WP); inevitably there are some cross-overs where similar data exist. There is insufficient space to present all themes that arose during the project; the data presented are drawn from a far larger data set which will be made available at the UK Data Archive following the completion of the project.

4.1 Production Interviews (WP I.)

'A Total Eclipse of the Sun': Statutory Remit & the Social Change 'Journey'

Underpinning the broadcast decisions of the Paralympic Games was the recognition of a 'C4 way' or philosophy of practice, an approach that dovetails with the regulatory broadcast environment in the UK. C4 operates under a statutory remit as a sustainable social enterprise with a mandate that includes stimulating debate and education, promoting innovation and fostering new talent, reflecting cultural diversity, and inspiring change through high-quality and innovative content that challenges the status quo. The 'C4 way' was described by one senior executive as 'doing it first … being diverse' and C4 viewed the 2012 Paralympics as an opportunity to translate this philosophy into production practices that 'inspired change and championed difference.' Indeed, the perceived 'fit' between the Paralympics and C4's public service remit was near perfect, as a senior executive explains:

> *"The values of the Paralympic Movement and the values of Channel 4, they come together in almost a total eclipse of the sun … Be different, stand up to diversity, represent an alternative point of view, champion young people, champion new talent. You can see how the Paralympics is just a bull's eye on many of those things."*

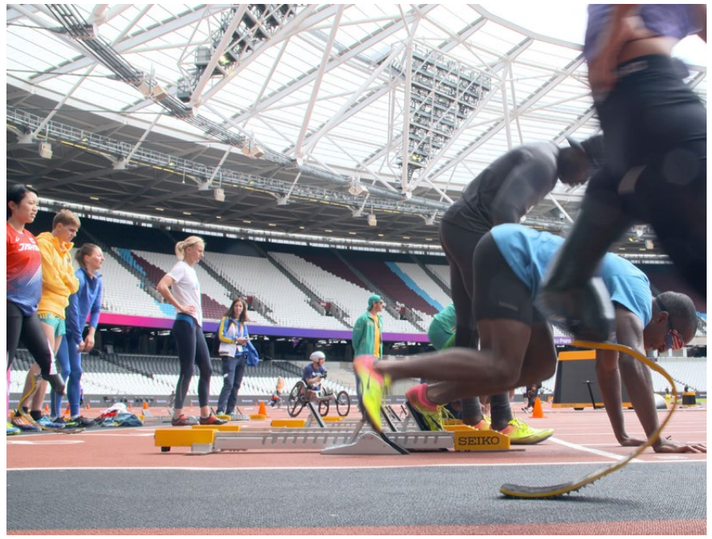
C4's broadcasting of the 2012 Paralympic Games acted as a showcase of, and a commitment toward, the 'C4 way.' The single biggest project in the broadcaster's history, the stated aim was to change dominant media perceptions

of disability; 'the slightly apologetic attitude towards showing disabled people whether they're sportspeople or not, generally on television' (senior executive). Previous Paralympic broadcasters were deemed, by our interviewees, as too 'conservative'; their Paralympic coverage a manifestation of an apologetic positioning of disability (Briant et al., 2013). This was apparent, for example, in notably fewer hours of coverage for the Paralympics (compared to the Olympic Games) and production aesthetics and practices that often saw the camera 'shying away from the impairment' (senior executive).

C4 were deeply cognizant of these underpinning industry practices and cultural assumptions, that they felt reinforced marginalisation within mainstream media products:

> *"Fundamentally the public will never take disability sport as seriously or feel about it as passionately on the same scale as able-bodied sport... because people instinctively and unconsciously think that a disabled person is not going to be able to perform to the same level as an able-bodied person and therefore the sport is never going to be as good. I think that may or may not be true, but when your job is to be the one that is innovative, alternative, challenging, that was like a red rag to a bull to us... from that moment on, I think it made us even more focused... to get the public to see what we could see you had to shake things up and be quite confrontational and be quite in-your-face but authentic (senior executive)."*

C4 felt that a 'reframing' of Paralympic coverage was required, one that challenged dominant non-disabled production techniques, legitimised it as an elite sporting event, and stimulated audience interest. To achieve these ambitions, C4 took a significant step change in the marketing and broadcasting of the games, in an effort to differentiate the Paralympic media product within the media sport marketplace, and to break from the perceived (aesthetic) 'misfit' of the disabled body and the elite sport context. Of central importance was a form of marketing that utilised athlete backstories as the point of



distinction. In so doing, some of these stories centralised (rather than erased) disability — they were described by one interviewee as 'confrontational' — but were emplaced within a wider narrative of sporting success, and thus were seen as an 'authentic' technique that could serve to both legitimise elite sport and serve as a point of difference. Such an approach was a pathway to connect to audiences, to 'normalise' disability (senior executive) and provide a provocative vehicle to challenge societal perceptions of disability:

> *"To get the public interested you have to go through people's stories to really appreciate the amazing thing that they are doing on the track ... there's no getting away from the fact that a lot of the Paralympic athletes have got much more interesting and incredible backstories than non-disabled athletes, why should we not tell those stories as well? Portray them, yes, as incredible athletes and that's the first thing we want you to see is their incredible athletic ability but we weren't also going to shy away from the fact that there is backstory of somebody having to overcome an adverse situation or come to terms with disability. We wanted to tell the human stories as well; so it's humanising people the whole way through but also reinforcing that these are not just any old people (senior executive)."*

Giving it the Hollywood Treatment: the Hyper-visibility of Disability

Whilst the use of backstories served as an essential 'hook' for audiences to follow Paralympic athletes, interviewees were aware of the challenges in attracting audience interest to parasport coverage and highly reflective about

Giving it attitude, a ‘sexiness’, offered more than just seeing. There was a need to narrate, to render marked difference - disability - (hyper-)visible.

their current approach. Indeed, interviewees felt that their approach was an important ‘stepping stone’ on a pathway toward achieving their wider statutory remit. In this regard backstories served a dual function with an inherent dialectic logic; the need to ‘other’ — through the promotion of personal, and often sensationalised, human interest stories — acted as the pathway to inspiring populations and achieving greater, social good. This deliberate tension is illustrated by one senior executive:

> *“It is an endless argument and one that sits at the very heart of how we broadcast as a channel about the Games, it’s a question of the chicken and the egg. From a broadcast point of view, we’re interested in the Paralympics because you have got, say London there were 4,200 athletes I think. There are 4,200 epic stories of overcoming adversity that can give a lot people around the country huge motivation and inspiration. But also, from a broadcaster [perspective], a brutally honest one, it is interesting because their stories are interesting to hear … it’s a natural curiosity and the entire country wants to know that, but of course as a broadcaster we are obliged to cover what the audience are going to be interested in, which is that [disability] at the moment … I wish we could get to a point where ‘alright fine, you had a little accident. Whatever. You are in a wheelchair but what are you doing now?’ … You see, we are not there yet.”*

The need to take audiences on a journey came from a perception that audiences are not yet ‘ready’ to simply ‘accept’ disability as portrayed through a Paralympic lens. Simply ‘seeing’ disability would not, it was felt, enable audiences to understand or come to terms with disability, nor provide the ‘hook’ to keep audiences watching. Instead, a decision was made to show disability differently by giving it the ‘Hollywood treatment’:

> *“I think our attitude and certainly my personal attitude very strongly is this is life, if you’re an amputee, you’re an amputee so let’s see your stump. If you have been in some terrible accident or some terrible war zone and you’ve got scarring this is not a tea party, let’s see it. Actually, most people will be able to deal with the reality of that, particularly if you do something that’s never been done before … it’s giving it the Hollywood treatment and giving it attitude and a sexiness that isn’t normally associated with that side of life (senior executive).”*

Giving it attitude, a ‘sexiness’, offered more than just seeing. There was a need to narrate, to render marked difference - disability - (hyper-)visible. The intent was to make - as one senior executive suggested - disability ‘popular’, to ‘create characters’ with which the audience could ‘empathise’ and therefore stimulate audience expectation both ideologically and materially in the narration of the marked body differently. Such decisions were not always uncontested and were the subject of debate amongst senior staff and with Paralympic stakeholders. To take a telling example, the 2012 promotional campaign ‘Meet the Superhumans’ (http://www.channel4.com/info/press/news/meet-the-superhumans) integrated footage of elite performance with dramatic footage of how various disabilities might be acquired (this included footage of a bomb exploding in a war, a car crash, and of a baby in a womb suggestive of congenital disabilities). Drawing on a narrative predicated on inspirational messages of individual success in overcoming impairment, the campaign was widely regarded as a watershed moment given its up-front and dramatic portrayal of disability.

Content Analysis

These research questions address the issue of cultural legacy and provide important empirically-driven contributions to the study of Paralympic broadcasting, disability equality, and meaningful social change.

4.2

In this section of the report, we present the findings of our quantitative content analysis of 90 hours of C4's live broadcasting of the 2016 Paralympics, supplemented by some further interview data as it relates to the identified themes.

4.2 Content Analysis (WP II.)

It should firstly be noted that our focus was solely on C4's main channel, not its digital channels and website. Our findings, therefore can be considered as what the majority of what UK audiences would see in 2016, though not the whole picture. Secondly, almost all of the live broadcast feeds that C4 used in 2016 were filmed by Olympic Broadcasting Services (OBS), the host broadcast organisation for the Olympic and Paralympic Games that serve broadcasters across the globe. While national broadcasters such as C4 can choose which live OBS feeds to show, they are reliant on the feeds that are available; and as our interviews suggested, not all Paralympic events are covered extensively by the host broadcaster.

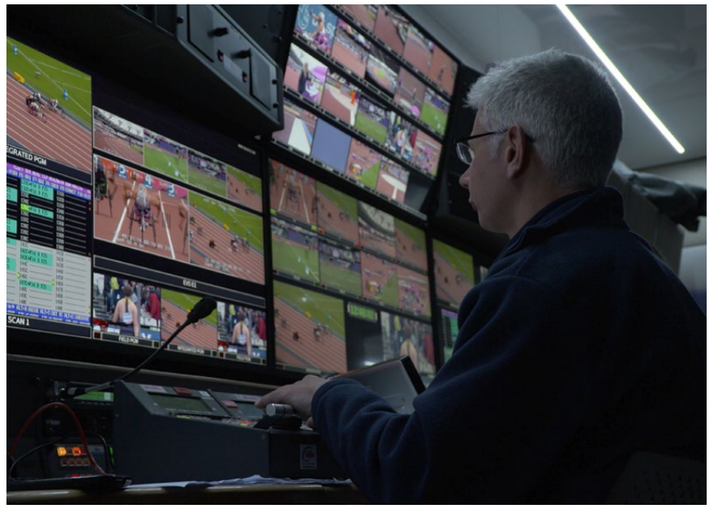
Framing the Nation

The data reveals the extent the broadcasting was framed around Paralympics GB and the pursuit of national success. When it came to live sport, only 14% of live sport segments did not have a GB athlete competing and 93% of all studio guests were British. This was an intentional broadcast strategy taken by C4 confirmed through the interview data. As one senior production executive explained:

> *"I do think we are quite hard-nosed about it, we make the decisions on where is the British interest, is it a good sport and are they a big star. If there was a great big Brazilian star going then we would make a bit more of an effort on it, those were the decisions really if I'm honest."*

Clearly then, the need for 'good sport' and 'big star[s]' was of equal importance in the broadcasting strategy and one factor explaining the disparity in coverage between British and non-British athletes. For C4, this was justified by data on audience viewing numbers:

> *"That's where all the peaks were. You can see the way viewing peaked, it was the same with the Olympics, same with Paralympics, those top moments were where it was live coverage of a British athlete going for a medal was where all the viewing peaked (senior executive, C4)."*



Focussing on British athletes, then, was a deliberate strategy intended to interpolate them into national audiences. This meant positioning the Paralympics as palatable to 'major eventers' - audiences 'who might not follow any other sport for the rest of the year but they get into this event from start to finish' (senior production executive). Taking this editorial position meant the need for 'competitive [sport] and Brits going for medals' (senior commissioning executive) in order for the public to 'embrace para-sport in the same way that they have embraced British success in able bodied sport'. Whilst this was a clear institutional strategy, it was in part connected to the C4's statutory remit to advance the cause of marginalized groups in society and challenge dominant stereotypes; a (hyper-)visibility leading to a 'normalisation' of disability (Pullen et al., 2018). Thus, the national lens was a way to position Paralympic sport so the public can 'embrace' it, generating large audiences as a pathway to a social change agenda.

Of course, the presentation of a global sporting event through a national lens is not unique to the Paralympics and is a staple of the prevailing logic of the mediation of sporting mega events. However, the Paralympics affords for important nuances that are not present in other events. Here, we can ask what national (disabled) bodies are given airtime, and are certain sporting events and disability classifications privileged over others?

The Visibility of Paralympic Sports and Disabled Bodies

In sporting mega events such as the Paralympics and Olympics where multiple events are taking place concurrently, decisions about which sport to broadcast live must be made. Which sports are given most airtime is therefore to an extent, a reflection of editorial agendas (albeit again largely as a result of OBS feeds). Table 1 shows the amount and proportion of airtime each Paralympic sport was given on Channel 4's main terrestrial channel during the 2016 Rio Paralympics.

The data reveal track and field and swimming as dominating the schedules, with over 50% of total airtime. Despite the presence of GB interest and potential medal success (excluding goalball), some (admittedly niche) Paralympic sports such as archery, boccia, goalball and shooting were almost entirely absent from C4's main channel coverage. Others, such as sitting volleyball and equestrian, were virtually invisible. For C4, athletics and swimming fitted with the broadcast strategy to provide 'good sport' and 'big stars' in the form of British success and guaranteed familiarity (as per Olympic broadcasting), as this senior production executive explains:

> *"Yes, we were unashamedly focused on Paralympics GB, we were unashamedly focused on the two biggest sports, athletics and swimming because they were going to deliver so much of the quality sport and the success for that British team and even outside that British team they tend to be the most accessible sports, people are so used to watching them at major events ... and then throw into that a few days of track cycling which just gets it off to a good start. So, we did know that that would be the biggest spine of the event, following Britain in those sports and then everything weaves around that."*

Live Sport	Amount of live sport airtime (hours: minutes: seconds)	Proportion of live sport airtime (%)
Swimming	12:11:17	25.34
Track and Field	12:02:49	25.05
Basketball	7:33:31	15.71
Tennis	5:24:26	11.24
Cycling	3:40:07	7.63
Rugby	1:40:09	3.47
Other Racquet Sports (Badmington, Table Tennis, etc)	1:27:51	3.04
Water Sports (Sailing, Canoeing, Kayaking, Rowing)	1:19:15	2.75
Football	1:10:09	2.43
Combat Sport	1:06:10	2.29
Weightlifting	0:22:13	0.77
Equestrian	0:04:10	0.14
Sitting Volleyball	0:03:54	0.14
Total	**48:06:01**	**100**

Table 1. Proportion of live sport airtime given to respective Paralympic sports at Rio 2016

Athletics and swimming would as likely form the backbone of Olympic broadcast coverage as they do Paralympic coverage. There are multiple factors that might explain this, such as their wide appeal and familiarity with audiences; the globally competitive nature of the events; their delivery of some of the most iconic Olympic events (such as the 100m sprint); alongside the more banal, production-related efficiencies of presenting from the two main venues (the aquatics centre and Olympic stadium). But with the Paralympics, there are additional dynamics related to the severity of the disability - as seen through events only played by the most disabled, and classifications ranging from the most to least disabled - that force broadcasters to make editorial decisions that their Olympic counterparts do not have to make.

Disability Classification of the Event	Amount of live sport airtime (hours: minutes: seconds)	Proportion of live sport airtime (%)
Wheelchair	21:37:05	60.06
Visually Impaired	5:59:46	16.66
Limb Deficiency	3:14:17	9.00
Degenerative and Coordination	2:04:01	5.74
Intellectual	1:52:02	5.19
Multiple	0:59:06	2.74
Short Stature	0:11:31	0.53
Unclear	0:01:42	0.08
Total	**35:59:30**	**100**

Table 2. Proportion of live sport airtime given to respective disability classifications*

Table 2 Analysis

Wheelchair-based events dominated the live sport schedules. Combined with limb deficiency classifications, Paralympic events featuring mobility enhancing technologies (including carbon fibre prosthetics) account for nearly 70% of all live sport. Previous research has highlighted how such technologically-enhanced disabled bodies, often termed 'cyborgs' (Howe & Silva 2017), have been the subject of most attention inside and outside of the Paralympic movement, particularly with the crossover of athletes such as Oscar Pistorius and Markus Rehm into elite non-disability sports. Despite interviewees revealing a subtle disruption to this dynamic – for example with the suggestion that there was an 'effort to feature boccia' based on medal success – the data suggest that the most able-disabled, technologically enhanced, athletes positioned at the top of supposed disability hierarchies are the most celebrated (Howe & Silva, 2017). This contention was also borne out in audience data (see section 4.3 of this report).

*Note: In this table we have removed a coding category - 'mixed' - which is where athletes with different impairments compete against each other (particularly in swimming) in the same classification (e.g. short stature athletes compete against those with limb deficiency). This mixed category accounted for 25% of live sport airtime, which is reflected in the lower total hours of live sport in column 2.

Previous research has highlighted how such technologically-enhanced disabled bodies, often termed 'cyborgs' (Howe & Silva 2017), have been the subject of most attention inside and outside of the Paralympic movement...

Marginal Bodies

Furthermore, these same athletes were also most likely to be subject to spectacularising in the form of a backstory feature. Backstory features are high production value promotional teasers and pre-recorded athlete videos that C4 produced as part of their Rio 2016 live broadcast coverage. These features, despite their relatively short duration (lasting approximately 1-4 minutes), provided an important narrative thread for audiences, giving them an insight into the biographies of para-athletes. Backstories narrated stories of disability, intentionally 'showing' disability as part of C4's wider strategy of disability 'normalisation' (see, Pullen et al., 2018).

Whilst there were 50 backstory features in total, backstories were based on 35 para-athletes, with some being broadcast several times during peak viewing hours. 62% of all backstory features were based on athletes using mobility enhancing technology. As one senior executive explained, across various aspects of broadcasting, including athletes with non-visible impairments was a challenge:

> *I think if I had my time again I would like to have spent more money on trying to find a way, possibly through animation for example, of illustrating effectively a non-visible mental impairment which we tried it but I think if we had concentrated on it more thoroughly from the start we would have come up with better solutions than we did. I personally think the solutions that we did come up with were fine in the grand scheme of the progression of the world but I would have liked to have gone further and one of the things to have come out of that is the galvanisation of the whole organisation around the question of how can we as a television company represent non-visible impairments throughout all of our programmes?*

Whilst this quote points towards a positive outcome of their reflections on representing non-visible impairments, it also acknowledges a shared challenge for media organisations. In the Paralympic context, the focus on portraying elite athletic performance can mean that those who fail to possess the requisite impaired sporting bodies can face marginalisation. But as Purdue and Howe (2013) point out, this is not just a shortcoming of media organisations, but a shared failing of other stakeholders in the governance and promotion of para-sport, who also often struggle with marketing athletes with 'invisible' impairments such as cerebral palsy.

Our content analysis also found that there was a lack of racial and ethnic diversity across featured athletes; 48 out of the 50 backstories featured white para-athletes. We would argue this is less a failure of the broadcaster to represent the ethnic diversity of Paralympics GB - our interviews suggested C4 were well aware of a lack of ethnic diversity amongst GB athletes and within the broadcasting - and more a symptom of a wider (and troubling) problem of para-sport itself. Neither the British Olympic Association nor the British Paralympic Association compile statistics on the demographics or ethnicity of their teams. However, our own analysis shows that 7% of Paralympics GB athletes in 2016 were of black and minority ethnic (BME) origin. This is an uncomfortably low figure given how in the UK, sport has been at the forefront of progressive notions of multicultural Britishness, which are regularly lauded in the media and formed an essential ingredient of London's bid to host the 2012 Olympics itself (Black, 2016; MacRury & Poynter, 2010). It can also be contrasted with the 13% of UK citizens who identified as BME in the 2011 census and the over one third of all Team GB (non-disabled) Olympic medals in 2012 from athletes born abroad or who had a foreign parent or grandparent.

“To get the public interested you have to go through people’s stories to really appreciate the amazing thing that they are doing on the track ... there’s no getting away from the fact that a lot of the Paralympic athletes have got much more interesting and incredible backstories than non-disabled athletes, why should we not tell those stories as well?”

A C4 Senior Executive
Page 31, 4.1 Production Interviews

4.3

Audience Perceptions

Audience perceptions of the Paralympic Games are an important indicator of current trends in public attitudes toward disability. Qualitative audience data on this scale provides an insight into the impact of Paralympic broadcasting since London 2012 on wider disability awareness, education, and perceptions of progressive social change, further highlighting tensions and issues related to forms of disability representation.

Work Package III collected over 1000 hours of qualitative audience data through focus groups conducted at six cities across England and Wales. Audiences were asked questions related to perceptions of Channel 4's Paralympic broadcasting; viewing habits of Paralympic Sport more generally; influence of Paralympic content on understandings of disability and disabled people in everyday life; and perception of social change in regard to disability awareness, rights, legislation and policy.

The normalisation of Paralympic Sport as Elite Sport

For a large proportion of participants, attitudes toward Paralympic sport document a shift away from viewing it as a non-elite sporting mega event toward a greater appreciation of it as an elite event. This has been influenced by the step change in the quantity, style and breadth of coverage C4 has provided since 2012 and the representation of para-athletes as elite sports people.

> *"I don't think disability comes into it. Perhaps before the London Paralympics I probably wouldn't have been so keen to watch it but after watching that, I thought oh there is no difference, it's sport, and as you said the Channel 4 coverage was excellent and before that it was put in the background I think, after watching the London one, hey I like the sport and if I come in I'll watch it, same with the Olympics, no difference you know."*

This has been influenced by the step change in the quantity, style and breadth of coverage C4 has provided since 2012 and the representation of para-athletes as elite sports people.

Whilst, some audience sentiments continued to imply a preference to watch non-disabled sport - with one participant likening the Paralympics to a 'vegetarian sausage' and suggesting that para-athletes were 'never going to take it to the same heights'...

The focus on successful medal winning Great British Paralympians resonated with a significant proportion of audiences who identified as sports fans and thereby engaged in Paralympic sport to see British medal success.

> *"I look at them the same. I look at both events as like opportunities to you know see my country like do good things, so like yeah that's it."*

> *"I don't sort of select the sport unless someone says oh it's the final of the women's breaststroke because it was quite a lot and then obviously if you've got a British person in there you want to watch it."*

For those who did not identify as sports fans, Paralympic coverage provided opportunity to watch elite sport events not specific to Paralympic coverage and piqued the interest of audiences

> *"It is quite fascinating to just sit there and watch things like goalball, which is like, I don't know, it's a kind of cross between blindfolded football and dodgeball. Like it is something that you would never normally, you know, you probably wouldn't even be aware it existed, so seeing these guys actually compete it is just a really interesting watch. What I think is great about the Channel 4's coverage is they certainly seem to have given it much more prominence and the Paralympics much more prominence than it had got before. So, before 2012 I can't remember watching Paralympics umm, so it is great that Channel 4 have kind of given it that platform and it's, yeah it just makes it a much more interesting event."*

> *"I think it offers, it has offered something different from just sport before, I think Channel 4's coverage for the last Paralympics offered sports as well as something different, so it kind of combined the two, less of, for lack of a better word, a spectacle."*

Whilst, some audience sentiments continued to imply a preference to watch non-disabled sport - with one participant likening the Paralympics to a 'vegetarian sausage' and suggesting that para-athletes were 'never going to take it to the same heights' - the dominant attitude implied a shift away from ableist attitudes in their viewing of the Paralympics.

Disability Stories and Inspirational Narratives

Stories of disability were an important feature of C4's coverage and this was reflected in the voices of many audience members. Stories of how Paralympians sustained their disability, the impact of living with a disability in the context of their everyday life, and their overcoming of disability to achieve sporting success were viewed as a way to educate the public around disability related issues.

> *"People are immune to or just don't choose to know what different disabilities are out there, how severe, like the severity of the same disability it can range. So, two people with the same disability can be completely different, and I think you're only going to get the population to know and educate about that by doing these stories."*

> *"You can relate to the problems that they have like for day to day tasks. So, like just doing day to day things you can relate where they have to overcome something that you do. So, it's not all about like running 100 metres or throwing a discus, it can be just day to day tasks, and that's like part of bringing the story."*

> *"I think it's very useful and if there are athletes that are willing to put their stories out there to educate people then that's the best way people are going to learn."*

Although the perception of disability related stories was overwhelmingly positive, for a proportion of audience members disability stories were a site of tension and were viewed as a distraction from the elite sport.

> *"Why do you have to dampen it like bring the background in and overshadow the accomplishment."*

Some audiences expressed how disability stories presented a 'slight discomfort' to their viewing and were concerned that they fixed attention on Paralympians' disabilities rather than their sporting success.

> *"There is slight discomfort in watching it really because I think, you know, some of it, when they focus on different athletes and they sometimes tell the story of what has led them to have the disability, it is actually quite uncomfortable for us to deal with. To think of some of the things that have put people in that situation."*

> *"I worry that it defines them a bit too much their disability though, like it's one part of the story but I like to hear just in general how, regardless of the fact that it's a disabled sport, how did they get into the sport at all or anything else about their life, I don't necessarily like it when it just hones in on that one aspect."*

> *"Why to do you have to dampen it like bring the background in and overshadow the accomplishment? I feel that people have to put a sob story spin on it to have coverage and I think*

that's shouldn't happen in something as great as para-sport. But if that is what gets people to fill the seats and be more aware of it then I guess a good thing. But for me, I feel it cheapens the story, it cheapens the character that you have to go that deep to get people to watch it. If you are trying to empower someone, it's like don't show their vulnerabilities. It's not like don't talk about their disability, it's like more about how they have trained, not their sob story."

Audiences often referred to the coverage as 'inspirational', 'awe inspiring' and how they 'admired' Para-athletes for overcoming disability and achieving sporting success. This reflects the wider inspirational narrative that underpins some of the disability related stories and frames much of the wider coverage and marketing of the Paralympics.

> *"You understand the monumental struggle that many of the sports people were experiencing, not understanding the fact that they only had one leg to rely upon, there is maybe a combination of other things going on which just added your you know, even greater to your admiration of those people who were there."*

This inspirational framing was a site of considerable tension for audiences who self-identified as disabled. Whilst disabled audiences recognised the importance of inspirational coverage in raising the profile of Paralympic sport at a national and local level and the development of para-athletes as 'role models ... to support grass root [disability] sport' many audience members with a disability viewed it as having a negative effect on how disabled people are perceived.

> *"I do think the Paralympics has had a slightly negative effect on the disabled community, because basically, things that disabled people hate hearing is 'Were you in the Paralympics? If they are disabled then they must be in the Paralympics, they must be this superhuman person. Now I can see why they have done it, they want to inspire people, they want to say to people, these people with disabilities are really amazing because they have conquered and they have had to train harder to do the things, they have had to overcome so much, and to inspire people to overcome their own problems? It does create a lot of pressure on a disabled person to be amazing and to be inspiring."*

Audiences who identified as disabled indicated that the way the Paralympic coverage represents certain forms of physical disabilities often reinforces a negative positioning toward those disabilities that are given less coverage and/or not represented. This puts particular disabilities "on a pedestal" and makes a distinction between disabilities deemed as superhuman and those deemed as "ordinary".

> *They are branding all the physical disabilities as superhuman, it's quite bad to those people with mental disabilities, who find it hard, even if they classify for the Paralympic.*

Hierarchies of Disability Preference

Audience perceptions reflected a preference in viewing toward physical disabilities. This indicates a persistence in disability stigma hierarchies amongst the public as documented within the academic literature (See Jackson et al., 2014).

> *"I think you're far more at ease with that physical element of it than you are with any mental impairment. I think naturally in society you are. I think there's a lot of people and there's a lot of people with a lot of stigma against that that kind of disability anyway because they don't, they don't understand it, it threatens them and they back off...I can understand from some of the people that I know who have challenges even being in the same room with someone with some form of mental impairment because it's so, it makes them uncomfortable... so, they're not going to watch it on television, are they?"*

> *"I think, in general, people struggle with intellectual impairments. Things like autism and stuff."*

This preference was largely in relation to non-visible, severe and/or intellectual disabilities and highlights a wider issue of the lack of public awareness and understanding of non-physical disabilities. For non-disabled audiences, being able to see physical disability was easier to comprehend and provided more comfortable and palatable viewing.

> *"I think it's more a visual thing and people connect with it better if they can see it [disability] straight away rather than have to think about it more."*

This is partly related to the IPC's classification system in Paralympic sport where specific disability categories provide greater 'consistency' in viewing, whilst further indicative of the lack of understanding audiences felt regarding particular forms of disability.

> *"I think it is more interesting, I would prefer to watch things where it tends to be the wheelchair athletes because everybody seems to be consistent isn't it. When you watch able bodied athletes, they are all able bodied and consistent. When you watch wheelchair athletes they're all in wheelchairs so there is consistency which is easy to follow...I would prefer to watch the wheelchair races because I can follow the consistency of those people in wheelchairs. I can understand what I'm looking at. It's a lack of understanding really of disability."*

> *"You are presented with a lot of disability that you may not have come into contact with. You are immediately faced with some difficult decisions because you don't really, well you aren't quite sure. What we said a lot of is that you see this mix of someone with a physical disability and other impairments and you are far more at ease with that physical element of it than you are with any mental impairment."*

> *"Well I feel as a nation we're still probably trying to understand some of those disabilities where it's not as obvious."*

> *"If you look at Jonnie Peacock for example, had his leg amputated as a really young boy but apart from that absolutely, you know, fully...functioning, able bodied, but somebody with for example, cerebral palsy, like if you see Jonnie Peacock wearing long trousers you would never know, you see somebody with cerebral palsy walking down the street you would know and I think that can make people think there's more of an issue."*

They are branding all the physical disabilities as superhuman, it's quite bad to those people with mental disabilities, who find it hard, even if they classify for the Paralympic.

> “It [coverage of the Paralympics] glorifies physical disability.”

Audience Member
Page 49, 4.3 Audience Perceptions

Across the audience data, perceptions of para-athletes were centred on those who used mobility enhancing technology and carbon fibre prosthetics. For a large majority of audiences, mobility enhancing technology was, in the words of one audience member ‘part and parcel’ of the Paralympics with the majority of audience members claiming they thought of ‘blades’ when asked to describe an image of a para-athlete. Paralympians who used mobility enhancing technology and carbon fibre prosthesis, particularly ex-servicemen, were praised by a large proportion of audiences:

> *“Let’s say somebody who is like standing up tall, he is like a ripped guy, athlete but he has got prosthetic legs you know, he is still a regular person and he gets to kind of be seen as an able person, in fact as a more than able person.”*

Audiences viewed mobility enhancing technology as providing a greater degree of ableism thereby breaking down stereotypes around the limitations of disability, with one audience member stating that:

> *“Before there was like this stigma like for some reason that they’re not as able as fully physically able people, then you watch the Paralympics and they’re a lot better at sports than a lot of fully abled people’ and another stating that ‘in some cases they [para-athletes] can do it better than the able bodied athletes with support and help from a bit of technology.”*

More able Paralympians were deemed as most palatable to watch in Paralympic coverage in their approximation to non-disabled sporting success.

> *“The wheelchair racing is completely different isn’t it because you can make a wheelchair go fast and that’s kind of getting that excitement back into it, and maybe that’s what makes it slightly different because that’s an out and out race of its own calibre.”*

The topic of mobility enhancing technologies raised questions regarding the issues surrounding the classification of disability, with one participant raising the question as to whether the use of prosthetics could be ‘classed as a disability anymore’? Indeed, the ambiguity relating to meanings of and identifications with disability within the context of sport was reflected in audiences who identified as disabled.

> *“Some people say I am a disabled person and other people say I’m just a normal person don’t use the word disability around me. Even in athletes you see that. You know the whole PC thing, is that person is disabled?”*

These accounts indicate a disability stigma hierarchy that positions para-athletes with mobility enhancing technologies at the top of - and even exceeding - disability stigma. This demonstrates how taking ‘disability’ as a unified category becomes a problem when attempting to ‘educate’ audiences and normalise disability. Improving audiences understanding of disability is therefore fraught with issues given the fluidity of the concept of disability and thus raising the question: which ‘disabilities’ are most visible and thereby normalised? This was highlighted in the perceptions of audiences who identified as disabled who claimed Paralympics coverage was seen to ‘glorify’ certain disabilities, reinforcing disability stigma hierarchies and disempowering those with non-physical disabilities.

> *“People are only reminded of people who physical disability of congenital diseases but when it came to mental health it glorifies physical disability, it makes civilisation more bias to people with actual physical disabilities.”*

More able Paralympians were deemed as most palatable to watch in Paralympic coverage in their approximation to non-disabled sporting success.

The Paralympics, Social Progress and Disability Attitudes

Although there remains a persistence in disability stigma hierarchies amongst public audiences, a significant proportion of audiences described feeling as though the Paralympic Games was an important catalyst for social progress with respect to disability attitudes, equality and rights. The Paralympics were seen to 'destigmatise' disability by 'humanising' through increasing the visibility of disability on television, improving forms of disability representation, and challenging non-disabled audiences understanding of what disabled people can do.

> *"It gets people talking about it more instead of just thinking, I don't know, a taboo sort of subject. I kind of think it's in the open, it encourages people to speak about it a bit more...not be scared to."*

> *"It's like anything, people need representation because obviously if you look at just mainstream society it tends to just be one sort of thing, so yeah I think it helps in that respect."*

> *"It challenges my understanding of what disabled means to me... like before 'disabled' I would have thought someone in a wheelchair, someone who needs assistance... I don't see these guys as disabled despite having a physical difference. They seem to get on with everyday tasks perfectly fine and that's a nice sort of change to see."*

> *"Just because somebody has that [a disability] and they're not able to do something that's exactly what the Paralympics shows, that's exactly what the advert is trying to show, just because they weren't born able bodied they are still like completely able to compete."*

In continuation of this theme, audiences described a palpable shift in the wider media coverage of disability including more disabled people represented in some of the most popular television programmes and a greater coverage of disability related issues.

> *"So, I think it's that kind of like, that breakdown and showing that like investment, not financially but like investment in screen time and just over time it's just beneficial. I think for a lot of people I think it is just normal, people don't really think anything of it, but there are always people who have never had that kind of exposure where like it's good to see that they can call a show "The Last Leg" and have a host who only has one leg and that, to show that somebody who has got one leg isn't offended by that and for them to show that they kind of shouldn't be, you know it's the norm, I think yeah it's pretty positive and beneficial."*

> *"I think in addition to that though, I have noticed reporters on shows like Watchdog and The One Show, disabled reporters but not talking about a disability issue... in the past I think you would have expected them to only be on TV when they are talking about disabilities but now they are talking about anything and everything which is how it should be and I think that has happened since the Paralympics in 2012."*

> *"I do think there seems to be a lot more in the media now as well about rights for disabled people, I remember seeing something in the news last week about a lady who travelled on the tube quite a lot and she has, she is in a wheelchair and she was saying how difficult it is to just use the toilets sometimes umm, like the struggle of getting through the gates. So, I think the issues that disabled people are facing on a daily basis have been highlighted a lot more through being aware, you take it in straight away when I see things like that which I think is good."*

More able Paralympians were deemed as most palatable to watch in Paralympic coverage in their approximation to non-disabled sporting success.

Many audience members described the extent the Paralympics had made them feel more comfortable to interact with disabled people in the context of their everyday lives.

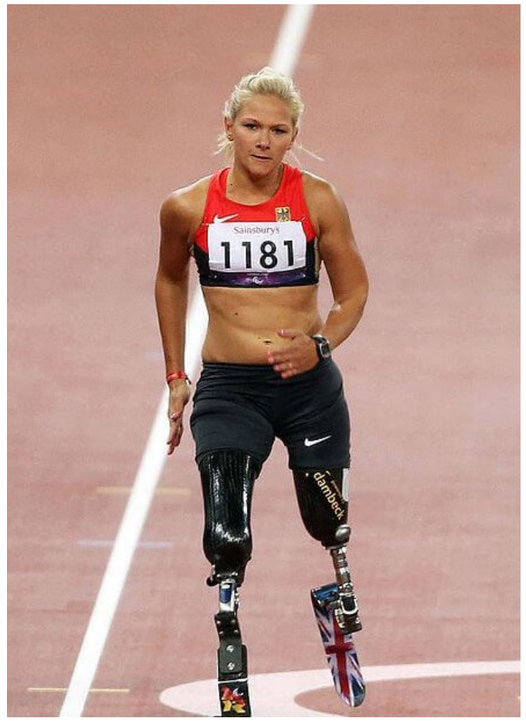
> *"It's made me much more willing to try and engage with people I come in daily life with a disability that previously I might have not. I have found over the last 6 years, having been exposed to it more on tv, that I want to talk to people and try and understand what their needs and wants are, not opposing anything on them, but I feel much more comfortable engaging with people."*

> *"[it] used to be disabled people you didn't talk about it or you shied away...let's say if you were at a party and there's a disabled person...you walk off, you didn't know what to say to them. Now you realise, I think it's made people realise that OK, they've got a disability but they can do a hell of a lot of things that I can't do. They can go out and break world records and they can go and do all these wonderful things that, that I can't do and they're just as valid a human being as I am. I think it's made people look at each other in a completely different way."*

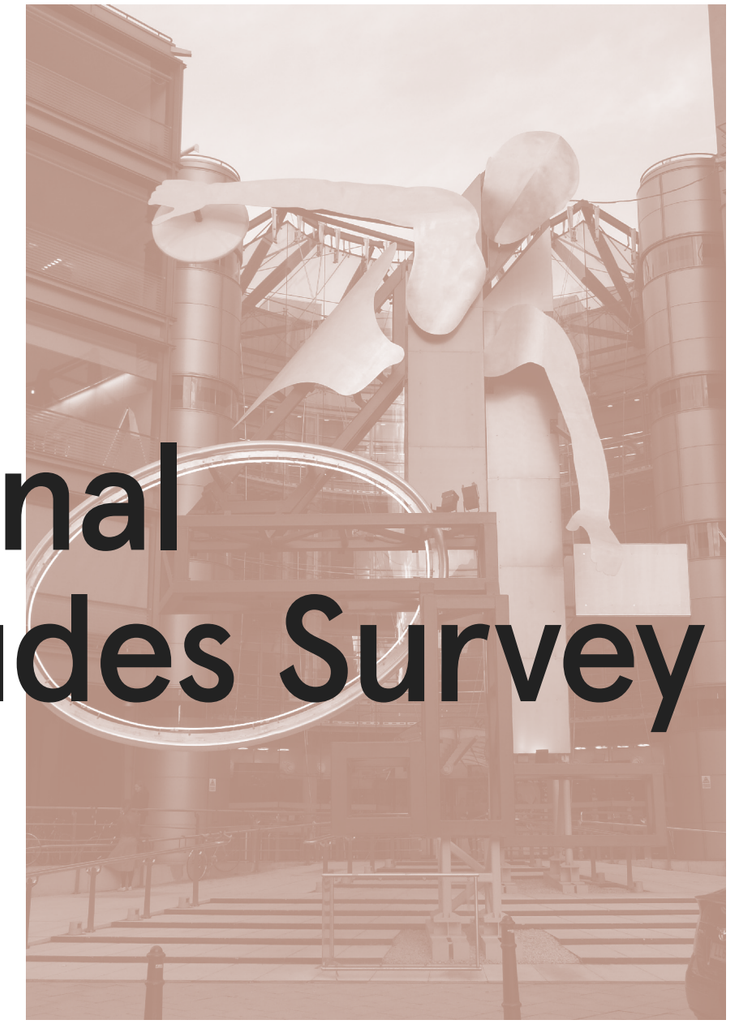
There were clear generational differences (also evidenced in survey findings) across the audience data between younger audiences who expressed a greater degree of comfort in their interaction with disability both on and off screen, and older audiences who continued to indicate a discomfort with disability, including in their watching of para-sport. Whilst this demonstrates the persistence of some problematic ableist views, the generational distinction in attitudes is more reflective of the progressive shifts in social change concerning attitudes toward disability and the cultural legacy of Channel 4's Paralympic coverage.

> *"It's the awareness I think isn't it, just getting more people, like younger generations that are watching it [Paralympics] and like it's just making it more common."*

> *"I think among the general public appreciation to disability issues is definitely much better than it was 10 years ago."*



Many audience members described the extent the Paralympics had made them feel more comfortable to interact with disabled people in the context of their everyday lives



National Attitudes Survey

This was the first time that such questions were included in this or any survey, and so we therefore cannot yet compare how attitudes might have shifted over time.

4.4

*Base: All respondents (n=2,011) Source: Q11 – Since London 2012, there have been three versions of the Paralympic Games – the Summer Paralympics in Rio 2016 (Brazil) and the Winter Paralympics in Sochi 2014 (Russia) and PyeongChang 2018 (South Korea). Thinking broadly across these three events, which of the following statements best describes how you have followed them...

Through a collaboration with UK Sport, we were able to include a number of questions relating to parasport and the Paralympics in their regular public attitudes tracker survey, which is carried out by DJS Research. This was the first time that such questions were included in this or any survey, and so we therefore cannot yet compare how attitudes might have shifted over time.

In the following analysis we present the top-level findings of this survey, supported by further statistical tests (correlations, T-tests, and regression) that allow us to understand the role of demographic and other factors in explaining the results. For the sake of parsimony, the full details of these statistical tests are not shown here, but can be shared on request.

First, we wanted to gauge interest in the Paralympics. We asked participants the extent to which they followed the Summer Paralympics in Rio 2016 (Brazil), the Winter Paralympics in Sochi 2014 (Russia) and PyeongChang 2018 (South Korea).

Figure 1 shows us that around half of UK adults have followed Paralympic sport to some extent in the past five years. This suggests that the Paralympics is squarely in the mainstream of public consciousness and is followed by a considerable portion of the UK population. When we run statistical tests to examine demographic influences on these figures, we find that there are no statistically significant differences by disability or gender, but correlation tests show that the younger you are, the more likely you are to follow the Paralympics. Moreover, if you are interested in sport generally, then you are more likely to follow the Paralympics.

Figure 1. Extent to which the public follow Paralympic Games post-2012.*

- Followed alot 8%
- Followed some 25%
- Followed only significant events 18%
- Haven't really followed 46%
- Don't know/Can't say 2%

Next, we asked explored a range of sentiments about the impact of the Paralympics, on their own attitudes and on their perceptions of societal change. As Figure 1 shows, 85% agree that the Paralympics have had a positive impact on the lives of disabled people. If you are female and interested in sport generally, then you are significantly more likely to agree with this statement. However, if you are disabled, then the opposite is true.

We also find that 35% agree that it's given them more confidence with disabled people in terms of real-world interactions. Here, females and non-disabled people are significantly more likely to hold this sentiment; and the younger you are and more interested in sport you are, the more likely you agree with the statement. When we look back to our audience study prior to the 2012 Paralympics, we found that this confidence was lacking (Hodges et al., 2014; Hodges, Scullion and Jackson, 2015). These 2019 findings suggest that some progress has been made here.

> As our interview and content analysis data earlier suggested, these backstories were an important feature of C4's Paralympics broadcasting – and it seems that audiences on the whole are responding positively.

Similarly, 54% agree that the Paralympics have challenged their attitudes about disabled people. Again, non-disabled and females are more likely to agree with this statement than disabled and males; and age and interest in sport are significant predictors of response to this question (the younger you are and more interested in sport you are, the more you agree with the statement).

When it comes to the athletes themselves, we find that 54% of UK adults are interested in the sporting achievements of Paralympics athletes and 49% are interested in the backgrounds of Paralympic athletes – in line with the findings in Figure 1. As our interview and content analysis data earlier suggested, these backstories were an important feature of C4's Paralympics broadcasting – and it seems that audiences on the whole are responding positively. Those who are least interested in the sporting achievements and backstories of Paralympic athletes are more likely to be older, male, and not interested in sport.

Figure 2. The impact of Paralympics on attitudes towards disabled people.

The Paralympic Games have had a positive impact on the lives of the people with disabilities.

Strongly agree	58%
Slightly agree	27%
Neither agree nor disagree	9%
Slightly disagree	1%
Strongly disagree	1%
I'm not sure	4%

I am interested in the sporting achievements of Paralympic athletes.

Strongly agree	18%
Slightly agree	36%
Neither agree nor disagree	27%
Slightly disagree	10%
Strongly disagree	8%
I'm not sure	1%

The Paralympic Games have challenged my attitudes about people with disabilities.

Strongly agree	26%
Slightly agree	28%
Neither agree nor disagree	31%
Slightly disagree	6%
Strongly disagree	7%
I'm not sure	2%

I am interested in the backgrounds of Paralympic athletes' (Including how they deal with their disability).

Strongly agree	17%
Slightly agree	32%
Neither agree nor disagree	29%
Slightly disagree	12%
Strongly disagree	9%
I'm not sure	1%

The Paralympic Games have given me more confidence interacting with people with disabilities in everyday life.

Strongly agree	11%
Slightly agree	24%
Neither agree nor disagree	44%
Slightly disagree	9%
Strongly disagree	9%
I'm not sure	3%

The Paralympic Games have inspired me to engage with other media content that features disability.

Strongly agree	14%
Slightly agree	17%
Neither agree nor disagree	42%
Slightly disagree	14%
Strongly disagree	11%
I'm not sure	2%

For all participants except for the 8% who have followed the Paralympics ‘a lot’ since 2014 (see Figure 1), we probed into some reasons why they do not. The three negative statements in Figure 3 originate from our previous qualitative audience work in 2011-12 (Hodges et al., 2014), which identified these as three key obstacles to engaging with Paralympic broadcasting (and were again evident to a degree in the focus groups discussed above).

Figure 3. Reasons for not following the Paralympic Games.

I feel uncomfortable watching people with disabilities at the Paralympic Games.

- Strongly agree 2%
- Slightly agree 5%
- Neither agree nor disagree 13%
- Slightly disagree 21%
- Strongly disagree 58%
- I’m not sure 1%

I don’t like the way the media portray people with disabilities at the Paralympic Games.

- Strongly agree 3%
- Slightly agree 10%
- Neither agree nor disagree 43%
- Slightly disagree 21%
- Strongly disagree 15%
- I’m not sure 9%

The Paralympic Games don’t really represent the elite sport.

- Strongly agree 4%
- Slightly agree 8%
- Neither agree nor disagree 21%
- Slightly disagree 24%
- Strongly disagree 38%
- I’m not sure 6%

Perceptions of the Paralympic Games

In 2019, it seems that two of these sentiments (discomfort towards watching disabled people and a feeling that the Paralympics does not represent elite sport) were far less pronounced (with 6% and 13% respectively agreeing with the statements), which to us represents positive progress, and a likely impact of C4’s Paralympic broadcasting. For these two questions, females were significantly more likely to disagree with the statement than males, and the younger you are, the more likely you are to disagree with the statement.

Opinions are more divided on the manner in which athletes participating at Paralympics are portrayed in the media. The only significant demographic predictor for this question was disability status, where disabled people were more likely to agree with the statement than non-disabled people. But why? Returning to our focus group data, we can see some of the idiosyncrasies that disabled audiences have with Paralympic broadcasting, which point to a challenge for broadcasters – a point we take up in the recommendations.

The only significant demographic predictor for this question was disability status, where disabled people were more likely to agree with the statement than non-disabled people. But why?

Perceptions of TV coverage

We also wanted to know if people were engaging with para-sport beyond the Paralympics, or whether these were just general mega sporting event audiences - which again was a suggestion of our 2011-12 data (Hodges et al., 2014). Our 2019 data is probably unclear on this, with 30% watching para-sport outside of the Paralympics (compared to 45% for the Olympics) and 50% undecided. Again, females were more likely than males to agree with the statement, and age and interest in sport were significant predictors: the younger and more interested in sport you are, the more likely you are to agree with the statement.

Figure 4. Enjoyment of the para-sport beyond the Paralympics

I enjoy watching programmes featuring disability sport, other than the Paralympic Games themselves, when they are on TV.

- Strongly agree.....9%
- Slightly agree.....21%
- Neither agree nor disagree.....44%
- Slightly disagree 10%
- Strongly disagree 12%
- I'm not sure.....5%

I enjoy watching programmes featuring Olympic sports, other than the Olympic Games themselves, when they are on TV.

- Strongly agree.....13%
- Slightly agree.....31%
- Neither agree nor disagree.....29%
- Slightly disagree 10%
- Strongly disagree 14%
- I'm not sure.....3%

Again, females were more likely than males to agree with the statement, and age and interest in sport were significant predictors, with the younger and more interested in sport you are, the more likely you are to agree with the statement.

These findings (both Figures 4 and 5) suggest that there is a significantly sized audience (approximately 30% of UK adults) who would like to see more para-sport coverage than is currently served.

Finally, we asked people to rate the amount of TV and online coverage given to disability sport outside of the Paralympics. Here, people were 10 times more likely to say there is too little compared to too much, with only 3% saying too much. Again, we tested for demographic differences and if you were female, younger and a high consumer of sport, you are more likely to say there is too little para-sport. These findings (both Figures 4 and 5) suggest that there is a significantly sized audience (approximately 30% of UK adults) who would like to see more para-sport coverage than is currently served.

Figure 5. Views on the amount of para-sport on TV and online.

Apart from the Paralympic Games themsevles, how would you rate the amount of TV or online coverage given to disability sport?

- Too little.....33%
- About right 37%
- Too much 3%
- Don't know 27%

Apart from the Paralympic Games themsevles, how would you rate the amount of TV or online coverage given to sports that feature in the Olympics?

- Too little.....14%
- About right 57%
- Too much 10%
- Don't know 19%

“It challenges my understanding of what disabled means to me... like before ‘disabled’ I would have thought someone in a wheelchair, someone who needs assistance... I don’t see these guys as disabled despite having a physical difference. They seem to get on with everyday tasks perfectly fine and that’s a nice sort of change to see.”

Audience Member
Page 50, 4.3 Audience Perceptions

Project Exhibition: bodyparts

> Through the bodyparts exhibition, we were able to provide a unique space for multiple voices to be heard, describe issues of empowerment and marginalization, and we hope, challenge thinking around disability.

4.5

Accompanying the research project was the development of a public exhibition—bodyparts—held in London. The exhibition draws explicitly on the project's audience data. Bringing together a diverse collection of artworks from disabled and non-disabled artists, this exhibition grapples with a number of challenging questions and themes explored in this research project.

As with the project, the exhibition was concerned with the following questions:

1. As disability becomes increasingly visible—through, for example, heightened coverage of events such as the Paralympic Games—what impact has such visibility had upon the everyday lives of disabled people?
2. Have there been widespread societal shifts with respect to attitudes toward, and understanding of, disability?
3. Has a hyper-visibility of disability changed the meanings we ascribe to disabled bodies and bought about meaningful social change?

bodyparts moved the public to think about progressive social change, the distance travelled, and evokes questions about continued marginalisation and struggle, empowerment and disempowerment, ability and dis-ability. Through a focus on bodily difference, shifting and affective understandings of disability, and wider issues of social justice, the exhibition challenged the public to imagine possible futures.

Through the bodyparts exhibition, we were able to provide a unique space for multiple voices to be heard, describe issues of empowerment and marginalization, and we hope, challenge thinking around disability. The exhibition offered a nuanced understanding of the relationships between culture, representation, meaning, and inclusivity. Through this exhibition, the research became something tangible; research that could be touched, seen, heard and felt.

All exhibition content has been digitised and will be subsequently available at the project website at the conclusion of the project: www.pasccal.com

Documentary Film: Parallel Lines

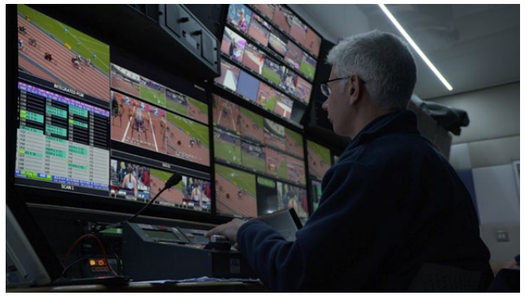
Eight times Paralympic Dressage Gold Medal winner Sophie Christiansen CBE and Double Winter Paralympian, World Cup Gold Downhill Sit Ski champion and now Winter Paralympic sports commentator Sean Rose also feature.

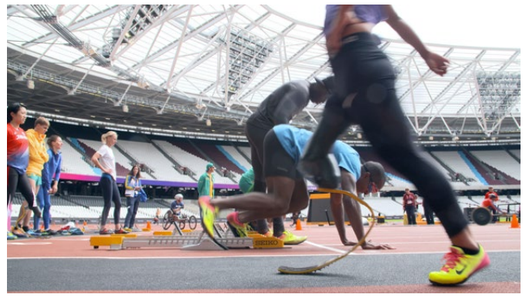
4.6

A further outcome from the project is the full-length documentary film, Parallel Lines. The film was made by Professor Kerstin Stutterheim and Stephanie Farmer for RedBalloon Productions, Bournemouth University. As artistic research the film gives an insight into the life and work of Paralympic athletes and explores the presence and presentation of para-sport in the media through the experiences of the athletes themselves, and goes backstage with broadcasters at a world para-sports event.

The filmmakers observe the usually hidden daily lives of Paralympic athletes as they go about their training and preparation in-between the global media events of the Paralympics. It demonstrates, to differing degrees, those athletes who (temporarily) become hyper-visible on our screens during major events as well as those whose lives (sporting and otherwise) slip under the radar of media attention. It asks questions about what motivates and sustains these athletes.

The full documentary closely follows David Smith OBE – 2016 Individual Rio Champion, 2017 European Champion, 2018 BISFED Boccia World Champion and Lucy Shuker – Wheelchair Tennis London and Rio Bronze medallist (doubles) and highest ranked British woman in her sport. Eight times Paralympic Dressage Gold Medal winner Sophie Christiansen CBE and Double Winter Paralympian, World Cup Gold Downhill Sit Ski champion and now Winter Paralympic sports commentator Sean Rose also feature. The filmmakers would like to publicly thank these athletes for kindly allowing us access into their busy lives and training schedules and everyone who has supported this project.





Watch the film here:
www.pasccal.com

Credits
Concept/Supervision: Professor Kerstin Stutterheim
Directed: Prof Kerstin Stutterheim & Stephanie Farmer
Cinematography: Dror Dyan, Tom Hooker, Louiz Moura, Vitor Vilela
Edit: Vitor Vilela, 2nd Louiz Moura, Assistant Harry Cowley
Location Sound: Harry Cowley
Produced: Stephanie Farmer, Executive Producer, RedBalloon Productions

5

Proposals and Challenges

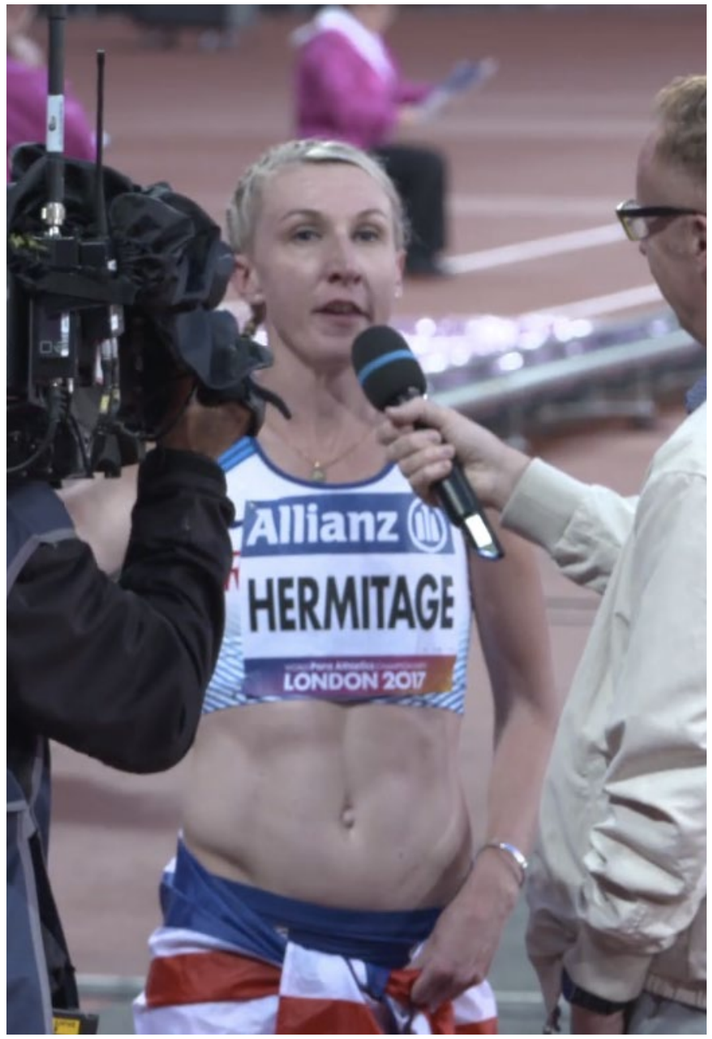
> This challenge exists for governing bodies, broadcasters, and host committees who collectively can harness their powers so as to ensure parasport is representative of, and for, the multiplicity of disabilities.

5.

The following are general recommendations and key challenges drawn from the research findings. These are important reflection points for a multitude of stakeholders, not limited to policy makers, disability advocates and charities, future host Paralympic cities, broadcasters, and national and international parasport governing bodies.

Our intent here is to raise these challenges and suggest ideas and opportunities for further discussion. We would hope to work with relevant stakeholders to continue to enhance societal change and for the full participation in daily life for disabled people.

1. Data are suggestive of the normalisation of disability (or at least certain disabilities, the able-disabled); there remains a pressing challenge within parasport generally, and within broadcast coverage, to embrace a wider spectrum of disabilities so as to further progressive social change. This challenge exists for governing bodies, broadcasters, and host committees who collectively can harness their powers so as to ensure parasport is representative of, and for, the multiplicity of disabilities.
2. Data indicate that there is a focus on certain types of sport (mostly familiar Olympic sports). Within the parameters/boundaries of producing high-quality elite sport, what creative ways can be explored to include/incorporate a wider range of sports and thereby represent a wider range of disabilities? There are numerous issues that need to be surmounted, such as budget, live feeds provided by host broadcasters, and unilateral availability. However, to continue to press for progressive social change, there remains a need for further dialogue between broadcasters, disability groups, policy makers, national and international governing bodies with respect to creating opportunity for inclusion and the development of blueprints for broadcasters, and for additional input into how varying forms of impairment are mediated and represented.



In a global context, Britain might be seen as a world leader in terms of scale and progressive form of Paralympic broadcast coverage.

3. It is beyond doubt that Channel 4's coverage has led to progressive social change. The show, The Last Leg, for example, was universally acclaimed by participants in our audience work package. However, disabled people were less likely to be engaged with Paralympic coverage than non-disabled audiences. This is suggestive that C4 have played an important role in societal attitudes and understandings of disability, particularly amongst those who are not disabled. We do recommend however, in concert with 2 above, that further dialogue take place with disability advocates, policy makers and disability rights groups with regard to reflection on, and debate about, how disabled people would like to be represented. We feel this will make important inroads into connecting disabled people to the coverage, and aid in undoing the impression shown through the data that Paralympians were not representative of the everyday lives of disabled people.
4. In a global context, Britain might be seen as a world leader in terms of scale and progressive form of Paralympic broadcast coverage. However, there exist large disparities in terms of form, content and amount of coverage by national broadcasters globally. We urge national broadcasters to engage with the approaches taken by C4 as well as the data within this study so as to further enhance the progressive nature of parasport coverage.
5. The data suggest that the amount of coverage of female sport in the Paralympics far outweighs that for non-disabled sport and the Olympic counterpart. This is highly encouraging, suggesting lessons that could be applied across the broadcast spectrum.
6. The data also suggest a younger and female audience are most likely to engage with para-sport. This hints towards the existence of a different demographic of audience for para-sport than many mainstream non-disabled sports (typically male, and of all ages). We feel this provides an opportunity to counter traditional and stereotypical portrayals of gendered athletes, which could further enhance a social change agenda related to gender equality. Future work should be conducted into the gendered representation of disability in the media so as to further inform broadcasters with regard to the representation of female (disabled) bodies and aid in influencing the younger, female audience about body culture, sporting opportunities and gender equality.
7. Backstories were seen as a key feature and audiences looked to them for education and to understand more about the everyday lives of athletes. We would recommend that such backstories provide further opportunity to narrate/frame coverage so as to continue the journey toward further social change, especially if they focus on the everyday lives of disabled people/para-athletes
8. Audiences expressed an overwhelming desire for coverage to explain/educate them about the events; technologies such as Lexi were lauded in this regard. We would recommend further exploration of how educational aims can continue to be achieved in future coverage and of new/emergent technologies for achieving this aim.
9. We appreciate that this report only covers one Paralympic Games and offers data related to one broadcaster—Channel 4—who we would argue are at the progressive end of the spectrum in terms of the representation of disabilities on television. Further academic work needs to be conducted on other sporting forms and on other broadcast media (as well as emergent and established new media technologies). There are other sporting contests, for example, the Commonwealth Games, where parasport sits alongside non-disabled competition. It would be highly important to extend analysis to such events (and on different broadcasters) to gain a fuller picture of the potential for progressive social change through parasport coverage more generally. Further, it will be important to continue to track future iterations of the Paralympic questions that have been inserted into the national attitudes survey so as to track change over time.
10. The data revealed that only 7% of the Rio Paralympic GB team were of BAME origin, which appears to be markedly low comparative to Olympic counterparts and national figures. Further work needs to be conducted to establish whether this figure is an aberration or part of a larger trend with regard to the participation and/or selection of disabled athletes/participants and whom are of BAME origin.

6

Conclusions

This challenge exists for governing bodies, broadcasters, and host committees who collectively can harness their powers so as to ensure parasport is representative of, and for, the multiplicity of disabilities.

6.

The research reported here was produced with a number of specific objectives. Working in conjunction with a number of stakeholders—including C4, UK Sport, Paralympics GB—our intent was to explore the media constructions of disability through Paralympic sport and the impact on public attitudes and perceptions of disability.

Furthermore, we were intent on highlighting where there exists measurable impact on attitudes towards disability, where there remain challenges and ensuring public debate on these questions. The legacy of the documentary film—Parallel Lines—and of the project exhibition—bodyparts—will continue long after this report.

The research, exhibition, film and this project report have taken the entire team on a fascinating journey with international collaborators, Paralympians, stakeholders, broadcasters, and sporting bodies, one which forged an immense appreciation and understanding of collaborative working, partnership development, and knowledge exchange. It also allowed for us to identify the priceless value (and inherent creative tension) of working across and beyond comfortable academic borders (figuratively and literally) with colleagues from the cultural industries, academics from different disciplines, from sport, the museum and galleries sector, and the charities. We were guided throughout the life of the project by numerous advisory board members and collaborators, including prominent disabled academics, Disability Rights UK, the APPG Disability, Paralympics GB, C4, Sunset and Vine, Open Mike Productions, numerous leading disabled artists. Further, the project team as a whole represents a number of both visible and invisible disabilities. Collectively, this ensured the project was stronger and spoke from, as well as to, various disability communities.

Through a diverse array of research methods and work packages we created a rich evidence base—some of which we have only been able to touch on in this report—that collectively provides contextual and reflective insights into contemporary disability body cultures,

> We have been incredibly lucky to have worked with many people who have challenged us shaped our approach, disagreed with us and strengthened both our approach and resolve.

representations, attitudes and social life. There are, of course, a number of accompanying academic outputs. Do contact the project authors if you would like to read any of the academic outputs.

Perhaps most important, are the people we have met. We have been incredibly lucky to have worked with many people who have challenged us, shaped our approach, disagreed with us and strengthened both our approach and resolve. Within a large, interdisciplinary and collaborative project there have, invariably, been some tensions; working through these within the team and with stakeholders has no doubt aided understanding and the data we have been able to present in this report. We are most grateful to all those who have contributed—time, advice, office space, guidance—to making this research as strong as it possibly could be. We are, however, most indebted to the general public. They have provided us with over 1000 hours of data through audience focus groups, filled in national surveys, spoken with us at engagement events, visited the exhibition, and watched the documentary. We have been cognisant to ensure that the words of the public and stakeholders are those most visible in this report; their words shaped the project exhibition and have provided us with the insights from which we have been able to develop our recommendations.

The pages of this report have provided a succinct overview of the key findings and recommendations and so they need not be repeated here; for us this is less of a conclusion and more of a starting point. There exist a multitude of opportunities, across all agencies and collaborators, to build upon what we were able to achieve in this short project. One of its strengths was the collaborations through which all parties were able to learn, enhance understanding, develop original approaches to research, and build sustainable partnerships with key stakeholders. The media representation of disability matters, and the role and value of the creative industries in shaping societal relationships, attitudes and understandings should not be under-estimated. The media - and Paralympic sport - are clearly an importance vehicle in shaping attitudes toward disability for all audiences and raising the awareness of social injustice and disability issues. Further, the media can play a crucial function in the further education of audiences around non-physical / visible disabilities (of which audiences continue to express discomfort and lack of knowledge).

The substantive and robust empirical evidence base detailed in this report, and our own reflections on the entire project, provides a number of sectors and stakeholders in the UK and internationally with any number of exciting opportunities, challenges and possibilities. Agencies from across a number of sectors can draw on the evidence herein to, for example: further promote social change, refine approaches to representation that are inclusive of all disabilities, understand the intersections and complexities of gender, race and disability, provide further education on and comprehension of the lived everyday realities of people with disabilities, ensure stereotypical free coverage and representation, collectively harness powers so as to ensure parasport is representative of, and for, the multiplicity of disabilities, create broadcast blueprints, and expand developments in the UK globally.

Yet, we have only touched the surface. We welcome future opportunities to provide more detail, engage with current and future stakeholders, and undertake further research related to the areas touched upon in this report. By way of a temporary closure, however, we invite, if not challenge, the media, national and international governing bodies, disability rights groups, host committees and so on to respond to, and engage with, this report and to capitalise upon the huge potential to be derived from socially progressive broadcast coverage of the Paralympics.

7

All images used in the pages of the report are drawn from the project; these include a number of stills from the project documentary ‘Parallel Lines’ and images provided by artists in the development of works for the project exhibition, bodyparts.

References

Black J (2016). ‘As British as fish and chips’: British newspaper representations of Mo Farah during the 2012 London Olympic Games. Media, Culture & Society, 38(7), 979-996.

Briant E, Watson N and Philo G (2013). Reporting disability in the age of austerity: the changing face of media representation of disability and disabled people in the United Kingdom and the creation of new ‘folk devils’. Disability & Society 28(6): 874-889.

Hodges C, Scullion and Jackson, D (2015). From awww to awe factor: UK audience meaning-making of the 2012 Paralympics as mediated spectacle. Journal of Popular Television, 3 (2), 195 - 212. DOI: 10.1386/jptv.3.2.195_1

Hodges C, Jackson D, Scullion R, Thompson S and Molesworth M (2014). Tracking changes in everyday experiences of disability and disability sport within the context of the 2012 London Paralympics. CMC Publications, Bournemouth University.

Howe P D and Silva CF (2017). The cyborgification of Paralympic sport. Movement & Sport Sciences, 97.

Jackson D, Hodges C, Molesworth M and Scullion R (2014). Re-framing Disability? The Media, (dis)empowerment and Voice in the London Paralympics. London: Routledge.

MacRury I and Poynter G (2010). ‘Team GB’ and London 2012: The paradox of national and global identities. The International Journal of the History of Sport, 27(16-18), 2958-2975.

Pullen E, Jackson D, Silk M and Scullion R (2018). Re-presenting the Paralympics: (contested) philosophies, production practices and the hypervisibility of disability. Media, Culture and Society. DOI: 10.1177/0163443718799399.

Purdue D and Howe PD (2013). Who’s in and who is it? Legitimate bodies within the Paralympic Games. Sociology of Sport Journal 30(1): 24-40.

Schantz OJ and Gilbert K (2001). ‘An Ideal Misconstrued: Newspaper Coverage of the Atlanta Paralympic Games in France and Germany’. Sociology of Sport 18(1): 69–94.

Arts & Humanities Research Council

Bournemouth University