

COMPETING AND CONFLICTING NARRATIVES:  
A FRAMING ANALYSIS OF THE PARALYMPIC GAMES IN *THE NEW YORK TIMES*  
AND *USA TODAY* BETWEEN 1996 AND 2013

BY

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THESIS

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## **Abstract**

This thesis examined the print media coverage of the Paralympic Games between 1996 and 2013. *The New York Times* and *USA Today* were used as a representative sample of print media coverage in the United States and the time period of the study was selected as it was determined to have been a significant area of development within the Paralympic movement.

Through the utilization of framing analysis techniques, this study explored the lens with which readers view the Paralympic Games. By examining the emphasis that is placed on particular angles of issues related to the Paralympic Games, it was sought to gain an understanding of the ways in which media producers influence public meanings and opinions. The three major themes found in this study were the growth of Paralympic sport versus frustration with the lack of progress, legitimacy of Paralympic sport versus differences from “traditional sport” and overcoming obstacles versus maintaining victimhood. This series of conflicting narratives indicate the complex challenge faced by readers of mainstream media in deriving meaning and opinions of the Paralympic Games.

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **Introduction**

Sport has the ability to shape cultural ideologies and values (Boyle & Haynes, 2000) and these ideologies serve as the basis for societal views of ability. The participation in sport by members of the dominant group is easily understood while those members of marginalized groups use sport as a means of empowerment and as a tool for their own stereotypical representations. These representations are often depicted through mainstream media outlets. The relationship between sport and the media is considered to be symbiotic (Coakley, 2003; Delaney & Madigan, 2009) as each harbor a responsibility for the growth of the other. The media serves as one of the most influential structures concerning the perceptions, opinion, and attitudes of the public (McCann, 1996), and this is apparent when considering the interest surrounding Paralympic sport. The Paralympic Games, the largest sporting competition for people with disabilities (International Paralympic Committee, 2013), exemplify the defiance athletes with disabilities are making on the accepted notions of ability within sport. The relationship between sport and the media reinforces and reproduces the dominant societal ideologies (Trujilo, 2001) thus furthering the accepted discourse of athletes without disabilities existing hierarchically before athletes with disabilities.

Mainstream media constructs an image of the growing status of the Paralympic Games and the growing influence on the existing discourse surrounding disability and sport. Researchers have examined issues of representation on an international scale (Schantz & Gilbert, 2001; Schell & Rodriguez, 2001; Smith & Thomas, 2005) and their conclusions have greatly contributed to the narrative surrounding disability and sport. However, there continues to be a

gap in the narrative that surrounds American print media, as the accepted cultural and social discourse of sport centers on able-bodied athletes rather than those with disabilities.

Many scholars have argued that for people with disabilities, the consistent media representation of attributing a low value and a continuous status as an “outsider” has a lasting internalized impact (Iwakuma, 1997; Smart, 2001). Conversely, researchers have continued to recognize that sport participation by people with disabilities instills confidence and garnish a lasting positive outlook on life (Thomas & Katz, 2001) and that through participation in sport, athletes with disabilities seek to reject their assigned role of invisibility and objectivity (Schell & Rodriguez, 2001).

Within each quadrennial, the Paralympics are continuing to grow in size and scope, with an increasing number of participating athletes, countries represented, spectators, and media reach. With this growth, knowledge of the Paralympic movement has continued to spread, reaching potential participants as well as sport fans. The United States has historically had a lack of media coverage concerning the Paralympic Games. While this has been found to be true, research is needed on the coverage that is present in order to understand the material consumers of media are being presented when considering sporting competition for people with disabilities.

My purpose with this research is to answer the lingering questions I have about the ways in which athletes with disabilities, specifically Paralympic athletes, are understood within American media. Through my own evolving identification as an athlete with a disability, I have come to recognize and identify with the present shortcomings but I also realize that there are existing narratives that are impacting consumers of mainstream media in the United States.

The objectives of this study are to provide an analysis of the print media coverage of Paralympic sport in the United States by utilizing *The New York Times* and *USA Today*. This

analysis will have a qualitative perspective in order to provide as clear of a depiction of the ways in which the Paralympics are discussed and framed for readers as possible. Additionally, this study will seek to provide a thorough examination of the existing research in the field concerning the inclusion of Paralympic sport in the mainstream media to locate any gaps or alterations in how disability is represented in a sporting context.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **Review of Literature**

This literature review is organized into three parts. The first part of the review investigates Paralympic sport in the mass media with a focus on the amount and frequency of coverage and the thematic narratives present within publications. The second section will examine the representation of disability in mainstream media. The final section will examine the impacts of media coverage on the self-identity of the athletes and spectators perspectives of the Paralympic Games.

### **Paralympic Sport in the Media**

#### **Amount of Paralympic Coverage**

Historically, newspapers have served as a popular media outlet for following the news and staying informed, and traditionally the sports section has been among the most widely read section by consumers (Boyle & Haynes, 2000). Despite the growth of the Internet, which resulted in the decline of newspaper popularity over the last several decades, the sports sections of print media continued to grow in size (Vincent & Crossman, 2007) and the use of newspapers as a resource for sporting news continued to remain high.

Even at an elite Paralympic level, however, newspaper coverage of athletes with disabilities has generally been very scarce, especially when compared to the Olympic coverage (Stein, 1989; Schell & Duncan, 1999). Schantz and Gilbert (2001) examined French and German newspaper coverage of the 1996 Paralympic Games and found that the French newspapers printed 36 articles and two photographs while the German newspapers sent 68 articles and 23 photographs to print during a month and a half observation. Thomas and Smith (2003) found similar results in their examination of British newspaper coverage of the 2000 Sydney

Paralympic Games, reporting 62 articles and 47 photographs from four newspapers over a span of 13 days. Coverage by six high circulation newspapers during the 2002 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games was examined in a study by Golden (2003). Her results indicated a significant discrepancy between the number of printed articles during the two major events (Table 1). There was an average of 427 articles concerning the Olympic Games and only an average of two articles, between all six newspapers, about the Paralympic Games during the span of the study.

**Table 1 Comparison of Olympic and Paralympic Articles Published by Selected American High Circulation Newspapers (02/01/02 to 03/18/02)**

Newspaper	Olympic Articles	Paralympic Articles
<i>USA Today</i>	611	5
<i>The New York Times</i>	387	5
<i>The Los Angeles Times</i>	533	0
<i>The Washington Post</i>	306	2
<i>The New York Daily News</i>	278	0
<i>The Houston Chronicle</i>	446	1

Chang and Crossman (2009) analyzed coverage of the 2004 Olympic and Paralympic Games in the South Korean newspaper *Chosun Ibo*. A total of 261 articles and 220 photographs were published during the Olympic competition with only 16 articles and 17 photographs published during the Paralympic competition. When the newspaper was considered as a whole, Olympic coverage accounted for 1.2% of the newspaper each day while the Paralympics were significantly less with only 0.2%.

Buysse and Borcharding (2010) examined photographs from 12 print newspapers during the 2008 Beijing Paralympic Games and found that there were 152 total photographs published. The authors examined four newspapers from the United States, the most of any country in the study, and found that there were only nine published photographs. Buysse and Borcharding cited a parallel study conducted on 2008 Olympic coverage in the same newspapers, and noted that there were over 4,000 published photographs.

Pappous, Marcellini, and de Léséleuc (2011) examined the Paralympic photographic coverage from Sydney, Athens, and Beijing in five European countries. The authors noted that while there was an increase overall (i.e., from 56 published photographs during the 2000 Sydney Paralympic Games to 95 in 2008), coverage actually decreased in Germany and Spain and the discrepancy between the Olympics and Paralympics was still significant.

Photographic coverage was also examined as it related to the host city selection for the Olympic and Paralympic Games. When photographic coverage from Sydney 2000 to Beijing 2008 was examined, Pappous et al. (2011) noted that British and Greek newspapers were among the leaders in Paralympic coverage. The authors observed that the Greek newspapers had an increase of four images in Sydney to 22 in Beijing, indicating coverage that was more than quadrupled in scope, and British newspapers increased from 22 images in Sydney to 42, nearly double the amount of coverage, in Beijing. During this study, both Britain and Greece had either been selected as a host of a future Olympic and Paralympic Games or were in the bidding process.

Interestingly, some researchers have examined whether the host country was able to sustain such media attention following the competition. This is of particular interest with regard to the Paralympic Movement. Pappous et al. (2011) found that the three main reasons a city looks to host the Olympic and Paralympic Games are for publicity, profit, and an increase in national pride. The Greek and British media coverage indicated that another reason a city may look to host was to promote Paralympic sport. After serving as the host country to the 2004 Paralympic Games, Greek newspaper coverage in the 2008 Beijing Paralympic Games remained ranked second among the five European countries examined by Pappous et al. (2011) for their continued photographic representations of Paralympic sport.

Similarly to the relative lack of textual and photographic news coverage on the Paralympic Games, so too was the televised coverage in the United States. Schell and Duncan (1999) conducted a content analysis on the four hours of taped CBS coverage from the 1996 Atlanta Paralympics, which was not aired live. There were 29 different segments within the 4 hours of coverage, each of which averaged 4 minutes in length, but only 96 seconds highlighted the actual sporting competition.

The Olympic and Paralympic Games have been marked by one striking difference. This difference is not indicated by the intensity of the sport being seen nor does the level of competition among the athletes demonstrate the seriousness of sporting competition. Rather, this difference has consistently been seen in the awareness and publicity of the two events (Nash, 2001). In their analysis of French and German newspaper coverage of the 1996 Atlanta Paralympic Games, Schantz and Gilbert (2001) found that the use of Olympic promotional materials prior to the start of competition contrasted with the timing of Paralympic media coverage. Within Paralympic competition, 80% of the articles were published from the day after opening ceremony through the day following the closing ceremony and most newspapers had no published media more than five days prior to the start of competition. The Olympics, being a major sporting event, heavily utilize the media as a promotional tool, generating interest for media consumers in the days, weeks, and months leading up to the start of competition. Furthermore, Schantz and Gilbert (2001) noted that while the 1996 Olympic Games were discussed up until two weeks following the closing ceremony, there were only two articles published following the conclusion of the Paralympics.

## Themes of Media Content

Norden (1994) indicated that in the representation of disability in the media, how disability was represented was in need of greater change rather than how much coverage was available. The media has the power to frame public opinions on reality and thus have the ability to encourage positive portrayals or further negative and stigmatizing narratives. A content analysis by Zhang and Haller (2013) noted that in general, people with disabilities believe the mass media “frame people with disabilities as supercrips, disadvantaged, or ill victims” (p. 329), similar to results noted by Clogston (1990) and Haller (1999).

Schell and Duncan (1999) noted that performance expectations and results are a significant portion of traditional sport journalism but have often been excluded from Paralympic coverage. In their content analysis of CBS’s coverage of the 1996 Paralympic Games, they indicated that there was an evident lack of sport-specific commentaries centering on rules and game strategies and rather described Paralympic athletes as “victims of misfortune, as *different*, as Other” (p. 27). Duncan (1986), noted that within Olympic sport coverage, losses and failures were presented as catastrophes but Schell and Duncan (1999) found that the underperformance of Paralympic athletes was described in very flat ways, implying that “the loser should be grateful for the Paralympic experience” (p. 35) and that their presence at the Paralympic Games was enough of a victory. They found that the navigation of loss was not depicted by commentators from the perspective of a disappointed elite athlete that had trained for competition but rather as satisfactory in the outcome exemplified as “They are being dealt the harsh reality and loving every minute of it” and “Fourth place never felt so good” (p.35).

Schantz and Gilbert (2001) concurred in their analysis of the 1996 Paralympic Games in France and Germany and noted that “performances, deemed as essentials in ordinary sports-

journalism, are totally neglected in French newspapers” (p. 79). They also indicated that rather than discuss performance, 27.6% of the examined articles in their study showed an admiration “for the way ‘these people’ have beaten all odds to ‘overcome their disability’” (p. 81).

Performance results legitimize sport by representing an interest and expectation surrounding competition and the lack of this coverage in the Paralympic Games was indicative of the lack of legitimacy that journalist and media producers found in Paralympic sport and the consistent perpetuation of the need to further the evolving human-interest story.

Chang, Crossman, Taylor, and Walker (2011) examined Canadian newspaper coverage in *The Globe and Mail* of the 2008 Beijing Olympic and Paralympic Games and found that when considering themes, there was variance between Olympic and Paralympic coverage. The prediction and reporting of game results accounted for nearly half (47%) of the 372 articles examined surrounding Olympic coverage. Reporting on game results accounted for 38.8% of the articles analyzed during the Paralympic Games. While these percentages may have seemed strikingly different, the content within the narrative surrounding competition results varied significantly. During the Olympic Games, competition results focused primarily on those who medaled while the Paralympic Games coverage included athletes regardless of whether they medaled. This indication surrounding competition results varied from that of Schantz and Gilbert (2001) who noted that they “could not find a patronizing attitude concerning the defeat of athletes, simply because the newspapers did only talk about medal winners” (p. 84).

Thomas and Smith (2003), in their analysis of coverage of the 2000 Sydney Games in British newspapers, found a likeness between the reporting styles of successful British Olympic and Paralympic athletes, indicating a strong sense of national pride by sports fans. This similarity coincided with the research of Schantz and Gilbert (2001), who noted that “93% of the articles

related to the competitions had a very strong ethnocentric and sometimes even nationalistic tenor” (p. 81). This finding is indicative of a favorable reflection between the reporting of performances by both athletes with and without disabilities (Thomas & Smith, 2003).

Following the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games, British newspapers also built upon the success of the Olympics by comparing British Paralympians to athletes without disabilities (Thomas & Smith, 2003) by utilizing language such as “the Paralympian equivalent” to a non-disabled athlete and discussing performances that had “hoped to emulate Olympian Jason Queally” (p. 174). Similarly, Chang et al. (2011) noted that in the examination of the 2008 Games, there was a comparison of Olympic and Paralympic athletes made in order to put the exceptional performances of Paralympic athletes into context by comparing them the performances of Olympic athletes already seen as extraordinary. This comparison served to put down Paralympic athletes by indicating that their performances needed a qualifier to be seen as exceptional. The comparison of Olympic and Paralympic performances seemed to indicate the media’s attempt at “emulating of able-bodiedness” (Thomas & Smith, 2003) in order to contextualize Paralympic performances for readers. This highlights Hahn’s (1984) claim that society socializes people with disabilities to conform to the majority within their surroundings, which so often includes “bodily strength and physical wholeness” (Thomas & Smith, 2003, p. 175). The media’s attempts at making Paralympic performances resemble that of the Olympics is a way in which the media has attempted to make those with disabilities “appear as ‘normal’ as possible” (p. 175).

The framing of Paralympic athletes by British newspapers and the association created to their Olympic counterparts was a way in which these athletes symbolized the perfecting of their bodies within the expression of physicality and strength in sport (DePauw, 1997; Hargreaves,

2000). People with disabilities are often portrayed within the context of a comparison to people without disabilities and this has been negatively associated with the denial of a disability identity. Through this suggestion, it was recognized that in order to establish status within a group of mostly able-bodied individuals, people with disabilities needed to downplay their marginal status in order to gain fuller acceptance (Hahn, 1984; Hughes & Paterson, 1997).

While the thematic narrative of national pride was observed, Thomas and Smith (2003) also noted in their examination that nearly a quarter of the articles featured in the four British newspapers “depicted athletes as ‘victims’ or ‘courageous’ people who ‘suffer’ from personal tragedies” (p. 172). These findings aligned with the similar findings of Schantz and Gilbert (2001) and, according to Golden (2003), athletes with disabilities have been described as “pitiable and pathetic; the superhuman cripple or supercrip; maladjusted; a burden; or unable to live a successful life” (p. 79).

Chang et al. (2011) contrasted these findings in their analysis of Canadian newspaper coverage of the 2008 Beijing Paralympic Games and found that Paralympic athletes were described as “real athletes” and “the best Canadians” (p. 42). These descriptions emphasized placed on their superior skills rather than the attention as “victims of tragic misfortune” that were found in previous studies (Barnes, 1992; Schell & Duncan, 1999). Suffering from their disabilities was perceived to reinforce the medial views of disability without recognizing other dimensions of disability that are otherwise constructed (Barnes, 1992; Barton, 1993). This traditional stereotype of people with disabilities furthers the continued perception of the heroic triumph of disability (Oliver, 1990).

## **Representation of Disability in Mainstream Media**

The models representing disability in mainstream media impact the coverage surrounding the Paralympic Games in the amount of coverage presented as well as the themes found within coverage.

### **Media Models of Disability Depiction**

Clogston (1994) categorized the representations of disability into two categories: the traditional model, depicting the disabled from a medical point of view, and the progressive model, perceiving the disabled as having been disabled by society. “Whereas the traditional starting point frames disability as a personal tragedy, generating pity and compassion, the progressive category of images frames the narrative in terms of a political struggle for equality and inclusion” (Kama, 2004, p. 449). The traditional model frames any problems people with disabilities experience to be as result of the disability itself (Brittain, 2012) and not of the social institutions that dictate the dominant discourse. This distinction

divorces disabled people from the cultural and social contexts that are responsible for their predicament and problematic status, and presents their complex problems as if they were a personal tragedy. Alongside stories that glorify ‘special achievements,’ most of the stories about disabled people relate to medical treatments and cures. (Kama, 2004, p. 448)

Within the traditional model of disability sport, Clogston (1994) reported that the media represented those without disabilities as normal, exhibiting the conceptions of the accepted discourse of being able-bodied, within a hegemonic mainstream, and those with disabilities as dysfunctions of the dominant discourse that exist outside of normalcy. Kama (2004) indicated that within the traditional model, disability was viewed as a deviance from normality and a personal tragedy, deserving of pity and compassion.

The medical model of disability indicated dependence by those with disabilities on health professionals and rehabilitation professionals who were able to provide constant care and focus on a cure (Clogston, 1990) as individuals with disabilities do not fit within the conceived notion of the ‘ideal body’ (Brittain, 2004). Mastro, Hall and Canabal (1988) indicated that the primary reason for disability sport existing outside the conceived mainstream is the therapeutic and rehabilitative nature with which people with disabilities are thought to utilize and engage in sport.

### **Supercrip Stereotype**

Clogston (1990) reported that another model of disability represented by the media was the *supercrip*. The representation of disability through the supercrip model undermined achievement by those with disabilities and framed accomplishments, or attempts at normalcy, as superhuman and out of the ordinary. Kama (2004) viewed the supercrip as an individual with a disability who was able to live life in a very normal manner and carry out the tasks of daily living in an exceptional way. The achievement of tasks of daily living earned those with disabilities the title of “super” where the able-bodied individual would simply have been viewed as “normal” for their accomplishment. The root of this contradiction was in the expectation that able-bodied individuals are, by virtue of capability, supposed to carry out normal societal tasks and people with disabilities were not associated with the same expectation.

If a person with a disability is “successful,” or seems to have a good life, he is seen as brave and courageous or special and brilliant. Given the intrinsic abnormality or awfulness of disability, anyone living a “normal” life must be extraordinary. (Charlton, 2000, p. 52)

Those with disabilities were expected to fight against impairment to overcome the constraints of disablement (Silva & Howe, 2012). Silva and Howe went on to indicate that this expectation supported the stereotype and the negative ethos surrounding the low societal

expectations of people with disabilities and candidly glorifies even the smallest of achievements. The overuse of praising achievements whenever disability is present, only works to undervalue and even overlook those that are actually extraordinary.

In addition to viewing the supercrip as someone who achieved ordinary tasks in an exceptional way, Kama (2004) acknowledged the glorified supercrip as someone who performed extraordinary tasks that even someone without a disability would have struggled with. The dramatic stories of astonishing accomplishment by those with disabilities that generate media attention furthered the idea that disability was not a social construction but rather a physical impairment, or temporary occurrence. The danger in this was found to be that people with disabilities are expected to adapt and overcome disability in order to be viewed as an equal to those that do (Rogers & Swadener, 2001) or risk being seen as unsuccessful if not able to accomplish the ‘extraordinary ordinary.’

One of us bursts onto the cultural radar screen as a superhero, and all of us are expected to perform amazing feats. Supercrips are everywhere in the media. The person with no use of her arms who paints masterpieces with her feet, the guy with Tourette’s syndrome who becomes a radio announcer. Stephen Hawking explaining the universe from his wheelchair. And of course, that blind mountain climber. The supercrip exacerbates the already difficult challenges that people with disabilities face. If we hear enough such stories we may feel defeated by comparison. (Wolfe, 2001, p. B4)

The validity surrounding the intersection of disability and sport was often questioned because of the perpetuated supercrip model. The legitimacy of Paralympic sport was questioned because of the continuous label of extraordinary given to people with disabilities. The heroes of mainstream sport are the few and the exceptional that shine above the rest, whereas in disability sport, the label of exceptional and super was used in a seemingly arbitrary fashion (Peers, 2009).

Silva and Howe (2012) examined the “Superatleta” campaign, a Portuguese initiative that spanned over three Olympiads to encourage and support participation in the Sydney, Athens, and

Beijing Paralympic Games. The logo (Figure 1) for this campaign was interpreted in three different ways. First, as a result of other daily obstacles faced by people with disabilities, engagement in sport required exhibiting a series of extraordinary qualities. Second, engagement in sport qualified them as extraordinary because it was seen as exceptional for a person with a disability. Finally, simply being an elite athlete made them exceptional.

**Figure 1 “Super Atleta” logo**



Source: Silva and Howe (2012)

### **Disability as “Otherness”**

In addition to the medical and supercrip models of disability, Silva and Howe (2012) found that within the able-bodied framework society viewed as the dominant ideology, the interaction of disability and normality resulted in the construction of the *Other* and evoked a spectrum of emotional responses ranging from repulsion to fascination. This spectrum of responses was experienced from a distance as the observer worked to establish his or her own “normalcy” and viewed himself or herself as structurally different from the other through emotional responses such as surprise, admiration, compassion, pity or fear (Thomson, 1996).

Othering was described by Silva and Howe (2012) as the magnification of differences and the purposeful lack of value in similarities between individuals. This resulted in the established distance between those who were deemed socially undesirable and those who were categorized as “normal” in society.

The desire to reaffirm one’s “normality” by increasing distance in relation to the “outcasts” was actively sought out. Sticker (1999) noted that “Nobody wants to be the ‘different’; we desire similarity, and, even more, we desire identicalness” (p. 9) when compared to others. This concept reinforced that disability is the opposite of what had established as aesthetically and functionally “normal.”

### **Marginalization of the “Other”**

Interactions with people with disabilities have often resulted in emotional responses in observers that varied between feelings of repulsion and fascination (Silva & Howe, 2012). As a result, onlookers have often sought to observe from a “safe distance” (p. 177) in order to reinforce the established discourse of normality (Davis, 1995) within themselves (Sticker, 1999).

The successes of individuals have been indicated by the ability of an individual to accurately display the dominant societal expectations of masculinity, physicality, and sexuality (DePauw, Karwas, Wharton, Bird, & Broad, 1993; DePauw, 1997). DePauw (1997) expanded further in her research to say that successful participation in sport has served as a reflection of these dominant values, norms, and standards of cultural expectation of has often served to institute social inequalities. Masculinity was represented within the context of the traditional able-bodied, Judeo-Christian, American that accurately depicted the images of aggression, independence, strength, and courage. Physicality was defined as the socially accepted opinion concerned with strength, aggression, and agility as empowered through able-bodied physical

ability. Sexuality was seen as the expectation of heterosexual activity. According to DePauw, those individuals who exist outside of the realm of these categories are actively contradicting the accepted cultural hegemony of sport participation, as sport has traditionally been constructed to serve as an able-bodied activity.

In accordance, society had socially constructed these ideals that surrounded the expectations of physicality, masculinity, and sexuality, which DePauw (1997) further indicated are the three key components of sport. The most successful athletes have been constructed by the media as able-bodied, aggressive, independent, strong, heterosexual men. As Chang and Crossman (2009) argued, “Sport, reinforced by the media as a hegemonic social institution, naturalizes the dominant group’s power and privilege over women, the lower class, minority racial groups and people with physical disabilities through a bias towards the dominant group’s coverage” (p. 18). The media only furthered this hegemonic power structure with the continued increase in coverage of the dominant group. This was a clear exemplification of the mutually dependent relationship that existed between media and sport, as both need the other to maintain their influential status.

DePauw (1997) further argued that social marginality was the inability of minority groups, women, people of color, persons with disabilities, and gays, lesbians, and bisexuals to penetrate into the larger cultural base as an equal participant, which have traditionally been associated with the power, privilege, and dominance of society (Sage, 1993). Participation in sport was traditionally framed within an able-bodied context, which marked those with disabilities as outsiders and prevented them from becoming legitimate participants. Due to the physical nature of sport, athletes with disabilities are a particularly marginalized group and for

many sports fans, seeing an athlete with a disability competing in sport beyond strictly for rehabilitation or therapeutic purposes was unimaginable (DePauw & Gavron, 1995).

Disability sport has not been viewed as legitimate sport, but rather as something less. Concomitantly, opportunities, rewards, public recognition and the like have not been afforded to athletes with disabilities. Segregated events and competitions have been somewhat acceptable but are still viewed as less valuable than sport competitions for able-bodied individuals. (p. 11-12)

When considering the marginalization of athletes with disabilities, DePauw (1997) found that within the spectrum of athletes with disabilities, there was a preferred hierarchy that existed. She indicated that when considering an athlete with a disability, spectators were most comfortable with seeing male wheelchair users because the upper body still offered a seemingly normal looking physique with the wheelchair serving as a substitute for the lower body.

### **(In)visibility of Disability**

People with disabilities are members of a socially marginalized group and thus have experienced an exclusion and marginalization within sporting framework (DePauw, 1997), while also experiencing more acceptance and inclusion. DePauw describes the progression of exclusion to inclusion in three ways: invisibility of disability in sport, visibility of disability in sport, and (in)visibility of disability in sport (p. 424).

Historically, individuals with disabilities have been excluded from sport and not seen as legitimate participants and therefore were ignored within the sport narrative. This was often particularly evident in high-risk sports, where the participation by someone with a disability would have countered the accepted ideologies surrounding the medical model of disability that framed them as victims and helpless (Clogston, 1994). DePauw (1997) indicated that individuals with disabilities were gaining more visibility within sport, yet the label of still being a disabled athlete in the separate sporting events that allowed them to partake has limited their full

participation. This was manifested in contexts such as disability-specific events such as the Special Olympics, wheelchair basketball tournaments, and the Paralympic Games as well as the inclusion of disability within existing sporting events such as the wheelchair divisions at major marathons and Paralympic demonstrations during the Olympics.

Finally, DePauw (1997) indicated if individuals with disabilities were to become truly visible in sport as legitimate athletes there needed to be an achieved invisibility of their disability while still visibly highlighting the athletic accolades in sport. Similarly to the importance of identification with gender or race, disability had a profound significance on an individual's self-representation and should not be completely overlooked or erased from the identification of individuals. DePauw argued, however, that to achieve the optimal level of incorporation within sport, there needed to be a redefinition of the expectation of ability and even presently, that ideal level of seamless integration has yet to fully occur as

most of today's sport fans and able-bodied athletes can't truly imagine seeing an obviously "disabled" athlete on the medal platform at the Olympic Games with equal status to that of able-bodied athletes. (DePauw, 1997, p. 424)

Since this level of acceptance has yet to be achieved, athletes with disabilities have continued to exist outside the confines of full recognition in sport.

### **Impacts of Paralympic Media Coverage**

#### **Journalists Covering Paralympic Sport**

Journalists work to develop rapport with mainstream media consumers based upon the types of events they cover and the style of content they present to the public. Within this rapport, the styles of news coverage that producers of media tended to look for centered on people stories, role reversals, human-interest stories, heroic stories, and 'Gee-whiz' accounts (Gans, 1979). Hardin, Hardin, Lynn, and Walsdorf (2001) contrasted this Olympic style coverage in

their findings and noted that when coverage of athletes was present in the media it was either a depiction of the supercrip model or a story involving controversy. Shapiro (1994) also contributed by stating that the stories written about disabled athletes tended to be more of a feature article rather than a sport-focused narrative.

The Olympic Games are considered the epitome of sporting events to cover as a sports journalist and in London 2012, there were over 20,000 media accreditations (The London 2012 Olympics in numbers, 2011). This elite status has been represented by the “frenzied pack journalistic practices” (Golden, 2003, p. 2) portrayed by the large and populated media centers that resembled the elite status that the Games held. According to Golden (2003), the 2002 Salt Lake Winter Olympic Games had 9,000 accredited reporters with access to the official Salt Palace media center during the two weeks of competition in addition to thousands of other journalists without accreditation that spent time in the area and provided additional coverage of the Paralympic Games. During the Paralympic Games, there were only 700 reporters, photographers, television news staff and technicians with media accreditation.

Golden (2003) found three common themes that arose from interviews with the Olympic reporters about reasons for the lack of coverage of the Paralympics: a perceived lack of audience interest and appeal, logistical challenges to covering the Paralympic Games, and the opinion that the Paralympics were not a legitimate competition. One reporter, who wished to remain anonymous, was quoted saying,

First of all, we're exhausted and want to go home. Also, I don't think the two events [the Olympics and the Paralympics] should be together at all. They have no relation to each other. It [the Paralympics] is not a real competition. You wouldn't hold a high school tournament in Yankee Stadium. You wouldn't hold an amateur competition at Madison Square Garden. (p. 9)

In this interview, the journalist compared the Paralympics to a high school tournament being held in a location as elaborate as Yankee Stadium – putting the Paralympics on the same level as the Olympics was thought to have been an inaccurate representation.

Golden (2003) also interviewed Paralympic reporters and found that there were three common themes for their decision to report on the Games: a previous positive audience response of Paralympic coverage, a desire to raise Paralympic awareness through media coverage, and a belief that the Paralympic Games were newsworthy. In the interviews with Paralympic reporters, it was noted that they felt as though the negative stereotype surrounding the idea that Paralympic Games were not a real competition and therefore not newsworthy was a result of a lack of exposure that other journalists had to Paralympic events (p. 13).

Bertling and Schierl (2008) indicated in their analysis of the German newspaper coverage of the 2000 and 2002 Olympic and Paralympic Games that the media held a desire to praise perfection and that viewing the imperfect was a continued source of fear and discomfort for journalists. Disability sport did not fall into the traditional ethos of sport journalism and the imperfection of the human body that was revealed by disability was a source of discomfort. The shortcoming of representations of disability sport in the media is a further representation of the source of fear that disability sparks and therefore is sought to be excluded. Longmore (1985) contributed to this narrative through the exemplification that disability was a great societal fear.

Disability happens all around us more often than we generally recognize or care to notice, and we harbor unspoken anxieties about the possibilities of disablement, to us or to someone close to us. What we fear, we often stigmatize and shun and sometimes seek to destroy. (p. 32)

Bertling and Schierl (2008) also identified that political correctness was viewed as more important than traditional sport journalism when sport and disability were considered together. Journalists viewed disability sport as a sensitive subject and did not want to demean or criticize

those already experiencing misfortune from disability. The material that was published went through a long gatekeeping process to ensure that the image portrayed in the content was a positive one.

It's going to make everybody scared about doing stuff. They're going to be so stressed out about looking for every little thing that a person in a wheelchair can complain about – they're not going to like somebody with a disability right when they come to their golf course because they'll think, "Because of you, we had to do all this crud and spend all the money." (Hardin & Hardin, 2004, section 7.17)

Bertling and Schierl (2008) noted the discrepancy in the opinions of the athletes being covered by journalists and the media in the study centered on the perceived, or lack thereof, appeal of sports. In interviews with sports journalists, Bertling and Schierl found that 70% thought there was an interest from readers in future coverage of the Paralympics but also believed that existing coverage was inaccurate. Of the journalists interviewed, 82.9% believed that coverage should include all forms of journalism, not just result-based articles, whereas the athletes desired media attention that focused solely on their athletic accomplishments and not just the circumstances surrounding their disability.

Ideal coverage of the Paralympics from the journalistic perspective would be considered discriminatory by many of the disabled athletes themselves, who would be shown primarily as disabled people rather than world-class sportsmen who happen to have a disability. (p. 46)

Clogston (1994) categorized this 'athlete-first' desire of representation as the progressive model of disability, whereas individuals with disabilities are portrayed in a similar manner to able-bodied counterparts.

### **Spectator Perspective**

The media has a profound impact on the perspectives, opinions, and attitudes of consumers, especially when it comes to the perceptions of ability and disability. As Berube (1997) stated, "Every representation of disability has the potential to shape the way 'disability' is

understood in the general culture, and some of those representations can in fact do extraordinarily powerful – or harmful – cultural and political work” (p. 4-5).

In the examination of German newspaper coverage of the 2000 and 2002 Olympic and Paralympic Games, Bertling and Schierl (2008) found that only a quarter of the 82 published Paralympic articles had accompanying photographic coverage while more than half of the 2000 published Olympic Games articles contained pictures and text. They noted that the Paralympic articles that had photographs either concealed the presence of disability through the utilization of shadowing techniques or did not openly display a visible disability.

Representations of impairment in mainstream newspapers and on television forced viewers to consider mortality and realize that that disability could affect anyone at any given time (Ellis, 2009). Researchers have argued that the inclusion of difficult images forced the audience to recognize the presence of a disability (Hevey, 1997) resulting in feelings of unease and discomfort. In order to accommodate this fear for spectators, oftentimes, images of Paralympic athletes were framed in such a way that the disability was hidden in order to legitimize their participation in sport (Thomas & Smith, 2003) and establish comfort with viewing the images.

In their analysis of photographic imagery of the Paralympic Games from Sydney to Beijing, Pappous et al. (2011) concluded that there were fewer images that focused on the disability of an athlete in Beijing but that 62% of the analyzed photographs were passive rather than action shots, which did not highlight or support the competitive nature of Paralympic sport. Following DePauw’s (1997) categorization of ‘(in)Visibility of DisAbility,’ athletes with disabilities are expected to assume an athlete-focused identity, rather than one based in disability

if this optimal level of inclusion is to fully take place. Bertling and Schierl (2008) noted that spectators relied on the messages displayed by the media to determine athletic accomplishment.

Disabled sports depend on their representation in the media, for it is only through the media that the public can become aware of the immense physical effort involved in them, which in turn facilitates the full integration of such sports into society. (p. 41)

Without the athletic representations of Paralympic athletes, spectators will not view or support the evolution of the disability sport movement as a real and legitimate competition (DePauw & Gavron (1995).

### **Athlete Use of Media and Perspectives of Coverage**

The harmful, and often stereotypical, representations of marginalized groups in the media were seen to have a profound impact on the self-identification of people within those populations (Smart, 2001). Hardin and Hardin (2003) interviewed 10 male wheelchair basketball players, focusing on the opinions and reactions to disability sport in the print media. The interviews resulted in four overarching themes concerning the response of the athletes themselves. For one, athletes with disabilities were considered to be avid consumers of mainstream sport media, utilizing media to learn more about sports, find role models, and enhance socialization through conversations surrounding sport. However, the use of these media sources centered entirely on able-bodied sport and not athletes participating in wheelchair sports. In addition to mainstream publications, the athletes described their own use and reference to niche media sources, such as *Sports n Spokes*, as a validate of their own self-identification as an athlete and helped to develop a sense of belonging to the larger disability sport community. In interviews, Hardin and Hardin (2003) found that when asked about niche media, athletes with disabilities saw commentary about other athletes as favorable “because it’s all about people like me” (p. 254).

Kama (2004) commented on the exaggeration by the media of “normal” activity by those with disabilities and how this indicated a supercrip representation but athletes with disabilities have indicated the desire for athletic accomplishments to not be viewed as exceptional but rather as normal.

I was simply a blind person who planned to climb a mountain and nothing more. But people sensationalize the lives of blind people when, often, all they did was exhibit a semblance of normalcy. (Khan, 2001, p. F1)

Hardin and Hardin (2003) also faulted niche media coverage for the manifestation of the “inspirational” story rather than a critical sports evaluation. Within these narratives, spectators are left with the vantage point of the “poor pitiful soul” (p. 10) instead of admiration for their athletic feats.

You could have an article about somebody in a wheelchair – somebody who plays basketball, and you don’t have to focus on the fact that they play wheelchair basketball. Focus on the fact that they scored 21 points per game, 10 rebounds, and the fact that he had a triple-double. (p. 254)

Finally, the athletes interviewed by Hardin and Hardin (2003) discussed the athletes’ view of media producers obligation to cover disability sport. The media content was responsible for building an audience while also maintaining a responsibility to generate revenue and make a profit. “If it’s not going to sell, it’s not going to be there, and the people who are interested and who are involved in disabled sports is such a small percentage, there’s just no point in it” (p. 255).

### **Media Impacts on the Self-Identity of People with Disabilities**

Haller (2010) argued that people with disabilities have been excluded from mainstream media reports and have been represented with harmful negative stereotypes and both the exclusion and misrepresentation have contributed to a misunderstanding of their identities and worth. The entertainment industry has been guilty of continuing to further these negative

stereotypes, with published depictions of those with disabilities as victims of stress or physical trauma, sufferers of a mental disorder, or prey to the cliché compassionate act often seen as a response to those with disabilities (Donaldson, 1981). In all of these instances, the person with a disability was continually described as a passive victim of disability rather than someone who activity identifies as a person with a disability.

Suarez de Balcazar (1988) examined the representation of people with disabilities in American newspapers in an effort to verify the, often negative, portrayals of people with disabilities in the media. The results of this study indicated that over a quarter (26%) of the articles in their analysis “described disability as having a negative social-emotional impact on the life of the individual with disabilities and/or family members” (p. 277). This was indicated by the use of phrases such as ‘shock and disbelief’ when describing the response when learning of an injury and ‘I felt like my life was over.’ The researchers noted that the use of such “emotionally charged language” (p. 277) presented an emotional, rather than informative, news-piece.

While previously discussed as a negative stereotype, the supercrip model was found to have seemingly positive benefits as well. Zhang and Haller (2013) argued that the perceived realism of media images by people with disabilities greatly impacted self-identities and feelings of self-worth of people with disabilities. Two of the measures in the study were media use and perceived realism, investigated through the amount of attention given to various media outlets as well as the degree to which the images seen were thought to be a realistic depiction of disability. Zhang and Haller found that the more often the media framed those with disabilities in a positive manner, understood as the supercrip model, the more respondents held a positive attitude about their own disability. The more often the media framed those with disabilities in a negative

manner, indicated as the medical model of victimization, the more respondents held a negative attitude about being disabled.

Portraying people with disabilities as supercrips gives positive feedback to people with disabilities and affects their self-identity positively. Specifically, people with disabilities are more likely to develop positive and confident self-identity when exposed to media stories about the accomplishments of individuals with disabilities . . . . Being aware of the fact that in group members have accomplished great achievements as implied by the supercrip model, people with disabilities can relate to the media message and ‘take comfort’ and feel hope from the fact that supercrips succeed ‘in spite of’ a disability and, therefore, maintain a sanguine self-identity. (p. 330)

The extent of existing literature within the narrative of Paralympic sport details how the Paralympic Games have been represented in the media both quantitatively and qualitatively (Buysse & Borchering, 2010; Schantz & Gilbert, 2001; Schell & Duncan, 1999; Thomas & Smith, 2003) on an international scale. Findings of these studies were indicative of, at times, an increase in media coverage over the span of several Olympiads as well as an examination of the thematic coverage within the Paralympic narrative. There was also existing analysis on the comparison of the Olympic and Paralympic Games both textually and photographically (Chang & Crossman, 2009; Schell & Duncan, 1999) and was indicative of a discrepancy in the number of articles printed on each, with more being concerned with the Olympic Games.

The review of literature also found that there were various models with which disability was represented in the media including the both the traditional and progressive representations. The concept of the supercrip was depicted both positively and negatively within media accounts. DePauw’s (1997) concept of (in)visibility of disability was also discussed at great length and provides a framework for much of the analysis found in this study.

Finally, the impacts of media coverage surrounding the Paralympic Games was examine, with specific attention paid to the effect coverage had on people with disabilities and the journalists that cover the Paralympic Games. This study seeks to provide a more critical

evaluation of the representation of Paralympic sport in American print media sources in order to provide a more holistic examination of the Paralympic movement. This will be done utilizing the widely accepted framing analysis technique.

## CHAPTER 3

### Methodology

#### An Overview of Framing Analysis

Mass media research has termed the concept of framing to indicate the media's role in influencing people's beliefs through the particular emphasis that is placed on issues and ideas (Croteau & Hoynes, 2000). Goffman (1974), an influential scholar in the subject of framing, proposed that an individual's thoughts and ideas surrounding a particular topic are organized within frames of prior experience and knowledge and that this ultimately influences his or her perception of reality. These frames influence public discourse through a means of specific "cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion by which symbol handlers routinely organize discourse" (Gitlin, 1980, p. 7) and are therefore considered to be "conceptual tools which media individuals rely on to convey, interpret, and evaluate information" (Neuman, Just, & Crigler, 1992, p. 60).

Fog (1999), through experimental research, indicated that the mass media has difficulty in altering or changing the existing beliefs that people have on particular issues but that there is a great impact on priming people to accept beliefs surrounding new issues. This factor is of great importance as related to framing disability sport for people with no prior experience with the subject (Atuona, 2011). Chang et al. (2011) indicated in their study of coverage of the 2008 Beijing Games, within the Olympic sport narrative, when describing an unfamiliar sport, there was a detailed description of the rules and predictions of competition results whereas within the Paralympic narrative, this sort of reporting was nonexistent.

Framing analysis, as Entman (1993) proposed is,

To select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, casual

interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described. (p. 52)

Societal beliefs and values are affected by the aspects of an issue that news-media frames as important (Slothuus, 2008). Therefore, the selections and angles by producers and editors of news-media content are responsible for an individual's understanding and thinking about issues, events, or situations (Gitlin, 1980). When emphasis is placed on a certain aspect, that issue is being framed and this influence helps media consumers derive meaning (D'Angelo, 2002; Scheufele, 2000).

According to Entman (2007), sport holds a powerful position within cultures because of its "deeply entrenched values that help allocate power in American society" (p. 170) through the framing that makes up the commonly accepted discourses within society. Since the media serves as a vital reference point within the sport narrative (Seltzer & Mitrook, 2009), framing theory has become a useful tool for scholars to "examine the media frames that create, promote, or distort various dynamics and power relations associated with sport phenomena" (Santos, Tainsky, Schmidt, & Shim, 2013, p. 70).

Framing is a technique that has been widely used within mass media research (Graber, 1987; Hanson, 1995; Lee, Kim, & Love, 2014; Santos et al., 2013) and as a result of the media's continued influence over the presentation of stories in a particular way, media organizations hold a great command over people's beliefs and values (Croteau & Hoynes, 2000). Mass media outlets have to decide which elements of a story are important and should be highlighted and which should be omitted in order to present complex issues and topics of debate in way that is easily digestible for the general public. Thus, because of this decision-making power, the media is seen to have a direct role in influencing the reaction and interpretation of a particular topic by audience members (de Vreese, 2005; Entman, 2007; Iyengar, 1991; Tewksbury & Scheufele,

2009). These selective decisions about story emphasis and representation are a notable way in which media producers influence how a topic is framed (Binder, 1993; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). The significance of these frames created by media producers surrounding particular issues and topics lies in the potential impact this has on public perceptions and opinions of reality (Croteau & Hoynes, 2000).

Gamson and Modigliani (1989) described frames as a “central organizing idea...for making sense of relevant events, suggesting what is at issue” (p. 3). The concept of framing, therefore, is a process by which an institution, in this case the mass media, influences the understandings of an identified reality through the selection of angles presented in communicative texts (Entman, 1993). Simply, the concept of framing is the means by which the reader’s view of reality is impacted by the presentation of issues in a particular way through the clues that aid in the development of inferences on the meaning of a message (Hallahan, 1999).

### **Differentiating between the Paralympic Games and the Special Olympics**

Due to the common misconceptions surrounding sport for people with disabilities, this section will include a brief description of the Paralympic Games and Special Olympics, highlighting the differences between the two internationally recognized events. Both the Paralympic Games and Special Olympics are recognized by the International Olympic Committee and have a focus on providing sporting competition for athletes with disabilities. A major difference between the two events is that within the Special Olympics organization, all children and adults with intellectual disabilities are welcome to participate (Special Olympics, 2014) whereas the Paralympic Games support only particular disability classifications and require that athletes meet a qualifying competition entry standard (International Paralympic Committee, 2013). Whereas the Special Olympics support the philosophy that athletes are

victorious in reaching their own greatest potential, the Paralympics develop an elite sporting competition where only the best compete.

### **History of the Paralympic Games**

Sport for people with disabilities originated as early as the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The first sport club for the Deaf was founded in Berlin in 1888. By 1924, the first national sports federations for the deaf had begun in Belgium, Czechoslovakia, France, Great Britain, the Netherlands, and Poland (Gold & Gold, 2007). In 1924, these federations sent 140 athletes to Paris to take part in the First International Silent Games, which have since been recognized by the International Olympic Committee as the Deaflympics (Seguillon, 2002).

Dr. Ludwig Guttmann, a prominent German neurosurgeon who escaped Nazi Germany in 1939 and sought refuge in Britain, has been credited with the early beginnings of the Paralympic movement (Gold & Gold, 2007). In 1944 Guttmann was appointed as the Director of the National Spinal Injuries Center at Stoke Mandeville Hospital, a center developed to meet the needs of wounded veterans returning from World War II (Schultke, 2001). While immediate concern for these wounded soldiers was on improving care for those with disabilities and infection prevention, Guttmann also believed that physical rehabilitation was necessary in order to achieve independence. It was here that the beginnings of sport for those with physical disabilities were seen. “The aims of sport for the disabled, as well as the non-disabled, are to develop mental activity, self-confidence, self-discipline, a competitive spirit and comradeship” (British Paralympic Association, 2013).

In 1948, Dr. Guttmann organized a sport competition for the patients at Stoke Mandeville in Aylesbury that was specifically planned to parallel the XIV Olympic Games that occurred in London that same year. Guttmann saw the potential value, both physically and mentally, that

sport could have on the rehabilitation process of paraplegic patients and this idea also caught on at various other spinal cord rehabilitation centers in England (Schultke, 2001). The success seen in England with the organization of groups of athletes with disabilities participating in sport served as inspiration for other groups to develop athletes to also partake and a growth in competition began. These teams of athletes began to come together annually for the National Games held at Stoke Mandeville (Scruton, 1979).

It was Guttman's hope that "one day the Stoke Mandeville Games would achieve world fame as the disabled men and women's equivalent of the Olympic Games" (Guttman, 1949, p. 24). In 1960, the Stoke Mandeville Games, now called the Paralympic Games, were held in Rome, the host city of the 1960 Olympic Games. The word "Paralympic" derives from the Greek preposition "para," meaning beside or alongside, and the word "Olympic." The significance of the name was that the Paralympics were seen as being an event parallel to the Olympics. This illustrates the intent that the two movements were to exist side-by-side (International Paralympic Committee, 2013). The Paralympics have continued to evolve and expand with each Olympiad and within this growth are now considered to be the second largest sporting event in the world next to the Olympics (International Paralympic Committee, 2013) with regard to the number of participating athletes as well as the event organizers.

Since 1960, the Paralympics have continued to grow and expand, bringing more athletes from a greater number of countries around the world, to the highest stage of competition for those with disabilities. The 2012 Paralympic Games were the largest ever held, bringing 4,237 athletes from 164 countries to London and were described as "the greatest Paralympic Games ever" by IPC President Sir Phillip Craven in his closing remarks (International Paralympic Committee, 2013).

## **The Paralympic Games Between 1996 and Present**

The IPC was formally developed in September 1989 to serve as the governing body of sport for people with disabilities on an international scale. The 1992 Barcelona Games were the last to be held under the ICC and upon the conclusion, the IPC had become the sole coordinating entity for athletes with disabilities. The IPC was responsible for streamlining operational efforts and developing a stronger communicative relationship with the International Olympic Committee. Following the 1996 Atlanta Paralympic Games, regular meetings began taking place between the IOC and IPC (Bailey, 2008) and in December of 1996, the IOC agreed to increase their funding support of the IPC by 20% as the organization began preparing for the Sydney Games. In addition, the IOC agreed that cities bidding for selection as the host city of the Games also needed to offer plans for the organization of the Paralympic Games.

The 1996 Atlanta Paralympic Games were a significant milestone within the modern Paralympic era, which began with the 1988 Seoul Games (PBS, 2014). The 1996 Atlanta Games had 3,259 athletes from 104 countries represented (International Paralympic Committee, 2013) and showed the first televised coverage of the Paralympics in the United States. While the televised coverage was not extensive, it was a definite marker of progress in the Paralympic movement in the United States.

## **Procedure and Analysis**

The development of this study aligns with the framing analysis protocols found in previous mass media literature (Billings & Eastman, 2003; Santos et al., 2013; Seltzer & Mitrook, 2009) to provide a lens into the narratives presented to mainstream print media consumers surrounding Paralympic sport. For the purpose of this study, analysis was restricted to articles specifically concerning the Paralympic Games, Paralympic athletes, or Paralympic sport

rather than encompassing the larger subject of adaptive sport as a whole. In order to gain an insight into this narrative, an analysis of *The New York Times* and *USA Today* within the timeframe of January 1, 1996 to November 18, 2013 was conducted.

*The New York Times* was selected as a newspaper to be examined in this study as it holds a prestige record as a reliable source for in-depth discussion surrounding current issue and is hailed as the standard when considering the significance of narratives within media coverage for American consumers (Kiouisis, 2004). *USA Today* was determined to have a large American audience, based on a known high rate of circulation and is notorious for printing articles in an easy-to-read fashion that appeals to a common reader. The combination of these two national newspapers was thought to encapsulate a wide range of writing styles and presentation on topics concerning this study to accurately represent the subject of Paralympic sport.

The sample, for this study, starts on January 1, 1996 and ends with the data-collection closing date of November 18, 2013. For both *The New York Times* and *USA Today*, articles were collected using the LexisNexis database using seven search terms: Paralympics, Paralympic Games, disability sport, disabled athlete, Paralympic athlete, Paralympian and Paralympic sport. In the initial search, a total of 2,122 articles were returned. The articles returned in the search were then compared and duplicate articles between search terms were removed, leaving 1,347 articles. In the initial article return, The New York Times contained paid notices and blog posts that were removed. Articles that were deemed to be irrelevant to the topic of Paralympic sport were also removed. The result was a final total sample of 545 relevant newspaper articles, 344 articles from *The New York Times* and 201 articles from *USA Today* (Table 2). The 545 articles were organized in chronological order, starting with the oldest and ending with the most recent, before any further analysis began.

**Table 2 Breakdown of Newspaper Articles Used in the Framing Analysis of this Study**

Newspaper	Articles returned in original search	Duplicates	Paid Notices and Blogs ( <i>NYT</i> only)	Total Relevant Entries
<i>The New York Times</i>	1336	852	734	344
<i>USA Today</i>	786	495	495	201
Total	2,122	1,347	1,229	545

The data sample of 545 articles was examined in accordance with the previous literature on framing analysis and a combination of methods was adopted following the protocols in Santos et al. (2013) as there is no set standard for this sort of analysis. The first step of analysis involved a “long preliminary soak” (Hall, 1975, p. 15), where all 545 articles were read for overall understanding by the coders. The second step of the analysis involved a more focused examination of each article individually by each coder to determine the focused message of the article and any discourses that functioned to help establish a dominant frame within the article (Richardson, 2007). From this investigation, each coder individually developed a comprehensive list of narratives and after a list of narratives was created, the third step involved a discussion among the coders to appropriately label and combine similarly identified messages and clarify any misinterpretations of the analysis, which helped to further refine the list of narratives presented. The final step in the analysis was the identification of predominant themes within the narrative of the study, revealing a dichotomy among the framing of Paralympic sport for consumers of American print media.

The analysis of this sample was guided by the identification and examination of the tensions found within the discussion surrounding the Paralympic Games, paying particular attention to how these competing forces frame the topic of Paralympic sport for mainstream print media consumers.

## CHAPTER 4

### Findings

In the initial reading of the articles presented in *The New York Times* and *USA Today*, a wide variety of thematic narratives were present and upon further evaluation, a striking contrast was identified between frames. *The New York Times* and *USA Today* offered a spectrum of accounts on the Paralympic Games that provided a lens for readers suggesting competing forces in the clear understanding of the Paralympic narrative. It is significant to note, however, that while there was a variance among themes, both newspapers consistently depicted this. On one side of the spectrum, the continued growth and development of the Paralympic Games was heavily praised and acknowledged, giving readers the ability to recognize the tremendous gains seen throughout the history. Simultaneously, however, there were strong indications of frustration from organizing committees, athletes, and spectators, which highlight the great lengths still needed to be travelled. The Paralympics were seen a legitimate sporting event as well as an extreme variance from “traditional sport.” The contrast manifested with stories presented on competition results, national team rivalries, scandals in doping violations and performance mishaps while also suggesting it to be impossible that the two entities could be thought of as the same because of technology adaptations and the superhuman like qualities participants in Paralympic sport are said to have. Paralympic athletes were described as inspirational figures, role models, heroes of sport, and courageous participants while also being depicted as situational victims, pitiful sufferers, and as unaccepting victims. This paradox further situates the difficulty media consumers have with contextualizing Paralympic athletes as “real athletes” and rather as mere participants in a playful contest where there are not actually winners and losers.

## **Growth of Paralympic Sport Versus Frustrations with the Lack of Progress**

The first dominant frame identified was titled growth of Paralympic sport versus the frustrations with the lack of progress. This frame is illustrated in the discussion of the milestones achieved in the Paralympic movement since the first Games were held in 1960, while also indicating the shortcomings and levels of equality between the Olympic and Paralympic Games that have yet to be reached.

**Growth of the Games within each quadrennial.** The modern Paralympic era has undergone a tremendous transformation and has been witness to significant marks of growth in the continued development of the Paralympic Games. In the early years of competition, athletes competed under a lens of anonymity and received little to no media or spectator attention. Paralympic sport has been showing signs of growth with each quadrennial, and the potential to continue to grow is ever present. This growth is exemplified in the progressive nature that is presented in print media. There are descriptions of the advancement from one Paralympic Games to the next and discussion on changes that ensued within each. Readers are therefore inclined to welcome and appreciate the manner in which development is taking place and allows them to see that humble beginnings are evolving into a global reach.

These games began in 1948 in London, designed for people who had been wounded in World War II, but now the movement reaches around the world. "We competed anonymously in Albertville," Waddell said, recalling the 1992 Paralympics that followed the Winter Games. "Then in Lillehammer we had a downhill race and we were amazed to hear this great roar. There were thousands of people in the stands, cheering. That went on for three days. In Nagano, the weather was miserable, 33 degrees and rainy, but they had people beating drums and wearing bright costumes. They were great." In Sydney, they used the main Olympic stadium for the Paralympics, with crowds of 50,000 or better. There would be school classes rooting during the day and adults at night -- "and the octaves would go down," Waddell recalled. (*The New York Times*, February 26, 2002)

The first formal Paralympics were in 1960 in Rome, with 400 athletes from 23 countries. Since then they've grown steadily and in 1988 began using the Olympic venues. This year, with 1.3 million tickets available, and network and cable TV coverage in the USA

for the first time (CBS, SportsSouth), the Paralympics are the second-largest sporting event in the world, behind the Olympics. (*USA Today*, August 15, 1996)

"Right now, leading this movement is like holding back a huge, raging river because it just wants to get out there and demonstrate to the world what an outstanding worldwide sports movement this is," says International Paralympic Committee President Robert Steadward of Canada. "There have been so many records broken during the past three Paralympic Games, I often wonder what limits there really are for an athlete with a disability." (*USA Today*, August 26, 1996)

This media frame signifies the growth and potential of the Paralympic movement and stands to speak to readers that the age of the Paralympic Games (the first official Paralympics took place in 1960), relative to the Olympic Games (with traces back to the 8<sup>th</sup> Century BC), is indicative of the potential for improvement and growth. This lens indicates that the Paralympic Games are not a stagnant movement but a continuously progressive event capable of further development. In this sense, the inclusion of seemingly small advances has a great impact for readers in their overall understanding and acceptance of the Paralympic movement.

The analysis of articles in this study from *USA Today* published surrounding the 1996 Atlanta Paralympics showed growth in the torch relay “the longest in Paralympic history...begins Aug. 6 in Washington, D.C....it ends 1.000 miles and 10 days later in Atlanta” (*USA Today*, June 10, 1996), the development of the Paralympic mascot Blaze, representing “the philosophies of the Paralympics, ‘triumph, strength, inclusion, and performance’” (*USA Today*, August 15, 1996) that served to represent Atlanta’s history and culture, and grew into an event with “more than 3,500 physically challenged athletes from 120 countries” (*USA Today*, August 15, 1996). DePauw and Gavron (1995) and Krahe and Altwasser (2006) indicated that the Paralympic Games have played an essential role in changing the outlook the public has on sport for people with disabilities and have ultimately contributed to the continued rise in status of the Paralympic Games. These depictions within media accounts provide validity to the developing

narrative that is continually indicative of growth.

In Barcelona, the United States Paralympic athletes funded their own travel expenses, received no official team competition gear or village wear and spectators were admitted to competition venues at no cost. A noteworthy area of progress within the modern Paralympic movement came out of the 1996 Atlanta Games as athletes began to receive recognition as serious competitors within the Olympic family. The inclusion of testimonials from veteran athletes serves as a lens for readers into DePauw's (1997) concept of social marginality, which highlights the inability of minority groups to penetrate into the larger cultural narrative as an equal participant which Sage (1993) indicates is reserved for the individuals displaying power, privilege, and dominance. In this case, the power construction is the Olympic Games. Prior to the Atlanta Games, United States Paralympians were not even issued official team gear and travel costs were covered from the athletes themselves, not the national governing bodies and since, U.S. Paralympic athletes have begun to receive these tokens of acceptance. This indicates the cultural and social expansion that is beginning to embrace the Paralympic Games.

Susan Hagel has been a Paralympian since 1976. She has won three gold medals in archery and two bronze medals in wheelchair basketball. This is her sixth Games. But tonight when she and more than 3,500 athletes from 120 nations enter Atlanta's Olympic Stadium, she will be treated like a full-time, honest-to-goodness elite athlete for the very first time. For the next 10 days, the Paralympics (Olympic Games for the physically challenged) take over the venues where Olympic heroes Michael Johnson, Amy Van Dyken and Andre Agassi competed. For the first time, Hagel, 42, from Minneapolis, won't have to squeeze her airfare from her therapist's salary. She rode a charter to Atlanta with the rest of the U.S. team. The Paralympians will participate in opening ceremonies in U.S. Olympic Committee-issued straw hat and polo shirt, an official member of the U.S. Olympic "family." The Games are being televised in the USA for the first time, on cable (SportsSouth), and CBS for an hour each of the four weekend days. (*USA Today*, August 15, 1996).

Hagel, depicted as a decorated Paralympic athlete yet has historically been treated as though these accomplishments bear little value, contrasts with the narratives of successful Olympic

athletes seen within mainstream media as was also indicated by other studies (Schantz & Gilbert, 2001; Thomas & Smith, 2003). Contrary to this finding, Chang et al. (2011) found that Paralympic athletes were being represented “as real athletes” (p. 42). The indication of strides being made towards recognizing Paralympians legitimately is an instrumental marker of success within the Paralympic movement and represents a continued growth and progress.

Atlanta was also the first time spectators were required to purchase tickets in order to attend the Paralympic Games. In Barcelona, turnout was upward of 1.5 million spectators and even though “attendance has been smaller than anticipated” in Atlanta, the “APOC won't give away tickets to boost attendance. ‘This is good for the movement. You have to put a value on this at some point,’ says Koch, noting that tickets are affordable” (*USA Today*, August 21, 1996). This marker of progress has served as an expectation for future organizers as tickets for purchase have since been required at all subsequent Games. Organizers were willing to take a loss on revenue in order to indicate a willingness to embrace the Paralympic Games and further contribute to the continued growth.

Following the Atlanta Paralympics, the 2000 Games in Sydney continued with the progress and development of the movement by focusing on the increase of media attention. When details of this are presented in media accounts, there is indication to readers that there is explicit intention towards the continuation of progress being made and a building success from the previous Games into those following.

But there is no widespread live TV for the Sydney Paralympics, and none in the USA. WeMedia is providing online results at [www.wemedia.com](http://www.wemedia.com). Japan, Germany, and the European Broadcasting Union will show live and tape-delay broadcasts to 43 nations. “Obviously a major TV contract is the next step,” Steadward said. “But the progress...is nothing short of amazing. In Barcelona, all the events were free. Now Sydney has more than doubled the ticket sales of Atlanta. This has become a secure, strong event that is able to stand on its own.” (*USA Today*, October 17, 2000)

These indicators of progress also continue to further the narrative of the Paralympic Games by framing the history and noting how much has actually changed and improved. The focus in the *USA Today* article when speaking of the Paralympic Games and labeling them as a ‘secure, strong event’ frames for readers that there are recognizable details that attest to this.

The name Paralympic signifies an event that occurs parallel to the Olympic Games (International Paralympic Committee, 2013) and within this narrative are the continued indicators of strides made in equality. After the 1996 Atlanta Games, hopeful host cities placing a bid for the Olympic Games were also required to include a plan for the Paralympic Games in their proposal. This allowed for both sporting events to utilize the same athlete village and competition venues as well as and served to represent the strides towards making disability a more accepted and integrated part of culture.

The International Olympic Committee has already decreed that the Atlanta Games will be the last in which the Olympics and Paralympics are separately planned. From now on, all cities seeking to be the site of future Olympic Games must include, as part of their formal bid, plans and proposed financing for the Paralympics as well -- and using the same sites and facilities. "Seoul and Barcelona demonstrated that it was possible and desirable to bring Olympic-level organization to the Paralympics," said G. Andrew Fleming, the president and chief executive officer of the Atlanta Paralympic Organizing Committee. Mr. Fleming pointed out that the organizing committees in Nagano, Japan, which will host the 1998 Winter Olympics, and in Sydney, Australia, which will host the 2000 Summer Olympics, were required to plan for the Paralympics as well. (*The New York Times*, August 15, 1996)

The decision made to combine the planning committees of the Olympic and Paralympic Games furthers the narrative that progress is being made in development. From the organizers perspective, this was an area of recognized weakness and their proposal was depicted as their efforts towards giving “Paralympians the closest equivalent we can to the Olympics experience” (*The New York Times*, August 15, 1996). Conversely, athletes still recognize the shortcomings and are voicing their desire to see the Paralympics in a deserving light. “Now a silver medalist

himself after Thursday's 1,500 meter race, Hollenback wants to see his sport receive proper recognition. 'It's frustrating, you bet. But it will change. It's the IOC's loss. People love the event. We need to educate the IOC'" (*USA Today*, August 2, 1996).

Within this framework of simultaneous competing notions of growth and frustrations, readers of *The New York Times* and *USA Today* are not given a definitive answer surrounding the growth of the Paralympic movement. As media consumers, they are forced to negotiate an understanding of areas that have developed and aspects that remain frustrating because of a lack of progress. The representations by organizers and athletes contradict and this exposure to readers will undoubtedly leave a lot of room for question.

Cities vying for an Olympic bid have been forced to also include plans for the Paralympic Games and this inclusion has also transferred to an exemplification of the ways in which various cultures treat those with disabilities. Historically, the lack of coverage surrounding Paralympic sport was a manifestation of the cultural discourse that people with disabilities are not fully recognized by society (Nelson, 1996). The narrative surrounding disability for readers is that of courageous victims and people who 'suffer' from tragedy (Thomas & Smith, 2003) and is further perpetuated by the stereotypes of athletes with disabilities and their participation in sport.

"Caring for the disabled is an important symbol for social civilization and progress," Hu said. Opening just two weeks after the Beijing Olympics ended, the Paralympics are designed to be a parallel games for athletes with a wide range of physical disabilities. The 10-day competition begins Sunday. Athletes will use many of the same Olympic stadiums and arenas, with 148 countries represented. Hosting the Olympics and the Paralympics is a source of national pride for China and a way to showcase the country on the international stage. China is keen to use the Paralympics to underscore what it says it has done for the country's 83 million disabled citizens. (*The New York Times*, September 7, 2008)

Readers of mainstream media sources surrounding the topic of the Paralympic Games are exposed to the greater narrative of disability and the cultural understandings and acceptance of

those competing as athletes. DePauw (1997) stated that society should seek the optimal '(in)Visibility of DisAbility,' within athletic narratives whereas an athlete-focused identity is desired rather than a disability-based identity for the full societal and cultural acceptance of disability, and in turn disability sport, is to successfully occur.

Sixteen years after the 1996 Atlanta Paralympic Games, the 2012 Games in London were said to have been "the greatest Paralympic Games ever" (International Paralympic Committee, 2013). This statement by the president of the International Paralympic Committee was a testament to the strides made in spectator and fan support, media awareness, and cultural and societal acceptance of the Paralympic Games.

Morrison and others say London's Paralympics mark a historic turning point. As recently as the mid-1980s, the Paralympics were considered so second string that they were held in a different city from the Olympics. This year's Paralympics promise to be unprecedented in their size, popularity and performance levels -- and they have inched closer to achieving the visibility of the Olympics, which London Mayor Boris Johnson on Friday jokingly called the "overture" to the Paralympics. A record-setting 4,200 athletes from 165 countries will take part in the Paralympics. The global TV audience is forecast to reach a high of some 4 billion people. The queen will open the Paralympics, and Coldplay will perform during the closing ceremony. Seasoned Paralympians say they no longer face the ignorant questions and condescension they once had to endure. Before, "people asked, 'What's the Paralympics?'" says British shooter Di Coates, who hopes to win her ninth medal in London. "Now, they know what the Paralympics are and just want to know how do we get tickets." "We're getting support that we've never seen before," says Allison Jones, a four-time U.S. medalist in cycling and skiing who will compete in track cycling in London. (*USA Today*, August 28, 2012)

The growth of the Paralympic movement has been furthered by the continued support seen within each quadrennial. The 2012 London Paralympics were a large success in part because of the impact the Games had on spectators and other sport fans that were able to generate an understanding and appreciation for sport for people with disabilities. In this light, Paralympic athletes are competing with less anonymity than previously, as there is a greater understanding of the reach and potential of the Paralympic Games.

**Lack of recognition as a serious competition.** The development of the Paralympic Games has been indicative of social growth for countries as disability becomes more mainstream and culturally represented in national and international sporting events. While there is a progress seen, there is much indication of the distance still to be travelled, particularly in the United States, as Paralympic sport does not garnish the recognition able-bodied competition does. The lack of seriousness seen in the Paralympic Games by spectators is depicted by the fact that they often overlook the results of competition and focus on glorifying ordinary tasks that if accomplished by an individual with a disability, are seen as extraordinary. In conversations where the subject of sport was addressed, sport does not become as significant as “Good for you!” like, ‘Good for you, you’re getting out of the house and doing something,’” (*The New York Times*, May 15, 2008). This media example is a testament to the glorification of the everyday, ordinary, tasks. This “hero coverage of people with disabilities simultaneously lowers and raises societal expectations of the disabled” (Hardin & Hardin, 2003, p. 10) and reinforces the negative stereotypes and misrepresentations of disability.

In these examples, *what* the athletes are doing has little significance, as it indicates they could be doing anything and it would be seen as extraordinary. Many times, the conversation between athletes and spectators does not focus on questions like “How’d you do at the last race?” (*The New York Times*, May 15, 2008) and the lack of seriousness this ensues inhibits the growth of the Paralympics to a legitimate and mainstream event.

Yet unlike the Olympics, the Paralympics have an identity problem. “The biggest thing we run into is, ‘How are the Special Olympics going?’ said Greg Rawlings, head coach of the U.S. Paralympic cross-country ski team, referring to the competition for people with intellectual disabilities. Paralympians are elite athletes with physical disabilities such as impaired vision or missing limbs. They train year-round. Some, such as “blade runner” and track star Oscar Pistorius of South Africa and Nordic skier Brian McKeever of Canada, are Olympic-caliber (*USA Today*, March 12, 2010)

Athletes with disabilities have reached Olympic level competitions, train full time, and exhibit the same athletic qualities as an athlete without a disability. Paralympic athletes have shown a desire to be praised for these qualities and these accomplishments, not as a source of inspiration for their disability. There is also the narrative surrounding the struggle spectators face when considering the differences between the various competitions for athletes with disabilities. When the lines remain blurred between the Paralympic Games and the Special Olympics, neither is being depicted in the proper light nor gaining the deserved recognition and following as the competitions are not seen as separate but rather generalized as one because of the viewpoint that people with disabilities may all be the same. This lens does not offer much clarity for media consumers and further the confusion surrounding the Paralympic Games.

A prevalent frustration found throughout the analysis of this study was the existing discrepancy between the funding of Olympic and Paralympic sports and the respective participating athletes. Support, or lack thereof, from national governing bodies for Paralympic sport has been an indicated weakness for the development of athletes. The inconsistency between the ways in which Olympic and Paralympic athletes are supported offers a lens for readers into the bigger narrative at work.

At the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta, swimmer Amy Van Dyken won four gold medals and was rewarded with \$129,583.33 in prize money from the USOC and USA Swimming. At the 1996 Paralympics, the Olympics for disabled athletes, visually impaired swimmer Trischa Zorn won two gold medals, three silver and three bronze. She received no money (*USA Today*, December 6, 1999).

When these instances find a presence within the media narratives, the frame developed for readers is that there is still tremendous room for growth and a need for the continued stride toward equality, as funding continues to be a point of contrast between the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Expanding further on the funding discrepancies, there were narratives found surrounding the decline in performance of United States Paralympic teams. This was attributed to a lack of allocated athlete funding and support, forcing Paralympic athletes to work additional jobs to sustain rather than solely dedicating their time towards training. “For example, in 2007, members of the United States Paralympic track and field team were given either \$1,000 or \$2,000 in stipends to help defray the cost of training; similar Olympic hopefuls received \$10,000 to \$15,000” (*The New York Times*, September 6, 2008). As this relates to performance, historically, the United States has consistently had strong Paralympic performances but recently, there has been a change seen in this.

The United States’ performance at the Paralympics has decreased markedly over the last 20 years. It won about 12 percent of medals in the Summer Games of 1988 and 1992, but in 2004 won just 5.6 percent of medals, well behind China (9 percent) and in a pack that included Australia (6.4), Britain (6.1), Germany (5.0), Canada (4.7) and Spain (4.5) -- nations with far smaller populations. (*The New York Times*, September 6, 2008)

Other countries are recognizing this weakness and attributing it to the lack of support for athletes saying “the manner in which the United States supported its disabled athletes was a top cause of the decrease. ‘I would say that this a nation that is choosing to underperform,’” (*The New York Times*, September 6, 2008) "It's the sort of thing you'd expect from a third-world country in Africa -- I think it's quite disgusting, actually," Weir said. "They've got talented athletes coming from there that could bring back medals from Beijing and London, and it looks like they don't really care." (*The New York Times*, September 6, 2008). United States Paralympic athletes also reflected on this inconsistency in funding and indicated that they “would attend the Beijing Games relatively unprepared, compared with their competition” (*The New York Times*, September 6, 2008).

These exemplifications in print media are another indication of the lengths still needing

to be reached in terms of equality within the movement. The support that other countries are showing Paralympic athletes prior to the start of the Games is indicative of a difference in recognition as compared to United States. In this instance, *USA Today* readers are being presented with another reality of the striking difference between the United States and other countries and as the publications continue to frame the Paralympic Games as lagging in development and appreciation by the American people. As a whole, "The United States has a robust Paralympic program and will be expected to finish near the top of the medal standings at this summer's Games in London" (*The New York Times*, July 23, 2012) but there is still a great deal of progress needed in order to compare to other developed countries.

For weeks London has been plastered with advertising posters and billboards showing Paralympic athletes in motion. "Before Beijing, how many people with leg amputations did you see on billboards?" says Libby Clegg, a British track runner who won a silver medal in the 2008 Beijing Paralympics. "That kind of thing wasn't really seen before. It's in people's faces." Once the Games start, the Paralympians will be even more ubiquitous. Britain's Channel 4 plans to show more than 150 hours of Paralympic programming, four times more than was shown during the Beijing Paralympics. This year's Paralympics will earn more than \$16 million in global broadcasting rights, a new high. In the USA, NBC holds the broadcast rights and plans to show 5 hours of coverage. None of it will be live. (*USA Today*, August 28, 2012)

Hardin and Hardin (2003), in their interviews with athletes with disabilities, found that this lack of media support in developing an attentive fan base surrounding Paralympic competition was frustrating and as Messner, McKay, and Sabo (2000) indicated that the media plays a critical role in the establishment and maintenance of this audience. Thus, when the mass media does not provide pre-competition coverage in an accessible format for viewers, there is a lack of support during competition as well and is indicative of a frustration in the growth of the Paralympic movement.

Following the scrutiny of their lack of coverage of the 2012 London Paralympic Games, NBC announced plans to broadcast the largest amount of live coverage of the Paralympics ever

seen in the United States, indicating plans for both the 2014 and 2016 Paralympic Games.

After being criticized for its sparse coverage of the London Paralympics last year, NBC announced it would broadcast 50 hours of the Sochi Paralympics. All events will be live-streamed, also a first, at TeamUSA.org. NBC and the U.S Olympic Committee announced their partnership Tuesday after acquiring U.S. media rights to the next two Paralympic Games. NBC Sports Network will broadcast 46 1/2 hours of competition from Sochi, while NBC will air an additional 31 1/2 hours...NBC covered 51 1/2 hours of the London Paralympics, none live. In comparison, the British rights holder aired 400 hours. The London Games were broadcast in more than 115 countries and watched by a total audience of 3.8 billion. After expressing disappointment in the limited North American coverage, IPC President Philip Craven went to work: "We said it was absolutely essential for the growth of the Paralympic movement and the Paralympic Games that in future years U.S. audiences had a greater opportunity to watch some of the world's best elite athletes in action." (*USA Today*, September 25, 2013)

Within this narrative, readers are able to see the markers of progress in the development of the Paralympic movement and the responses made to the critique of previous handlings of the Paralympics in the United States. This growth is indicative of progress within the development of sport for people with disabilities and speaks even further to the status in which the Paralympic Games are viewed by American media.

**Equal treatment of Olympic and Paralympic athletes.** A final indication of growth seen within this study, and likely the most notable, is the continued narrative that surrounds strides towards equality in the treatment of Olympic and Paralympic athletes. Paralympic athletes are beginning to see the shedding of their identity as an athlete with a disability and this marker within the movement has notable significance. The 'invisibility of disability,' which DePauw (1997) noted as a signifier of achievement within the course of equality, is indicative of the ability of mainstream media sources to represent the Paralympic Games within the media narratives of sport without the stereotypes of ability in sport depicted. "These images of athletes with a disability can, and will, alter our traditional view of the normal body (bodies) and of sport and performance" (DePauw, 2000, p. 366).

The manifestation of this invisibility took shape in three ways. The first indication was allowing athletes with disabilities to compete in elite able-bodied competition as equals. With advances in technology and training protocols, athletes with disabilities are earning spots on Olympic teams through the achievement of the necessary entry standards of eligibility. This achievement is growth towards a true “parallel” between these currently separate groups and furthers movement towards invisibility within the Paralympic movement.

The USA’s Marla Runyan, a multiple Paralympic Games champion and the first legally blind person to compete in an Olympics, qualified for the women’s 1,500 meters semifinals Wednesday (*USA Today*, September 27, 2000).

Du Toit qualified with a fourth-place finish at the open-water world championships in May. She and Partyka represent another sign that the Olympic movement, once insensitively restrictive, more seriously embraces the ideal of equal opportunity and inclusiveness. Women, once prohibited, now account for more than 40 percent of Olympic athletes. Disabled athletes have begun to participate regularly, even if the numbers remain small, long after George Eyser, an American, won three gold medals in gymnastics with a wooden leg at the 1904 St. Louis Games. (*The New York Times*, August 18, 2008)

Pistorius, 25, will run the 400 meters in London, as well as the 4x400-meter relay, making him the first amputee track athlete to compete in the Olympic Games. "Today is truly one of the proudest days of my life," Pistorius said. It's one of the proudest days in the history of the Olympic Games as well. The most important sporting event on earth now will showcase a disabled athlete in a way that would have been unimaginable even four years ago. The Paralympics? Of course. He has been a star of the past two. But the Olympic Games? South Africa's decision to send Pistorius to compete against the world's best able-bodied athletes is a laudable, inclusive and respectful decision, one that is likely to resonate far beyond this summer's London Games. (*USA Today*, July 5, 2012)

The narrative of Pistorius has sparked the inclusion in American print media of these impacts on other debates of fairness, as children with disabilities are seeking rightful inclusion in their high school sport programs. Readers are being given a lens into the impact that Pistorius’s participation had on fueling an even greater narrative as “some young disabled athletes are having their own Oscar Pistorius moments – not by breaking barriers in the Olympics, but by battling sports officials over whether and how they should be accommodated in competition with

able-bodied athletes” (*The New York Times*, January 16, 2013). Within this frame, media outlets are aiding in the relief of frustration by informing and engaging readers of the lengths still needing to be achieved in order to signify additional growth of the Paralympic movement.

The second way in which an invisibility of disability was seen to take shape throughout the analysis of this study was in the opinions of spectators and coaches. The viewership of Paralympians by peers and spectators has presented as a series of negative stereotypes that undermine their credibility as athletes. The presence of disability contradicts the accepted discourse of physicality, masculinity, and sexuality (Fine & Asch, 1988) in sport and serves to soften the opinion that observers have of the capability of athletes with disabilities in sport. A challenge of that discourse by the media presents a conflict for readers.

Tom Moulton, an assistant coach, said: "The first time I met these guys, I see these guys taking off their legs and walking on their hands; I walked out of there all emotional. At first it was like total awe, total respect. How do these guys deal with this? "But after a couple training camps, I didn't even notice," he said. "They're just regular guys. They're just players. Now I don't even have to look beyond it." (*The New York Times*, March 15, 2002)

The challenge within this media frame surrounding the acceptability of disability within sports serves to indicate a growth towards a fuller acceptance of Paralympic sport into mainstream, elite sport. As the narratives of athletes with disabilities continues to focus primarily on athleticism and less on disability, greater strides towards this will be made and media consumers will have less conflict in their own interpretation of the Paralympic Games and the participating athletes.

Lastly, an invisibility of disability has taken shape in the direct comparison of Olympic and Paralympic athletes. The incredible performances of athletes with disabilities in the Paralympic Games have earned merit in the nomination and winning of awards by Paralympians as nominated alongside their Olympic counterparts. Top performances in the Paralympic Games are finally recognized in the manner in which is deserved and athletes are being seen as

competitive and successful in the same way as any other athlete. In addition to garnishing a public vote, the performances of Paralympic athletes are also being recognized among Olympic athletes and being credited for commanding performances.

Jessica Long of Dundalk, Md., is the first Paralympic athlete to win the Sullivan Award, given by the Amateur Athletic Union rather quietly last Wednesday night in New York. Hour by hour, the import of this election strikes home. The voters considered a 15-year-old athlete with no lower legs to have had the best year of any American, including Michael Phelps, the swimmer; and Brady Quinn, the Notre Dame quarterback. Comparing these national celebrities with a disabled swimmer might seem like an exercise in apples and bananas, but the Sullivan voters recognized a star jock when they encountered her. Long won three gold medals at the Paralympics in Athens in 2004, at age 12, and trains against able-bodied swimmers at home, beating most of them. Last year she won nine gold medals in world competition in South Africa. She also swam in a one-mile race across Chesapeake Bay. And for recreation, she climbs rocks. (*The New York Times*, April 15, 2007)

Erin Popovich won seven gold medals in the Paralympics last summer in Athens, to Phelps' six in the Olympics. They met last June at the U.S. Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs, but their participation in a "Swim with the Stars" camp Wednesday marked the first time they had seen each other since Athens. Ian Crocker, another U.S. swimmer at the camp, pointed out to Phelps that Popovich one-upped him, but Popovich didn't use the opportunity to trash talk. "She should have," Phelps said. Phelps came up short of matching Mark Spitz's 1972 gold medal haul. But Popovich, a dwarf, went 7-for-7 in five individual events and two relays (*USA Today*, June 23, 2005).

This exemplification of recognition of Paralympic athletes serves as progress towards DePauw's (1997) concept of '(in)Visibility of DisAbility' in sport where to achieve this "a redefinition of ability and sport is required" (p. 425). DePauw argued that in order for athletes with disabilities to achieve a full marker of invisibility of their disability, the value system with which sport exists needs to be redefined. This frame of invisibility that the media is casting over the narrative of Paralympic sport with the inclusion of accounts that discuss the equal comparisons of athletes with and without disabilities and the participation of athletes with disabilities in the Paralympic Games serves as a challenge for readers. Consumers of media, and those that accept the dominant ideologies of sport, have yet to fully recognize the full inclusion of athletes with

disabilities as legitimate and full participants in sport and without this, the further growth of the Paralympic movement will continue to be inhibited.

### **Legitimacy of Paralympic Sport Versus Differences from “Traditional Sport”**

The second major frame identified in this study was labeled legitimacy of Paralympic Sport versus differences from traditional sport. This frame portrays the Paralympics within the scope of being thought of as a serious competition, speaking to the continued movement towards equality between the Olympics and Paralympics while also contrasting with the variations that make the Paralympics different from traditional able-bodied and mainstream sports. Being that the Paralympic Games have not gained nearly as much attention as the Olympic Games, it would be reasonable to categorize them among a niche sport, which, according to Miloch and Lambrecht (2006), is defined as a sport that has not yet become mainstreamed and does not have a large audience appeal base. Titlebaum and Lawrence (2010) indicated that the commonalities among mainstream sports include a large fan base, widespread appeal and extensive media attention, while niche sports do not have large fan support and receive very little media attention.

**Similarities and differences between Olympic and Paralympic sport.** Within the modern Paralympic era, print media sources have begun to shed light on Paralympic sport by identifying the similarities between the Olympic and Paralympic Games, which gives readers something to relate to within the narrative. This identification of the parallels between athletes allows readers to see sport as sport, whether or not the competition takes place the most traditional ways. Through this framing, readers are invited to view athletes in the same manner they would any able-bodied athletes. Using Olympic competition and Olympic athletes as a point of reference stimulates the possibility that the reader will see the two events as parallels that occur within the same scope of sport and with equally as favorable outcomes.

Paul Nitz, 31, of Avon is a quadriplegic who will compete in the 100-meter dash -- on the same track Marion Jones did when she collected five track and field medals last month for the United States. And, Dana Albrycht, 22, of Canton could be Sydney's next swimming sensation -- in the same pool American backstroker Lenny Krayzelburg won three gold medals. But, Albrycht will be springing off the starting block and doing the butterfly kick with only one leg. (*The New York Times*, October 15, 2000)

Shadowens, who was paralyzed in a 1989 auto accident, is a 1.0, near the bottom range of motion, which makes him a defender or enforcer, a kind of Dick Butkus of wheelchair rugby. The team's youngest member, Cliff Chunn, 22, who was paralyzed by a neurological disease when he was a toddler, is a 2.0, which makes him a Barry Sanders type. (*USA Today*, October 25, 2000)

Around the 1996 Atlanta Paralympic Games, *USA Today* also included detailed charts that exemplified Olympic records and their Paralympic sport counterparts in order to contextualize the performances of Paralympians as competition began (Table 3). This idea, while seems to speak favorably to Paralympic performances, actually serves to undermine and question the legitimacy with which it is viewed as it indicates the need of a qualifier in order for performances to be viewed as exceptional (Chang et al., 2011).

**Table 3 Comparison of Olympic and Paralympic Games**

Event	Paralympic Record	Olympic Record
Track, men 100m	10.72 seconds Ajibola Adoye, Nigeria (arm amputee)	9.84 seconds Donovan Bailey, Canada
Long jump	18 feet, 3 ¾ inches Dennis Oehler, USA (single leg amputee)	29-2 ½ Bob Benson, USA
Track, women marathon	1:42:48 Connie Hansen, Denmark (wheelchair)	2:24:52 Joan Benoit, USA
Swimming, men 50 free	26.07 Christopher Holmes, Great Britain (visually impaired)	21.91 Alexander Popov, Russia
Swimming, women, 100 back	1:09:89 Trischa Zorn, USA (visually impaired)	1:00.68 Krisztina Egerszegi, Hungary

Source: *USA Today*, August 15, 1996

The comparison of Olympic and Paralympic athletes, in essence, works to remove the differentiation that exists between the two in discussions and establishes the Paralympic Games legitimately within the scope of sport. Referencing performances that occur in the same venues that held Olympic glory, places the Paralympic Games within the frame of excellence for readers, as Olympic success has an already established understanding within mainstream media. By explaining the classification system within the realm of Olympic comparisons it also allows readers to understand the role that the various players have on the court and exemplifies the idea in sport that each player has a distinct role and different strengths, regardless as to whether the player is able-bodied or not.

This concept is also translated into the explanations given around the game itself and the sometimes only subtle differences that make participation for athletes with disabilities possible in the various Olympic sports.

The players sit in custom-made sleds, balanced on blades, and propel themselves with two short sticks, which they also use to maneuver the puck. Periods are shorter. An extra penalty called T-boning, when someone deliberately hits another player's sled with his own blade at a 90-degree angle, usually takes the place of a tripping call. As in any hockey game, confrontations, body slams, shoving and speed are the norm. "If people would come out and see the game, they'd see that it's hockey," defenseman Francis St. Germaine said. "Five guys and a goalie getting together against five other guys." (*The New York Times*, March 15, 2002)

"Of all the sports they can participate in, that are offshoots of standing sports, fencing has the least amount of special circumstances to fit a handicapped person," he said. "It uses the same equipment and the same weapons. If there are 10,000 rules in fencing, 9,990 apply to wheelchair fencers." (*The New York Times*, October 12, 2009)

The legitimacy attributed to understanding the language of the game being presented by comparing it to a dialogue of able-bodied competition is that consumers are able to appreciate that the two are not very different at all. Use of the phrase 'as in any hockey game' and 'uses the same equipment' by the editors gives the reader a lens into the similarities and differences

between sled hockey and the game traditionally recognizable to *NYT* readers as hockey. These markers, followed by a quote from the player discussing the undeniable similarities brings the conflict of the legitimacy of the sport to light, the athletes themselves that appear to view the games as one and the same, while the objective viewer can see both the similarities and differences.

The narrative within this examination of both *The New York Times* and *USA Today* also included instances that discussed the striking differences between Paralympic sport and the Olympic counterparts. Examples such as “Wheelchair basketball rules are similar to the international basketball rules. Players can roll their wheels twice but then must dribble, pass, or shoot” (*The New York Times*, October 15, 2000) and “Wheelchair rugby is a hybrid of basketball and football played with a volleyball” (*USA Today*, August 23, 1996) were found in the study. In Mason’s (2013) investigation of Canadian newspaper coverage of sledge hockey during the 2010 Vancouver Paralympics, he saw the need to distinguish between Olympic and Paralympic sports as an explicit emphasis of the two *different* sports being of unequal value.

**Traditional sport journalism in covering Paralympic sport.** Continuing with recognizable dialogues, there was indication that efforts towards traditional sport journalism are being made within Paralympic sport coverage. The mass media, specifically newspapers, traditionally focus on action, records, elite performances, aggressions, heroic actions, drama, emotions, celebrities, performance results, statistics, and behind the scene stories (Coakely, 1994). When this same type of journalism occurs surrounding the Paralympic Games, readers are able to focus on the sporting aspects of the competition, rather than all of the ways that what they are reading is inherently different from mainstream sport.

In 1999, Shirley got serious: "I went to the nationals and beat Brian (Frasure) and Tony Volpentest and tied Tony's world record (of 11.33)." Frasure was still the favorite going

into the 2000 Games. However, it all came together in Sydney as Shirley crossed the line in 11.09 seconds, a Paralympic record. The look on his face that night wasn't shock but amazement. "It's just that I had my perfect race at that moment in time," he says. Shirley believes that someone will have to put down a similar effort to win the 100 here, predicting that the winner will go under 11 seconds. So far, he's the only one to do it, clocking 10.97 in the Utah State Games. Feeling good about his recovery and with a silver medal already in his pocket, Shirley will be looking for another perfect night in Athens. (*USA Today*, September 22, 2004)

Although the Americans sailed through the preliminary rounds, winning and dominating every game, Norway put up a tough fight before a crowd of 8,315, the largest ever at a Paralympic event. The Americans were facing a team that matched them in speed and conditioning. Rolf Einar Pedersen scored on Norway's first shot on goal, 2 minutes 49 seconds into the first period. Although the Norwegians were energized by the goal, the Americans kept play largely in front of Norway's net. Using the Americans' typical fast-paced style, Joe Howard scored 13 minutes into the period, then sailed down the rink and scored again just over a minute later. The game looked like a blowout when Matt Coppens scored in the second period to put the United States up, 3-1. But less than a minute later, Atle Haglund took advantage of a slow United States defense to pull Norway to within a goal. After Stig Svee scored early in the third, Norway's superior speed and physical play kept the tired Americans on the defensive, while goalkeeper Roger Johansen deflected numerous shots. After a scoreless overtime, the Americans' first attempt in the shootout, by Sylvester Flis, was stopped. The game was decided when the United States' Kip St. Germaine slid the puck by Johansen. (*The New York Times*, March 16, 2002)

Crossman (2007) noted, "in any sport, the anticipation of what might happen is almost as important as what actually happens" (p. 133). The interest surrounding the prediction of performance by elite athletes generates spectator attention (Billings & Eastman, 2002) and therefore generates interest in the competition. The inclusion of the media frames surrounding predictions and results will work to establish legitimacy within the Paralympic narrative as well as increase the size of the interested fan base.

This is one of the many examples found in the data that indicates a reporting on the quantifiable aspects of competition. The journalist is able to take the reader through the game synopsis at a face-paced speed, while focusing almost exclusively on the game statistics. By giving play-by-play analysis and describing the moments of the game that were close and players

that were instrumental in maintaining a lead over the competition, the media is framing the narrative of legitimacy for readers. In addition, when reading through the descriptions in this example, there is minimal mention that it was a Paralympic sport being described. Without the mention of it having been the largest crowd size seen at a Paralympic event, the reader would have little indication as to whether they were reading a synopsis of an Olympic or Paralympic hockey game. The fact that the reader is given so little to differentiate between the two indicates an aspect of legitimacy surrounding the sport. There is value placed on describing sport, without having to distinguish between whether or not the athletes competing have a disability. This indication, while it does not provide a complete solution, works to change the necessity that often existed within media frames that separated sport based on ability.

In addition to competition results, a concentration on reporting on scandals and ethical indignities indicates a relatable point for consumers and allows for the opportunity to see that the same sort of issues that occur in Olympic sport also have a presence in Paralympic sport.

“Paralympic sprinter Brian Frasure plans to challenge a four-year ban for a positive drug test” (*USA Today*, November 3, 2000) exemplifies fault that can take place within the Paralympics.

This legitimacy serves to recognize that Paralympic athletes are not immune to this sort of scandal. This serves as an indication that these are occurrences within sport, regardless of whether it is the Olympic or Paralympic Games.

The shadow of drugs fell on the Paralympics here today as four power lifters were banned for taking performance-enhancing substances. The International Paralympic Committee expelled Aurel Berbec of Romania, Marina Diakonova of Russia, Ali Mahmoudikordkheili of Iran and Radko Radev of Bulgaria. The four will not be allowed to compete for the next four years, including the 2004 Athens Paralympics, the I.P.C. said. (*The New York Times*, October 22, 2000)

This finding aligned with the findings of Chang et al. (2011) in their examination of the 2008 Beijing Olympic and Paralympic Games where ethical issues were a topic found within each.

**Desire to be recognized as an elite athlete.** When considering sport, athletes desire that spectators and fans recognize the amount of time and energy that goes toward being successful. Elite athletes, whether Olympic or Paralympic, turn their sport into a lifestyle and Paralympic athletes desire this to be easily recognized among spectators. The same lengths put towards training Olympians should also be found within the strength and conditioning programs of Paralympians. Athletes indicate that coaches cannot be afraid to hurt or injure athletes with disabilities and cannot approach their training with any more caution than they would any other athlete.

"To take the Paralympic movement to the next level, athletes need to produce more outstanding times," Volpentest says. "Sometimes it's hard for somebody who's not missing a limb to know how hard to train someone who is. Their natural instinct is not to train them as intensely. "If you want to set world records, you can't be cautious in training a Paralympian. You can't be afraid of our bodies. You've got to go for it." (*USA Today*, August 19, 1996)

Silva and Howe (2012) noted in their examination of "Inside Paralympic Athletes" that there were existing conceptions that the success of Paralympic athletes was thought to be attributed to the superhuman qualities that people with disabilities are said to inhibit by virtue of disability. In their findings, however, they noted that "the adaptations induced by training and hard work are largely responsible for Paralympic athlete's performances" (p. 187). Disability is thought to be synonymous with 'fragile' and 'breakable' and in turn, there is a particular carefulness and restraint that is taken when interacting with people with disabilities. The direct quotation of an athlete putting down the cautions many coaches take in training an athlete with a disability is a testament to the desire Paralympians have to be viewed legitimately.

As the stories of more athletes with disabilities are finding a place within able-bodied competition, the epitome being competing at the Olympic Games, there are elements of legitimacy being attributed to the ways in which they are depicted. Athleticism and earning a

rightful spot within the competition are among the various narratives that are surrounding these athletes and are indicators of being seen as an equal rather than something entirely different. The media frames surrounding athletes with disabilities, specifically Paralympic athletes, closely resembles the manner in which participation by women in sport are often framed, representing women as the *other* thus asserting an inferiority to male athletes (Messner, 1988). The prevailing stereotypes of the dominant ideologies of physicality, masculinity, and sexuality in sport regard disability and femininity synonymously (Fine & Asch, 1988, p. 23) and as having qualities that are thought to be indicative of weakness and inactiveness. The existing media frame perpetuates the restriction of participation by these “so called broken bodies or disabled bodies” (Schell & Rodriguez, 2001, p. 128) furthers the acceptance of the abnormality seen in the participation in sport by athletes with disabilities by readers and as more media outlets continue to challenge this notion, progress is made towards the legitimization of the Paralympic movement.

To the end, Brosnihan fought for dignified treatment and perceptions of the disabled. "You think about women," she said, "and people used to pat us on the back and say: 'Isn't that sweet? She's competing.' Now they don't do that anymore. It's the same with the disabled. People treat us with dignity. (*The New York Times*, August 28, 2001)

South Africa's Oscar Pistorius made history by becoming the first amputee sprinter to compete in the Olympics. When Pistorius finished last in his 400-meter semifinal heat, a teenager from Grenada asked him to swap race bibs, the ultimate sign of respect. (*USA Today*, August 10, 2012)

This framing indicates the role Paralympic athletes are taking in defining their own identities within sport, with the help of the media, and the exemplification of the desire to be praised for their athleticism, not their disability.

Paralympic athletes desire to be viewed as the best at what they do, not simply as courageous figures that are rising above circumstance in a courageous way. The title of Steadward and Peterson's (1997) book *Paralympics: Where heroes come*, was inspired by the

advertising slogan for the 1996 Atlanta Paralympic Games ‘the Olympics are where heroes are made. The Paralympics is where heroes come’ (p. 8). Peers (2009) indicates the harmful discrepancy seen between Olympians earning the title of hero while Paralympians are passively being generalized as heroes, regardless of their accomplishments, for simply appearing disabled at a sporting event. The desire to be viewed legitimately as a decorated athlete rather than a source of inspiration for having a disability is a way in which Paralympic athletes are seeking to claim their own sporting identity and allows media consumers the lens to share in that understanding.

"Sometimes, stereotypes make me laugh. Like when people introduce you as courageous. Often, I've heard it on television, 'We're talking with a girl today who had cancer when she was 12, beat the odds and now she skis.' I say: 'Now wait a minute. I don't just ski. I'm the best in the world and I train my heart and soul out for this and I ski 150 days and I work out in the weight room, and to me courageous doesn't imply any of that.' "Athletes don't want to be courageous. They want to be good." (*The New York Times*, August 28, 2001)

"I am not a disabled person. That's not how people define me. I'm not a courageous person. I'm an elite athlete who's training for the same reasons as Carl Lewis or Jackie Joyner-Kersey. I want to be the best in the world in my sport. I want to make a difference." (*USA Today*, August 22, 1996)

Her struggle was with the perception of her and other disabled athletes as pitiable people who were "so brave" for just being out there. She wanted admiration for her technique, her skill, for how she had discarded disabled ski equipment for regular ski poles to produce faster times and fought successfully to compete in the same races with the nonhandicapped. (*The New York Times*, August 30, 2001)

In the discourse surrounding elite sport, it is not uncommon to see inflated acclaim used to create sporting heroes and maintain an emotional ethos for consumers (Cashmore, 2010) and explains the consistent use of the supercrip narrative surrounding Paralympic sport. Olympic sport develops a few standout athletes among a large group, where in Paralympic sport, the term hero is a casual descriptor used to label any participating athlete (Peers, 2009). This frame negatively impacts much of the legitimacy that has been achieved within the movement, as it does not

distinguish those few standout athletes from the masses.

This indication develops further when considering how and at what stage individuals become involved in Paralympic sport. There were many articles that centered on using sport as a rehabilitation tool after an injury and from there, developed as athletes. The harmful use of this narrative lies within the perception it creates that anyone is capable of reaching the elite level of Paralympic sport. Athletes have attested to having been athletic prior to being injured but never reached a national level because of the large number of people competing for a limited number of spots whereas the field of athletes is much smaller in Paralympic sport, indicating a higher probability. This serves to greatly delegitimize Paralympic sport and frames it as an almost second-best option for those looking to compete at the national level.

“After I was injured in a car accident, I spent a couple of years staring at a spot on the wall in my bedroom. But being bored and depressed gets boring and depressing. I'd look at my wheelchair and think, I'll never be able to get in or out of that easily. But I was wrong. I've done more cool things than I ever would have done had I not been injured. We were all athletic before, but we wouldn't have been good enough to play for Team U.S.A. in anything, and in 2002, we represented America in the Paralympics.” (*The New York Times*, July 10, 2005)

For almost all the soldiers, striving to compete in the Paralympic Winter Games in February in Turin, Italy, is unrealistic. But Sean Halstead, a 34-year-old Air Force veteran paralyzed in a training accident in 1998, left here aiming for the Paralympic trials in cross-country skiing. "Rehab helps you exist," Halstead said. "This helps you live." Walsh explained which competitions Halstead would need to succeed in to qualify for the World Cup race that will serve as the Paralympic trials this winter. "I like to compete," Halstead said. "I like to push myself. And I think what really pushed it was the fact that it's possible. Before my injury, I was an athlete. But compared to other athletes, especially on the elite level, I wasn't at the top. Now, I guess because it's a smaller population, I can be competitive." (*The New York Times*, October 9, 2005)

Within able-bodied sports, there is a “continuum of options...ranging from relatively uncompetitive recreational sports where ‘everyone is a winner’ to highly competitive elite sports where only a very talented few are selected or earn the right to compete” (Nixon, 2002, p. 429) which inhibits the participation of every individual wanting to reach the highest elite level. The

reality is that not every athlete will reach that level, adding a prestige to those who do. In this disability sport narrative, it is suggestive that anyone wanting to reach the Paralympic level can because the population of those trying is smaller, thus negatively framing the legitimate aspects of sport.

There were many descriptions of individuals sustaining an injury and using sport afterward as a tool in their rehabilitation process in both *The New York Times* and *USA Today*. Many of these accounts discussed individuals that had been involved in sport prior to their injury and were looking for ways to stay involved and resume a sense of normalcy. In addition to this narrative, there were also accounts of those individuals committing to training and seeking to develop further from just a recreational participant to an elite athlete. That narrative worked to further the media frame of growth of the sport, as a greater number of participants is an indication of development.

The narrative, however, of those developing athletes that were seeking involvement because of their lack of achievement of an elite status within able-bodied competition. The viewpoint that ‘because it’s a smaller population’ and ‘I can be competitive’ serves to undermine the success of Paralympic athletes, as it implies that anyone can be successful. This narrative brings into question the legitimacy of Paralympic sport and, of particular importance, how those newly involved athletes are portraying it within the media. Consumers of mainstream media are exposed to this frame and question the legitimacy with which they view the Paralympic Games. While the Paralympics continue to serve as the height of competition for athletes with disabilities, athletes that have sustained injuries indicate that growing up, their dreams rested in competing at the Olympic level, not the Paralympics which has brought many to seek inclusion within able-bodied competition. This is an indication that there is still an inequality viewed in the

caliber of competition between the two events impacts the legitimacy with which the Paralympics are viewed.

**Lack of equality between the Olympics and Paralympics.** Despite acknowledging the similarities, the legitimacy of Paralympic sport is often challenged as the parallels often become questioned and provide a contrasting frame to previous narratives that gave readers a lens to view the Paralympics from a similar perspective as the Olympics. The lack of equality depicted within Olympic and Paralympic discussions indicates that while the Paralympics may be gaining attention, the natural and unquestioned acceptability is not depicted as of yet. This is exemplified in a deficiency in media attention as well as the continued question as to the fairness of competition between athletes with and without disabilities

While the word Paralympics is based on the idea the event is "parallel" to the Olympics, in marketing terms they're far apart. Realistically, the only reason for the wall-to-wall live online coverage is that the Paralympics haven't had enough broad-based appeal to attract regular TV exposure. In Atlanta in 1996, the Paralympics got four hours on CBS – the only time the event has had any broadcast network coverage in the USA -- and nine hours on regional cable TV. Networks from just a dozen countries showed up and organizers provided broadcast feeds from two or three event venues. (*USA Today*, July 25, 2000)

"I've got to give him credit," the Bahamian sprinter Demetrius Pinder said, "because I think he's under more pressure than the rest of us." Pistorius, 25, has faced unusual challenges. Born without fibulas, he had both legs amputated below the knee before his first birthday, and he has battled for years to compete against able-bodied athletes. Four years ago, he qualified for the Beijing Games but was ruled ineligible by track's world governing body because his blades were deemed to give him a competitive advantage. (*The New York Times*, August 6, 2012)

Hedrick (2000) noted that with the help of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), a sense of legitimacy would emerge surrounding Paralympic sport but he indicated that as a governing organization the IOC done very little to integrate wheelchair events into the Olympic Games.

The “complete programmatic separation” (p. 74) between athletes with and without disabilities is an impediment to reform and Berger (2008) notes that the “‘separate but (un)equal’ model of the

Olympics/Paralympics” (p. 669) is an area that needs to experience change if true legitimacy is to be reached. Narratives depicted as the ones above in *The New York Times* and *USA Today* further fuel the frame of (un)equal treatment of the Olympic and Paralympic Games. Within the narrative of Pistorius, who was deemed ineligible to compete in the 2008 Beijing Paralympic Games, the fairness of his position in the competition was examined and, in turn, the legitimacy of him as an athlete was questioned.

In recent Olympiads, print media sources also began to indicate the performances of the Paralympic teams in relation to their Olympic counterparts and fuel the narratives that surround national pride.

The United States sled hockey team, competing in the 2002 Salt Lake Paralympics, may do what the men's and women's American Olympic hockey teams could not: bring home a gold medal. After a 6-0 victory over Sweden Tuesday night, the surprising United States team gained a berth in the gold-medal game on Friday, against Norway, which advanced by defeating Japan, 2-0. (*The New York Times*, March 15, 2002)

During the Olympic Games, which preceded the Paralympics in China, Egypt did poorly, earning just one bronze medal. But in the Paralympics, Egypt earned 12 medals, including four golds. "Face savers," read the headline on Al Ahram Weekly, an English-language newspaper. It was an extraordinary achievement coming from a country where physical disabilities are largely seen as props for street begging. (*The New York Times*, October 4, 2008)

Media sources are able to indicate that Paralympic teams are worthy of fan support and national backing because of impressive performances on the global stage. The incorporation of Paralympic athletes as a source of national pride and success is an indication of the legitimacy being attributed to their athleticism and warrants fan support.

One of the more obvious distinctions between Olympic and Paralympic sport for readers, as framed by the media, is the equipment often needed to make the participation of athletes with disabilities possible. This is often in the form of a prosthetic that serves the place of a limb or a wheelchair that compensates for a spinal cord injury. These technologies, when described to

readers, point out the aspects that make Paralympic sport drastically different from Olympic sport and highlight the seemingly superhuman qualities found within the participants. This frame supports the establishment of athletes with disabilities as outsiders in sport. DePauw (1997) argued that the most desirable indication of equality would be to achieve a level of invisibility of disability within media representations of Paralympic sport. When discussing the technological advances and developments seen that enable participation, disability is highlighted, making some sort of adaptation necessary.

When all is said and done, it's still the human machine who makes all the difference, but technological advances, such as the ongoing development and improvement of sport-specific wheelchairs, have been critical to the improved performance of the Paralympic athletes... "Racing chairs began to develop by athletes building their own," says Kiley, who used a standard wheelchair that he modified into a race chair in 1976. "We were all just playing around, trying to make these things go faster. We were cutting down backs and taking off the brakes."... "It gives me the ability to be the best that I can be," Glasbrenner says. "The chair is an extension of my body, and without that extension, I wouldn't do the things that I can do." Just like Switzerland's Heinz Frei, the winner of 96 marathons who holds the world's best official marathon time of 1:20:14, set in 1999 in Oita, Japan. By comparison, Kenyan Paul Tergat's able-bodied runner world record of 2:04:55 set last September is more than 44 minutes slower. (*USA Today*, September 23, 2004)

As Paralympic sport is continuing to develop because of advances in technology and training programs are becoming more specialized, performances are continuing to exceed and the bar is steadily being raised. The selection standards for Paralympic Teams have continued to increase with each quadrennial, indicating a development in the sport that, in turn, enhances the legitimacy under which it is viewed.

With this, athletes with disabilities are achieving feats such as reaching qualification standards to name them to not only their countries' Paralympic Team but the Olympic Team as well. In order to maintain the integrity of naming a team, these athletes still do have to achieve the qualifying standard in place from the national governing bodies, ensuring an equal selection

procedure is maintained. Media consumers are being exposed to stories that center on athletes with varying disabilities that are finally being allowed to compete within able-bodied competition, which works to ensure an even higher testament to their legitimacy as athletes and frames them within the highest level of competition. Easily, the most recognizable narrative surrounding this was Oscar Pistorius, who competed on the South African 2012 Olympic Team after a series of back and forth rulings on his participation eligibility in 2008 left him off the Beijing Olympic Team. Even though he ran a world record time at the Paralympic level, his time was slower than that which would name him to the Olympic Team. The validity that this testament gave was that even Paralympic athletes experience disappointment and that they will be given no advantages to any other athlete with regards to competition.

Striding on his curved prosthetics, which touch only a few inches of ground, Pistorius now looks as comfortable and light-footed as a gymnast. Pistorius has clocked times of 10.91 seconds in the 100 meters, 21.58 in the 200 and 46.56 in the 400 -- world-record times for disabled athletes. He finished second in the 400 at the South African Championships, an able-bodied meet, in March. Pistorius is close to the Olympic qualifying standard in the 400. He needs to run a 46.3 before the July 2008 qualifying deadline. (*The New York Times*, June 24, 2007)

### **Overcoming Obstacles Versus Maintaining Victimhood**

The third major frame identified in this study was labeled victimhood versus overcoming obstacles. This frame centered on the manner in which Paralympic athletes and the ways in which some were identified as having been successful in spite of their disability, sometimes placed in the context of triumph over tragedy, while others were depicted as remaining a victim to their disability without being able to overcome it. These contrasting frames create a narrative that offers little clarity for media consumers surrounding Paralympic athletes. In their empirical study surrounding representations of disability in American newspapers, Suarez de Balcazar (1988) sought to examine the validity of the accepted conception that the media inappropriately

resented people with disabilities. This study concluded that 78% of the articles examined presented people with disabilities as a “victim of” or “suffers from” (p. 276) impairment.

**Athletes with disabilities as pitiful victims.** The narrative of including disability within Paralympic accounts has an ever-present place within the discourse that details the participating athletes. In many of the published articles in this study, a detailed backstory accounting for how a specific disability was acquired was present as well as the detailed description surrounding the rehabilitation process and unexpected mishaps along the way. This aspect of the Paralympic narrative is a means in which the media continues to build on the emotional ethos surrounding the Paralympic human interest (Gans, 1979; Hardin & Hardin, 2004; Schell & Rodriguez, 2001) story and continues to focus on an athletes’ disability as a critical facet of their identity, thus inhibiting an athlete from ever really existing outside these confines. This frame offers a lens into the victimhood of Paralympic athletes for consumers, as there is a consistent association between the athlete and their disability.

Runyan suffers from a degenerative condition of the retina called Stargardt's disease, which has left her with a hole in the center of her vision. She has 20-300 vision in one eye, 20-400 in the other. She cannot see the tape at the finish line of the metric mile. She cannot read a stopwatch or watch a replay of her races without pressing her face several inches from the television. She wears contacts and can see the track beneath her feet with peripheral vision, but her competitors are visible to her as shards of color and smudged faces and gauzy hairstyles. (*The New York Times*, April 19, 2000)

A graduate of Deer Park High School, Suffolk Community College and South Carolina State College, Mr. Oehler was on his way to a career in soccer when his car broke down on the Meadowbrook State Parkway on April 4, 1984. As he tried to push the car off the road, several cars struck him from behind. When he awoke in the hospital that night he learned that he had lost his right leg below the knee. “All my life I’d been living for soccer,” Mr. Oehler recounted, “and that dream had come true when I signed with the New York Nationals. Now that was all gone.” A few setbacks in rehabilitation made things even worse. “I was really down, back at work selling electronic office equipment,” he said, “but despondent. I wasn’t sure I would walk again, let alone run” (*The New York Times*, July 14, 1996)

The exemplification of this frame is an indication of the level of comfort found in the portrayal

of the negatives found within disability and the caution executed in these descriptions is limiting. The media has an impact on the attitudes and knowledge that the public has of people with disabilities and can influence positive social awareness or reinforce negative stereotypes as a result (Keller, Hallahan, McShane, Crowley, & Blandford, 1990). Suarez de Balcazar (1988) stated “The media portray people with disabilities in a negative and unrealistic way, preferring the sensational or pitiful to the everyday and human side of disability” (p. 34). The vulnerable and pitiful nature in which athletes with disabilities are often seen in the media continues to further the stereotype of victimhood, indicating to spectators, and media consumers, that these athletes are not ‘normal’ and should not receive praise for their athletic accolades. The optimal desire for likeness between groups (Sticker, 1999) by the media serves to exemplify those that are ‘different’ and reinforces the negative stereotypes surrounding disability (Haller, 2010).

**Looking past disability.** Conversely, there are descriptions of athletes that center on the ability to look past their disability, framing them as people with little attention attributed to the misfortunes bestowed upon them as a result of injury. Media accounts that describe the perspective of athletes in terms of their accomplishments, while mentioning, but not solely focusing, on their injury within the popular angle of misfortune and tragedy, gives readers a lens to see beyond what is not there and embrace the capabilities that are still present.

Mark Zupan swigs beer. Spews out four-letter words. Sweats up a storm in the gym. Wrestles with his dog. Has crowd-surfed at a Pearl Jam show. And enjoys an active sex life with his live in girlfriend, Jessica Wampler. Oh yeah, and he happens to be a quadriplegic who has been in a wheelchair since he was 18. That was when he was thrown from the bed of the pickup of his best friend, Christopher Igoe, and broke his neck. Spend two minutes with Zupan and you forget he’s sitting in a beat-up chair that’s both an extension of himself and at the same time completely overshadowed by his piecing intelligence, sharp-edged humor and outspoken, trash-talking personality. Yet his accident, Zupan say, is “the best thing that’s ever happened to me.” He means it. Zupan, 30, is the captain of the U.S. quadriplegic rugby team, which competes in the Paralympics and took home a bronze medal at the Athens games (*USA Today*, July 8, 2005).

“I’d gone just to see what it was like,” he said. “I did so well at it the very first time that the guy running the workshop came over and said, ‘You have a natural ability that you should really pursue.’ “And I said, ‘Why not?’” Mr. Shields, now 34 and a technical writer for the New Jersey Highway Authority, owns two national records, won the 1999 national grand prix championship, has competed for the United States on two teams (in Barcelona, Spain, in 1992 and Atlanta in 1996) and hopes that his performance at the Oceania Championships now ending in Sydney, Australia, will earn him a spot on the American team for 2000. He has also been to competitions in England, the Netherlands, Puerto Rico, and Finland. Did somebody forget to mention that he competes in a wheelchair, a result of being born with spina bifida, an incompletely developed spine? (*The New York Times*, November 14, 1999).

Within each Olympiad, the stories of those Paralympians able to overcome adversity and find the positives and a purpose again continue to emerge. Individuals with disabilities are continuing to refuse to have a disability be their only defining quality and these narratives provide a frame for readers to view success in the ability to move past the instances of self-pity and realize that life does go on. Athletes are hopeful that their success stories "show people there's a great life after getting hurt. It can be a better life because it's good to get knocked down -- be at the bottom sometimes -- and then come back up" (*USA Today*, August 9, 2005).

Among the most popular pins are those bearing the “What’s Your Excuse” Paralympic slogan and Blaze, the Games’ multicolored phoenix bird mascot who symbolizes resurrecting victory from defeat. That inspiration is evident among the international disabled community here, for whom the Paralympics celebrate the decision to live fully despite physical challenges. “These people put their whole heart and soul into this. I want to see them overcome their challenges, facing life and hitting it head on,” says John Bancheri, a disabled Atlanta musician. “So many people who become paralyzed sit around, cash in their chips and feel like life is over. These athletes are saying, hey, you can live, too” (*USA Today*, August 16, 1996).

Another manifestation of seeing beyond disability is indicated through descriptions by mainstream media of the participation in sport by athletes with disabilities, which frames individuals with disabilities as “normal.” Steadward and Peterson (1997) discussed the justification of participation in sport by people with disabilities in the context of “as soon as the community sees the person with a disability participating in sports, that person is looked on as an

equal member of society, not as an appendage” (p. 15).

Shirley, who lost his left foot in a lawnmower accident as a boy and had the leg amputated below the knee in a subsequent operation, is probably the most recognizable American Paralympian. Besides his two 100-meter golds, he has Paralympic medals in the high jump, long jump, 200 meters and the 4x100 relay. He owns world records for his disability classification in the 100 meters (11.05 seconds), the 200 (22.64 seconds) and the long jump (6.79 meters). Buy a drink at McDonald's, and his picture may be on the cup. (*The New York Times*, September 7, 2008)

Despite these physical limitations, Volpentest, one of the top runners competing in this week's Paralympic Games, has been driven since an early age to tackle every challenge and try any sport by strapping on a pair of prosthetic legs and feet. He played football with his able-bodied friends in the streets of his family's home in Mountlake Terrace, Wash., 10 miles north of Seattle, and he also mixed it up in pickup basketball and volleyball games. Volpentest mastered wrestling and taekwondo. He was in a bowling league, rolling a high game of 199 (*USA Today*, August 19, 1996).

Due to the existing relationship seen between sport and normal behavior, when individuals who do not fit within the confines of what has been deemed 'normal' participate in a normalizing activity, there is a validation recognized. Media consumers are thus invited to share the viewpoint surrounding their participation with a lens that highlights their success.

**Defying expectations.** Another common theme found within the analysis of this study was the defiance of expectations by Paralympic athletes. Berger (2008) presented the supercrip model as “those individuals whose inspirational stories of courage, dedication, and hard work prove that it can be done, that one can defy the odds and accomplish the impossible” (p. 648).

This framework presents to readers that many of the preconceived notions that foster expectations towards ability or performance are capable of being proven otherwise.

“I was told I'd end up with a sit-down job,” Driscoll says. “My only goal was to sit behind a desk, filing and typing. My sister could be the first female president, but I was supposed to become a secretary.” ...In fact, it was a wheelchair that enabled her to start living. Now 29, Driscoll has become arguably the best wheelchair racer, male or female, in the world. Her versatility is astounding: She has set world records or produced world-best times from sprints to endurance events, and her stamina is of iron man proportions (*USA Today*, August 22, 1996)

“I want to challenge people’s conceptions,” she said in a phone interview from the apartment she shares with two other students near the Georgetown campus in Washington. “People freak out when they find out I don’t have two complete legs. They expect you to be lacking, less attractive, less confident, less competent” (*The New York Times*, file 1, May 4, 1997).

"I want to develop a presence in the elite field domestically," King said, "not just among blind riders but all riders. I don't want to be a one-of-a-kind role model because we have one-legged cyclists out there, too. I want people to realize the possibilities. I hope there will be 15 or 20 or 30 of me out there eventually in the senior nationals. "The Paralympics demonstrate that as a society we should not expect less from people with disabilities. Too often, we encourage disabilities to be used as a crutch. We've got to change that because it's silently killing those people." (*The New York Times*, July 12, 1997)

Within this narrative, athletes discuss the predetermined expectations that people have surrounding disability and that the ability to overcome and exceed them is not only a defiance of this but means in which people with disabilities are capable of existing outside of the confines of stereotypes.

The ability to find acceptance and not allow tragedy to define capabilities, is an avenue in which Paralympic athletes are serving as role models for others undergoing similar experiences. It was observed through the analysis of articles in this study that by seeing prominent Paralympic athletes, other people with disabilities were able to see that they too could make something of themselves and harbor passion and motivation again. The frame that this creates for readers is the appreciation of the role that athletes with disabilities play in the lives of other people with disabilities. Through this recognition, people with disabilities are able to find acceptance through sport as the success stories highlight what is possible despite disability.

Finding acceptance among peers was difficult for Al until he began wrestling in high school. His success in sled hockey, which he chose over wrestling two years ago, has helped even more, he says. “It’s one of the best things that has happened to me,” he says. “By playing hockey, I got to see other disabled people, and I started to think more of myself” (*USA Today*, April 14, 2005).

Track needs Pistorius to be seen, not shooed away. Track needs Pistorius to restore its

image, not to be cast away in a squandered moment of inspiration. "You think about all the people who come back from the war, and anyone in a situation where they lose a limb," Martin said. "And then to see this guy run, do you know what that would do for people? They can say: 'Hey, even if I don't run in the Olympics, I can get out there and be active, be athletic. My life doesn't have to come to an end.'" (*The New York Times*, July 18, 2007)

Runyan, who is legally blind and is an ex-heptathlete in her second year of middle-distance running, is the first Paralympian in the Olympics, much less a final. "I started feeling pressure," she said, "and then I thought, it's not pressure, it's an opportunity. I have the opportunity to show the world -- kids that are losing their vision -- what life is going to be like now. Now there's a girl who's legally blind and she's in the Olympic final. I hope parents out there will say, 'I'm going to let my child be whatever she wants to be.'" (*USA Today*, September 29, 2000)

**Overcoming adversity and seeking to feel “normal” again after injury.** Sustaining a disabling injury is not something most plan for, so the process of readjusting can be overwhelming at times. People with disabilities discuss that when they were injured, they found themselves trying to find a sense of normality again, and for many, sport was their normal, as sport is an accepted mainstream activity. The media portrays that people facing this obstacle surrounding disability can overcome it the presence of the success within this narrative indicates to readers that not all of those people that experience disability remain victims of it. In fact, those success stories often even make the process seem as though it is little trouble. “Don't worry if you get hurt," he said, "you won't stop playing hockey. You'll just get reclassified” (*The New York Times*, January 31, 2010) was the message relayed by an athlete looking to shed light on this frame.

But after a friend "literally dragged" him to the International Games for the Disabled the situation began to change. "I saw those athletes, some of them in wheelchairs, competing," Mr. Oehler said, "and that single moment changed my life. I realized I could get my life back together again." (*The New York Times*, July 14, 1996)

But in the Paralympics, Nicholson will be playing against other athletes with some form of lower-body disability, to test the boundaries of the human body and the human will. "Some people have had a drastic change in their lives and others were this way from birth," Nicholson said the other day. “The Paralympics show people you don't have to be

disabled. You don't have to give up." (*The New York Times*, February 26, 2002)

"To have the chance to compete again, to stand up there in front of the flag and represent my country, I can't describe it," he says. "I feel like I got my life back again" (*USA Today*, July 6, 2000)

"The first thing I thought of was, I want to play hockey again," said Bowser, who had been playing the game since he was 9. "My whole objective was to get back on the ice." He chose amputation and a prosthesis. "In 2005, I finally got back on the ice," Bowser said, pausing for a long time, choked by emotion, "and felt normal once again." (*The New York Times*, January 31, 2010)

Trujillo and Vande Berg (1989) indicated that a commonly accepted American ideology centers on the ability of individuals to better oneself by overcoming their own obstacles. The narratives in the media that depict this transformation by Paralympic athletes frames for readers the willingness and ability of athletes with disabilities to align themselves with the accepted discourse of self-actualization.

Finally, the narratives that center on finding success despite a disability are noteworthy, the danger of this frame for consumers is that it creates expectations for future interactions or exposures to individuals with disabilities. Silva and Howe (2012) noted that

to strive to live as 'normal' as possible, in spite of disability, may not be achievable or even desirable depending on the practical consequences of this upon the quality of life of the individual. This leads to the situation where it may be seen as a failure when people experiencing disability do not have the conditions, the will or the power to lead a normal life. (p. 189)

The narrative surrounding Brian McKeever pities "all the people who do not see as well as he does" as he is "the first winter sports athlete to earn berths in the Olympics and the Paralympics" and as a result, stands out "less for his disability than for his demeanor" (*The New York Times*, February 28, 2010). This gives the notion to readers that this is the ideal situation for every athlete with a disability. This generalization is harmful because of the potential it harbors to stereotype all people with disabilities, and athletes with disabilities, as the same. The narrative

that should be understood here is that within Paralympic sport, the legitimacy attributed through training and development accounts for success, not that having a disability necessarily always equates to success.

## CHAPTER 5

### Discussion

This study examined the Paralympic narratives present in *The New York Times* and *USA Today* between January 1, 1996 and November 18, 2013 utilizing the accepted protocols of framing analysis (Santos et al., 2013). Over this nearly seventeen-year span, there were 545 relevant articles and three major media frames representing conflicting narratives present. The objective of this study was to provide a dynamic analysis of mainstream print media of the Paralympic Games in the United States from a qualitative perspective. By providing a thematic analysis of the coverage presented, what is being said about Paralympic sport and the lens being offered to consumers can be analyzed and improved rather than simply working to increase the amount of coverage.

Karen DePauw contributed significantly to the discussion on inclusion of athletes with disabilities within sporting contexts and her work has served as a foundation for much of the following research done concerning inclusion within sport. DePauw (1997) noted that there were three markers in the development of the visibility of athletes with disabilities in sport: invisibility of disability, visibility of disability, and (in)visibility of disability. Initially, sport for people with disabilities had little to no presence in mainstream media or social context as the connection between elite sport and disability was seen as contradictory. The visibility of disability began to present as more competitions for people with disabilities formed. This visibility was limited, in that it included separate competitions for able-bodied and disabled athletes exemplified by wheelchair divisions of major marathons, designated wheelchair basketball tournaments and the Paralympic Games. Finally, and what DePauw noted was the epitome of inclusion, an

(in)visibility of disability would indicate that representations of athletes with disabilities has moved beyond that of a disability-focused depiction to one where athletics is the highlight.

In this study, it was found that the media has moved beyond the idea of invisibility of disability in coverage of the Paralympic Games, as there was coverage present and was seen to be increasing over the period of time examined. When considering the visibility of disability in sport, the establishment of separate competitions for athletes with disabilities has continued to remain in the sporting narrative. The Paralympic Games occur two weeks following the Olympics and contain competitions exclusively for those with disabilities. When considering this, the name 'Paralympic' itself, however, it invites the comparison to the Olympic Games. Benchmarking, according to Goetsch and Davis (2000), is the way in which organizations continuously search for the best practices in the industry by imitating what others have done right. The Olympic Games are an established and publically accepted and understood organization and as a result, much of the planning and organization of the Paralympic Games is a result of what occurs prior during the Olympics. This comparison grounds the two as separate events, with a visibility of the differences between the two remaining strikingly apparent.

The visibility of disability will continue to remain, as Olympic athletes are still used as a qualifier for Paralympic performances in order to put success and underperformances into a context that is more easily understood by consumers. In addition, the attempts at a more similar reporting style to the Olympics in covering performance expectations, competition results, and ethical scandals have further established able-bodied competition as the benchmark in sport. So much of the strides sought in Paralympic sport are a result of the accomplishments already established in the Olympics.

As DePauw (1997) explained, the ideal point of inclusion to reach would be an (in)visibility of disability in coverage of the Paralympic Games, where disability is included but not the main focus of the narrative. In the examination of *The New York Times* and *USA Today*, disability was seen to remain present in the sporting narrative, as there was a continued focus on the emotional and human-interest narrative surrounding the Paralympics.

A true invisibility will be drawn from the inessential, reaching a point where disability does not even remain a factor in the narrative. In essence, true invisibility lies in ambiguity. When considering the coverage of Paralympic sport, a true inclusion will come from establishing disability as an afterthought of a sporting identity, as to not make it as the primary focus of the narrative surrounding competition. This is not to say that disability is not an important and valuable aspect of identity, in the same way that race or gender are an important aspect of identity, but true inclusion and invisibility will be achieved when the “struggle” of disability does not mean as much as the success being found in sport. So that someday, the compelling aspect to journalists and media outlets of including a narrative on how, where, when, or why a particular disability was acquired becomes such an afterthought that it possibly is not even included. Media producers need to reach the point where the frames surrounding Paralympic sport offer readers a lens into the competition itself, without attention on the differences between Olympic and Paralympic style sport or using Olympic athletes as a qualifier for the success of Paralympians. In this light, the coverage of the Paralympics would closely resemble the Olympic coverage traditionally seen.

Framing Paralympic sport in the extraneous in that the lines blur between who can participate in Paralympic-style sport will work to further the ambiguity within sport. This expansion of inclusion within Paralympic sport to include people who are participating whether or not it is the

only option will increase the reach of sport and foster a relationship between participants. This is exemplified by choosing to play wheelchair basketball because it seems like an enjoyable activity rather than categorizing participation based on whether or not a disability is present.

In addition to making participation in Paralympic-style sport more accessible to the general public, there should also be reciprocity between Olympic-style sports in the Paralympics. In a broad manner for instance, this can be exemplified by able-bodied runners participating in a marathon from a racing chair or handcycle, as the equipment becomes a tool for training rather than governed by categories that dictate participation. In the same way that the Olympics contain demonstrations of Paralympic sports, the same should also be true conversely. By including able-bodied competition within the Paralympic agenda, ability becomes more ambiguous as sport is seen to be occurring without a focus on having or not having a disability.

### **Summary of Findings**

The first narrative found in this study framed Paralympic sport as the growth of the Paralympic Games versus the frustration with the lack of progress. The first formal Paralympic Games “were in 1960 in Rome, with 400 athletes from 23 countries” (*USA Today*, August 15, 1996) and have since grown exponentially to where the 2012 London Paralympic Games had a “record-setting 4,200 athletes from 165 countries” (*USA Today*, August 28, 2012). This exposure within mainstream media gives readers the perspective of how far the reach of the Paralympic Games has extended over the history of the movement. The narrative also furthers the dialogue that expresses the growing strength of the field of athletes. “Every Paralympics, the field gets bigger and faster” (*The New York Times*, August 16, 1996) and therefore athletes need to continue to better themselves in order to be successful. There were indications throughout the narrative that suggested the attempts at equality between Olympic and Paralympic athletes which

served to relate to DePauw's (1997) ideas that the optimal level of visualization in sport was an (in)visability of disability.

The lack of progress within the movement was described in terms of funding disparities, a lag in media attention, and a misunderstanding of the Paralympics by spectators. Athletes view the lack of governing body support to be indicative of "a lack of respect" (*The New York Times*, February 24, 2000) and the small strides in creating more media attention was "to expand the presence of the underexposed Paralympics" (*The New York Times*, June 5, 2000). The conflicting narrative seen surrounding the growth and frustration of the Paralympic Games presents a conflict for readers seeking to formulate opinions and conceptions about the event.

The second frame in this study was found to be the legitimacy of Paralympic sport versus the differences from traditional sport. Within the dialogue of *The New York Times* and *USA Today*, findings indicated explicit language that served to undermine the legitimacy of Paralympic sport. In one specific example, language such as "wheelchair users" and "elite runners" (*The New York Times*, November 21, 1999) to differentiate between the two groups. This, as Mason (2013) concurred, consciously highlights the differences between sport for people with and without disabilities and describes the inequality between them.

On the other hand, spectators described their reasons for following the Paralympics and attested their opinions of the athletes to be that "Once they're in the water, their disabilities fall away and they're just athletes" (*USA Today*, August 28, 2012). This framing attests to progress towards the development of the optimal (in)visibility of disability within sport as described by DePauw (1997). Narratives within this frame also found thematic similarities between Paralympic coverage and traditional sport journalism that highlights performances, athleticism, competition predictions and sport celebrities (Coakely, 1994).

The third and final conflicting account represented in the development of the Paralympic narrative was the overcoming of obstacles versus the maintenance of victimhood by athletes. Media accounts have traditionally depicted athletes with disabilities as “unable to live a successful life” (Golden, 2003, p. 79) because of disabling circumstances, reinforcing negative stereotypes. Language such as “sustained a spinal injury” (*The New York Times*, September 8, 2005) and “contracted transverse myelitis” (*The New York Times*, November 6, 2006) are disabling descriptions of Paralympic athletes that place disability at the forefront of the narrative and frame for readers that these disabilities are the most important aspect of their identification as a Paralympic athlete.

Within the framework of positive narratives, *The New York Times* and *USA Today*, framed disabilities as ‘nothing more than a problem’ (Stiker, 1999) needing to be overcome. These depictions of triumph serve to represent that ‘life does go on’ and it is possible ‘to get your life back’ after injury. *The New York Times* and *USA Today* also showed athletes with disabilities serving as role models by overcoming obstacles.

### **Study Limitations**

This study was an examination of only one country, the United States, and therefore cannot be considered a complete representation of all Paralympic coverage. This study, which focused on print media coverage in the United States was also only a sample of print media as it only looked at *The New York Times* and *USA Today*. Finally, the study analyzed only a sample of the Paralympics as it did not offer a complete examination of the history of the Games, only the last 17 years.

## **Areas of Future Research**

The conclusions reached in this study provide direction for future research projects. This study provided an analysis of *The New York Times* and *USA Today* but the reach and impact of print media extends far beyond American news sources. Through the utilization of framing analysis, it would be beneficial to explore print media coverage of the Paralympic Games by other countries that compare in size and development to the United States. Furthermore, the media exposure of the Paralympic Games has changed considerably with the decision by NBC to air live coverage of the most recent 2014 Sochi Games as well as indicated plans to show more live television coverage than ever before during the 2016 Games in Rio. Including a larger sampling of media sources that impact the narrative of the Paralympic Games will enhance the analysis of the frames provided for spectators.

## **Conclusions**

This study examined coverage of the Paralympic Games between 1996 and 2013 in American newspapers by utilizing a framing-analysis model of *The New York Times* and *USA Today*. The primary focus of this study was to analyze the lens with which the Paralympic narrative is viewed by consumers of mainstream media as a result of the way in which issues are framed as these frames serve to influence public opinion (Entman, 1993). In this study, the major frames identified were growth of the Paralympic Games versus frustrations with the lack of progress, legitimacy of Paralympic sport versus the differences from traditional sport and victimhood versus overcoming obstacles and the contrasting nature of the three themes serve to further yet inhibit the evolution of the Paralympic Games as a mainstream sporting event. There are indicators that represent the growth of the Paralympic movement in size and reach as shown by changes in the organizing committees and media attention as well as a movement towards

equal treatment of Olympic and Paralympic athletes while also continuing to be frustrations with the lack of progress towards a true (in)visibility of disability and equality between the two narratives. The legitimate aspects of the Paralympic Games were often highlighted while also exemplifying the manner in which the Games were without compare to the Olympics. Finally, athletes were shown to either shown to be able to overcome the obstacles represented by their disability or to maintain the status of victim that is common to the accepted discourse. These contrasts serve to ultimately inhibit the development of the Paralympic movement as a mainstream source of sporting entertainment.

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