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Chapter 2

The 2012 Paralympics and Perceptions of Disability in the UK

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Introduction

As the positive rhetoric surrounding the London 2012 Paralympics continues, it is appropriate to reflect upon the narratives of such an important event; both within the parameters of sport and the lives of ordinary disabled people.¹ The dominant argument being made here is that whilst the Paralympics can be positive within its own context of sport, disabled people in the wider population do not necessarily benefit directly. To reach this overarching position, this chapter takes a “critical disability studies” perspective by drawing together four lines of tributary arguments.

It begins by briefly inspecting the media coverage of the London Paralympic Games and recent survey data (relating to post-Games perceptions of disability) in order to discuss the impact of the Paralympic Games for changing attitudes towards disability. As a second feature it investigates the claims of the IPC (International Paralympic Committee) relating to the vision of the Paralympic Movement to achieve a more equitable society for the wider population of disabled people. Thereafter, the work brings into the sociology of sport literature seldom heard arguments from

advocates of the DPM (Disabled People's Movement) regarding key concerns for achieving disability rights. Finally, this chapter is brought to a close with concluding thoughts regarding the Paralympics and its influence on disability rights beyond sport.

Initially however, it is first appropriate to map out the status of the current literature in order to highlight the need for "critical disability studies" within the sociology of sport.

The Paralympics and Critical Disability Studies (CDS)

"Para" stands for parallel and in many respects this is now a clear reality for the Paralympic Games. Since the first Paralympics in Rome in 1960, the Games have increased in size and organization with Barcelona 1992 being the first time the event was held in the same venue as the Olympics. Indeed, the joint organizing committees of the Olympics and Paralympics in 1992, began the process of host cities being required to bid for both events. Furthermore, as the Olympic and Paralympic Games have increasingly become intertwined, it is evident that scholarly focus on Paralympic athletes and the Paralympic Games has grown in stature to reflect this. In recent years, for example, there has been an emerging catalogue of literature covering such issues as, the fairness of the classification of disabled athletes for competition (Howe and Jones 2006; Jones and Howe 2005); the genesis and history of the Paralympic Games (Bailey 2008); journalism and the politics of the Paralympic movement (Howe 2008); and the consequences of Paralympians doping (Brittain 2010). Whilst all contributions are valuable towards furthering our

understanding of disability sport, it is notable that little or no attention has yet been paid to the views of disabled activists on any particular issue, including the perceived impact of Paralympic sport.

It is difficult to know exactly why this is the case. Perhaps there is a reluctance to engage in what can be perceived as negative views of disability or disability organizations within the realm of sport and sport academia. Alternatively, it might reflect the fact that most scholars writing on this subject (sport and disability) are non-disabled persons that lack the specific insight and experience of living with disability and the concomitant negative connotations implicit within and extending beyond sport. Currently tackling this trend are ex-Paralympians Danielle Peers, who embeds a CDS view within her publications (cf. Peers 2009; 2012a; 2012b); and Stuart Braye, who makes use of disabled activists views (cf. Braye, Dixon and Gibbons 2013; Braye, Gibbons and Dixon 2013; Braye 2014).

To be clear, CDS can be thought of as a critique of dominant approaches to disability whilst at the same time offering a sphere of scholarly work that has similar legitimacy to women's studies, black studies and queer studies (Linton 1998; Meekosha 2004). It moves away from current binary understandings of disability (such as social versus medical models, but is more closely aligned to the former) and incorporates a more conceptual understanding of disability oppression whilst linking clearly with the lived experience. Consequently, proponents of CDS do not hold a universal theoretical position but they do share the assumption that fluid, intricate changes in, for example: the current socio-political climate, the rise of new social movements, identity politics, globalization, fragmentation and the compartmentalization of everyday life, are crucial to one's understanding of disability in late modern society. In other words, CDS research is grounded in practice and the

struggle for an autonomous, participatory society and progressive social change (Meekosha and Shuttleworth 2009).

It should be noted that those writing “outside” of the sport literature, in the area of CDS have had much to say about disabled people’s access (or lack of access) to just about everything in society; yet there is little to tie the Paralympic Games into this literature in any meaningful way. For example, Barnes and Mercer (2011) make no reference to the Paralympics at all, while Goodley (2011, p.131) makes only one comment. Smith and Papathomas (2014, pp.222-223) helpfully devote a small proportion of a chapter to the Paralympics, but with no political elements evident, and Cameron (2014b) briefly tackles some claims of the IPC, suggesting that there is a distinction between the views of disabled activists and other disabled people.

Given the nature of the related literature at this point, we suggest that it is timely to consider the Paralympic Games from a CDS perspective. We argue that not enough is known about how the Paralympic Games are received by disabled people and the potential implications that this could bring for disability politics and the rights of disabled people per-se (Braye, Dixon and Gibbons, 2013). To clarify, “disability politics” refers to the actions of political activists who wish to bring changes to policies and practices in order to reverse the oppression that disabled people face in addition to having an impairment (Oliver 1996). Indeed, as far back as 1997, disabled activist Ian Stanton drew attention to the lack of cooperation between the DPM and sport (Stanton 1997). This still appears to be the case today with organizations in the UK DPM protesting about benefit changes during the London 2012 Paralympics. In this instance, the activists protested against the UK Government’s use of Paralympic sponsor “Atos” to assess the fitness of disabled

people for work; and this temporarily took the focus away from sport into a broader political field, with UK Government ministers occasionally booed by the Paralympic crowd. We will return to this incident later in the chapter. Despite this fact (above), it should be noted that the Games were generally received in positive terms and this will now be discussed further.

Jubilant Games: media representations of the Paralympic Games

In a study which features data collected prior to the Games (Braye, Dixon and Gibbons 2013) it was revealed that participants (a sample of disabled activists) were suspicious of what the mediated coverage of London 2012 might look like. For example, one activist “George” spoke with skepticism regarding, as he sees it, the “usual” stereotypical and “pathetic” representation that has been (historically speaking) inseparable from the Paralympic Games:

The media likes heartbreaking stories, but they convey them so pathetically that it's bad telly (Braye, Dixon and Gibbons 2013, p.992).

Once the Games were in process, however, the initial fear (expressed by George, above) did not seem to materialize. Instead, disabled people were depicted (via the media) as enthusiastic supporters of media coverage and the potential accrued benefits that this could bring for disabled people throughout British society. For example, on the day after the Paralympic opening ceremony (29 August 2012), *The Guardian* (British national newspaper) featured a number of interviews with disabled people which were all positive about the Paralympic media representation. One such

interviewee, 47 year old Addie Slenderise, a wheelchair user from Holland, is representative of these views when she makes comment on the Games and its media representation:

It is really emancipating people with disabilities, giving them examples of what they could achieve themselves (Topping 2012, p.2).

Hence, the portrayal of the Games as a tangible force for the good of disabled people in wider society had currency with some disabled people during London 2012. Moreover, the positivity with which the Games were received continued beyond the opening ceremony and into the competition with disabled people still lauding its impact. For instance, on 9 September 2012, former Royal Marine, Arthur Williams, a television presenter and Paralympic cyclist, wrote the following on *The Guardian's* official website:

In just one and a half weeks, there has been such a profound change in how people perceive disability and that has taken people by surprise. It has shocked a lot of people. As a country, we were really open-minded going into the Games and it has lived up to expectations. No one has been disappointed (Williams 2012).

Other sections of the British print media, including *The Telegraph*, *The Times* and *The Independent*, continued the generally positive reporting throughout the Paralympic Games. For instance, examples of front page titles with photographs included the following: 'Success Storey' – in relation to Sarah Storey winning her 10th Paralympic gold (Telegraph 2012); 'THE LEADING LADY' – with a double front page

wrap round photograph of swimmer Ellie Simmonds on her way to victory in the 200m medley (Times 2012); and, 'New King of the Blade Runners' – reporting Jamie Peacock's success over Oscar Pistorius in the 100 meters final (Independent 2012a).

In addition to this, and taking into consideration the BAFTA (British Academy of Film and Television Art) awards achieved by Channel 4 (the main broadcaster of the 2012 Paralympics) for "best sport and live event" and "digital creativity" (reaching more than 40 million people [Channel 4 2013]), it is reasonable to suggest that the positive media representation during the Games has played a part in raising people's awareness of the Paralympics itself and to a degree it has created a heightened cognizance of disability within the "media consuming" British public. The long-term impact on public attitudes towards disability is a little less certain, and yet in July 2013, one year on from the London 2012 Paralympic Games, the UK Government's Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) produced a report that made the following claim:

The Games improved attitudes to disability and provided new opportunities for disabled people to participate in society (DCMS 2013, p.3).

This report (discussed in more detail in Chapter 6) referred to the 2012 British Social Attitudes (BSA) Survey and findings from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Opinions and Lifestyle Survey from November 2012 to March 2013. Overall, it contained London 2012 related questions that were commissioned by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). Research by the disability charity "Scope" was also referred to in the report and focused on gaining the views of disabled people specifically. Both the BSA and ONS surveys drew upon samples of

mainly non-disabled individuals. For instance, only 15.2 per cent of the BSA survey respondents classed themselves as having a disability (BSA 2012).

According to Scope (2012), 62 per cent of disabled people and their families believed the Paralympics could improve attitudes towards disabled people, although the precise meaning behind this finding remains ambiguous. For instance, 2,025 disabled and non-disabled UK adults aged 18 years and above completed this poll one month before the Paralympic Games and yet the percentage of respondents who were disabled people was not disclosed, calling into question the validity of representation. In 2013, Scope commissioned another opinion poll in which all 1,014 respondents were disabled people. 81 per cent of these respondents felt there had not been any positive change in the public's attitudes towards disabled people over the previous year following the 2012 Paralympics (Scope 2013).

Notwithstanding the ambiguity expressed within official survey responses to the Paralympic legacy, the British Paralympic Association (BPA) continues to stress the positive impact of the Paralympics and its British athletes upon wider society. Their website contains many positive images of disabled athletes including a short film clip accompanied by the James Bond theme song "Live and Let Die" and titled, "Paralympic Superheroes". It states, 'Superheroes is an inspiring film that shows off the skill and ability of Paralympic athletes' (BPA 2014). This robust portrayal of disabled athletes as able to overcome any adversity does not necessarily deny disability, but rather celebrates and embraces it whilst downplaying the associated difficulties experienced by many disabled people in daily life. This is particularly evident in the comments of the IPC president, Sir Philip Craven, who stated (when referring to the Paralympic Games) in *The Guardian* online (26th August 2012) that:

This is sport. It's not disability anything. I come from sport (Gibson 2012).

There is some confusion here, relating to the ambivalent use of the term “disabled” as it is expressed by Craven. After all, saying that the Paralympics is “not disability anything” is rather like saying that the MOBO (Music of Black Origin) awards have “nothing to do with black anything”. In other words, we argue that the downplaying of disability (as evident in this instance) adds confusion to the claim that Paralympic sport can improve attitudes towards (and provide opportunities for) disabled people within society. If it fails to acknowledge disability, and if it only couriers the glamorous elements relating to “Paralympic superheroes”, then surely the representativeness of the Paralympic Games and its philosophy for the social inclusion of disabled people beyond sport should be brought sharply into question .

In order to assert this point, we refer first to the current “vision statements” of the IPC (the governing body for Paralympic sport) before discussing key issues that concern disabled activists regarding the impact of Paralympic sports towards the ongoing campaign for disability rights.

Vision beyond sport: the IPC and a more equitable society?

The IPC (2012a) had a vision that the Paralympic Movement is a vehicle for achieving ‘a more equitable society’ and this included the following statements listed on their website:

The Vision

Inspire and Excite - Touch the heart of all people for a more equitable society

Aspiration

Their [athletes] performances and incredible stories teach the values of acceptance and appreciation for people with a disability. The Paralympic Movement builds a bridge which links sport with social awareness thus contributing to the development of a more equitable society with respect and equal opportunities for all individuals.

Paralympic Values

Courage

It encompasses the unique spirit of the Paralympic athlete who seeks to accomplish what the general public deems unexpected, but what the athlete knows as a truth.

Inspiration

When intense and personal affection is begotten from the stories and accomplishments of Paralympic athletes, and the effect is applying this spirit to one's personal life.

Equality

Paralympic Sport acts as an agent for change to break down social barriers of discrimination for persons with a disability.

These seemingly noble themes are in one sense perfectly acceptable for an emerging and significant sports event of global recognition. However, the majority of these visionary statements extend beyond the confines of sport without suggesting how the IPC expect to achieve such aims. Moreover, one specific incident during 2012 places the IPC in direct conflict with its vision (particularly in relation to its

statement on equality [above]). For instance, we suggest that the IPC have demonstrated a lack of understanding of the vision in their continued association with the sponsor “Atos”, a company that has been at the center of much controversy in relation to disabled people in the UK.

To explain, Atos are a French IT company and they have been a sponsor for Paralympic events since 2002. In addition to this, they have been responsible for distributing marketing rights for the Paralympic Games worldwide over the last decade (IPC 2012b). During the 2012 Games a controversy surrounding Atos arose regarding their involvement with the UK Government Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). Atos has a £400m contract with the DWP to implement the Work Capability Assessment (WCA) which is the means used to assess disabled people’s fitness for work (Ramesh 2012). UK based disabled activists have strongly criticized the integrity of the WCA strategy, citing Atos’ “assessment misconduct” and the UK Government’s removal of vulnerable disabled people’s benefits. This emerging issue has also been highlighted by the media, for example:

The Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) is dealing with at least 27 complaints amid similar allegations that the nurses conducting Work Capability Assessments (WCA) have fallen short of the professional code of conduct (Lakhani 2012, p.5).

Seizing the opportunity to capitalize on the media coverage of the London 2012 Paralympic Games, the disability rights group “Disabled People Against Cuts” (DPAC) staged a week of direct action. Beginning on 29 August 2012, the day of the Paralympic opening ceremony, they held protests called the “Atos Games” at Atos offices in Cardiff, Glasgow, Belfast and London claiming that disabled people have,

'died after being declared fit to work' (Lakhani and Taylor 2012: 6). The irony of these protests was that a central part of the 2012 Paralympic opening ceremony focused on disability rights. It featured a group of acting protesters holding up a series of banners spelling out the word "RIGHTS" around a copy of the Alison Lapper Pregnant statue (Independent 2012b, pp.28-29).² To the uninitiated viewer of the 2012 opening ceremony it may have looked like the dramatized "rights now" protest suggested that the Paralympics had achieved exactly this for disabled people (an understandable assumption within the framework of generally positive media coverage); and yet in the context of the DPAC demonstrations, there is only one possible interpretation – not "we have rights now" but rather "*we want rights now*".

Moreover, considering the IPC's claim to understand and impact disability issues beyond sport, it was unfortunate that they secured Atos as a Paralympic sponsor and unwittingly handed DPAC an opportunity to highlight inequalities beyond sport. Sir Philip Craven (IPC president) has publicly defended the relationship between Atos and the IPC, whilst criticizing disability rights campaigners at the same time, stating in *The Guardian* online:

All I can say is that we have a record over the last 60 or 65 years of being a fighter for the right causes. That's what we will continue to do. But where they [disability rights campaigners] seem to be very upset with this particular part of that company's organization, our experiences within the Paralympic movement with Atos are very positive (Gibson 2012).

Whilst the media profile of the IPC has grown in recent years, the opinions of its president, though much sought after, have not grown in understanding for wider disability issues; Craven continues his defense of Atos:

They have given us incredible help with the development of our new website. That isn't just people putting their expertise in, that's people working night and day and really giving of themselves to make sure the deadline was met (Gibson 2012).

Perhaps then, Craven could be accused of missing the point or confusing administrative professionalism with Atos's involvement in a politically damaging movement that negatively affects disability rights within Britain. Moreover, it was ironic that DPAC were organizing nationwide protests on issues that impact all disabled people *including* Paralympic athletes and the IPC president. Nevertheless, as the DPAC 2012 protests occurred within the context of resistance to discrimination against disabled people, it is worth noting that the Paralympic Games did prove useful to the cause. Not, perhaps as one might expect, as a bastion of support for the cause and protests, but rather as prime outlet (considering the global media attention placed on the event) to ensure impact for the DPAC campaign. This is nothing new, of course. For instance, in 1988 disabled activists in South Korea protested against the government's use of the Seoul Paralympic Games to propagate the idea that disability equality was high on their agenda. More recently, Chinese activists did exactly the same in regards to the 2008 Paralympic Games in Beijing (Kim 2011).

Notwithstanding this and beyond discussions of the Games as a site for protest, we argue that there is a more fundamental problem with the wording of the "IPC vision". That is, it aspires to promote equality through highlighting inequality. For example, one of the statements of the IPC is that they aim to, 'Inspire and Excite - Touch the heart of all people for a more equitable society' (IPC 2012a); and yet, the

idea that people's hearts have to be touched to achieve equality places disabled people in the unenviable position of having to do some emotive "touching" of wider society in order to receive acceptance in return. To be perceived as in need of heartfelt sympathy is a passive and pathetic position in society, one which certainly does not empower disabled people. Thus, despite the "well meaning" nature of the IPC vision, we argue that its underpinning philosophy is in need of refurbishment in order to cut through emotional hyperbole and to consider a more principled approach for achieving an equitable society.

For some of the reasons stated above, it is unsurprising to note that members of the DPM tend not to concern themselves with or hold high value in the Paralympic Games as a symbol for the advancement of disability rights (Braye, Dixon and Gibbons 2013). To further understand the apathy that disabled activists hold towards the Paralympic Games we argue that it is important to consider the underpinning philosophy of the DPM. For this reason, in the following section we draw attention to the key arguments expressed by supporters of the DPM before articulating concluding thoughts regarding the Paralympics and its influence on disability rights beyond sport.

The DPM: towards a more equitable society!

In their seminal text on disability politics Campbell and Oliver (1996) map out the genesis of the DPM in the UK and the impetus from which an independent group of disabled people grew. This emergence in the 1960s was to draw away from charities staffed by able bodied professionals and for disabled people to be independent decision makers. One of the problems for the British Council of Disabled People (BCODP [founded in 1981]) was that political parties, local authorities and other

service providers thought that charities *for* disabled people precluded the need for organizations *of* disabled people; the former being driven by non-disabled people, the latter being led by disabled people only (cf. Campbell and Oliver 1996 pp. 62-80). These issues remain today with disability charities like “Scope” - and National Disability Sports Organizations (NDSOs) such as the BPA and the English Federation of Disability Sport (EFDS) - coming in for criticism from some DPOs (Disabled People’s Organizations). Indeed, the empowerment of disabled people remains largely in the hands of non-disabled people in many areas of society. As Braye (2014, p.133) suggests:

Organizations *for* disabled people that are run and controlled by non-disabled people have easily wrestled the ideology of equality and emancipation of disabled people out of the grip of disabled people; a concept Debord ([1967] 1994, p.146) calls “détournement” which is the “disturbing or overthrowing” of an idea. In other words, non-disabled people have become “professionals” and “experts” that have hijacked our voice against oppression and softened or changed our ontology to one of high dependence.

The crux of this argument is that whilst charities *for* disabled people have a right to exist, they are established without any mandate from disabled people. If a disabled person wants to take up sport at any meaningful level it will be in a system designed by non-disabled people. To be clear, we are not suggesting that non-disabled people have nothing to offer within this system, but we feel that it is important to raise questions as to what extent disabled people have a say in the services provided and how much discrimination exists because of the dominant structure. For example, organizations such as the EFDS require many of their sports development officers to

be educated to degree level, and yet disabled people (including Paralympic athletes) do not have the same opportunities to access Higher Education as non-disabled people (Lewthwaite 2014). They do, however, possess vast personal experience of disability which is not usually seen as beneficial.

Of course, this may be a rather strange argument to make, but the overarching point for disability activists is that the experience of living with disability ought not to be overlooked by employers within the realm of sport and physical activity provision and development. This devaluing or ignoring of one's life and experiences is a subtle form of discrimination in a structure dominated by a non-disabled ideology (Braye 2014). If disability matters enough to have specific organizations that provide services for disabled people, but not enough to value disabled people who want to work in them, then this presents an interesting contradiction. If, for a moment, we contrast this with two other marginalized groups, we can see how, for disabled people, an unusual provision has emerged and remains. For example, in the UK there is a National Black Police Association (NBPA) whose Cabinet Staff is (quite rightly) made up of *only* Black and Asian Police Officers and whose aims are:

To improve the working environment of Black staff by protecting the rights of those employed within the Police Service and to enhance racial harmony and the quality of service to the Black community of the United Kingdom (NBPA 2014).

Similarly, an example from sport is the Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation (WSFF) which has several aims, one of which is 'to remove the barriers that prevent women from enjoying being active - throughout their lives' (WSFF 2014). The WSFF has a leadership team of twelve people, ten of whom are women; it also

has nine trustees, seven of whom are women. There seems to have been no conflict staffing these two organizations and valuing people's direct experience of the issues under scrutiny. If the cabinet staff of the NBPA was predominantly white or the WSFF leadership team predominantly male, it would render the groups illegitimate and unfit for purpose. In contrast, as introduced earlier, it remains the case that for many charities *for* disabled people the bulk of the power structure rests within the control of non-disabled people, as Cameron (2014a, p.23) suggests:

The slogan of the disabled people's movement, 'Rights Not Charity', expresses the antipathy felt about these big businesses.

This long held stumbling block for disabled activists is the primary reason for the existence of the DPM in the first instance and moreover, Shakespeare (2000) highlights the patronizing culture of charities for disabled people having their roots in past Christian traditions of Victorian Britain. However, as Bengtson and Bengtson (2002) point out, the difference between philanthropic Victorian Christians and contemporary equivalents is that the former were entirely voluntary with all of the money donated by a few wealthy people going directly to needy beneficiaries (Levy 2013). By contrast, contemporary charities often have salaried personnel structures that have become immovable and hold the monopoly on the distribution of funds and decision making, as Barnes and Mercer (2011, p.163) indicate:

The key decision-makers in organizations *for* disabled people are salaried professionals who put forward their own "expert" views about the needs of their particular "client group".

These modern super-charities influence UK Government policies at a national and local level making it extremely difficult for disabled people to shape policies. Thus, whilst not totally agreeing with Shakespeare's inference that all Victorian charitable organizations were patronizing in their approach, we do agree that the continued existence of this culture remains an issue for concern. Reduced to its simplest form, and for ease of understanding, the overarching notion here is one of *dependence*. That is, dependence on others – or outsiders – and not having disabled people in control of the decision making process. As has been highlighted elsewhere, dependence as an equality concern is by no means new and was raised by Voltaire when writing on equality in 1764:

Thus all men would be necessarily equal, if they were without needs. It is the misery attached to our species that subordinates one man to another [*sic.*]; it is not the inequality which is the real evil, it is dependence (Voltaire 1764, p.245 cited in Braye 2014, p.131).

Despite being written in the 18th Century, Voltaire's statement still has relevance when considering issues on equality today, in particular the issue of disability, which by practice often places disabled people in a position of dependence. In the foreword to Campbell and Oliver's (1996) disability politics text, Barnes (1996, p.ix) states:

Since at least the nineteenth century, Britain, in common with most western societies, has witnessed the gradual but sustained growth of a multi-billion pound "disability industry" dependent upon disabled people's continued dependence for its very survival.

The lack of involvement of disabled people in the decision making processes that impact their lives both inside and outside of sport is likely to remain for quite some time. The influence of non-disabled people should not be vilified entirely, however, it is the lack of access to decision making by disabled people that should be the primary focus of criticism. Society appears to tolerate the fact that disabled people are kept in a position of dependence more than any other group and we suggest that high dependability means high vulnerability both of which ought to be reversed.

Concluding thoughts: the Paralympics and disability rights beyond sport

Throughout the Paralympic Games of 2012 the host nation, Great Britain, was praised for its liberal attitudes and for embracing disability more specifically. This chapter has aimed to move beyond this one-sided representation to examine the Paralympic Games from multiple positions highlighting the heterogeneity of perceptions that exist. First, the fact that the Paralympic Games is a significant multi-sports event of global proportions and the rise from its early humble beginnings of the 1960s to its present state is truly remarkable. In addition, the response from the media and many academics has continued the generally positive rhetoric that surrounds disability sport and primarily the Paralympic Games itself. In keeping with this, we have not sought to discredit in any way the significance of the Games within the confines of sport. Besides, from a sports perspective we admire the achievements of Paralympic athletes as successful sports men and women and role models within that context.

Second, we have shown how the Games also have attached to it, some unclear elements such as the confusion that lies in the claims of the IPC to be able

to create significant social improvements for the wider population of disabled people. The Paralympics is a segregated event for disabled people claiming to lead the way in terms of breaking down barriers and creating opportunities for disabled people right across all aspects of society. How this is meant to take place and the exact details of this expected change is generally held within the belief that if non-disabled people change their attitudes towards disabled people then everything will become inclusive.

Attitudes may well change amongst many non-disabled people through consuming the Games, but for this to somehow lead to tangible positive opportunities for disabled people in areas such as education, transport, housing, leisure and employment, for example, is never explained satisfactorily. The views of the IPC President Sir Philip Craven also gain significant coverage and as the figurehead of the Paralympic movement his views are widely received. The tension around the use of the word “disability”, and subsequent attitudes towards disabled people, is an issue that he suggests can be tackled by removing the word disability completely. Quite how this is possible bearing in mind that the Games exist because of people’s impairments is never fully explained. The political view of disabled activists is that impairment is the shape or function of a person’s body and disability is the discrimination those people face because of their impairment. As such, people are disabled - hindered or discriminated against - by society.

Third, we have discussed the fact that there is another view of the Paralympic Games which is far from positive and is strongly critical of many aspects of it. This view is held by disabled activists affiliated to DPOs, who are fighting for equality for all disabled people in every area of society, and perhaps surprisingly regard the Paralympics in negative terms, particularly the media portrayal of the Games and

Paralympic athletes themselves. They also hold, 'that the Paralympic Games can be counterproductive to disability rights beyond sport' (Braye, Dixon and Gibbons 2013, p.984). This is a much overlooked view, possibly due in part to academic discourse on the Paralympics being written predominantly by non-disabled people, and that Paralympic athletes tend to comment positively on the Games in the media leading many TV consumers to conclude that it is a successful event.

The Games are most certainly portrayed as a triumph *over* disability as opposed to a triumph *for* disabled people. This creates a stumbling block when a more negative perspective is raised and indeed some confusion when disabled people themselves hold these views. To bring such perspectives into the academic lexicon further research is needed to examine why disability is portrayed in such a way and what the views of disabled people are on this portrayal. The exploratory study of disabled activists by Braye, Dixon and Gibbons (2013) was a useful starting point but a more thorough examination is needed to address the claims made. For example, the views of retired Paralympic athletes may offer a useful avenue for empirical data gathering bearing in mind their unique position as Paralympians and disabled people. It would be helpful to see what contrasts, if any, there are with the views of disabled activists.

Notes

¹ Wherever we use the term 'disabled' we do so in agreement with Paralympian and academic, Danielle Peers, 'to signal the active construction of disability' (Peers 2009, p. 663). We will also use the term "disabled people" as it is the preferred term of the United Kingdom Disabled People's Council (UKDPC).

² Alison Lapper is a disabled woman who was institutionalized from early childhood due to her disability and later graduated from the University of Brighton, UK, with a first class honours degree in Fine Art. She posed naked and pregnant for sculptor Marc Quinn and the subsequent marble statue was displayed in Trafalgar Square, London, from 2005 to 2007, and is considered an iconic part of disability rights in the UK.

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