# Meeting The Superhumans: Channel Four, Disability and the 2012 Paralympic Games

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# Abstract

Channel Four's media coverage of the London 2012 Paralympic Games is said to have delivered a seismic shift in attitudes towards those with disabilities. But why and how was a marginalised group brought into the mainstream by the media? What were the influencing factors and who made the decisions? By interviewing key people involved in the television production process, and accessing some of their internal documentation, my doctoral research sheds light on how meanings about disability were constructed and delivered, from the top down and across the creative workflow. Drawing on elements of both cultural studies and political economy, this thesis investigates the complex and entangled production mechanisms asking why, how and what representations of disability were promoted by the decision-makers and communicated as their preferred meanings.

Using Hall's theory of constructivist encoding, influences on representation and meaning are analysed through the theoretical lenses of the critical political economy, disability theory and Goffman's conceptualisations of stigma management. I also examine how sporting tropes and programme formats were used and adapted to reduce the stigma of 'otherness' and bring a marginalised group into the mainstream. Channel Four's unique funding model, and risk-taking remit, are repeatedly under review and this project explores the relationship between the channel's commercial, industrial and organisational contexts alongside individual agency and creative constraints. The study provides a systemic perspective, separating institutional influences and individual influences from the surrounding commercial environment, to map how each of these trigger adaptive changes in each other.

# Table of Contents

## List of Abbreviations

AMC:    Arthrogryposis Multiple Congenita

BBC:    British Broadcasting Corporation

BPA:     British Paralympic Association

C4:       Channel Four

C4TVC:  Channel Four Television Corporation

IMG:     IMG Sports Media

IPC:      International Paralympic Committee

LOCOG: London Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games

# Chapter 1 Introduction

At the beginning of September 2012, a group of relatively unknown disabled athletes took part in the London Paralympic Games, and were given a raised profile and a new collective identity. Meanings about disability were changed as Channel Four's media coverage of an international sporting event produced something beyond just showing us the Paralympics. There was a noticeable cultural shift in the acceptance of disability, particularly in public places, that had not been there before. As a publically performing café pianist with a visible physical impairment I personally found that, from the onset of that televised coverage, people started to treat me differently. I was approached and asked about my disability and jokes were made that signified a cultural taboo had been broken. Elsewhere, too, changes in perception and new meanings about disability amongst the public were acknowledged (IPSOS, 2012; YouGov, 2012). This shift was attributed to significantly improved audience engagement with the Paralympics (see Jackson, 2013), where specific media representations were used to bring the group of disabled elite athletes from the margins into the mainstream. The coverage is said by many to have delivered a 'seismic shift' in attitudes towards those with disabilities which is significant because until now the 'disabled' have been one of the most marginalised and invisible groups in society.

Although other research, the press coverage and wider public discourse described and discussed *what* was happening, research has not been undertaken to interrogate *why* this marginalised group was brought into the mainstream. The outstanding questions are *who decided* to normalise disability, *how* were media representations used to trigger social change, and for *what* reasons? Although the Paralympic Games had been televised before and disability representations had been present onscreen in a variety of forms, in 2012, televisual meanings about disability were redefined. Since it is changes in meaning, not just changes in representation, that bring the invisible or the derided in from the margins, my study examines all of these aspects in order to make sense of the media trigger for social change in this case.

In order to explore the meaning-making process, the specific contexts of the cultural conditions that year need first to be understood. The unprecedented popularity of the London 2012 Paralympic Games may have been in part due to the tide of national euphoria widely reported in the press following on from the Diamond Jubilee and the London Olympics. However, in that same year Channel Four also ran poster campaigns and raised the profile of disability sports, placing 'disability', and certain individuals, firmly under the media spotlight. The media coverage was designed and prepared in anticipation of, but long before, the scale of this home games enthusiasm and sense of collective belonging could have been accurately predicted. There must have been other contributing factors, then, as to why this moment happened, with such far reaching consequences, and my research focuses on these factors.

## Objectives

The objectives of the research were to discover what the influencing factors on media producers had been, in order to illuminate how and why new meanings about disability had emerged. I wanted to establish what changes, if any, had happened inside the media organisation, asking who had decided to do it, why in this transformative way, and what other reasons there may be behind what Channel Four had done. The opportunity arose, given the nature of these questions, to explicitly engage with theoretical discussions around the representation of 'others', and also to contribute insight into the reasons for the manipulation and/or dismantling of media tropes and stereotypes that are normally used to reinforce the stigma and meaning of 'difference'.

The organisational circumstances in which the creative portrayals were formed also contribute a significant part of this study on representation. This is because Channel Four sits uniquely within the industry as a publisher-broadcaster with a public service remit that is also supported by a commercially funded, but publically owned, business model. In order to explore how the particular depictions of disability came about in 2012, ones that were so far removed from the representations offered in previous BBC highlights packages

for Athens in 2004 and Beijing in 2008, I considered organisational and institutional structures, and their bearing, or not, on individual creative agency.

Creative independence has been a hallmark of Channel Four's output throughout the history of the channel (see Darlow, 2004; Hobson, 2008). However, commercial pressures, too, inevitably impinge on creativity, and these would be particularly visible in this instance, given that Channel Four's unique funding model relies on advertisement revenue in order to fund its public service programme content. For the first time a positive advertising campaign for a marginalised group ran on an unprecedented 78 television channels simultaneously. The media coverage, and marketing of it, was an intrinsically important televisual moment that was intended to change perceptions in society (C4TVC, 2009; C4TVC, 2013a). Using the London 2012 Paralympics as a case-study, then, a focus on the media producers provides rich empirical material to contribute to existing theoretical debates about the production of culture within the political economic environment surrounding it.

Additionally, understandings about what currently happens inside the complex and fragmented media production process are in need of constant revision, in order to keep abreast of important changes to the media landscape (see Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995; Hesmondalgh, 2013). Channel Four, as a hybrid model of publisher-broadcaster, provides an opportunity for detailed research into this area of complexity. Critical political economists of communication continue to assert the need to integrate this type of detailed production research into their own analyses. Very recently Murdock and Golding (2016) have stressed the need for studies showing 'how shifting webs of pressure and opportunity impinge on the everyday business of crafting cultural goods in particular settings' (p.763). My study explores those pressures and opportunities in relation to Channel Four's new and unprecedented depictions of disability sport in 2012.

The parliamentary remit, unique business model and funding mechanism were some of the organisational and structural factors that impinged on creativity. Other influences, and influencers too, from the marketing team to outside

stakeholders affected the decisions made by editors and producers of these specific meanings that caused the shift in audience perceptions. As such, creative agency and editorial judgement were exercised on many levels across the media organisation and its subsidiaries. Many production scholars (see for example, Klein, 2009; Zoellner, 2009a; Hesmondhalgh, 2013) have stressed the need to escape the binary separation of political economy and cultural production studies, in order to better explore the broad range and extent of influencing factors. By looking at representations determined during production, some of the cross-disciplinary complexities can be untangled.

The intersection of representation and production can be best understood at the encoding stage of the process (Hall, 1973; 1980), using the seminal conceptualisation of a 'circuit of culture' (Du Gay et al., 1997) as a tool for the analysis of meanings. The circuit broadly emphasises five particular 'moments' in cultural production where meanings can be significantly created or changed. These points are articulated as 'regulation', 'consumption', 'identity', 'representation' and 'production'. Whilst all these moments overlap to some degree, it is primarily the last two with which this study is concerned in order to locate and investigate the pockets of editorial and creative power. Throughout this research I investigated the construction of meaning, through the practice of making onscreen representations, taking into account the full range of overlapping 'moments' in their production.

Hall (1997) has identified representation as one of the 'central practices which produce culture' (p.1) so any changes to that practice ought to be investigated. By studying representation at the point of production, it is possible to contribute to the cultural understanding of meaning-making whilst adding definition to recent work being debated by critical theorists of political economy, for example, around creative labourers as agents of change (see, for example, Hesmondhalgh, 2002; 2006). In addition scholars have argued there is also always a need to update knowledge in the field of media production studies because of continually changing complexities with audience fragmentation, changes to commissioning and other commercial pressures (see Prendergast, 2000; Klein, 2009; Webb, 2009; Zoellner, 2009a). Born (2004) in her production

study of the BBC refers to access and workforce issues relating to programme content (p.16), and my study provides a useful comparison by looking at the work environment within Channel Four. In this context, a better understanding of the working realities for cultural producers can be derived by investigating their creative and commercial pursuit of suitable disability representations for the London 2012 Paralympics in particular.

The core argument, arising from my production research which explores the influencing factors affecting the decision-makers, is that - irrespective of perception changes within the audience - a permanent change has happened within the media organisation. Directly correlated with this is another potential legacy, of reframed and newly acceptable onscreen disability representations. Close-up portrayals of visible difference were normalised in the sporting context and directly displayed onscreen in an inclusive way. Channel Four set out to 'change perceptions in society' about disability and their own research (BDRC, 2012) and other more recent research (e.g. IPSOS, 2012) suggest that to some extent they may have. Whether this moment in television history has had any lasting effect on society only time will tell.

Conclusions drawn from my study suggest that some of the change, at least in terms of what types of representations are seen on television, will be permanent. This is partly because, as this thesis will show, the producers changed perceptions whilst changing their own attitudes and practices. The upcoming chapters reveal multiple actions that were taken by the producers on a variety of levels during the preparation and production of the London 2012 media coverage to trigger change. The consequences of these actions may well affect other representations of other diversities in due course.

My study reveals how, whilst attempting to effect a change in the audience, the agents actually affected some of the structures that constrained or enabled them. Most of the producers that I encountered also experienced a change in perceptions and attitude towards disability themselves. I will show how some of the structures were purposefully dismantled, others were dented through the sheer effort of their achievements and others were changed through necessity

at the time and now permanently remodelled with new parameters. Channel Four, by seeking to remove stigma, were creative with the programme formats, and after following their parliamentary remit on accessible employment, subsequently also wrote their own *Diversity Charter* (C4TVC, 2013b) to retain the advantages for minorities within the workforce they had created. I will demonstrate how each of these sets of actions affected meaning-making and ultimately contributed towards the framing of disability for future onscreen representations.

## Theoretical framework

The theoretical starting point for this study, which I explore in detail in chapter two, is based around the encoding of media representations of 'otherness' (Hall, 1997), and the framing of meanings currently understood by scholars in the fields of disability (Oliver, 1990; Barnes, 1992; Thomson, 1996; 1997; Shakespeare, 2013) and mega-event sport (Whannel, 1992; Dayan and Katz, 1994; Roche, 2000; Horne and Whannel, 2012). Meanings are encoded within televisual representations, and are also shaped by the programme genre in which they are embedded. They are also defined by the time of day in the schedule that they are delivered, whether during mainstream hours or the diversity 'graveyard' slot.

Questions around meaning-making continue to be at the heart of studies of representation (e.g. Van Zoonen, 1994; Prendergast, 2000; Gill, 2007; Webb, 2009; Parry, 2010; Orgad, 2012; Frosh, 2015; Thumim, 2015). It is also foundational for those who teach in this field (e.g. Kidd, 2015). Seeking to understand social change and cultural shifts, my analytical paradigm is based on Hall's (1997) theory of representation, in particular notions of 'the spectacle of the other' (pp.223-277). His earlier identification of the 'encoding' process (Hall, 1973; 1980), with producers shaping meanings for intended audiences, suggests production as the obvious starting point for an exploration of how meanings are made, and who by.

Representation, as a field of study, has been thought by some scholars (e.g. Prendergast, 2000; Webb, 2009; Kidd, 2015) to have limitations for advancing theory in interpretive contexts. This is partly due to the subjectivity of 'preferred meanings' and individual readings of those that are 'decoded' by the receiver (see Hall, 1997). Nevertheless, others, including Perkins (2002) and Frosh (2015) have asserted that, even with a post-structural perspective, representation is fundamentally political. The influencing factors present at the construction of meanings during the production stage are important indicators of creative freedom and constraints, and of mediated power (Thumim, 2015) which continue to be of interest within the media and communications literature. There is direct value in focusing on representations specifically for this purpose, as Kidd (2015) has observed, they are 'ensnared in complex and infinite entanglements' (p.2) relating to identity, production and the other elements of the 'circuit of culture' (Du Gay et al., 1997). I will not be looking at the stability of those meanings when unpacked, or decoded, by the reader, consumer or audience. My investigation is into the process of meaning-making at its constructed source, with the executives, holders of the purse-strings, stakeholders and vocational creatives. As Kidd (2015) has recently articulated:

> When people create representations of the world there are agendas at play, and particular sets of ideas, values, attitudes and identities assumed and normalised. There are thus issues of power, ownership, authenticity and meaning at stake. (ibid., p.3)

Building on the work of early cultural theorists (e.g. Hoggart, 1957; Thompson, 1963) Hall understood cultural shifts as better prioritised by agency than what he called 'reductive economism' and 'organisational determinism' (Hall, 1980, p.58). It is this cultural construction paradigm that is so applicable to my study. DuGay (1997), alongside Hall (1997) built on this embryonic form of cultural studies and included the study of representation, in particular as a key focus for understanding better some of the socially constructed aspects of 'reality'.

Like many other studies my study of representation has attempted to strike a balance between what political economy and cultural studies offer. Micro and macro perspectives were held by my participants and through a study of both, particular themes emerged. Other theorists have considered this break from the

economic and organisational schools of thought helpful and kept the ideas separate in different academic disciplines. Production studies have tended to rely heavily on Marxist paradigms of economic superstructures and power, without necessarily regarding individual human agency within these same studies. At the other end of the spectrum, the cultural studies approach has been considered to be too interpretive and subjective. As a consequence production studies have tended to contribute to the body of knowledge using analysis based mainly on political economic and/or organisational perspectives. With their respective epistemologies and methodologies either one of these binary positions would not and could not answer my particular research questions by themselves and other scholars also take account of a broader range of perspectives. For example, Curran and Gurevitch (2005) argue that the production process is more nuanced, and Hesmondhalgh (2013) has more recently argued that the division between political economy and cultural studies should be reconsidered and the gap closed between them.

As Zoellner (2009b) points out, whilst there have been studies situated on a scale between the two, fundamentally macro observations say little about the micro realities, at the point of production. It is these micro sites that often play such a significant role in influencing media texts (ibid., p.220). The London 2012 Paralympic Games coverage is a case in point. Looking at the influencing factors, within the cutting rooms and corridors of the creative workforce, provides complimentary insights to add to the broader overview that regulatory and hierarchical structure research provides. Along with Zoellner, I agree that these detailed micro studies are of great value, and this study is designed around that approach. Banks (2009) also suggests that 'embedded industrial theorisations of production and culture must be harvested from practitioners and analysed by scholars at every point in the production process' (p.96). This is because the production of meaning is so deeply embedded in the actual practice of representation, particularly of 'others'.

The *intentions* of producers, as affected by institutional and cultural structures may well have prevailed over the representations of disability developed through the London 2012 media coverage. Certainly, at the awards ceremonies

those producers and broadcasters took the credit for their work and their decisions. The story of the economic pressures, external stakeholder interests and internal wrangling affecting those decisions is the backdrop to this study. Limits were set, and pressures exerted, whilst a level of autonomy was continually maintained. Struggles of this kind have been identified in the fields of both media studies and cultural studies and my research has been designed to contribute theory and empirical evidence to both bodies of work.

I will establish how onscreen representations were affected by working conditions and hierarchies, alongside, in the case of Channel Four, a passive kind of state intervention, through the terms of the parliamentary *Communications Act* (2003), updated by the *Digital Act* (2010). The conditions of Channel Four's broadcast remit, and perceptions of it by its own producers, influenced the shaping of representations as they appeared on our screens. In addition, the cultural ideologies of mainstream TV and international sport also impinged on and informed the way the production process was carried out. It was on ideological levels, as well as operational ones, that the agency of the executive, editorial and creative teams was performed. Relevant and illuminating existing theory related to these areas is set out in the next chapter.

To satisfy the objective of understanding how and why disabled elite athletes were thrown into the limelight, this research seeks to understand how the act of representation, and decisions made around those representations, contributed to the onscreen content. Theoretical considerations include whether the representations reflect and therefore mimic existing social realities, or whether they are constructed to create new realities. This thesis explores the case of the London 2012 Paralympic Games media coverage to establish further these dynamics of reflection and construction, within the microcosm of Channel Four, with the media production process as its focus.

Whilst the study of representation through textual analysis answers other questions about, for example, meaning-making by the audience, there is a strong case for interrogating the creators of onscreen representations to learn more about media production and industrial contexts. Mayer at al. (2009, p.1)

note that 'we frequently come to know about media producers and their work ironically through the representations they make'. It does indeed sound ironic to connect the two for this reason and, as they go on to point out, what happens behind-the-scenes is itself 'a cultural production mythologised and branded much like the on-screen textual culture that media industries produce' (ibid., p.1). This study joins the many others that have sought to connect production practices with on screen representations (e.g. D'Acci, 1994; Born, 2004; Saha, 2012; Lieb, 2016). Finding out who decided what, and under what conditions, will provide insights, not just about the meanings that were made on-screen but how these depictions were produced.

As I will explain more in the next chapter, semiotic decoding of representation has been somewhat criticised as a scholarly enquiry into the understanding of meanings through postmodernist questionings of reality and subjectivity. However, Prendergast (2000) asserts that the constructive nature of representation still makes it a field worthy of study both where meaning is made at the point of production and also upon receipt or consumption. Rather than looking directly at content, as this will not answer my particular questions, I shall be investigating the decision-making that shapes content, within the production process, to reveal the political, social, cultural and ethical layers of influence that occur there. Representation, as a central practice in cultural production, provides a connecting thread to the rest of the media production process which means that the study of it remains vital. I explore the understandings of this process in more detail in the next chapter and refine, from the debates outlined there, where the most useful contribution for this study lies.

## Research questions

In this thesis I am asking 'who decided to bring disability into the mainstream, how they decided and why'. In the shaping of ideas I will show that 'who' was sometimes 'what' using conceptualisations from the agency and structure debate. I will also give a specific account of who 'they' were. Other writers have said 'Channel Four' did this or that as if they spoke with one voice (see for

example, Alexander, 2015, p.108). Where there were conflicting voices, I track down and define what kind of power finally held sway, and in whose hands. Media power can be sometimes lumped into one imagined place in the public discourse on social change and also in the past has been referred to rather generally or seen as purely hierarchical. I look closely at this concept of media power, and make sense of its manifest operation within Channel Four at the time of the 2012 Paralympics coverage.

By asking the 'how' element of my question I was able to follow the enactment of the creative process by individual worker roles, exploring their own freedoms. I investigate beyond just the decision-making into the conscious developing of ideas, themes and feelings about disability that eventually made it onto the screen. The research shows how programme content often morphs from intended idea into something else altogether via serendipitous moments and, as many of my contributors reflected, something they couldn't quite put their finger on. My empirical evidence pieces together a series of moments that one contributor rather erroneously called 'the perfect storm' revealing further influences and contexts that I analyse in the light of existing theories and debates.

Why the producers decided things will, at one level, be specific only to this case-study, particularly where there are personal reasons relating to the individuals who contributed. However it is individuals who make up groups and, as a group within their own production sub-culture, the social dimension that affected their enactments as a whole is also very much part of Channel Four's story. These machinations under the bonnet of the media production process also inform theoretical implications of other research undertaken by communication theorists as well as by academics working within a broader sociological perspective. By enquiring of disability, what was 'up close and personal' for some, and just a 'deliverable commodity' for others is exposed. In this respect the subject matter is useful as a sample of what agendas and dimensions exist within the production process when offering representations from a mainstream position for the depiction of 'others' in their diversity.

The unique moment of a host-nation sporting mega-event affords the opportunity to explore the tension between marginalisation and celebration, invisibility and focus, and inclusion and exclusion as represented in the media coverage. By looking closely at the choices that were made within the production process, with those who constructed these representations for the London 2012 Paralympic Games, my study is able to reveal in detail what shapes meanings that are made.

## Chapter synopsis

The upcoming chapters show how much 'othering' is reinforced through the framing of 'extraordinariness', and also conversely, dismantled by closing the gap between 'them' and 'us' for the purposes of selling sport. Drawing on interviews with key players in the production process, I establish what was constructed on purpose and what was forced by circumstance or influenced by industrial contexts, production infrastructures and money. 'Disability sport is cool' became part of the channel's culture as well as being the central framing for onscreen representations. The decision-making process that created this cultural shift is traced in my study through recollections of the two year run-up to September 2012 into post-Paralympic decisions, relating to Rio 2016.

Whilst establishing how this 'cool' framing came about, recurring themes of structure, agency, creativity and commerce emerged. These themes are discussed throughout the upcoming chapters roughly in that order. Naturally the areas do all overlap and command an iterative influence over each other, and they do so too here in my chapters. However, I have separated the themes out broadly into separate sections to enable manageable evaluation and to distinguish their impinging influences over meaning-making. This study contributes to the structure and agency debate and the creativity vs. commerce discussion by exploring the constraints and enablement (see Giddens, 1980) that occurred specifically in relation to the representations that were formed during the disability sport production process.

In chapter two, I evaluate the three research areas of representation, disability and sport to develop my theoretical framework around the encoding process further. In particular I explore how meanings about the 'other' are framed differently in these three contexts and what this might mean for the production of representations. I also examine the Paralympics literature in particular, alongside what the elevation to mega-event status might confer. This is set in the brief contextualisation of commercial interests within sports in general that also affects meanings that make it onto the screen.

The research design outlined in chapter three draws on existing production studies to establish why interviews with key decision-makers would be essential for establishing how media coverage is put together. I discuss the methodology and reasoning for conducting elite interviews and why it was necessary to gather associated internal documents as well, using a selection based on what my contributors felt was significant. I also draw on my field notes to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of my design.

Given the unique position of the Channel Four Television Corporation, I devote the first empirical chapter, chapter four, to regulation and the industrial context. In particular I look at the organisational and funding structures and the concrete consequences of those structures on the processes of production. The chapter explores the way the parliamentary remit dictated inclusion of a new group into the workforce and also insisted on diverse voices being presented onscreen. According to my participants these edicts enormously affected decisions relating to content enabling riskier representations. The unique funding mechanism (which is also protected by parliamentary regulation) currently forces a certain type of organisational structure with associated independent stakeholders. Drawing on my interviews I discuss what happened within that ecology that shaped the onscreen representations of disability.

Creative human agency, even within the restraints of the existing structures, plays an enormous role in the production of meanings for onscreen content. Chapter five explores disability representations and the intentional co-constructions of disability identities by the creative workforce. In order to

normalise disability, stereotypes and tropes were disrupted, reinforced and modified to forge the new identities that disabled athletes were given. This chapter explores how these portrayals were chosen and framed by the producers, in the pursuit of parity, focusing mainly on group dynamics and individual agency. Building on the previous chapter's discussion about the regulation of access to employment, a possible correlation is explored between the inclusion of disabled producers and presenters in the workforce and the editorial power exerted to shape the particular meanings of the London 2012 coverage.

With a separate look at creative meaning-making, chapter six explores how the programme formats were used and adapted to reframe disability within the sporting context. I consider the types of representations produced by Channel Four, using these formats, in relation to who has the editorial power and how much creative freedom they have to use it. Long-form documentaries pointed the way, and the summer of sport continued with depictions of disability as 'normal', piggy-backing off Olympic momentum. As the Games began, a new format emerged that has endured beyond both the London and Rio Paralympics.

Along with the other formats and genres used to shape meanings in the build-up and live coverage, I explain how *The Last Leg* team, who have now taken their programme into the mainstream contexts of politics and satire, consistently blur the 'us' and 'them' distinction swapping normative places and joking about it. This has been the most successful programme for reframing disability onscreen, closing the gap of 'difference' by introducing a blended team of 'normal' and 'other' characters. In this chapter I again explore, therefore, how access and inclusion into the media production process took a new and creative turn, and in particular during the impromptu formation of the late night 'banter' slot.

In the context of 'live' television programming, audience engagement and consumption is a commercial concern. The focus on this commercialism is mainly steered and driven by the Marketing Department and chapter seven is

devoted mainly to their efforts. I show to what extent commercial interest and the need for audience growth affected the representations and their promulgation of 'cool'. Some very specific meanings were overlaid over the entire coverage and these were developed and extended again to attract audiences to the Rio Games. This chapter looks particularly at the marketing but also at the branding of the athletes, the borrowing of meanings from other brands and the rebranding of Channel Four as 'the Paralympics channel'. My participants made it clear that these elements were designed, at least temporarily, to embed disability into the mainstream. They were also expected to enhance the consumption of present and future channel inventory as well as change audience perceptions of disability.

Chapter eight summarises my core arguments then explores the application of this study's findings beyond the representation of disability. Although the focus of this project is on portrayals of disabled athletes, my investigation highlights production issues relevant to representations of minority groups more generally. Until now there has not been a television production study of the Paralympic Games, but a focus here, on the decision-making process behind the coverage, is important because the production spaces are where actors utilise their power. Media representations, or at least their meanings, were different in 2012, so investigating what those differences were is essential, and whether they were reflected in, or even connected to, the inside of the media production process is an important enquiry. This final chapter reviews the internal machinations of the production process that shaped the media coverage, from initial decision to final delivery. I summarise the circumstantial 'answers' to my empirical research questions. These were provided by surprisingly corroborative recollections given to me in personal interviews and are also derived from internal documentation that I received. I then review how my material and analyses elaborate on, and to some extent modify, some of the theories and debates, connected to the construction of meanings, outlined in the next chapter.

# Chapter 2 Literature Review

In this chapter I outline the theoretical debates that have informed the development of this thesis and which I draw on and contribute to in this study of meaning-making. The research questions were initially triggered by what seemed to be a social phenomenon arising from the media coverage of the London 2012 Paralympic Games. Channel Four, the producers of the media coverage, set out to 'change perceptions in society' (C4TVC, 2013a) and they did this, at least in the short term (IPSOS, 2012; Jackson, 2013), by changing the meanings associated with the representations of a marginalised minority.

In the following discussion I argue that there is a need for research that explores the production mechanisms affecting these particular media representations. The reason for selecting the producers of London 2012 is that they, apparently out of the blue, made the decision to normalise disability using dramatically different representations. On the surface their creative agency won them a BAFTA award, but underneath that surface there was clearly an interesting case-study to investigate, relating to multiple agendas, the enabling or constraining structures and other influencing factors that affected the programme content. As I will show, the theoretical intersections of disability and mainstream sport together with the production of 'other' televisual representations, provides a unique opportunity to address issues and questions that arise in the literature set out below.

Broad themes of creativity, commerce, structure and agency are investigated in the upcoming chapters using theoretical insights from the following interrelated research contexts: representation and the production of meaning; disability studies and the Paralympics; and televised sports mega-events. In each field creativity, commerce, structure and agency are acknowledged, but this chapter, divided into three corresponding sections below, focuses mainly on the key debates and ideas emerging from the areas of representation, disability and sport that have informed my theoretical approach.

All three research areas shed light on the production process and also on the production of meanings. There are demonstrable conflicts. The slightly differing theoretical questions engendered by each of these research areas are built into my research design, outlined in the next chapter, and relate to both representation and production. What makes the intersection of the representation, disability and sport bodies of literature significant, and important to explore, is that they have conflicting theorisations about 'otherness' and what a televisual spectacle can and does achieve. Understanding the differing dynamics, whether separating or unifying, as outlined below, is central to understanding 'what' happened, and 'how' and 'why' during the production stage of the 2012 coverage. Meanings that differentiate 'us' from 'them' serve slightly different purposes, even when they are apparently framed in a similar fashion, as I will show. The three bodies of literature also provide differing perspectives on the pressures within the production process, relating to power, access and commercial interests. These conflicts, appearing within the production context and also onscreen, throw into relief creative and commercial agendas, as well as making obvious where structures and agency appear to collaborate or collide.

Within the sub-sections below, I examine respectively the theoretical conceptions of marginality and mainstream 'normality' for each field. In particular I outline previously theorised onscreen representations of the 'stereotyped' other, the disabled 'repulsive' other and the elite sporting 'inspirational' other, along with how meanings for each have been framed and understood so far. These positions set a reference point for making sense of the empirical material later on, based on previous scholars' key perspectives from the three fields. I also, within each section, summarise some of the known or speculated production dynamics that have been found previously to impinge upon, or enable, the editors' shaping of onscreen content. Within the three subject areas, these are, as I have suggested, concerned with power, access to the workforce, and commercially motivated influences respectively. Derived from the following review of existing literature I use these current understandings to frame targeted questions for my own study to contribute

additional knowledge to the debates about production as well as to representation and meaning-making.

## Representation and the production of meaning

In this section I show that the main focus for theorists of representation is one of power: power of one group to create meanings about another. This power is exerted behind the scenes and reflected onscreen. Before looking at that use of power, I will outline the more general conceptualisations of meaning-making, in relation to normality, that set my use of this concept of representational power in context.

Media representations are described by Hall (1997) as ways in which the media portray 'reality' from a particular set of values, ideology or other distinct perspective. These representations can apply equally to portrayals of communities, groups, ideas, experiences, relationships and also, therefore, sporting events (Dayan and Katz, 1994). In order to change perceptions in society, as Channel Four intended to do, a particular set of realities need to become common sense, and Hall's explanation of how this can happen is helpful. He describes how media representations provide the 'shared meanings' (Hall, 1997, p.3) that help 'us' understand our cultural practices and more specifically identify who we are in relation to 'others' or 'them'.

The key elements of representation, according to Hall (1997), are the setting up of difference or 'otherness', by creating boundaries of 'us' and 'them', whilst reducing individual realities to known stereotypes in order to fix meanings that will communicate to an audience. Hall argues that 'otherness' is something that occurs when editorial power is in the hands of a 'normal' group who seek to maintain a *safe distance* between themselves and the 'others' (ibid.). This safe distance appeared to be reduced, during the London 2012 Paralympic coverage, by bringing the Games from the margins into the mainstream. It follows, from Hall's perspective, therefore, that the place to look for a substantial change in depictions of 'other', should be at the 'normal' producers who changed the parameters.

A central concept, offered as a framework for thinking about the making of television representations, is that representations generally come about as *reflections* of existing society or are deliberate *constructions* of a changing reality (Hall, 1980; 1997). These constructions and reflections are hammered out in creative spaces to make onscreen representations that provide the viewer with a sense of shared meanings. Producers, who make meanings, may or may not be conscious of their role as reflectors of existing realities when constructing paradigms or new framings for change and may feel they hold a neutral standpoint (Born, 2004). However Hall's (1973; 1980; 1997) cultural understanding of the process includes the notion of reflecting existing social realities, and therefore reflecting what is considered as 'normal'. This matters when looking at the media production workforce as a microcosm of wider society, as this study does and Born also did with her ethnographic study of the BBC (Born, 2004, p.10).

The notions of reflection and construction provide a clear indicator that research should also be focused on the attitudes and beliefs held within the media organisation, as well as on other influencing factors, especially as any existing social realities are likely to transfer into onscreen representations. Media producers, within their microcosm, bring their own meanings to bear during the editorial process and I explore this aspect of Hall's theory (1980; 1997), particularly in chapters five and six, to argue the correlation between the make-up of the workforce and who they consider 'others' to be. The sense of an agreed norm has a direct bearing on how to represent 'them' and how to construct their identities as different from 'us'.

Embedding the values of outsiders, not for but *by* the minorities being represented, is explored in, for example, the fields of education, health and organisational management (Hart, 1992; Tritter and McCallum, 2006; Cummings and Worley, 2014) using engagement models based on Arnstein's (1969) theoretical ladder of citizen participation. This tracing of power has been extended into media production (Cammaerts and Carpentier, 2007; Carpentier, 2011) to measure some forms of consultancy and presentation but not as yet to consider the make-up of the production workforce itself. Born (2004) connects

the lack of promotion for minorities within production teams with under-representation onscreen, considering these two situations to be 'linked failures' (p.10). I address this potential correlation, or linkage, in the latter part of chapter four, in relation to Channel Four and their disability programming output. The linked relationship between 'normal' producers and their representations of whom they consider to be 'others' affects why certain representations are made, dependant on the agreed viewpoint of the ones with editorial powers.

## A constructed spectacle of the stereotyped 'other'

Making a spectacle of 'others' is achieved through stereotyping, by deliberately exaggerating familiar imagery to set apart the group with more power from the group with less power. These forms of representation shape culture as what we think of as normal is re-educated, and this happens, according to Giddens (1989), by reinforcing 'the values the members of a given group hold' (p.31). Who is in that group is clearly an important indicator in the process of understanding how certain representations end up on screen. What they choose to portray is more often taken up by textual analysts but is nevertheless connected to production (Campion, 2005; Ahmed, 2007a; Caldwell, 2008; Kellner, 2011; Saha, 2012) validating an exploration of stereotyping during that process. The continuing questions of who decides and what affects their decisions are addressed in this study, in direct relation to the operation of editorial power to create a spectacle of stereotyped others.

A correlation between who the producers are and what they portray is also highlighted starkly by the disability theorists, whom I introduce below, and additionally noted in the Paralympics literature. The key point is that a spectacle is made of 'others' because the others are different. This difference can be used as a form of entertainment for the mainstream group (Garland-Thomson, 2002a), as well as providing a distancing mechanism to protect those not being depicted (Hall, 1997; Howe, 2008a). Identities of 'us' are reinforced by knowing whom we are not, in relation to these contrasted stereotyped 'others'. The idea of making a spectacle of 'them', including any

respective purposes and connotations, is developed further in the disability section below and also, slightly differently, in the sports section that follows on.

In more detail, representation, generally, establishes and embeds a 'norm' from which other groups are differentiated and the distance from that norm determines their relative value. For example, black, female, gay, immigrant, disabled and welfare 'scroungers' are expressions of 'other' groups in relation to the appearance and/or greater (perceived) function of the white, middle-class, employed, heterosexual male standpoint (see Said, 1979; Davis, 1995; Ross and Sreberny, 2000; Schell and Rodriguez, 2001; Butler, 2011). Particularly, the power used to reduce the excluded 'other' group naturalises the normalcy of the culture from which it is being produced and acts as an exclusion mechanism.

A feature of previous BBC Paralympic coverage had been the use of largely non-disabled producers to form representations of disabled athletes (BBC, 2011). Scholars of representation suggest that editorial power in the hands of those who consider themselves 'normal', when depicting 'others' of any group, results necessarily in excluding, reductive or negative representations (Prendergast, 2000; Webb, 2009; Kidd, 2015). Understanding this mechanism of power over others, to ascribe lower value and reinforce distance, forces the questions, in my own research, directly towards *who* had control over *why* the London 2012 coverage was substantially more inclusive.

The use of power is intrinsic to defining 'otherness', with reductive stereotyping used as a form of exclusion or even violation. The media representation is an imposed caricature rather than a negotiated reality and conveys meanings within its portrayal. According to Hall (1997), strategies for stereotyping are designed to fix meanings for as long as possible (p.259) but, he established, new meanings can be grafted onto old ones. This distinction between representation and meaning is an important one to be aware of when establishing what happened in the case of Channel Four's disabled athlete depictions. Hall (ibid.) goes on to point out that, even with reductive stereotypes, meanings are not fixed, or else there would never be any change

(op.cit., p.259). Active choice-making over imagery reflects existing inequalities in power relations, as well as potentially creating new ones, since the chooser of the imagery is defining meanings for and about the 'other'.

In order to interrogate this power, production studies, such as undertaken for this thesis, are essential for understanding the process of representation. Inequality in editorial power has particularly been seen as a form of social oppression within disability studies (Barnes, 1992b; Oliver and Barnes, 2016). Portrayals are understood to have been designed to manipulate emotional response (Shakespeare, 1994; Garland-Thomson, 2002b) and to make the able-bodied feel better (Longmore, 1987). Whilst stereotyping is inevitable and useful for communicating known ideas quickly, both in drama and factual output (Fiske, 1987; 1989), the way that meanings are redrafted needs further investigation. I explore the construction of new meanings in detail in chapter five.

Meanings are constructed to appear as 'reality' and carried out by the creative production teams, whether by diverse, minority group, or not. Each has their own viewpoint and reasons for asserting their perspective. Whether reflected or constructed, or both, the creative media process includes the assembling and projection of words, pictures and other media as a form of multi-media language (see Saussure, 1974; Barthes, 1977; Baudrillard, 1994) to convey the object, person, idea, identity or other concept to an audience. The decision-makers creating meanings within each of these areas need to be included, therefore, in any production research on the meaning-making process.

One of the chief ways televisual meanings are achieved is through the use of these multi-media forms of language (as developed by Williams, DuGay, Hall, etc.). Signs are often analysed to decipher such 'othering' textually (drawing on the works of, for example, Barthes (1973) and Saussure (1974) to do that). A necessary additional question this 'othering' raises must also be, 'who has access to the workforce, and with what associated editorial powers to shape the language that makes these significations?' It is a powerful role that can shape society to denote any group, or type of person, as 'other' at all and only

some participants in the production process have enough power to produce these distinctions. In the upcoming chapters I examine the power associated with certain roles to try to understand how social change can be brought about through constructing representations that change audience perception.

Hall's (1973) theory of both 'encoding' by producers and 'decoding' by audiences has spawned criticisms and refinements about the subjectivity of the audience decoding elements (Morley, 2006; Ross, 2011). Decoding has been considered limited as a 'semiological concept' (Wren-Lewis, 1983, p.179) and the model in general has been critiqued. However, Hall makes a usefully important point about the encoding stage where, in addition to there being intended and preferred meanings, there is also a 'dominant meaning' creatively produced. He describes this creativity as:

> The work required to enforce, win plausibility for and command as legitimate a decoding of the event within the limit of dominant definitions in which it has been connotatively signified. (Hall, 1973, p.124)

It is therefore important to question a variety of agents about their impact on the generation of dominant meanings, however problematic these meanings are to locate, measure and define (e.g. Lewis, 2005). In my study I observe how the significations of mega-event sport were used to position the Paralympics for a favourable decoding by the television audience. Another question posed in my research is whether 'winning plausibility', in this case, was a central challenge faced by the sports producers, and potentially the Marketing Department, in order to legitimate the previously marginalised elite athletes. Hall's central notion, that meanings are encoded, shapes and informs the scope of my research design and this design is explained in detail in the next chapter.

Current work by other scholars continues to validate Hall's constructionist paradigm (e.g. Chimba and Kitzinger, 2010). Kidd (2015) notes that recent academic studies (see also Prendergast, 2000; Webb, 2009) have tended to focus on textual analysis and audience responses. She additionally points out that continued exploration of the production process is still important, to investigate the mechanisms of representation (Kidd, 2015, p.2). Thumim (2015)

also calls for 'specific instances' (p.57) of media production to be examined to understand the power of those undertaking the mediation of 'others'. Some scholars have considered a focus on representation as outdated and lacking in impact (Harris, 2006), but this critique is largely addressing the subjective nature of much textual analysis (Steyn, 2016). My study looks at representation from the encoding position. It is clear that studying how and why representations are constructed at the point of production remains an important and relevant complementarity to reading texts, as the producer intentions for those onscreen representations of 'others' also provide insight into cultural production.

*Production, producers and power*

Representation is inevitably entangled in the consumption, identity and regulation of culture as well as being part of the production 'moment' (DuGay et al., 1997). The key element of power, to define who is 'other', and therefore marginalised, is held in place by external and internal structures. Political economists and cultural theorists (e.g. Wasko et al., 2011; Couldry and Curran, 2003; Garnham, 2005) have considered these structures from their perspectives and established that part of this power comes from who controls the money being used. Hesmondhalgh (2013, p.38) speaks of the need to analyse and be sensitive to editorial power, and not to overlook it, within the 'systems of management' operated by 'the agents of change' (ibid.) and journalists 'follow the money' as a matter of course to establish issues of power. Others have written extensively on the structure of Channel Four (e.g. Harvey, 1994; Darlow, 2008) and included some elements of these structural dynamics at play during production, focussing mainly at the higher directive levels of this process.

More recently Malik (2015) has pointed out that the BBC and Channel Four attempt to 'out public service one another in response to ethnic minorities' (p.95) as part of the new 'creative diversity' initiative. Exploring the effort, then, to bring disability in from the margins, will highlight many of the dynamics that are relevant to both political economic and the cultural production fields. With

editorial power firmly in mind, I use a micro approach with an eye on the wider combined macro approach, to consider the recollected 'lived realities' of the producers as they developed their ideas within the uniquely structured publisher-broadcaster arrangement of Channel Four.

In order to really dismantle onscreen representations of 'other', Link and Phelan (2001) hypothesise the need to adapt existing structures to moderate editorial power. A new approach, they suggest:

> Must either change the deeply held attitudes and beliefs of powerful groups that lead to labelling, stereotyping, setting apart, devaluing, and discriminating, or it must change circumstances so as to limit the power of such groups to make their cognitions the dominant ones. (ibid., p.381)

Channel Four's editorial decision-makers decided in advance to change perceptions in their audience about a minority group. One of my contributions to the field, in this case-study, stems, therefore, from examining both the powerful group and the circumstances for any sense of change that may have contributed to the construction of the newly prevalent meanings that were produced. The power to create dominant meanings is built into the structures of media organisations and also regulated by certain conditions. There has been a growth of media production studies in the past twenty years exploring these aspects and the focus of many is on the issue of labour (e.g. Mayer et al., 2009; Hesmondhalgh, 2013) and the commercial pressure to compromise creativity (e.g. Born, 2004; Klein, 2009). I argue below the need for a production study in relation to disability inclusion in particular, but first need to establish whereabouts in the media organisation creative editorial judgement is likely to reside.

In relation to the location of power within the labour force, some production studies draw a distinction between roles that are 'above the line' and roles that are 'below the line' (Banks, 2009; Mayer, 2011). These are terms that scholars use about the industry to indicate where the decision-making power lies. Hesmondhalgh (2002) notes that the 'above the line' people, namely producers, directors, writers and actors, are responsible for generating 'symbolic meaning' that shapes cultural values (p.22). These creative 'above

the line' people hold the 'decision-making and breaking' positions involving 'artistry and inventiveness' (Banks, 2009, pp.88-89), according to Banks in her feminist production study on defining gender roles. She does concede that in her own scholarship also 'the voices of female practitioners working 'below the line' have much to offer in their own theorisations of media production practices' (ibid., p.87).

In Andrew Billings' (2008) production study of *Olympic Media* he interviews NBC's commentators and other practitioners who reveal their stigma-consciousness and sense of appropriateness for 'up close and personal' treatments when athletes' class background or family trauma are known and may need to be included or avoided (p.82). These are both above and below-the-line adjustments to meaning-making similar to those that are revealed throughout his production study. My own study, like Billings', does not draw a line between these two areas of labour, as both areas of the labour force share creativity, and both also may be constrained in their representational choices for a variety of reasons.

Other studies (e.g. Silverstone, 1985; Dornfeld, 1998; Gitlin, 2005; Mayer et al., 2009) have long established that the craft positions, as well as so-called creative positions, also have pragmatic decision-making powers that contribute to the meaning-making process associated with representation. This body of literature would suggest it is across the spectrum of roles, then, that a rigorous exploration of meaning-making should take place, as pockets of creative power exist elsewhere in addition to in the board room and at executive levels. It has been my own experience too, derived from my professional experience in television post-production, that the power to validate, delineate, include or exclude others is held across the range of practitioners, not just for key decisions but also in decisive minor moments in edit suites, dubbing studios and other less researched production areas. These pockets of power, as well as the hierarchies of power, are accessed and considered throughout my research and interviewing all roles was central to the design elaborated in the next chapter.

I have shown in this section that the key understanding of the televisual representations, made by producers, is that power is used to depict 'others' in order to create a safe distance from 'them' for those who are 'normal'. Whether this distance is 'safe', is more problematic with depictions of disability as I outline below.

## Disability studies and the Paralympics

A key representation issue in disability studies, Shakespeare (1998; 2013) argues, is that the able-bodied are more threatened by portrayals of disability than they are by other depicted anomalies because of the risk of becoming disabled themselves. Disability therefore makes uncomfortable viewing. We may develop a disability either sooner or later, at the onset of illness, by unexpected accident or inevitably in old age (ibid.). Other forms of difference, such as race and gender, are less threatening (Mitchell and Snyder, 2000), both onscreen and off, because they do not normally suddenly, or gradually, affect us. For race and gender, and possibly sexual orientation, the 'normal' position remains a safe and not too remote position from which to view the 'other' (Prendergast, 2000). Therefore, because of the uncomfortable underlying threat to 'us', media representations of disability are understood to be, amongst disability scholars, distinctly more problematic.

In this section I show how meanings about disability are informed by our past cultural history as well as our own potential futures, beginning with an inherited historic sense of *revulsion* (Elias, 1978). Then I show how, either invisibility altogether from the screens, or the use of the overcoming supercrip representations, have been adopted to avoid that sense of revulsion. I also outline how scholars in the disability field have disagreed about the 'medical' and 'social' models, the historic schism in their field (see Oliver, 1983; Shakespeare and Watson, 2003). My argument is that both of these perspectives still relate to and affect media production. There is agreement amongst disability theorists, as I will show, that 'medical' meanings about disability are used onscreen generically to benefit the non-disabled (e.g. Longmore, 1987; Garland-Thomson, 2002). The primary 'social' media

production issue for disability theorists is lack of access into the production workforce. This access has been denied both onscreen and off, as any part of the production team. Scholars (Barnes, 1992; Corker and Shakespeare, 2001; Barnes and Mercer, 2010) have noted in particular that disabled practitioners are not present to shape more positive meanings about disability and the key arguments, relating to production and meaning-making, are set out below.

*Revulsion, invisibility and supercrips*

Whilst meanings are generated, as already established, by a shared common sense understanding about 'them' (Hall, 1997), meanings can also be rooted in a familiar and shared historic context. Over thirty years ago Elias (1978) identified that depictions of disability, or extreme difference, often trigger revulsion in the spectator or audience. He argued that the source of this cultural revulsion, to certain forms of disability, stemmed from the post-medieval 'civilising process' that historically trained our prevalent perceptions of acceptable bodily function and control. The spectacle of the disabled 'other', therefore, carries an extra meaning of being repulsively different. Davis (1995) traces the construction of 'normalcy' for 'us', through the nineteenth century, where he notes that 'the terrain of the body' (ibid., p.48) is scrutinised for difference of any kind (see also Ahmed, 2007b). This is one of the ways that we have defined who we are in relation to others, by checking for bodily differences. Since noticing bodily differences is something that cannot be avoided whilst watching the Paralympic Games, attempts at normalisation could be a particular challenge.

Revulsion, Davis says, is a learned response, becoming an action on a societal level producing discrimination and marginalisation (1995, p.13). These deeply ingrained historical prejudices pervade literary and artistic representations of disability as they did in the days of the Ancient Greeks and Romans. The antidote to revulsion on television has been not to depict disability at all, rendering it invisible (Davis, 2005), unless fascination or intrigue dictate the need to include it (Barnes, 1992a; Goggins and Newell, 2003). Historically, 'freaks' were paraded and celebrated for their difference in a way that was

designed to invoke revulsion and construct distance away from them, for the 'normal' public majority (Davis, 1995).

The Olympic and Paralympic sporting events also include a parade of athletes, with the athletic body as a central focus. What makes this parade problematic, when televised, is that depictions of able-bodied and depictions of disfigured or 'different' bodies, even if framed the same televisually, do not carry the same connotations because of their differing historic contexts. Over time, spectacles of disability have triggered repulsion in the mainstream audience (Elias, 1978; Davis, 1995) whilst perceptions of Olympian bodies, as I show in the next section, have been of perfection and beauty. These conflicts of meaning make the Paralympian bodies harder to represent as watchable, because of the paradox of the predisposed meanings about physical difference already in place (Purdue and Howe, 2012).

In relation to onscreen depictions, there are two key paradigms about disability that activists and academics have debated over recent decades, since the inception of a formalised field of disability studies in the late 1970's, (see Hunt, 1966; UPIAS, 1974; Finkelstein, 1980; Oliver 1983). The key discussions for understanding media representations of disability come from these two theories. One, the 'medical' model, reflects the depictions that are normally seen on television and the other, the 'social' model, offers potential reasons why this reflection may be so. The first perspective, more explicitly known as the 'bio-medical model' (Barnes and Mercer, 2003), focuses on 'disability' as a malfunction of the individual. The second, the 'social model' (Oliver, 1983) argues that the focus of (dis)ability should be on the ableist society that creates disabling barriers (see also Barnes and Mercer, 2003).

Representations of disability in the media, so far, are typically reflections of the first, of the individual impairment approach to disability. This bio-medical perspective highlights the condition of the impaired individual as a 'personal tragedy' whilst emphasising 'courage' if negative circumstances have been overcome. Stigma, and the sense of being wrong, were famously articulated by Hunt (1966) as a predominant representation with discriminatory meanings.

Television portrayals consistently portray 'disability' in this way (Barnes and Mercer, 2003) with the 'disabled' seen as flawed able-bodied people. The key theme of 'having to overcome or fix a disability', with triumph or failure narratives, arises repeatedly in disability studies of representation (Hunt, 1966; Barnes, 1992b; Thomson, 1996; Goggin and Newell, 2003) and the corresponding tropes are firmly embedded in the 'medical model' approach to disabled 'others'.

Being extraordinary at something, for a disabled person, has not been celebrated televisually for its own sake, purely as an achievement, but only as part of fixing an anomaly by compensating for impairment (Darke, 2004; Gilbert and Schantz, 2012). It is, therefore, possible to anticipate the difficulty producers might have in celebrating disabled elite athletes *as* anomalous in the sporting context, as extraordinary athletes, whilst at the same time *fixing* their primary anomaly by apparently 'overcoming' disability. Various stereotypes are used to reinforce this 'overcoming' positioning (Shakespeare and Watson, 2003; Darke, 2004) and these categories have not changed (Goggins and Newell, 2000; 2003; Barnes, 1992; Oliver and Barnes, 2016).

Arguably, reliance on the 'bio-medical model' has led to the recurrent use of these categorised stereotypes, tropes and narratives. As a background for this study the most relevant are the 'pitiable and pathetic' condition (also particularly utilised by charity advertisers, see Hevey, 1992, p.5) and the opposite to this underclass, the 'super cripple', over-achieving to be acceptable. When disability features at all, being 'subhuman' or 'superhuman' consistently remain the binary narrative also used in the press. A content analysis, undertaken by the Glasgow Media Group of print representations of disability, compares newspapers from 2004-2005 with newspapers from 2010-2011, and concludes that most portrayals and references to the physically impaired are related to their 'burden on society' (Philo, 2012, p.9). The other predominant representation conveys the meaning 'triumph over adversity' (ibid., p.8) with 'super cripple' references being found in both periods. In 2012, these superhuman and subhuman narratives ran alongside each other, and even

alternated, as perceived by Crow (2014) who says of the press, 'now that the Paralympics is over, the benefits juggernaut rumbles on' [no pagination].

Further types and tropes, in a much-quoted list of negative disability representations (see Barnes, 1992), are mainly sinister and villainous in connotation, or legitimise ridicule using caricatures of functional difference. These other categories occur mostly in fiction, usually as a means of progressing the plot, and also are used in other forms of literary and visual representation as signifiers of difference that reinforce 'normality'. What is significant across all genres of media production is that cultural meanings are attached to people with impairments consistently portraying them as 'deficient, not quite normal or perhaps not fully human' (Barnes and Mercer, 2010, p.168). The London 2012 Paralympics coverage appeared to be, and billed itself as, an exception to this pattern, and as such is a uniquely rich resource for investigation into how and why changes in meaning are actually made.

Disabled imagery, in addition, has tended to exist in either the margins of the television schedule (Goggins and Newell, 2000), or around the periphery of the central programme subject (Darke, 2004). The Paralympics coverage, as mainstream 'normal' programming (see Appendix D), had to be framed in a way that would dismantle existing disability depictions and audience expectations in order to create new meanings. Meanings relating to freak (Garland-Thomson, 2002), or superhuman (Silva and Howe, 2012) are theoretically nuanced at this intersection and could be the cause of conflicting editorial judgements. In the light of this literature, I frame interview questions to discover more about which of these contexts has more power to prevail over meanings.

I trace the creative decision-making process that producers went through to make these shifts in the upcoming chapters. More research is needed to explore whether it is possible to be depicted as 'different' without being the 'other', and this study contributes to that. It is also not clear whether tropes from one included 'acceptable' group can be successfully mapped onto a previously excluded 'unacceptable' group. In televisual terms, this should be

straightforward, but, as this chapter demonstrates, in theory might create different meanings. The dilemmas thrown up by historical revulsion (Elias, 1978; Davis, 1995) alongside repeated visual caricatures of disability (Barnes, 1992; Darke, 2004), within the context of familiar mainstream TV (Fiske, 1987), make the decoding of dominant sporting meanings less predictable. Entrenched meanings conditioned by existing framings would potentially be hard to dismantle.

Historically I have shown that there is a tension between how disability is typically represented and how elite athletes are typically represented. This makes the Paralympics coverage, as a sporting event for disabled elite athletes, all the more important to research. The sports section below outlines the inspirational cohesive framings that Channel Four would have had at their disposal. These clash with the way that disability has been portrayed on television so far, raising the question as to why the producers would choose to blend these positive and negative framings in 2012. Until now, disability studies have shown that typically media portrayals still mainly focus on lack of function and helplessness (Smith and Thomas, 2005). Why this changed is an important question that my empirical chapters take up and address.

Prior to the London 2012 media coverage, Silva and Howe (2012) interrogated the value of the 'supercrip', or 'superhuman', representation that occurs in the Paralympics, and suggested an openness to difference could be thought out and presented in other ways. The authors question whether the 'supercrip' representation of Paralympic athletes fulfils the International Paralympic Committee's requirement for 'empowerment' (IPC, 1989) or whether it is in fact a form of *dis*empowerment. Their premise (see also Haller, 1995) is that overemphasis of a 'super' difference actually helps to preserve a *safe distance* for the 'normal' observer whilst undermining the 'normal' prowess of these athletes with impairments. There is a conflict here between the historic understanding of disability representations as repulsive or invisible (Barnes, 1992c; Goggins and Newell, 2003; Davis, 2005), and an understanding, which I discuss in the next section, of the inspirational and visible sporting tropes (Whannel, 2012). It seems clear that further research needs to be conducted to

clarify the motivations and purposes of producers constructing such representations.

Meanings are highlighted by Silva and Howe (2012), in their textual study of Paralympic representations, whilst discussing the reinforcement of 'achievement syndrome' (p.2). They explain that using the 'supercrip' narrative creates a meaning that 'the impaired are successful *in spite* of their disability' (ibid.). This predominant meaning suggests a query in editorial judgement that a disabled producer might have, over, for example, one of the sports editors. That disabled people are cast as 'heroes or zeros' has been well established in previous research (Brittain, 2010; Schantz 2012), however in sport, so are athletes also winners or losers. What this might mean is that the disadvantage embedded in the 'disability' meaning may not perhaps be intended as a disadvantage in the sports representation.

This discrepancy raises questions of power. Whose editorial judgement holds sway and what are the considerations? Established uses of disability representation arguably makes the celebrating of Paralympic athleticism harder to frame. The question of how to overcome a sense of revulsion and dismantle existing tropes for an imagined audience is something I explore in chapter five. I analyse the intersection of associated meanings and the cross-pollination of mainstream tropes within the different programme formats to see how they were used and to what purpose in the formats chapter, six.

It is only recently that much academic interest has been taken in the media coverage of the Paralympic Games at all (Gilbert and Schantz, 2008) and most of this research has either analysed broadcast and print output for its meanings or focused on audience reception. At the time of writing there is one published media production study on the Paralympics (Howe, 2008a), and this was undertaken in the print newsroom at Athens in 2004. Howe's work focused on the production of printed texts rather than broadcast television or digital platforms. He noted that images were carefully mediated for a target audience. Howe embedded himself as a newspaper reporter to study media production ethnographically within the journalists' habitat. He found that 95% of the

reporters, in 2004, were able-bodied and that they constructed meanings of 'purity' with charitable and patronising undertones, during the production stage, using only positive representations. Here, again, as Born (2004) had done (p.10), Howe makes a link between the use of able-bodied producers in direct relation to the tone and framing of ensuing media representations. The relationship between mediator and mediated representations is also central to this study.

Howe (2008) noted additionally that amongst print journalists in the Media Centre at Athens the 'triumph over adversity' narrative was being gradually superseded by a greater focus on sport (ibid., pp.141-143). This continued to happen in 2012 too, with the sport making the front as well as the back pages of the national newspapers. The reason given for choosing to break away from a text analysis approach to Paralympic representational studies was because he wanted to examine the control of information. By 'researching the lived experiences of the media production processes' (ibid., p.135) he sought to understand how the image of elite sport for the disabled was 'properly managed' (ibid.). His own researcher perspective was that of a former Paralympic athlete, my perspective comes from being a former BBC television production practitioner, who has had the experience of broadcasting national sport output. There are currently no other published production studies on the Paralympics and decision-making processes about representation and image management are yet to be explored in this context.

Existing theoretical insights, from my discussion so far, suggest that simply applying familiar media production processes, even from the field of inspirational sport, below, may not solve underlying revulsion to a minority group with visual disfigurements. However Bournemouth University's (2013) audience research suggests that it did so. Their findings reinforce my suggestion that further exploration is therefore needed to examine the overlaying tropes and common televisual representations that were used to unite an audience as opposed to separate them.

Increasingly spectacular representations (Haller, 1995; Orgad, 2012), alongside

a clearly selective omission process (DePauw, 1997), are the embodiment of the 'emphasise' or 'ignore' attitudes that emerge within both the disability and sports literature. Although this may be oversimplified, Gilbert and Schantz (2012) suggest that there are really only two main attitudes to Paralympic sports that are taken up by the media. The first is to ignore the event completely, as NBC do when they choose not to transmit 'live' coverage, or overlook elements by selective representation of the more normal looking sequences (e.g. not swimming events). The second is to 'construe the myth of the supercrip, the freaky cyborg or the hero who overcame his terrible fate' (Schantz, 2012, p.8).

The reductive attitude towards event selection is perhaps a reflection of the stereotypical representations of disability across other genres of television programming, in that the Paralympic Games has historically featured largely wheelchair based events (Schantz and Marty, 1995). The physical motor impairments have been found to be the predominant representation upsetting the able-bodied public the least, and the wheelchair symbol, as recorded across other television genres, the least 'repulsive' of these (see Barnes, 1992). Triumphing over disability is not, however, the same as triumphing in sport, and negotiations over the distinctions in meaning, as I have already suggested, throw production issues and editorial judgement-making into relief.

According to Barnes and Mercer (2003), there is now a strong emphasis on the reality that the social world is organised by an able-bodied majority. Additionally, a combined 'biopsychosocial' approach (World Health Organization, 2001) confirms that impairments and a full range of other factors affect a person with unusual appearance or impaired function (Barnes and Mercer, 2003, p.14). There is a normative implication in this approach that the status quo will continue. This defining emphasis raises a question for television production, however, that I take up in the chapters that follow, asking whether media representations should necessarily also be made by the organising able-bodied majority. Based on the unfairness of 'othering' and distancing, as described in the representation section, and media invisibility, or sense of 'revulsion', observed by disability scholars above, depictions, I suggest,

perhaps ought to be made by those who have experience of what is being represented.

## *The 'social model' and access to production*

Having established that the medical/individual narrative has remained the virtually unchallenged dominant discourse within the media, it has historically been the 'social model' (Oliver, 1983) which has dominated arguments within the academic discipline. This model challenges the location of power and powerlessness and identifies the nature of disabled identities as socially constructed. Studies have focused the direction of disability theory away from simply the medical condition of the individual and towards the able-bodied societies that are perceived as excluding and constructing 'disabled' others (e.g. Finkelstein, 1974; Oliver, 1991; Barnes, 2004). In spite of this social focus, the literature shows media portrayals have generally represented these situations as barriers less often and generically point to the individual medical predicament as the disabling factor or point of blame (e.g. Darke, 2004). This may be a reflection of the make-up of the workforce, as intimated above, and is a question that scholars have wanted to address (Barnes, 1992; Haller, 1995).

Where the 'social model' does seem to still apply is within the production process. This model is not particularly depicted onscreen as a representation of disablement, compared to the 'medical model' of individual tragedy, but society's disabling barriers have been identified as restricting access into the media production process (Barnes 1992; Oliver and Barnes, 2016). This identification demonstrates the continuing importance and validity of the 'social' model paradigm, in spite of some saying that the concept has run its course (Haller, 1995; Shakespeare, 2006; Thomas, 2011; Oliver and Barnes, 2016). The inference is clear, that social exclusion in wider society has also affected access to mainstream television programme making, other than, perhaps, tokenistically, as a 'consultant'. I explore this role of consultant as it occurred for my participants and evaluate the influence, or not, on final onscreen outcomes in 2012.

A major criticism of media representations generally is that they are created mainly by able-bodied people who overlook the social barriers that others say are the really disabling factors (Oliver, 1990). In addition to attitudes, the 'social model' highlights infrastructures that are created for the consumption and use of the able-bodied group to the exclusion of disabled 'others'. The way society is organised at a macro level, applies equally, of course, to the micro levels of television production and associated marketing. My research therefore investigates whether any of the disabling social barriers also occur within the media production process, and within the organisational structures, rather than, as disability theorists have done, simply amongst the audience and society at large.

In order to establish how disability is represented and what perpetuates such commonly negative representations, Barnes' (1992a) study remains important and relevant. The fundamental reason for onscreen stereotyping has been clearly understood and defined by one of the founders of disability studies. He says in that report, 'Disablist imagery will only disappear if disabled people are integrated at all levels into the media' (ibid., p.21). Barnes mooted a potential correlation between onscreen representation of 'others' and their involvement in the production process as the conclusion to his classic list (1992) of prevalent disability tropes and stereotypes. The paper insisted that 'there must be more effort to recruit disabled people to work in mainstream media organisations' (ibid.) in order to get rid of 'disablist' imagery (as distinct from images that could neutrally include physically impaired people). Twenty years later disablist imagery suddenly changed at the 2012 Paralympics pointing clearly, in the light of Barnes' research, towards the need for an investigation of the media organisation. My research design in the next chapter ensures that knowledge is generated about the organisation and the potential integration, or not, of disabled producers.

Recent textual studies have discussed whether these 'new' representations are really new, or indeed helpful, (e.g. Hibberd, 2015, pp.100-102; Pepper, 2016). These are valuable contributions, although an understanding of representations of disability will still benefit from an exploration of the production context, as

Barnes suggested, and as my study takes up. Whether change is indeed down to the integration of disabled people within the workforce is an important line of enquiry. Barnes does not go on to interrogate at what level of integration within the media organisation those disabled producers would need to be, to make any difference to the imagery. My methodology, in the next chapter, ensures the acquisition of empirical material that addresses both of these important questions. A key reason, Barnes (1992) says, for needing this access, and to be included in the workforce, is to reduce 'corporate ignorance about disability […] since those who experience disability daily have little or no say in how they are presented on television or in the press' (ibid., pp.6-7).

This is a similar observation to the one made by Born (2004) about the under-representation of ethnic minorities at the BBC (p.10). Make-up of the workforce is clearly flagged up as integral to the construction of onscreen depictions, within the field of disability studies, as it has been amongst production and cultural industry scholars more generally. In the following chapters I take up this issue by exploring this integration issue throughout all levels of the Paralympic production, to assess the extent of its influence, amongst other impinging factors. If the workforce is mixed between able-bodied and disabled, which criteria are applied and what are the constraints? I address these issues throughout the upcoming chapters.

In this section I have flagged up the lack of access to production for those with disabilities as potentially key to detrimental onscreen representations (Barnes, 1992). I have also explored the reasons for the historic sense of revulsion, onscreen invisibility and supercrip representations that have prevailed to date in representations of disability. Unlike watching representations of race or gender from a 'safe' distance, something unexpected can happen to suddenly make 'us' disabled, and if not and we live long enough, disability scholars note that we eventually become disabled anyway (Shakespeare, 1994). Therefore disability is not a 'safe' topic for viewing, and there would be considerable risks for producers in making it more visible or positively watchable. I have shown how, historically, watching disability on television, with its associated meanings of pity and tragedy, has been considered uncomfortable and unsafe viewing.

How disability is typically represented differs enormously from how elite athletes are typically represented, as I will outline below. Trying to marry the depictions of impairment with the meanings of celebrated sport is one that has not been attempted by Paralympic 'side-show' (Gilbert and Shantz, 2008) TV coverage before. Given the difficulty of this, my study asks why Channel Four would choose to risk elevating and reshaping the London 2012 Paralympic Games coverage into an international, highly visible sporting mega event.

## Televised sports mega-events

Neither revulsion nor invisibility have had a place in inspirational high-profile international televised sport. The research shows that sport has its own tropes and framings along with its own mainstream audiences who understand its televisual conventions and shared meanings (Roche, 2000; Whannel, 2012) Additionally, in the field of sport, audiences are bought and sold (Horne, 2007). In this section I explore the arguments that a sense of collective identity is central to the representations of international athletes on television, and that the spectacle of the athlete is there for us to be drawn *towards* (Hayes and Karamichas, 2012) rather than to be kept at a safe distance *from*. I outline how social cohesion is understood to be a key component of global mega-events and how the short-term disruption of the special event broadcasts has a direct bearing on how we feel about what we watch in this context. Marketing and commercialisation are also key focuses for sports television coverage, especially amongst the producing decision-makers (Horne, 2007; Horne and Whannel, 2012). I outline below some of the key understandings from this research field that have a direct bearing on how to understand the producer intentions, and influencing factors over them, for the production of the London 2012 Paralympics coverage.

In order to understand the meanings that can be derived from onscreen sports representations, the context, format and genre need to be established, as some of these come with meanings and assumptions built into them (Billings, 2008). For the first time the Paralympic Games was treated, in 2012, as an international mega-event. Arguably, this in itself will have reframed the identity

of the Paralympians. There has been much debate about whether mega-events are purely driven by economics or whether they serve a greater purpose for reinforcing collective identities (Whannel and Thomlinson 1984; Maguire, 1993; Dayan and Katz, 1994; Billig, 1995; Roche, 2006; Hayes and Karamichas, 2012;) through a sense of 'communitas' (Katz, 2009), national identity and cultural affinity (Gellner, 1983; Smith, 2003). The sense of 'us' (Herzfeld, 2005; Bauman, 2001) is developed within this particular context of international sporting mega-event, for reasons I develop below.

By mega-events I am using Maurice Roche's definition of 'large-scale cultural [including commercial and sporting] events, which have a dramatic character, mass popular appeal and international significance' (Roche, 2000, p.1). Horne adds a pre-requisite to the definition, that the event is televised and broadcast in many countries around the world (2007, p.33). The term is largely used in relation to sporting events but not exclusively so. It is more significant that the event interrupts daily schedules and routines. Dayan and Katz (1994) point out that, whether they be a coronation, conquest or contest, mega-events are particularly considered to be an opportunity for 'hegemonic manipulations' (1994, p.5), able to frame both narrative and spectacle on a global scale (see also Katz and Dayan, 1986). It is important therefore to examine the decision to elevate the 2012 Paralympics to mega-event status and establish not only why this was done but what difference it made to framings and subsequent perceptions of disability. I explain how I was able to gather this information in the next chapter.

Mega-event framing, developed during the production process, sets up the feel that 'the whole world is watching' broadening the reach and authenticity of its meanings (ibid.). This occurs to such an extent that Whannel (2008), after Beijing 2008, referred to the Olympic Games as one of the 'institutions through which we define ourselves as a global collectivity' (p.199). The mega-event is a platform, therefore, for defining who is included as 'us', and by implication who is excluded, whilst also refining and reflecting collective values. A sense of collective 'shared meanings' (Hall, 1997) has been the hallmark of large-scale media events since the inception of its kind in the UK when TV sets were first

purchased to watch the coronation in 1952 (Billig, 1995; Katz, 2009). The important point is that in this setting the shared meanings are about who we *are* rather than who we are *not*. It may be that the embedding of a diversity group with a transformation agenda into a unifying collective history moment such as an international sporting event is a crucial part of bringing a minority into the mainstream. It certainly makes that moment of attempted inclusivity an important one to study.

Representations created in sporting contexts have also been studied in relation to the Olympic Games (beginning with Riefenstahl's famous film *Olympia* (1938) representing the Aryan race at the 1936 Berlin Games) and the football World Cup (Roche, 2000; Hayes and Karamichas, 2012). The collective 'sense of connection' (Marshall et al., 2010, p.267) comes about through the projection of 'liveness' which is represented by a 'seamless mix' (Whannel and Tomlinson, 1984, p.34) of replays, inserts, pre-recorded interviews and special effects. Although a lot of it isn't technically live, the linking with others is a meaning that is made through the constructed representation of 'liveness'. Dayan and Katz (1994) have called this powerful and mediated representation of the Olympics a 'social integration of the highest order' (p.15). Arguably this socially integrated space is ripe for embedding common-sense ideas of identity, of who we are in relation to 'others'. It follows on, therefore, that any act of borrowing tropes from the Olympics would include the borrowing also of the shared embedded meanings about 'our' identity.

At the time of the London Paralympic Games, press coverage connected the meanings and excitement attributed to it with the context and momentum carried over from the two previous media mega-events in the same year. Later research also confirms this beneficial momentum (Wood, 2013). The first of these media events, although not a coronation per se, was a Royal Jubilee, and the second, the London Olympics, including its massively successful British medal-haul, could arguably be seen as a conquest as well as contest. These events may have set the scene for a potential 'cultural shift' that might not have been possible otherwise, based on the sense of collective national identity and shared values that can be communicated on such occasions

(Horne and Manzenreiter, 2006). I take up these questions, about the decisions that were taken in relation to becoming or being marketed as a mega-event, as part of my research design.

*Collective identities and inspiration porn*

As established, elevating the treatment of the Paralympic Games to mega-event status, with round the clock 'live' sports coverage puts it on a par with the World Cup and the Olympic Games in terms of televisual spectacle (Roche, 2000; Hayes and Karamichas, 2012). This status, in itself, arguably has a direct impact on meaning-making since those represented are automatically positioned within the mainstream. A key part of the media framing is the extraordinary spectacle of elite 'others'. However celebrity sport is designed to inspire and to get 'us' to root for 'them' and identify with either the national team or the individual being represented (Billings, 2008). The team in turn represent 'us', our nation, or our aspirations. This two way identification means the *extreme* 'spectacle of the inspirational other', in this context, has an almost polar opposite effect to the extreme spectacle of revulsion analysed by disability scholars. The gap between 'them' and 'us' is closed rather than widened because, rather than providing a safe distance, the sporting spectacle draws us in. This dynamic seems to be at odds with the normal function and use of extreme caricatures or stereotypes.

Extraordinary achievement is focused upon but for inspirational reasons rather than distance-creating ones. Olympic parity and success were aimed at in 2012 by the television producers and also by the British Paralympic Association (BPA), with the London Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games (LOCOG). However, Longmore (1987) argues that representations of successful disabled people, including under the guise of entertainment, are seemingly used to reassure the non-disabled audience (p.66) rather than inspire others with impairments. Since the 2012 Paralympics, Haller (2017) has re-asserted that she considers the disabled subject a media construct to confirm normalcy. Calling the 2012 Paralympics coverage 'inspiration porn'

(ibid., p.53) she bases her argument on a shift away from subject to object. Haller asserts that objectification occurs when:

> One whose struggle against systemic barriers is converted into a moment of reflection and encouragement for the nondisabled to better themselves. (ibid.)

If the coverage is encoded and framed as Olympian, however, this suggests other contextualised meanings might also be considered. Olympic athletes are also objectified, but not necessarily for the same reasons, and this raises the question of whether parity is indeed possible. Certainly it raises the question of what parity, for those who are different, might mean. In chapter five I address how producers considered that and what influenced the decisions they made about it.

The key difference in 2012 was the alignment of these 'superhumans' with ableist Olympic representations. Understanding the influences that brought about that shift is an important part of my investigation. The super-athlete in the Olympic setting, is considered successful because of their inspiring efforts (Wenner, 1998). Their triumph is not a 'triumph over tragedy' (Barnes, 1992, p.13) but could perhaps be seen as a triumph over their own ordinariness. Both able and disabled groups of athletes need to master and extend the limitations of their own bodies. Within this extraordinary or 'freak' setting revulsion seems to be the preferred meaning for one group (according to Brittain, 2010; Schantz, 2012; Silva and Howe, 2012;) and inspiration (consistently since Riefenstahl's film in 1938) the preferred meaning for the other group. Resolving the two sets of meanings, or even managing them, could therefore potentially be problematic during production. Whether or not the producers were aware of the need to dismantle the negative historic associations or, indeed, whether they consciously chose to borrow from the positive ones, is a question that I address in chapters five and seven. There would undoubtedly be different agendas affecting the decision-makers and this particular intersection between disability and sports representation provides an opportunity to better understand the editorial dynamics of media production.

It is without doubt that issues of structure and agency would arise in such a delicate setting, as indeed one would expect in any study of production (see Zoellner, 2009a; Hesmondhalgh, 2007). The question raised for this study is to what extent these issues should be studied in the context of the encoding of representations? Giddens' (1984) argues that there is a duality between structures and agents where the power between the two is linked and where they potentially change each other. His assertion that structures both enable and constrain is a valuable concept when asking how production contexts shape meaning-making. Famously, Bhaskar (1998) and others (e.g. Mouzelis, 1989; McLennan, 1997; Parker, 2000; Stones, 2005) have criticised Giddens' model of structuration for not really explaining how agency works, and seemingly reducing agency to merely 'action'. Archer (1995) particularly identifies that he has conflated the dualism so that they are too blended conceptually and she places the structure and agency interplay in a sequence instead, with agency ultimately leading to 'structural elaboration' (p,16). Based on both Giddens' and Archer's ideas, I aim to give structure and agency equal weight and attention in this thesis, understanding that both are affected by each other in potentially iterative ways, and possibly, as Archer suggests, sequentially too.

*Commercialisation, marketing and branding*

The other scaling-up process connected to the Paralympic Games, in addition to Olympic-style spectacularisation, has been the increasing *commercialisation*. Since it was first officially staged at Rome in 1960 the Paralympics has been treated as a side-show to the Olympics (Gilbert and Schantz, 2008) at least until Barcelona in 1992. Brittain (2012) noted in his summary of disability sport media portrayals that, from Barcelona onwards, there has been a sharp increase in media coverage, both in broadcast hours, and in the breadth of countries providing air-time and column inches. Because the media value of sports coverage has become increasingly 'determined by the size and composition of its audience' (Maguire, 1993, p.38), scholars argue that representations of events and athletes have consequently been changing,

becoming more and more spectacular for commercial purposes (Tomlinson and Young, 2006).

Whilst sport in general has been developing its celebrity culture to increase its saleable commodity value to sponsors and advertisers, the Paralympics has been at an inevitable disadvantage. This is because the pervading representation in sport is of an ideal physicality which DePauw (1997) concludes is an able-bodied masculine perfection, for both men and women, including 'aggression, independence, strength and courage' (p.421). Attractive body appearance is central to the media agenda for sport (Rowe, 1999) which has resulted in marginalisation of the Paralympic Games (Gilbert and Schantz, 2008) and until 2012 a selective representation of only a handful of 'acceptable' events. This begs the question, why change that now? Why would the Paralympics suddenly be of commercial value?

From a production perspective, Zoellner (2009a) points out that the multi-platform environment needs the amplification of the ordinary to the extraordinary simply to attract a distracted audience's attention (p.528). This idea brings the benchmark for normalisation into question as even the mundane is spectacularised to compete for commissioning into the multiplatform environment. Much of the scholarly concern with the super-extraordinary misrepresentation, within the disability and Paralympic fields (DePauw, 1997; Silva and Howe, 2012) does not yet take into account this new environmental pressure. In what follows, my study addresses these questions and establishes some reasons that will be useful for comparative research in other contexts.

According to other production studies, commercial value to the broadcaster occurs on several levels that we ought to pay attention to, particularly the presence of marketing. Mann (2009) notes the commercial tension over creativity when she suggests that the singular 'auteur' voice, as an industry paradigm for meaning-making, is now obsolete. She makes the point that a 'six-pack of execs' (2009, p.99) is now needed to run spinoff digital content and promotions since they are 'managing a brand and not just a TV show' (ibid.).

This raises the question of the role of execs at Channel Four, and whether they had any impact on the programme content or meaning-making more generally than just their promotional material. In chapter seven I discuss the role of Channel Four's marketing team in relation to the 2012 Paralympics entire coverage.

As well as the marketing drive, other production researchers have highlighted brand awareness amongst public service broadcasters away from the field of televised sport. Brand influence can occur at channel level and also for types of content, and this is another factor in the meaning-making process established by both Buckingham (1987) and Born (2004). In his study of a BBC soap, Buckingham (1987) suggests that the BBC commissioned *Eastenders* in the first instance to get rid of the unwanted 'Auntie' image and reshape the brand of the BBC. Buckingham here establishes that the existence of the soap as well as its content creation are primarily there to serve a commercial agenda. Born (2004) later established, in more detail, through her ethnographic research, that the distinct channel brands within the organisation, namely BBC1 and BBC2, are conceptualised differently from each other by creatives, beyond the generic Auntie image, and that depictions and meanings are chosen to be delivered uniquely through each of them. It is worth considering, therefore, whether Channel Four also had a commercial or brand agenda for choosing to host the Paralympics, and whether this possible agenda also shaped the content. The channel idents during the Games included the strapline 'Channel Four - The Paralympics Channel', both in 2012 and then again in 2016 during the Rio coverage, signifying a brand awareness amongst the producers. I address questions of branding and channel identity in the industry chapter, four, and the marketing chapter, seven.

Typically, branding is seen as a tool of marketing but Banet-Weiser (2012) has argued that the social meanings and significance attached to brands extends their influence beyond normal commercial business models. Davis (2013), too, is concerned that the promotion of ideas and meanings surrounding more complex uses of brands is producing a promotional culture that it is harder to identify. He associates these promulgated ideas with influences over

representations and the identity shaping of 'others' (ibid., p.4). With this in mind, I examine the internal culture of the organisation throughout each of my chapters, in case meanings were shaped by changes taking place there.

Beyond sport, other television scholars have also shown that both creativity and commerce are influencing programme output in increasingly complex and messy ways, in order to secure an audience or reinforce brand loyalty (e.g. Grindstaff, 2002; Caldwell, 2008; Banks, 2009; Mayer, 2011). To what extent these are affected by the political economy, with its associated regulations and macro structures, can be examined from inside the production process. For a nuanced explanation of the distinction between various strands of critical political economy, political economy of cultural studies, political economy of communication and other variants, Hesmondhalgh outlines these with clarity (2013, pp.42 – 50) as does Mosco (1996, pp.22-69). Whilst these various ways of understanding power have full bodies of work behind them (e.g. Adorno and Horkheimer, 1979; Miege, 1989; Garnham, 1990; Mosco, 1996), I draw on their perspectives mainly to inform the scope and focus of my investigation, especially in relation to the public service broadcasting structures. In particular Golding and Murdoch (2000), as critical political economists of media production, have highlighted that there is an impact on the way meaning is made, derived from financial and organisational processes, that has 'concrete consequences' (ibid., p.84) for production. I utilise this perspective and explore concrete consequences of these processes on meanings about disability sport in chapter four.

Televised sport, as a highly commercialised product (Wenner, 2009), is potentially affected by all of the concerns highlighted by the scholars discussed above. Because sport is inclusive and relies on ability, or ableness, (Rowe, 2003) certain editorial aspects of the production process will necessarily be highlighted whilst creating acceptable sports representations for 'others' who are normally, by contrast, disabled, excluded and stigmatised. There are two particular ways of managing stigma that Goffman (1963) has theorised which are pertinent to this study and may provide insight for any of the potential editorial dilemmas that would occur with televising disability sport. Both theories

relate to settings of 'mixed contact' (p.14) where the abnormal person or group is in close proximity with 'normals'. With diversity programming this close contact happens both away from the cameras and also onscreen.

The first, 'disclosure etiquette' (ibid.) defines the conceal or reveal dilemma faced by those who are stigmatised, when amongst those who are not. Goffman asserts that moments of proximity produce the dilemma of whether to show or hide 'difference' in order to be treated normally. With normalisation as a goal of the Paralympic production, in chapter five I ask whether this dilemma emerges amongst the Channel Four producers representing the stigmatised group onscreen.

The second idea from Goffman surrounding stigma management relates to a specific anomaly in the 'othering' process. Whilst marginalised groups generally mix amongst their 'own', sometimes these groups can include an honorary 'wise' outsider (ibid., p.19). According to Goffman, these 'normal' people are included because of some connection they have with the 'othered' group and the net result is that the 'wise' one tends to *normalise* the stigmatised because they spend time around them and the others do not mind them being there (1967, pp.31-32). This has the effect of reframing meanings for those within that group and leaves open the question of whether the dynamic extends also to affecting television audiences should that Wise One dynamic be presented on the television screen. The Paralympic sports coverage appeared to include some examples of this anomaly in the chatty satire programme format, *The Last Leg,* and this question is addressed in chapter six. Drawing on Goffman, I also observe stigma management by the producers in other ways throughout all my empirical chapters.

## Conclusion

The three bodies of representation, disability and televised sports research, that I have outlined above, provide intersecting debates on representation of bodily difference and the framing of 'meanings'. In terms of production, the scholars suggest that representing others is a matter of power, the power to

reduce a person or people to a set of characteristics from which we may feel a *safe distance* from them. Additionally, disability scholars have established that production is carried out by the able-bodied and that representations of disability are negatively produced to benefit the nondisabled. Within sport, depictions of the 'other' are much more relatable. The debates indicate that athletes are set up as inspirational heroes whom we can identify with and root for. With all three of these processes occurring at once for the Paralympic Games the intersection both theoretically and in practice provides an important focus.

Starting from Hall's theoretical standpoint, that dominant and preferred meanings are encoded at the point of production (1980), it is clear that the producers, as encoders, would be valuable subjects for this research. Sporting narratives are constructed to inspire us *to be like* 'them', or at least identify with the athletes and the teams, they are not constructed to reinforce distance and difference. This is the opposite to how representations of disability have historically been encoded. Because the 2012 Paralympic Games was elevated, by its media coverage, to international mega-event status the collective national identity was a further frame through which new meanings could be negotiated and disability potentially brought into the mainstream.

As this chapter has shown, there is a considerable production risk in attempting to close the gap between 'us' and 'them', in relation to disability. Mixing disability, something we do not want, with sport, something that mainstream viewers do want, has inherent conflicts of meaning for the creation of suitable representations. The Paralympics presents this very challenge. I explore the production risks taken by Channel Four, and how the meanings were negotiated throughout the upcoming chapters. My study also investigates to what extent producers wanted to change the inherently negative positioning and how they were able to successfully market an unwanted attribute.

The purpose of examining representation at the point of media production is to gain a better understanding of the media producers' role in meaning-making and how meaning is made through a series of linked decisions. In order to examine how meanings are made and by whom, the importance of generating

knowledge at this point in the cultural production cycle (Du Gay et al., 1997) cannot be over emphasised. The above three bodies of literature that intersect with this study each elaborate on familiar media representations with some similarities but also with some different understandings of the meanings that are conveyed. Meanings are contextualised, then, in these different spaces and their combined framing of the athletes at the London 2012 Paralympic Games provides a rich opportunity to explore influencing factors on meaning-making.

The power of representation, in relation to cultural production and theories of social change, is that the media is able to 'effectively manage the understanding that the public has of the world' (Howe, 2008b, p.135) . Since 'us' and 'them' mean different things for the team supporting audience, the diversity voyeur and the charitable or patronising viewer, the role of those that frame these meanings needs to be scrutinised in some depth. There are unanswered questions that this review of the literature reveals in particular in relation to the representation of marginalised groups, with no research into the televisual media production setting of Paralympic sport yet undertaken. Disability theorists have suggested in no uncertain terms that the under-representation of disabled media producers in the workforce affects the meanings that appear onscreen. Was this the difference with the television coverage of London 2012?

Another question to ask is whether the 'superhuman' trope has merely been showcased yet again, albeit in this unusual home games context, for the Paralympians? Did the depictions *mean* the same as previous versions of the trope, and if not, why not, and how was that achieved? Was this down to the personnel involved at the production stages or did the dictats of the public service remit, and other structures, constrain or enable their creativity? Which underlying commercial pressures impinged on these decisions or was it just the way that the elite athletes were marketed? Equally, was the level of involvement, by disabled 'others' on the inside of production, somehow different than, for example, within the BBC for Beijing 2008 and previous Paralympic coverage? Shaped by the debates discussed in this chapter I address these empirical and theoretical queries in what follows.

# Chapter 3 Research Design and Methods

In the last chapter I explored the themes, debates and discussions connected with the way that 'others' have been portrayed in the media. These debates were about representations on television generally and also relating to disability in particular. I explored how representations of elite athletes, in the context of high-profile international sport, might especially change how we feel about 'others'. It was established that the media coverage of the London 2012 Paralympic Games, straddling the three research areas of representation, disability and sport, provides the potential for a fruitful case-study about how meanings are made. In this chapter, I describe how my case-study was put together, the methodological framework for that study, and which methods were used, drawing on other media production examples in the field to make the case for my research design.

## Making a case for studying media production

This study is informed by the methodological approach of production studies that have explored the construction of reality (e.g. Burns, 1977; Newcomb and Alley, 1983; Schlesinger, 1987; Born, 2004; Gitlin, 2005; Caldwell, 2008; Mann, 2009, etc.). As established in chapter two, the media coverage of the London 2012 Paralympics makes an ideal focus for the investigation of contemporary production and representation and, as a case-study, will complement the work of existing production scholars.

I will demonstrate why a case-study of the Paralympics media production, using semi-structured interviews, documentary analysis and a degree of ethnography, was chosen to investigate the production of meanings. I then describe the methods used, how data was collected, ethical considerations and analytical approach. I also give an account, taken from my field notes, of how my research techniques were gradually modified as the research progressed.

The main research questions were:
*Who decided to reframe meanings about disability?*

*Why and how did they do it, and what influenced them?*

Secondary research questions included:

*How far down and across the production process were any decisions communicated?*

*Were any of the producers actually disabled themselves, or had they been affected by disability in some other way?*

There is no other production study of this London 2012 Paralympic Games. In order to fulfil the determinate 'moments' that Hesmondhalgh (2013, p.60) says make up a complete analysis of any media product (see also Hall, 1973; Stevenson, 2003; Toynbee, 2008) textual analysis and audience research would also be needed. It is outside the scope of this research to examine what happened to the constructed meanings from transmission onwards. However, some of this audience and textual work for London 2012 has already been carried out by others (e.g. Jackson, 2013; Alexander, 2015, etc.), leaving an important and significant gap remaining, for an investigation into the media production itself.

*A case-study research design*

In order to answer the research questions, a case-study, in the form of an up-close, in-depth, and detailed examination, was chosen. For the investigation of media production, Mayer (2009) argues that a case-study where something unexpected occurs can be very fruitful in order to observe changes, or differences, that may or may not be recognised by those creating that change. It is a context which can reveal more about influences on production because something has happened. The unexpected occurred in 2012, on two levels: onscreen and within the viewing public. Dramatically different onscreen depictions were chosen to represent the Paralympic athletes for Channel Four's coverage, which I discuss in chapter five, and a cultural shift in public perceptions about disability was also recorded through commissioned audience research at the time (see Hodges, et al., 2015). This combined occurrence provided a clear indication that a particular new 'reality' must have been put

together during production – and so a case-study investigating 'how' seemed an important contribution to understanding both the representation of disability in particular and the broader question of the how the other is represented in general.

It seemed likely that there would have been significant determinant moments (Hall, 1997) within the production process, from decision to delivery, that either triggered or shaped the dramatic new representations of disabled athletes that made it onto the screen. In the light of the changed perceptions within the audience it also seemed an important moment to explore behind-the-scenes meaning-making of disability embedded within the Paralympics media production process. Establishing how changes to dominant modes of representation occurred could be challenging after the event. To manage this effectively, I drew on particular research approaches used by other scholars and I now explain each method used in the case-study, in turn, below.

*Interviews*

Although his focus was on newsrooms, Schlesinger's (1987) *Putting Reality Together* used a line of enquiry and associated methodology that map very well onto my own research objectives. His study included personnel interviews at every level across the spectrum of roles, in order to trace the process of meaning-making and illuminate *how* the 'reality' was put together at the BBC. In Schlesinger's case, this was within a single, large institution. Informed by Schlesinger's key study, I designed a research project which would enable me to trace meaning-making within the smaller public service broadcaster, Channel Four, and its suppliers.

Since the *Peacock Report* (1986), there has been a compulsory outsourcing to independent production companies, even obligatory for the BBC (see Born, 2004), which has made these kinds of studies now more challenging. Although they are still achievable, the workforce is more scattered. Scholars have argued that this fragmentation also makes studies following the creative process all the more necessary (see for example, Hesmondhalgh, 2013) and is why, despite

the challenges, I decided to conduct my research in a similar way to Schlesinger. I needed, likewise, to explore *how* and *why* onscreen 'reality' was put together, in the way that it was, in this case, for the London 2012 Paralympic Games. I aimed to interview the key executives and producers, scattered across a range of organisations, from the full spectrum of roles who contributed to the making of meanings about disability .

As shown in the previous chapter, ideas about corporate ideology and policy decisions are regularly investigated in some production contexts (see Garnham, (2005), for example) but not yet in relation to disability or sport. At the industry and network levels, methodologically, Burns (1977) and Gitlin (2005) relied very heavily on producer interviews, whilst others, including D'Acci, (1994) and Levine (2001) have looked at audience response as well, but still used producer interviews to establish how particular circumstances impinged on production decisions.

Interviews are often used across a range of roles, sometimes separating above-the-line executive roles (see previous chapter) from below-the-line craft roles (Banks, 2009; Mann, 2009), and sometimes mixing them (Billings, 2008). The higher-level interviews are often classed as 'elite' interviews. In my study of the London 2012 Paralympics coverage, most of the interviews would fall into this category. Dexter (2006) cautions that elite interviewees are often willing to provide information because they feel they are the experts on the matter, and can educate the interviewer whilst expounding on their particular area of expertise. This power relationship presents challenges within the dynamics of the interview, which I attend to in my research process through adapted question phrasing, development of rapport within the interviews and later critical analysis. Dexter does point out that their willingness, however, can make it easier to gain access, and I found this to be true.

In this study I opted for face-to-face interviews because the indirect alternatives seem to be weaker. As Mayer (2009) points out, conducting interviews over the phone, or via email and online messaging, creates 'considerable distance between what subjects say about themselves and what they do' (p.19). I felt the

emphasis for my project needed to be face-to-face interviews, therefore, in order to provide evidence of lived realities on a par with the investigations by, for example, Schlesinger (1987), Born (2004), Gitlin (2005), Billings (2008) and Banks (2009).

*Documentary analysis*

This research seeks to make sense of the decision-making processes including how other influencing factors impacted on production and the study's aims were informed by Schlesinger's (1987) primary questions. Within the context of news, he asked 'how is news actually put together and *how* does the way in which it is assembled result in a specific version of reality?' (1987, p.11). In addition to interviews he also followed his enquiry by investigating the various departments and the information that travelled across the correspondents' desks. Schlesinger argued that 'reality' was created as a series of representations. This suggested to me that exploring the representations, through interviews with producers, but also along with any associated documentation, could therefore work successfully in relation to the Paralympics coverage, even though the event was already in the past.

It was important to realise, as Schlesinger (1987) had, that the correspondence that passed across desks would certainly have had an important influence, or at least a bearing, on creative agency. This correspondence may also have been significant in relation to key decisions, and should be collected as part of the research. The current equivalent would now include, of course, internal emails, as well as recollected significant phone calls and other forms of interpersonal communication. Evidence of each of these influences clearly would need to be acquired and I drew on this insight throughout my collection process.

I was also informed by Born's (2004) *Uncertain Vision* of the BBC in which she included this method to understand the public broadcasting institution. From that combined research she derives insight into decisions that were made in a variety of capacities. Viewing documents, reading letters, memos and other

internal and external literature helped Born piece together a picture of what went on behind the scenes at the BBC, towards the end of the John Birt era. She also used documentation to inform her interview questions, a method which I incorporated into my own research design. I sought to include these additional elements of her successful methodology as closely as possible, without being embedded ethnographically for the long term, clearly not useful after the event and not possible across multiple sites.

Combined with an analysis of associated internal communication, Born held in-depth interviews with top BBC personnel, managers, producers and technicians as well as chatting informally in corridors. Her study consequently reveals *what kinds* of decisions were made to produce what is seen on the screens, as well as providing insight into how and why it was done. It is exactly these sort of insights that I sought, adopting the same combination of these methods, of personal interviews together with relevant documentary collection.

*Ethnography*

Many production studies also have a spirit of ethnography, ranging from simply being allowed into meetings (e.g. D'Acci, 1994; Born, 2004; Banks, 2009) to actually taking on a job within the production (e.g. Dornfeld, 1998; Zoellner, 2009a). Whilst embedding myself in the relevant production process would clearly have been impossible after the event of the London 2012 Paralympics, it is evident that some form of participant observation has been extremely illuminating in these other studies. I needed, therefore, to look out for opportunities to engage with the producers beyond just the interviews if at all possible, to better understand the context of their working decisions. Caldwell (2008) argues that for scholars to fully understand the production of culture, it is essential to explore the culture of production. Corridor conversations and watercooler moments, at the very least then, would add value to the project.

By borrowing from these other models I therefore concluded that a combination of interviews, documentary analysis and some form of participatory

observation, if at all possible, would be the best methods to use. In this next section I explain how I used them.

## An account of my methods

I undertook an initial review of existing literature, press coverage and publically available documents, as Born (2004) had done, and then, informed by this review, conducted in-depth elite interviews, across a range of executive and production roles, with twenty three participants. I then extended the research with an analysis of the internal documentation that my contributors made available following our interviews. The most significant of these, in the shaping of programme tone and content, were the *Bid to Broadcast* (C4TVC, 2009) pitching document, including the Channel Four agenda for producing the media coverage, and the *Mental 4 the Paralympics* (C4, 2011) staff training presentations. I have attached permitted sample pages of these in Appendices B and C. The in-house presentations were used to shaped attitudes about disability, within the media organisation, prior to production, and before framing new meanings for the general public. I discuss these mainly in chapters five and six.

*Interview list*

Having worked in the industry, and also drawing on the insights of existing scholars, I knew that I needed to interview personnel in craft roles, in addition to executive ones, since below-the-line creatives also have the power to create and shape meanings. As Casey (2002) asserts there are specialists and technicians who also have a degree of autonomy in the creative process (p.177), as well as those who contribute to meaning-making via established practices, and these meaning-makers need to be included in the research. I therefore drew up a route map across the organisations of who might be the key players and developed my list, as I gradually came to understand who had been important. I conducted twenty three recorded interviews, across a full range of significant roles, on average each one lasting about an hour, mainly between September 2014 and July 2015. I also engaged in plentiful casual or

corridor conversations, to pick up the flavour of the corporate culture and the context of some of the formal moments. Many of the personnel no longer worked for Channel Four, so I interviewed them either at ITV Studios, where the top executives had gone, or in neutral surroundings mostly in London.

I interviewed my contributors one at a time, in the capacity of their role at the time of their involvement with Channel Four, and the full list of names is included as Appendix A. The roles that they had within Channel Four (C4) at the time of their involvement were as follows:

- Head of Television,
- Commercial Lawyer,
- Paralympics Project Leader,
- Head of Programming,
- C4 and 4Creative Business Director,
- Chief Network Director and 4Creative Film Director,
- Board Director and Head of Communications,
- Head of Marketing,
- 4Creative Video Editor,
- Programme Controller/Editor,
- 4Creative Executive Producer (x 2)
- Disability Executive.

From outside the organisation I also interviewed:

- TV Presenter, Clare Balding,
- TV Presenter/ex-Paralympian, Ade Adepitan,
- LEXI graphics originator/ex-Paralympic Gold Medallist, Giles Long, MBE
- A freelance Camerawoman
- Head of Communications, International Paralympics Committee (IPC)
- IPC Digital Marketing Manager
- Head of Sport, Sunset and Vine
- Media and Communications Officer, British Paralympic Association (BPA)
- *The Last Leg* TV Presenter and Sports Journalist, Alex Brooker
- Scriptwriter for *The Last Leg*, Tom Craine

I also had a half-hour telephone interview, for a contextual overview of Channel Four, with:

- Founding CEO of Channel Four, Sir Jeremy Isaacs

A brief email exchange, whilst on her flight to the Rio 2016 Paralympics, with:

- Channel Four Head of Television, Jay Hunt (Lygo's successor)

Finally, in passing, back stage, I later had a brief but useful discussion with:

- *The Last Leg* TV show host, Adam Hills

*Semi-structured interviews*

Wanting to retain participants' freedom to recall what they felt was important, I chose to take advantage of semi-structured one-to-one interviews rather than asking fixed questions, or conducting group interviews or focus groups. This is because the structure of the more flexible one to-one interview allows departures from basic questions to follow additional points that the participants feel are significant from a personal perspective. Whilst focus groups can do this too, sometimes participants agree with someone else, or a particular perspective gathers momentum. I needed to piece together individual pieces of the production jigsaw rather than collective ones. I also wanted accounts to corroborate one another rather than be jointly agreed in a group setting. With the one-to-one interview, Bryman (2012) highlights how important it is that the interviewer does not talk too little or too much (p.475), in order to maintain the topic on the right lines whilst keeping the interviewee actively involved. Drawing on classic studies, such as Burns' (1977), Schlesinger's (1987), Born's (2004) and Gitlin's (2005), and more recent work by Billings (2008), Caldwell (2008), Banks (2009) and Klein (2009), I knew that in-depth interviews were the best way to find out underlying causes and triggers for why things had changed. In this case, without knowing what the contributor would want or need to say, a semi-structured approach seemed most suitable. This is where:

> The interviewer usually has a written list of questions to ask the informant but tries, to the extent possible, to maintain the casual quality found in unstructured interviews. (Berger, 2013, p.160)

Berger's advice about keeping it casual also taught me to avoid looking at my notes to ask questions, in order to keep the participants in the flow of what they were saying, whilst still steering them gently to stay on topic.

*Questions*

I began by asking about their role and how they 'fitted into the jigsaw', wanting to find out about their sense of personal power within the work context. I noticed that the operation of executive power was possibly overstated by some, as the creatives revelled in how they were able to shape the stories they were given, at the programme level. Some roles that really did change meanings were understated by others. In reality, there were plenty of further dynamics at play, for example, between stakeholders and in-house advisors. These dynamics emerged in discussions initiated by the question about who had what role. Power struggles were made apparent, importantly for the rigour of this study, without my asking directly about them. Over time a bigger picture emerged as if it really were a jigsaw, and I piece the empirical data together, after summarising the core arguments, as part of my conclusion in chapter eight.

Secondly, I asked about any challenges my participants experienced, and about what went well. By asking about 'their challenges' I was researching structural resistances whether organisational, logistical or conceptual. For example, some had challenges with editorial roles, or camera placements or changing their own feelings towards disability. By asking about 'what went well' most of their replies told me about their individual and collective agency, particularly in relation to achieving their desired outcomes as a team. Sometimes the reverse was true and *other people* constituted 'the challenge' with the government remit as a structural facilitator for things to go well, giving them the green light to take risks with their creativity. I found this question broad enough to open up the main discussion with each of my participants. It was also interesting to note which they preferred to tell me about first.

For me, it is important that interviews are a collaboration between both parties. They should always be more than 'apt questions and replies' (Gubrium and Holstein, 2003, p.141). Ideally, ideas should be 'actively and communicatively assembled in the interview encounter' (ibid.). This type of collaboration is a co-construction in a different way than data collection of other types, such as surveys, questionnaires or fixed questions, which are less flexible. These other

data collection methods could not generate answers to my particular research questions, and I sought to avoid too rigid an adherence to highly structured interview questions, in case participants wanted to reveal things that I had not anticipated.

I phrased my final question as 'in a nutshell, what did your involvement in the Paralympics mean to you?' The response often included either an aside about their own agenda, ranging from 'I just wanted to do my job properly' (no disability agenda) to 'well of course my brother has…[a disability]' or 'I did a lot of work with cerebral palsy with mum after school'. This open-ended opportunity to disclose freely also established where previous personal exposure had been tapped into, or by virtue of its inclusion in their retrospective summary, at the very least been used to make sense of their involvement afterwards.

I sought to research 'the social actor's position' (Blaikie, 2010, p.51) and not have participants thinking about my perspective, answering pre-framed questions or simply 'helping' with my research. This would have placed disability as everybody's central focus and not generated the kind of knowledge needed to really interrogate individual agendas, motivations and the other influencing factors that actually affected production. I needed to establish how and why the new representations were really being made, by keeping my agenda out of the way of the interviews as much as possible, at least with the wording of the questions. By doing so I found it was indeed the voluntarily recalled details that provided extremely rich material from which I was able to piece together the dynamics of the production jigsaw.

*Rapport*

One of the techniques I used to level the above-the-line and below-the-line interviews, to get to the main discussion quickly, and to help the producers recollect the significant moments, was to make sure I developed a rapport with each of my contributors. This is clearly easier to do face-to-face than over the phone, Skype, or email. I have learnt from my experience, reviewing hours of

documentary film interviews, that it is only when there is a genuine rapport between the interviewee and the interviewer that useful or interesting insights freely emerge. My goal was always to meet the person first, before launching in to the subject matter, in order to achieve this level of conversation.

Skeggs, et al. (2008) have reflected on the collaborative technique and explain what happens with the relative positioning of the interviewer and the interviewee dynamic:

> We three researchers carried out the research each with our own different volumes and compositions of capital, 'able to draw upon different resources to establish rapport with our participants, thereby impacting upon the production of data'. (ibid., p.9)

I used my capital as an industry practitioner to help my contributors speak about their roles in their own language, referring to dilemmas and struggles using frames of reference that we both shared. Interviewing participants, by developing this rapport and then listening, enabled me in particular to gather insights into how the meanings of disability were made. Building a rapport first, over the coffee machine or in the corridors, established an openness and easy conversational style which then led to an enhanced 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973, pp.5-6; 9-10) through the informality and openness that we jointly experienced. The risk, however, in conducting interviews in this collaborative way, I felt, was of producing steered outcomes. Nevertheless, as Skeggs et al. (2008) point out, having an impact on the data is inevitable, to some degree.

I soon discovered that the level of rapport affects the production of data considerably. Not having enough rapport affects the quality of participant contributions negatively. I had one such occasion, at the BT Sport studios, in the Olympic Park, where the bustling context and the loud noise of a temporary air conditioning fan unit made engaging and friendly conversation rather difficult. By contrast in another setting, having too much rapport quickly introduced a researcher effect that I realised I needed to modify. I noticed that either my own body language was reinforcing certain subject areas or that I was inadvertently encouraging a particular thread by being overly enthusiastic with what the contributor had to say about certain things. As Skeggs et al.

(2008) have noted, 'interviews are performative; they do not simply "capture" or reveal the world out there' (p.20).

Notwithstanding this characteristic of interviews, I found I could reduce my own performance somewhat. For example, if the contributor was to say something that was tricky and I responded with 'oh no!', and shuffled in my seat, this could set off a longer detailed description than if I had remained neutral. Equally, if I visibly reacted to something I was clearly clocking as important, it made them more guarded. I was thereby at risk of steering their perspective, or encouraging an out of proportion response compared to what they may have chosen to contribute otherwise. This researcher effect cannot be avoided, but could be reduced I found.

I had initially adopted Blaikie's 'empathetic observer' (2010, p.51) stance which has this potential liability built in to it. From here, I repositioned myself closer to the 'faithful reporter' position (ibid.) by encouraging the research participants to 'speak for themselves' (ibid.), with a neutral listening ear, rather than an empathetic one. Adapting to this faithful, but hopefully more neutral, reporter stance was a modification that helped to keep my distance, and my material more objective. This was especially important as I was researching within my own field and could personally identify with the producers' challenges and triumphs. There was a delicate balance to be struck between rapport and empathy. Maintaining this balance helped me, from then on, to maintain a consistent approach and secure the rigour of my interviews. From this neutral but investigative position I found that contributors felt safe to speak freely, and were also then happy to forward on internal documents that they had authored or been privy to.

*Documentary collection*

I used documentary analysis both before my interviews and afterwards. Initially, as background research, I utilised public documents, press cuttings, industry journals and corporate publications to map out, as much as possible, what could be known about the media coverage from the outside. Then, in order to

prepare and make the interviews more forthcoming, I also briefed myself on what my prospective participants had said in public or in print so far. This really helped cut through the PR-type openings that some of my elite contributors, perhaps out of habit, tried to begin our meetings with. Once they realised I had read their speeches, we were able to dig below the surface more quickly, and they were happy to contribute.

Whilst I was conducting interviews, when references were made to significant material, or communications, I asked for copies. In D'Acci's (1994) study of *Cagney and Lacey*, she gained access to the set, production meetings, files, publicity firms, executive and audience letters and found out why meanings had been changed in a nuanced way about femininity. Informed by this approach, I knew that I needed to focus on associated material too to understand what had happened at the time when they were constructing meanings, and not just rely on recollections. I was able to track down more detail about why and how meanings about disability were changed for the London 2012 coverage from several associated documents. Meanings were changed from embarrassingly negative to 'cool' for reasons that I was able to investigate through analysis of documents that were written at the inception of the project in 2009 and also yearly, then directly before the coverage began.

Following my interviews, I was provided with the all the relevant documentation that my participants had mentioned and considered significant. I was given a copy of the Channel Four *Bid To Broadcast* (C4TVC, 2009), that they used to pitch for the broadcasting rights of the Paralympic Games, in which motivations, agendas and disability framings are all set out. Sections of it appear in the following chapters and I include excerpts in Appendix C. I was also sent a copy of the *Mental 4 the Paralympics* PowerPoint presentation, attached as Appendix B, that was key to the shaping of disability meanings and disseminated to all staff at the away days prior to the Games. The contents of these communications are discussed in chapter five, six and seven, and, I argue, directly feed into the shaping of disability representations.

In addition to the previously mentioned items, I was also sent a copy of some training on 'how to do the Paralympics media coverage' that Channel Four wrote for a Dutch TV company. Their advising of another independent public service broadcaster, on how to represent diversity and disability, illuminated some of the unspoken and tacitly understood features of their editorial work that were not revealed in conversation. By looking at related documents, D'Acci (1994) had discovered behind-the-scenes production conflicts between those who preferred the meanings as they were and those who felt they needed to change them. In a similar vein, I discovered complex negotiations and directives linking London 2012's new meanings to channel survival and commerce as well as social responsibility. The written documentary evidence I received was extremely useful in understanding some of these nuances, alongside the interviews with producers.

*Ethnographic influence*

My fieldwork was loosely ethnographic in the sense that it involved a form of immersion and time spent with informants. As it was a largely retrospective study there was no intrinsic value in planning to embed myself anywhere for any length of time – I couldn't watch meaning-making as it happened. However, although I was not an embedded observer (see Denzin and Lincoln, 2005) for the preparation of the London 2012 coverage, I was invited to social occasions that allowed me to build relationships with key informants. Influenced by other accounts (e.g. Born, 2004) of the value of participant observation (see also Mayer, 2009), I attended, for example, the Channel Four Leaving Do for the Disability Executive.

Out of that party I was offered some time with Ade Adepitan, an ex-Paralympian TV presenter, which meant travelling with him in his modified car, across London between gyms. Caldwell (2008) suggests that, given the changing nature of production work, it is even more fundamental to examine the local cultures of these groups of workers with their changing habits and practices. I certainly picked up the sense of urgency and the need to multi-task from his way of operating. Travelling with Adepitan allowed me insight which

directly impacted my understanding of the TV representations themselves. I devote a section to this in chapter five. Being an 'empathetic observer' (Blaikie, 2010) involves 'putting yourself in the participant's shoes' to understand more about their situation (p.51). More time with, and access to, my contributors revealed more personal stories as well.

Participant observation was not something I had initially planned to do, but I realised that having at least 20 interviews to conduct would constitute a considerable amount of time in and around Channel Four and their associated production houses even without extra invitations. I made field notes to help myself build a picture of their environment and also to maintain a degree of detachment. Spending time in an environment that any researcher has an interest in, presents the common risk of losing a detached perspective (see Bryman 2012, p.445; Hobbs, 1988). This I sought to avoid. I did need to join in where possible, however, in particular to gain access to everyone within the production network.

*Snowball sampling for access*

One of the key challenges with production studies is the difficulty of gaining suitable access to production personnel (Lindlof, 1995; Bryman, 2012). The more powerful the person is, the higher the hurdle is thought to be, to reach them (see Ortner, 2009; Caldwell, 2008). Other scholars have found that executives are, in fact, sometimes willing to provide access to researchers, in order to emphasise their success and hide their failures (see Mayer et al., 2009; Banks et al., 2016). In my view, designing a project based on good access was worth the risk; I discuss the challenge of speaking to elites in the next section.

My previous work in the industry proved to be an advantage in gaining good access. I did not anticipate being blocked by anybody and indeed I was not. I gained access to all the key decision-makers, as well as below-the-line crews and other assistants. My own practitioner experience, both in the public service broadcasting arena and with a commercial broadcaster, meant that I also had

the advantage of knowing who to speak to first in order to gain the more difficult access. I calculated that starting in the middle and working outwards would help build a momentum of producer interest, which it did. Indeed, in practice, participants opened doors for me to speak with personnel whom I may not have been able to reach from the outside, without their internal recommendation and referrals.

Mann (2009) writes that 'too many production studies are looked at from the top down' (p.103). I made a point of not starting at the top, also because it made sense to start with the interviewees who were easier to access. I chose to search for pockets of power amongst the production roles, rather than assuming hierarchical layers were holding complete sway, in order to obtain a more rounded picture of what actually happened. This meant that I needed to 'snowball' sample, (Bryman, 2012, p.427) with help from my initial participants, based on their suggestions of who had influenced *them*. In this way, having started with my 'purposive' sample (ibid.), I was able to follow the networks of power and relationship to build up a clear picture of how the organisation and their subsidiaries had worked together (or not). This process also enabled and opened up access throughout that set of companies.

It was relatively easy to gain access to some of the roles, as some of the personnel did not have gatekeepers. Burns (1977) noted in his investigation into the BBC, that where there are several specialist centres of control the main organisation is by definition less autocratic. These more accessible producers also had a key role to play in the Paralympics coverage as I knew they would. Typically, when I worked as a Video Editor at the BBC myself, the dubbing mixers, for example, who nuanced the mood and meanings of the sound tracks, were on a separate floor to the editorial staff and were not necessarily overseen by 'a producer' or an executive at any stage. They made creative decisions of their own. The plurality of decision-making and constructions of meaning exists today on an even greater level as production processes are outsourced, not just to different floors, but different locations and separate companies (Born, 2004). Discovering how the lines of communication and power travel across these more recent and more challenging boundaries also

contributes understanding to how the current television environment works, providing insights for other television studies beyond understanding disability representations in particular. In this case I based my enquiries on where, when and why the 'unexpected' (Mayer, 2009. P.17) had occurred across the range of roles that were accessed.

*Elites*

Having got access to contributors, the challenge of what they might spin to suit their own agenda (see Berger, 2013, p.149) became a central issue. Many of my participants were practiced at handling press and media relationships and this made it more difficult to focus the subject directly onto meaning-making decisions and circumstances. As Lindlof (1995) has pointed out, public service broadcasters are susceptible to handling the flow of information themselves. Because part of their role is to 'inform the public', Lindlof advises they naturally have this propensity, even in non-broadcast settings. My stance, for what I anticipated might be 'carefully delivered' pieces of information was to acknowledge the value of the informant's perspective but also challenge contradictory or overly simplistic explanations, including 'spin'. Things said for public consumption are often different from what might be revealed 'off the record' or in private (see Mann, 2009), and I recognised the need for building rapport, as discussed above, to encourage genuinely reflective moments. I also made sure I had done my background research so that they did not feel I was wasting their time. It was more difficult for them to repeat what they had said to the press if I had already heard it before, and most of my contributors valued the opportunity to pass on a personal perspective, even if their role was marketing or communications.

There was a definite benefit to taking a retrospective look at what happened two years earlier with the higher profile executives, as, in some cases, this produced a safer position by their own admission, for 'more honest' hindsight. The further away in time that my meetings took place, the more the material was reduced into either positive 'didn't-we-do-well' glorious hindsight or 'it-took-me-three-years-to-recover' recollections of arduous struggle at every turn. More

than one participant with the latter view, felt they could now make their contribution, particularly because they no longer worked for the organisation. There also seemed to be a sense of relief for some, to be able to finally tell someone, after the 'media circus', as some of the team referred to it, had moved on. There was as much value then, in the later interviews, which had crystallised recollections, as there was in the earlier ones where the memories were fresh. This is because all seemed to point at the most *significant* moments that they felt they were affected by.

As many have noted, the challenge with elite interviewees is that, due to their busy schedules, you inevitably have to meet the elites in their own surroundings, where the building architecture and office layouts can impose a hierarchical power structure with intimidating consequences (Bryman, 2012). For example, there was a long corridor to the Head of Television's office at ITV Studios that led to a space where 'meeting the person', rather than their powerful role within the company, was much harder. I really noticed the powerful spaces between guest chair placement suitably far away from important desks more evidently at ITV than Channel Four. The contrasts in culture were interesting and I was only able to get a feel for the specific 'Channel Fourness', described by my interviewees, because I chose face-to-face meetings, instead of Skype or phone calls, with the two top executives, both of whom had moved on to the other company. The comparison was a useful one. Participants spoke of the team effort, and an almost 'family' feel at Channel Four and their surroundings were tangibly different, reflecting a collegiate feel, compared to the bigger studios and offices I went to. These contrasting details were an important part of my observations in order to make sense of the relative power of certain roles and any sense of internal corporate culture that may have affected meaning-making. I address these aspects where they emerged in the upcoming chapters.

## Ethics, consent and data protection

Having built a rapport and conducted interviews, I needed to think carefully, in particular, about protecting the views of my participants. The key ethical issues

for the project centred around whether my contributors should be anonymised or not. For all my research participants it was necessary to be specific about their role. The difficulty with defining participants only by their role is that, for the Paralympics coverage, all of their names are in the public domain, or at least traceable. The 'crediting' of the interviewee, therefore, may be acceptable on ethical grounds in the sphere of 'elite' interviews, as demonstrated by D'Acci (1994), Darlow (2004) and many others, but the publicising of names still requires interviewee permission and may also inevitably produce performance challenges. Burns (1977), Hobson (1982) and Born (2004) all reflect on whether to identify speakers, as their particular roles also added value and credence to what was being said. I needed to do the same with my study and I received informed consent from all my participants, with only two of them wishing to remain anonymous. As it turned out, in both their cases, this was achievable because their roles were duplicated and so not traceable.

This study only involved interviews with adult media professionals. The research was explained to them and guidelines, about being allowed to withdraw their contribution from the project, explained. My research design received ethical approval as there was no risk of harm to my contributors and my data collection and storage has been encrypted throughout. I had a moral responsibility not to misuse my data and my participants felt protected by the University of Leeds ethics code to which I assured them I was bound. This mattered because many were used to talking to journalists and said they needed to be cautious in some settings.

It was also an important part of my study that my open questions were free of any expectations to discuss disability. Significantly, although many of them did, some of them did not. I was able to establish the important personal connections with disability that most participants had, by not asking directly. This also made a topic of potential vulnerability a safe and voluntary one.

*Audio recording*

During the recorded interviews we both felt secure in the knowledge that I was bound by the Ethics Code of Leeds University. This helped to encourage frank and open discussion. The actual recording of these discussions, however, could potentially have interfered with the free flow of conversation. Mason (2002) recommends that 'where you place your microphone' (p.98) should depend on what it is you want to find out. I found that a fairly discreet but clearly visible position helped achieve, non-defensive, rich data. Also, with my audio recorder still running, I learnt to close my notepad and put down my pen a few minutes before I planned to leave, as this relaxed the participants and the final parting shots were frequently the most revealing. Some of the contributors would suddenly, at this point, say something about someone else who had made their job easier or harder, or put the whole project in a nutshell from their personal perspective. These parting shots gave great insights into the exact role of the individual within the production and enabled me to piece together a jigsaw of how the pockets of power fitted together within the organisation. For some reason stopping taking notes, even though the interview was still in progress, relaxed some participants and released extra stories, as if getting used to a red audio recording light was easier than feeling 'evidence is being collected' in a potentially judgemental way with a pen and paper. My participants either said they had enjoyed their interviews or at least offered to help me out again if I needed further information. The audio recordings did not seem to impinge on this relaxed and informal gathering of my material in the way that perhaps note-taking might have done.

## Analysis

My analytical approach was thematic, thus my analysis included the finding and coding of evolving themes, to make sense of the literature, documents, and interviews. At first I pieced together information from the interview transcripts because, as Whannel (1992) says, 'it is important to hold open the distinction between what formally happens and what actually happens' (p.25). I then

explored contradictions and conflictions relating to material already in the press.

I drew out specific themes that emerged, such as 'focusing on the sport, not the disability' and other constructions as they were articulated. Repeating tropes were identified. Patterns emerging from interview transcripts and relevant documents were then coded, to piece together a framework for what meanings were actually made, or reflected, and how. I separated and analysed a variety of constructions and interpretations in order to make sense of the process; highlighting influencing structural factors, individual and collective agency; random or considered creativity; and commercial pressures.

I reviewed the anecdotal material from my semi-structured interviews and evaluated it for 'plausibility' (see Hall 1973, p.124). As I have already noted, a benefit of time passing was that recollections crystallised, leaving perhaps the most important ones still in the memory. A good example of this being 'I don't remember much but I do remember it [the decision to do the Paralympics] had something to do with *Big Brother*' (Lygo, Head of Television, *Interview*). A downside was, for example, where, as more than one participant explained, memory had drawn a veil over the more difficult aspects. The Project Leader, responsible for the delivery of all the television coverage, played a vital role and I persisted until I was able to get hold of her over Skype in Australia. In her case, the distance elicited more detail rather than less, prefaced with 'it is so long ago now, and I don't work there anymore, so I guess I'll be offending a few people here, but I distinctly remember [this challenge]…and [these agendas]' (Poulton, Project Leader, *Interview*). One of the Production Managers who had also moved on to pastures new, said 'well I wouldn't have said this at the time, but…' These later conversations gave me just as much to analyse in the sense that the significant elements were still included, and I deemed them equally valid even though they were later recollections.

Most of the other production studies that refer to representations and meaning-making have been conducted within newsrooms (see Klinenberg, 2005; Anderson, 2011), or entertainment settings (see Hobson, 1982; 2003) rather

than within sport. Production studies, of any type, investigate *where* the control over meaning is exercised, and there have been various methods mooted for doing this. Newcomb and Lotz (2002) suggest five levels of possible analysis (p.26) of which I have focused on the last two. These are 'national and international political economy and policy, specific industrial contexts, particular organisations, individual productions and individual agents' (ibid). Rather than taking a separate political economic stance, as I outlined in the previous chapter, it was more relevant to my research questions to find out about how the specific industrial contexts *impinged* upon the producers for this individual production, and how they felt the organisational and policy contexts affected their creativity and freedom to work. In order to help find out *where* control lay I analysed my data broadly at the level of the production and the individual agents. Since I was looking for themes relating to the construction of meaning, my study was based on personal and lived experiences. It was important that I was able to combine the more macro level institutional perspectives with the micro day-to-day experience of the producers and I coded the ensuing fairly complex themes using a qualitative software tool.

*Coding in Nvivo*

I loaded the transcripts of my *semi-structured interviews* and *internal documentation* into Nvivo,. The two ideas, of constraint and enablement, polarised by Giddens (1980), were the initial codes that I adopted before other themes emerged. Kvale (1996) in his discussion of ten successful interviewing criteria suggests that statements should be clarified during the interview so that unintended meanings are not imposed at a later stage. As I went through my transcripts I coded the meanings I had either felt, or had clarified in the interviews, immediately after I got back. These included recording a sense of 'resistance', 'freedom', 'autonomy' and 'risk'. I then cross referenced these in nodes of 'structure' 'agency' 'creativity' and commerce', to help establish how my envisaged themes were developing, and coded sections according to the programme genres, different teams, and outsourced organisations.

In order to find out what was serendipitous and what might be a pattern of practice, belief or structure, I coded extra nodes for emerging influences and/or repeated similar types of comments, such as 'show the stumps' or 'perfect storm'. I also created a category for 'anomalies' in terms of unexpected comments or ideas and 'concrete consequences' of internal and external factors. Finally I coded the individual pieces of the jigsaw, the identities and roles of the contributors themselves, for the reasons set out below.

In terms of individual influence, Mills (2000) writes that 'from the standpoint of power it is easier to pick out those who count from those who rule' (p.204). This makes it important to accept that anybody might become important during the analysis stage of the study and not necessarily just because of their decision-making powers. The snowball sampling, that I had used to gain access, also led me to those who had 'counted' in the eyes of other members of the production teams. I recorded everybody's names as nodes, and coded comments about individuals to evaluate the pockets of power as well as how power was being hierarchically exercised. Hesmondhalgh (2013) and Klein (2009) have both suggested that there are personal as well as organisational influences affecting decisions that creatives do or do not make, and I needed a way to track these influences, in order to ask what effect they had on whom.

Through my analysis, for example, I discovered that Alison Walsh, the Disability Executive, was mentioned by everybody from Kevin Lygo to the Video Editor of the *Meet The Superhumans* trailer in Channel Four's subsidiary advertising agency, 4Creative. Nobody left her out of their account which suggests her influence, as an appointed Disability Executive with the mandate 'to put disability on the agenda on every occasion' was also far-reaching, and universally experienced. It is much more common for diverse voices to have limited reach and very little influence within media organisations (Barnes and Mercer, 2003; Carpentier, 2011). My coding and analysis highlighted this organisational and cultural difference for London 2012 very clearly.

As the story unfolded, I found the coded pieces could be put together using a variety of enquiries. In this way, what are considered 'complex and messy'

production and organisational processes (see Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995; Couldry, 2003; Hesmondhalgh, 2013) could be untangled. For example, in this case of the Disability Executive, using the nodes I have articulated above, it was possible to establish that her role had provided guidance and 'freedom', amongst the creative teams. In the sports team her role had induced 'resistance' and amongst business executives she was noted as 'risky' and 'exasperating'. I was able to build up a picture of how the organisation and the teams worked together just from these analytical enquiries.

Qualitative data, of course, cannot be manipulated in concrete ways, as quantitative data can (Jensen, 2013, p.284), but for informing relational, institutional and theoretical perspectives I found it extremely valuable and insightful. Whilst many of my queries did not provide fruitful conceptualisations in pursuit of any social or media theory, the facilities of this digital coding tool enabled me to build up a picture of the dynamics that did connect with my research enquiry. I was also able to log, as part of my secondary questions, who had been affected by disability before the Paralympics, during the media coverage, or never at any point, and how far directives and individual influences reached. I made nodes for each chapter, which evolved and regrouped as I interpreted my findings and synthesised the analyses over time. Being able to update thoughts and themes as they evolved was a very useful feature of this coding and analysis phase, made simpler with the Nvivo tool. The flexibility of the digitised database enabled nuanced distinctions in argument as well as clarifying clear stories relating to the foundational structure/agency and creativity/commerce debates.

The main themes that emerged through my analysis relate to organisational and regulatory structures, the reframing of meanings to provide parity for the Olympians, the nuanced adaption of existing programme genres and formats and the presence of a powerfully branded marketing strategy to elevate the profile of the Paralympians. The empirical work is explored thematically and I now turn to the first of these, the structural and regulatory influences on meaning-making.

# Chapter 4 Enabling Risky Representations: the Industrial Context

Channel Four is renowned for its risk-taking and was designed to be that way from its inception (Burns, 1977; Brown, 2007). The facility for taking risk was uniquely built into the corporation's fundamental structures (see Harvey, 2003; Darlow, 2008) and in this chapter I argue that this industrial context particularly enabled risky representations. Drawing on interviews and documentary analysis, I will show how risk-taking was facilitated by Channel Four's organisational, financial and regulatory structures and how this taking of risk enabled ground-breaking onscreen representations of disability. Born (2004) asks of the BBC, 'what kind of an organisation is [it], and why does it matter?' (p.67). Her answer applies equally well to Channel Four that, 'above all, it matters because it affects what is made' (ibid.). Both organisations are public service broadcasters, and both have a parliamentary remit that regulates the quality and content of their programming. In Channel Four's case this regulation includes taking risks both with programmes and also with the workforce.

In addition to the public service remit I found two other external and internal structures that also affected what was made and this chapter is devoted to examining and analysing the impact of all three on the 2012 Paralympics media coverage. Critical political economy theorists, particularly of media production and communication (e.g. Mosco, 1996; Garnham, 2005; Wasco et al., 2011; Dwyer, 2015; Murdock and Golding, 2016) have made a recent call for research to analyse the way meaning is made, incorporating economic dynamics but with a broader scope (Murdock and Golding, 2016, p.5). The need, they say, is to illuminate the connections between 'the concrete practices of production and the wider organisational and economic shifts that shape them' (ibid.). In particular this research perspective strives to go 'beyond structural features to assess the consequences for daily practice' (ibid.). They have gone as far, in the past, as describing these as 'concrete consequences' (Golding and Murdock, 2000, p.84) and I draw out clear concrete examples in the discussion that follows.

Drawing on evidence from my interviews, with practitioners across a range of media occupations, in this chapter I utilise this perspective to illuminate the influence of Channel Four's inherent structures on the practice of meaning-making, arguing that the structures provided freedom to take risks with the London 2012 Paralympics media coverage. Specifically, I draw on the research findings to show that the unique *funding mechanism* of Channel Four had a direct bearing on risk-taking, for the acquisition of the Paralympic project in the first instance, and by providing protection against attempted risk-associated stakeholder vetoes regarding innovative representations of disability. The financial organisation also created a need for corporate sponsors, whose presence and finances stabilised other risks. I then show how the *organisational structure* facilitated flexibility amongst the various decision-makers to enable risk-taking with the framing of onscreen disability portrayals. Whilst the Channel Four *parliamentary remit* will be a repeating theme throughout this thesis, in this chapter I look specifically at two effects of its power, to facilitate innovative risk-taking and to take risks with the make-up of the production workforce (*Digital Economy Act*, 2010, Section 22).

The remit also protects a public service mandate into which is built a commercial motivation (Harvey, 1994). None of the other channels available in the UK, whether terrestrial or via satellite, has a public service remit that includes developing new talent as well as shaping society's attitude through education without being accountable to either the government, a Board of Governors, or shareholders (ibid.). This makes Channel Four's business model a unique focus for researching influential structures and the relationships between these that, either directly or indirectly, affect the creative process. I begin with the funding mechanism, then the organisational structure before discussing the impact of the parliamentary remit below.

## Funding mechanism

In this section I will show how the funding mechanism that is part of Channel Four's business model, enabled, rather than constrained, risk-taking. Firstly, I show how the decision to broadcast the Paralympics as 'live' mainstream

sports coverage was influenced by the way that programmes were funded. With Channel Four the advertising revenue pays for next year's programming and this dictates the make-up of Channel Four's schedules based on the need for income generation. I show how an emerging schedule deficit prompted the selection of the Paralympics to fill a gap. Secondly I highlight how the security and structure of the funding mechanism gave power to the producers at Channel Four seeking change, to resist the attempted vetoes by external stakeholders of the newly realistic depictions of disability. Thirdly this section explains how the addition of necessary corporate sponsors helped to stabilise some of the risks that were being taken by Channel Four.

The three dominant broadcasting organisations in the UK have each been defined by their funding mechanisms, namely the licence fee for BBC, subscriptions for Sky and advertising revenues for ITV. Channel Four is structured differently, being publicly owned but commercially funded. It has been defined more by its output irrespective of the funding model, which has changed already once, since its inception in 1982 (Darlow, 2004). Doing things differently at Channel Four was the mantra of everyone that I interviewed, as understood by their remit, and the *difference in the funding model* particularly had a bearing on the representations of disability that made it to the screens during the Paralympic Games of 2012. It also had a bearing on the fact that the Channel Four coverage happened at all.

When I walked into the office of Kevin Lygo, who had been Head of Channel Four Television at the time of their bid for the broadcasting rights for the Paralympics, his opening comment demonstrated that financial considerations were central to why he had chosen the Paralympics and bid for the broadcasting rights. He initially said, when casting his mind back to 2009, 'I do remember it had something to do with *Big Brother'* (Lygo, Head of Television, *Interview*). He then recalled saying to his team at the time:

> You won't have *Big Brother*. Do you understand? It's going to be a fucking nightmare without *Big Brother*? Get real! Get ready for a very cold wind especially in the summer. (ibid.)

This live production had been a huge show that almost redefined the channel when it arrived, being the first of its, since much-copied, genre. Whilst other executives, as I will show later, were concerned about the channel brand and reputation, also, curiously, in relation to *Big Brother,* for the primary decision-maker at the inception of the project, this was still very much driven by the funding mechanism. He told me:

> It was all up to me as to what I did with the £700 million or whatever it was that I spend every year, so in the scheme of things, you know I wish I could remember, 25 million - whatever it was, in the scheme of things [not much]. It was one of those bloody great holes in the summer [schedule] anyway and money had come free because *Big Brother* wasn't there and also it is 2009 for 2012. It is great to say, I don't remember anybody saying anything other than 'oh that's a good idea'. (Lygo, Head of Television, *Interview*)

Lygo clearly did not regard the acquisition of the broadcasting rights as much of a risk 'in the scheme of things'. He simply had to shell out a small portion of his budget to fill the schedule and it was 'all up to me', he said. The Paralympics provided Lygo with a solution to a deficit problem and his thinking for a solution was, 'It's going to be hours and hours of telly, it's going to be an event, it's going to be "live"' (ibid.) The value of 'live sport' (which continues to deliberately give the appearance of being 'live' even when it is pre-recorded and edited), for a commercially funded broadcaster, is that it holds the audience for the advertising breaks (Werner, 1998; Horne, 2006; Howe, 2008). I take up the strategy of purchasing sport audiences further in chapters six and seven. What is significant here is that the Paralympics was an opportunity to be purchased. In this interview with the chief decision-maker, disability, as yet, had not been mentioned.

As the controller of the schedule with money to burn, and money to recoup, he demonstrates his consideration and calculation of the risk:

> We thought that if we're going to do this, it is only two weeks actually on the air - and I know what the BBC will be like - they will be complacent. It will be the same as they have always done it, they won't be paying much money for it - it wasn't viewed very heavily - but for us, you know, why wouldn't you get 2 million viewers, type thing? And that is fine for Channel Four anyway, and it is so beautifully public service and we can pick up the coverage and tell

the stories. [We could] redesign it; being that we would not only
show a lot more of the events than ever before - I mean I can't
remember but - I mean five or six times more! (Lygo, Head of
Television, *Interview*)

It was in Lygo's thought processes, therefore, to buy 2 million viewers and fill
the hole left by *Big Brother*. This is a significant motivation, distinct from a
desire to change perceptions about disability, that influenced the decision to
broadcast the Games. Richeri (2003) stresses the importance of highlighting
'how financial organisation acts on the creation and circulation of content and
its meaning' (p.131). Channel Four's Head of Television, in this instance, had
the money available and makes it clear there was a financial consideration
affecting the acquisition of the London 2012 Games. He explained to me that
Channel Four relies for its funding, largely, on its advertising revenues to
provide the commissioning budget for the following year. Therefore, the
schedule needs to be full and consistently attracting an audience that
advertisers will want to advertise to. In this case, the funding mechanism
directly affected the creation and later circulation of the Paralympic Games
coverage – which went on to achieve an unexpected 11.8 million viewers for
the opening ceremony (C4, 2013, see also Appendix E), making the circulation
significant too.

It was Lygo who introduced *Big Brother* to the screens in 2000 and it was he
who axed it a decade later. It may therefore have been a personally or
politically motivated decision to prevent the 'cold wind' he predicted for that
summer in such a risky way. Garnham (1995) writes that:

A delimited social group, pursuing economic or political ends
determines which meanings circulate and which do not, which
stories are told about what, which arguments are given prominence
and what cultural resources are made available to whom. (ibid.,
p.65)

In this case, the initial determinant for the meanings that were then to circulate
about Paralympic athletes in 2012 did indeed have economic roots and
possibly political ones. The first reason was embedded into the structure of
Channel Four but the second was personal and serendipitous. Later, his
successor, Jay Hunt, is recalled by others to have thought this project a

'financial disaster', but could do nothing about the inherited deal as it was signed and sealed in 2009. This serendipitous moment, then, and the risk taken, set the course of all that was to follow, making an understanding of how it came about all the more important to understand.

Channel Four exists in a unique production setting, even though commercially funded, because it is publically owned and therefore does not have shareholders. This is a crucial part of being able to take unfettered risks, allowing Lygo the autonomy to achieve the following, as he put it:

> We do our pirate thing of stealing it from the BBC, we'll do it properly, we are genuinely committed to the promotion of disability and the community - and it hits the sweet spot of Channel Four. (Lygo, Head of Television, *Interview*)

Opting to outbid the BBC to buy an audience has a slight risk attached to it, but it would have been much harder to persuade a board of directors seeking dividends, or shareholders looking to make a profit for themselves, to agree with his idea. Lygo considered that transmitting 'hours and hours' of disability sport was a risk worth taking. Purely commercial operators may well not have agreed with this. Without the funding mechanism in place for the channel, Lygo may not have been allowed, by others with vested interests, the freedom to bid for the broadcasting rights, and audience perceptions about disability might still be where they were in 2011. The outcome that was BAFTA winning and caused a cultural shift in attitudes towards a minority (see Bournemouth University, 2013) was one of the 'concrete consequences' (Golding and Murdock, 2000, p.84) of Channel Four being set up the way that it was. Sir Jeremy Isaacs, founding CEO of Channel Four, told me that the way the Paralympics coverage unfolded and what it achieved, by taking so many risks, was derived directly from the 'DNA of the channel' (Isaacs, Former CEO, *Interview*) that he had helped design at its inception.

The second way in which risks were protected and enabled is again down to the absence of shareholders. There were two groups of stakeholders that vehemently objected to the *Meet The Superhumans* advertising trailer, in particular an eight second sequence in the middle. This included soldiers

caught in an explosion, a car crash and a maternity hospital 'bad news' scene contrasting starkly with previous BBC slow motion and violins type representations. The Channel Four shock depictions challenged existing ideas about disability being only about 'others', with the potential for the audience to feel less safe about their own identities. I discuss this conflict in the next chapter, on representations, but need to establish here that this segment is what most of my participants considered the defining lynchpin for the new framings of disabled sportsmen and women. If the funding mechanism had not been in place, to prevent a veto from outside voices, creative risks would have been compromised and the opportunity to shape new meanings potentially lost. Objection letters were written, including from the Head of the International Paralympic Committee, who according to the Disability Executive 'kicked up an absolute storm about it' (Walsh, Disability Executive, *Interview*) but as the in-house Head of Communication told me 'it was our money' (Brooke, Head of Communications, *Interview*) so they took the risks and transmitted the portrayals anyway.

Whilst it is tempting to imagine that it was solely in their capacity as a public service broadcaster that Channel Four was inspired to take this risky path, the Business Director makes it clear that the financial structure also dictated what they could do. He compared the models operated by the BBC with their own at Channel Four. Whilst both broadcasters have a public service remit, it was other considerations that affected and enabled the risks that they did take. He explained:

> The BBC are very different because everyone pays a tax or whatever you want to call it, so everyone owns a bit of the BBC so you can't push the boundaries too far because you are going to be speaking to a very small part of your big audience. Channel Four can do all that stuff, it's why it was set up in the first place. There have been very few opportunities for Channel Four to flex those muscles since *Big Brother* so the Paralympics was a perfect opportunity to actually reassert why the channel was set up in the first place. And to go 'you know what, this is exactly – only Channel Four could do what we [can] do with the Paralympics, literally only Channel Four could do that' – because the BBC would NEVER do a 90 second trail showing people being blown up in a car with a Public Enemy Hip-hop track. (Wieczorek, Business Manager, *Interview*)

Murdock and Golding assert that economic dynamics define the key features of communication processes (Golding and Murdock, 1991, p.19) and Channel Four's Business Director demonstrated a clear understanding of this dynamic. He particularly told me:

> ITV are driven by profit, they are a business. If people don't [love it], they don't get their ratings, if people don't feel good about it, if people watch less ITV - that can't ever be their strategy because they'll die as a business in the longer term. (Wieczorek, Business Manager, *Interview*)

Mosco (2009) argues that, beyond purely economic and political aims, mass media institutions are predisposed 'to advance social life as opposed to simply having commercial purposes' (2010, p.4). However it is clear, from the above interview, that ITV are not in a position to advance social life by taking risks with their audience, because they will then 'die as a business'. The uniqueness of Channel Four's funding mechanism therefore shaped and protected the creative processes associated with meaning-making and the reshaping of attitudes towards disability. Retaining autonomous editorial judgement is something that Channel Four were able to do, according to the Head of Television, Head of Communications and the Business Director, as I have shown above. My assertion is that being free to take financial risks and creative ones was a key factor in being able to change perceptions in society.

It is clear from existing scholarship (Richeri, 2003; Wasko et al., 2011; Dwyer, 2015;) that meaning-making should specifically be analysed from the perspective of the way the finances are organised, which this study also does. The power of stakeholder veto is an important one, particularly in relation to minority group representations, and absolutely needed to be resisted in this case. Many of my participants either associated the element of risk with their channel brand (see chapter seven) or referred to risk as stemming from the remit (see below). My argument here is that it was the unique *funding mechanism* of Channel Four that ensured they had full editorial judgement and control over other vested interests, and these powers facilitated the risk-taking. This second 'concrete consequence' (Golding and Murdock, 1991, p.84) of the business model on the Paralympic Games was that Channel Four could

prevent outside stakeholders (the British Paralympic Association and the International Paralympic Committee) from stopping *them* taking risks with the representations that might have challenged public feeling. There is more detail about this in upcoming chapters.

The third influence that the funding arrangements had on the London 2012 Paralympic media coverage was the inbuilt extra necessity of finding additional corporate sponsors. Funded entirely by the previous year's advertising revenue, it was of huge importance to Channel Four, who had paid a lot for the broadcasting rights, to sign up corporate sponsors as marketing companions, with their financial contributions essential to offset the production budget. Had the corporation been funded by subscriptions, or from the annual licence fee, Sainsbury's and BT would not perhaps have been brought on board. Meanings were affected by the sponsors they chose, as well as budgets. The Project Leader for the Paralympics noted that the particular combination of niche broadcaster, Channel Four, partnered with a 'major' supermarket chain, Sainsbury's, and a 'massive' telecommunications company, BT, was a deliberate choice of hers (Poulton, Project Leader, *Interview*). Although choices like these are not always obvious from the outside, Corner (2013) considers strategic selection a naturalised process (p.57) for political purposes and for the propagation of powerful messages. Certainly, these brand alliances were powerful message carriers for Poulton. As Project Leader she considered the strong combined network she had created as vital for the success of the Paralympics coverage and the meanings they would be able to project.

Channel Four chose these two companies' differing visions to add richer content and meaning for the wider mix of television audiences that they were expecting, after putting the sponsorship deals out to tender. Films and inserts were made by, and for, both companies and these were also transmitted throughout the other programming across the schedule. Poulton chose these two, because of the funding they brought with them, but also because Sainsbury's had a 'wholesome' approach which she wanted to blend with BT's outlook that was 'a little more edgy' (Poulton, Project Leader, *Interview*). I discuss other aspects of these sponsorship arrangements in chapter seven as

part of the marketing and branding initiative. However, I include them here because these two companies were needed not only for funding, but also to add value and enhance the reach and specific messaging of the media coverage. Here again, this is another example of meanings and circulation being driven by underlying financial organisation (see Richeri, 2003; Murdock and Golding, 2016).

In this case, 'wholesome' and 'edgy' were added to a 'niche public service' framing and distributed as a blended meaning via two differing types of national networks beyond the television environment. These 'horizontal lines of communication' (see Castells, 2011, pp.1976-1977), personally achieved by Poulton, had far reaching consequences across Britain with initiatives taking place in schools, supermarkets and on billboards across the UK. All these initiatives fed into the television coverage of the twelve days of the Paralympics. This situation suggests that theories of connectivity and consequence need again to be updated, to include wider networked business practices, for example, using even supermarket networks, to consolidate meanings within media production.

It was a huge vision, set out at the beginning before production began, that the Paralympics should no longer be a poor second cousin to the Olympics, as it had been on the BBC. However, in televisual terms, there was no corresponding budget to match that aspiration. My final point about these corporate sponsors is that the two partner organisations contributed, on Poulton's recollection, £1 million each towards the production costs. This extra money enabled the risk of attempting visual parity with the Olympic Games. I suggest that the additional cameras, and camera angles, needed to achieve the media coverage created by Channel Four, were a vital ingredient in the normalisation process of disability. The layout of these camera positions is attached in Appendix D. The effect on meanings that were made by these additional resources, alongside other attempts as Olympic parity, are discussed more fully in later chapters, but were hugely significant for the visual representations of normality.

Other production studies (e.g. Silverstone, 1995; Grindstaff, 2002) have also noted how important the right camera positions are to create recognisable and familiar meanings, and Channel Four needed to supplement the existing ones as these were insufficient for a mega-event sports treatment. More than one of my contributors observed that without the corporate sponsorship deals the high quality of Channel Four's television coverage could not have been achieved. Channel Four has the freedom to engage in commercial activities to fund its production budgets (Harvey, 1994) and the selection of the two chosen partner brands therefore had a direct impact on creativity and content delivery, and arguably the ability to woo the BBC Olympic audience across to Channel Four.

From the above examples, drawn from my empirical material, I have shown that the funding mechanism performed a structural role directly affecting the construction of meanings. The way the finances are organised within the business model of Channel Four explicitly facilitated the taking of risks, and provided editorial autonomy over outside stakeholders. This same mechanism included a requirement to reach out to external sponsors, who brought other powers of persuasion and brand messaging along with their financial backing. In this case decisions were made with care and judgement but it does not necessarily follow that in other cases this combination of roles, resources and revenue pools would be as sensitively handled. It does help that Channel Four is a small organisation with a lot of cross accountability, and this is discussed further below.

## Organisational structure

In this section I will show how the organisation of Channel Four, particularly as it compares to the BBC, meant that people had to double up, be flexible, and work in ways that actually increased the risks that they could take. I will also show how it gave them the ability to discuss different approaches. Born (2004) in her study of the BBC, discusses the loss of vertical integration in that structure (p.132). A comparison, here, with Channel Four's more fluid organisational structure and flexible ecology will show how the differing

production environments do affect decisions made and levels of risk that can be taken with framing and programme content.

Creativity and commerce, as one might expect, are symbiotically linked in the case of the London 2012 Paralympic Games. Changing dynamics are traceable throughout my interviews, reminiscent of the 'marriage' between commerce and creativity described by Hesmondhalgh (2013, p.249), in the field of popular music. The inherent tensions of this relationship within the television production process are exacerbated when a client relationship is introduced, but, as I discovered, those tensions can also enhance creativity and make the ground for new ideas more fertile.

The success of the funding combination with sponsors, discussed above, relied heavily on 'client management', or as the Project Leader put it in this case, a 'healthy positive collaborative engagement' with Sainsbury's and BT, who were their clients. Poulton had to carefully handle Sainsbury's queries about, for example, the hip-hop street framing of their shared Paralympian actors, or the 'close-up lingering' on Jonnie Peacock's artificial leg, and she managed to keep the clients on side. Elliott (1972) stresses the importance of investigating 'the organisational setting and the social context' (p.144) in which programme production takes place. It is true here that for Channel Four, as a publisher-broadcaster, these external relationships are key to their ability to create meaningful content. The channel's autonomy, according to my research evidence, remained intact for these partnerships in 2012. In spite of having cultivated friendly relationships, ultimate editorial power was written into the contracts in favour of Channel Four. Other social collaborations, at Channel Four, in-house, and with the outsourced sports producers for the Paralympics, needed to be equally healthy and positive even though, away from the sponsors, Channel Four was now the client in the production relationships. The evidence from my interviews suggests that in-house power was retained in all of the collaborations, to maintain the creative freedom Channel Four's remit protects.

Freedom to take creative risks was essential to framing a disabled group who might be potentially considered repulsive (see chapter two), in order for them to be acceptable to the 'normal' audience in the mainstream television schedules. The 1990 *Broadcasting Act* asserts the need for Channel Four to make programmes that *ITV* would not make. This has a definite risk implication. Yet within the organisation, most of my participants saw themselves as making something that in fact *the BBC* would not make. This may be an artificial comparison in the sense that only the BBC had ever produced the Paralympics before, however the key dimension of comparison was consistently the level of 'risk' rather than the subject matter itself. In all bar one of my cases the contributors vocalised the creative freedom as being something they felt was unique to Channel Four. The only dissenter was an outsourced independent sports producer, for whom disability was not on his radar. His sports provision, widely used by many broadcasters, carries, in his opinion, no risk in any case.

The BBC has a large workforce of thousands that has layers of management, committees and procedures to inhibit impromptu decisions (Burns, 1977; Schlesinger, 1987; Silverstone, 1995; Born, 2004). By contrast Channel Four is very small with less than 800 employees (Brooke, Head of Communication, *Interview*). One of their business managers utilised Channel Four's distinctive organisational arrangement to extend the possibilities for portrayals of disability within their media coverage. He worked closely with the Channel Four Disability Executive throughout and they both separately spoke of the battles they had gone through together. It was a distinctive element of their project that the teams pulled together where necessary. On one occasion, when an academic researcher was brought in to advise, telling them not to shock people, the Disability Executive told me she had resisted. As she recalled in our interview:

> It wasn't just me, it was everybody in the room, all the producers, said, 'No, wait a minute. Well that's not how we're going to do it, because Channel Four doesn't do programmes like that and we've got a remit to bring disability into the mainstream and to make people familiar with it'. You don't make them familiar with it by not showing it. (Walsh, Disability Executive, *Interview*)

They were able to retain their creative power in this situation because they were all together in one room. It was not a question of memos passing across

desks and sub-committees, an entrenched practice that Born (2004) noted at the BBC. This same situation with the academic acted as a catalyst for the Head of Communication who said for him the pronouncement that people needed to be treated gently was 'a red rag to a bull' (Brooke, Head of Communication, *Interview*). The team continued on their track of redefining how to present disability to the public, possibly with even more intent, or as they started to say themselves, 'Channel Four-style'. At different levels within the organisation, individuals felt they had autonomy and this permeated down from the Head of Channel Four. He said:

> I think there is something gloriously unaccountable about Channel Four and so when it's working well, in the job I had, you could just do anything you wanted and you don't really see it that way at the time, but nobody would ever tell you 'don't do this' or 'do do that'. (Lygo, Head of Television, *Interview*)

Historically this had been the case too, as Sir Jeremy Isaacs explained to me in a telephone interview, 'no one could say no to us' (Isaacs, former CEO, *Interview*) because this power was built into their structure as an organisation on purpose.

As well as the freedom of autonomy there was also considerable freedom to communicate powerful feelings both onscreen and off. There were several emotive and passionate expressions used by the decision-makers. One had been that 'red rag to a bull' experience when the researcher came in to brief their collective ranks. Another hugely significant one, that may have partly set the trajectory for the project, was what the Project Leader called her 'fire in the belly' moment. This decision to do even more for disability sport was, as the academic advice had been, triggered by someone whom she disagreed with, who wanted to sideline disability and make it invisible. The impact, though, comes from the multiple roles of the person she passed it on to, Tom Tagholm, Channel Four's Creative Network Director who was also the film maker of the *Meet The Superhumans* Ad. This was how she explained it:

> Tom contacted me on Wednesday afternoon just to get a perspective on what I wanted the marketing trail to have. It just so happened that, that Saturday night, I had been to a dinner party down in a West Sussex pub, and I met, face on, the ugly, ugly, ugly

face of disability discrimination and it was disgusting and I was really upset by it. It was so black and white, and the person who said it was so unaware of the offence that they would have caused anybody. So when I met with Tom that week I was still really riled by that, and I relayed to Tom in great detail this story about this woman, who said, at the school fundraiser, that this man [a parent with one arm] 'had had the gall to walk around without a jacket over his arm' and how offensive she had found it, and everyone had wanted to run home and hide. I relayed that story to Tom that day and later said 'I hope I really fired you up with that story' and he said 'yes you did'. It was very timely. (Poulton, Project Leader, *Interview*)

This timely moment was a serendipitous piece of the jigsaw that my participants helped me piece together, defining why they took so many risks and did so much more than the BBC had done before. Poulton went on to tell the woman, who was a friend, what she thought, as she was so angry, before leaving promptly. However, the person whom she next told was part of 4Creative, the influential marketing arm of Channel Four. His role became one that could directly shape onscreen representations, once he was unable to secure the Hollywood Film Director he was hoping for to direct the trailer (anecdotally thought to be James Cameron who directed the '*Titanic*'). I discuss Tagholm's role in a later chapter but the important organisational issue here is that, due to clashing timetables, he ended up directing the film himself. This multi-functioning role meant that, according to him, he could pass Poulton's 'fire' directly into the tone, texture and feel of the film. There were no other layers of creatives, producers or planners between his shared exchanges with Poulton and the finished piece.

It has been common practice within the commissioning model that an idea, once pitched, is often taken over (e.g. Dornfeld 1998; Redvall, 2013). Concepts are watered down or changed (D'Acci, 1994; Lieb, 2016) as they are passed through the creative labour roles. Worse still, ideas are now more often strategised rather than inspired, as one of Zoellner's (2016) contributors argues:

In development it's completely idiotic to say 'Well, I think this topic is interesting, I want to make a film about it.' Total idiocy, one shouldn't even think like that. You have to think about what broadcaster, what slot, what fits into that slot and we try to develop something that fits'. (p.151)

Born (2004) likewise found that:

> Whereas in the previous, vertically integrated BBC, channels and production departments sat side by side in Television and Radio and cooperated in planning the output, now a streamlined commissioning apparatus based in Broadcast and backed by teams of market analysts and strategists would determine channel strategies and schedules, to be filled by Production as required. (ibid., p.132)

This dictat by analysts and strategists did not happen in Channel Four's case. There was not a top down directive to 'do a disability sports event' or anything to satisfy 'the strategy and planning apparatus'. At Channel Four, although there had been a hole in the schedules left by *Big Brother*, it seemed serendipitous that the arrival of the Paralympics opportunity fitted this bill. Many of my contributors felt it had happened somewhat organically.

What they did with the opportunity was more creative because of the organisational set-up and fluidity between roles. Tagholm was able to take creative risks based on the fundamental structure of Channel Four's organisation. The structure, in this case, facilitated multiple conversations that cross-fertilised between teams, and as I will show in chapters five and seven, enabled considerable innovation and risk.

This individual passing on of vision, passion and even fury, was more exposed and open in the Channel Four setting than the BBC, as the Project Leader felt she wanted to tell me two years after the event:

> It was never a harmonious project. There was a huge amount of tension because we all wanted to do such a brilliant, brilliant job of it - and because unlike the BBC or ITV we didn't have a 100 strong sports department which is what the BBC have, that is what ITV have. We were just a disparate group of individuals and we, as a result, had to go out and seek the input and advice of a lot of people and we did that by getting advice from former Paralympians. Ade Adepitan was a central person for us. We assembled a project team of about 30 or 40 people from within the channel and [some] other external people. (Poulton, Project Leader, *Interview*)

Because the group was so small, it was possible to communicate quickly and easily, and not just about her fire and her passion. She continued:

> So there was this tension, because...[when we]…reported back at our regular forums we'd have one end of the table going, 'we need cameras in the dressing room we need cameras underneath them as they are diving off the blocks. We need cameras with them in the athletes studio' - and then the other end of the table are going, 'it's not possible, we don't have that access'. 'Well, we've got to get that access!' (ibid.)

Without the inhibiting nature of an overbearing infrastructure, it seems that creative freedom to take risks arose, particularly, for example with the recurring camera position topic. The visual representation of 'showing the stumps' came to be a key trope that I explain in the next chapter but it was considered by many to be an extremely risky decision. It was facilitated by these early discussions. This group were not simply a sub-committee as they might have been at the BBC. These conversations came out of necessity, close proximity and doubling up within the production roles. The infrastructure wasn't there for risks to be played down or minimised, mainly because the organisation was so small, as the Project Leader realised shortly after putting in the bid for the broadcasting rights:

> Martin [the Commercial Lawyer] rang me in January and said 'we bloody won it', and what was ironic was that we won one of the biggest sporting events in the world, but we didn't have a sports department! (ibid.)

At first this may seem like a challenge, but one of the production managers stressed how the manageable scale of Channel Four's organisation had made a positive difference to their working practice. We were discussing whether it would have been any different if the BBC had won the licence for it. Having worked for both companies his response is significant:

> I do quite a bit of stuff for Red B [with the BBC]. I have done in the past. And they're a bit more by committee. They're very, very - I mean Channel Four is not quite the same as it used to be. It's slowly getting a little more watered down. They even say, I mean comparatively - with all the BBC jobs I've done, it's just like a 100 people coming and there's so many departments and layers. Maybe sometimes it's good. But in my experience, that many opinions is only going to have one effect. And that is to water an idea down. Unless you've got one person who overall is brave and sort of says, 'Guys, alright, we have to….' and has got a vision of something. Then it will come through. But I don't know. I mean it's hard to say, if it had gone purely down the agency route then there's all that other

> stuff coming into it, and that worry and angst, which we just didn't
> have to worry about. We really didn't. I think we just didn't have
> those extra voices. There was very few. There was not tons of input
> coming in from other people. (Fry, Production Manager, *Interview*)

Attitudes were shaped in these more intimate settings and this may have had a bearing on how they were able to change so much, compared to the BBC. The last Paralympic coverage of theirs had included only a late night package of highlights (BBC, 2011), and this reflects an attitude that still remains on their Disability Sports webpages. On the BBC Paralympic Games website, a BBC representative (Hudson, 2004) writes of their attitude towards risk after the Athens 2004 games, in consideration of following Beijing 2008 Games:

> In some ways, a great ignorance of the needs of the disabled was a
> risk…many Greeks have tried to embrace the idea of the Games
> and the positive sociological effects they can bring to try to *advance
> the cause* from now on…As sport becomes more and more
> professional, it is clear that, even in disabled sport, winning means
> everything to some and they will do whatever it takes to be the
> best…Media interest in disability sport also remains something of a
> problem. (Hudson, 2004, my italics)

The final lines of the BBC's attitude in this article, which is still available in 2018, demonstrate their low risk approach:

> It is impossible to change everyone's perceptions on the subject of
> disabled sport. But when it comes down to the ability of people to
> have their senses opened to the possibility of learning about it, then
> it's worth trying. (ibid.)

Being 'open to the possibility of learning about it' and having 'their senses opened' did not happen four years later with the Beijing 2008 BBC coverage, but it did with the London 2012 Channel Four coverage. This study explores other contributing factors, but the producers felt a key reason was risk-taking. Ideas grew and developed, my contributors refer to 'conflicts' and 'arguments', 'tensions' and even 'battles', but their communications were open and 'epiphanies' 'flips' and 'tipping points' were all repeatedly mentioned. Because of the scale of the BBC, the silo mentality of their sports department and other creative departments may have meant that real innovation could never have taken place there. Born (2004) unearthed, bureaucracy, internal career manoeuvrings, personal rivalries and arrogance, during her time at the BBC.

What was strikingly different with the Channel Four creatives was their regularly getting together, apparently on an equal footing. I discuss the staff 'away days' in detail in the next chapter, five. Here I need to make a structural comparison between what happens when departments are insulated from one another, and when they are not.

There was a pivotal creative moment for Channel Four, which was experienced by the producers at one of these group days away. Contributors told me they suddenly and simply decided to 'remove disability from their thinking' and get excited about the project as if they were doing the 'real' Olympics (something they could never afford). It was only at this point that the project was taken seriously by those creatives present. One of the Business Directors explained the moment:

> There were a couple of internal things that we had organised that I think made us realise that it was a phenomenal creative opportunity. We had a couple of away days in August 2011, two big away days, and then - we sort of - we've analysed at 4Creative that, as a creative opportunity, it was just huge because, just because we all sort of realised that the creative benchmark was so low - that disabled athletes were never treated as real athletes - they were always massively patronised in terms of how they were portrayed in advertising especially. And, you see, we were sort of talking very much about Channel Four's remit - and that hold that Channel Four has in society - and the two things sort of just came together at that time really. (Wieczorek, Business Director, *Interview*)

Out of this, the biggest marketing push in their history was born, affecting content, the athletes, the public, and public discourse. Initially the attitude from within the creative production team had been that this project was one that *no one* really wanted to get involved with. It involved liasing with several groups of stakeholders which made it 'rather grubby' according to the 4Creative Business Director. He also said that Channel Four had initial reservations relating to both themselves and the likely outcomes. Wieczorek told me:

> It ended up infinitely a far larger project than any of us anticipated - so how it started was, it was actually relatively modest and small when 4Creative were first briefed. And I think that is largely due to just the sort of preconceptions we had at Channel Four, but also that society had in general, about disability sport. (ibid.)

This was before what he called their 'tipping point':

> After that away day we stopped making a distinction between disabled sports and able-bodied sport. We banned that phrase…we banned that distinction. (ibid.)

This is a far cry from the BBC's earlier view that 'when it comes down to the ability of people to have their senses opened to the possibility of learning about it, then it's worth trying' (Hudson, 2004). Banning the phrase 'disabled sport', even amongst the producers was a crucial tipping point for the production team. Paralympics representations were reframed from the inside of the organisation, through personnel changing their own views, and this process was facilitated by the broadcaster's flexible organisational circumstances.

Channel Four's internal culture changed as they collectively banned the word 'disability' from their own discourse. This, Wieczorek said, acted as a switch, raising the excitement within the team. I noticed that it resurfaced in his body language as he recalled this moment in our interview. More importantly their group dynamic helped spawn a new trajectory for the entire project away from disabled, special, 'also-rans' to authentic representations of elite athletes. According to Hesmondhalgh (2002), and Banks (2009), 'symbolic meaning' shapes cultural values (Hesmondhalgh, 2002, p.22) and comes from the people who hold the 'decision-making and breaking powers' (Banks, 2009, pp.88-89) in above-the-line roles. What is significant about Channel Four is that they could all sit in one room, making collective decisions seeming to share the sense of risk as a point of group identity.

If there were internal rivalries of the kind that Born (2004) noted, then they diminished during the project. Because of the publisher-broadcaster model there are no long-term production roles to be protected or preserved. Actual programme making is outsourced and this affects the dynamics. It may also, project by project, make them riskier as an organisation. There *was* a rivalry across different roles and levels of editorial decision-making amongst the range of my participants, but this was a channel rivalry with the BBC. The Commercial Lawyer passed comment to me, in a corridor one day when I was leaving the Channel Four building, that 'of course Channel Four only exists to snap at the

heels of the BBC' but, even so, a desire to do something *better* than them, as well as something *different* to them, was a recurring theme. Jacka (2003) writes that the need for Public Service Broadcasters (PSBs) is over, given the multi-channel options available to air niche or minority programming in other places. However her argument perhaps overlooks a suggestion that emerges from my research, that a creative tension exists and is developed through more than one channel having a PSB requirement. It provides healthy competition, encourages risk-taking and forces diverse programming into mainstream schedules.

It may be that the BBC, after Rio, will broadcast the Paralympics again, but now 'the genie is out of the bottle', as the Head of Marketing put it, they will not be able to pass it off as an afterthought. Indeed they may not even want to, now that the risks have already been taken and broader audience acceptance received. The BBC have since employed Alison Walsh as a Diversity Officer in their own team, after Channel Four broadened their version of the role but did not offer her this new contract in 2015. Whether or not she will be able to achieve the same goals within their different structure remains to be seen. In the case of London 2012 it does seem that the unique Channel Four business model, with its flexible organisation and fluid editorial roles, facilitated certain key decisions and lots of smaller ones. Individual personalities made a difference, as chapters five, six and seven will show, but the range and profile of diverse representations were collectively derived, which many of my participants acknowledged, because they were all 'part of the team' that took risks. In this section I have shown that this 'team' were organised in ways that facilitated operational freedom and provided room for ideas to germinate, culminating in collective risk-taking and innovation. They attributed much of their courage to 'the remit' below.

## Parliamentary remit

In the final part of this chapter, I will show that there were two distinct directives, associated with risk, that were used by Channel Four that helped to shape the outcome of their 2012 Paralympics production. The first of these

government remits is to make 'innovative' programmes (Communications Act, 2003, c.3) whilst reflecting *in the content*, the diversity of the wider public. The other risk is situated in the Digital Economy Act (2010) in Section (22), part 4 of the revisions for Channel Four, where they are expected to recruit new and untried talent. Channel Four did both and went further by training new disabled talent, thereby reflecting diversity *off screen* as well. One of the concerns of some political economists of communication (e.g. Golding and Murdock, 1991; Mosco, 1996; Garnham, 2006) has been to observe the mutual influences of media systems and regulations and how they operate within the processes of production. These two parliamentary regulations applying to the commercially funded publically owned Public Service Broadcaster had a direct impact on Channel Four's media coverage of the Paralympic Games, by legislating risk, as I will show.

In addition to the BBC and Channel Four, there are two other companies that have a PSB remit in the UK. These are ITV and Channel Five, but they are not required to put their minority output on their main channel, or at peak times; they therefore may not serve 'most' of their public, only a much smaller portion of it. The noticeable sense of rivalry between Channel Four and the BBC comes in part from their shared remit to public service, as Public Service Broadcasters who do have to represent minorities more visibly. In the previous section there are examples of this rivalry, and sense of competition. One of the ways of 'beating the BBC' has been to invoke their Channel Four remit for 'risk'. Their recent channel ident affirms the value of this distinction by carrying the slogan 'born risky' (C4, 2013). This account, of the bid writing stage, demonstrates an understanding of the uniqueness of Channel Four's remit and how that affects its position in the broadcasting field:

> There were lots of people involved and Julian [Bellamy] was the architect of that at the time and I remember those meetings. Alison Walsh's job was to get disability onto the agenda at every point that she could, and I remember us all sitting in the room thinking 'oh my god we could do something really exciting here' and we had all this anecdotal evidence saying the BBC have been doing the Paralympics for years and they never do it properly. (Poulton, Project Leader, *Interview*)

There was a keen sense of competition here that goes beyond their 'snapping at the heels' role. Schlesinger (1987) asked of the BBC 'how is [it] affected by the state and by competition in the media industries?' (p.12). It is clear from this interview material that Channel Four were considerably affected by both the state, via the parliamentary remit, and its closest competitor. It seems feasible that there was a motivation for Channel Four to use the remit to 'beat the BBC', based on the similarity in detail, in this account here, with how the coverage ended up:

> They give hours and hours and hours and hours to the Olympic Games - and then they just do a one-hour highlights of the Paralympics and, you know, they never show the bodies up close, they don't celebrate disability they just do a polite nod to it…and this was our chance to do it 'different'. So we wrote a very bold bid that talked about how we would go further than any broadcaster had gone before, and we would really show disability in its true light and we would attempt to normalise it. (Walsh, Disability Executive, *Interview*)

It was this bold bid that fixed later actions; many oppositional viewpoints that would have dulled the effectiveness of the coverage were resolved because certain things were laid down in the bid and therefore were non-negotiable. Risks were written into it. Incoming executives were not happy with the unprecedented marketing budget allocation, but it could not be changed (see chapter seven). The LOCOG (London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games) chief asserted that he did not need there to be any disabled presenters onscreen, but the Disability Executive was able to protect them, because their inclusion was written into this document.

The remit for 'innovation' was used as a central argument and as a heading within the document. It was a vision to normalise disability by taking innovative risks and was offered as follows:

> Our coverage will pull no punches. We will never be patronising, and we will bring a rawness and intimacy to the coverage that hasn't been seen on television before. (C4TVC, 2009)

They built the remit requirement into the pitch for the broadcasting rights, perhaps in order to succeed, or to beat the BBC. In reality it was the money that they offered which won the bid, but the uniqueness of Channel Four, as

defined by the remit, was written into every page, and felt by all whom I interviewed. There was a sensed culture of 'Channel Fourness', that indirectly shaped the programme content. To what extent this is linked to the parliamentary remit is explained by the current CEO, David Abrahams (2016), who has recently given this evidence to the House of Lords Communications Committee:

> When I worked for a private company and came in, in the morning, my obligation was to find a way of maximising the returns to the owners. That was my moral and fiduciary duty. My duty in my current role is to take the remit that has been given to us by Parliament and to optimise all the activities of the organisation to that end. If I fall short of that, Ofcom will raise it with me. If I fall profoundly short of it, I would not expect to keep my job. This permeates the organisation. (ibid.)

His comments are based on the premise that not only did they have the freedom for innovation, they had a mandate for it. I found during my season of interviews that this shared awareness of the remit did indeed permeate the organisation. Golding and Elliott (1979) link newsroom practices with occupational ideologies and here too, the sense of Channel Fourness and duty to the remit were bordering on the ideological amongst the workforce. The ability to satisfy the parliamentary remit, including the hiring of higher risk new staff, and doing what others dare not, for risk of loss of funding, is intrinsically linked to the business model of Channel Four. The risk-taking edgier remit is part of the DNA of the channel but it is also part of their culture. Born (2004) speaks of the BBC as a microcosm of society, and the mini-culture defined by Channel Four's remit, was palpable amongst the people and in the office spaces that I met them in.

The tension between creative and commercial decisions as a publisher were clear and they were looking for all sorts of things when, according to Lygo, 'the Paralympics flared up in front of us.' Actually the Commercial Lawyer had received a phone call from LOCOG asking them directly to pitch for the broadcasting rights, but the suggestion when it reached the top executive did 'hit the spot'. Their sweet spot, it emerged, is when all the remit directives are in place. This was experienced and identified by some participants as a collective

identity, or feel, and more explicitly, a brand image. I discuss the brand image of Channel Four in chapter seven. In all cases the sense of innovation and risk gave them confidence to branch out and do things differently.

However framed, whether government mandate, corporate culture or brand awareness, the executives and producers mainly understood the structural undercurrents to decisions they were making that affected representations of disability. Within this context the Head of Marketing revealed their 'making a difference' paradigm that was held in tension with those undercurrents:

> We have to fund ourselves, we don't have a licence fee, so we have to fund ourselves. But we do have a licence to take risks and some will come off and some won't come off, and ultimately, ideally, we wanted the thing [the Paralympics] to pay for itself but our primary objective was not to, we didn't - this wasn't a commercial decision. This was a decision based on 'could we change something significant in the world?' You know, 'could we actually do something really worthwhile?' And, yes, it would benefit our brand and our reputation on top of that but you know, clearly within our aims, we wanted to change attitudes to disability and to disability sport - and a by-product of that would be people feeling that Channel Four had done some good and done something worthwhile, and we did manage to get significant sponsors to help us. (Walker, Head of Marketing, *Interview*)

How they then treated the project was very much affected by the remit, to represent the diversity within society and make innovative programmes about them. Although I have split the funding mechanism, organisation and remit legislation for analytical purposes, in this chapter, it can be seen from Walker's perspective that in fact they are much more intertwined.

This first of the two remit elements that introduced risk, not taken by other channels, was considered to be a mandate, that made my interviewees feel secure because it was legislated by government. They were proud to be taking risks, because they were meant to be. In this way the innovative parliamentary remit became part of the occupational ideology (see Golding and Elliott, 1979) that directly affected methods of operation and decisions about production (a question raised by Golding and Murdock, 1991, p.19). My contributors also felt secure, taking risks with ideas about representation, as the upcoming chapters on disability representation, formats and marketing will show.

The second remit element involving risk had probably an even more profound effect on the production of the Paralympics media coverage. Indirectly this will also have had an impact on the available meanings for audiences as they would have been affected by differences onscreen. The *Digital Economy Act* (2010) stipulates that Channel Four 'must support the development of 'people involved in the making of innovative content' as well as 'people at the beginning of their careers' (Section 22, iv). Fulfilling a diversity quota at the same time was a way of satisfying multiple requirements at once, for new talent and disabled talent. As well as being an equality issue for the physically impaired to be able to access mainstream employment, the onscreen presence of disabled television presenters also affected meanings for the viewer. Seeing deformity onscreen in a mainstream setting (Prendergast, 2000) rather than as a spectacle to be peered at by 'normal' people (Goffman, 1963), meant that mental defences against difference could be breached and the 'other' unexpectedly included within the popular culture (see Hall, 2012, p.261).

Two slides for the in-house Production Teams (see next chapter for more details) mention this and gave producers this advice, 'It's when viewers happen on disability when they least expect it, that we can really open eyes, stretch minds and change attitudes.' Likewise, 'We've had greatest impact when we have perfectly cast disabled contributors in favourite shows, rather than making disability the focus. Channel Four [has] led the way in getting disabled people into peak time popular shows.' (*Mental 4 the Paralympics*, 2011)

The Paralympics paradox (Purdue and Howe, 2012), celebrating ability in spite of disability, is that disability *is* the focus, in the sense that it is the qualifying entrance requirement for the athletes to compete. How to treat the apparent contradiction of meanings within the Paralympics has been handled differently, with almost no risk, by the BBC. Channel Four chose to invoke their high-risk 'new talent' mandate, having spent £500,000 developing and training new disabled talent. Ade Adepitan, who the Project Leader had said was key, was able to make a direct comparison between the two approaches:

> Initially when Channel Four approached me about taking on the
> Paralympics, I didn't see them as a correct fit. But I think that was

me going against my principles because I didn't -- I wasn't open minded enough to think 'oh look they've got some potential here'. And it's only when I started working with them that I thought 'absolutely, of course, this would work with Channel Four because they're risk takers. That's what they're about, they're about taking risks, they're about doing things differently, they're about going against the norm.' So they were perfect and no disrespect to the BBC, the BBC is probably too establishment to have taken those kind of risks. They probably worry too much about offending people in middle England to be able to have done something like *The Last Leg* or to have had myself, a black disabled guy and Clare Balding someone who is out as a gay woman presenting the main show. It wouldn't have happened on the BBC because they would have been worried about all the *Points of View* letters they would have got. And so that's probably what made Channel Four the perfect fit for it. (Adepitan, ex-Paralympian/TV Presenter, *Interview*)

It was a huge battle for the London 2012 team to get the sports producers to allow disabled presenters onto their sporting coverage. Alex Brooker, who is physically impaired and has moved from sports journalist to *The Last Leg* celebrity, told me, 'We were an unknown quantity going onto the television, because no-one had seen how we could operate in a stressful live environment. It was a big gamble that everyone was taking.' It is a gamble that some of the sports producers had not wanted to take, and had there been shareholders, for example, power may have been wielded to stop the inclusion of 'rookie' presenters with six months training taking on a sporting occasion that was being marketed at elite sport mega-event level. As Channel Four were the client however, they made the final decision. Brooker went on to say:

The BBC never would have done what Channel Four did. They wouldn't have taken the risk. And if they had have, then it would have been 'Yeah, we'll have you on [as a presenter] but it's paying lip service to it.' There's no way the BBC would have run the 'Meet the Superhumans' campaign and there's no way the BBC would have shown – I've seen the BBC coverage of Beijing. It was the highlights. It was second-rate. The production was second-rate, whereas Channel Four treated it as a flagship event. And that was the difference and I think, you know – as great as the BBC are, they wouldn't have let us do it. (Brooker, TV Presenter, *Interview*)

Brooker was not the only one to associate risk with Channel Four, suggesting that even for outside production staff on short term contracts their culture and distinctive remit was clearly communicated. The BBC had used disabled

presenters as pundits, to give advice about their specialism, but not elevated them to full presenter status, speaking on behalf of the viewer. These decisions were taken here under the shadow of a parliamentary act asking them to take risks with new talent. The Project Manager highlighted just what a risk it had been, professionally:

> What we did was extremely challenging. We didn't just use our disabled talent that we discovered, to be pundits, we also recruited disabled TV talent with little or no experience and turned them overnight into live sports broadcasters and that was an incredibly dangerous and risky and bold thing to do. I think we were extremely lucky that we pulled it off [laughs]. It was nerve wracking, extremely nerve wracking. (Poulton, Project Leader, *Interview*)

Undergirding all this risk was the clause in the remit, which they took further than was required, by representing the minority population within the production as well as within the programme content. For 2012 they trained up onscreen talent; for Rio 2016 they also recruited production trainees as well. Participation at any level of society has been has been difficult for disabled people and the disabling barriers highlighted very much through the 'social model' (Finkelstein, 1974; Oliver, 1983; Barnes, 1992a) scholarship that has been produced over the last few decades. The risk, insisted upon by the remit, is to take on new talent, but Channel Four took on the 'double whammy' (Brooke, Head of Communication, *Interview*) of new, untried personnel who were also from the untapped disabled talent pool.

The use of pundits, who give their expert opinion on camera, is an extremely low risk policy, as the main presenter can easily take back the reins. However to train the pundits to be the presenters was a risk that the BBC had never taken. Pundits are simply referred to, whereas presenters are part of the programme. The BBC websites still refer to the same people that Channel Four used, as 'advisors' or 'experts' (e.g. BBC, 2008), as accessories to the anchors for the show. The remit for Channel Four expressly advises the use of new talent, but they still had a choice over the level of participation. My interviews suggest that there is a narrowly defined point at which power is shared between both the consultant and the producer, just beyond tokenism where risks begin to be taken (see Arnstein, 1969; Carpentier, 2011). The BBC

referred to their 'pundits' for expert analysis, allowing them slots of time to make comments, before taking back control of the programme. This is a common format in sports programming anyway (see Horne, 2007; Whannel, 2012). Channel Four, however, allowed the disabled presenters to share the onscreen time with 'able' presenters, making teams that had equal status as onscreen personalities. The Project Leader, Poulton, described these set-ups as a 'risky but refreshing mix'.

It is a central finding of this research that off-screen, these 'rungs of participation' (Arnstein,1969, p.93) were scaled higher than normal and that people with disabilities were included with executive function and power to shape production. Suggestions and advice, that outsiders commonly give, do not carry much weight as they are seemingly listened to, but do not change anything (ibid.). At this level of 'participation', the relationship seems to be collaborative but only if what the 'consultant' says agrees with what the key decision-makers were going to do anyway. Such gestures of consultancy have been understood as tokenistic (Cammaerts and Carpentier, 2007), whereas the less frequent higher level of participatory power occurs when what the consultant suggests *changes the decisions* that are taken. Ade Adepitan was one of the 'pundits' from the BBC's 2008 coverage who crossed over to Channel Four for the 2012 Games. He contrasted his experiences at both places, as an ex-Paralympic athlete, highlighting the differing level of involvement he experienced, and the way he was treated by executives:

> I was invited to a meeting and [...] met with the bosses at the time of Channel Four, Kevin Lygo and Julian Bellamy. And that impressed me straightaway the fact that they invited me to a meeting to meet the people at the very top of their organisation. I think I can barely remember counting on one hand the amount of times I met the top or the big boss at the BBC. So straightaway that made me believe that these guys really wanted to do something special with the Paralympics. And they basically asked me for a lot of advice on how it should be portrayed and what needed to be done. And the main thing I said, you know, I said people understand a little bit about the sport, but what they don't know about is the athletes. And I said I feel we need to give the athletes a personality. (Adepitan, ex-Paralympian/TV Presenter, *Interview*)

He went on to say 'I wanted us to have athletes on billboards. I wanted Nike, all the big brands to be interested. And I think in a way we started to get there and I really think the *Superhumans* campaign played a big part. I helped push that a little bit as well'. This level of access and influence is something that Adepitan felt was unique to Channel Four's 'set-up'. He didn't think NBC or FOX 'would do it with the same freedom that Channel Four did it.' Nor was he given that much voice at the BBC.

That defining participatory point, where the 'consultant' has a voice, but the producers do what they were going to do anyway, occurs regularly in documentary film, as Dornfeld (1998) found. In his study specialist advisors could make suggestions that may or may not be taken up. The element of risk, however, occurs, he argues, when you give the participating person *executive* power. This is exactly what Channel Four did with Alison Walsh, the Disability Executive. Her role was to 'put disability on the agenda at every opportunity' but from 2010 and for the duration of the Paralympics they also gave her power over *all* the commissioning editors (Walsh, Disability Executive, *Interview*). As well as directing content and having the final editorial say, which was not always popular, she helped change the make-up of the workforce and led the initiative to achieve this. It seems significant that Walsh was actually asked about 'the 'social model'' (Oliver, 1983) at her job interview in 1995, and when the Paralympic opportunity came up she embedded as many disabled practitioners into the workforce and onscreen as possible, of those she thought were good enough. The upcoming chapters are full of evidence that employment choices made a difference - to the meanings that were circulated about disability within the teams and, most markedly, as a direct consequence, onscreen.

## Conclusion

Drawing on the critical political economic perspective of communication studies, and media production, this chapter has illuminated connections between Channel Four's industrial structures and the production of media representations for the London 2012 Paralympic Games. There were 'concrete

consequences' (Golding and Murdock, 2000, p.84) of these wider contexts, evidenced in daily practice, on those who created new meanings about disability. These practices were shaped by the unique financial, organisational and regulatory structures governing Channel Four's operation.

The financial structure enabled an audacious bid, provided autonomy over resistant stakeholders and engendered stabilising and lucrative corporate sponsorship deals. Additionally, the size and make-up of the organisation facilitated creative relationships with fluid roles, and those who held those roles felt they were able to take greater risks than their counterparts would have been able to at the BBC. The parliamentary remit, that directs both channels towards minority programming, insists that Channel Four takes risks with innovative content and should also risk employing new talent in the workplace. Channel Four did more than that and recruited and trained new disabled talent, who made up 50% of the onscreen presenters for the London 2012 coverage. They then increased their self-imposed quota to 75%, including personnel across the *entire* workforce in *all* roles for the Rio 2016 Paralympics. This study therefore evidences that the industrial context in which the producers were situated, facilitated risk-taking with disability both within production and with representations onscreen. As well as increasing visibility of disabled presenters, representations were framed with new and positive meanings for the minority group of elite athletes at the London 2012 Paralympic Games. The next chapter looks at the agents who brought about changes to those meanings, including what they did and how and why they did it.

# Chapter 5 Normalising Disability: Encoding Meanings

The last chapter demonstrated some of the structural influences on Channel Four's Paralympic media coverage. I have shown there that the industrial context shaped decisions that had concrete consequences for onscreen representations and the production of meaning. This chapter examines the individual attitudes and actions of the production personnel, as they sought to renegotiate meanings of disability through their specifically selected televisual portrayals. Whilst attempting to normalise disability the common theme amongst the producers was to provide parity for the Paralympians with 'us', normal human beings, and also with our super-elite Olympic athletes. As the previous chapter has already shown there were conflicts and resolutions, and executive powers exercised, in order to achieve new representations that were then able to challenge audience perceptions. This chapter examines specific instances of those conflicts, where creative and executive powers of judgement were used, arguing that it was predominantly the pursuit of 'parity' that drove the personal decisions at the level of production.

There were two representational dilemmas the producers faced, which I have divided into the two sections below. The first was whether to 'show the sport' or 'show the stumps'. Visual representations were constantly reviewed and discussed in terms of parity with others, from differing perspectives. The second was which stereotype to promote, to give Olympic parity to an unusual sub-set of elite athletes, and with what meanings attached. The shaping of meanings involved challenging, reversing or tweaking existing stereotypes. This is a powerful mediation role for producers, and a role that still needs scrutiny (see Silverstone, 2005; Livingstone, 2009; Thumim, 2015, p.57). Would it be possible to communicate that these elite Paralympic athletes were 'extraordinarily human', 'extraordinarily good at sport' and 'extraordinarily different' all at the same time? These dilemmas, at the intersection of representation, sport and disability, were exacerbated by the existing tropes and meanings resonating from the respective media histories that I have outlined in chapter two.

During this chapter I analyse the relationship between these media histories and my participants' dilemmas around communicating new meanings. To recap briefly, and as elaborated in chapter two, making a 'spectacle of the other' (Hall, 1997) is commonly achieved by selecting some extreme characteristics for a group of people and de-humanising that group with a reductive stereotype, to provide a 'safe distance' (ibid.) for 'us' from 'them'. This situation is transformed for athletes in the context of televised sport, where we seek to identify *with* 'them' whilst they win or lose sporting competitions *for* 'us' (Whannel, 1992; Dayan and Katz, 1994; Roche, 2000). The entertaining televisual spectacle of international sports competitions includes multiple tropes that help attract large audiences (Howe, 2006) and the coverage is a desirable commodity for a television channel to therefore purchase. Unfortunately, spectacles of disability, however, do the opposite to spectacles of sport, and do not attract the same audiences. As noted in chapter two, historically, parades of disability have invoked revulsion in the spectator (Elias,1978; Barnes, 1992; Davis, 1995; Garland-Thomson, 1997; Gilbert and Schantz, 2008; 2012) . Televisual representations that wish to avoid revulsion have normally minimised disability by not showing it on camera (Shakespeare, 1999; Brittain, 2012).

It is possible to see from these representational issues that media coverage straddling disability and elite international sport would inevitably engender challenges that could surface during production. This chapter investigates specific instances of conflicting attitudes catalysing both individual and collective agency. The moments outlined reveal how certain meanings are preferred and chosen and what happens to bring about their construction at the encoding stage (see Hall, 1973; 1980). How these representations are then framed, utilising different programme formats, will be the subject of the next chapter, six.

The sections that follow explore the micro decisions that were made to normalise representations of the disabled athletes onscreen. Drawing on personal interviews, and some associated internal training materials, I discuss the dilemmas around visual representation, and the meanings and stereotypes

that were constructed, from the details supplied by my participants. The vast majority of decisions, that were taken at the role level of the individual producers or creatives, were driven by the felt need to deliver 'parity', of some sort. Historically, of course, and more broadly within the three research areas, there has been no such parity. However, as I will show, these histories shed considerable light on the underlying dilemmas the producers faced. Excerpts from my interviews, below, demonstrate how those working for Channel Four handled these underlying opposing dimensions, and produced a new range of representations that other producers now, post-2012, have at their creative disposal.

## 'Show the sport' or 'show the stumps'?

Whether to expose or conceal disability on camera is the theme of this first section. The dilemma was that whilst strong visual representations play a huge part in the successful close-up portrayals of televised sport (Howe, 2008), looking at physical disability onscreen is uncomfortable (Garland-Thomson, 1997; Corker and Shakespeare, 2002). There were outsourced sports producers who wanted to get on with their job of sport 'as usual', giving the coverage parity with any normal sport. This would naturally involve overlooking the physical bodily differences in order not to detract from the sport. At the same time there were Channel Four employees who wanted to take risks with the media profiles of the disabled athletes, showing them 'up close and personally', providing creative treatments they would consider equal with their Channel's other 'risky' programme-making. These visual representation dilemmas were carefully considered before and throughout the 12-day media coverage. Binary viewpoints were repeatedly recollected across my interviews surrounding the dilemma of what to conceal or expose.

Whilst for many the issue was which to do, 'show the stumps' *or* 'show the sport', or which to show first, the Commercial Lawyer, from the outset, saw the perspectives equally:

> Our view was that you couldn't and shouldn't disentangle the two
> and that there was something, an extraordinary thing, happening

here and it was right to reflect that. (Baker, Commercial Lawyer, *Interview*)

Not being able to disentangle the physical differences from the extraordinary sportsmanship was an essential ingredient, he felt, to the whole project. By contrast, attempts to separate the sport from the athletes' physical impairments was an adverse pressure applied, somewhat surprisingly, by the International Paralympic Committee (IPC), one of the stakeholders, who, like the British Paralympic Association (BPA), objected to the 'in-your-face' approach and kept telling the production teams and commissioning editors not to focus on the disability. Walsh, as the adviser on disability, told me she repeatedly had to respond to them:

> Actually if you do that, you separate it. You make it as a sort of special [event]– you know, disabled people are like a different species then. You're not being true to the athletes; you're not treating them like any other athletes then. (Walsh, Disability Executive, *Interview)*

Parity, in Walsh's argument, is between the disabled athletes and any other athletes. The goal to achieve status parity with the Olympians had been a firm objective for Walsh, and Channel Four had promised it in the bid for the broadcasting rights, that Walsh had helped to write, to the London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games (LOCOG) in 2009 (see Appendix C). She also did not want them to be treated like 'a different species' and this humanising concern was central to many of the team throughout the decision-making process.

Recently Paralympic scholars (Gilbert and Schantz, 2012) have argued that the media, if it 'carefully thought through' (p.241) the visibility and invisibility of its athletes, could arrest people's current perceptions of disability. Their argument continues:

> Everything which is not standard in terms of the body is often hidden by the sports media, as they are responsible for the ideas and concepts which are selected for the consumer of sports. (ibid.)

Although those with a disability are, of course, human, it is commonly agreed that the prevalent conceptualisation for disabled 'others' in the media is either

subhuman (see Haller, 1995; Garland-Thomson, 2002b) or superhuman (e.g. Purdue and Howe, 2012). Because disabled people are so often depicted as subhuman (see also Philo, 2012), academic writers have complained that the Paralympics would always be a 'side-show' (Gilbert and Shantz, 2008). Clearly, in 2012, the Paralympics was not a side-show, garnering, for the opening ceremony, the highest audience figures, 11.8 million, in over a decade for the channel (C4, 2013, see also Appendix E). Depicting the athletes as superhuman is discussed in the next section on stereotypes. The blend of 'showing the stumps' as well as 'showing the sport', however, was a separate way of humanising the athletes intentionally to give them parity. Visually depicting the athletes as *actually* human in this way, rather than subhuman or superhuman, was a new conceptualisation.

Walsh felt that communicating this normal humanity for the physically impaired was part of the job that Channel Four had employed her to do. In her capacity as Disability Executive, she had the strategic role of shaping the representations of disability onscreen, as well as promoting disability within the organisation off-screen. She, herself, had been a keen rower until contracting rheumatoid arthritis which brought her own sporting career to an end. The reach of Walsh's powers was extended for the duration of the 2012 Paralympics production schedule over all other editorial positions as well as content (from 2010 with *Inside Incredible Athletes,* discussed in the next chapter*,* until the end of the event in 2012). It was clear, from the general tone of comments from Walsh's colleagues, that she operated with determination to bring disability into the mainstream, as if it was 'normal'. She tried to achieve this by offering them parity with everyone else, Olympic athletes and normal human beings alike. Berger and Luckman (1979), discussing social constructions, once pointed out that 'he who has the bigger stick has the better chance of imposing his reality' (p.127). Channel Four, unlike the BBC previously, gave this role, and this editorial stick, to someone with a disability.

It is important to raise the distinction here between normalisation and parity. What is normal is what is *expected*, whereas parity constitutes *equal* treatment (Stevenson, 2010). This distinction matters for the following reason. It is not

*expected* to see stumps and close-ups of anatomical differences on television (other than programmes about that), but if the disabled athletes were to be treated *equally* with Olympians, then close-ups are part of the drama of the way that they would normally be televised. Offering equal visual treatment was a way of normalising the athletes and changing what could be expected onscreen in the future. This combination was seen as 'natural' for Walsh, and she brought personal experience of disabling physical impairment, with a corresponding sense of what ought to be normal or equal, to her professional role, within the organisation.

*Visibility*

Most of my contributors wanted to 'show the stumps' on screen. There is lots of evidence that having a disabled voice on the inside of the production helped reshape the culture and attitudes within the production and marketing teams. Walsh was a key proponent of the revealing disability viewpoint. At pre-training days, across multiple creative teams, she wrote and delivered a special presentation called *Mental 4 the Paralympics* (C4TVC, 2011). A copy is attached as Appendix B. An example of the editorial control over the emphasise strategy states, '[We need] clever editing with disabled presenters or reporters – make it look natural, and we want to see the disability, not shoot to hide it' (ibid.).

The reason for insisting on this strategy was not simply to 'show the stumps', but to provide a parity with other presentational tropes. There are particular televisual styles used in sport to introduce and also depict elite athletes, including the Olympians (see Whannel, 1992). Channel Four wanted to create the same televisual representations that would be normative for this other group of elites. Specifically, the Olympic athletes are depicted using uninhibited and impactful close-up visuals (Jhally, 1989) with brutally honest commentary, and Walsh did not want the Paralympians to be treated as a 'different species'. By being *treated* differently, as they had been historically, their actual differences were being masked onscreen. There was a sense, this time, for

2012, that the Paralympians should be treated exactly like Olympians, as if that was natural, however much of a shock this might be for viewers.

At Channel Four, a sense of parity, or equality, was communicated clearly from the outset even though there was not a budget to match (see chapters four and seven). I was able to establish through my interviews that this directive for equal treatment filtered through to the technical crews pervasively during production. Interviewing a Camera Supervisor, who had worked at the swimming pool in the Aquatics Centre during both the Olympics and the Paralympics, I asked if there had been any differences for her role. There was only one technical directive that she remembered as 'different' for her role, apart from extra health and safety issues. This was being asked to widen the shots 'more than we normally would' (Bell, Camera Operator, *Interview).* The shots were to include crutches and other elements within the frame so that the audience could see they were needed. These wider framings were chosen to emphasise that the guests had disabilities during their poolside and studio interviews. The significance of this choice to point cameras at the impairments and supporting equipment was understood as an explicit attempt, including by other producers who mentioned it, to reveal 'reality' rather than as a gratuitous depiction.

Showing the visible reality of physical disability was seen, by Channel Four, as a kind of equality. It seemed clear that previously the Paralympic stakeholders, the IPC and the BPA, whilst also seeking equality, had been more sensitive to the possible revulsion that audiences might feel if they could see the stumps. This has certainly been the sensitivity in previous Paralympic coverage (Gilbert and Schantz, 2012, p.229). In the case of Paralympics output, the US normally choose not to televise it all, and the BBC has historically sanitised disability portrayals and broadcast them late at night. Previously, the packaged BBC highlights for Athens 2004 and Beijing 2008 were confined to the margins of the 'graveyard' diversity segment in the schedule. Whilst the time-zone differences may have made highlights packages necessary, visual differences were still blurred or glossed over with music. For 2012, the pressure to de-emphasise disability as much as possible came from sports producers and also from the

outside stakeholders, even though their organisations' roles are to represent the disabled athletes. Instead, Channel Four utilised the 'normal' sports tropes, by adopting a realistic stance to provide representations during the coverage. The new visibility was intended to portray reality, equal to other sports coverage.

In an informal corridor conversation with a senior executive I asked if the 'up close and personal' coverage was perhaps an extension of the *Embarrassing Bodies* 'in-your-face' type of programming, and he was very quick to jump on that premise. He clearly believed the ethos and aim of their camerawork was for natural visibility, expecting that emphasising imagery would gradually help normalise the impairment experience for viewers as they got used to it. Getting used to it involves a retraining of accepted norms within the media frame, and Gitlin (1980) explains the way the media frame tells us how to interpret what we see onscreen. He describes the 'frame' as, 'persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion, by which symbol-handlers routinely organise discourse, whether verbal or visual' (p.7). In 2012 the Channel Four symbol-handlers intentionally set out to change the discourse for Paralympic athletes using media frames to do so.

*Beautiful Imagery*

I asked the Video Editor for the powerful *Meet The Superhumans* trailer how he had selected his footage and he explained that he picked startling images intending 'to almost normalise it [the impairment]'. He said:

> We weren't going to shy away from anything…but we didn't want to focus on it in a freakish way or anything like that. (Hardy, Video Editor, *Interview*)

Not shying away from anything was a professionalism of his, giving parity to this project alongside any other. As a Video Editor myself we were able to discuss the routine search for the best images and how to juxtapose them for best effect. This is a normal part of any video-editing role and Hardy clarified his not shying away approach to mean 'the balance we're always looking for, and to make things beautiful as well' (ibid.). Looking for beautiful images is a

central element to Hardy's work, whatever he is editing, and he made no exception here. Disability was treated the same as any other imagery, with parity, at this point, from the Video Editor's perspective.

Seeing the body as visually beautiful, regardless of taboo or difference, was a noticeable characteristic of Hardy's work and work ethic more generally. There was artwork on the walls of his office, showing off his style, which was in keeping with the *Meet the Superhumans* trailer he edited for Channel Four. He also, through his creative choices, contested the visual imagery associated with 'repulsive' disability and did not resolve this by hiding it. Hall (1997) describes 'contesting the stereotype from within' (p.264) as a 'representational strategy' (p.265) useful for subverting existing stigmas or attitudes towards anomaly. By taking the body as the principal site of the stereotype and making it beautiful rather than bad, odd, or wrong, Hall says 'stereotypes work against themselves' (ibid.) Hardy undid the 'wrong' stereotype for disability in pursuit of his normal professional goals. Just as the sense that 'black is wrong' could be restated as 'black is beautiful' (Hall, p.262) with racial imagery, Hardy was able to do the same for disability, restating it as beautiful, visually, in this commercial.

Visual communication scholars (e.g. Parry, 2010; Domke et al., 2002; Petersen, 2005; Arpan et al., 2006) have discussed how inclusion of particular angles and gestures affect critical or positive evaluations of a depicted group. In practice, editors make evaluations, by sifting through all the available footage, that then affect other evaluations of what or whom they are depicting. The 4Creative Video Editor was therefore the potential author of a considerable level of the framing and attitude that prevailed towards the disabled elite athletes. Methodologically, Domke et al. (2002) have said, of news analysis, that:

> While scholars in recent years have begun to devote increasing attention to people's use of core values and mental categories to sift through […] messages, the role of visual images is virtually unexamined. (ibid., p.133)

Textual analysts do examine these images, but less enquiry is made into the producer's understanding of the role they play at the time of production, or what

mental categories are used by them to sift through the visual material. Hardy often, he told me, prioritises beauty as an aesthetic to tell stories when looking for powerful and striking images. He simply looks for what he considers to be outstanding images, whatever form they take. Notwithstanding this, Parry (2010) points out that framings created by visual imagery do, however, produce an 'outlook or a 'point of view' (p.70). Hardy's core values, therefore, of promoting beauty and startling imagery, in this case, may have provided parity with his other work, but also delivered a particularly sympathetic perspective on physical deformity.

Historically, for sport, the body beautiful has already been defined as 'perfect' famously on film by Reifenstahl (1938). Theoretical notions of the Olympian Spirit were visually embodied by her through dramatic imagery elevating the Arian physique. In the last few decades, visual representations of Olympic athletes have continued to resonate the focus on attractive bodies (see Horne et al., 2013, pp.105-111) without applying any focus on the bodily imperfect Paralympic athletes. Hardy's search for beauty within the hours and hours of footage he had at his disposal, even for his minute-long trailer, took him to what he regarded visually as the perfect *image*, rather than the perfect body. This is a departure from previous Paralympic portrayals which have not been given this equal treatment; these have instead glossed over and away from the anatomies of its elite sportspeople (Howe and Jones, 2006; Brittain, 2010), leaving legitimate athleticism uncelebrated.

Visually, Claydon (2015) suggests that 'representations of disability sport can disavow the framing of the athlete in terms of the body beautiful to reject the primacy of the body in favour of the primacy of the sport' (p.89). My interviewees have articulated that this was not the case in the edit suites of 4Creative for London 2012. Before the Editor got to the sport, he chose the best imagery for its own sake, which is a normal practice for many television advertisements, particularly the Nike style they were emulating, discussed in chapter seven. What this means is that part of what changed the representations of disabled athletes with the 2012 coverage, was the selection of impactful imagery; it was chosen purely on merit.

According to my contributors, these kinds of decisions and choices were made in a collaboration of what scholars call above-the-line and below-the-line production roles (Hesmondhalgh, 2002; Banks, 2009). The Film Director, Tom Tagholm, actually steered Hardy away from cutting narrative sequences, which he had begun to do, in order to emphasise 'the startling yet beautiful imagery in an exciting way' (Hardy, Video Editor, *Interview)*. This disruption of the natural instinct to make sense of what we see was deliberate, and the Editor had to recut his material to achieve this anti-narrative disruption. Usually, only the strongest and the most able are celebrated in mainstream competitive sport (Whannel, 1992; 2012) which makes the connection between disability and elite sport something of a representational paradox (see DePauw, 1997; Silva and Howe, 2012). To combat this paradox, meanings were made and a point of view constructed that went against normal conventions in order to introduce the Paralympics in a new way. VT Editor, Hardy, by treating the subjects of the project carefully, as the poolside and other creative teams were doing, was able to combine his art with the athletes' reality. Both were embedded in the visual representations where he revealed the stumps *and* redefined elite sport. The emphasis on reality therefore, provided a real parity on many levels, including skilful treatment of subjects and crafted representations of them.

*Producer Perspectives*

Since London 2012, Paralympic scholars Schantz and Gilbert (2012) have urged that it is time to investigate producer perspectives on the way the Paralympics is delivered through the media. Because televised sport is a mediated process there needs to be a focus, again, they say, on the encoding stage of the representation process, to counter-balance the more prolific literature focusing on texts and audiences. With this in mind, Schantz and Gilbert (2012) conclude the most recent collection of media and Paralympic sport literature, *Heroes or Zeros,* by saying:

> There is a lack of understanding of thoughts and ideas of the Olympic and Paralympic television […] producers' perspectives, regarding the many ways in which the Paralympics are delivered to the public. It would be of great interest to interview these powerful

people and try to understand their ideas regarding the delivery of Paralympic sports to the public. (ibid., p.267)

Having interviewed these 'powerful people' for this study, it became clear that their delivery of the London 2012 Paralympics was intended to normalise disability through visually emphasising physical impairment whilst imbuing it with new meanings. The style and visual treatment were shaped deliberately to reflect a new paradigm, away from the old marginalised disabled 'other' discourse.

Producer perspectives on whether to 'show the stumps', or not, shaped many key decisions made by Channel Four. This creative emphasis produced images that were more striking than any previously used in disability sport. The production teams across the different output types were all told to, 'Linger on the athlete's body, like you'd linger on an Olympic athlete's body, however warped and cracked' (C4TVC, 2011). This directive, to make it like the Olympics, filtered through into actual footage and the form of engagement, using the close-up medium of television, was a typical Channel Four strategy. According to my participants it was well thought out but had attendant risks. There had been a repeating mantra at the trainings, 'Don't focus on the impairment? Do, if it engages the audience' (ibid.). Engaging the audience is not necessarily the fairest way of treating disability on television, as other Paralympic scholars have pointed out:

> Representational media secure our attention as readers and viewers in the double bind of our fascination/repulsion with physical difference. (Mitchell and Snyder, 1997, p.15)

It may have been in order to protect against this wrong kind of fascination, therefore, that there was resolute resistance by the BPA and IPC to risk-taking visuals. This resistance was referred to by personnel with roles in marketing, commissioning, sports production and presentation. The outside organisations suggested a de-emphasising mode of depiction, in contrast to the parity-treatment coverage, using the highlights packaging style previously used by the BBC in order to gloss over difference. It was a general consensus amongst all my contributors that the typical television trope for disabled sport using 'slow-

motion with music' was both cheesy and patronising and they refused to tone the imagery down.

The Commercial Lawyer involved from the beginning, and also part of the top level wrangling throughout, said he overheard much of these confrontational conversations. He referred to the minimise/emphasise battle against the patronising tropes by saying:

> We definitely didn't go that way [slo-mo music sequences] and I think some of the people in the BPA had some initial reservations about how that might go, because they felt…[exposing disabilities]…might be a turn off to some sections of the audience. They felt that some of our plans about showing, for example, instances of disability right up close - so people jumping into the pool, being lowered into the pool which is something you would not have seen so clearly in the past… might be a turnoff to some people, and almost to the athletes, focusing on the wrong thing rather than focusing on their extraordinary achievements. (Baker, Commercial Lawyer, *Interview)*

The conscious decision to emphasise disability came clearly from a position of understanding both sides and Baker went on to say that there had been a mixture of feelings about it. In spite of these misgivings voiced by others, the decision was upheld to emphasise visual disabilities even though some considered it 'the wrong thing'. It was explained by several people that these close-ups were 'giving parity'' to the Paralympians, and not intended to make a separate spectacle of them. I discuss this spectacle in the next section.

Whilst it is commonly understood that defining 'difference' is intended to create a sense of otherness (Hall, 2012, ch.4), in this case it was to create a sense of similarity. Not shying away from shot types and sizes that would have been used at the Olympics meant showing stumps and other potentially shocking physical impairments, such as absent limbs, in a way that had not been done before. Otherwise the coverage would not have had the look and feel of an Olympics, or any other sort of mega-event. The BPA feared the reveal-all approach would detract from the value and performance of the athletes whom they represented. As will become clear later in this chapter, these stakeholders later found that in practice the Channel Four creative choices enhanced the

standing of the athletes as elite sportsmen and women, and gave them greater parity with their Olympic counterparts.

Several of the Channel Four creatives explained why they had adopted the approach. As well as giving parity, it was felt that 'letting people notice' a difference, in both appearance and function, helped the normal group, without the stigma, to 'stop noticing'. This is an effect that those with a stigma know well, and was theorised many decades ago by Goffman. He called it 'disclosure etiquette' (1963, p.172) saying that giving the 'normal' person a chance to adjust to the stigma helped overcome the feeling of 'otherness'. For some at Channel Four, 'showing the stumps' was a clearly planned winning strategy. For others involved in the media production, I sensed, the success of this may have been accepted as a hindsight observation. Showing the sport first, by itself, instead would have involved masking disability, and was an approach that was consistently overruled by the in-house editorial team. They steadfastly held to their remit to 'take risks' and justified the undisguised portrayals as part of providing equal treatment.

An example of how the emphasise-first strategy may have been central to the 'shift in perceptions' that was attributed to the coverage later (C4, 2013; Jackson, 2013; Hodges et. al., 2015), was noted by Clare Balding, presenter of the *Tea-time and Evening* programme. Parity with non-disabled sportspeople apparently removed the issue of disability for some of the younger audience. She pointed out, as one of her key memories, how she and Ade Adepitan had been surprised by their trips out into the Olympic Park when they went out with a camera to film the 'Ask Ade' segment (*Tea-time and Evening Show*, 2012). Children were canvassed for questions, and Balding particularly remembers still that, unexpectedly for her, they 'did not mention disability until about day four or five'. She went on to say that if they did mention wheelchairs it was about 'the kit' not the disability. When I asked her why she imagined this was so, her thoughts were that because the disability 'had been visible from the outset' it was no longer an issue, helping the viewers 'focus purely on the sport'. The camera crews had also, as I have discussed, been asked to reveal the 'kit' using wider shots. This helped the children, that the presenters

interviewed, accept impairment predicaments alongside technical solutions as normal, for these new sporting heroes. Goffman's (1963) disclosure effect can be seen to be at work here, with people relaxing about the stigma after noticing it, because it was out in the open. The trait, or obtrusion, was no longer in the way. Having pieces of anatomy missing, for example, is something that is regularly played down in media representations of disability, unless being examined in particular within a disability programming segment.

Channel Four subverted this norm by paying passing close attention to disability but en route to the other attributes. Paralympic stakeholders wanted their television event to be 'received easily' but tried to skip this step. They were clearly not aware of the benefits of disclosure (Goffman, 1963) to help overcome a sense of stigma. Instead all the other stakeholders (the BPA, IPC and LOCOG) suggested and tried to insist upon a minimising only strategy. This view was communicated as well by one of the heads of the television sport production (who wanted to remain anonymous). In interview with me he simply said that, 'with extraordinary sporting performance it is immaterial that there is a disability' (Sports Executive, *Interview*).

It is not immaterial though, and has to be addressed, at least initially. In particular with the Paralympics, the stigma has to be revealed and noticed, as the disability is in itself a qualifying hallmark for the competition, and needs to be considered as part of understanding the rules of individual events. However the sentiment that other attributes are the important ones to highlight ties in with the rest of Goffman's thesis that an 'obtruding stigma' has the effect of 'breaking the claim any other attributes may have on us' (p.76). At this point the one with the stigma has lost any chance of equal treatment, or parity. In other words the disability, or stigma, whilst not immaterial in the sporting context, is *in the way* until it has been observed and adjusted to. There was a way of preventing this blinding to normal human characteristics, and sporting prowess, other than by avoidance, and that, the producers felt, was by showing it.

*Emphasise to Minimise*

For the 2012 coverage, emphasising *in order to* minimise was achieved by using the cameras to reveal difference, and changing the meanings of the representations to evoke normal humanity and elite athleticism. Drawing again on Hall's (2012) argument about the transcoding of meanings (pp.260-262) to think through this phenomenon, it became clear how meanings were changed. As noted earlier, a shift historically occurred with the transformation of racial difference in certain media representations, from meaning 'black is wrong' to 'black is beautiful' (ibid., p.262) by applying normal conventions. Likewise here, beyond beautiful imagery, disability is imbued with new and positive elite meanings by the combination of unashamed stump disclosure but also high performance sport camera angles, thus bringing another marginalised and 'different' attribute into the mainstream. 'Elite disability' had not previously been considered or framed, as it was for 2012.

Having shown that it was parity with the Olympians that prevailed, in using recognisably the same visual language to support showing 'the stumps', I now explore the two reasons that were given for the opposite perspective. Seeking to claim attention for the athletes' performance achievements, by providing parity with other sports programmes, was the intention of some groups. When it came to what to actually focus on it was the outsourced sports producers and the Paralympic associations who just wanted to 'show the sport'. Two reasons surfaced for apparently wanting to do this.

The first was expressed at Sunset and Vine, the sports producers to whom the coverage was outsourced, where their remit was to deliver high quality sports coverage and achieve good ratings, as they are well known for doing. The strategy of avoiding showing physical impairments would have helped to achieve those ratings as it could have appealed to their 'normal' viewers. Editorial leanings in this direction by the Head of Television Sport did, according to other contributors, beneficially affect the overall television output in what became a collaborative effort. He was called 'a safe pair of hands' by a senior colleague; however, his stance also created 'a battleground', according to the Disability Executive at Channel Four.

The second reason others wanted to focus on the sport was to conceal the impairments. For some stakeholders this was so that the Paralympians 'could be taken seriously as athletes' (Carpenter, BPA Press Officer, *Interview*). Their concern for parity was not in terms of visual treatment, but in terms of being accepted as if they were other athletes, who are normally taken seriously. At the time it seemed very important for the BPA (British Paralympic Association) to make sure sport was exclusively the focus. In the chapter on marketing it is made clear that in fact, once the disability element had been flagged up, the schedules and trailers did then go on to focus on the sport, literally switching from one emphasis to the other. However at the production stage the IPC, as well, were very upset by, and distanced themselves from, the more direct representations of the *Meet The Superhumans* campaign. Letters of objection were written, but not taken into account.

The BPA, who represent the group of athletes, were not able to affect the editorial decisions with the fiercely independent Channel Four in the way that they had been able to do with the BBC (who ran heavily edited highlights packages). It was over this point, of what to show, that they fell out. However, after the event I went to visit the BPA offices where it was clear from the artwork over all their walls that the Paralympics coverage had in fact been a fantastic success for them, fulfilling their true focus of, perhaps, sport for sports' sake. The unexpected outcome and benefit to them was that by actually focussing, against their better judgement, on disability, the result was then a desired focus on sport and sporting performance. The Communications Officer for the BPA told me that their athletes just wanted to be regarded as elite athletes. It was clear, though, that the organisation, and in particular their chairman, who was named by several of my participants, had failed to recognise the 'disclosure etiquette' required to get them there. One of the Paralympians had understood this better when he told a Sports Editor for Channel Four:

> Yeah, we understand people want to know why I've only got one arm, but once you've done it once can you talk about how far I'm jumping? (Aitcheson, Commissioning Editor for Sport, *Interview*)

The Paralympic athlete recounted by the Editor here understood that first you need to 'come out' as other stigmatised groups do, then be celebrated in all your normality or, in the case of elite sport, extraordinariness. Negrine and Cumberbatch (1992) in their comprehensive study of disability on television surmised that:

> Given […] people with disabilities wish to be treated first and foremost as people, and only secondarily as people who happen to have disabilities, they should be so treated on television. (ibid., p.141)

In practice, though, the difference needs to be addressed first, so that, setting the anomaly aside, the person can then be viewed as they normally would, if they were 'normal'. This was the firm view, at least, of the in-house editorial teams who commissioned the programmes for 2012.

A measurable and key success of the visually shocking media coverage, as it transpired, is that journalists and magazine writers now ring up the Press Office at the BPA to ask if their gold medallists would like to feature in fashion magazines. Previously, I was advised, they were rung up by medical magazines who would say 'can I speak to the one who had cancer?' (Carpenter, BPA Press Officer, *Interview*). It appears the strategy to 'show the stumps' and then 'show the sport', whilst perhaps not a 'hegemonic manipulation' (Dayan and Katz, 1994, P.5) that the Olympics can achieve on a global scale, was at least a visual manipulation of 'dramatic character' and 'tone'. (Roche, 2000, p.1)

Reversing old stereotypes, as discussed, worked in a similar way for the normalisation of racial difference. Also, Hall observes that once black people had been made central within certain media genres this made them 'essential to what we may call [the] mystical life and culture of American Cinema' (2012, p.261). Now that the Paralympic athletes have joined the elites at the centre of international televised sport, this same phenomenon has occurred, to some extent, for them. They can now sell fashion items based on the shift of their personas from margin to mainstream. The ghoulish focus on, for example,

cancer, has been transposed into 'normal' human celebrity, parity even, as regards magazine interest and articles, with their non-disabled celebrity peers.

The role sport plays in creating celebrity, and specifically through artificial rivalry narratives, is explored in the next chapter. However this strategy of noticing, in order to stop noticing, worked here in the 2012 media representations of disabled athletes with curiosity possibly amplified in this context by heightened viewer interest that year in athletic performances. This interest was probably enhanced by the known sense of collective national identity derived from hosting an Olympic Home Games (Tomlinson and Young, 2006), against which the Paralympics was deliberately compared. Equal treatment, visually, was a risky strategy and was justified, by my participants, on the grounds of giving parity to help normalise disability. The demystifying process, achieved here by emphasising *in order to* minimise, did seem to some degree to remove the stigma (recognised by Jackson et. al., 2015), making the athletes appear more 'normal' and 'human', at least in the visual representations. According to my data, it was clearly a producer intention, therefore, to achieve normalisation by showing the stumps first, within the sports context, then celebrate and focus on the sport.

## Which stereotype to use?

One of the other ways that the producers sought to bring the Paralympics into the mainstream was by redefining the identities of the Paralympic athletes. To give the disabled athletes parity with the Olympians they needed to reject the existing negative stereotype associated with disability sport, and create new meanings. In this section I explore the theme of the selection process, showing that the producers first chose to not use the 'victim of circumstance' stereotype, with its connotations of brave and courageous. They did then begin to construct the Paralympians as fictional 'superheroes', with technological cyborg references, but finally, with an intervention from the Culture Director at LOCOG, settled for a disability/Olympian hybrid of 'superhumans'. They felt this last one was more grounded in reality and made them more like Olympians. I will show how the seeming nuance, of what still seems to be the exceptional trope,

created a stereotype onto which they were then able to superimpose a new type of extraordinariness. This new meaning was a combination of 'extraordinarily different', 'extraordinarily good at sport' and also 'extraordinarily human'.

Stereotypes, as already noted, give one group a dominant power over the 'other'. In the field of communication theory, building on Silverstone's (2005; 2007) and Livingstone's (2009) discussion about 'mediation' in the meaning-making process, Thumim (2015) suggests that 'specific instances' (p.57) of media production should be analysed as part of the process of understanding more fully how meanings are constructed. Thumim reinforces the point that it is the 'power relations' (ibid.) that should be acknowledged, as these continue through the whole mediation process, beginning with production. Examining the construction of the superhuman stereotype, at the production stage, can therefore reveal those power relations because, as Hall (1997) has established, power is made apparent when one group make representations about another. This power is revealed in the micro details, in this case, of how one stereotype was rejected and another powerful one adapted to mean something potentially new.

The mediation process is particularly transparent with the Olympic and Paralympic Games. As part of the media sports complex (see Jhally, 1989) televised sport is understood to be a highly mediated environment, with powerful constructions of apparently 'live', neutral-sounding 'coverage'. The coverage does not actually 'cover' the sport, rather it articulates constructed narratives (Horne et. al., 2013) which are developed using the actions and stories of stereotyped athletes. In this setting then, how meanings are negotiated and constructed, in specific instances, reveals more about the power relations that operate within the production process.

For example, recent semiotic analysis of the 'superhumans' trope, as used by Channel Four for London 2012, has revealed resonances with other cultural influences (see Alexander, 2015) such as Nietzsche, X-men and a superhuman race. Strong connections are made to these historic references derived from an

analysis of the content. My discussions with those who actually encoded the stereotype tells a slightly different, but overlapping story to the one derived from scrutinising the texts.

For London 2012, the producers met the 'superhumans' in real life before they represented them onscreen which affected how they sought to portray them. As well as some athletes coming in to the studios (Aitcheson, Commissioning Editor for Sport, *Interview*), in particular the 'normal' TV producers encountered the 'other' athletes at an international swimming gala and also at a wheelchair basketball match. The reality of those meetings imbued everyone I spoke to with the desire to no longer sanitise depictions of this group of sportspeople, and instead represent the raw reality of their high performing athleticism in a more tangible way. They also watched the documentary *Murderball* about wheelchair rugby, and that had its own aggressive and masculine style which several contributors referenced.

Disability scholars have noted that wheelchairs are the most commonly accepted trope to symbolise disability on television (Barnes, 1992; Barnes and Mercer, 2010) and heightened masculinity is still the prevalent representation for Olympic sport (Morris, 1991, p.93; Horne et. al., 2013; Howe, 2008a). *Murderball* and the competitive basketball had both. Close encounters with the 'crashes and the clashes', which I discuss below, changed their attitudes towards disability sport and the Paralympic athletes. The swimming gala, for other reasons, shifted their paradigms too. Between these two events it was collectively decided that they were 'not victims', they were 'nearly superheroes' but actually 'superhuman', in every sense of the word that the range of producers understood it, as I will now show.

## Not 'victims'

The first moment that changed attitudes within the production teams, and triggered the determination to give the Paralympics parity with the Olympics, was a swimming gala in Sheffield. This was one of several pre-events attended by many of the production staff (another included the World Championships in

Eindhoven, 2010). Unsolicited, the occasion came up in many of my interviews because it had clearly left an impact for some that never really left them. This swimming event is where many contributors had their own perspective on disability changed. The shock of the spectacle of 'torsos, stumps and stuff' (Tagholm, Film Director, *Interview*) was laid bare and an extraordinary contrast between the athletes either being helped, or crawling to the poolside, and then achieving record breaking swimming speeds, challenged notions of their pre-existing stereotypes. A recurrent observation from my interviews was voiced by the Video Editor, who said:

> The interesting thing was that you could see all they were thinking about was qualifying [as] fully focused athletes. (Hardy, Video Editor, *Interview*)

That their sporting performance was 'all they were thinking about' was a dramatic realisation for Hardy and many others. They no longer saw the Paralympians as tragic victims, with their own 'special sports' event. The tragic victim is the most prevalent or 'normal' way of perceiving the disabled (see, for example, Hevey, 1992; Clogston, 1990; Brittain, 2010) and this shift away from that normality to a different one happened at an early pre-production stage. Most of my participants had something to say about the personal paradigm shift the first-hand exposure to the swimming events had on them. There was also a striking line in the film they all watched, at one of the team away days, that summarised this perspective of not being a victim. One of the athletes says, 'I don't want a hug, I want a medal' (*Murderball,* 2005). The Channel Four output reflected this perspective, with a distinctive point of view. They also rejected any hint of victimhood in the programme tonality throughout, and this was a perspective change for the producers that took place, notably, before the representations were constructed. As such these constructions were genuine reflections of the attitudes held by the programme creators.

By contrast to this more positive perspective, a senior executive told me that a Paralympian had come in and said that she'd just done a piece with BBC News and the tonality of it was just so awful she'd never want to do anything for them ever again:

> Because it was all that kind of 'oh, aren't they brave' thing. She went on to say that this was the 'kind of crap that we desperately wanted to get rid of.' (anon.)

With the issue of tone it was clear the Channel Four teams were aware of what to do and what not to do. The tone of voice delivered in vision, or with the voice-overs and commentaries, was also carefully managed and trained to avoid the 'victim of circumstance' trope. In their trainings one of the slides read as follows:

> For the Paralympics, with emphasis on elite sport, if we're not careful with tone and balance across all our programming we'll be right back in 'exceptionally brave and talented' mode. (C4TVC, 2011)

The 'brave and talented mode' stems from a well-used media representation suggesting that as a disabled person 'anyone living a normal life must be extraordinary' (Charlton, 2000, p.52). The separation they were trying to make was between being 'extraordinary at sport', which would normalise them as Olympians, as distinct from the old victim trope for the weak subhuman disabled person.

It was as if the effect of those personal encounters with extreme and challenging difference somehow shocked the production teams into looking more closely at what they were seeing, finding a more compelling meaning beyond the appearance and the classic victim stigma. Exposure to the realities of the athletes' differences, whilst living, training and competing, forced the production teams to pay attention to their other attributes. My first interviews were conducted eighteen months after the event and the details were recounted with clear and vivid insight with each contributor, demonstrating that the moments had made an impact on them. This is important because there was a clear transmission of the experience of the production personnel into the creative production process. Exposing the producers to those they were to create representations of, prior to the creation of that content, played a significant part in shaping their rejection of the tragic victim stereotype.

I observed that the experience of the producers almost exactly replicates what made it to the screens. Clare Balding's input, as TV Presenter, is significant as

she was uniquely positioned to notice the details, having personally presented the television coverage of the Paralympics since 2004 for the BBC and then, in 2012, for Channel Four. She had not attended the pre-events, but she told me how she suddenly realised what was different, for her, about the London 2012 coverage. It was the swimming:

> I remember the first time I went to a swimming event at the Paralympic Games, and I – you cannot not be shocked because there's no prosthetic limbs; there's no clothing either, so you are seeing everything and, you know, you will see an amputee – a double-arm amputee, for example, helping a double-leg amputee to get dressed, or you'll see somebody clothing themselves on their own with their feet or eating breakfast with their feet. I mean, it is amazing. But when the BBC covered the swimming, they would join it as the athletes were – as the gun was about to go, so you'd only briefly see the swimmers on the podium. And they would leave it before they got out of the pool. (Balding, TV Presenter, *Interview*)

The impact of the exposure to physical difference was the same for Balding as it had been for the producers previously. However, she noticed that these differences were being displayed on camera for the first time:

> Channel Four, because it was live, live, live […] joined as you would join for an Olympics, as the athletes were coming out of the changing room. Now some of them were coming out in chairs; some of them were coming out with prosthetic limbs that they then removed. You then would see them either get on the start block or get into the water and they would stay with the pictures for them getting out of the water. Now that does something in your - you know, to a viewer – that is showing you an awful lot more of the human body than you would ever have seen before. (ibid.)

It was clear to someone who presented both the BBC and the Channel Four coverage, that what we were seeing onscreen, although stark, was visual parity with the Olympic coverage. Schantz and Gilbert (2012) summarise the media portrayals within disability sport in the decades immediately prior to London 2012 as either 'glamorous hagiography' transforming the athletes into tragic overcoming 'heroes' or nothing much, as overlooked 'zeros'(p.14). In my interviews there was no evidence of intended portrayals as either tragic or overlooked. In fact the tragic or brave portrayals were studiously avoided.

Power to represent the disabled group differently was exercised by the producers at this encoding stage, and these specific instances demonstrate that there was a cognitive understanding of what they needed to do. I have attached the Aquatic Centre Camera Positions from the crew call sheets as Appendix D. These show the 'up close and personal' extra camera positions, funded by the sponsors, that were not part of the generic outside broadcast feed. Channel Four had to choose to make the coverage look like the Olympics, and they did so with the help of Sunset and Vine.

There were also, as well as visual and tone-of-voice considerations, issues of story-telling. Whilst framing the narrative for disability is part of the next chapter, it needs a mention here because the 'exceptionally brave and talented' mode is also commonly associated with the use of back-stories which have constructed narratives. Very often disability back-stories are used to evoke sympathy (Barnes, 1992; Garland-Thomson, 2002), and this was something Channel Four were trying to change. The sporting context of back story usage is only briefly glossed over in many of the recent academic articles relating to media representations of the Paralympics (Gilbert and Schantz, 2012; Silva and Howe, 2012). This may be because very few researchers examine television in particular (Howe, 2008b, p.4). I found a range of views towards them amongst my interviewees, particularly relating to the perpetuation of tragedy and victimhood:

> The back stories were clearly a very powerful tool and a slightly controversial one, because I think some people felt that an old-fashioned approach, that is potentially overly sentimental, actually takes away from them as sports people. (Baker, Commercial Lawyer, *Interview*)

Whilst it is an old-fashioned approach to documentary, and current affairs pre-interview profiles, the televisual treatment is still newer to sport and not necessarily sentimental. This comment by the Head of Marketing gives an indication of why it was used at all:

> It is a tool in every sport and I would say that the only sport that probably get away with it, without doing it, is something like football because it's so popular. The footballers can be the most boring people in the world and it doesn't really matter, they are forgiven. But

> in a lot of Olympic sports they don't actually get much coverage
> outside the Olympics, aside from athletics and the hundred metres.
> Most of them are sports that only really get interest every few years.
> (Walker, Head of Marketing, *Interview*)

The point here is that the backgrounder packages are made so that the audience can relate to and identify with the characters. When the back stories were used, they were being utilised as they would for other sport and not to exacerbate the victim stereotype. In this way then, the production personnel consciously steered away from the 'brave and courageous' disabled trope, during the twelve days of the event, only utilising that televisual treatment when it served the sporting context.

*Nearly 'superheroes'*

Having refuted the victim trope, the team then started to design another one on paper. Glorifying high achievement is central to the drama of televised sport, and was therefore a necessary device for the Paralympic Games, if it were to be viewed on a par with other international sports competitions. Creating superheroes, though, as a media representation, unfortunately falls directly into the category of the much denounced disempowering supercrip framing (Barnes, 1992; Haller, 1995; Howe, 2011; Gilbert and Schantz, 2012). This depiction was originally identified by Barnes, and specifically refers to the need for 'super' or 'magical powers' to achieve acceptance if you are different (1992, p.12). The black equivalent stereotype he cites (1992) is that they be 'good at rhythm or exceptional athletes' (p.12). He goes on to say that if a disabled person is, for example, blind, he/she needs to have super sensitive hearing, or some other extraordinary compensating facility that makes them an exception that we can allow, whilst keeping, as Hall (1997) would say, a safe distance.

Depicting these 'elite' others as superheroes was an intuitive reflex for the Creative Network Director, who also directed the film called *Meet The Superhumans*. Tom Tagholm told me how he had been affected by watching wheelchair basketball players, as he sensed their competitiveness and raw energy, even just 'racing to barge through a door first' after their practice. He went on to say that:

> Their rage and their fuel and their way of turning that into a positive energy, you know, seemed like quite an interesting way to build up a way of seeing Paralympians. (Tagholm, Film Director, *Interview*)

Tagholm's initial idea, he told me, had been for the 'superhero' frame rather than 'superhuman' which was the later change made by Greg Nugent, Brand, Marketing and Culture Director at LOCOG. The feel for how to create the personas of the Paralympians was based initially on thoughts of the X-Men triggered by the sportsmen and women that Tagholm had met. This concept was underpinned by other connotations, which he described as, 'the way that a lot of these superheroes have some kind of a society-perceived flaw that becomes their strength'. He personally experienced their 'flaws' as *part of* their strength and it was this that he was trying to convey.

Whilst disability is often depicted as something that needs fixing (Barnes, 1992; Shakespeare, 2006), or sometimes seen as incidental (Ellis and Goggin, 2015, p.81). Muller et al., (2012) assert that this is not always the case. They say it may be *part of* the disabled person's identity that should be accepted, rather than overlooked or overcome (ibid.). It was Tagholm's experience that disability could not be separated from his sense of who the athletes were. He felt it was partly what gave them their extraordinary athleticism and this was what *he* meant by superhero, as if it gave them powers. His genuine assimilation of the athletes' energy and emotional drivers was communicated clearly to me and he spoke of his desire to catch this essence on film.

The Film Director's depictions were not destined or designed, by him, to separate the viewer or create a safe distance as a cognitive act. It was my observation that he intended there to be nothing safe about his directing or filmic style at all and that the essence of raw reality was essential to his depictions. It appeared to me that Tagholm's own absorption of the Marvel comics, as personally assimilated childhood texts, helped him construct his conceptualisation of the Superhero trope. He remembered and understood the cyborgian undertones. Hall speaks of the 'intertextuality' (1997) between cultural forms where one existing cultural product can affect the creation of others. Tagholm's childhood affinity with the Marvel comics and the film is an

example of this intertextuality as his previous experience clearly touched his adult creative imagination when concocting the superheroes concept.

The film, *Murderball,* watched by all the team, may have affected him too, as he particularly mentioned it. It starts with a close-up of a spanner as part of the getting-out-of-bed routine for a disabled athlete, in a sequence reminiscent of a fantasy cyborg future. It is significant that Tagholm's take on the meaning of superheroes as a frame for the athletes was 'where biology meets technology'. This did also come from his self-confessed passion for watching technology in other sport. He said:

> The geekiest side of my sport viewing is that I like Formula One as well. And you look at these things [Paralympic wheelchairs] and think, 'Okay, it's quite incredible, the lightness of the chairs and the engineering that goes into them' and that's kind of visual, very visual actually, you know, if you watch X-Men or you watch any of these Marvel or DC Comics franchises, how that is very filmic. And like the sprint chair, or a carbon fibre blade, is straight out of moviemaking. And it just seemed like that way of seeing humans...yeah, there was a lot of that DNA in it. (Tagholm, Film Director, *Interview*)

Further to the valuable textual analysis and decoding undertaken by Alexander (2015, pp.107-111) of the *Meet The Superhumans* trailer (2012), this producer insight demonstrates a slightly different creative perspective shaping the 'encoding' (Hall, 1973; 1980) stage. Scholars are seeking to 'understand their ideas regarding the delivery of Paralympic sports to the public' (see Schantz and Gilbert, 2012, p.267) and this interview excerpt demonstrates the influence of both phenomenology and intertexuality in the concept of the superheroes. Tagholm was affected by the direct experience of those he was seeking to create representations of, as well as by fictional texts he had enjoyed in his non-professional life. It was mainly the filmic nature of the Marvel and DC Comics franchises that Tagholm sought to emulate, he told me, to emphasise the athletes' differences. In this case it was filmic parity he was wanting to achieve whilst engaging with, and wanting to borrow from, the fictitious but real, struggle-against-society connotations.

In the real-world sporting context, away from fiction, Howe (2011) questions the 'cyborgification of Paralympic bodies' (p.868) by suggesting that this particular

framing disempowers disabled athletes. In my interview with Adepitan, a technology-dependent Paralympian, his view of his own empowerment, as seen on and off screen, was far more positive. He said:

> Wearing blades or having technology - it was always going to go that way, but I think people didn't realise that, when you have a disability, technology is a really big part of your life….it helps us to go where we want to go. (Adepitan, ex-Paralympian TV presenter, *Interview*)

I experienced what he meant here at first hand when I first met him at the Channel Four Disability Executive's leaving party. Here, in his wheelchair, he was swamped by everybody standing around having drinks. He was near the back of the room with a view of people's legs whilst the farewell speeches were being made at the front of the room. Adepitan's *impairment*, not having the use of his legs as a result of childhood polio, did not affect his personality or his party sociability. His evident 'disability' was a consequence of the disabling barriers discussed in chapter two, (see Barnes and Mercer, 2003) of other people standing around and blocking his view. This 'social model' (Oliver, 1982) experience meant that he had less power than everybody else in that setting because the ableist majority dictated the use of the shared space.

The following morning, by stark contrast, I met him in his own setting, outside a gym, where the sense of power was reversed. I found I was as dependent as he was on technology to first of all find him, then text him, then record our interview digitally. Adepitan arrived, exuding coolness, in his modified 4x4, with music blaring, in sunglasses, apparently fused to his vehicle. The car added a powerful dimension to his persona. He was strapped into his driving seat platform, with a playlist and satnav all fully functioning, and freedom to travel wherever he liked. When we drove off to Chelsea sportsground, with him at the wheel, and myself an invited passenger, he had *all* the power and was uninhibited in his own environment without any disability at all - whilst he remained in the car. Whether superhero or not, Adepitan's own version of the Film Director's 'biology meets technology' vision was distinctly part of his lived experience.

The relationship of a Paralympian to his or her technology, sporting or otherwise, recalls what Coutant (2012) describes as a prototype for future forms of human being. She argues that, in this sense of predicting the future, the Paralympics has not yet fulfilled its potential or full reach. This makes it important to choose a stereotype conveying the right nuances. She sees the technology fusion within the sporting arena as a laboratory for future interventions that many of us might need or want (p.13). Less positively, Haraway (1991) calls the cyborg the 'awful apocalyptic telos' (p.150) suggesting a future that none of us want, where humanity ultimately loses its independence. Adepitan, however, put it another way saying that:

> Everything [is] happening at the right time when we're going through a technological revolution and also maybe a cultural revolution in the way that people look at disability and disability sport. (Adepitan, ex-Paralympian TV presenter, *Interview*)

Shakespeare (2006) has pointed out that disability is uncomfortable because, even if we don't have a sudden accident, it points to a future version of ourselves, if we live until we are handicapped by old age. The cyborg element of the Paralympics may be more watchable now because we realise that technology can make up for our deficits and therefore disability is not necessarily as threatening as it once was. I would also assert that because ableist society is becoming more and more dependent on technology too, there should, therefore, be less stigma attached to the disabled 'other' group also using it. For London 2012, it was felt that the 'freaky cyborg' connotation, within the superhero stereotype, carried unwanted science fiction references. Resonating too much with fictional characters, on these grounds, the stereotype of the 'superheroes' was dropped.

The 4Creative Business Manager described their thinking in more detail:

> If you position them as sort of superheroes, almost it's never going to work, so the big, big, strategic creative flip that happened, when we went back to the drawing board was, rather than 'Meet the Superheroes' let's change it to 'Meet the Superhumans'. And that was a big flip - they turned from superheroes to superhumans so we rooted them in reality and we rooted it in real sport and that was a huge turning point for us - it goes from you positioning them as bionic men that are almost fictitious to real sports people – it's a

huge shift: a campaign rooted in reality rather than in a conception. (Wiencitz, Business Manager, *Interview*)

By changing the language, initially by eliminating 'disability' from their own vocabulary, and now by changing a single word, they repositioned the Paralympians so that they could treat them equally and normalise them as 'real sports people'. The word they finally chose has never been a neutral one for scholars, as it carries other meanings relating to the extraordinary, specifically the 'having to over achieve to be accepted' trope (e.g. Barnes, 1992; Garland-Thomson, 2002; Haller, 1995; Clogston, 1990; Purdue and Howe 2012). However, for some of my contributors this was not the focus. Whilst considering the superhero trope, in his role as Creative Network Director, Tagholm also had another defining experience. This was a profound 'lightbulb moment' for him about realising their need to purposefully focus on the sport:

> These little windows open in your creative brain and you think, 'Oh, that's what this is about.' This is about people busting themselves to succeed and to win. There's a backdrop of a fuck load of adversity as there is with all elite sportsmen and women, and that was a sort of…that was a sort of important gear change for us in our thinking and the way we saw this. (Tagholm, Creative Network Director, *Interview*)

This shift, or gear change, was a shift in representation of 'others' to try to capture 'the essence' of the athletes that these creatives had met. It is one of those specific instances of mediation (see Thumim, 2015) that shows the power lies not only in the representation, but even more with the producers who create it. The producers here were powerful agents who changed the athletes' personas from a fictional to factual stereotype. In turn this decision changed the trajectory of the Paralympians as they were propelled into the public domain. Silva and Howe (2012) suggest that disability is essentially misrepresented in disability sport (p.175) by exacerbating the 'supercrip' representation as an 'othering' spectacle. However the Channel Four team were aiming for a closer to 'us' kind of human reality when they dropped the superheroes concept and finally adopted the 'superhuman' idea, as the defining frame for the Paralympians.

*Let's call them 'superhumans'*

The opening campaign for marketing the media coverage for the Paralympic Games included, notably, the phrase *Meet the Superhumans.* The phrase intentionally framed meanings about the athletes, and at first sight seems not to assist in normalising them. A representational process recognised and articulated by Hall (2012) as 'transcoding' (p.261), where new meanings are grafted onto old ones, reuses existing codes whilst simultaneously transforming them. This is what happened here. The production process for this particular film was a crucible in which the blend of disability and sport were fused together. Other ways that this happened have been discussed in the first section of this chapter. Other brands, Nike and Public Enemy, with their associated attitudes and profiles, were used to help give the 'superhumans' new meanings as well, and this process is discussed further in chapter seven.

 In terms of transcoding, the attitude of the hip-hop musical tone and the slick marketing imagery brought disability acceptably into full view, from a position that previously had left them 'out of the picture'. The Paralympians were depicted preparing for their events, with a huge build-up, that is briefly interrupted, then unleashed in the stadium, on the track and in the pool as if the Olympics was back on TV. Hall calls this way of reversing the stereotype the 'revenge film' (2012, p.260) to bring the weaker 'other' group into its own. He noted the exact same phenomenon with the transformation of racial representations that, I note, is apparent here with the marketing campaign and sports coverage framings.

From the outset, within the team who made and promoted the *Meet the Superhumans* television trailer, there were a variety of opinions about what 'superhuman' might mean. An Executive Producer for 4Creative, the in-house marketing team, felt 'superhuman' was the right word, 'because they are pushing against more than other people are pushing against. It's harder for them'. Also he pointed out that they run into people not wanting to help or

support them, who resist them and 'as athletes it is unlikely they will ever get parity in funding'. He felt that this made them superhuman, training with less financial support. The extra effort required for their achievements did in that sense make them 'super' human beyond, rather than equal to, the Olympic athletes.

There was a much contested 'eight second explosion sequence' in the *Meet the Superhumans* trailer, consisting of soldiers stepping onto a land-mine, a pregnant woman receiving bad news and a car crash causing paraplegic injuries. Arguments raged about whether to include these realities, and the reasons for inclusion are relevant here. The Head of Communication said:

> We have got such a job to do to change people's minds that you have to shock people. And if that is what it takes, that is what it takes. But it wasn't a shock for the sake of it, it was shock based in truth! You are just telling a little bit of the back story, and of course you know there was no way we were going to take that out. It goes on the air and that is part of what creates this amazing response that people have to it. (Brooke, Head of Communications, *Interview*)

By connecting the viewer to the eight second unexpected-life-event sequence, the producers wanted to break the detachment commonly experienced when viewing disability and make us realise that we could also become them. In this case, the Paralympians ceased to be vulnerable, but we became so.

Chouliaraki (2013) has established that spectatorship of vulnerable others can sometimes be ironic, in the sense that we still remain detached as onlookers. She theorises a 'homogenous sphere of safety' (ibid., p.2) which reflects the dynamic at work when looking at stereotyped vulnerable others on television. Connecting the vulnerability to 'us' disrupted this ironic pattern she has identified. Channel Four promoted the Paralympic athletes with this 'it could be you' back-story sequence, to help 'us' identify with 'them' in a way that has also started to happen with, for example, charity fundraising videos. Chouliaraki observes that solidarity, as we look at weaker 'others', has changed in recent decades, from the theatrical viewing at a distance, to encounters using the 'they are one of us' narrative. She describes this as a mirror structure (ibid., p.4), as opposed to a theatrical one, playing on personal feelings in particular.

This mirror structure can be seen in the encoding of the eight second sequence. Here, according to some of my interviewees, the producers sought intentionally to represent those who were once depicted as 'vulnerable' others, as the same as 'us' now.

In order to depict disabled athletes as members of the human race rather than extreme outsiders (that we don't want to look at), plenty of other devices were used. These are described within each programme format in the next chapter. What is not included there is the controversial middle section of the aforementioned trailer. The 'eight seconds explosion sequence', cuts across binary representations, where the 'normal' collection of characteristics is implicit from the spectacle of the 'other' characteristics (Hall, 1997). This happens because the visuals and the sound track yank the viewer across the threshold of 'them' to 'us'. The producers discussed this at their away day training, using the following slide:

> It's when viewers happen on disability when they least expect it, that
> we can really open eyes, stretch minds and change attitudes.
> (C4TVC, 2011)

Almost all of my contributors described this sequence that they had to defend, as a lynchpin within the coverage. Drawing on previous research it is clear why, as it shifted the power of legitimated exclusion to seeing disability as a life-event for all of 'us' that may have to be faced. Garland-Thomson (1997) articulates that historically 'the extraordinary body is fundamental to the narrative by which we make sense of ourselves and our world' (p.1). The sense we make of ourselves is that 'they' with extraordinary bodies are so 'other' we can feel ourselves to be safely normal. To show disability suddenly happening to some of us, by stepping on landmines, hearing bad news in the maternity unit or crashing a car, forces a step-change from 'them' to 'us' in just this one brief televisual moment. The trick was to make the viewer 'just happen on it, when they least expected it'.

The surprise moment disrupts not just audience expectation but also the modern spectacle of freakery, where 'an inextricable yet particular exclusionary system [is] legitimated by bodily variation' (Garland-Thomson, 1997, p.10).

Once bodily differences are noted in the film, we are then, in the eight seconds, forced to associate with the differences, making our viewing of it unsafe. This is presumably why some people objected to it. We were just getting used to the smooth inspirational Nike effect, then were forced to identify with unexpected life circumstances, and this jolt was deliberately intended by the producers to make the audience experience and understand the Paralympians' vulnerable humanity.

Superhuman, as a concept seems to conflict with human vulnerability. Yet, the Head of Communication at the International Paralympic Committee felt the Superhuman ad helped to give the disabled athletes 'equal status' to the Olympians. He explained:

> So it comes back to London 2012, LOCOG, saying, 'We're going to try and aim for parity between the Olympics and the Paralympics.' Fine […], how are we going to position the Paralympics? Well if we can achieve that, we need to position Paralympic sport as high-performance sport. But we still need to tell people a little bit about the back-stories. We need to show - we need to focus on - a certain number of athletes and their training regimes and how they get to high-performance sport. And if you encapsulate all of that, that's the Superhumans advert. (Spence, IPC Head of Communication, *Interview*)

The declared purpose then, was not to patronise but to help us get to know the personalities, for the purposes of enjoying the rivalries and the sport. 'Humanising' people who had previously been objectified and stereotyped was felt to be a necessary route to bridging the gap, to make something of no interest into watchable mainstream TV.

In addition to surviving dramatic life events, there were still other interpretations of the 'superhuman' term that my participants articulated. One of the sports producers felt that it was their elite training which made them 'superhuman' especially combined with the effort, with or without limbs, of 'just getting out of bed in the morning, let alone to the trackside'. There was considerable debate amongst various stakeholders as to how the group of superhuman characteristics should be represented. The Disability Executive at Channel

Four, according to others, doggedly pursued a particular line which eventually prevailed. Her recollections of this experience she described as follows:

> There was some degree of suspicion because they didn't know us and they were slightly worried I think that because our pitch had been so much about bringing disability to the fore, and if I use the word 'confronting', I mean, 'making people realise' that disability was being overcome as well as [presenting] the delivery of an extraordinary sporting performance. (Walsh, Disability Executive, *Interview*)

It seems to be the case that creating distance was not a direct intention and that personal engagement with the elite team inspired and informed their decisions to give the Paralympians parity with other athletes. The Network Creative Director, who also directed the film, explained:

> There's a texture to it and a really compelling and tough back story to these guys' lives. But, it all comes into focus when you realise that one of the massive tragedies is being 0.5 of a second over the time they wanted to get. (Tagholm, Film Director, *Interview*)

The Paralympians were seen by the creative team, who concocted the *Superhumans* campaign, as an extraordinary group of high achieving athletes who were being overlooked just because of their physical impairments. Bringing them out into the open was felt by many to be a way they could make a difference using their creative roles in public television. They were not personally trying to disempower the athletes; they wanted to give them a mainstream televisual treatment.

In this section I have shown that whilst still aiming for parity with the human race in general, and the Olympic athletes in particular, the producers rejected one stereotype, nearly used another, finally opting for a third. They actively chose to dismiss the 'victim of circumstance' trope with its associated 'brave and courageous' narrative. The 'superhero' was next, with its cyborgian connotations, but this was rejected after a while, because it was derived from fiction and not reality. When, on the grounds of 'reality', the superhero stereotype was adapted, or 'flipped' (Wiencitz, Business Manager, *Interview*), to 'superhuman' I have shown that this frame was chosen to *give the Paralympians parity* with the Olympians, and with normal, not disenfranchised,

human beings. Along with 'freaks of nature', some of the Olympic athletes had already been called 'superhuman' (e.g. Michael Phelps, the U.S. Gold medallist swimmer), and this was part of their justification. My contributors made it clear that they associated both ideas of freak and superhuman with 'normal', able-bodied, Olympians.

The superhuman stereotype, is of course extremely close to the supercrip framing that many scholars have analysed in great detail (e.g. Barnes, 1992; Schantz and Gilbert, 2001; Thomas and Smith, 2003; Snyder and Mitchell, 2010; Peers, 2009; Silva and Howe, 2012). In this instance the editorial decisions appeared to be based on a conceptual meaning of superhuman as gold medallist, not superhuman as tragic victim. The quest for joint parity, with 'us' the humans, and 'them' the high performing elite Olympic athletes, may have moved this 'super' and 'human' portrayal forward, or not. Normalisation would depend on whether a somewhat contradictory meaning could be superimposed, of the disabled athletes somehow being extraordinary but also just like 'us' as well. A superhuman effort was made by the producers to normalise the Paralympians and this was partly achieved through the negotiations around the group of athletes being 'extraordinarily human', 'extraordinarily good at sport' as well as being 'extraordinarily different'.

The momentum of the Olympics and our desire to continue identifying with Team GB will have helped frame these extraordinary disabled athletes, in a superhuman sort of way, but now suddenly they were also framed as agonisingly human - like the rest of 'us'. There was a shift in emphasis from the oddity of difference to recognised outstanding qualities, making the athletes extraordinary, in the same way as the Olympians are. This was to normalise their difference into a more acceptable elite athleticism which we had grown to enjoy in the summer of 2012. Walsh put it this way, 'It finally feels like there are no "no go" areas for disability, and disabled people have joined the human race as depicted on TV' (Walsh, Disability Executive, *Interview*).

As members of the human race they are moving away from their otherness and gradually becoming normalised. Whilst, perhaps unfortunately referring to

'them' as 'freaks of nature' in their marketing campaign, Walsh told me this was to align them to, for example, the Olympian Michael Phelps. He was similarly called a freak, in the press, and as a U.S. role model for aspirational young swimmers, is considered one of 'us' and not 'them'.

Inspired by the Paralympics, MP, Mark Harper, has since expressed in a government paper a similar thought, 'I want to get the message out that disability is about "us" not "them."' (DWP, 2014, p.3). He went on to say that with now almost 12 million disabled people in the UK:

> Many of us have disabled people among our friends or family and we are all increasingly likely to live to an age when we may well experience multiple impairments ourselves…. Removing barriers is not just good for disabled people but for all of us. (ibid.)

Media representations at the London 2012 Paralympic Games were already going some way to reflect this change in our cultural and political thinking. The *Superhumans* campaign, with carefully chosen characteristics to represent that stereotype, were considered by my interviewees to have started that trajectory.

Changing audience perceptions of disability was a declared aim through the original bid stage and throughout the production process and I have shown that it was undertaken by deliberately altering and reconstructing existing stereotypes. The type and style of coverage was internally promoted across the teams with the *Mental 4 the Paralympics* in-house training to all decision-making executives and creatives. It was felt that the intended messaging would be risky but it was nevertheless gladly embraced by the producers, many afterwards saying it was the best thing they had ever worked on. It emerges that through the two normalising strategies encapsulated by the directives to 'show the stumps' and 'show the sport' a dual depiction was taking place. One looked at the outside, at the anatomical anomaly, which is very much a point of difference. The other focused on the inside, at the triumph and trials of the human spirit, at the points of our human similarity. The coverage included both and was deliberately set within the superhuman, freaks of nature, Olympic paradigm.

## Conclusion

By exploring exactly *how* the producers arrived at which intentional portrayals in this chapter I have shown that they were attempting parity in order to normalise disability. This equal treatment was expressed and applied as equality with other humans; with elite athletes; with other Channel Four programmes; other projects; other depictions of art, beauty and sporting imagery and the Olympics presentational style in particular. Whatever the individual level of focus of each producer's role, there was a distinct recollection amongst my participants that, for them, normalisation equalled treating the athletes on a par.

Normalisation and parity, though, are not the same, just as expectation and equality are not. In this case, one may have led to the other; they certainly seem to be linked during this media coverage. Disability is still normally unexpected on television, and triggers the shock of difference, therefore remaining unequally portrayed. Perhaps what may now be *expected,* or normalised, for depictions of disability has been changed, however, through the course of the Channel Four producers' actions. They treated the project as *equal* to other mainstream high-profile programme output.

So, did anything else change? It is evident that some of the apparently distancing models or frames were still being invoked, such as extraordinariness and triumph over adversity. However, the patronising, victim frames were essentially broken down during the high-achievement events, based around the discourse of peak performance, talent and training. The understanding that the represented group had been through 'a fuck load of adversity' (Tagholm, Film Director, *Interview*) was an underlying sense experienced by most of my contributors. However the disability representation of triumph over adversity was carried by the narrative, in the sporting context, into a more acceptable 'triumph of the human spirit' (Balding, TV Presenter, *Interview*) which is a standard trope for elite sport. Since all sportsmen and women have courageous back-stories of determination which often include physical injuries and pain, the familiar context of this normality for depictions of winning elite athletes, was

used to modify the inherent disability meanings associated previously with marginalised disability sports.

Following on from the Olympic Games, through careful 'thanks for the warm-up' linking by Channel Four (see Appendix D), Paralympic athletes had their personas transformed from victim into victor. They were profiled and celebrated for breaking sporting records and winning medals, notwithstanding their added day-to-day victories in managing their lives or even just getting to training. The association, by framing them as Olympians, broke the tragic mould that Paralympic theorists have highlighted in the past (DePauw, 1997; Smith and Thomas, 2005; Howe, 2008a). Paralympian athletes are no longer represented as unfortunate victims seeking to redeem themselves from their lost place in an ableist society. They train with Olympians, they do Olympian things. They are extraordinary athletes, physically different in extraordinary ways and also extraordinarily human. My contributors felt that this combination of meanings was 'cool' and decided to portray the group of previously uncool and tragic 'others' as such.

It is already the case that the extraordinarily cool vibe, blended with superhuman and heroic connotations, is recognisably normal for some ableist sports teams and personalities. Applying this vibe and media treatment to the disabled athletes gave the Paralympians mainstream positioning, changing the meanings that were made about them. As well as normalising disability in this way, by giving the production and the represented group this positional parity, the producers also reframed meanings using the programme types into which they were set. How this was achieved, by adapting existing formats across four genres of television, is the subject of the next chapter.

# Chapter 6 Reframing Disability: Adapting the Programme Formats

I have shown in the previous chapter that the combined meanings of being 'extraordinarily human', 'different' and 'good at sport' were overlaid onto existing representations in order to normalise disability rather than caricature it as 'other' stereotypically. This incorporation of meanings was achieved through the contestation of familiar imagery and by the reversal of power and preferred viewpoint within a familiar stereotype (as noted, this recalls Hall's counter-strategies for unwanted stereotypes, 2012, pp.261-267). Now I explore how new meanings about disability were also embedded creatively by the producers within the formats of the programme genres. My research material suggests that in each case the formats of the scheduled programmes were adapted for the specific purpose of *reframing* disability.

In this chapter I draw on interviews and internal documents to assess how meanings were made, utilising and adapting the forms and structures of each of these genres. After explaining the context of mega-event television and how and why the generic formats are so important to meaning-making, I have divided this chapter into four sections to discuss the different programme outputs separately.

In the first section I show how *The Breakfast Show* adapted its current affairs format to give some of the filmed inserts a 'first-person' reality TV-style treatment. The second section shows how the producers chose to deliver daytime sports coverage, for morning, afternoon and evening, as normal, but with the intentional use of 'a different voice'. Thirdly, the documentaries, mostly broadcast before the event took place, and particularly one called *Inside Incredible Athletes* (2010), used a blend of treatments, that included persuasive rhetorical narrative, in order to fulfil a requirement of the Marketing Department to drive an audience to the later coverage. I finally show how the late night highlights show, *The Last Leg,* was converted at the last minute into a satire, chat format, breaking taboos about disability with humour and banter and a twitter hashtag #IsitOk. All parties seemed to intend this coverage to normalise

the disabled athletes, reframing the Paralympians as equal to the Olympians, and they used each programme type differently to do so.

The type and format of a television programme frames what Hall (1973; 1980) has called the dominant or preferred meanings associated with media representations. The meanings are not only contained within the screen frame, they are shaped by where the programme is placed in the schedule and what type of content the audience understands it to be. As Ericson et al., (1991) argue, audiences read and make sense of messages differently, depending on their expectations of that genre. Other scholars (e.g. Fiske, 1989; Tulloch, 2000; Kuhn, 2007; Dover and Hill, 2007; Livingstone and Lunt, 1993), have also noted that the genre, or type of programme, creates a kind of contract between the producer and the audience, as to how the content should be read and understood.

I have argued that producers made a conscious effort to normalise the Paralympians, by positioning them alongside their Olympic counterparts. I will now show that this was partly achieved by using the programme formats to reframe and embed meanings of 'extraordinarily human', 'extraordinarily good at sport' and 'extraordinarily different' across the range of their Paralympic output. Paralympian athletes were shown to be human in the breakfast magazine programme, sporting elites in the event coverage, different in the documentaries/sponsor inserts and all three in the comedy satire programme.

Initially, there were four promised segments in the Channel Four broadcasting bid. These were, loosely, morning, noon and night coverage with a round up at around midnight (C4TVC, 2009). According to my interview with Channel Four's Commercial Lawyer these slots were originally 'sketched out on the back of an envelope' and others intimated that they improvised as they went along. As the live sport was occurring in our own time zone, being a Home Games, the early and late slots necessarily morphed into other genres, since there was no live sport to show at these points. The final running order (see the crew call sheets in Appendix D), therefore, began with a magazine format, *The Breakfast Show*, then it included three segments of live sports coverage during

the day, followed by *The Last Leg,* that became a topical satire/review show in the evenings. There were also accompanying documentaries and short film inserts.

All day everyday coverage was something that Channel Four had the flexibility to do, switching programmes around on their suite of channels to suit what might appeal to their audiences. This level of coverage, in and of itself, has the power to change meanings as I outlined in chapter two (see also Dayan and Katz, 1994). The identification of the athletes as mainstream, rather than marginalised or ostracised, was facilitated by utilising the unifying dynamic of collectively shared mediated sport. Additionally the newly encoded depictions were reinforced by saturating the media coverage. Media saturation, according to Hepp and Couldry (2016), produces cohesion and commonality as outcomes. They describe these phenomena as:

> Situated, thickened, centring performances of mediated communication that are focused on a specific thematic core, across different media products and reach a wide and diverse multiplicity of audiences and participants. (ibid., 2016, p.12)

The following sections will show how the sense of collective identity, generated in the mega-events saturated sporting context, was used to overcome the gulf between disabled athletes and able-bodied viewers. Mediated Olympic representations of extraordinary athletes have always been conducive to 'social integration of the highest order' (Dayan and Katz, 1994, p.15). By contrast, historically, the 'supercripisation' (Howe, 2008b) elements of the Paralympic spectacles of 'otherness' have been considered to be negative (see for example, Schantz and Gilbert, 2001; Smith and Thomas, 2005; Britain, 2012; Purdue and Howe, 2012). The producers for London 2012 intentionally sought to change perceptions in society, and they used the mega-event occasion as a reason for including the Paralympians in all their scheduled programme formats.

By carefully changing meanings about disabled identities through the representations they used within those programmes, and the sheer volume of content, the Paralympics was given centre stage on the channel. In the

sections below I show how they filled the schedule with newly minted representations, slightly adapted, within each of the following programme formats. The purpose within each of the genres utilised was to bring a marginalised group into the mainstream and this was largely achieved by disrupting expected patterns, or adding to familiar formats, to reframe disability as follows.

## Magazine format

The first programme in the morning was *The Breakfast Show* and it particularly added the 'extraordinarily human' meaning to the recently reconstructed superhuman stereotype. In this section I argue that the format for this genre of programme was adapted creatively to help reframe disability, and make audiences want to watch the Paralympics. A theoretical issue with this intention is that by portraying some characteristics as extreme, or extraordinary, 'they', with those characteristics, are not like 'us' and are consequently depicted as 'other' rather than normal (Hall, 1997). Usually there is no parity between 'them' and 'us', as 'we' hold all the power to say they are not normal. This happens because extraordinary stereotypes are cameos or caricatures, and are achieved by choosing a small selection of extreme characteristics, whilst overlooking, or not portraying, other humanising traits. Since production decisions about what to include or exclude are based on needing to create a trope that we can easily and safely identify as 'other', being normally human is more difficult to portray than other traits. In this case, though, the producers used the genre and certain studio and filmic formats to close the gap between them and us and so begin to normalise and reframe the disabled athletes.

*The Breakfast Show*

This morning programme, with two studio presenters, one with a disability and one without, followed a familiar format including chat, filmed inserts and studio guests. Whilst the genre might not seem to have a direct bearing on the Paralympics event coverage it nevertheless set the agenda for each day. Why

agenda setting is important, even in this case for a light-weight current affairs programme, is that, as Coleman (2008) explains:

> Media contribute to the creation of a public mood towards particular individuals, issues and themes, which leads to them being thought about in terms of respect, derision or suspicion'. (ibid., 2008, p.199)

Being handed a programme slot to discuss disability carried with it the potential risk of losing viewers. The stigma of revulsion and the television history of invisibility within the mainstream schedules made popularising the topic difficult for the Programme Editor, Luke Gawin. He was very aware of his power to induce respect, derision or suspicion and told me, during his interview, how he had wondered how to fill the hours each day. Klein (2011), in her exploration of unconventional representations of social issues (p.911) assesses producer perspectives and the power that they can wield. Of those who wanted to 'make a difference' she found a tension between two roles, of creative and of instructor (ibid., p.918). Gawin was both. Whilst he called his programme current affairs it was in fact a form of edutainment. It included elements that were both entertaining and instructional; a form he was able to shape to promote interest in disability and the upcoming sports coverage each day.

The overall role of the programme was a strategic one. It was used to involve and interest audiences using multiple perspectives. Horne and Manzenreiter (2006) note that modern spectacles have become multifocal 'bridging the gap between frontstage and backstage' (p.155) in order to communicate to multiple audiences. They say that people need to see behind-the-scenes, especially those who are not taken in by the commercialism and the hype (ibid.). The standard format for the magazine programme was adapted to some degree to get behind the lives of the Paralympic athletes, as well as connect with the audiences who were going to watch them. Gawin, the Programme Editor who was responsible for the whole series as well the programme each day, said that he was first approached by Sunset and Vine, the sports producers, who were not actually keen on all his ideas, but gave way in the end. Then he communicated with the Project Leader, Deborah Poulton, who knew him in other contexts, and he felt he had her trust to operate with his normal level of autonomy.

He also spoke extensively, on multiple occasions, with the Disability Executive, Alison Walsh, who was clearly able to shape elements of the show. She told me:

> My thing was always, show them as human; don't show them as sort of two-dimensional, you know, automatons who are so media-trained that we, the audience, will never engage with them. Because I think that's really important… if we stick to this line where they're elite athletes and they've got to be treated as, you know, elite human beings we won't have moved the portrayal of disability on really. (Walsh, Disability Executive, *Interview*)

The extent to which the Disability Executive was able to shape the culture of the programme, and its relationship to the audience, was evident in one of the encounters Gawin recounted to me:

> Alison [Walsh] is very good because we had a meeting, more than ten actually, at the Channel at various stages and the run up to it where there was [sic.] various amounts of kind of 'Oh Shit, what are we doing? And how are we going to do this, what do we do about saying the wrong thing?' and the answer from Alison and everybody else was, 'just say the wrong thing and then correct yourself and stand corrected live on TV because that way we are the audience and the audience will identify with us making a mistake'. (Gawin, Programme Editor, *Interview*)

The query about getting things wrong, with the taboo of even discussing how to talk about disability, and what would be 'ok' if we treated them the same as everyone else, later became a centre piece of the topical satire programme, as I discuss in the final section. The dynamic step-change, of making mistakes on air, was understood, by the production team of this morning programme, to be a construction designed to create the sense of 'we [the presenters] *are* the audience'. This construction, to say the wrong thing and let the audience identify with the team, was designed to *pull the audience towards disability*. It was significant that the production staff creatively used the informal morning format in this way, to encode this identification connecting 'us' to 'them'.

Handling the stigma of disability was a challenge for almost everyone I encountered in the production team. As discussed in chapter two, Goffman (1963) says that stigma occurs where the normal and the different actually meet. There were many occasions during my research where the presence of

disability amongst the team and onscreen with presenters and guests was mentioned as a catalysing factor in how perceptions within the team were changed. Now the magazine programme had to deal with disability on location and within the studio on both sides of the camera. It was clear from my interviews that these interactions created a new culture. When Gitlin (2005), interviewed individuals at every level within his busy network, he discovered that the creatives and executives were shaped by their political and cultural climate too, as well as whilst crafting shared meanings for their mass audience. These conditions and dynamics developed similarly, at Channel Four.

The climate set by Gawin, to cope with stigma, was one of informative creativity. Klein (2011) has highlighted that some educational entertainment programming 'does not function as mere amusement for viewers, but a site through which contemporary social issues may be considered and negotiated' (p.905). In Gawin's pursuit of the renegotiation of the *social* issue of disability, he adapted the 'roving reporter' format into a mini form of 'reality TV'. If not reality TV per se (see Skeggs and Wood, 2008a; 2008b), it was certainly 'first-person programming' relying on actors, as I show below, to create drama 'from contrived situations' (Wood and Skeggs, 2004, p.178). Gawin set up instances for the 'different' and the 'normal' to meet in planned ways that he could film so that their interactions could then be negotiated and discussed in the studio, as well as revealed in situ.

A key example of this was when he sent out three disabled people to a busy shopping mall. Going shopping was not a conventional media framing of disability since it is usually the 'medical model' (Barnes and Mercer, 2003), with a focus on individual impairments, that is represented and focused upon. Instead the Programme Editor chose to take the disabled 'actors' out into the normal public domain and film them there to explore and highlight the disabling barriers. These 'social model' (Finkelstein, 1974; Oliver, 1983) barriers might include, for example, having nowhere to sit down in the changing cubicle when you have a prosthetic leg to take off. He described what happened as follows:

> So I got the three girls to go shopping in the West End to see how
> they coped and how people reacted to disability in shops. And it was

great. I mean, it was just such a lovely, lovely piece. They did exactly what they were supposed to do. They sat in changing rooms. They tried dresses on. They had to take legs off to try things on. There's nowhere to properly sit. There's no, you know, the air-conditioning was not always right. John Lewis let us in, which was very sweet, and, good for them. A couple of the others, like Top Shop said 'no,' and somebody else said, 'no, we don't have time for that, it's Saturday, it's busy'. (Gawin, Programme Editor, *Interview*)

He spoke at length to me about how difficult it is in society for people with particular impairments and it was my observation that this personal belief shaped his creativity and decision-making. Gawin employed the normalised caricature 'girly' trope of 'shopping on a Saturday' to highlight this difficulty, and by employing the familiar to depict the strange he used one trope to attempt to redefine another. In this instance it strengthened his intentions to show normality by only having one variable of difference – legs that come off. In every other sense they were 'normal, girly' girls. The film was designed to tell a story, and he used a standard narrative form to do so. Narrative structures very often have a single particular 'anomaly' that disrupts the norm creating a story about how this anomaly will be handled (see Walsh, 2007). The leg issue served as that anomaly.

Rather than attempting to explain the 'social model' of disability, Gawin decided that the shopping expedition would be able to *show* the disabling barriers, and thereby create a depth of understanding that is not normal for depictions of disability (see Darke, 2004; Shakespeare, 2006). By sending the girls to try on clothes, their bodily difference created a logistical dilemma in this setting. The adaptation here was to use the swap feature of, for example, *Faking It*, or *Wife Swap* to put the disabled athlete in the normal person's shoes. There being no seat to use to take off a prosthetic leg in the changing cubicle was an educative moment for the viewer, whilst remaining entertaining within the 'reality' genre.

Demonstrating the 'social model' within a 'reality' style entertainment segment does nevertheless have an apparent limitation. As many have established (see Fiske, 1989; Livingstone and Lunt, 1994; Kuhn, 2007; Dover and Hill, 2007) utilising recognised television formats helps steer the audience's reading, and acts as a container for specific ideas and values. A particular limitation is that

'television formats offer only contained emotional experiences and limited theoretical explanations' (Lisus and Ericson, 1995, p.2). This simplifies the role for the communicator, although the inherent structure can then restrict the understandings that can be communicated. A key point, however, noted in previous format research, has been that the format privileges *emotional* experience over detailed *understanding* (Ericson et al., 1991). This lighter touch, than say a documentary on the subject, does mean, however, that a broader audience is likely to watch it, and this was vital for bringing disability into the mainstream. It is also key for sports television coverage and also for entertainment generally in all its forms.

Gawin had a specific strategy for connecting the viewer to previously overlooked or negatively considered disability sport, through the construction of various programme elements. He explained:

> So every day I had commissioned, I think, four films to do with the sport of that day. Off the back of those, we could build guests in the studio. So we'd have the British Equestrian Association there. We'd have someone from, you know, swimming and things like this, all tied into the sport. But the film would set off the issue about what the sport is going to be. (Gawin, Programme Editor, *Interview*)

*The Breakfast Show* is a classic magazine format often used at breakfast time, as well as later in the schedules, and is a familiar one he could use as a solid foundation. He then played with it a little. By buddying up 'one of them', a Paralympian, and 'one of us', a normal celebrity, the audience were able to explore the context of difference within the proximity of respect and friendship rather than purely observationally or as a report looking 'over there'. Gawin described 'a meeting of the minds' between two selected characters on one of his setup films. Again he is using other 'feminine' tropes to make his point:

> So, when the equestrian thing started, we had filmed with unbelievably, Katie Price, who likes horses…and one of the Paralympic dressage competitors, I can't remember her name now, lovely girl, so, we got the two to meet, the dressage rider and her hero, because she always loved Katie Price who thought [she] was great, so it was a really perfect meeting of minds. And it was, you know, it was a three and a half minute film, but it made the point. And it also gave you box office kudos to have Katie Price sitting

there because then obviously, we'd invite her in to talk about
dressage and Paralympians off the back of the film. (ibid.)

Just as the *Meet The Superhumans* campaign had done (see previous chapter)
the production team used a jolting mechanism to attempt to break the existing
views on disability:

> I explained how we're going to jump from sport to the tragedy of
> Melanie Reid and the bravery of her trying to get on with the rest of
> her life, but also her saying things like, you know, I felt like ending it
> all because it was so bad. And I just didn't - it's such a difficult thing
> to deal with. And it was heart-rending. But, so to go from glory of
> sport to that is a hell of a gear change, which Rick [presenter] found
> uncomfortable to start with, but then got it. He just switched into it,
> and I said, this is current affairs broadcasting, it's not a sports
> program. It's about current affairs and it's about the issues that make
> a difference, that make you realise why the Paralympics is important
> as an event. Because it tells you the human story behind these
> things…Obviously, each and every sportsman has, and woman has,
> a back story. You just got to be careful about this. (ibid.)

Gawin communicated to his team that it was not a sports programme, but was
a current affairs programme, reminding them of the genre. Yet, before it could
become a disability programme, in the minds of the production team, he
reminded them that every sportsperson has a human story that might be heart-
rending. This brought the focus, therefore, back to sport as the wider context.

In this adapted format there was an active dynamic between representations of
sport and representations of disability, particularly on a visual level. As
discussed in the previous chapter, the issue had been whether to 'show the
sport' or 'show the stumps'. My interviews suggest there was also an internal
wrangling over the narrative story-telling - of whether to focus on the
showmanship of the sport or the humanity of the athletes. The former was the
overarching initial idea, expressed to me by Julian Bellamy, who was the Head
of Television in 2009, handling the bid and the early stages of the coverage
planning. His perspective remained prevalent even after he had handed the
baton to his successor. He explained:

> First and foremost all these guys were sportsmen. That is the
> beginning and the end of the story. You know they are amazing
> sportsman and [you] tell the story through that prism. (Bellamy, Head
> of Television, *Interview*)

A year later, in 2011, at an in-house producer's briefing, another perspective had emerged:

> They are not all heroic and perfect and 'elite'– at least not all the
> time. Some are arrogant bastards, divas, or hard drinking party
> animals - ALL of whom make great telly. (C4TVC, 2011)

Entertainment, or what would 'make great telly' was still the over-riding concern for each of these viewpoints and struggling to achieve both was felt, at least with hindsight by my contributors, to enrich the coverage and bring the representations of disability to life. As one of the producers put it:

> There was a frankness, you know, that honesty – it somehow
> captured the mood - captured the imagination of people in a way that
> I didn't expect would happen. I thought we'd do a good job and make
> it really different. (anon)

The adaptation of current affairs roving reports to include, for example, bringing disability into the shopping mall as a 'girly' shared shopping trip, and using celebrity endorsement for the Katie Price dressage experience, *was* really different to what had gone before. Researchers of infotainment scholarship, who have considered reality television, suggest that the format holds 'distinct opportunities for delivering messages' (Klein, 2011, p.184). Klein asserts that viewers are more likely to believe and attend to advice and information when 'real people propel the narratives' (ibid.). In this sense, of also including advice and information, the film inserts were a form of hybrid, or at the very least an adaptation of the current affairs roving report.

Skeggs, (2009) has argued that the genre of 'reality' television, whilst offering a clearly constructed reality, also includes the encouragement of voyeurism, something that disability scholars have highlighted as a common situation with media representations of disability across other genres (e.g. Garland-Thomson, 1997). Taken together, my interviewees suggest that voyeurism would not necessarily be a bad thing in this case, because of the inclusive framings they were trying to portray. Reality TV as a particular format is popular, according to Klein (2011), because it attracts an audience to 'real relatable characters' (p.183). Swapping roles, environments and temporary status were all creative production decisions that made these characters more relatable. They also

made the coverage very different. The disabled actors were treated as subjects rather than objectified and distanced, as they normally are using reductive stereotypes. Thumim (2015) has noted that both talk shows and reality TV use their formats to frame people as 'ordinary' (p.78). These formats were used similarly here to reinforce the everyday, common, aspects of the Paralympians, not so much as extraordinary but as real ordinary human beings.

Members of the Paralympic production teams were well aware that they needed to create relatable characters in order to draw audiences to the media coverage. In this section I have shown that they extended representations, utilising the informal magazine format, with allowable presenter mistakes, and first person reality-style inserts, to construct an 'extraordinarily human' identification of them, as the same as 'us'. The collective identity, according to my interviewees, was designed to connect Paralympians, in the non-professional segments of their lives, with 'us' learning about handling disability in the studio, alongside the rest of the viewing public being informed and entertained on the sofas at home.

## Sports coverage

After the breakfast magazine programme, the next segment of the television schedule (see Appendix D) needed to demonstrate that Paralympians are 'extraordinarily good at sport' rather than tragic or brave. In this section I demonstrate that the change in meaning was achieved by utilising the tropes of Olympic and mega-event live sports coverage, whilst using what they called 'a different voice' (see below). Interview data from the producers suggests the intention was to provide a change in tone for disability coverage, by adapting some of the normal techniques used for television sports. Within the genre of sports coverage, the main formats are live action, edited highlights, often including a studio discussion with presenter and pundits, results roundups including interviews and features, and short backgrounder films profiling individual personalities or teams (BBC Sport, 2011). These all featured during the sports coverage of the London Paralympics, but using a different voice, as I shall explore.

Within Channel Four the focus on high-performance sport began when, as I have previously shown, the in-house creative and editorial team collectively decided to remove 'disability' from their thinking *and* their vocabulary. There was a cultural shift within the organisation away from the Head of Channel Four's initial thought, in 2009, that 'I didn't think anyone would be interested in the races' (Lygo, Head of Television, *Interview*). Realisations came, for later decision-makers, that the worst pain for any particular athlete was not his/her disability but that s/he was defeated because they had failed to beat their own personal best. It was encounters with the disabled group themselves, as I have noted in other chapters, that stirred the sense of a 'not disabled' reality amongst the key communicators and changed attitudes within the organisation. Throughout this thesis I argue that the changes in attitude that were encoded onscreen and picked up by the audience, happened in-house first.

Even within that culture, there were naturally many individual approaches and outlooks within the teams, at Channel Four and within the sports production houses, as to how to present the live footage of the London 2012 Paralympics. These needed to be managed and steered in roughly the same direction and the role fell to Jamie Aitcheson, Head of Live Sport, who explained this to me:

> One of the biggest challenges was taking a load of sports producers, who are used to making cricket, football etc. and saying to them, 'Here's a sports event but it's not a sports event, it's something much bigger than that and you're going to do this in a completely different voice to how you've done any of your other programmes before'. So it was putting together a team – trying to put together a team of people producing it, who – their, sort of, default settings had to be changed for the period of the Paralympics. (Aitcheson, Head of Live Sport, *Interview*)

Clearly, then, Channel Four's Head of Live Sport wanted to 'change their default settings', particular as Channel Four's remit is to show things differently and provide programmes that are not available elsewhere (*Digital Economy Act*, 2010, v). They had changed the programme treatment for the cricket previously, and what they wanted to achieve with the Paralympics was different again. It was to borrow the Olympics style of live sports coverage but also adapt it.

Walsh explained the adaptation when I asked her whom she felt the target audience was for this project. With her agenda for the promotion of disability rather than sport, she replied:

> Well people who might not be sports fans, who would be more - who would be interested in the drama and the fact that it's a Home Games - and the excitement of it all, and maybe dip in and out. So I wanted us to do a lot more weaving in the disability information and the back story into the commentary. It was quite successful with some commentators; they really got it. Others didn't. (Walsh, Disability Executive, *Interview*)

Weaving disability into the live commentary was something that was practiced, as they trained up new talent to do that. Elsewhere, weaving disability together with sport wasn't all plain sailing. The 'different voice' was not so well understood by those outsourced producers who worked outside the Channel Four culture. Two sports production companies, Sunset and Vine and IMG were picked by Channel Four 'because they've done big global events like this and we wanted to show that we were serious by employing the best' (Baker, Commercial Lawyer, *Interview*). However, having 'the best' did bring challenges when they tried programme treatments outside the norms. An example of this was described to me as follows:

> There was a VT that went out which I was very annoyed about and tried to stop them – but, you know what a live production is like - you don't see everything before it goes out, particularly if the production company doesn't like you to see everything before it goes out. They just want it to - it was a piece about how the Paralympics would change things for children who have disabilities and there's this able-bodied reporter wandering around interviewing parents, over the heads of their disabled children who are sitting in their chairs, not really - you know, talking about them as though slightly they weren't there. And it just felt - it had the wrong tone. It had this sort of plinky-plonk music going on in the background. They should have known better by that stage, you know. (Walsh, Disability Executive, *Interview*)

Having 'the wrong tone' was something that both Walsh and the Marketing Department had tried to train the crews and the producers out of. Disability had been consensually removed from the thinking of the in-house teams, but it seems not from the outsourced organisations. The opening of the Rio Paralympics on 8th September 2016 also carried a video of a very similar ilk,

with an able-bodied actor using a heavily theatrical tone of voice over sadly determined music underneath (C4, 2016). Perhaps, rather than being a retrograde step into 'othering' representations by Channel Four, this second piece was also made by an outside company who did not identify with the cultural perspective, expressed by some of my contributors. The internal shift in perspective towards disability, in 2012, seemed tangible within the teams that I encountered. However, only being a publisher-broadcaster, a non-production commissioning structure I discuss in chapter four, would seem to limit the sphere of editorial influence, especially when commissioning 'the best' experts in their own field, as these other sports producers clearly considered themselves to be.

By adding, as ex-Paralympian Adepitan had also called it, 'plinky-plonk' music, and using able-bodied actors to observe or discuss the 'otherness' predicament, boundaries between 'us' and 'them' could have been heavily reinstated. Born (2004), in her study of the BBC, noted that producers she encountered felt they held a neutral standpoint when constructing framings, and the sports producers I spoke to, outside of Channel Four, were certain of it. However the confidence they had in their own production skills did mean that the request for nuanced 'weaving in' of disability was rather lost. The pre-existing tropes that patronise disability (see Barnes, 1992; Garland-Thomson, 1997; Shakespeare, 2006) were clearly something that Channel Four were aware of and wanted to avoid. However, the outsourced producers did not actively dismantle the 'othering' process (see Hall, 1997) and therefore continued to use their power to infer that others are not normal.

Aside from inconsistencies of this sort, the Channel Four team were mostly able to capitalise on the 'live sports' trope, to move representations of disability forward in line with their intentions. They sought to connect us with the Paralympians, by encoding their television coverage in a sympathetic but equitable way, providing parity with the Olympians in the televisual treatment of their sporting regimes, achievements and abilities. Hall (2012) states that once meanings have been transcoded, or superimposed, onto existing stereotypes, they do not go fully back (p.267). So, using live sports coverage and adapting it

to weave in stories about disability was a very successful way of normalising them, and I would argue this for the following reason.

Drawing on Bakhtin's theory of the carnival (1968) Horne and Manzenreiter (2006) observe that, in addition to strengthening communal bonds, ritualised masquerades and exceptional events enable the inversion of everyday hierarchies (p.154). They consider the modern sporting spectacle an extension of the historic carnival, with nationally branded sports 'uniforms' acting as masquerades for the athletes, thereby providing a temporary removal of social constraints. What they call the 'festival of status inversion' (ibid.), based on everyone sharing the experience together, is clearly an opportunity, I would argue, to place new meanings about disability successfully into this context. Cultural differences of race, for example, are accepted far more within athletics than they are down at the job centre. With normal judgements about hierarchy and power suspended, therefore, for the duration of the carnival, and with everyday power relations inverted, the distinction between 'able' and 'disabled' surely can also be temporarily removed. What would remain, usefully, is a type of televisual representation that audiences then come to expect.

Encoding the spectacle as high-performance athletics rather than, as the BBC had done, a special but 'sad third cousin' (Walker, Head of Marketing, *Interview*) was a powerful way, therefore, of changing meanings about the Paralympic athletes. Even though the extraordinary anatomical differences were given onscreen visibility, by showing the stumps, when the focus was on Olympic feats of superhuman achievement, the dynamic of 'them' and 'us' was changed in that setting. Because the *athletes represent 'us'*, rather than act as representations to us of 'others', as disability representations do, we are able to feel their winning and losing as passive members of the team, in spite of any obvious differences. Further, at mega-events, our own national identity is also reinforced by the athletes, even though we are spectators and they are actors (Dayan and Katz, 1994; Roche, 2000), because the distinction between us and them dissolves (Abercrombie and Longhurst, 1998, p.78) in this televised sporting context. The decoding stage has therefore some default settings built in to it with international sport, and the spectacle of live sports coverage

provides a different resonance with our identities and experience. This opens up possibilities for reframing representations at the encoding stage.

Disability sport has never previously had any parity with the way marketable sport is treated on television. The audience-pulling power of international sport had not been associated, until London 2012, with the Paralympic Games (Gilbert and Schantz, 2012), because meanings about normal elite athletes are constructed as positive and engaging (Whannel, 1992), whilst disability causes revulsion or an unwanted kind of fascination (Barnes and Mercer, 2003). What changed for the London 2012 coverage was that the producers realised there was actual parity between the two groups of Paralympians and Olympians, so they tried to depict them in a similar way. The Commissioning Editor had wanted to utilise the live television sports genre, but also chose to adapt the format slightly.

When it came to how they might produce the key elements of the sports event with 'a different voice', there was still some doubt and a range of views were expressed amongst the other decision-makers that I interviewed. The Head of Channel Four Programmes, Julian Bellamy, had expressed the decisive moment for him, as being when he told his team to 'just produce a bloody great bit of sport'. This could not actually be achieved just by itself, though, because there was no previous interest in the Paralympics (Brittain, 2010), largely, some of the producers believed, because the characters were unknown.

The strength of the project lay, according to Poulton who led the televising element, in being able to solve that lack of recognition, with the treatment, voice and framing of the live sports coverage:

> We believed in the narrative, not just showing isolated sport. We believed that if you're going to show Jonnie Peacock running the hundred metre final on a Thursday night from the stadium – [because] the general British audience really had no engagement with Paralympic sport - we had to work a lot harder to tell the story of Jonnie Peacock at the beginning so that people would engage with the fella. And that's where the nervousness was. We had to work a lot harder because the Paralympics athletes do not get the coverage the Olympic athletes get. They are not household names so we had to really go for it. (Poulton, Project Leader, *Interview*)

They had to make some of the characters household names, and I discuss this further in the next section about the documentaries commissioned for that purpose. The producers also had to get across that the athletes were 'extraordinarily good at sport', in order for the live sports segment to work.

How vitally important the elevation of sporting achievement was, to the television coverage, became clear for the Director of Communications for the IPC (International Paralympic Committee), who worked closely with Channel Four. He explained to me how his own perceptions were changed after he joined the Paralympic movement and discovered how hard the Paralympians actually train. He was surprised to learn that some are so close in standard to their Olympian counterparts that they train alongside them (e.g. Jonnie Peacock, the Paralympic 100m sprinter, and Greg Rutherford, 'Super Saturday' long-jumper; both these men are London 2012 gold medallists). Being personally affected by this understanding affected his communications with, and suggested directives to, Channel Four executives.

The spur to promote elite sportsmanship thus seems to have come from the Director's own experience but also from pressure from other stakeholders who wanted their Paralympians to be recognised as international high-performance sporting athletes. In terms of disseminating the message he spoke of the challenge in this way:

> I get journalists who come to me going, 'Oh I love covering the Paralympics; the back-stories are amazing'. And I'm like, 'yeah they are, but their athletic performance is absolutely amazing because there's a guy there with no arms who can swim 50 metres free-style in less than 30 seconds'. We can't do that and we've got two arms and two legs and it's just like they are incredible superhuman athletes - and you've got to really hammer that home. (Spence, IPC Director of Communications, *Interview*)

These views and feelings successfully filtered through into the programme treatments, and, within the live sports coverage, particularly with the commentators. For example, one commentator, on day three, at the end of a track and field event, declared 'on-air', in an excited tone, 'This is not about disability, this is pure sport!' (*Afternoon Show*, 2012). There was a sense of the audience growing into this new idea *with* the commentator. It was a

spontaneous onscreen remark but it reflected the shift in focus away from 'disability sport' to elite high-performance and it involved all of 'us' who were watching. When there is media saturation for spectacular events, which comes with mega-event status, Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) have observed that the strict separation between actors and spectators/audiences dissolves (p.78). Joining actors and audience in this context, I would argue, also acts as a way of breaking down the 'othering' process. The programme treatment for round-the-clock mega-events coverage is constructed so that we share the commentator's viewpoint, especially when events are transmitted live.

According to Rowe (2003), the role of the commentator, within live sports coverage, is to get the audience 'on the team'. The manufactured style of delivery, with its friendly camaraderie, is delivered in order to attract, secure and retain the target audience (ibid., p.118). Sports commentators, therefore, play a unifying role to keep audiences but this also closes the gap between 'us' and 'them' in a way that is specially designed for televised sport. Unifying moments are achieved for commercial reasons, in order to secure audience engagement, and to that end promote the sense of a shared experience. Significantly, and by design, in 2012, this existing element of the sports coverage programme type, the unifying tone of voice, was utilised to also integrate the delivery of messages about disability. This was a key way of adapting the format and resetting a familiar trope to keep the audience onside, as 'part of the team' of the nation's Paralympians.

In reality, adding depth to the commentary, my interviewees suggest, was in fact difficult to achieve with the outsourced seasoned reporters and also because they were using so much new talent. An easily flowing narrative was still something that they hadn't got quite right according to the advisor on disability, Walsh. Her criticism of some of them, was:

> You haven't told them [the audience] the story, so all you've told us is the sun's shining, and, you know, the stand is packed and all your, kind of, standard commentary. (Walsh, Disability Executive, *Interview*)

This was in spite of the training they had been given by her, as she recalled:

> I went big on that in my presentations to all of them; the […] things I did with the *Mental 4 the Paralympics*. I just said, you know, 'It's really patronising to make assumptions about disability and about disabled people, and what I want you to do is, you know, always go in wanting to be frank and honest and get under the skin of these athletes'. (ibid.)

There was a temptation then to either patronise or talk about the weather and, as Aitcheson, the Editor of Live Sport, had pointed out, 'default settings' needed to be reset, or in the case of the new presenters created from scratch. The existing commentary tropes acted as a structure, dictating behaviours/agencies, and were difficult to overcome – even for the creatives with the vision for a different kind of representation. However, as Rowe (2003) has argued, the role of the sports commentators to engage the audience is an important one. I would argue that feeling 'part of the team' affects how one does or does not objectify difference. If the commentator is not doing so, or the studio team, then neither do we, as the audience.

With this adaptation, the athletes were not high-achievers *in spite* of, or to *overcome* their disability, as Paralympic scholars have noted in the past (Rowe, 2006; Brittain, 2010; Silva and Howe, 2012). They were high-achievers because peak performance is what is expected of *all* elite athletes, as reiterated by the commentators and live reporting teams. Changing this expectation, that the disabled athletes needed to be different to be accepted, is how their sporting profiles were normalised, as I have shown in the previous chapter. Now they needed to be extraordinary to qualify for the final. This is a shift in meaning. Adapting the live sports format to include the rivalry and drama, but with disability information woven in, is one of the ways Channel Four were able to make this shift. The meanings associated with the elite group of Olympians were transcoded (see Hall, 2012, p.267) onto the old supercrip one, by the particular way that they were represented.

Being 'extraordinarily good at sport' used to be a key *overcoming* framing for black males too, along with their having an 'extraordinary sense of rhythm' (Hall, 1997, p.254; see also Barnes, 1992b). This was true within programmes about race, or where the diverse actors were bit-parts or accessories to the

lead white roles (see Hooks, 2006; Hall, 2000). Similarly programmes about embarrassing or fascinating bodies, or where disabled characters are used as plot devices (Barnes, 1992a; Garland-Thomson, 1997) carry the same *overcoming* meaning. By reconfiguring the Paralympics as live international elite sport, during the daytime (in 2012) sports coverage segment, this decision changed the references for reading onscreen depictions.

Using the live sports format to embed differently decodable meanings altered the old stereotype of the victim 'trying his best' (BBC, 2008) at sport, reversing the stereotype (see Hall, 2012, p.262) to show athletes as elite. In terms of power, the elevated status, and mega-event all-day coverage, produced a shift in position from the viewer looking down, with more power, at overachieving 'supercrips', to looking up at them, now with the greater power and status of Olympic athletes. These athletes, according to the favourable and respectful commentaries, could master their bodies and, for example, swim 50 meters faster than most people in the world. They were overcoming what all elite athletes do, rather than just their physical differences, and were not therefore overcoming tragedy with bravery (see Barnes, 1992a; Garland-Thomas, 2002a).

Walsh, the Disability Executive with overall editorial control over the disability agenda, saw the event, not only as another Olympics, in terms of achievement, but also as raw entertainment. She wanted emotions and tears onscreen, as part of the Olympic narrative, and not because they were 'crips' (Haller, 1995; Philo, 2012):

> Prior to *Big Brother*, we were at that stage where disabled people only appeared on screen if they were sort of tragic or brave or exceptional in some way and I wanted to get us to the sort of human side and embrace the sort of tantrums and tears and… I mean I don't know if you remember after the Olympics, or watching the Olympics, it was just tears, tears, tears. I remember doing a montage of all the tears at the Olympics and showing it to the production teams just before we went into the Paralympics and saying, 'That's what I want on the Paralympics. I want it all – I want the audience you know, absolutely wrapped up in all that drama'. (Walsh, Disability Executive, *Interview*)

Her reference to *Big Brother* was not to a gap in the schedules that needed filling, as it had been for the Head of Channel Four, Kevin Lygo. Nor was it a reference to the consequently tarnished brand-image, as it was for the 4Creative Business Director, Kuba Wieczorek. According to these two interviewees, the Paralympics was used to compensate for both deficiencies left by the show. For Walsh, however, *Big Brother* gave her confidence to adapt the live sports format. When 'Pete', with Tourette Syndrome, won the public vote and the seventh series (*Big Brother*, 2006) she explained that he was centre stage, in the mainstream*, with* his disability but not only because of it. He won a prize that normal people always win, in a normal person's arena, and she considered this a milestone for disability. She now wanted to utilise the ableist Olympics arena too, without belittling the realities that having a disability may present.

Within television sport, argues Whannel (1992), the tears of frustration, grief and joy experienced by elite athletes, are all part of the able-bodied spectacle. Those able-bodied tears reflect the drama of winning and losing rather than the 'poor me this is really difficult' adversity inference (Gilbert and Schantz, 2001) which had hitherto been the default framing for representations of disability (see Philo, 2012). The transposition of the Olympic narrative onto disability sport meant that familiar meanings could be reworked within the adapted format. As I noted in chapter four, sponsorship money was used to pay for extra cameras so that the production could visually emulate other elite sporting competitions (see Appendix D). A key one of these cameras was deployed at the track side specifically to capture raw emotions.

Wheatley (2016) questions whether inequalities are reproduced or subverted through moments of mediated emotional excess. In this case I argue that inequalities were *not* reproduced because more equal meanings, inherent within the genre, were transposed onto the disabled athletes. Tragedy, suffering, loss and redemption are key components of television drama in general, and as Horne (2007) and Wenner (2009) have argued, sport has evolved as commercialised entertainment, such that these elements have been gradually included into this genre too. Modern coverage no longer simply

reports on the action of a mere match or track and field event without employing dramatic narrative. The high drama, as the *Mental 4 the Paralympics* montage demonstrated, needs to include 'tears, tears, tears' just as it does for the Olympics.

Grindstaff (2002) establishes that developing emotional involvement with the main characters, in her case with talk show participants, creates an important connection between the audience and the television content. She points out that it is the need to generate audiences that leads to the manufacture of emotional displays. With the 2012 Paralympic coverage, the 'money shot' (ibid.) moments of open emotional displays did not need to be manufactured but they did have to be styled to emulate the track side dramas of other international elite sports events. Depleted, exhausted athletes are now caught on camera so that we can feel their triumphs and their pain. In sport there are winners and losers, and the spectacle is emotional, but loss in this context is represented not necessarily as disempowering, as it is for the 'disabled', but as part of the sporting rivalry narrative.

Channel Four producers adapted the sporting rivalries trope by adding more depth and detail to their coverage. Historically, analysis of television sport has highlighted that the televisual framing of rivalries used in sports programmes creates personalities for us to identify with (Whannel and Tomlinson, 1984) but that other things disappear with the personified rivalry framing (Daney, 1978). Historic and social contexts are lost from the frame (ibid.) as well as the losers who mysteriously disappear (Whannel, 1992, p.96). The consequence of this process is that the focus just on winning forces correlated onscreen absences. In this way, the selective construction is far from objective and Kinkema (1998) say that 'although institutions claim to present athletic events objectively, they engage in considerable selective construction and interpretation in the production phase before their programs reach an audience' (p.32). Channel Four mediated their athletics event in a particular way, by weaving in disability and using a different voice to show that the event was 'bigger than just sport' as Aitcheson, the Commissioning Editor, had said.

In the case of the London 2012 Paralympics, adding the social context is something they did differently to previous packages that only included events round-ups. Whilst it was important that Team GB did win medals to keep the ratings up, lack of funding for disability sport was mentioned, as was access to facilities and the need for improved talent spotting at schools. As the Disability Executive had said in her interview, 'we did not want them [the athletes] to be two-dimensional'. Contextualising with back-stories was a deliberate construction to play a different and better role than the purely emotional encapsulations of the sob-story trope. These social contexts were woven into the commentaries and conversations of the onscreen reporters and presenters and were still based around being 'extraordinarily good at sport'.

One of the other programme treatments adapted to consciously stop patronising the athletes was to inject the coverage with humour. The style and content of commentary was reconstructed for their desired frame:

> It's the triumph of the human spirit and you can be funny with it. You can put comedians on the boccia [wheelchair bowls] commentary, so long as they have admiration for the athletes – we had one lovely commentator on the rugby who said something like, 'Oh I would have said he got that by his fingertips, but he hasn't got any so I won't.' You know those sort of throw-away lines that come out naturally. Giles Long, the LEXI creator is full of those. He talks about, you know, 'she lost because she finished on her stump arm instead of her good arm'. (Walsh, Disability Executive, *Interview*)

Other suggestions from Aitcheson, Channel Four's Commissioning Editor for Sport, included 'elevate the talent, so you're treating them as you would an Olympic athlete in terms of what you show, and how glossy your VT is and everything' and 'don't try and tip-toe around things'.

Live coverage matters because it draws the audience in, according to Dayan and Katz (1994). The inclusion of so many hours of live footage was a huge adaptation from previous disability sports coverage. Packaged highlights are historically the treatment that the BBC had used and was something that they would not now be able to go back to, if they were to regain the broadcasting rights for Tokyo 2020 or beyond. In this way the expected type of programming has been changed and developed. If the audience are not engaged with after-

the-event highlights then the commentary can sound patronising, as it has done so often in the past.

In this section I have shown that Channel Four's treatment of live sports coverage included 'pure sport', outsourced to purist sports producers, but also a change to 'default' producer settings to ensure, for example, that the commentators would weave in disability information as an adaptation of the format. The blending together of two types of representations, of elite and also disabled athletes, seems to have worked because it was dropped into the powerful commercial framing of mega-event live sports coverage.

## Documentary format

Documentaries were, unusually, incorporated into the Paralympics coverage timeline by Channel Four (see Appendices D and E). One in particular, *Inside Incredible Athletes* was designed to highlight that the Paralympians were 'extraordinarily different'. Although the documentaries and short films were buried within the normal schedule they were in fact either made by the corporate sponsors, or commissioned by the Marketing Department to draw an audience to the Paralympics coverage. These programmes were commissioned by the Head of Marketing who said in his interview:

> Alongside what might be seen as more classical marketing as in, you know, TV ads, we decided we were going to have programming before the event itself. So we […] had some special documentaries that were made. (Walker, Head of Marketing, *Interview*)

Walker makes it clear that 'we had' documentaries made. Whereas it is commonplace for the press to contain advertorials that seem like features although they are really advertisements, the commissioning process for documentaries is not normally undertaken on this basis. The Commissioning Editor role here has moved away, it seems, from its traditional location, into the Marketing Department, at least for the Paralympic Games. The first step for the planned coverage was to highlight the human interest stories. In the two-year run-up to the event the intention, my interviewees told me, had been to create

particular characters for the audience to engage with. In this section I describe how commissioned documentaries were used to do this.

Sports needs artificial rivalries and attractive personalities for the winner-loser drama to work (Hayes and Karamichas, 2012 ; Whannel, 2012) and market research had shown Channel Four that most of the Paralympian athletes were virtually unknown, (C4TVC, 2013). Other broadcast outlets have realised that you will not get the ratings if you suddenly show a highlights package about disability sport, because nobody knows who any of the players and athletes are (NBC, 2016). In order to address this issue the Marketing Department were given particular creative input with the producers to introduce and elevate certain personalities. Adepitan, former Paralympian and on-air presenter realised:

> Channel Four really brought alive characters we don't see much and we don't see enough of in live sport. You wouldn't have known before who Jonnie Peacock or Hannah Cockroft were. Channel Four made them matter, that is the key to live sport - you have got to make people care. (Adepitan, ex-Paralympian and TV Presenter, *Interview*)

It was the Marketing Department, as well as the Disability Executive, who reminded the teams of the need to make people care. In the two year run up to the Paralympics, personalities needed to be profiled to ensure audience engagement with the 2012 media coverage, and documentaries were commissioned, with an accompanying marketing campaign.

*Inside Incredible Athletes*

Just the title of this film evokes the classic supercrip trope again, and it should be noted that this documentary was made to be shown in 2010 because this was before the finessed new meanings had been discussed. Many media stories still draw on stock stereotypes of 'brave, elite athletes', 'special people', 'remarkable achievers' (e.g. Goggin and Newell, 2000, p.83; Howe, 2011). Channel Four focused on removing the 'brave' or 'special' characterisations and trained this into their workforce before their coverage began, but that was not true of this film. What was consistent though is that the extraordinary

differences, particularly in anatomical appearance or function, were seen, in the television output, to contribute rather than take away from the athletes' remarkable achievements. For these reasons the producers were happy to portray the Paralympians as 'extraordinarily different' using this genre for that portrayal.

Whilst stereotypically extreme characteristics are generally grouped together to dehumanise and objectify others as Hall (1997) observed, there are other scholars who have provided new reasons for extraordinariness or extremes to appear onscreen. In particular, the need to stand out and compete for the fragmented audience's attention has become increasingly more apparent in the multi-platform digital age. According to Zoellner (2009a):

> The increased focus on the extraordinary or the extreme in the selection of documentary subject matter, angle, and/or contributors, […] is related to the changed production and consumption environment. The growing demand for projects to be more interesting, special, or extreme in content and form to gain audience attention presents a significant shift in television documentaries. (ibid., p.527)

Similar representations, then, are still being made, but not necessarily for the reasons the repulsion and disability scholars (e.g. Elias, 1978; Davis, 1995; Schantz and Gilbert, 2001) have understood in the past. Now, it is not perhaps solely to create a safe distance from the 'others' as Hall (1997) understood it, but also to attract an audience at all, in the fragmented multi-channel, multi-format, networked environment we now share.

Whether or not marketing were involved for reasons of profit, their presence was required to focus the messaging and framing of personalities for the purposes of audience engagement. This is a step away from a creative having an idea and offering it up for selection, or for the old-fashioned creation of a documentary feature simply to stand in its own right as a programme of interest. The embedded meanings within the text, undoubtedly, will also have been aligned with and been part of the 'strategy'. The *Mental 4 the Paralympics* presentations, referred to throughout this thesis, demonstrate that messaging and attitude framing strategy. Many of my contributors did feel 'free' to create

what they liked, but most also mentioned the staff away days as when everything had clicked into place.

A prime example of what seemed to Channel Four to be creative 'freedom', undergirded by an agenda, was highlighted by Walsh, the Disability Executive, relating to one of the pre-Games documentaries. Referring to the feature length *Inside Incredible Athletes*, she praised the Film Director, Mike Christie, for his creativity. He had filmed a Paralympic dressage horse-rider with his horse, on the concert platform in the Royal Albert Hall, 'dancing' alongside a ballet dancer. As Walsh explained, the incongruity disrupted existing understandings of disability since it was so far out of context, and used an artistic portrayal to help the audience connect with the rider. However the representations were still part of the scheme to promote audience engagement with disabled sport and later in the sports coverage, for 2012 and for the Rio 2016 coverage, the dressage competition was correspondingly relabelled as 'horse-dancing'. The film had been framed to amuse or appeal to a wider audience than the usual equestrian aficionados but also to profile a character for later on.

Lee Pearson, the Paralympic rider, was then used on the Channel Four idents in between programmes and increasingly on posters to raise his profile in a way not afforded a normal 'star' of a mere documentary. This was a planned campaign to introduce characters for the purposes of engaging audiences in 2012 for the twelve days of the Paralympic Games. The choice of whom to elevate was made, according to my contributors, on the basis of their likely success as Gold medal winners. There was a clash of priorities at one stage when Jonny Peacock, a blond, attractive, inherently endearing, male track athlete, was side-lined because the BPA thought 'he wouldn't make the podium in London' (Walsh, Disability Executive, *Interview*).

Darke (2004) observes the systemic oppression of the unnormalisable (p.103) within media representations and this situation with the exclusion of Peacock, demonstrates one of the ways that such oppression comes about. He did not fulfil the 'over-achieving' stereotype that was needed. The creative editorial decision-making criteria for the film was overruled by the real purpose of the

film, that the Marketing Department needed to promote the 'winners' two years in advance. Using a physically impaired but attractive 'poster boy' to make a more appealing programme was a creative agenda, but it was the competing commercial agenda, for the documentary to serve as a promotion for the later Games coverage, that prevailed.

Whilst not appearing to the audience as advertising, these documentaries were part of the marketing strategy nevertheless (see Appendix E). What was new was that representations of their personal challenges focused on their training regimes as well as their disabilities. Hesmondhalgh (2013) has drawn our attention to the downplayed role of marketing at other less recognised stages in the process of creative production (p.234). He notes that marketing is used, as I have observed here, to inform the conceptual stages of a project. He also points out that there is a role for marketing, sometimes, *within* the creation of cultural products. Developing this argument, my research reveals that it is the very *existence* of these additional programmes which seems to be dictated by the needs of the Marketing Department in this case. Caldwell (2008) refers to these increasingly overlapping influences as a 'mess' (p.163) as they are difficult to disentangle. However, in this instance it was quite straightforward, a whole series of programmes were commissioned to make the up-coming sport watchable, fundamentally because the audience had to know about and care for the personalities who were going to take part. Disability tropes were artistically conveyed in the earlier films, but not particularly moved forward or challenged yet, at this point.

The long form documentary *Inside Incredible Athletes* was transmitted on August 29th, 2010 and was cited by several of my contributors as being the cornerstone of the pre-Games coverage. This film not only framed 'up close and personal' depictions of disability to prepare the viewing public, it also helped other stakeholders buy into Channel Four's innovative style. As Walsh explained:

> *Inside Incredible Athletes* was a huge help with the BPA because that was our first 90 minute, you know, feature-length doc. where we absolutely did delve right into the disability side of things; we showed their athletic prowess but it was a lovely mixture of science and

medicine and sport and art really, with those little performance films. (Walsh, Disability Executive, *Interview*)

The full length film framed disability representations in a particular way using three variants of narrative structure. These were poetic, dialectic and rhetorical forms of communication (Lucaites and Condit, 1985) and had differing functions.

### Poetic Narrative

Structurally, those 'little performance films' were segments within each athlete's profile using a form of *poetic* narrative to paint a picture about the person, their condition, and their relationship to it. In the instance of Lee Pearson, an equestrian dressage rider, who finds it hard to walk along the ground, his skill was depicted as balletic and graceful once he is up on his horse. To accentuate this contrast he was filmed, at great logistical effort, inside the Royal Albert Hall, a symbol of high British culture, alongside some ballerinas who were also dancing with him, in the same space, accompanied by the same music. Because the location and the juxtaposition of images disrupted norms, the associated disability tropes were also disrupted. Watching a non-disabled dance group simultaneously performing with the out of context horse and disabled rider makes it difficult to keep them separate, reducing stigma and forcing a closing of the difference gap. This artistic segment, as with the others in the extended film, blurred otherness by disrupting difference and blending the two groups to create a merged artistic spectacle.

### Dialectic Narrative

The science and medicine segments, within this same film, and evenly spaced between the artistic segments, were part of another theoretical structure, the *dialectic* narrative. This version of narration explains facts, providing reasons in an objective way, as distinct from the poetic approach used above. The angle for disability portrayal here firmly reinforced the 'bio-medical model' preferred by most TV productions for understanding the nature of physical impairments (see Barnes, 1992d, Oliver, 1991). Illustrating facts with scans, and other

scientific evidence can demean the identity of the disabled person, by inferring something is 'wrong' with them (Clogston, 1990). Proponents of the 'social model' (see Oliver 1983) have argued that it is society that has something wrong with it, by not accepting differences as normal. The explanatory narrative structure used to build this 'medical condition' picture of reality is delivered by the narrator for the benefit of the ableist viewer and sounds factual and true. Disability theorists agree that 'factual' truths of this kind do not tell the whole truth and are therefore reductive. Documentaries, as a format, of course are necessarily edited and shaped using a process that Corner (2004) regards as bordering on 'deception' (p.158). In these 'medical' segments, the tropes and stereotypes were reinforced in their normal vein (see Garland-Thomson, 1997) but the disguise of science, for what was really marketing, however, constituted an adaptation of the format.

*Rhetorical Narrative*

The overarching purpose, captured in the title of the film, fits directly into Lucaites and Condit's (1985) functional perspective where *rhetorical* narrative is used for persuasion. The lens of the film focuses firmly on the emotional back-stories building a crescendo of anticipation in the shadow of preparations for the upcoming sporting event (for which this is a disguised trailer). It should be noted that the story arc is repeatedly intercut with the disruption of medical information and a borrowed soap opera trope of looping through the different characters in a sequence of mini dramas or enactments. This latter looping ostensibly provides traction and momentum for viewers with lighter attention spans and is becoming a feature of many of the hybrid docusoaps, reality shows, lifestyle programmes and lighter documentaries privileging entertainment over education (see e.g. Corner, 2004; Klein, 2011). Adopting this trope to attract a broader audience may well have been a key part of their strategy here. Zoellner (2009a) observes that there is an increasing emphasis on the extraordinary and the extreme in television documentaries. During her own production research she explains:

> This became apparent during my observation in the development
> department where ideas, stories and characters allegedly had to be

> 'big enough,' 'headline grabbing,' and 'extreme' to appeal to
> commissioning editors. (ibid., p.527)

The marketing campaign for *Inside Incredible Athletes* was even more headline grabbing, and designed to be such, according to three of my contributors. The campaign, *Freaks of Nature* was a deliberately provocative strapline associated with the 'extraordinarily different' targeted documentary, utilising voyeuristic fascination (Elias, 1978; Davis, 1995) in a way that the later *Meet The Superhumans* campaign did not do.

In this section I have demonstrated that the documentary format itself was relatively conventional, at least in relation to the hybrid formats closely allied with the genre. It had both poetic and dialectic elements blending art and science. However it was structured with an overarching persuasive rhetorical narrative in line with the underlying commercial purpose. The commissioning and use by the in-house Marketing Department of documentary was a departure from the publisher-broadcaster's normal processes. Editorial decisions were made about the content that were shaped directly by the need to drive an audience to the later event coverage. According to the Head of Marketing, it was for this future purpose that the documentary format was adapted and used.

## Topical satire/review programme

Finally in this last section on formats I show how one format has endured, and I argue that this unconventional hybrid has delivered the most change for disability representations. Since the London 2012 Paralympic Games coverage, there has been one enduring programme legacy. It was created at the last minute and encapsulated what the Business Director called 'the magic' of the Paralympics. The programme was innovative and has been recommissioned for other uses since, including general elections, where disability has nothing to do with the show at all. The three presenters are apparently all disabled, except one of them isn't and he is the odd one out. They laugh at each other and introduce guests providing a post mortem on the day's proceedings. Within this largely invented format the satire show genre is

transformed allowing disability into the mainstream by confounding the existing boundaries, as I will now show.

*The Last Leg*

The Chief Creative Officer and Head of Channel Four, Jay Hunt, who inherited the Paralympics from her predecessor Kevin Lygo, told me that her main challenge with the media coverage of 2012 had been persuading the production company to take a chance on disabled talent. It had been, she said, 'quite a battle'. She then went on to say that getting *The Last Leg* to work was the other huge challenge:

> We were keen to have a show that had a different approach to disability and an irreverent tone but it had never been done before. The host, Adam Hills was completely unknown in the British market. Alex Brooker was cast after he stood in, in a rehearsal. Josh Widdecombe was also unknown. There is also a long and noble tradition of sports entertainment shows struggling and this one was particularly problematic. Landing it successfully was one of the real high points of the Games. (Hunt, Head of Channel Four, *Interview*)

It came about after the Disability Executive, who has never worked on sport, but was a rower herself before contracting rheumatoid arthritis, noticed what she felt to be a gap in the types of programming. She recalled the thinking behind her actions, as follows:

> Why isn't there any entertainment element here in these programmes – in this line-up? Who do we know? I went down to Comedy, spoke to Shane Allen who was the Head of Comedy then, and I said, 'I need a presenter who's funny, and happens to be disabled - who've you got?' 'Adam Hills' So,[I] went back to James Belardi - he found this clip of him doing this hilarious routine and we just - we just said, 'Right, he's in. He's got to do it.' And then, of course, we had to get him past Sunset and Vine. (Walsh, Disability Executive, *Interview*)

Humour was clearly going to have a part to play in this formatted slot, as the selected Australian presenter was a former stand-up comedian. As a performer, he emphasised that although they put the sport first every single day:

> Once you've covered the sport, and you've given it the respect it deserves and, you know, the coverage it deserves as a sports event, you then buy yourself, almost, the kind of, the leeway to then go and kind of have a little bit of fun with it. (Hills, 2015)

It needed to be fun as the Chief Sports Editor, Jamie Aitcheson said, when I asked him about the challenges they faced, 'No one would want to watch highlights of disability sport so we had to do something else with it.' He also pointed out that Sunset and Vine 'hated it.' Presumably because it didn't fit their idea of an appropriate sports format. It was new, and, according to every producer who mentioned it to me, Channel Four made it up as they went along.

Nobody was sure what to do with the slot until the Entertainment Commissioner turned up on set and took over. The chaos was recalled by one of the team:

> Rehearsals were hilarious, all the script meetings, where we were all tossing ideas around, but she brought in the rigour of building the show, you know, coming up with ideas; having a writer attached to each presenter; you know, going out and shooting VTs – and bringing in, you know, the athletes, and as many funny guests on the sofa as you could…there was also this hash-tag segment, yeah…even when they got to the Olympic Park, we weren't quite sure how we were going to use Alex [Brooker]. It was still undecided whether he was going to be a reporter, out doing little pieces, and then come in and do studio pieces – but after the first night, Syeda [Irtizaali ] the Entertainment Commissioning Editor, was asked to go down and she spent the whole time down with us then and she – she basically shaped the show. (Walsh, Disability Executive, *Interview*)

So this sporting format, originally intended as a highlights show, morphed into entertainment by much agency, and more than a little denting of the structure. With lots of comings and goings on the set, disabled athletes, celebrities, and comedians reported, discussed and joked about the day and also just joked about. 'They' got muddled in with 'us' and Josh Widdicombe, who does not have a prosthetic limb or a deformity, was constantly teased onscreen by the 'others' for not being disabled. This turning around of the trope that ordinary people are normal confused the public enough, says Widdicombe, for him to be offered the disabled toilet offscreen when appearing in public elsewhere. Shaking up the format, and messing about with the stereotypical behaviours acted as a disruptor, in the way that Hall (2012) noted for representations of

race when they similarly changed (p.216). Drawing on Goffman's (1967) theory of the Wise and Own (pp.30-33) I argue that there was also another phenomenon at work to bring disability into the mainstream.

Goffman suggests that where the token 'normal' is accepted into the 'other' group and allowed to be one of them a change in understanding takes place. The role of Wise One (ibid., p.31) is allowed by virtue, normally, of that person having some connection with the stigmatised oddity, 'whilst not actually possessing it' (p.31). This tacit permission at play in *The Last Leg* is a nuanced dynamic utilised to advantage to create a new programme format, arguably a new genre. Embedding Widdicombe into the team of *The Last Leg* made him the 'wise' outsider on topics of disability. He has said himself that he is allowed to make disabled jokes 'for some reason' and this, according to Goffman's theory, is because the main 'other' presenters accept him as one of their 'own'. Of course, in practice, they were thrown together by the producers, but their camaraderie onscreen was rehearsed to make inclusion of each other, whether disabled or non-disabled, a two-way shared experience.

The audience are linked to the 'wise' one who is actually one of 'us' (not disabled) and also to the others who, in this context as show hosts, explainers and joke-makers, also feel like they are one of 'us'. This close relationship with the viewer is an extension to the contrivance cultured on *The Breakfast Show*, that 'we *are* the audience', as the presenters said. It works because we are all trying to make sense of the Paralympics together on live TV. There are no 'others' in this setting. Hereby Hall's (1997) spectacle of the other evaporates. Confounding the 'we' and 'you' audience dimension with the 'us' and 'them' onscreen mash-up creates changes in how difference and commonality are perceived. By making everybody acceptable, the blurred boundaries curiously normalise everyone, including in relation to the viewers at home.

This adaptation of an existing format is standing the test of time. By extending the commissioning of the programme, since 2012, to other broader topics, such as the General Election, an even more extraordinary 'us' and 'them' role reversal has taken place. Placed in the mainstream programming slot Hills and

Brooker, both with a prosthetic limb, are back to being two 'other' presenters, but now they are acting as 'wise' ones to the 'normal' populous on matters of general interest away from disability. Their continued presence in the programme has been protected by the format, allowing the bonding and chemistry of the able-bodied and disabled trio to continue their agency, laughing and joking about serious matters, with live input from the viewing public. The cheeky trio format is similar to the *Top Gear* style of presenting but includes a dynamic continuous swapping of who is normal, which has never happened before with disability.

The new hybrid format, which has morphed into topical satire was born out of necessity because the producers in 2012 knew nobody wanted to watch a highlights programme. All players have an equal voice, albeit an irreverent one, and seeing their stumps, in the case of Brooker, or having no disability at all, like Widdecombe, are seen as the same, without one being the 'other'. Hills' prosthetic limb is under the desk, but we know it is there. It is no longer visible, but it is alluded to in the title of the show. Disability is not invisible or repulsive but has a raised profile, deliberately, within as normal a context as the genre allows.

The safe distance between the audience and the actors was also crossed by the use of social media. Reading out tweets on air is not new, but actively incorporating them into a segment to tackle tacitly held taboos specifically might be. It was considered by my participants to break new ground, and came about accidentally on the first day of the Paralympics. Alex Brooker, the sports journalist who became one of the stars of the show by accident, told me how the twitter hashtag segment happened:

> Afterwards [the first programme] we got a tweet asking 'is it ok to ask why some of the people are competing because they don't look disabled?' And there might have been another one that night saying 'is it ok to find some of the para Olympians quite fit?' [Laughs] we talked about it ourselves and we thought 'yes of course it's ok' why shouldn't you? And I remember the next day in the meeting saying ok we've got to cover these and someone said we should call it '#is it ok' and that should be the segment. So it kind of came organically out of what people were actually tweeting us. (Brooker, TV Presenter, *Interview*)

This viewer and producer agency created a structure within the programme format that others have wanted to copy. The BBC attempted a similar show with Alan Carr after the 2014 Winter Paralympics without perhaps understanding the dynamics beneath the surface. This programme was withdrawn shortly afterwards. It is the mixing up and swapping of normal and 'other' roles which created the 'magic' and it is this that reduced the gap between oddity and acceptability bringing a marginalised group into the mainstream.

Widdicombe, the able-bodied presenter on *The Last Leg*, who feels he now has a licence to tell disabled jokes on his own show, said:

> We will get away with jokes on *The Last Leg* that you can't do on other shows and then you go on other shows and make these jokes and then people tense up and you go 'oh wait a minute maybe that's not appropriate on other shows'. (Widdicombe, 2014)

The shows that Widdicombe appears on tend to be of a similar late night entertainment genre, with ingredients of chat, comedy and observational satire. However, having forged a format of their own, his remarks show that the delicately nuanced meanings are dependent on the format in which they are framed. Inadvertently Channel Four had created a new one.

## Conclusion

With all four of the formats discussed in this chapter it is clear that representations of disability are still finely balanced in terms of what they mean. Drawing on my interviews I have shown that the media frames for each genre necessarily continue to adhere to at least some unwritten rules, and are undergirded by their own particular templates. I have argued that it was, in part, by adapting each format to disrupt existing meanings and create new ones, that Channel Four were able to reframe disability and change perceptions in society. Audience research suggests that they have been successful in doing so (Bournemouth University, 2013).

Building on Channel Four's in-house agenda of extending market reach to grow a bigger audience, which I have explored in chapter four, I have shown in this

chapter that specific efforts were also made by Channel Four to appeal to wider audiences through the use and adaptation of the *programme formats*. By taking a marginalised group through the televisual sporting machine, disability was to some extent normalised, and by treating the coverage as pure sport (at least during the 'live' action segments) the athletes were celebrated whilst embracing their disabilities, rather than in spite of them. This coverage was flanked by other familiar formats to fill out a rounder picture of who this group really were. In the precursor documentaries, disability was still framed as the challenging back-story, with sporting prowess as a form of redemption. Thereafter the culture within the organisation changed and new riskier representations were embedded into the formats that they felt confident to adapt, or invent.

The marginalised group were lauded and applauded across a series of programme formats, and no longer were they contained purely in programmes about their differences. The breakfast show, the sport, the backgrounder trails and documentaries and the topical satire show set out to normalise these disabled athletes by utilising familiar programme treatments. These treatments made 'us' feel normal about watching 'them' precisely because the tropes and media frames were already familiar. The magazine show paired up celebrities and athletes, and interviewed kids and people-in-the-street to relax the setting. The sport was given the full 'live' sport spectacle and rivalry treatment, and the documentaries were shown in the mainstream slots rather than in the diversity quota graveyard of late night. A twitter stream ran alongside *The Last Leg* and was allowed to interrupt the programme, asking those 'others' directly if 'it was ok' to think and feel in ways 'we' were previously uncertain of. This process restructured and redefined acceptable behaviours crossing the divide between 'us' and 'them' because they could reply directly. It was not *about* disability, it included disability. Even the satirical highlights replacement programme was live and therefore more engaging for normal audiences. My research demonstrates that all of these things were creative adaptations of familiar television formats and tropes.

In this chapter I have shown that the unifying effect of this suite of programmes, that temporarily monopolised and saturated the Channel Four TV schedules,

reframed meanings about disability, adapting all the mainstream formats throughout the day. I have also shown that the role of marketing was an influential one and this in particular, along with how brands were used, borrowed and repaired, is the subject of the next chapter.

## Chapter 7 Embedding Disability: Marketing Branded Meanings

The success of the media coverage of the London 2012 Paralympic Games has been attributed in huge part to the marketing campaign. The Paralympians and the coverage were carefully branded by the marketing team, creating new meanings for disability sport and its sub-set of elite athletes. In this chapter I will show that these new meanings were embedded into the mainstream television culture by collaborating with particular brands, borrowing from other brands and creating a new brand, whilst simultaneously managing and repairing their own channel brand. It is perhaps common to assume that artistic creatives create content and that commercial advertisers and marketing teams promote that content. A key finding of my research is that these roles and relationships, within my case-study, were much more complex and not as clearly defined.

Both internally within the organisation, and throughout the public sphere, the 'seismic shift' in perceptions towards disability was recorded and commented upon - particularly making reference to the high profile TV and poster advertising used as part of the coverage. There was, however, a recurring theme amongst a significant group of my interviewees that suggests the marketing influence ran deeper than simply the campaigns, whether *Freaks of Nature* to promote the *Inside Incredible Athletes* documentary beforehand, or the saturation marketing of the *Meet The Superhumans* TV trailer, drawing attention and audience to the start of the Games. I will show the extent of the marketing influence, from the inception of the project through to the end of its creation, that contributed to what ended up onscreen.

Meanings were framed, representations clearly defined and depictions of disability were shaped in a form of cultural production that relied upon a well-defined marketing strategy and also, perhaps more definitively, brand identities, brand associations and branded meanings. I need to address these constructs here because television audiences associate values, attitudes, identities and emotions with particular brands, and certain messages are more acceptable when delivered by some brands rather than by others. This chapter analyses

the intangible as well as the tangible branding influences that affected how representations of disabled athletes were created for the London 2012 Paralympic Games coverage. The discussion on brands, how they were used, borrowed and repaired, follows a brief description of the marketing strategy and its focus on the promotion of plainly commercial objectives that were established before the project began (see Appendices C and E).

This chapter seeks to contribute to a wider debate on the role of commercial objectives within the creation of apparently non-commercial cultural media products. The context for my analysis derives from Davis' (2013) notion that a promotional *culture* exists and has been formed by the marketing of *ideas* as well as the marketing of products and services. He suggests that the subtle promotion of ideas and people and the diktats of related corporate strategy form a promotional culture that influences huge swathes of cultural and civic life. In addition to shaping representational meanings, this culture, he says, shapes and influences society's perceptions about itself and 'others'. As such, the pervasive promotional culture is an important dynamic to consider within the creative commercial debate, and also within this case-study here.

In order to investigate some further impinging factors upon the construction of disability representations, beyond those in the previous chapters, I draw on Klein's (2009) insights into the role of branding. Particularly useful is her understanding of what a brand association can achieve, as a shortcut to authenticity, promoting social significance, and also, potentially, as a mask for other commercial objectives. Banet-Weiser's (2012) similar focus on authenticity hints that creativity is now used in the service of brand cultures (ibid.) and is at the very least 'reconfigured' (Banet-Weiser and Sturken, 2010, p.268) within a promotional commercial context. In this study, on meaning-making, it is necessary to include a final chapter, therefore, on the role of marketing and the configuration of brand influences that were used to promote the Paralympic athletes and shape meanings about them onscreen.

It became clear to me, as my interviews progressed, that some producers involved with London 2012, were talking about changing perceptions of *their*

*brand*, not changing perceptions of disability. In this chapter I show that certain framings of disability and sport were not only marketed directly to attract viewers but were also developed for commercial objectives connected to the reinforcement of brands and corporate branding. For Channel Four's London 2012 media coverage there was specifically a brand reputational issue (see chapter four) that had a pervasive effect and informed the creativity at the very early stages of idea development and throughout the production and marketing processes. In theory, amongst scholars (e.g. Banet-Weiser and Sturken, 2010; Davis, 2013), and in practice, with my participant producers, discussions about audience perceptions and encoded meanings point towards the power of a pervasive and overarching promotional culture. This culture is understood from both sides to shape content and creative ideas.

Drawing on my own interviews, in the sections below, I highlight the blurring of commercial and creative objectives within the production of this important one-time cultural product. Multiple purposes, encompassing both creative and commercial goals, were fulfilled alongside standard promotion of the coverage, and I discuss what net effect the dynamic of those differing purposes had on disability representations both at the time and afterwards. I also draw on contributor donated internal documentation, in order to avoid the methodological weakness of relying too heavily on personal interviews.

In the first half of this chapter I evaluate Channel Four's stated objectives and draw on my material to argue the pervasiveness of the marketing influence over key creative decisions right from the very beginning of the project. In the second section, I discuss the role of brands and branding and their effect on the shaping of meanings about disability. I will show how significant the issue of channel brand management was to the whole process, and explore how the producers borrowed and utilised the power of other brands, including Nike, Public Enemy, Sainsbury's, BT and the Olympic Games, to develop a new branded identity for the disabled elite athletes whilst also repairing their own. I argue *why* and *how* the emphasis and focus morphed from 'otherness' and 'difference' to 'normality' and 'inclusion' through an analysis of the marketing strategy and the use of brands and branding below.

## The marketing strategy

This section examines the role of the outline marketing strategy drawn up at the initial bid stage of the London 2012 Paralympics project (see Appendix C). Hesmondhalgh (2013) has flagged up the need for academics to acknowledge the increasing role that marketing is playing, whether positively or negatively, in the creation of media texts, not simply towards the end of projects to promote them, or during the production process, but also at the inception of ideas (p.234). With that in mind I looked back at the original documentation that was presented to the London Organising Committee (LOCOG) and was also able to ask some of my participants, many of whose roles were linked to marketing and brand management, about the inception stage of the Rio 2016 Paralympics coverage. Decisions were being made about this coverage during my interview period in 2014/15 and this provided a chance to examine the influence of key individuals at the earliest stage of the production cycle, which I had missed for 2012.

The documents I was given that clarify the role of marketing and branding in the shaping of disability representations are primarily the 2009 proposal bid, provided by the Commercial Lawyer, and several rounds of staff presentations, provided by the Disability Executive. Changing onscreen representations and corporate attitudes towards disability was so important that a Brand Manager, Gareth Orr, outsourced from Insight, was asked to organise delivery of the material for them four times. These events took place in May, 2012, to include all Channel Four Paralympic presenters; reporters and commentators; senior execs (executive producers, programme editors, directors) from Sunset+Vine and IMG; Channel Four News teams and, for online, Twofour and DeltaTre Media.

Other production researchers have highlighted that marketing is now inevitably playing a key role in programme making and the promotion of ideas (including, for example, Grindstaff, 2002; Born, 2004; Klein, 2009; Mann, 2009). For London 2012, everybody was briefed about how disability ought to be portrayed, in all the organisations listed above. Ideas about disability were

promoted and marketed to them under the umbrella of Channel Four with the help of an outside agency. In this section I argue that there was an underlying strategy, even before the programme making stage, to promote meanings through the use of their own brand across the creative content that was to follow. This is in addition to the discussions in previous chapters that show marketing and branding executives were key decision-makers in programme meaning-making. They were also, crucially, involved from the outset.

In order to understand the location of editorial control in the concocting of the marketing strategy I first need to explain that the organisational structure of Channel Four includes a Marketing Department with a Head of Marketing, as well as 4Creative, their in-house advertising agency. These separate departments reflect the differing functions of marketing and advertising, with 4Creative creating tools for, and receiving their briefs from, the Marketing Department. The advertising agency were at pains to tell me they also retained a degree of autonomy outside the politics of the company. Overseeing both groups was the Director of Communications, who was also on the Board of Directors. This is an increasingly common strategic practice, to have a marketing representative on the board, blending creative-commercial agendas, and both Hesmondhalgh (2013) and Born (2004) have noted that this is the practice in other organisations. Based on my interviews with these teams, and the Board Director, I shall be discussing the relevance of the marketing strategy that was put in place before the development of the television advertising used to promote the media coverage.

A key factor in driving audiences to watch the television coverage was the commitment to utilising the biggest marketing budget ever allocated by Channel Four (see Appendix E). This budget was locked into the bid contract by the Commercial Lawyer, Martin Baker, which meant that when successive executives came to it at a later date they were unable to downgrade it, even though they wanted to. I explained in chapter four that the decision to buy the Paralympics coverage was a controversial one made by the team of Kevin Lygo, James Bellamy et al. who then moved on to ITV Studios before the Paralympics began. (The same group of executive men incidentally remained

as a team, moving on to a third power house, to head up ITV, centrally, a couple of years later, in order to make some changes there). Tying funding to the marketing budget was an important part of what they left behind and directly affected the power that the new representations would have over viewers. The generous size of the budget meant they had far more resources at their disposal to promote and redefine new representations.

This outgoing team's initial enthusiasm for the Paralympics idea was not shared by all of the incoming team, and Lygo's replacement, Jay Hunt, conjectured it would be a 'financial disaster', according to the Project Leader. The marketing dynamic was clearly significant in shaping framings around disability, and was intrinsic to the part marketing played in steering relationships between television programme content and the consumers of that content. As well as driving an audience to engage with the coverage across a multitude of platforms, a push to develop intended meanings ran alongside this process. The marginalised group, in this case of disabled elite athletes, was thrown into the public consciousness over a period of time, and then given the super cool 'Nike'-style treatment. Across the programming normalisation was marketed, and not simply by the series of advertising campaigns.

In order to promote the Channel Four brand and affect perceptions of disability, a route to market for the actual product was needed. The marketing strategy was planned over time to gradually funnel an audience towards an undesirable subject. As I have already mentioned, the Paralympics TV coverage was purchased as an opportunity for audience growth and there needed to be a plan to drive new viewers to engage with the Paralympians and watch the programmes. Drawing on explanations given by my contributors the plan seemed to be a linear strategy. I have discussed the outworking of this more fully in chapters five and six. Briefly, the plan was to introduce selected characters in advance, not shy away from showing the stumps and physical differences, then shift the focus to the sport, giving it an Olympic televisual style treatment. The purpose was to reach a bigger audience, bolster ratings, enhance channel brand reputation and justify the public service remit. To change perceptions in society, their published purpose, they had to change

depictions of disability, create new meanings about those depictions and then drive an audience to watch them. Throughout this chapter, I show how they used brands and branding, as well as a marketing strategy, to do that.

Brands have to be taken into account because they have values and emotions attached to them which affect meaning-making (see Keller, 2003; Klein, 2009; Banet-Weiser and Sturken, 2010), and the producers at Channel Four had a clear understanding of this association. It became obvious that no part of the production process was free of a relationship to branding of some kind, and when I finally received a copy of the bid proposal (sample attached as Appendix C), after I had completed all my interviews, I saw that utilising the 'golden brand' of Channel Four was also written into the contract in at least two places.

The usefulness of that brand, the document says, was to be better able to promote diversity and also to benefit 'the long-term inventory' of the London Organising Committee of the Olympics and Paralympic Games (LOCOG). The bid also mentions potential beneficial outcomes for its own inventory confirming brand enhancement as a goal for both organisations. These seemingly small details within their strategy to bring the Paralympics to a bigger audience, confirm the analysis I also derived from my contributor interviews, that marketing was central to the whole project from beginning to end. This would undoubtedly not have been the case for the BBC's previous coverage that was consigned as packaged highlights to the late night graveyard slots.

Blatantly commercial objectives, including management of their own brand, were fundamental to the London 2012 Paralympic Games media coverage. But there were other commercial objectives too, not related to the television audience. Davis (2013) acknowledges that promotional culture now extends beyond production into corporate strategies, yet the direct connection between actual television programmes and corporate strategies may not always be as clear cut as it was here. In the UK Broadcast Rights proposal document, written by the Channel Four Television Corporation (C4TVC, 2009) to bid for the Games coverage, the corporation states that 'we will schedule our key

programming around the key moments for ticket sales' (p.20). The bid was argued on the basis of promoting and adding value to LOCOG's inventory, as I have noted elsewhere, and to provide additional revenue opportunities for both parties. One of the ways the enhancement was achieved was by actively promoting ticket sales to 'fill the stadiums' through the use of support programming.

Examples of what they described as 'support programming' were the carefully timed documentaries examined in the previous chapter. It would seem then that Zoellner's (2009a) observations about the commercialisation of the TV documentary commissioning process also extends to assisting the sales of related event tickets. She explains how digitalised production is now taking place in a new environment of distribution and consumption and that programmes are being decided upon under substantially 'altered conditions' (ibid., p.508). Coinciding the timing of certain programmes, and presumably the content too, to increase sales of tickets, is potentially yet another altered condition of commissioning. The creep of promotional culture appears to be affecting decisions about programme production in ever increasing ways including, as discussed in the bid document, like this.

What follows the promise of additional revenue for LOCOG in the bid proposal is a list of four benefits to the Channel Four Corporation (C4TVC, 2009). Each of these benefits refers to either brand management or corporate strategy, suggesting that commercial objectives were pervasive within this creative media production alliance. The marketing strategy generally, in the bid document and later retrospectively (see Appendix E), was described as an 'up close and personal' and 'phased approach' to programming. Specifically, the four strategic benefits to Channel Four for broadcasting the Paralympic Games coverage were set out, in the bid, as a summary sheet, as follows.

The first relied on the 'remarkable crossover' between Channel Four's public service remit and LOCOG's cultural and social objectives to say, 'Being selected as the UK broadcast partner for the Games will strongly reinforce and differentiate our brand and help underline our public service credentials to our

key stakeholders.' Notwithstanding a concern for social objectives then, brand management is the key consideration here.

The second benefit also provided a strategic solution for a known corporate challenge. Because of the complete enmeshment and juxtaposition of public service goals with business considerations, I feel the summary should be included here in full:

> Distinctiveness is at the core of the Channel Four brand. Giving the Games pride of place in our peak-time schedule and positioning them as one of the world's greatest celebrations of diversity, will speak to Channel Four's core values and priorities and help underline our distinctiveness for viewers and opinion-formers at a time when it is increasingly difficult for broadcasters to stand out in the media marketplace. (C4TVC, 2009)

It is clear from this documentary evidence that the power to 'position' diversity within the mainstream television schedule, mediating a new frame of 'celebration' for erstwhile repulsive or invisible disability, is firmly rooted in the need to fix a deficit in their distinctiveness. This is a brand identity issue with what Davis (2013) calls a 'social-shaping influence' (p.4). The pressing need to manage a marketplace 'difficulty' apparently triggered this decision to celebrate diversity. It was at least an argument for it. This is a very powerful social-shaping role, for meaning, or framing, about diversity and is driven by something that has nothing to do with it.

The third benefit argued in the bid proposal is simply that the extensive television and multi-format coverage will broaden audiences to provide 'a valuable commercial opportunity for Channel Four and its partners'. This is perhaps to be expected as Channel Four relies on advertising revenues to fund its future programming. The reason is not one that was mooted in the press releases however.

The mutually beneficial collaborative vein extends to the fourth benefit too, based on a need to cohere the rapidly fragmenting audience. The summary concludes, 'The Games represent a rare example of genuine 'event' television', which they considered an advantageous opportunity in the current digital media world. The corporate strategy for engaging the fragmented on-demand

audience and providing a focus onto its own inventory was to increase coverage by 400% on the previous Paralympics, and, as it says elsewhere in the document, match the BBC Olympics 2008 live broadcasting levels to elevate the coverage status to that kind of high-profile international televisual mega-event. This is another example of the tailored commissioning I referred to in chapter five that is explicitly designed, as Zoellner (2009a) has pointed out, to capture the fragmented digital platform market.

In heavy type, after this list of benefits, the summary concludes, 'we will relish being entrusted with the Games, and our audience will share, develop and enhance our enthusiasm'. Their 'enthusiasm', according to the list I have cited above, is based on differentiating their brand, needing to stand out in the media marketplace, offering a valuable commercial opportunity and attracting an increasingly difficult to reach, rapidly fragmenting audience. The promotional culture therefore is clearly prevalent in this corporate strategy, seeking to protect and enhance the television channel brand and finding a way of capitalising on the Paralympic Games to do that.

The brand is described as 'risky' and 'innovative' with references to its parliamentary remit to include diversity onscreen and off. It can be seen, then, that the remit has been subsumed into the brand as part of its identity, or DNA, in the thinking behind this document. There was also a promise that, during 2012, the Games would be 'the single biggest priority for Channel Four's 40-strong marketing team' and that marketing plays 'a key role in creating a genuine sense of event'. Hesmondhalgh (2013) makes clear that all parts of the cultural production process are now subject to commercial pressures and other scholars have alerted the need to subject every stage of the production process to scrutiny (see for example, Corner, 2004; Klein, 2009; Mann 2009; Banet-Weiser and Sturken, 2010). Here the commercial objectives are set out before the inception of ideas for the media coverage itself. Additionally the channel brand's role is supported by the full weight of the marketing workforce.

Scrutinising the process for commercial pressure does not negate the other perspectives that are true at the same time. My contributors recalled their

genuine sense of purpose in changing perceptions about disability in society. In this case the bid writers also assured LOCOG that 'Channel Four believes it has a responsibility beyond the Games, and will continue to develop ideas that contribute to a legacy of permanent value'. Underlying a subtly developed promotional culture, Davis (2013) has shown that a social-shaping influence happens, not just on the targets of promotion, but also on those who adopt its strategies. This legacy included creating 'a significant new pool of disabled media production talent for whom we will aim to provide further employment and training opportunities so that they can continue to develop their skills' (p.27). Leaving a legacy of disabled production talent to carry on working for Channel Four afterwards has the potential for the shaping of future content far beyond what the twelve day changing of televisual representations in 2012 would be able to do. Representation of diversity within the workforce could potentially affect more than just attitudes depicted onscreen, but attitudes in the workplace as well.

The desire to influence others applied beyond the Channel Four sports coverage. As well as providing a purchased audience, self-professed public-spirited aspirations were also articulated. In the bid description it was stated that historically their sports coverage 'is driven by inspirational stories and our passion to encourage audiences to get involved, get fit and have fun' (p.26). This was coupled with their bold statement, again in bold type, that 'never again will disabled athletes be treated differently' (p.4). The bid document shows that in fact brand management was intrinsic to all these decisions and outcomes, and the outcomes were threaded together and woven into what later became a fully-fledged marketing strategy. To summarise then, brands, enhanced programme inventory and changes in perception were all included in the mix for this pitch to broadcast the Paralympic Games.

According to Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011), in other spheres, such as music and magazines, there has been a prevalent shift away from individuals assigned for marketing and advertising to a 'self-directing Marketing Department which has its own priorities' (p.104). Here too, at Channel Four, the priorities of the Marketing Department shaped the representational content as

well as the context and settings for the suite of programmes and advertisements that made up the Paralympics media coverage. Audience engagement was going to be a challenge and the marketing team, according to the Disability Executive, were on hand to remind staff about the need for engagement starting at the first away day in 2010 and restated in 2012. The staff training events, that were organised by the Brand Manager at Insight (the outsourced creative problem-solvers), had this text on one of the first slides:

> Paralympics is a difficult sell. But it can be done. Audiences are curious about disability; we just need to be clever about how we pique that curiosity and play with their expectations. (*Mental 4 the Paralympics*, 2011)

That it would be 'a difficult sell' is not just commercial language, it implies that intervention was required, beyond artistically or creatively making high quality programmes. Playing with expectations was necessary to pique audience curiosity and the technique was cultivated and embedded in the run-up programmes to make the sport 'sell'. It can be seen that editorial freedom was ostensibly governed, here, by the need to satisfy marketing objectives. These objectives were invisible structures affecting creative agency in ways that may, or may not necessarily, have benefitted those being represented.

Given the key role of the marketing strategy for the London 2012 Paralympics from 2009 bid to 2012 broadcast, it made sense during my research, which extended into 2015, to establish if there would be a similar pattern for the following Paralympics. The scope of the response, even from the member of the board who was also the Chief Creative Officer for Communications and Marketing, was more surprising than I anticipated. I was told:

> We have already decided how we are going to present the Rio Paralympics – not just in the marketing - the whole thing. And that actually did come out of the Marketing Department. (Brooke, Channel Four Board Director, *Interview*)

So, building on its influence over aspects of the 2012 production, how to present *all of the coverage* for 2016 apparently emanated from the Marketing Department. Brooke went on to say that the creativity doesn't have to come from marketing, because they are a small organisation and very porous. He

said, 'Literally if somebody suggests [something] someone else says "oh that's a good idea" and the creative process just builds and builds and builds and builds on it'. I asked him to clarify the role of the Marketing Department, as he is the Head of Communications as well as a member of the Board of Channel Four Directors. Did he mean 'the whole thing' conceptually, or in more practical detail? Brooke made it clear the level of involvement of the Marketing Department, for Rio 2016, was significant:

> Well we have just decided, well we, not for how the Games are going to be presented – obviously the sport is the sport and you are given the feed that you are given - but whatever percentage of the coverage, and I don't know what it is, that you control which is in the studio or on the track side, you know, there are umpteen different ways that you can handle that. And you know we have kind of decided now how we are going to do Rio. (ibid)

The Marketing Department, in this case, decided how they were going to go about producing the Rio 2016 Paralympics, including the trackside and studio presenting, not just the advertising campaigns associated with the coverage. For both the Olympic Games and the Paralympic Games an outside broadcasting company (OBS) provides the sports feed, with each individual country supplementing the pictures with their own additional camerawork and commentaries. The plans for this particular tailored coverage were, here, decided within the marketing team. Hesmondhalgh (2013) notes that some marketing influences are 'less obvious' (see p.234) and this is a case in point. He also points out that the importance of the commercially oriented department is often reflected structurally by the inclusion of these decision-makers on corporate executive boards (ibid.). At Channel Four, at board level, the 40-strong marketing team has Brooke's voice heading up their perspectives and needs at the top of the organisation. It was never that clear in his interview whether 'we' meant his department or the organisation as a whole. What was clear was that he wore both 'hats', as he put it, comfortably, and brought his brand objectives to the executive table.

*Commercial objectives*

Building on Klein's (2009) critical analysis of the restructuring of meaning though the *merging* of commercial and cultural objectives, my research shows that certain decisions about meanings were indecipherably blended at source. The above interview with the Head of Communications and Marketing does suggest that the coverage may not necessarily have arisen through commercial exploitation per se, but certainly did derive, at least, from commercial exploits. Klein (2009), considering exploitation, and particularly the 'asymmetrical relationship' (2009, p.118) between musicians and advertisers, observes that the creative and commercial relationship is an unequal one. The creatives and in-house advertising company at Channel Four, at least in the case of the Paralympics, appear to have had a more equal, symbiotic, relationship. Both the marketing team and the other in-house decision-makers apparently collaborate in the following way, as Brooke, in 2015, went on to explain:

> We are not going to tell anybody about it [the Rio 2016 coverage] but it will be different from London and that is, it is not a sort of production line type of process. You know, it is a creative everyone-muck-in-together type of process. (ibid.)

So, within Channel Four, at least whilst it continues with its current funding structure, anyone with a creative spark can apparently initiate their ideas for production. Brooke reiterated this twice.

Davis (2013) has identified, in the spheres of politics and also civic life more generally, that there are 'promotional intermediaries' (ibid.) operating with decision-making powers within social structures where they do not apparently appear as such. I would argue, therefore, that the power to initiate an idea is not the same as the power to consequently influence and shape the framing, the representations, the timings in the programme schedule and meanings that are then produced from that collaboration. In chapters four, five and six, I have included Business Managers, Marketing Executives and the Communications Director as key contributors to the shaping of onscreen representations. It seems that all the creative processes from beginning to end had joint objectives assisted by actors whom Davis might term promotional intermediaries.

I interrogated this collaborative practice, for the creation of 2012 Paralympic coverage, to assess its pervasiveness. Klein (2009) and Hesmondhalgh (2013), amongst others, have both asserted that in other fields of cultural and media production the 'collaborative' relationship is intrinsic to production. Klein (2009) found this to be true in cases of popular music used in advertising, where commercial processes can work against the interests of musicians. Hesmondhalgh (2013), too, has found that, within the magazine industry, a particular company, for example, has replaced the marketing person with 'a self-directing' (p.235) marketing department which has 'its own priorities' (ibid.). Whether or not these priorities match the creative purpose may possibly vary from case to case. What does not seem to vary is that, in both these fields of cultural production, the cultural and commercial processes are inextricably linked.

I have argued throughout this thesis that, in the case of the 2012 Paralympic production, the commercial goals were not only pervasive, but also connected to their creative and societal ambitions for change. Since then, as the Board Director and Head of Communications states, the way to 'do' the Rio coverage actually *originated* within the Marketing Department. This power to design entire productions extends beyond the shaping and promotion of content, or even the commissioning of documentaries. Such powerful influence may be pervasive, then, within the public service broadcasting sector as well within the music and magazine industries, at least it seems to be so with Channel Four. 4Creative is the in house advertising agency, owned by the Channel Four Television Corporation, whose website asserts that they do the advertising and produce the marketing campaigns. They also, evidently, influence a lot more of the programme content than that.

Clearly, as Klein (2009) has already pointed out, changing media alliances now routinely blur creative ambitions with commercial objectives and this issue, as she asserts, is a critical one. At the end of the Birt era, which involved a radical transformation of the corporation, Born (2004) felt that a team of market analysts and strategists (p.132) were playing an increasingly influential role over the creatives at the BBC. In that case, the influence was with respect to

the shaping of programme content to reinforce their separate channel brands (ibid.). In the case of the 2012 Paralympics and the bringing of a marginalised group into the mainstream, the messages were marketed through the 'golden brand' (C4TVC, 2009) of Channel Four, which also sees itself as the Public Service challenger channel (Baker, Commercial Lawyer, *Interview*). The alliance between in-house ad agency 4Creative and Channel Four, has worked out well. It is still apparently porous and collaborative. There are no guarantees, however, that future influences, or some might say 'interferences', with the creative production process will have such beneficial outcomes. Negative onscreen representations could potentially also be decided upon if it suited the market conditions and other agendas that in this case brought about a championing of diversity. These media alliances need, therefore, to remain under scrutiny.

In this section I have shown that the creators and executors of the marketing strategies for both the London 2012 and Rio 2016 media coverage should also be recognised as key decision-makers in the creative process. They do not just write the marketing strategy, they implement it, affecting programme content, tone and style (see Appendix E). In addition to creating advertising campaigns and advertorial content, they also shape the programme schedule and, for example, are able to decide on production messaging for the trackside and studio inserts for apparently neutral 'live' sports coverage too. Whilst being involved in 'the whole thing', in particular these producers utilised the power of brands to carry messages, and I discuss this method of shaping meanings in the section below.

## How brands were shared, borrowed, repaired and created

Having initially offered up their own brand to win the London 2012 bid, it became clear from my interviews that links with other brands were vital to the project. In this section I show that the Channel Four Television Corporation first needed to *share* brand associations by collaborating strategically with particular corporate sponsors. Two household names, Sainsbury's and BT, were chosen for this purpose as part of a deliberate branding strategy. The

next step was to *borrow* brands for their tropes, associations and values. Nearly all of my contributors mentioned 'Nike' and 'Public Enemy' at some point in their recollections, suggesting a considerable influence by both brands on the producers themselves. The inspirational influence of Nike was indirect, whereas Public Enemy's soundtrack directly influenced the creative process and the practitioners making the content. Collaborating with and borrowing from other brands was also used to *repair* their own brand. According to both the Business Manager and the overall Project Leader, the media coverage was purposed for brand reputational rather than directly financial reasons (alongside what they could do for disability perceptions). Finally the outcome, of what turned out to be a highly successful project, was to *create* another brand of Olympian/Paralympian hybrids, the 'superhumans' (as distinct from the stereotypes of superheroes, or supercrips, as discussed in previous chapters). This brand, with its specified characteristics and attached meanings, could then be reused and revamped, as they chose to do (Walker, Head of Marketing, *Interview*), to sell the coverage for the Rio 2016 Paralympic Games and attract the earlier audience back.

The significance of branding for 'normalising' representations of disability lies in the attachment of social meanings that Banet-Weiser (2012) says provide specific personal resonances for consumers. She explains that 'the process of branding impacts the way we understand who we are, how we organise ourselves in the world, and what stories we tell ourselves about ourselves' (p.5). In other words, brands can define who 'we' are in relation to 'others'. Branding, therefore, is more than just a tool of marketing. Both Klein (2009) and Banet-Weiser (2012) have established that sometimes the cultures surrounding specific brands compete and overlap with each other. Amongst the Channel Four producers, I noticed different relationships with brands were used as shortcuts to create, enhance and distribute particular messaging about disability. These meaningful messages were embedded in the content, taking advantage of pre-trained audience responses to particular brands, as I outline below.

*Brand collaborations*

It was not just Channel Four's 'golden brand', as written into the bid, that was used to shape representations. The first action taken, after being awarded the broadcasting rights, was to join forces with two well-known corporate brands and *share* the benefits of their brand associations. At first glance the need for collaboration with sponsors would seem to be simply a financial one, but they also relied on meanings associated with two other brands, in their capacity as corporate partners. Huge sums of money worldwide are invested to amplify the commercial gains afforded by the dynamics of international mega-events, (see Whannel, 1992; Dayan and Katz, 1994; Howe, 2008b) but these have not naturally been proffered to the previously low profile, poor relation, Olympic 'side-show' (Gilbert and Schantz, 2008). Corporate sponsors therefore needed to be approached, but they were approached with meanings, associated with their brands, in mind.

The two sponsors, BT and Sainsbury's, who subsidised Channel Four (rather than being sponsors of the Paralympic Games itself), were essential for their associated brand values. The Project Leader, Deborah Poulton, as a key decision-maker and responsible for all the media coverage, turned down other companies in order to get them. In earlier chapters I have explained how sponsorship deals provided funding to supply, for example, extra cameras and equipment, so that the coverage could look more like the Olympics. This was an indirect way of positively affecting the visual representations and the 'feel' of the Games. Independently, two Executive Producers made it clear to me that without the financial help of the sponsorship money none of the branding ideals, especially the attempt at parity, which I explored in chapter five, could have been achieved. The Project Leader told me she had other reasons for bringing these two particular corporate sponsors on board. She selected them to shape meanings about disability sport and also for their ability to distribute the messaging.

The two brands were, for her, 'what made the Paralympics coverage possible'. As discussed in chapter four, Poulton described the merger of a niche

broadcaster (Channel Four) with a huge supermarket chain (Sainsbury's) and a high profile telecommunications team (British Telecom) as the 'perfect mix'. They needed the income and the exposure provided by the separate campaigns and infrastructures of the corporate sponsors to promote the Games but also to make the Paralympics more palatable. Poulton, as Project Leader, felt that to affect long-term perceptions, had it been a 'purely commercial' business venture to yield a definite income stream, rather than a brand alliance, then they would not have achieved what they had done. Poulton did not make it clear whether the backing of familiar brands may therefore be a necessary ingredient needed for bringing marginalised diverse 'others' into the mainstream, but she certainly felt it to be necessary for her project. The tactic filtered through to, and was recognised by, some but not all of my other contributors. Those producers who recognised it, I observed, were very aware of the benefits and power of brand alliance.

In their own Paralympic marketing campaigns and short documentaries, aired on Channel Four and You Tube, Sainsbury's went for the 'wholesome' feel, aligned with their brand, and BT were 'edgy', as Poulton put it. She felt that this helped 'balance the output for the broader audience' as they were reaching, with a niche programme, beyond the niche audience. Adding the 'wholesome' sense of Sainsbury's' family depictions made the inclusion of a wider television audience more likely, and their brand was chosen for that 'warm glow'. This helped allay the 'revulsion' towards disability (Elias, 1978; Davis, 1995; Garland-Thomson, 1997; Gilbert and Schantz, 2008; 2012) that stand-alone programming has suffered from in the past (e.g. Barnes, 1992b). Logistically, Poulton explained that she was under contract to deliver their own editorial frame but had to handle the other two frames alongside without compromising Channel Four's. (The Channel Four logo appeared on their material, as well as vice versa.) The mix was reassuring, she felt, to the public, as it blended meanings in a palatable way, mixing edginess and risk with family cohesion and wholesomeness. Placing disability inside that mix acted as a familiar interpretive cushion against old unwanted interpretations and was a conscious act of design on her part.

I would argue that these 'editorial frames' she describes in media producer language are in fact 'brand identities' in marketing jargon, containing brand values and brand associations. These types of association have to be consistently cultivated over time (Kellner, 2003; Kapferer, 2008) and were utilised to prepare and reassure audiences prior to the Paralympics media coverage. It is clear that the two companies were chosen as collaborators for the inherent feelings and perceptions connected to the brands by their broader base of carefully cultivated and monitored customers.

In the sense that brands have personalities, this group constituted a family of voices. They were necessary to overcome the revulsion or disinterest normally associated with disability on TV. Poulton told me she felt this combination of company identities was more acceptable as a package of reassurances and meanings than if they had broadcast the coverage on their own. One of the Executive Producers at 4Creative felt that their combined efforts would all blend into one and be seen as one campaign, making it safer to bring the disabled athletes into the public eye. It would be safer because more than one familiar point of reference would be giving the new messages. The combination was apparently needed to overcome the qualms that portraying disability on mainstream television was predicted to create, since they were well-known and signalled familiar, safe, ordinariness, even with their different brand images.

The media producers' predictions naturally did not come from reading the work of disability scholars, but from their own audience research (C4TVC, 2012). They were aware there was a stigma to overcome nevertheless. Sainsbury's recognised that their own inherent brand identity, with associated values, was distinctly different to Channel Four's, as they were unable to take risks with their supermarket chain. A marketing person from 4Creative said, 'For the record, when we first presented *Meet the Superhumans*, Sainsbury's loved it. They said "We could never do that and we take our hats off [to you]"'. The mix of brand reassurances then was needed for all parties to reframe the Paralympics in an acceptable way, but this was as a collaboration rather than a merger. By combining their messaging power, inclusive meanings were blended but the brands nevertheless remained separate.

Bringing together the mix of brands with their collective framings was intended to heighten and enhanced the impact that was felt by audiences. The Press Officer for the British Paralympic Association (BPA) told me:

> Without the backing of their commercial partners, as well as people like the Sainsbury's and BTs of this world, and without Channel Four putting all of their energy and effort and creative [sic.] into it that they did, there's no way that we would have -- and by we, I mean collective we, not just BPA, that we would have had the sort of impact that we did. (Carpenter, BPA Press Officer, *Interview*)

Another stakeholder representative, the Digital Marketing Manager for the International Paralympics Association (IPC), associated this impact more consciously with the marketing infrastructure:

> I think the Sainsbury's campaign [contributed] as well, with David Beckham and football five-a-side [a schools initiative]; that massively elevated the Paralympics as well. (Dannenberg, IPC Digital Marketing Manager, *Interview*)

Commercial and creative elements throughout can be seen to be intrinsically linked at all levels of ideas and initiatives. The collaborative benefits, as a net effect, also extended and amplified the TV coverage in other ways through, for example, the celebrity and school initiatives. Craig Spence, the IPC Media and Communications Director, explained that they needed the sponsors on board to do that. The relationships between sponsors, stakeholders and their associated brand meanings were complex, he said, but necessary to create the right mix to create new representations of disability onscreen that would be accepted by the public. My contributors understood that the public needed reassurances from multiple places, not just the TV Channel.

Even though amplifying the television coverage was important, the 'bumper ads' at the top and tail of each programme segment struck some of the creatives as an impingement. Suggesting a divide between creative values and the marketing imperatives amongst some of the roles, a poolside camerawoman told me, typically:

> I think people felt happy that somebody like Sainsbury's were involved in it. But the idea of having their logo plastered everywhere was just, ugh, let's not. (Bell, Camerawoman, *Interview*)

She was briefed by her camera supervisor to exclude at least part of the logo in her camera angles wherever possible during the swimming. *Breakfast Show* Editor, Luke Gawin, also did not want the logo in shot all the time admitting, 'Yes, it gave you a warm glow about Sainsbury's, good for them. Good for them.' However he tried to avoid too much brand placement in his studio discussion shots and did not want to see complete names of other brands onscreen, even though they were the sponsors. Here, internally within the production, the clash between commercial and creative goals was clearly prevalent and personally felt. The visual presence of these 'other brands' in shot, whether in the studio, poolside, or as bumper ads, was extensively resisted by the teams that had to accommodate them. Mostly the crews and post-production teams were irritated by them, even though the visibility of brands in shot were, according to executives, reassuring to the public.

The resistance and irritation came from a sense of 'selling out', where their craft was now being devalued for commercial purposes. For some of the below-the-line technicians and operators their creative value comes from a sense of autonomy over the details of how they carry out their roles (Gitlin, 2005; Banks, 2009). Being made to point at the Sainsbury's logo felt different to the camera person, for example, than having to frame a shot to include wheelchairs or crutches. The latter edict, whilst also taking away her autonomy, had a purpose that the programme was about, whereas the former carries the reminder that their art is being commodified. Banet-Weiser (2012) makes the distinction between commodification and branding saying that one is for profit and the other about meanings. In the case of the bumper ads, the meanings about Sainsbury's 'wholesome family' brand were not picked up on by the technicians I spoke to. They responded cynically. Other research could establish whether it might have been significant for the audience; it was certainly intended to be so by the executive decision-makers.

TV audiences also experienced other endorsements of this 'different' sporting event in other places, to resonate and reassure them during the coverage itself. Not just through schools and shops but through some BT technology poster campaigns as well. Meanings were forged through the collaboration of these

big brands. The 'freaky cyborg' (Brittain, 2010; Garland-Thomson, 2009) trope suited BT's brand image, and was used within the their televisual marketing, but Channel Four, with their less technological brand, took a more human reading of man and machine. For the media coverage itself then, the cosy family supermarket, the national telecommunications network and the 'born risky' niche broadcaster came together with their combined brand equities to forge a new profile for the Paralympic Games normalising disability across each of their respective networks.

These brand equities, in marketing terms, are derived from the value that comes from the unique set of attributes associated with individual brands (see Kapferer, 2012). What was intended, to promote the disability portrayals, was that if the audience felt safe enough with the brand or brands communicating with them, then challenges to existing paradigms about otherness could be taken on board or found more acceptable (Poulton, Project Leader, *Interview*). Existing consumer knowledge about a brand is known to affect responses to that brand. As Keller (2009) explains 'different outcomes result in the marketing of a product or service because of its brand, as compared to if that same product or service was not identified by that brand' (p.140). He also asserts that because of this inherent value of brand equity it is therefore a management priority to build strong brands. For the purposes of bringing a marginalised group into the mainstream, a sense of social significance for the Paralympians arguably needed a boost from some strong brands.

Keller (2009) says that, in order to build a strong brand:

> The right knowledge structures must exist in the minds of actual or prospective customers so that they respond positively to marketing activities and programmes. (ibid.)

Amongst the decision-makers at Channel Four I found this priority for brand strengthening to be the case, in particular through volunteered information which I hadn't asked for, from the Head of Communications. Changing perceptions about Channel Four was unashamedly part of the mix, for him, when promoting the inclusion of disabled athletes into the elite group of high-performance sports men and women that already have acceptance. He cared

about the knowledge structures in the minds of his customers because he needed them to respond positively to their channel brand.

To help structure the thinking of the audience, I have shown in the last chapter that it is common practice to consistently show certain types of programmes within particular slots in the TV schedule. Genres are reinforced, developed and invented in this way (Brown, 1990; Fiske, 1989), but so too are brands built and consolidated (Born, 2004; Mann, 2009). Most producers that I interviewed recognised some sort of channel identity. As one of my participants suggested, for example, if the BBC had played a hip-hop track over a segment of disabled sport it might seem strange and incongruent, whereas if Channel Four did that the audience might expect it. Audience responses are cultivated by relationships with the previous messaging, as was clearly evidenced by the uproar caused when *Great British Bake Off* (2017) was relinquished by the BBC to be shown on Channel Four. The programme is made by an independent company but experienced through the brand that publishes it.

As Born (2004) noted for the BBC, their Marketing Department defined the channel brands by 'symbolising certain values' and proposing an ideal. Her contributors for 'planning and strategy' laid out the challenges for television, at that time in the 1990s. These were the need to attract niche viewers who were not already viewing the channel; boosting TV audiences; securing sporting rights; and acquiring 'landmark' shows to unify the audience (p.266). Born (2004) points out that the key influence of marketing on the culture of the BBC channels was the impact of 'brand-thinking' (p.268), where their values had to be 'consciously formulated and performed' (ibid.) This same process was evidenced in my own research at Channel Four.

The other brand with which all three organisations needed to collaborate was the Paralympics Movement itself. The movement's ethos of inclusion and empowerment are central to the ideology of the Games (Brittain, 2010). Framings about disability, and what positive depictions should be deployed, were set out clearly from the outset by them. That the Paralympics should no longer be a side-show or second cousin to the Olympics was central to their

search for a suitable broadcaster. Previously Gilbert and Schantz (2008) had theorised the pursuit of this idea to be a 'vain discourse' (p.93). Since then, by utilising the marketing mechanisms I am outlining in this chapter, disability was in fact propelled into the mainstream. It was repositioned both onscreen, and to some extent within the general public, as far more than a side-show - for the first time (4Creative, 2013). A lot of the strength of the mainstreaming process came through the audience relationship with this group of brands.

Brittain (2012) notes that the IPC (International Paralympic Committee) has been working on upgrading their Paralympic 'brand' for some time. Changing perceptions it seems was not limited to disability, nor just perceptions of Channel Four. Sir Ludwig Guttmann had based his original inspiration for a parallel Olympics on what he called 'the values of hope and rehabilitation' (IPC, 1991). These values were then broadened to include enjoyment and then competiveness. With the commodification of the Olympics (see Roche, 2000), and televisual sport in general (Whannel, 2012), it may well have also been the financial gains that have driven the movement consciously towards the parity I discuss in chapter five. Channel Four accepted the challenge to modify the Paralympic Brand and offered the 'distinct benefits' in the bid for broadcasting rights that were discussed in the first half of this chapter. They went on to offer enhancements to LOCOG including additional revenue opportunities that would come as a consequence of pairing their brands. For a while, after the event was broadcast, Channel Four continued to run the Channel Ident between programmes calling themselves 'The Paralympic Channel'. They have also used it since, at intervals.

In 2006, Howe and Jones evaluated the impact of combining commercial strategies with the marketing potential of the Paralympic Games, in terms of demand and supply, and profit. The list below would directly affect the televisual style, and hints very much at what did in fact transpire in 2012. They wrote:

> Good Games are profitable ones, good sports are marketable ones, and good athletes are endorsable ones. The IPC are conspiring with the IOC to repackage, remarket, refresh, modernize, and essentially sell the Paralympics. The product, however, needs revising to

increase demand. The Paralympics needs to be quicker, slicker,
shorter, with fewer events and fewer, but higher profile champions.
(Howe and Jones, 2006, p.33)

This sports product that was purchased by Channel Four for 2012 was imbued

with these characteristics and the marketing remit given to them was to

increase demand for that product. For Channel Four, according to my

contributors, this would provide audience growth, and for the IPC, according to

Brittain (2010), increase the saleability to future sponsors and media

organisations (p.119). Marketing objectives here directly affected

representations, and all the types of decisions that have emerged throughout

my interviews were shaped by these objectives, including, for example, editing,

sporting tropes and the production of artificial rivalries to manufacture known

personalities.

The new positioning of the sporting event as 'high-performance sport', was a

brand development requirement for the Paralympics itself, placed upon

Channel Four as part of the deal. What brand brings to the product is the

*meanings* and *associations* understood by the audience or consumers. So,

during the encoding process, the decoding, that Hall (1980; 2012) asserts is

interpretive, can at least be guided to some extent, through the power of

branding. In the bid, Channel Four wrote about their audience:

They have come to expect Channel Four to do significant and
surprising things – we are the 'Channel of Firsts' – and the
Paralympics would be one of our biggest firsts to date. (C4TVC,
2009, p.23)

It is clear from this document (sample attached as Appendix C) that audience

awareness of brands shaped the representations of disability and is a

measurable factor in the framing of meanings about disability.

The Head of Communications at the IPC also recognised, during his interview,

that brands are able to position the subjects of their representations. He

reflected on how 4Creative's *Meet the Superhuman* campaign had successfully

rebranded the Paralympics as follows:

I just think, for us, that advertising campaign did more to re-position
Paralympics sport amongst the British public in 60 seconds than

probably the last 25 years put together […] positioning Paralympics sport as high performance sport for the first time, that advert just did it. It was amazing. I remember watching it for the first time and just going, 'Oh my God!'- if I'd put together a dream list of what I wanted an advert to have, that's it. Because it focuses very much on the training of the athletes and they just look like day-to-day athletes. They don't look like what had previously been perceived in the British public's mind of people with a disability who can't do things. They could do things and it just – it's a tremendous 60 seconds of work. (Spence, Head of IPC Communications, *Interview*)

Repositioning, as he calls it, was also rebranding, in the sense that new meanings were associated with the same athletes, so that they might be perceived differently and in a new light.

Whilst talking to the Video Editor who created the '60 seconds' (and the 90 second version) it was obvious that the innate creativity, which he had used in his cutting room, was influenced by the intertextuality of assimilating brand tropes over a lifetime - rather than borrowing directly from other brands himself. In other words, he had not directly used cookie cutter templates for style, pace or meaning although others did ask him to create a particular attitude and feel. The best way that the Film Director was able to communicate this with him, though, was to cite other brands to give him pointers. These came to mind to the producers who, as well as operating with 'risk', borrowed other meanings from other brands, as the next section shows.

### *Other brand relationships and dynamics*

The pervasive nature of promotional practices, beyond the concerns of products and services, has been examined in depth by Davis (2013) who also includes brands and brand resonances. He suggests that the subtle promotion of ideas and people is influencing huge swathes of cultural and civic life. My findings agree with others, such as Born (2004), Klein (2009), Mann (2009) and Lieb (2016) that this pervasiveness also reaches into the media production process. It is affecting our commercially and non-commercially funded public service broadcasters, even those we did not previously think of as commercialised or branded.

As cultural artefacts are being produced, Hesmondhalgh (2013) has pointed out that marketing executives reduce meanings sometimes down to a single word, and then build their methods and ideas back up from there (p.234). In the case of the Paralympic athletes creativity around their depiction did indeed derive from a single word. That word was 'cool'. As a representation I discussed this in chapter five, but here I am recognising the word also as the label, or tag-line, for their marketing strategy. This conversation with the Business Manager shows how the shaping began:

> In all our heads we thought, 'okay this has now turned into a really cool project that went from being a little bit grubby dealing with lots of corporate organisations - God how are we going to make it all fit?' into suddenly we were like, with *Murderball* and the away days and seeing wheelchair rugby, there was something we were like now 'okay this is a cool thing and we just need to say to the public this is going to be really cool'. How would Nike approach it? What would Nike do? They make sport look cool - they make you feel like you want to partake in that sport and not just watch it - we wanted to communicate that and that visceral nature that the sport gives you. (Wieczorek, Business Manager, *Interview*)

When they considered portraying the sport as 'cool', the brand most associated with that meaning immediately sprang to mind. The essence of cool is built into the brand of Nike, so they *borrowed* it, not as a formal partnership but as an inspirational example. By utilising the camera angles, tropes and high production values 4Creative were able to reference meanings built up by another brand, for consumption within their own. This 'cool' buzzword, that everybody was using, had been successfully introduced and embedded into the global sports shoe brand. It came with associated narratives and visual style, all of which the production team copied. Whether creativity was inhibited by this reduction or channelled by it can be argued either way. However it was clear, from virtually all of my participants' recollections, the association and intention to emulate was there.

How these actions came to improve perceptions about disability may well have been through the mobilising of existing cultural myths. As Hearn (2012) point outs, 'goods come to be designed less for their direct usefulness and more for the meanings and myths they are able to mobilise and represent' (p.204).

Hearn (2012) also suggests that with some brands, 'the sign comes to displace the material object to which it refers and in this way acquires a kind of agency' (ibid.). In this case, by styling the televisual representations to look like a Nike advert, the positive 'vibe', trained by that company's previous advertising, helped displace the negative perceptions of disability. I would argue that the mobilisation of invisible devices, in the form of these branded cultural myths, assists consumers in buying into meanings rather than products. For 2012, with the Paralympics as 'a difficult sell', audiences were not expected to buy into disability per se. By overlaying branded meanings, old entrenched meanings of disability were instead simply displaced.

This one famously cool brand, Nike, and their televisual style, was borrowed without any formal collaboration. The Head of Marketing, James Walker, explained how and why they mimicked the Nike media tropes to give weight to Channel Four's own audio-visual treatment:

> They are cliches of sports marketing, but when people do them brilliantly - as Nike does it brilliantly - there's a sort of energy and a kind of grittiness and a reality to it that is incredibly powerful. You know, showing the perspiration, showing the training and stuff like that. (ibid.)

The visceral nature of what the producers wanted to portray was already encapsulated in the essence of another brand's televisual tropes. What they drew attention to within that was the mainstream positioning of high-performance athleticism. It was this essence and perspective that was really being borrowed.

As well as adopting the Nike 'cool' style, a soundtrack was found that eventually underpinned all their programming and *The Last Leg* comedy satire show has continued to use it several years afterwards. It took considerable searching to find and once they had it, the marketing campaign was defined by the music. Nike had once borrowed The Beatles' *Revolution* to shape a commercial and Channel Four borrowed Public Enemy's 'Harder Than You Think*'* to define theirs*.*

Klein (2009) writes of the determination of some musicians to differentiate between commercial uses for their music, and that it is not always considered 'selling out'. In this instance Public Enemy actively chose to be involved, not with an existing brand of, for example, a cleaning product, but in the creation of a new brand of emerging 'Olympian' athletes. According to the band they did this because they identified closely with the Paralympic underdog predicament, (Majendie, 2012). One of Klein's (2009) contributors acknowledges that some artists 'feel their music was created in so much emotion that they refuse ever to use it to promote a brand' (ibid., p.111) even where the licence is sought to borrow from 'the essence of their music' (ibid.). There seems to be a fine line, therefore, between the emotional essence of the music and the sense of brand that essence can create. The underdog predicament of Public Enemy's identity, within their music, was understood by the television producers of the TV commercial, and the values and meanings borrowed to serve a purpose, to shape similar meanings in another context.

This use of a piece of hip-hop music as a soundtrack, for the *Meet The Superhumans* commercial, embedded a brand within a brand, resonating the intangible sense they were looking for, with a very tangible musical brand with its own complex associations. Hip-hop music emanates from a culture of the marginalised and dispossessed, with connotations of powerlessness for the predominantly black or Latino Americans within that ghetto culture (see Smitherman, 1997). Challenging safe middle class norms of acceptability (ibid., p.4) is exactly what Channel Four wanted to do, in a similar way, to disrupt and change representations of the disabled athletes. Public Enemy, as one of the founding groups to emerge from within the hip-hop sub-culture (ibid.) have their own brand of rhetoric that is easily identifiable, and their defiant independent stance was epitomised in the song that was selected. The Head of Marketing told me:

> It completely blew us away, because that was the first time we'd heard that track and it was found by the Editor. And also, he found it because… he's a Public Enemy nut! He's a hip-hop nut! And he heard the song and just said, 'Lyrics' completely. Because they were about something else; they were about politics. Public Enemy are a real political band and the lyrics were about their struggle - Public

Enemy's struggle and the sort of, you know - the sort or Civil Rights struggle in the US which is still going on but it was so applicable to disabled sport. [The lyrics] were all about overcoming problems and overcoming adversities and getting stronger and 'you're stronger than you think' and 'you've got strength', and it was just, wow this is perfect! This is absolutely perfect! Once we re-edited it to take out all the swear words, it was like, bang, this is it! This is our track for the Paralympics. I mean, we all knew instinctively, straight away. It wasn't conscious searching, searching, searching. The Editor found it; we heard it and we went 'Wow!'. (Walker, Head of Marketing, *interview*)

Actually it was conscious searching on the Editor's part, he told me, and he had spent a month looking for it, after the Film Director had come in and shown him the Jay-Z You Tube video of the track '99 problems', and said 'we want something like this' (Hardy, Video Editor, *Interview*). This only meant 'a vibe' like this to the Editor, which has a kind of meaning attached to it, but when other producers heard the track it was understood more explicitly and differently, beyond just being 'a vibe'.

For example, although the lyrics were the significant element for the Head of Marketing, the Director of Communications assured me that it was nothing to do with the lyrics, which was true for him. He said he hadn't clocked the correlation between marginalised struggling blacks and marginalised struggling disabled athletes. Clearly other members of the team had. Some of the creative evaluations, then, were cognitive and others instinctive, just as some of my contributors relied more heavily on either their thought processes or their feelings, certainly in the retelling of their stories. The Head of Marketing seemed to take account of both:

Yeah, you know it was just a powerful way - you've got two seconds to draw somebody in and make people think differently. But we did, using a kind of powerful hip-hop track. You know, by a group who were kind of famous for their defiant attitude. In a way […] with Public Enemy - when they started it was a very much kind of 'this is who we are, we are black men in this time in America and we were going to stand up to racism', whatever. And they did it defiantly, and I think that attitude that you get from hip-hop music transcended into the Paralympians as kind of, 'this is who we are', not, 'if you don't like us we don't care' but there's an element of 'we are', you know - well yes they've been in a car accident or whatever but 'we've

overcome that' - and it obviously stirred people and moved people.
(Walker, Head of Marketing, *Interview*)

The borrowed meanings and associations are very clear from the Head of Marketing as well as all the 4Creative team I interviewed. The important key was that 'they instinctively knew' the meanings fitted. In this way the embedded values of the existing brand were exerting their power over the production team. Then that same defiance and fiercely independent attitude provided meanings with which the previously invisible Paralympians had not been linked.

According to Smitherman (1997) the hip-hop genre has a 'disturb the peace' vibe, which is very much what Channel Four were trying to do for the Paralympians. Blended meanings are more pronounced here than with the corporate sponsors, whose brand associations simply added to the mix reassuringly and broadened the reach of audience. Disturbing the peace is also a kind of mission statement for Channel Four, as their parliamentary remit (see chapter four) requires them to challenge and broadcast perspectives that are not shown elsewhere, particularly for those being under-represented. With Public Enemy, therefore, the blend was organic, rather than additive, and the joint branding created new meanings beneficial to both. The band re-recorded their track for the television commercial, and then, after the Games, as a tribute to the athletes, re-edited their video for 'Harder Than You Think' to include the Paralympians even though most of them are white and none of them are from inner-city America. This collaboration demonstrates the irrevocable change in relationships that Klein (2009) has highlighted between advertisers, sponsors and musicians. What they now share has morphed and both groups have benefited from the brand associations, expanding audiences and consolidating meanings for both groups.

Channel Four's audience have been prepared to expect an alternative take on life and an unusual perspective, as this is embedded into their on-brand programming (although not all of their current ratings-grabbing cheap format programmes are on brand, Lygo, then Head of Television, was quick to point out). Had this same content been transmitted or delivered by BBC1 the music might well have been understood as a burst of otherness, but when presented

by Channel Four it sat well within the brand's 'remit', 'feel' and 'tone of voice' connecting with the audience. The sense of underdogs emerging from their marginalised ghetto, as a sub-set of elite Olympians, was acceptable because of the audience priming, to expect the unexpected from Channel Four. As more than one contributor proudly told me 'only Channel Four could have done that!'. This may have felt to the producers like creative freedom but, according to Keller's (2009) definition, is actually branding. In practice it was probably both.

The Head of Communications said the ad 'hit the sweet spot' speaking of 'Channel Fourness'. Meanings were embedded within the brand as well as the programme content. The brands even have a televisual style. Back in 2010 two of the training slides read:

> Programmes like *The Boy Whose Skin Fell Off*, *The Strangest Village in Britain*, *Make Me Normal* and *The Undateables* show you can make disability rate...

> ...All great programmes each with a secret weapon: brilliant title or trails, innovative structure or storytelling, fresh treatment of disability, jaw-dropping heart-breaking moments. *(Mental 4 the Paralympics, 2011)*

Branding within the programme inventory, then, clearly goes beyond snappy graphics and logos into narratives and rhetoric embedded within identifiable channel stylings, relating also to photography and editing. Editorial decisions at this level used to be made by creative film and television makers separately from other departments (Dornfeld, 1998, p.178). They are now contributing to and part of a group product, as these corporate slides reveal.

Banet-Weiser (2012) explains that it is the socially imbued meanings that create the brand, in the sense that associations build over-time and become part of how the brand is understood. Meanings attached to other brands were added together and associated with the Paralympic athletes and this works when 'the meaning of one thing is transferred to or made interchangeable with another quality whose value attaches itself to the product' (Dyer, 1982, p.116). Whilst branding may hide the capitalist logic that guides it (Klein, 2009, p.81), the power of branding to shape the possible range of decoding positions

available to audiences is of great value even to those creative producers not seeking to directly profit from the brand association.

Building on the idea established by Williams (1983), that personal meaning must be linked to an object in order to sell it, Klein (2009) argues that viewers are happy to set aside what they know objectively in order to be entertained through the emotional experiences offered by advertisers (ibid., p.82). She asserts that 'there is a joy in allowing oneself to be taken for the branding ride that discourages renunciation and prevents a lucid and commonsensical response for even the quickest of viewers' (ibid.). This ability of brands to temporarily 'discourage renunciation' of the advertising message means that, in the case of the London 2012 onscreen representations of disability, the ingrained audience reflex of revulsion (see chapters two and five) could be temporarily overcome in order to enjoy the persuasive normality associated with the other brands.

The interruption of typical responses during Klein's 'branded ride' (ibid.) suggests a suspension of disbelief is at play, at least for those advertisements which are artistic, entertaining or pleasurable to watch. For the Paralympians to be normalised it was essential that the viewing public could identify with them and experience positive emotions. Branding was used as a quick route to creating these associations. As Klein (2009) points out, branding provides shortcuts to both authenticity and also social significance (p.94). Banet-Weiser (2012) similarly suggests that we should no longer make a false distinction between consumer culture and authenticity, since the culture claims to be authentic, as well as defining the sense of it. In Channel Four's case, it is clear that, without the help of strong brand associations, reassuring the public with their own familiar meanings, depictions of authenticity and mainstream credibility could not have been achieved.

There was also an element of needing to *repair* their own brand. Brand relationships, in a variety of forms, affected how disability was portrayed and viewed and the overarching brand consideration, throughout the whole production cycle was to restore their own reputation in the process. In addition

to all the other reasons I have explored in preceding chapters, the Business
Director recollected:

> We were a year before Channel Four's 30th birthday, there was lots
> of talk about 'has Channel Four lost its way?' And there was a lot of
> talk about 'well maybe the Paralympics is the right thing to put it
> back on track' and make people realise just what a fantastic
> organisation and what a fantastic force for good it is. We realised we
> should treat this with a bit more respect and reverence and time and
> attention and that's when things flipped really. You know, just the
> way we approach things internally. (Wieczorek, Business Manager,
> *Interview)*

According to Aaker (1991) building a strong brand, from which to distribute your
content, helps build a loyal audience. The brand identity, as discussed, also
depends on past investments. When I spoke to Lygo, as Head of Television, he
defended his choice of programme mix during his watch as Commissioning
Chief. He also explained why he had axed *Big Brother* as part of getting that
mix right. The channel was no longer offering programmes that were not being
offered elsewhere, particularly as the reality show he had introduced as initially
ground-breaking was now being copied in a variety of other guises. They
needed to be distinctive, as part of their remit, and as part of their recognised
public service channel identity. Instead format shows were taking over the
schedules and the sense and identity of 'risk' was being lost. Although not at
first, as the Business Manager recalled above, the Paralympics was eventually
taken seriously by the producers and used to build the Channel Four brand
back up, in time for its 30th birthday.

Since then, their key element, 'Born Risky' has become the branded Channel
Four company strapline. The phrase was also used to justify editorial choices
during the profile-raising campaigns for the 2012 GB Paralympians. Decision-
makers who made references to 'our remit', as I discussed in chapter four, also
used the phrase as they might for an understood brand perception. Producers
identified with the identity created by the remit and it became 'our brand of telly'
as Lygo put it. An underlying understanding of the need for brand enhancement
emerged quite early on during my production study. This sense of potential
repair had clearly affected some of the producers and steered others as they

were guided towards restoring particular edgy or risky representations to their output.

Walker, Head of Marketing, told me, just after they had decided on their strategy for Rio 2016, that they were going to remind people 'what they loved' about the London Paralympics. Feelings had been embedded in the brand to be re-triggered when required. Later, the Head of Communications, Dan Brooke, explained the brand enhancement saying that for Rio they wanted to extend the meanings associated with 'superhuman' to include musicians, artists and everybody else. These mental associations affect behaviours towards the product (Keller, 2009; Aaker, 2001) and also the supplier; in this case a television channel, and the corporation who owns that. Thoughts, feelings and consequent actions can produce growth for the brand, and their positive value adds to the brand equity (ibid.). This is something that the producers certainly felt the Paralympians now had and they realised that this was of value to the channel and corporation. Branding the Paralympians accorded them meanings that were designed to trigger favourable personal resonance. This resonance, encapsulated within the brand, was then reusable at a later date. In this way the superhumans signified a newly *created* brand of heroes, very closely associated with Channel Four.

The project, then, had started with a bid to utilise the 'golden brand' of Channel Four to give signification to the 2012 Paralympic Games, and it ended with the newly defined 'superhuman' brand restoring memories and attachment to the channel for the benefit of their future inventory. At the closing of the London 2012 Paralympic Games, Lord Coe, former Olympic Gold Medallist and Chairman of LOCOG, said, 'We will never think of sport the same way and we will never think of disability the same way'. The advertising agency, 4Creative, have overdubbed this onto their own publicity material as the final words for their archived 'Meet the Superhuman' campaign portfolio on their website (4Creative, 2013). It was their crowning achievement to promote *ideas* as well as drive footfall to a product. Changes in audience/consumer perception were achieved by utilising known brands and *transferring their meanings* to the Paralympic athletes and the live sports coverage. In turn, using these brands to

create a new brand created a whole new set of associated meanings. It is important to note, however, that within the unique mix of meanings that were made, some of that personality was derived from other products and well-known companies as I have shown above.

## Conclusion

In this chapter I have revealed the deep penetration of marketing logics into the production processes and practices connected with the media coverage of the London 2012 Paralympic Games. I have shown that the marketing team at Channel Four influenced representations of disability in order to fulfil their own brief and as part of the wider requirement to deliver the promises of the broadcasting rights bid. They were a powerful arm driving significant and influential messaging and their actions were intrinsic to how, and why, meanings were made about disability in the way that they were.

Whilst this newly developed 'superhuman' brand of disabled elite athletes did benefit from the media coverage, the *brand* of Channel Four, alongside the Paralympic brand, with its own mission and messaging, was also expected to reap a dividend (see Appendices B, C and E). The net outcome for 'the Paralympics Channel' was a reinforcement and enhancement of its own brand reputation providing added value to future advertisers. 'Changing perceptions in society' also, therefore, included a hidden legacy of improved revenue opportunities for other brand inventory, to be associated and conveyed later. The uplift was to be achieved over time, both as promised for the Paralympics Movement but also for Channel Four (C4TVC, 2009). It is here that the blur between the commercial and the creative is at its most murky.

Authenticity was overlaid onto carefully constructed representations, and marketed to the widest possible audience, in a way that Klein (2009) suggests can potentially mask malevolent commercial objectives. In this case the objectives were not malevolent, nor was the project undertaken for financial gain, at least by the TV channel, but the marketing campaign was funded and driven by a need to enhance Channel Four's brand reputation (Poulton, Project

Leader, *Interview*) as much as to fulfil its diversity remit and represent the marginalised onscreen.

I have shown in this chapter that ideas and feelings were marketed as well as products. By adopting the advertising cool style of 'Nike', and using the essence of Public Enemy's legendary anti-authoritarian stance, Channel Four's edginess was safeguarded. Executives blended the known, Sainsbury's and BT, with the unknown, 'superhumans'. Producers applied unexpected military accident scenes to expected mainstream sports visuals and used these juxtapositions as their marketing campaign to promote new ideas on a scale they had never done before. Aspirational sporting performances and winning personality stylings are not new, but mixing them up with powerful national and international brands, to the advantage of an ignored and marginalised group, was ground-breaking. I have argued in this chapter that the role of the marketing strategy in the London 2012 media coverage was highly significant. Meanings about disability were shaped and influenced, not only by the creativity of the Marketing Department, but also by the strategic use of other familiar brands with their own associated meanings and messages.

How and why certain meanings about disability were made were influenced by the promotional needs of the channel, and brand reputational elements were woven into all aspects of the production process. Having separated these elements out in this chapter for analytical purposes, I now replace them into the mix of other influences to conclude my arguments for who, how, why and what shaped onscreen representations of disability at the 2012 Paralympic Games. The core arguments of my findings are now revisited in the next chapter.

# Chapter 8 Conclusion

The year 2012 had been a typically bad one for disability representations with 'benefits cheats' making the news headlines, and 'embarrassing' bodies being paraded as onscreen entertainment. 'Subhuman' discourses were continuing as usual with negative imagery as the key constituent of disability stereotypes. Then suddenly, on 6th August, Channel Four thanked the Olympic Games 'for the warm-up' and the British public were then offered the chance to 'Meet the Superhumans' as a precursor to the Paralympic Games. Apparently out of the blue, Channel Four brought a disabled marginalised group into the mainstream, marketing Paralympic athletes as if they were non-disabled Olympians. In contrast to the BBC's previous late-night highlights packages, the sporting event was then given 'live' all-day coverage, and treated as a mega-event in the mainstream Channel Four schedule. This study has therefore investigated an extraordinary piece of television history at the point of production, exploring the particular production dilemmas raised and illuminated by the intersection of the three bodies of sport, disability and representation literature.

Notwithstanding the inevitable uplift in attention that a 'home games' would achieve (along with a compatible time zone for viewing) a 'seismic shift' in attitudes was claimed by the organisers. Media representations were dramatically different, accompanied by a slick Nike-style ad campaign framing the athletes as 'cool'. Commissioned audience research conducted by academics before and immediately following the event (Bournemouth University, 2013), and market research at the time (IPSOS, 2012), indicated that perceptions about disability were indeed changed (see also Jackson et al., 2015). This study has explored the meaning-making process asking who decided to change society and why? What made Channel Four take it on, and how and why, at the point of production, were representations of a previously marginalised segment of the disability community transformed in this particular way? The thesis has established some of the influencing factors, and explored the context in which these new disability representations were produced, as a contribution to the study of both representation and production.

My findings matter because they show that internal and external influences on production do affect onscreen representations, in at least the variety of ways contributed by my participants. This study shows that there is still a valuable purpose in having a public service broadcaster, protected by parliamentary remit, in order to allow positive risk-taking with representations of non-commercially profitable minority groups. It also agrees with other recent work by showing the integration of marketing and branding into meaning-making. In this final chapter I first present the outcomes of my research in a brief summary of findings and core arguments. Then, returning to the key questions with which I began, I draw together the empirical facts, established by my contributors, before clarifying what this knowledge means and why it is important within our field. My discussion leads on to questions raised for further research, before I briefly outline the legacy that my investigation into the media coverage of the London 2012 Paralympic Games reveals, for representation, production and disability on television.

## Summary of Core Findings

There are three key points from this study that can help us understand future representations of disability and difference more generally. These are that regulatory structures protected and enabled the taking of production risks; that the inclusion of staff with disabilities positively affected disability representations; and that it was the coherent vision led by marketing, utilising the full force of brands and branding, that successfully promoted new meanings about disability, repositioning undesirable difference as acceptable within the mainstream.

Throughout the empirical chapters I have argued that, having adopted the riskiest of approaches (chapter four), and chosen to give the athletes representational parity with normal human beings (chapter five), the producers adapted existing successful programme formats within particular genres (chapter six) to promote mainstream acceptance. My interviewees also clarified how they borrowed meanings associated with other powerful brands to market

the Paralympians as normal and project them into the mainstream culture (chapter seven).

In the introduction I argued that, according to scholars across the disciplines of culture and political economy (see Klein, 2009; Zoellner, 2009a; Wasco, 2011; Hesmondhalgh, 2013; Murdock and Golding, 2016), there is still more to be learned from the complex entanglement that occurs at the intersection of representation and production. This part of the 'circuit of culture' (DuGay et al., 1997) is still an important one to be scrutinised and is the obvious point from which to understand what happened with the Paralympics media coverage.

Chapter two examined media theories about representation, disability and sport, and established that representations are constructed to mean different things in the three separate research areas. It emerges that there would inevitably be production dilemmas for how to represent disability sport onscreen, as the 'safe distance' (Hall, 1997) that the 'spectacle of the other' (ibid.) is designed to create for viewers, normally, is far from safe when portraying onscreen disability. This is because becoming disabled is a predicament that could suddenly happen to any of us (Shakespeare, 2013) and consequently carries with it connotations of repulsion (Barnes, 1992a). The paraded 'spectacle' of disability, therefore, to a greater degree than other diversities, such as race and gender, is not an immediately obvious choice for promoting sport which needs to be marketable to a wide audience. The dynamics, as well as the meanings, are also different in a sporting context. Elite athletes, as spectacular others, are used to inspire and connect viewers to the teams and their countries being represented, rather than identify 'us' as separate from 'them' which happens when you stereotype 'others' more generally.

To investigate how producers handled this conundrum and the conflicting dynamics it would inevitably have caused, I outlined in chapter three why semi-structured interviews would work best with an ethnographic spirit, together with internal documentation relating to meaning-making, based on methodologies adopted by previous production researchers (e.g. Schlesinger, 1987; Born,

2004; Mann, 2009; Mayer et al., 2009). Whilst expecting themes to emerge derived from these and other production studies, room was left as well for the unexpected within my investigation.

What was unexpected was that the structures investigated in chapter four, according to my contributors, actually enabled the producers to take risks, both with the make-up of the workforce and with portrayals of disability onscreen. As a clear example of where structures and agency collide or collude, the parliamentary remit, the organisational structure and even the funding mechanism were shown to have affected how disability was portrayed onscreen. Whilst the power to define who 'others' are and what we should think about them reveals itself throughout all my chapters, I sought to disentangle the regulatory and organisational structures from the actions of the producers in this first empirical chapter. A thematic analysis of my semi-structured interviews revealed that, along with the funding mechanism for the television corporation, these external structures impinged upon and shaped depictions of disability with direct and concrete consequences.

Producers were enabled to take creative risks with the Paralympics media coverage in an 'edgy' and unconventional way, which they justified because of the regulatory structures that protected them (see Appendix E). They were also free to create 'risky' representations without the intervention of shareholder vetoes, thanks to the structure of the organisation that preserved their autonomy and editorial power. The Head of Television, Kevin Lygo, in his personal interview with me, valorised the autonomy that he personally had to authorise the bid for the Paralympics based on the funding mechanism that gave him freedom to do so. Channel Four were in a unique position to compete for the project, as the internal documentation I was given shows (Appendix C), and also to subsidise the coverage with sponsorship deals.

It emerged through my study, which I discuss specifically in chapter five, that there were two competing strategies for the focus of the media coverage and these were held in tension by Channel Four, on one hand, and the various stakeholders on the other, in relation to LOCOG's goal of achieving a closer

'parity with the Olympics'. Stakeholder requests for portrayals and creative techniques to intentionally *minimise* disability and difference were rejected completely by Channel Four. Instead the editorial decision-makers insisted they 'show the stumps' *so that*, with physical differences duly acknowledged, the audience would then see past that and focus on the sport.

Whilst multimodal, content and discourse analysis scholars will be able to textually analyse the media coverage of the 2012 Games for years to come, my fifth chapter includes valuable first-hand recollections, by the meaning-makers, of their own involvement, passed on to me shortly after the production of their historic project. The producers explained how they disrupted existing disability stereotypes intentionally (see Appendix B), and consequently imbued the Paralympic athletes simultaneously with normal human identities and elite sporting status. What the material gleaned from my contributors shows is that by highlighting, in the extreme, the elite attributes (e.g. international gold-medal winning performances, extraordinarily sensitive horsemanship etc.), whilst 'showing the stumps' in unapologetic close-up, the interest in the sportsmen and women as elite athletes was not broken by the pointed referencing of their disabilities.

Reframing difference in this way, by absorbing the abnormal qualities into the mainstream tropes, was a consistent technique applied to all the programme formats. In chapter six I evaluated the coverage output and established that the intrinsic creativity of the production teams was used strategically to improve the meanings associated with disability. By tweaking and adapting well-known programme formats, whilst keeping them recognisably familiar, disability was introduced to a mainstream audience on their terms. First person reality-style inserts, for example, were filmed for the breakfast magazine show connecting real people, who happened to have an impairment, with a wider audience. The disabled athletes were brought out of their sub-culture into the 'real world' of shopping and mixing with celebrities, and the public were given opportunities to respond to them in a new way, on camera. Next in the schedule, mainstream event coverage included extra information woven into the 'normal' sports commentaries providing a different voice, but with the tone that is expected for

international athletics competitions consciously retained. By not compromising the tropes and treatments offered by mainstream television, even though necessarily adapting them, the producers I interviewed made sure the marginalised and ignored disabled athletes were given a platform that made them both visible and acceptable to a broader audience.

My argument is that, rather than adopting a weaker style to make some disability programming for the schedule margins, Channel Four adapted mega-event framing to promote the Paralympians as the elite athletes they found them to be. This was a specific way that the athletes were brought into the mainstream, by retaining the familiar and known televisual framings and focus, and assimilating these 'others' into normal programmes. The programme genres for the coverage were not treated, either by format or content, like the Special Olympics, for the pitiable tragic, but used to reposition the Paralympics as the actual Olympics with athletes who are extraordinary in even more ways than able-bodied Olympians are.

The main repositioning came from the Marketing Department who were able to shape meanings about disability through their campaigns and their ideas about content. My contributors explained how the use of familiar brands and brand associations were used to *reassure the public* that the new mainstream positioning for a marginalised group was normal. New meanings about the group, with the power of known brands behind them, delivered a greater than normal social significance for the previously invisible group. My research, explored in this thesis, suggests that maybe only a public service broadcaster can provide this level of significance, but it seems certain that it would not be able to do so anymore, without the help of internal marketing and a level of sponsor branding to go with it.

It is important to acknowledge here too how the tone of voice for the representations discussed in the earlier chapters was led and directed in collaboration with the Marketing Department. I have shown how brand identities were utilised for their own emotional associations with the public, and how meanings were shaped using brand resonances, associations and

understandings of those brands. The dynamics of these elements are understood well within advertising, but less so within programme production.

It is not just the genres and formats, or programme slot schedules that help to create the frames for representations within the media output (see Silverman,1995). Perceptions of the channel directly affect perceptions of the depicted content, as Born (2004) argued, and for a commercially funded public service broadcaster this can be a two-way relationship. It would seem that the content, in the case of London 2012, was used to validate the channel just as Channel Four were able to 'get away with' using hip-hop as an anti-authoritarian voice for the athletes. I have included in chapter seven how several of my contributors commented on the singularity of Channel Four's brand and remit, and the permission that gave them to produce unconventional representations.

The project leader articulated clearly to me that alongside the unorthodox portrayals very familiar brands were necessary to help resonate safe feelings for the viewers. If the 'safe distance' of making a spectacle of 'others' (see chapter two) was to be disrupted, then household brands were needed to reinforce mainstream cultural acceptance. It wasn't enough to just change televisual representations (see chapter five and chapter six), the producers knew they needed to use the meanings associated with commodified brands. I have shown throughout my chapters that the entangled mesh of creative and commercial interests has a powerful collective influence on representations that others have shown (Silverstone, 2005; Mayer et al. 2009) can still shape society using television as its primary touch point.

## Returning to and answering the key questions

I now return to the questions motivating this study:

*Who decided to reframe meanings about disability?*

*Why and how did they do it, and what influenced them?*

These questions matter because it is important to understand how and why editorial power is used to shape meanings about 'others', and by whom. The decision-makers for the 2012 media coverage were cultural producers with a social-shaping influence. Because they chose to change the way Paralympians were represented to a mass audience, they therefore provided a unique opportunity to focus on the production of specific representations. This was in order to clarify what actually happens within the production process that shapes meanings. Although this research has been an exploration of disability media portrayals it has focused on representation for an important reason; it is here that complex entanglements are made visible (Kidd, 2015, p.2) and in particular issues of power, ownership, authenticity and meaning are revealed (ibid.). I wanted to establish the extent to which crucial decisions about representations were communicated throughout the roles, whether hierarchically or within creative pockets of power. The final query was whether any of the producers were actually disabled themselves, or whether they had been affected by disability in some other way, just in case there was a correlation of some kind.

In answer to the *who* decided and *why* questions, Channel Four did not simply 'choose' to produce the London 2012 Paralympic Games. They had either presumed it would be covered by the BBC, as in previous years, or not considered it at all. A telephone call was made to the Commercial Lawyer, Martin Baker, by a member of the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) to persuade him to put in a bid for the broadcasting rights. The IPC wanted a higher profile for their Games (ideally parity with Olympics, but without the financial backing) and Channel Four could see there was the potential for audience 'growth' in it. The idea then reached the man with the most power, Kevin Lygo, as Head of Television, and being the holder of their £700 million budget, it was he who made the decision to take the coverage on. His reasoning did not include anything to do with disability. He told me that it was because he had a gap in the summer schedule to fill, left by his decision to axe *Big Brother*. The live sports event would solve his problem and that it happened to be the Paralympics was accidental.

Out of office hours, a group of men organised by the lawyer ordered pizza and devised a plan. Their interest in producing the Paralympic Games coverage was not disability related either; they were excited by covering a live sporting event in London, as these did not often come up. My research demonstrates it was what happened next that produced the transformation in disability representations. The team that these executive men pulled together to make it happen *included disabled people* on purpose*.* Initially, they needed their long-standing Disability Executive, Alison Walsh, who manages a disability of her own, to 'write the disability section' of the bid. This would be natural for any production, and often occurs in the commissioning process, but she was later in addition, given *executive editorial powers* over the commissioning editors and all the coverage.

It became noticeable, during my research, that internally the organisation was affected by an intentionally high level of editorial participation by those with first-hand experience of disability. On screen the gap between 'them' and 'us' was reduced by the presence of disabled presenters in the studio and the presenters were given equal status and power to their nondisabled counterparts. These representatives were not pundits, as they had been with the BBC coverage, but had equal status as TV anchors and reporters. I was able to interview production staff who had been hired by both companies and that comparison was made by my participants themselves about their own experience. It was also clear, as an outside observer, that the teams were no longer voyeurs of disabled sport, because there was disability within the studio as well as on incoming camera feeds. The new inclusivity within the production culture was collectively experienced, and this meant that the entire event was projected as more mainstream and less out on an awkward limb. *The Last Leg*, even with a joke in its title, blurred the distinction even more. It was the interchangeability between able and disabled and an equal emphasis within the presenting team, as well as with the mix of guests, that made the 'difference' more difficult to discern.

Another significant person with a disability, who was described as 'key' by executives, was a previous Paralympian, Ade Adepitan. He is well-known and

ticks lots of diversity boxes including being black and using a wheelchair. He had been employed by the BBC as a pundit in a tokenistic way for what they termed 'expert analysis' for their previous coverage of Beijing, 2008 (BBC, 2008). With Channel Four he was called in at a higher level of consultation (still a tokenism rung on Arnstein's (1969), ladder of participatory power) which then developed into a partnership, where his opinions appear to have gained equal status rather than simply advisory status. This senior consultation role at Channel Four was different to the BBC's use of him. The role was not just to deliver onscreen sports analysis, but also how to set it all up from the very beginning. Adepitan went from pundit to presenter onscreen, but also helped drive the production from behind the scenes as well. An example of this had been when the *Meet the Superhumans* marketing was still being conceptualised; his endorsement of the hip-hop vibe and the cool portrayals was circulated by email to the whole team from the Director of Communications. 'This has to happen for anything to change', he had said, and it did, on both counts.

Of those who were not disabled it was the Project Leader, Deborah Poulton, who, whilst being asked about another topic, told me how she had been *influenced by* disability not related to her. This question about disability was one I had chosen not to ask anybody directly, so that genuine influence would emerge, if it existed. Poulton's 'incident' affected her so much that she then, apparently, wanted disability portrayed in an *even more* visible way during their television coverage. An act of bigotry, against a parent with one arm at a school event, incensed her into discussing the need to actively display disability more prominently, during a phone call to the Network Creative Director, Tom Tagholm, (who also directed the *Meet The Superhumans* film). Their conversation is one they both referred to, in relation to challenging and inspiring new meanings across the entire production. There were other serendipitous moments affecting the production of representations too that I have also included throughout the chapters of this thesis. In answer to my initial question, many of the producers were affected and influenced by exposure to disability without actually possessing a disability personally.

Exactly *how* meanings about disability were reframed has been discussed in summaries in the previous section. The data answering these *who, what, when, where* and *why* questions confirms, though, that the producers had not produced a media 'template' or blueprint for disability, that other television stations might be able to adopt, as mooted in the public discourse. In fact, I have found that the producers were a group of individuals with a multitude of agendas from commercial to personal, for themselves and for others, who collaborated, tussled, resisted and compromised, to produce an output that is unlikely to have occurred in this way outside of Channel Four. Sir Jeremy Isaacs, as founding Chairman, said to me that the London 2012 Paralympics coverage, in his opinion, epitomised the kind of coverage the channel had been set up for.

Additionally, spotting opportunity, the Commercial Lawyer recognised that it could hit 'the sweet spot' of the remit, and deliver audience growth, in one fell swoop. Without the commercial sponsorship funding it could never have attained the high quality required of it by the parliamentary remit nor could the audience reach have been achieved without the massive push from the Marketing Department. The 'perfect storm', referred to by Clare Balding, who presented the previous coverage for the BBC and fronted Channel Four's coverage in 2012, was not a repeatable template for the future but a moment in time. What that moment left behind which is permanent, however, both for production and representations of disability, is summarised at the end of this conclusion.

## What this means for the production of representations

To consider the bigger question of improving representations of disability and difference more generally, within future media production, my research has demonstrated that coverage was shaped by three key factors. As my chapter summaries have shown, these were firstly structures, enabling risk at the organisational macro level, and shaping meanings at the micro programme format level. Secondly, and directly linked with this, representation within the workforce of the 'others' was a key factor and empowered greater disclosure

onscreen of physical anomalies in close up. Thirdly marketing, with its campaigns, strategies and programme advertising, was intrinsic to successfully inclusive coverage. These combined factors also have implications for theories of the production of representations and future research.

Firstly, I have shown that the representations of disability were constructed and shaped by individuals who had permission to take risks. Evidence from my interviews suggests that there were a number of elements that encouraged and enabled them to do so. In this case at least, on the macro level, government regulations protected these public service broadcasters from purely commercial agendas, from stakeholder opinions and, most significantly, from stakeholder attempts to veto what they considered unpalatable content. The regulations also recommended that they take risks by employing untried and tested producers within the workforce.

Programmes have been made by disabled teams in the past, either for community access television or late night diversity slots. However, having disabled 'others' on the inside of this *mainstream* sporting production, within the workforce and at the executive meetings, meant that normalisation was occurring within the organisational and more subtle structures as well as amongst the creative agents. This research reveals that from February 2010, after the broadcasting rights were won, that kind of integration was immediately set in motion at Channel Four. As a Trojan horse effect, it meant that producers working on the inside of the differently formatted shows and sports coverage were able to blend meanings about difference into normal televisual treatments, thus slightly reframing the programme content.

Additionally, elevating the Paralympic Games in 2012 to a televised, live, mega-event spectacle also enabled new framings for the negatively perceived marginalised group. The producers safely embedded Paralympic bodies in the known sporting context, as Team GB athletes there to represent *us*. They also saturated the schedules with coverage of the event so that we identified with them as sporting heroes in spite of their physical differences.

Normally, extreme characteristics are chosen to depict the person or group who are *not like* us. This is easy to see in the sitcoms and other television comedies where we laugh at groups of people who have been depicted in a caricatured way (Fiske and Hartley, 2003). What is different with a sports production is that elite athleticism is depicted as extreme for a different inspirational reason, and not as a parody. The athletes at Olympic level have extreme training regimes to be the very best in the world in their fields and extraordinary feats are part of their trope. In other words, representations of them are spectacularised because the sporting event is already a spectacle.

Discussions with *The Last Leg* team clarified that introducing humour about the everyday and mundane was another way of exploring personal differences and outlooks. Between the London and Rio Paralympics, a top Channel Four executive told me that, in addition to the value of utilising live sports coverage, their future strategy would be to 'sprinkle the magic of *The Last Leg*' over all the coverage. He certainly understood that they had gained a new audience across more than one programme genre. This was not the mainstream four-yearly Olympic audience but a late night disability-tolerating audience. By bringing stigmatised actors and their individual differences onscreen into a topical satire programme, the macro spectacle became personalised. The safe distance between 'us' and the 'other' was reduced and made safe by asking 'is it ok?' directly *to* those 'others' rather than *about* those others. The question, according to my contributors, closed the gap between the viewer and the presenters, as well as the viewer and the guests, and by using Twitter interactively, became part of the programme itself. What this means is that, in the context of the new hybrid format show, Hall's (1997) 'spectacle of the other' can now potentially be undone, through deliberate connection with the audience, and is already, at least, being disrupted.

For the topical satire show those 'others' were around on set too. They selected comedians, one disabled and one not, and wove a group dynamic with them alongside a sports journalist with a visible stump. In this setting stereotypes were at the very least mixed up and collectively dumped, unexpectedly, onto the evening sofa of the satire programme. My contributors revealed that the

format happened by accident and was improvised on the first day of shooting. It would seem, from their recollections, that the humour, openness and explanation was deliberate and did indeed play a huge part in the change to representations across the formats.

Secondly, out of all the influencing factors described and evaluated within this study, the most significant was the change in attitudes within Channel Four, brought about by having disabled producers and executives *amongst* the decision-makers. What involvement of the 'others' on the inside of the production process achieved, in 2012, for disability representations was immeasurably more important than perhaps those executives who first decided to include them may have realised. Objectification and stereotyping are commonly understood to be accentuated by distance from those 'others' whom 'we' are not like. It is clear from this case-study, that having close contact in a work environment *changed the culture* of the organisation and reduced the opportunities for cultivating negative perspectives. Other scholars have also found this elsewhere (see Luka, 2016). The stigma management process, according to Goffman (1963) is triggered by individuals negotiating disclosure or enacting difference in close proximity to those who think of themselves as 'normal'. When worked out in a creative labour context, this dynamic can directly affect onscreen content, since the 'normal' producers are seemingly changed by having those 'others' around.

Since Barnes (1992a), made the connection between prevalent disablist imagery and lack of integration into the workforce, there has not been a television production study to confirm or deny any correlation. My research now does this, at least in the context of this one-time event. The production was not only integrated beyond any previous levels, to include diverse actors, the event coverage itself provided a dramatic change to representations. 'Othering', in this case, was dismantled consciously within the content, and also, perhaps inadvertently, *within the individuals* producing that content. The evidence from my research strongly suggests, therefore, that having 'others' on the inside of the production makes the onscreen representations of 'them' closer in meaning to more normal representations about 'us'. Removing the 'safe distance' during

the production process, where some producers did not know how to shake hands with new staff at the start of production (e.g. Craine, Scriptwriter, *Interview*), reduced the distance between the two groups by exposure. This reduced gap also appeared to be mirrored within in the programme content (see chapter five).

I contend, therefore, in agreement with Born (2004), that both 'we' and 'they' are needed onscreen and off-screen in above-the-line and below-the-line production and executive roles to positively affect televisual representations. Born regarded under-representation onscreen and the lack of promotion for minorities within production teams as 'linked failures' (Born, 2004, p.10). Even before Channel Four committed to their Diversity Charter, which came about as a direct consequence of the Paralympics coverage (C4TVC. 2013b), my research demonstrates what I would call 'linked successes' rather than linked failures, between visibility onscreen and inclusion of diverse others within the workforce in 2012. Whereas the 'social model' of disability' (Oliver, 1983) has now come to a dead end, within disability scholarship (Shakespeare, 2013), its highlighting of disabling social barriers within the labour context should remain still highly relevant to communication research.

Thirdly, I have shown that portrayals of disability were improved across each of the programme formats but so were perceptions of the Channel Four brand. Both of these were measured and I have attached the documentation relating to their research data that I was given in Appendix E. The risky representations, paradoxically, were used to *reduce* risk for purchasing advertisers by strengthening the reliability of the brand for future financial gain. This relationship between creativity and commerce was seemingly indirect in places, during Channel Four's season of Paralympic meaning-making and the planning for it. However the entire project had an underlying driver, discussed in the original phone call between the Commercial Lawyer, Martin Baker, and LOCOG; there was more potential audience growth in this project than there would have been for the Olympics. Whilst a financial loss was a risk for the event itself, the enhancement to the brand was the prize to be won, including,

as mentioned in the bid proposal, associated benefits to longer-term inventory. These benefits in turn, were expected to reap dividends over time.

In spite of the commercial pressures, my contributors felt sincerely that they would raise the profile of disability more positively and other research suggests they achieved that (see IPSOS 2012; Bournemouth University, 2013). I have shown how, amongst other factors, the role of marketing in this process was central, entering the frame at the inception of the bid for the Paralympics media licence, and remaining until after the medal ceremonies were over. The repositioning of marketing power goes beyond creative advertising to having a voice across all associated organisations. In this case this voice was used to make the unusual familiar, in order to reach wider audiences across a plethora of platforms. Perhaps it is a social-shaping role that now only marketing can achieve. Commercial voices do seem to be an inevitable component for future media production, and it would appear more so now than was observed by, for example, Born (2004), Hesmondhalgh (2007) and Mann (2009). Certainly this seems true when marketing sports coverage, which provided positive cultural leverage for the disabled athletes in this context.

None of this would have much impact in the fragmented, multi-platform world of modern televisual consumption, unless, as was true in the case of Channel Four mounting the Paralympics, the full force of branding and marketing is also borrowed to promote the new meanings in a way that audiences can accept. My study supports findings that this kind of blanket marketing approach is potentially a prerequisite for changing representations, meanings and paradigms. Channel Four is the only UK PSB with that sort of flexibility, other than ITV, for whom the topic would not be viable. Disability is too niche a topic to attract the advertising revenues ITV would need to make the Paralympic Games profitable enough to purchase.

Clearly the power of brand relationships, whether brought on board or simply borrowed, can be useful as shortcuts when framing realities with embedded meanings. Other scholars have established that branding carries associated values and attitudes with it, through its own methods of trope and identity

reinforcement (Davis, 2005; Klein, 2009; Banet-Weiser, 2012) and these existing associations were very much utilised in this case. Representations were challenged, utilising existing brand relationships with the audience, for London 2012, by forcing the creative envelope, and dismantling the previous understandings of existing artistic and psychological boundaries. My analysis reveals that the inherent branding structures functioned in similar ways to the programme genres and stereotypes discussed in previous chapters, affecting actors within the production process, as well as the audiences who ultimately decoded the onscreen content more positively.

## Potential Future Research

Building on the results of my study it would be of value to clarify ongoing motivations and purposes of producers with further research, in order to understand any other influences on meaning-making. This case-study has explored the influencing factors impinging on decision-makers in a particular setting, and mapped the producers' roles, their creativity and their power. As further changes to regulation, organisations and programme funding affect production and individual creativity in other settings, it matters that these influences should also be examined. Public Service Broadcasting is frequently under threat and there is a risk of certain diversities either disappearing off the screens or being misrepresented as they have been in the past. This study has separated institutional influences and individual influences from the surrounding commercial environment, to map how each of these affect each other. More work needs to be done in this field to understand the complex production mechanisms and also the unexpected pockets of creative power.

It is vital that production research asks similar questions to the ones in this study, related to other groups of diverse 'others' to investigate changes, if any, happening on the inside of other media productions. My research clearly demonstrates that editorial decision-makers are affected by those who are around them. Representation, both within the workforce and onscreen, could be researched using a similar methodology to mine, to explore linked meanings that are made, for example about women in sport, or disability in drama. My

contributors have clarified that there are grades of power affecting meaning-making, in both hierarchical layers and nuanced pockets of creativity. Hall's (1997) threshold concept of the 'safe distance' that is created by making a 'spectacle of the other' relies on the others *not* being part of the decision-making process. If they are, as they were for the London 2012 Paralympics, then this is where representations and stereotypes are likely to be changed. My documentary evidence, attached as Appendix B, clearly shows that it is the decision-makers in the production stages who create or disrupt the 'safe distance' that defines what normal is. Further investigation is therefore required to consider the mediated power being used, across other programme types. This is because the producers can shape not only the televisual cultural product but also the society into which it is distributed (see Hodges et al., 2015). I have shown in this thesis that my methodology can generate knowledge about who has the power and how and why they use it, successfully.

A single case-study is, of course, not sufficient to generalise a direct correlation between onscreen representation and 'diverse' access into mainstream production. The empirical evidence set out in this thesis does seem to suggest that the link exists, as Born (2004) also observed that it might. Other production research is therefore needed to corroborate this correlation and might then be of value to policy makers as well as academics. Whilst a single case-study on this scale cannot be conclusive, or generalise from its findings, it adds to the body of literature that suggests representation is still an important field of research. The complex mechanisms of power examined by critical political economists of communication and cultural theorists alike are made visible in projects like this one I have just carried out. Regulation, collaboration, risk, parity and branded marketing are all elements affecting what appeared onscreen as the London 2012 Paralympic Games coverage. These need to remain under scrutiny.

In terms of production research, there are now full storylines for disabled actors in BBC dramas, for example, most recently, for Clarissa in *Silent Witness* (2018) who had a two-part personal story, developed out of her erstwhile plot

device role. All the other characters treated her warmly as the central figure and she was given a back-story that was even discussed on *The One Show* (2018). The actress has a rare disease (AMC) and has been in a wheelchair since she was seven. There is also a BBCTV weather presenter on full view now, with one arm and a stump, normalised within the mainstream setting as she delivers the forecast during the peak time schedule. What is expected is changing, even if rare positive instances have occurred before, and knowing how and why these inclusive representations of disability have come about would also enrich the existing body of research. It may or may not be consequential that the Channel Four Disability Executive, Alison Walsh, has now moved to the BBC. This study has shown she was a driving force, with the London 2012 Paralympics coverage, for getting disabled talent onscreen and also for 'showing the stumps' 'when viewers least expect it'. Further study could perhaps track her influence there within a completely different organisational structure. The role of disability advisors in media more generally should also be explored, especially in relation to their editorial and executive powers. Representation and diversity are already examined within public service broadcasters in other countries (e.g. Abd Karim, 2015) and more production studies in the UK could provide a valuable contribution for media sociology as well as adding a richness to current communication theory.

## Legacies for Diversity in Production and Disability on TV

In the light of this research, my evidence suggests that the lasting Paralympic legacy provided by the media coverage is specifically the newly framed meanings associated with more graphic media representations of physical difference. According to Channel Four's commissioned research (see Jackson, 2013), because of the London 2012 portrayals, society's response to disability has been more inclusive since. But how disability is shown on TV has changed even more. There is a continuing and increasing visibility onscreen for disabled characters in a non-repulsive way, and not just on Channel Four. Cerri Burnell suffered vitriolic abuse from protective parents for not hiding her stump arm when presenting children's television for CBeebies in 2009, but agreed that she

would have been accepted more readily had she first appeared on TV 'after the Paralympics' (Gilmour, 2015). I note that the framework for understanding research into Paralympic legacies (see Misener et al., 2013) does not include any focus on media representations, and this is an important omission.

The role of the media representations in changing attitudes towards disability has already been established (Bournemouth University, 2013) for the twelve days of the event coverage. For two weeks, as I found out from personal experience, deformity was allowed to have a sense of humour. The 2012 Paralympic Games media coverage with its 'seismic shift' effect, also heralded a turning point in the types of representations that audiences have come to expect. It is surely a legacy of the media coverage, rather than the Games themselves, that there is now a gradually increasing visibility in the mainstream TV schedules for normalised disability. This means that those with anatomical variances, within our communities, can now see themselves reflected onscreen, in a way that they finally might want to recognise. As a public service broadcaster, Channel Four have fulfilled their remit, and for a range of commercial and creative reasons also created other changes for everyone.

During production, Channel Four disclosed and illuminated difference whilst at that same time de-stigmatising it. Seeing the opportunity to redefine the brand and enhance their reputation, they multiplied their productive efforts to *elevate* the athletes and *innovate* with their programme styles. My contributors made it clear that the channel wanted to show the BBC that it was *they* who were the real diversity champions, and that the diminutive Channel Four could equally well host a national mega-event. In one sense the Channel Four producers might be considered a reflection of the 'superhumans' themselves, in that they were previously underestimated and perhaps misidentified as the 'other' public service channel. By meeting the team who had put in the superhuman effort that was backed by the largest marketing budget in their history (see Appendix E), I have been able to show in this study why they gave the Paralympians a boost. But it was *more* than a boost to the athletes' profiles. This media coverage changed the trajectory for media representations of disability as the

decision-makers repositioned physically impaired athletes within the elite mainstream.

Now much more broadly, across both fact and fiction, it is no longer inevitable that disabled actors on television have to play the anomalous plot device, or be repulsive or invisible. They have a chance for a normal onscreen presence, when and if producers, as they did for the Paralympians, choose to give them centre stage. The Paralympics coverage created space beyond the sporting genre for a wider range of disability portrayals, including aspirational and positive representations of difference. By celebrating diversity, but not for its own sake, the producers redefined inclusiveness representing 'others' as part of our mainstream culture. This thesis has revealed why change happened from first-hand accounts of those who produced the historic coverage. Time will tell what else changes because of it.

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# Appendices

*[All internal documentation within these appendices are contributed by interview participants and included by kind permission.]*

## Appendix A: List of face-to-face interviewees

**Head of C4 Television**, Kevin Lygo;

**C4 Commercial Lawyer**, Martin Baker;

**C4 Paralympics Project Leader**, Deborah Poulton; (Skype from Australia)

**Head of C4 Programming**, Julian Bellamy;

**C4 and 4Creative Business Director**, Kuba Wieczorek;

**C4 Chief Network Director and 4Creative Film Director**, Tom Tagholm;

**C4 Board Director and Head of Communications**, Dan Brooke;

**C4 Head of Marketing**, James Walker;

**4Creative Video Editor**, Tim Hardy;

**C4 Programme Controller/Editor**, Luke Gawin;

**Freelance Camerawoman**, Liz Bell;

**4Creative Executive Producer**, Gwilym Gwillim

**4Creative Executive Producer**, Rory Fry

**C4 Disability Executive**, Alison Walsh;

**TV Presenter**, Clare Balding;

**TV Presenter and ex-Paralympian**, Ade Adepitan

**LEXI graphics originator and ex-Paralympic Gold Medallist**, Giles Long, MBE

**Head of Communications for the International Paralympics Committee (IPC),** Craig Spence;

**IPC Digital Marketing Manager**, Natalie Dannenberg;

**Sunset and Vine, Head of Sport**, Gary Franses;

**C4 Commissioning Editor for Sport**, Jamie Aitcheson

**British Paralympic Association (BPA), Media and Communications Officer**, Tash Carpenter (in lieu of BPA Director, Jane Jones).

**The Last Leg TV Presenter and Sports Journalist**, Alex Brooker

**Scriptwriter for The Last Leg**, Tom Craine

*Other exchanges:*

**Founding CEO of Channel Four**, Sir Jeremy Isaacs, telephone interview about the DNA of Channel Four and his current guidance of successor, David Abrahams.

**The Last Leg TV show host**, Adam Hills, brief back-stage conversation about his attitude to disability stigmas.

**Current C4 Head of Television**, Jay Hunt, Lygo's successor, by brief email exchange whilst she was on the flight to the Rio 2016 Paralympic Games.

*All internal documentation below has been contributed by interview participants and included by kind permission.*

## Appendix B: Staff Training '*Mental 4 the Paralympics*' slides

**E = Everyday, Everywhere...**

**Disability in Hit Shows**

**...no longer Exceptional**

- In 2005 Trevor Phillips said black and Asian people used to be on TV because they were "exceptional - exceptionally talented, exceptionally brave, exceptionally stupid or exceptionally criminal. Reality shows", he said, "normalised us".

- But disabled people were stuck firmly at the "exceptionally talented, exceptionally brave" (we might add "exceptionally tragic") stage – largely absent from shows that featured ordinary Joe Public doing everyday things.

- Then in 2006 Pete won *Big Brother* and normalisation took off, with disabled cast across shows like *Location Location Location*, *Deal or No Deal*, *Secret Millionaire*, *How to Look Good Naked* and *One Born Every Minute*.

- With the inclusion of disabled contributors, including Paralympic athletes, on *The Sex Education Show* it finally feels like there are no "no go" areas for disability, and disabled people have joined the human race as depicted on TV.

- There's still a long way to go. We told LOCOG that C4's Paralympics would take what started as a ripple with *Big Brother* and turn it into a tsunami of change in attitudes to disability in 2012.

## ... not always Elite

- For the Paralympics, with emphasis on the ELITE sport, if we're not careful with tone and balance across all our programming we'll be right back in "exceptionally brave and talented" mode.
- Yes Paralympics = sport at elite level, but we must show these athletes as HUMAN. Like any athlete they have back stories, they can fail, they have weaknesses and less appealing sides to their characters. They are not all heroic and perfect and "elite" – at least not all the time. Some are arrogant bastards, divas, or hard drinking party animals... ALL of whom make great telly



## &... Emotion + Engage

- So let's make portrayal AUTHENTIC, warts and all, rather than relentlessly upbeat and positive. We shouldn't be afraid of EMOTION, heartbreak, even a dash of sentiment – if it touches people it will engage audience

**N = New (not better but different)**

- Innovation is in our DNA. Think *Cast Offs* and *I'm Spazticus* – "breakthrough in television's depiction of disabled people". That's what we want for the Paralympics.

**N = New (not better but different)**

- We're not trying to be slicker, more competent than the BBC; we're trying to be DIFFERENT, NEW.
- Everyone has to go to bed at night wondering how to bring these Games to a new and bigger audience.
- Stickmen will be huge, but what else?
- Clever editing. Shots of the swimmers getting out of the water or athletes getting into their racing chairs.
- Clever directing with disabled presenters or reporters – make it look natural, and we want to see the disability, not shoot to hide it
- And our talent line-up, which is set to change the face of British broadcasting

## T = Talent

- C4 is top of the tree at launching New Talent. *Cast Offs*, *Coming Up*, *Comedy Lab*, *The Shooting Party* and our Production Training Scheme have launched some fine disabled talent.



- But it's not happened yet with disabled presenting talent. Paralympics is about to change all that.

- Ade speaks eloquently of the effects of watching sport as a child on his future career as a sporting hero. We want young disabled sports fans or budding journalists to watch our talent on the Paralympics and be inspired to follow.

## & Talk (rules of engagement)

There are not many rules

- Don't say freak?

You *can* call Oscar a freak of nature – and Lee, and Steve, and Liz, Dave, Steph, Jonnie...



FREAKS OF NATURE

Inside Incredible Athletes Tonight 9pm

- Don't call a dwarf cute?
*Davina did that*

**& Talk**
**(rules of engagement)**



- Don't focus on the impairment?
*Do if it engages audience*

Seven Dwarves
Starts Tues 16 Aug 9pm

**& Talk**
**(rules of engagement)**

## & Talk (rules of engagement)

- Don't ask about disability first in an interview or when you're commentating?

*Hmm that depends…*

Pearson would welcome an <u>unflinching</u> approach to the presentation of sport and disability in London:

"Paralympics has always had to push the media into it being about sport and not focusing on the disability. For me, that's now reached a limit where we can say that we're disabled and we've got issues. Let's be interested in that…..

When I'm riding round before the judge rings the bell to enter the ring, I'd love it if the commentator said: 'This is Lee Pearson, he's won nine gold medals, he's got arthrogryposis which means his legs and arms didn't grow correctly, he wears plastic leg splints from his hip to his heels, his limbs are a bit twisted and weak and his muscles don't work correctly.

Then, people would watch me and think: 'Jesus, and he rides a horse as well.' As opposed to someone looking at me and trying to work out what's wrong with me.

I think it's our selling point to make us more

Lee Pearson
interview with Owen Gibson
Guardian/Observer 27 Aug 2011

## & Talk (rules of engagement)

- Don't say confined to a wheelchair, or wheelchair bound, or suffering from, victim of, and don't call anyone a fat spastic. Though all of those will happen in Drama; here's a scene from Cast Offs…

## & Talk (rules of engagement)

- It's all about <u>context</u>. Staying the right side of the line. At C4 we go right up to the line and lean over it.
- We have to get people talking about disability, it's much better talked about than ignored, though clearly we don't want a repeat of this...



## A = Audience

- With Paralympics we've given ourselves a double whammy – disability AND sport. Paralympics is a difficult sell. But it can be done. Audiences are curious about disability; we just need to be clever about how we pique that curiosity and play with their expectations
- Programmes like *The Boy Whose Skin Fell Off*, *The Strangest Village in Britain*, *Make Me Normal* and T*he Undateables* show you <u>can</u> make disability rate.
- All great programmes each with a secret weapon: brilliant title or trails, innovative structure or storytelling, fresh treatment of disability, jaw dropping heartbreaking moments.
- For Paralympics YOU are our secret weapon: with your fresh, down-to-earth way of talking about disability, your blinding insights to disability sport, taking the audience into a different world, making them laugh and making them cry.
- So let's turn Boccia into cult viewing.

## L = Love, Linger...

- Elite sport yes, but Paralympics is also a massive celebration of disabled talent. So Love Disability.

- The best programme makers think disability adds to the creative possibilities rather than making life difficult. Linger on the athletes' bodies like you'd linger on an Olympic athlete's body. Celebrate the human form, however warped and cracked.



- It's all in the execution and the attitude: play with disability, be braver. Do the unexpected – when the swimming races in the lower categories are a bit slow, let the commentators say so, and use the time. Talk about how the quads in that single limb are honed to deliver a surprising amount of propulsion. Compare their lap times with the average keep-fit able bodied swimmer's. Anything. Help us enjoy the race.

- Engage with the audience (online and on air ) to debate every outrageous opinion and inside story. Think of all the questions you'd ask if you were watching in the pub, and ask them.

## & Laugh...

Like Alex asking blind judo player Simon Jackson "is there anyone else who's caught your eye today?" Let's have more of that.



Lighten up and Laugh. Learn from Adam Hills describing a swimming race.

Treat your disabled guests just how you'd treat your non disabled guests. Watch Adam interview a man with no limbs.

**... all the way to the bank**

- If we don't get bums on seats we won't change anything – remember we've promised a tsunami of change in attitude to disability and disability sport

- What we're making here is not just sport it's entertainment, drama, upsets, magical moments.

- As Howard Cosell, from America's ABC network which led the way in developing a new style of presenting sport as entertainment, said: "There's no damn way you can go up against Liz Taylor and Doris Day in primetime TV and present sport as just sports."

# Appendix C: Channel 4's Bid Proposal for UK Broadcast Rights

© Channel Four Television Corporation, 2009 [selected pages only]

The London 2012 Paralympic Games
Channel 4 Television Corporation Proposal for UK Broadcast Rights

## Section 1. Introduction

### A ground-breaking Games demands a ground-breaking broadcast partner

Channel 4 is convinced that London 2012 is too momentous an event in the life of the United Kingdom to be entrusted to a single broadcaster. We believe that the public impact and legacy of the Games can only be fully realised by having separate, dedicated, broadcasters for the Olympic and the Paralympic Games.

In this document we demonstrate:

- how, on all LOCOG's criteria, Channel 4 and the Paralympics make the perfect match

- how the Paralympics can be transformed in the public mind from what many consider to be a sideshow to the main event, to a vital occasion at the heart of world sport

- and how our distinctive 'no boundaries' coverage will place the Games and its athletes firmly at the heart of the nation.

Extensive coverage across Channel 4, our digital channels and online platforms, with 150 hours of event television coverage at its centre, will aim to reach more than 35 million viewers. Channel 4's heartland audience of younger viewers will be a prime, but not an exclusive, target. Indeed, our aim is to make coverage as *inclusive* as possible, for example providing subtitling and audio description for all paralympic-related programming.

Our editorial vision is to be as close to the action as possible, bringing to life the characters of those competing, demystifying the complexities of the sport, and transforming public attitudes about what disabled people – whether world-class athletes or ordinary folk - can achieve.

But our commitment goes a considerable way beyond covering the Games themselves. If awarded the rights, the build up to the Games will have a permanent presence across all Channel 4 platforms from August 2010. We will commission major landmark peak-time documentary series to run in 2011 and 2012 which will bring vividly to life the extraordinary characters who will make the 2012 Paralympics. We will broadcast regular weekend coverage of major disability sports events as a prelude to the Games, and utilise many of our best known TV talent and programme brands to raise the profile of the Games, and lead viewers to our coverage.

Marketing is crucial to the Games' success: we will commit the same on air marketing effort to the Paralympics as the BBC devoted to the 2008 Olympic Games.

As London 2012 has a responsibility to leave a valuable legacy, we believe Channel 4's responsibility does not end with the closing ceremony. We will nurture and give employment opportunities to the disabled on- and off-screen talent 'discovered' as a result of the Games; keep those athletes who have become national heroes as a result of their sporting achievements in the public eye on air and through our websites; and produce a legacy site that will have practical value for disabled people throughout the UK.

**In short , Channel 4 will embrace the Paralympics for the next three years, and for many years beyond 2012. Our coverage will ensure that disabled competitors will receive the same acclaim – and criticism – as non-disabled sports stars. Never again will disabled athletes be treated differently.**

3

The London 2012 Paralympic Games
Channel 4 Television Corporation Proposal for UK Broadcast Rights

Channel 4 is unique in its record of putting disability into the mainstream with inclusive programmes and ground-breaking talent initiatives. We have a proud track record of transforming existing sports - and introducing new ones - to large, mainstream audiences. As the Paralympics returns home to its Stoke Mandeville beginnings, we believe that covering this important event is consistent with every aspect of Channel 4's public service remit to challenge, to innovate, and to include voices that usually attract little media attention.

Given the striking congruence between LOCOG's Vision for the Games to inspire change and Channel 4's Core Purposes to *champion alternative voices and fresh perspectives, challenge people to see the world differently,* and *inspire change in people's lives,* we believe Channel 4 is the broadcaster most perfectly fitted to the task of bringing these Games to the British public.

**We will use our best people, the country's top sports broadcasters and our 100% focus to ensure that the London 2012 Paralympic Games will be the most entertaining, most transformational and most inspirational sports event in a generation.**

4

## 1) Company Structure

Please see Appendix 1 which contains Channel 4's company chart.

## 2) Company History

Channel 4 was originally established in 1981, launching in November 1982 and was provided for by the television broadcasting regulator at that time, the Independent Broadcasting Authority. The Channel Four Television Corporation was subsequently established under the Broadcasting Act 1990 and Channel 4's functions were transferred over to the new Corporation in 1993.

Channel 4 is a publicly owned corporation with no shareholders, but it is also commercially funded. Unlike the BBC, Channel 4 does not receive public funding; it is funded entirely by selling advertising and through other commercial activities. As a "not for profit" organisation, the income generated from commercial activities goes back into paying for Channel 4's programming and operational costs. Channel 4 is also a publisher/broadcaster; it does not have an in-house production facility but commissions all of its programmes from a broad range of independent producers across the UK. The establishment of Channel 4, under such a model, radically changed the broadcasting industry in the UK, not only stimulating and sustaining the independent production sector, but also playing an important role in the growth of the UK's creative economy.

Channel 4 was set up to offer a different perspective on the world, and its remit is to participate in the making of a broad range of relevant content of high quality that, taken as a whole, appeals to the tastes and interests of a culturally diverse society. Channel 4 asks different questions and seeks alternative answers; in terms of its people and programmes, Channel 4 aims to shake up the schedule, make a noise and give voice to people and characters rooted in diverse communities.

# Appendix D: Call Sheet Aquatic Centre Camera Positions, etc.
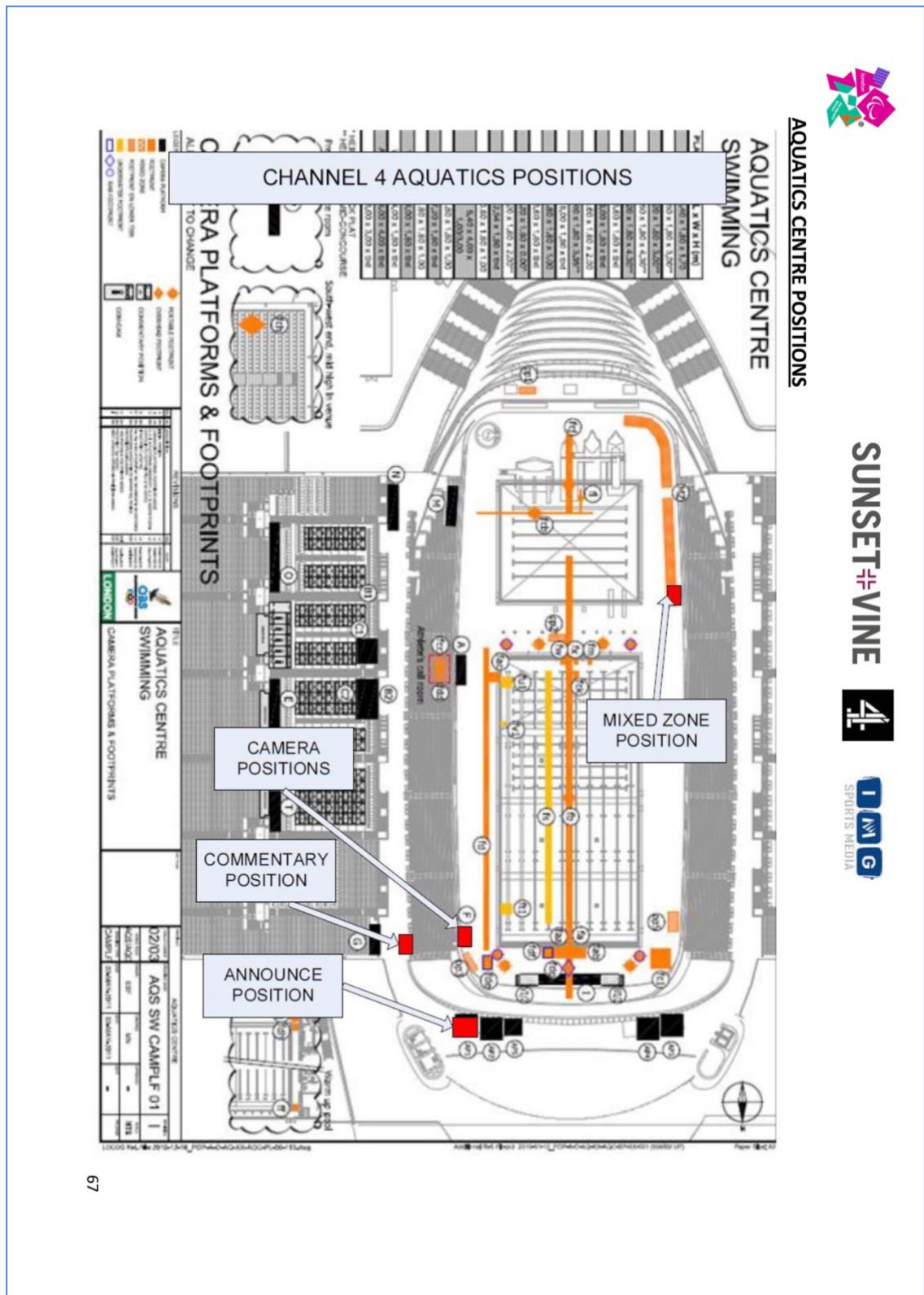
## TX SCHEDULE

| TX DATE | EPISODE NUMBER | PROGRAMME TITLE | PROGRAMME TX TIME | DURATION |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Wed 29th | 1 | PARALYMPIC GAMES OPENING CEREMONY - C4 | 20.00 - 23.00 | 3 hours |
| Thur 30th | 2 | PARALYMPIC GAMES BREAKFAST SHOW - C4 | 07.00 - 09.15 | 2 hours 15 mins |
| | 3 | PARALYMPIC GAMES MORNING PROGRAMME - C4 | 09.15 - 12.00 | 2 hours 45 mins |
| | 4 | PARALYMPIC GAMES MORNING PROGRAMME - C4 | 12.00 - 13.00 | 1 hour |
| | 5 | PARALYMPIC GAMES AFTERNOON PROGRAMME C4 | 13.00 - 15.30 | 2 hours 30 mins |
| | 6 | PARALYMPIC GAMES AFTERNOON PROGRAMME M4 | 15.30 - 17.25 | 1 hour 55 mins |
| | 7 | PARALYMPIC GAMES EVENING PROGRAMME C4 | 17.25 - 18.30 | 55 mins |
| | 8 | PARALYMPICS GAMES EVENING PROGRAMME M4 | 18.30 - 19.30 | 1 hour |
| | 9 | PARALYMPICS GAMES EVENING PROGRAMME C4 | 19.30 - 22.30 | 3 hours |
| | 10 | THE LAST LEG WITH ADAM HILLS - C4 | 22.30 - 23.15 | 45 mins |
| Fri 31st | 11 | PARALYMPIC GAMES BREAKFAST SHOW - C4 | 07.00 - 09.15 | 2 hours 15 mins |
| | 12 | PARALYMPIC GAMES MORNING PROGRAMME - C4 | 09.15 - 12.00 | 2 hours 45 mins |
| | 13 | PARALYMPIC GAMES MORNING PROGRAMME - C4 | 12.00 - 13.00 | 1 hour |
| | 14 | PARALYMPIC GAMES AFTERNOON PROGRAMME C4 | 13.00 - 15.30 | 2 hours 30 mins |
| | 15 | PARALYMPIC GAMES AFTERNOON PROGRAMME M4 | 15.30 - 17.25 | 1 hour 55 mins |
| | 16 | PARALYMPIC GAMES EVENING PROGRAMME C4 | 17.25 - 18.30 | 55 mins |
| | 17 | PARALYMPIC GAMES EVENING PROGRAMME M4 | 18.30 - 19.30 | 1 hour |
| | 18 | PARALYMPIC GAMES EVENING PROGRAMME C4 | 19.30 - 22.30 | 3 hours |
| | 19 | THE LAST LEG WITH ADAM HILLS - C4 | 22.30 - 23.15 | 45 mins |
| Sat 1st | 20 | PARALYMPIC GAMES BREAKFAST SHOW - C4 | 07.00 - 09.15 | 2 hours 15 mins |
| | 21 | PARALYMPIC GAMES MORNING PROGRAMME - C4 | 09.15 - 13.00 | 3 hours 45 mins |
| | 22 | PARALYMPIC GAMES AFTERNOON PROGRAMME - C4 | 13.00 - 18.30 | 5 hours 30 mins |
| | 23 | PARALYMPIC GAMES EVENING PROGRAMME - C4 | 19.00 - 22.30 | 3 hours 30 mins |
| | 24 | THE LAST LEG WITH ADAM HILLS - C4 | 22.30 - 23.15 | 45 mins |
| Sun 2nd | 25 | PARALYMPIC GAMES BREAKFAST SHOW - C4 | 07.00 - 09.15 | 2 hours 15 mins |
| | 26 | PARALYMPIC GAMES MORNING PROGRAMME - C4 | 09.15 - 13.00 | 3 hours 45 mins |
| | 27 | PARALYMPIC GAMES AFTERNOON PROGRAMME - C4 | 13.00 - 17.30 | 4 hours 30 mins |
| | 28 | PARALYMPIC GAMES AFTERNOON PROGRAMME - M4 | 17.30 - 19.00 | 1 hour 30 mins |
| | 29 | PARALYMPIC GAMES EVENING PROGRAMME - C4 | 19.00 - 22.30 | 3 hours 30 mins |
| | 30 | THE LAST LEG WITH ADAM HILLS - C4 | 22.30 - 23.15 | 45 mins |
| Mon 3rd | 31 | PARALYMPIC GAMES BREAKFAST SHOW - C4 | 07.00 - 09.15 | 2 hours 15 mins |
| | 32 | PARALYMPIC GAMES MORNING PROGRAMME - C4 | 09.15 - 12.00 | 2 hours 45 mins |
| | 33 | PARALYMPIC GAMES MORNING PROGRAMME - C4 | 12.00 - 13.00 | 1 hour |
| | 34 | PARALYMPIC GAMES AFTERNOON PROGRAMME C4 | 13.00 - 15.30 | 2 hours 30 mins |
| | 35 | PARALYMPIC GAMES AFTERNOON PROGRAMME M4 | 15.30 - 17.25 | 1 hour 55 mins |
| | 36 | PARALYMPICS GAMES EVENING PROGRAMME C4 | 17.25 - 18.30 | 55 mins |
| | 37 | PARALYMPICS GAMES EVENING PROGRAMME M4 | 18.30 - 19.30 | 1 hour |
| | 38 | PARALYMPICS GAMES EVENING PROGRAMME C4 | 19.30 - 22.30 | 3 hours |
| | 39 | THE LAST LEG WITH ADAM HILLS - C4 | 22.30 - 23.15 | 45 mins |
| Tue 4th | 40 | PARALYMPIC GAMES BREAKFAST SHOW - C4 | 07.00 - 09.15 | 2 hours 15 mins |
| | 41 | PARALYMPIC GAMES MORNING PROGRAMME - C4 | 09.15 - 12.00 | 2 hours 45 mins |
| | 42 | PARALYMPIC GAMES MORNING PROGRAMME - C4 | 12.00 - 13.00 | 1 hour |
| | 43 | PARALYMPIC GAMES AFTERNOON PROGRAMME C4 | 13.00 - 15.30 | 2 hours 30 mins |
| | 44 | PARALYMPIC GAMES AFTERNOON PROGRAMME M4 | 15.30 - 17.25 | 1 hour 55 mins |
| | 45 | PARALYMPICS GAMES EVENING PROGRAMME C4 | 17.25 - 18.30 | 55 mins |
| | 46 | PARALYMPICS GAMES EVENING PROGRAMME M4 | 18.30 - 19.30 | 1 hour |
| | 47 | PARALYMPICS GAMES EVENING PROGRAMME C4 | 19.30 - 22.30 | 3 hours |
| | 48 | THE LAST LEG WITH ADAM HILLS - C4 | 22.30 - 23.15 | 45 mins |
| Wed 5th | 49 | PARALYMPIC GAMES BREAKFAST SHOW - C4 | 07.00 - 09.15 | 2 hours 15 mins |
| | 50 | PARALYMPIC GAMES MORNING PROGRAMME - C4 | 09.15 - 12.00 | 2 hours 45 mins |
| | 51 | PARALYMPIC GAMES MORNING PROGRAMME - C4 | 12.00 - 13.00 | 1 hour |
| | 52 | PARALYMPIC GAMES AFTERNOON PROGRAMME C4 | 13.00 - 15.30 | 2 hours 30 mins |
| | 53 | PARALYMPIC GAMES AFTERNOON PROGRAMME M4 | 15.30 - 17.25 | 1 hour 55 mins |
| | 54 | PARALYMPICS GAMES EVENING PROGRAMME C4 | 17.25 - 18.30 | 55 mins |
| | 55 | PARALYMPICS GAMES EVENING PROGRAMME M4 | 18.30 - 19.30 | 1 hour |
| | 56 | PARALYMPICS GAMES EVENING PROGRAMME C4 | 19.30 - 22.30 | 3 hours |
| | 57 | THE LAST LEG WITH ADAM HILLS - C4 | 22.30 - 23.15 | 45 mins |
| Thur 6th | 58 | PARALYMPIC GAMES BREAKFAST SHOW - C4 | 07.00 - 09.15 | 2 hours 15 mins |
| | 59 | PARALYMPIC GAMES MORNING PROGRAMME - C4 | 09.15 - 12.00 | 2 hours 45 mins |
| | 60 | PARALYMPIC GAMES MORNING PROGRAMME - C4 | 12.00 - 13.00 | 1 hour |
| | 61 | PARALYMPIC GAMES AFTERNOON PROGRAMME C4 | 13.00 - 15.30 | 2 hours 30 mins |
| | 62 | PARALYMPIC GAMES AFTERNOON PROGRAMME M4 | 15.30 - 17.25 | 1 hour 55 mins |
| | 63 | PARALYMPICS GAMES EVENING PROGRAMME C4 | 17.25 - 18.30 | 55 mins |
| | 64 | PARALYMPICS GAMES EVENING PROGRAMME M4 | 18.30 - 19.30 | 1 hour |
| | 65 | PARALYMPICS GAMES EVENING PROGRAMME C4 | 19.30 - 22.30 | 3 hours |
| | 66 | THE LAST LEG WITH ADAM HILL5 - C4 | 22.30 - 23.15 | 45 mins |
| Fri 7th | 67 | PARALYMPIC GAMES BREAKFAST SHOW - C4 | 07.00 - 09.15 | 2 hours 15 mins |
| | 68 | PARALYMPIC GAMES MORNING PROGRAMME - C4 | 09.15 - 12.00 | 2 hours 45 mins |
| | 69 | PARALYMPIC GAMES MORNING PROGRAMME - C4 | 12.00 - 13.00 | 1 hour |
| | 70 | PARALYMPIC GAMES AFTERNOON PROGRAMME C4 | 13.00 - 15.30 | 2 hours 30 mins |
| | 71 | PARALYMPIC GAMES AFTERNOON PROGRAMME M4 | 15.30 - 17.25 | 1 hour 55 mins |
| | 72 | PARALYMPICS GAMES EVENING PROGRAMME C4 | 17.25 - 18.30 | 55 mins |
| | 73 | PARALYMPICS GAMES EVENING PROGRAMME M4 | 18.30 - 19.30 | 1 hour |
| | 74 | PARALYMPICS GAMES EVENING PROGRAMME C4 | 19.30 - 22.30 | 3 hours |
| | 75 | THE LAST LEG WITH ADAM HILLS - C4 | 22.30 - 23.15 | 45 mins |
| Sat 8th | 76 | PARALYMPIC GAMES BREAKFAST SHOW - C4 | 07.00 - 09.15 | 2 hours 15 mins |
| | 77 | PARALYMPIC GAMES MORNING PROGRAMME - C4 | 09.15 - 13.00 | 3 hours 45 mins |
| | 78 | PARALYMPIC GAMES AFTERNOON PROGRAMME - C4 | 13.00 - 18.30 | 5 hours 30 mins |
| | 79 | PARALYMPIC GAMES EVENING PROGRAMME - C4 | 19.00 - 22.30 | 3 hours 30 mins |
| | 80 | THE LAST LEG WITH ADAM HILLS - C4 | 22.30 - 23.15 | 45 mins |
| Sun 9th | 81 | PARALYMPIC GAMES BREAKFAST SHOW - C4 | 09.30 - 11.30 | 2 hours |
| | 82 | PARALYMPIC GAMES MORNING PROGRAMME - C4 | 11.30 - 14.00 | 2 hours 30 mins |
| | 83 | PARALYMPIC GAMES AFTERNOON PROGRAMME - C4 | 1400 - 17.30 | 3 hours 30 mins |
| | 84 | PARALYMPICS CLOSING CEREMONY - C4 | 1900 - 2300 | 4 hours |

19

**This list has morphed since the Bid Proposal and includes 'The Last Leg' in lieu of highlights.**

# Channel 4's Paralympic journey

**2010**

Nationwide talent search for disabled presenters/ reporters begins **9 August**
*That Paralympic Show* beings **28 August**
*Inside Incredible Athletes* airs **29 August**
IPC Swimming World Championships, Eindhoven **30 August**
First Talent Boot Camp **December**

**2011**

Second Talent Boot Camp **February**
Athlete Video Diaries Launches online **February**
*That Paralympic Show* Series 2 begins **2 April**
BT Paralympic World Cup – live event training for presenters/reporters **26–28 May**
Online boccia game launches **May**
*Sainsbury's & Channel 4 Presents* short films air on Channel 4 **4–8 July**
IPC Swimming World Championships, Berlin – live event training for presenters/reporters **17 July**
*Best of British* documentary series announced **30 August**
*That Paralympic Show* Series 3 begins **3 Sept**
Sainsbury's Super Saturday **10 Sept**
Wheelchair Basketball European Championships – training for reporters **12–17 September**
*BT & Channel 4 Presents* **26 Sept–7 October**
European Wheelchair Fencing Championships, Sheffield – event training for presenters/reporters **11 October**
Wheelchair Rugby GB Cup 2011, Cardiff – event training for presenters/reporters **26 October**
Online wheelchair rugby game launches **October**

**2012**

Intensive studio training begins for anchor presenters **January**
*Sainsbury's & Channel 4 Presents Pt II* short films air on C4 **30 Jan–10 Feb**
*Best of British* airs **8–29 February**
*Road to London 2012 Paralympics Extra* Series 1 **21 February**
Wheelchair Rugby – London Prepares test event – live event training for presenters/reporters **29 April**
UK School Games – live event training for reporters **May**
*That Paralympic Show* series 4 **5 May**
*BT & Channel 4 Presents Pt II* **21–25 May**
BT Paralympic World Cup – live event training for presenters/reporters **24–27 May**
Big 4 unveiled outside Channel 4 headquarters **28 May**
*Sainsbury's & Channel 4 Presents Pt III* short films air on C4 **2 July–13 July**
*Road to London 2012 Paralympics Extra* Series 2 – broadcast training for presenters **29 July**
Thanks for the Warm-up campaign begins **6 August**
*Best of British* airs **7–22 August**
Games Time website launches **13 August**
*Jon Snow's Paralympic Show* – presenters on ex-guests **20–26 August**
Documentary about Ben Rushgrove **18 August**
Paralympic torch relay – TV and online coverage **28–29 August**
Paralympics Opening Ceremony **29 August**
Channel 4 announces £XXX commitment to train talent **September**
Paralympics Closing Ceremony **9 September**
*BT & Channel 4 Presents Pt III* **1–5 October**
Adam Hills signs exclusive contract with Channel 4 **18 October**

**Media Coverage Timeline from beginning to end.**

**Appendix E: Marketing Strategy Summary** (Selected Slides)

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The Power of the Paralympics:
What we learnt in 2012

## Central Pillars of the Partnership

Short form bespoke content
- 50 x Ad-funded 90-second films created with partners

- Each partner's series had distinct tone

- Mini-documentaries created with full C4 editorial input

- Scheduled like ads for maximum reach, 600 plus transmissions, reaching over 25 million viewers

- Introduced UK to: Jody Cundy, Danielle Brown, Ellie Simmonds, Lee Pearson, Nathan Stephens, Jonnie Peacock, Hannah Cockcroft, David Smith, David Clarke, Stephen Miller amongst many more



The Power of the Paralympics:
What we learnt in 2012

## Partners Bespoke Activity

- **BT Paralympic World Cup Coverage**

- **BT kit Product Placement**

- **Sainsbury's Super Saturday Event and Ad-Funded Programme**

- **Sainsbury's Online Blind Football Game**

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