

Paralympics Through the Lens of the New York Times

Introduction:

Disabled people are underrepresented in sports on various levels from participant [1-3] to leadership positions in the sport industry [4]. Although 12.4% of Canadians have disabilities related to activity and functional limitations, they represent only 1% of the memberships of National Sport Organizations [5]. The non inclusion of disabled people in mainstream sport is seen as one reason for 'separate' sports opportunities for disabled people [6]. How media deals with the Paralympics plays a big role in the participation of disabled people in sport [1]. Furthermore, quantity and quality of media coverage of the Paralympics is one powerful influence on public representations and attitudes toward sport for people with disabilities [7]. Given the important role of the media to transmit discourses to the public and the perception of importance of the NYT we chose to investigate a) the imagery of the Paralympics and its athletes and competitive sport with people with disabilities b) the views and hopes of athletes with disabilities and c) the visibility of athletes with disabilities through the lens of the NYT from 1851-today.



Table 1 Keywords	NYT 1851-1979	NYT 1980-2011	Canadian Newsstand (1980-2011)
Paralympic	20	214	70
Olympic	105,809	38,537	1,900
Paralympics	35	178	36
Olympics	20,870	28,822	1,423

Table 1. Frequency of keywords in the New York Times and Canadian Newsstand. Canadian Newsstand covers 300 Canadian newspapers and the hit counts are divided by 300 to come up with an average hit count per Canadian newspaper

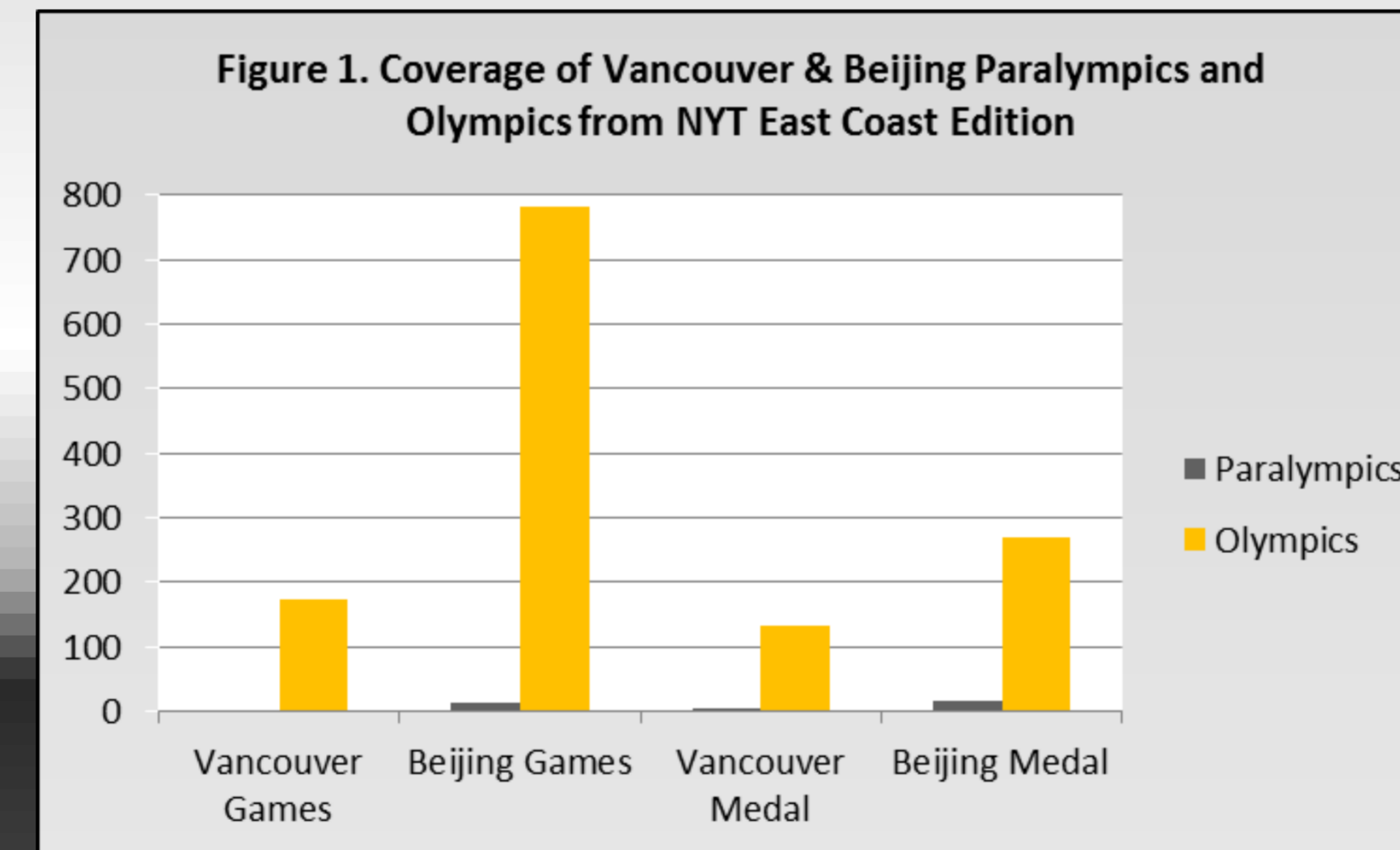
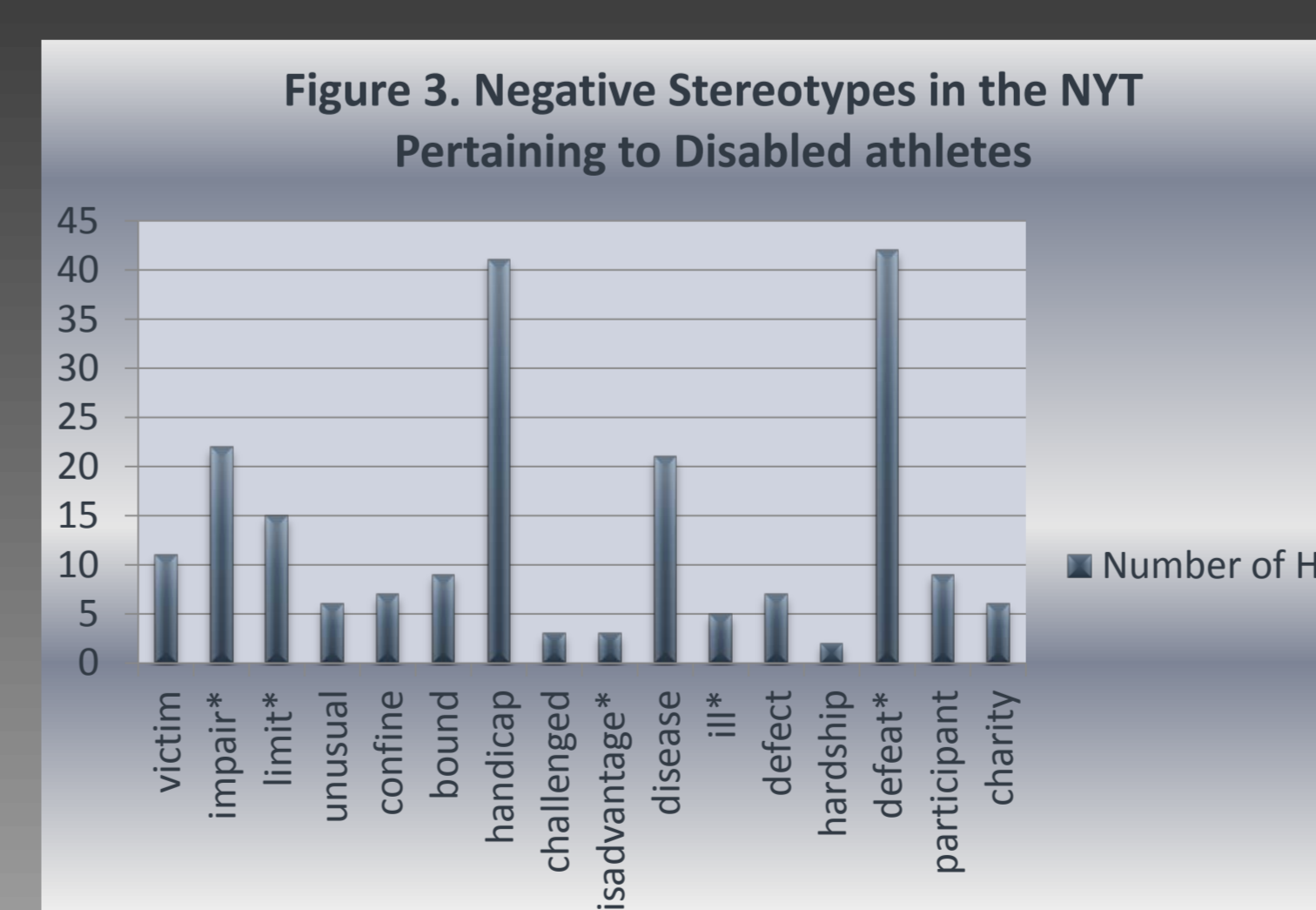
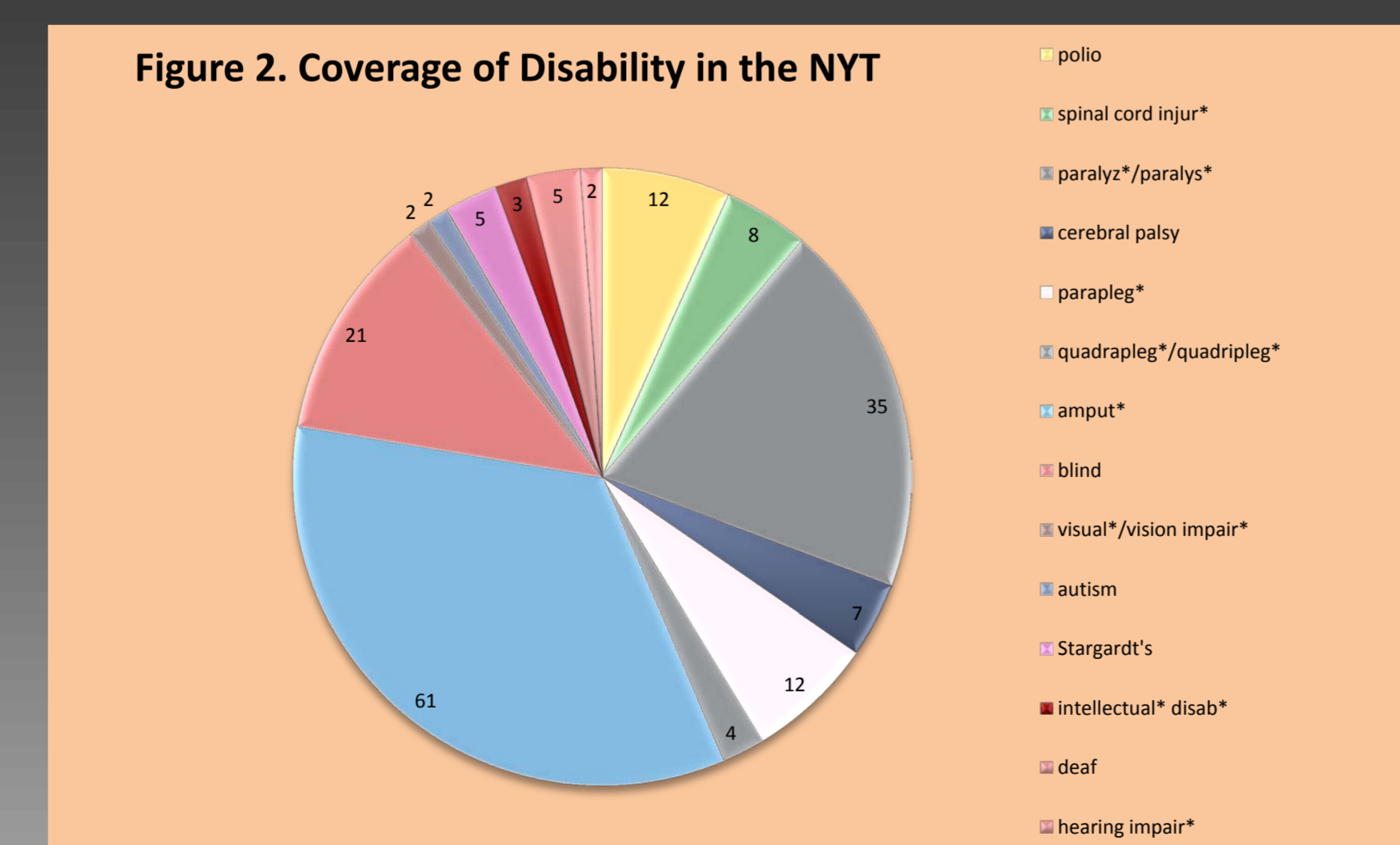


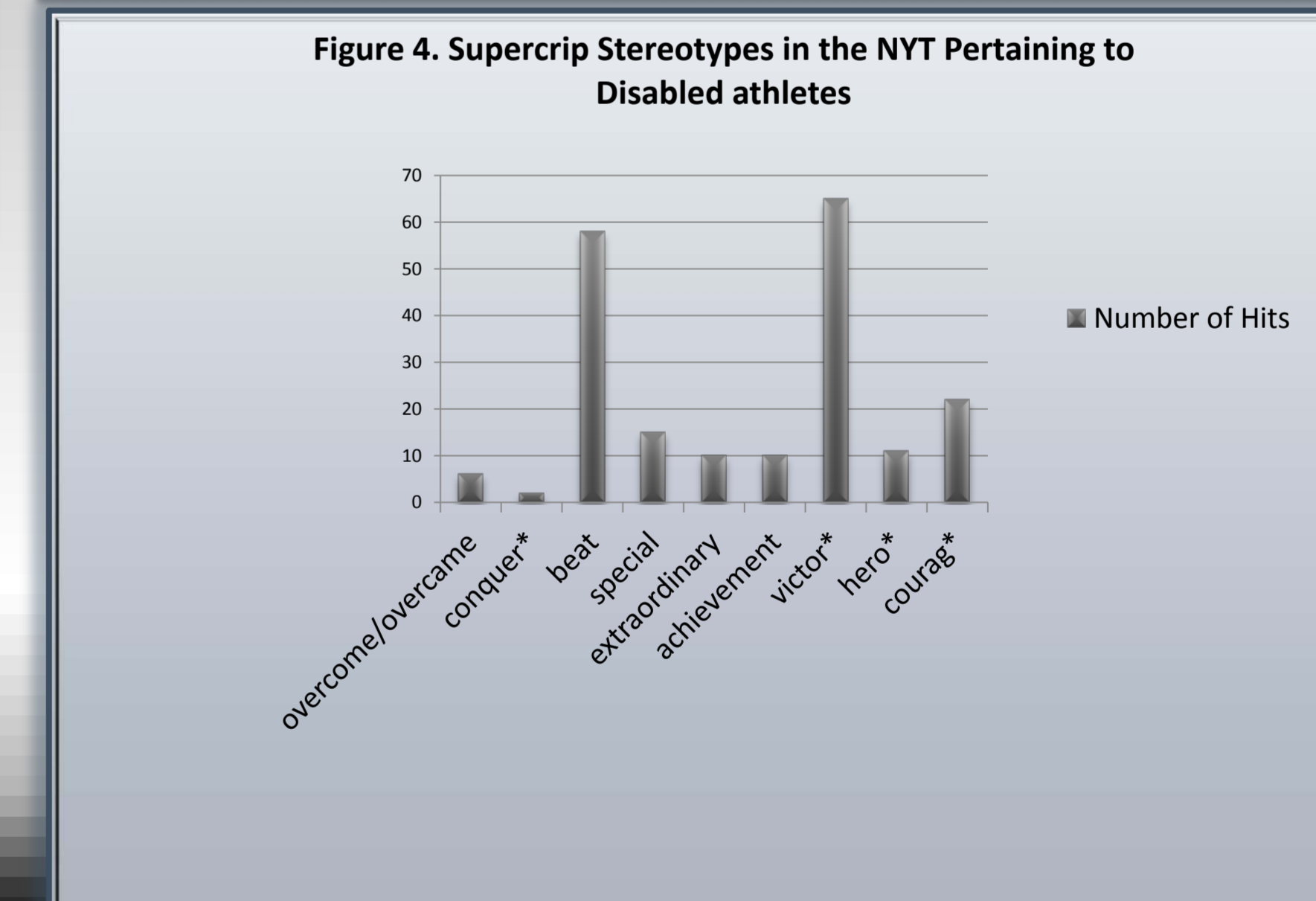
Table 2. Visibility of Paralympians in NYT 1955-201

Paralympian	Number of articles
Oscar Pistorius	22
Natalie du Toit	9
Jessica Long	7
Marion Shirley	6
Marla Runyan	6
Dennis Oehler	5
Neroli Fairhall	3
Alonzo Wilkins	3
Brian McKeever	2
Nick Scandone	2
Marla Runyan	2
Aimee Mullins	2
Chris Waddell	2
Todd Schaffhauser	2
Kortney Clemens	2



Results:

- NYT used extensively stereotypes (Fig 3 and 4) to typecast athletes with disabilities as:
 - pitiable or charitable
 - vulnerable
 - invoking curiosity or violence
 - superscript
 - laughable
 - his/her own enemy
 - unable to participate in activities of daily living
 - demonization of liberation tools
- Paralympics were underrepresented in comparison to the Olympics (Table 1 & Fig. 1).
- Very few Paralympians were covered by name (Table 2).
- Difference in coverage existed based on the label of 'impairment' (Fig 2)
- N = 42 articles highlighted that Paralympians wanted to compete in the Olympics as well as the Paralympics being a stepping stone to a higher level Olympiad event.



Conclusion

Given the results, the authors conclude higher visibility of Paralympics and less stereotypical portrayal of Paralympic athletes is desired and needed to put forth a vision for recreational and high performance sport and sport education that increases the numbers and quality of participation in performance and recreation sport and sport education for disabled people.

References

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Experimental Approach:

A frequency and content analysis was conducted of the NYT to investigate historical and contemporary media constructions and discourses surrounding the Paralympics. The NYT were searched for articles covering the Paralympics from the ProQuest database (University of Calgary provided) for articles from 1851-2006 and the latest East Coast Edition (1980-2011). 217 documents were obtained. Canadian Newsstand was also researched to provide insight into Canadian coverage of the Paralympics.

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