

Institution: Bournemouth University		
Unit of Assessment: 34		
Title of case study: Shaping para-sport policy, promotion and broadcast coverage in the UK		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2017 – 2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Dr Daniel Jackson	Associate Professor	September 2006 – current
Dr Emma Pullen	Post-Doctoral Researcher	June 2017 – March 2019
Professor Michael Silk	Deputy Dean Research and Professional Practice	January 2015 – current
Dr Richard Scullion	Executive Dean Media and Communication	December 1997 – May 2019
Dr Carrie Hodges	Principal Academic In Public Relations	June 2007 – June 2019
Dr Rafaella Nicholson	Senior Lecturer In Sport And Sustainability	April 2018 – current
Professor Kerstin Stutterheim	Professor of Media & Cultural Studies	September 2015 – March 2020
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2019 – 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>Findings from the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) funded project 'Re-presenting para-sport bodies: Disability and the cultural legacy of the Paralympics' have been utilised by Channel 4, Paralympics GB, and UK Sport to shape future broadcasting, policy and promotion of para-sport. Specifically, as a result of the research, these organisations have given greater emphasis to representing a wider spectrum of disabilities and types of para-sport in their <i>marketing, promotion</i> and <i>media coverage</i> for Tokyo 2020 and beyond. Furthermore, the research has significantly influenced the <i>strategic planning</i> of these organisations, evidenced through new Key Performance Indicators at Paralympics GB and athlete support structures at UK Sport.</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>With the rapid commercialisation of the Paralympics and the entry of Channel 4 as broadcast rights holder in the UK, the Paralympic Games—elevated as a sporting mega event—has become an increasingly important site of disability representation. The Bournemouth University (BU) research team undertook the largest ever academic project to examine the implications of these changes and the increasing visibility of (selected types of) disability in the media. The project aimed to capture the <i>intentions and practices</i> of Channel 4's broadcasting of the Rio 2016 Paralympics; the influence of this on the <i>content of Paralympic coverage</i> and mediated forms of disability representation, and the <i>wider impact on public attitudes</i> toward disability. Key research questions included:</p>		

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

Four main datasets were developed using the following methods: (i) 23 production interviews with senior production and executive staff at Channel 4; (ii) qualitative and quantitative content analysis of all 90 hours of Channel's 4 live Paralympic coverage of Rio 2016; (iii) 18 audience focus groups (with 216 adults); (iv) a nationally representative attitudes survey (with 2,011 adults) conducted in collaboration with UK Sport.

The evidence documented convincing evidence of progressive social change related to Channel 4's broadcasting, while highlighting tensions and contradictions within the coverage which were reflected in audience interpretations, particularly amongst disabled audiences. Specifically:

- The study of the practices of senior staff at Channel 4 revealed that their promotional campaigns and para-athlete backstories not only rendered disability (hyper) visible, but they were narrated with the intention of popularising and making disability 'sexy'. Questions thus remain over which types of disability are subject to media acclaim, for example, the backstories of athletes with severe impairments are deemed unsexy, less marketable and less media-friendly [R1, R2, R3].
- The focus of the coverage was on the Paralympic events / athletes deemed to be most 'accessible' to audiences. Events where disabled bodies most approximate ableist sporting norms through mobility enhancing technology were 'hyper-visible' in coverage [R2]. For example, 50% of live broadcast coverage was given to swimming and track and field events, while 60% of coverage was given to wheelchair classified athletes; by contrast, some sports and disability classifications gained almost no coverage [R2, R4].
- Some narratives evident in Channel 4's coverage (e.g. rehabilitation narratives) subtly reinforce ableist assumptions, which were also reflected in audience discourses [R4, R5].
- Our survey data helps understand *who* the Paralympic audience is. Findings suggest they are more likely to be younger, female and non-disabled, and therefore different to typical sporting audiences [R3].
- Our survey and focus group data found that disabled audiences are often critical of Paralympic broadcasting, stating that coverage often makes a distinction between disabilities deemed superhuman and those deemed ordinary [R4, R5, R6].

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

R1 to R5 are published in journals that are rigorously peer-reviewed and with low acceptance rates. While a self-published project report, R3 presents the same peer-reviewed datasets as these outputs and has been scrutinised by researchers at UK Sport prior to publication.

R1. Pullen, E., Jackson, D., Silk, M. and Scullion, R. 2018. Re-presenting the Paralympics: (contested) philosophies, production practices and the hypervisibility of disability. *Media, Culture and Society*, 41:4, 465-481. DOI: [10.1177/0163443718799399](https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443718799399)

R2. Pullen, E. and Silk, M. 2019. Gender, technology and the ablenational Paralympic body politic. *Cultural Studies*, 34:3, 466-488. DOI: [10.1080/09502386.2019.1621917](https://doi.org/10.1080/09502386.2019.1621917)

R3. Silk, M., Jackson, D., Pullen, E., Rich, E., Misener, L., Howe, D., Scullion, R., Hodges, C., Nicholson, R., Silva, C., Stutterheim, K. and Farmer, S., 2019. *Re-presenting para-sport bodies: Disability and the cultural legacy of the Paralympic Games*. [online] Bournemouth: Bournemouth

University. Available at: <http://pasccal.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/BU-3-Paralympic-Report-6.4.pdf> [Accessed 18 January 2021].

R4. Pullen, E., Jackson, D. and Silk, M. 2019. (Re-)presenting the Paralympics: Affective Nationalism and the “Able-Disabled”. *Communication and Sport*, 8(6):715-737. DOI: [10.1177/2167479519837549](https://doi.org/10.1177/2167479519837549)

R5. Pullen, E., Silk, M., Jackson, D., Silva, C. and Howe, D. 2020. Extraordinary Normalcy, Ableist Rehabilitation, and Sporting Ablenationalism: The Cultural (Re)Production of Paralympic Disability Narratives. *Sociology of Sport Journal*. DOI: [10.1123/ssj.2020-0093](https://doi.org/10.1123/ssj.2020-0093)

R6. Pullen, E., Jackson, D. and Silk, M. 2020. Watching Disability: UK audience perceptions of the Paralympics, equality, and social change. *European Journal of Communication*, 35(5):469-483. DOI: [10.1177/0267323120909290](https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323120909290)

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

The research findings outlined above have influenced the ways in which Paralympic sport is presented, in particular encouraging more representative coverage of disabled people in the build-up to and during the Tokyo 2020 Games, which are now due to take place in 2021.

The findings of this project were disseminated through a) a project report for non-academic stakeholders [R5], b) meetings with Channel 4, Para GB and UK Sport to discuss emergent findings, and c) an exhibition featuring artistic interpretations of the research data held in London in July 2019 [E1, E2]. The exhibition was attended by representatives from: Paralympics GB, UK Sport, Sport England and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, as well as executives from Channel 4.

Shaping the marketing and broadcast coverage of the UK's Paralympic broadcaster

Channel 4, who will broadcast the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games in 2021, have made it clear that BU research will “underpin... future coverage of the Paralympics” [E3] and that the coverage will “embrace a wider spectrum of disabilities within para-sport coverage”, implementing our recommendations [R1, R2].

A film from the opening night of the exhibition [E2] was used by Channel 4 “as a provocation at the first meeting of the creative team”, resulting in “a key change of emphasis in the marketing for Tokyo 2020 - as a result of the research - [which] was a shift in how we will focus on elements of the athletes lives, as sports people and humans” [E3]. This move away from their portrayal of Paralympians as ‘superhuman’, draws directly on BU’s research which showed that this labelling was particularly problematic amongst disabled audiences [R4]. Based on the team’s recommendations [R5], Channel 4 have “engaged in dialogue with disability advocates, policy makers and disability rights groups with regard to how disabled people would like to be represented”, in order to shape coverage of Tokyo 2020 [E3].

Shaping Paralympics GB policy, practice and marketing

Paralympics GB, the governing body for the Great Britain and Northern Ireland team at the Paralympics, state that the “insights provided from the data ... have framed the decisions we have made for Tokyo in 2021 and beyond” [E4]. In particular, the research has:

- “Informed the development of our new corporate strategy to focus more on athlete voice, which we identified as enabling the organisation to enhance its authenticity and credibility and allow Paralympics GB athletes to talk about wider social issues.” [E4]
- “Supported our desire to incorporate a wider range of disabilities (beyond those that are most visible) in this marketing campaign and utilise the athlete’s voice to drive social change.” [E4]

- Encouraged Paralympics GB to showcase “a wider range of sports, impairments and diversity – particularly with regards to BAME athletes” during Tokyo 2020 coverage [E4].
- Directly informed Paralympics GB’s marketing strategy for the 2021 Paralympics, [E4], drawing on project data which highlights the young and female audience for the Games [R5].
- Encouraged Paralympics GB to focus their Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for Tokyo 2020 around “increased public awareness of Paralympics GB athletes” and an improvement in “positive attitudes to disabled people” [E4].

Influencing sport policy and communication strategy of UK Sport

In February 2019 BU collaborated with UK Sport to develop the UK Sport Public Attitudes Survey, focusing on public attitudes towards para-sport, the Paralympics, and media coverage of such events. The research team’s analysis of the initial results has helped shape UK Sport’s approach to para-sport events, enabling them to “explore territory that we had never specifically entered into before and enhanced our knowledge accordingly” [E5].

Silk, Jackson and Pullen later presented their broader research findings to a UK Sport all-staff session in February 2020, which:

- “Informed the ways [UK Sport] communicate regarding issues of para-sport ... In particular, it is supporting our attempts to encourage the media to cover a broader spectrum of disabilities and parasport events.” [E5] This draws on our research highlighting a need for a broader representation of disabilities / events, as some disabled audiences feel current coverage does not represent them effectively [R1, R2, R4].
- “Helped to shape our communications strategy for the Tokyo Paralympic Games, ... particularly in the audience demographics that we will seek to engage.” [E5] Specifically, UK Sport will now target a younger, female audience; drawing on BU’s finding that para-sport is more popular amongst these groups [R5].
- Supported UK Sport to “make a stronger case for increased funding from government” for para-sports [E5], drawing on the team’s evidence for both the popularity and progressive impact of watching para-sport [R5].
- Made “an invaluable contribution to a proposed new induction programme for those coming into Paralympic sport and to the enhanced support being developed for disabled athletes transitioning out of sport.” [E5]
- Influenced diversity and inclusion (D&I) policy, particularly from our finding that there was a lack of racial and ethnic diversity across featured para-athletes during the Rio 2016 coverage [R5]. “The research has landed at a particularly opportune moment in UK Sport’s development in that, building on the momentum of the Black Lives Matter movement, we have recently restated our commitment to the whole area of diversity and inclusion – i.e. to tackling racism in British sport; to implementing a far more ambitious internal D&I plan; and to driving forward D&I within our new strategy.” [E5]

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

E1. O’Connell, K., Silk, M., Jackson, D., Rich, E. and Pullen, E. (2019). *Bodyparts*. [Exhibition]. ArtRabbit. Available at: <https://www.artrabbit.com/events/bodyparts> (Accessed 16 December 2020).

Impact case study (REF3)

E2. Rich, E., Silk, M., Jackson, D., and Pullen, E. (2019). *Bodyparts — Bringing Paralympic representation to life through art*. [online] Stories.bournemouth.ac.uk. Available at: <https://stories.bournemouth.ac.uk/bodyparts-exhibition/index.html> (Accessed 16 December 2020).

E3. Channel 4. (2020). Testimonial email, 28 October.

E4. British Paralympic Association. (2020). Testimonial letter, 28 September.

E5. UK Sport. (2020). Testimonial letter, 6 October.