

## 2013 North American Society for Sport Management Conference (NASSM 2013)

### **Influencing Media Representation of Disability: An Investigation of the Canadian Paralympic Committee's Use of Media Training for the 2012 London Paralympic Games**

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**Communication**

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**20-minute oral presentation**

**(including questions)**

**Abstract 2013-120**

**10:45 AM**

**(Room 404)**

In our modern and highly mediated society, Kellner (1995) argues that media culture plays a critical role in socialization. He further suggests that "media culture continues to be a central organizing force in the economy, politics, culture, and everyday life" (Kellner, 2003, p.vii). At the same time, society's understanding of disability is constantly developing (Hurst, 2003; Bickenbach et al., 1999). Contemporary theories and models of disablement point towards the importance of interaction between physical impairments and contextual factors in constructing disability (WHO, 2001). However, the extent to which various theories have been successfully disseminated and publicly adopted is undetermined. Media framing research has the power to draw insight into current mainstream attitudinal orientations that are reflected in the mass media (Entman, 1993). Furthermore, mass media has the potential to play a critical role in changing public understanding of disability. As a result, organizations may choose to invest in media training interventions with the end goal of increasing control over media messaging.

The purpose of this study was to examine the Canadian Paralympic Committee's use of media training for athletes and staff prior to the 2012 Games and its potential impacts on media representations of disability. The international importance of the Paralympic Games provides incentive for periodic media coverage of parasport, an area of sport generally otherwise absent from mainstream news. The London 2012 Paralympic Games marked the first occasion that the Canadian Paralympic Committee provided every delegate with pre-Games media training. From a managerial perspective, this decision and its outcomes merit investigation.

The study consisted of two components. To begin, a brief media frames analysis was conducted to provide context of current representations using critical disability theory. Data were collected from Canada's two national newspapers, The National Post and The Globe and Mail, two weeks prior to the London 2012 Paralympic Games through two weeks post-Games (August 15, 2012 – September 23, 2012). Qualitative analysis was performed to discover emergent frames in the text and paratextual elements (i.e., accompanying images, placement, and length). Text was coded using constant comparison to two levels of abstraction grouping ideas into themes (Glaser, 1965).

In the second phase of the study, findings from the media frames analysis along with previous research will be used to guide the line of questioning in a set of interviews designed to investigate the production level of the mass communication circuit (Kitzinger, 2007). Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with mission staff and athlete representatives of the Canadian Paralympic Team. Fifteen participants (10 athletes, 5 mission staff) will be selected from the London 2012 Canadian delegation using mixed purposive sampling strategies (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Athletes will be chosen based on maximum variation sampling techniques (Creswell, 2002) to represent both men and women participating in a variety of sports. Mission staff will be selected using expert sampling (Given, 2008) in order to target specific staff roles with media exposure (e.g., Press Chief, Media Attaché). Interviews will focus on pre-Games media training, experiences with media while at the Games, and personal perceptions of fairness of representation in the Canadian print media. Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2008) will guide the exploration of how media training influenced athlete self-representation in the media. This theoretical context allows for discussion of the type of media training conducted and the ways in which it aimed to enhance athlete and staff motivation to position oneself in a particular way.

This research offers insight into the outcomes of the Canadian Paralympic Committee's first attempt at a media training intervention for all athletes and staff. As "media culture continues to arbitrate social and political issues, deciding what is real, important, and vital" (Kellner, 2003, p.viii), media training is a critical step toward improving representations of disability in the media by empowering athletes and staff to tell the stories they want to hear.

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