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**Disability in the News: Assessing the
Frames used by the UK Press in their
Coverage of Disability Issues**

**Presented in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of MRes Political
Communication**

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Disability in the News

Assessing the Frames used by the UK Press in their Coverage of Disability Issues

Abstract

Framing theory has become a vast area of research in political communication. Framing is used by journalists as a way of shaping and organising content. Subsequently, they have the ability to influence how audiences view the realities around them, by contributing to how frames come to be understood. This study attempts to apply framing theory and disability theory to UK press coverage of disability issues. To achieve this, it analyses two leading UK broadsheets, *The Guardian* and *The Daily Telegraph*, for the identification of frames, the language used, the valence of frames, and the sources cited. It was found that the UK press continue to embody ‘traditional’ media models when portraying issues of disability. This study contributes to understandings of the extent to which news media are moving forward with ‘progressive’ representations of disability, yet highlights how far they still have to go to understand the ‘realities’ of disability, and the need for wider attitudinal and societal change.

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Introduction

It has been argued that there is a lack of academic focus on the issue of disability as portrayed in the media, with academics focusing instead on disability models and theory (Goggin, 2009; Haller et al, 2012). Using a media content analysis of the frames used in British newspaper coverage of disability, this study seeks to examine whether there has been a recent change in the nature of disability coverage. The period between March and October 2012 will be studied. This is due to the increased coverage of disability topics in this time frame, such as the introduction of disability welfare cuts and the London Paralympics, allowing for an exploration of disability issues, broadly defined. The overall aims of this study are to;

- Explore recent newspaper coverage of disability, in order to identify the frames being used to represent issues of disability, and;
- Assess the presence and/or absence of progressive perspectives on disability in newspaper coverage of disability.

Studying the content of the news media allows us to gain an insight into how newspapers represent people with disabilities. Traditionally, news coverage has framed disability as personal ‘tragedies’ (Shakespeare et al, 1996). The biological features of a person with disabilities are emphasised, reflecting the entrenchment of ‘ableism’ in many societies (Haller et al, 2012). In doing so, the media presents disabled people as being “imperfect, incomplete and inadequate”, which implies that they are inferior to the able-bodied (Hargreaves, 2000: 185). Thus, ‘disability’ becomes a “constructed difference” (Williams and Mavin, 2012: 159). In UK welfare debates, disabled people have been highlighted as a burden on the state, especially when linked to sickness-related benefits (Golding, 1999). Consequently, it is not uncommon to see negative portrayals in the UK press depicting people with disabilities as ‘scroungers’, ‘cheats’, ‘workshy’, and so on; further reflecting shared social fears and misguided conceptions of disability (Briant et al, 2011; Garthwaite, 2011).

Through the study of news media content we are able to gain some insight into the perceived characteristics of particular groups in society and how these perceptions change over time. Some scholars have argued that the mass media’s coverage of social groups may in fact have more influence than personal experiences when forming opinions of a group in

society (Philo and Secker, 1999). Further, due to persisting barriers within society for people with disabilities, there can be a lack of “inter-personal interactions” between disabled and non-disabled people, implying that much of the non-disabled public receives information about this societal group as it is presented to them by news media, as opposed to ‘real-life’ accounts from people living with disabilities (Haller et al, 2012: 46). For example, Philo and Secker (1999) argue that the media have a tendency to depict those with mental health disabilities as being a danger to society. However, they show through statistical evidence that the majority of people with mental health issues are not in any way violent, which is further backed up by personal accounts of people who know others with mental health issues. From the news media, audiences receive constructed ‘facts’ of ‘reality’. Journalists reporting the ‘reality’ around them have the ability, albeit somewhat subconsciously, to frame the content of news, thus exchanging underlying meanings and messages about societal groups to their audiences (Graber, 1989). Gitlin (1980: 9) argues that “the mass media are, to say the least, a significant social force in the forming and delimiting of public assumptions, attitudes, and moods – of ideology, in short”. Therefore, by studying news media content we are able to gain an understanding of the ‘realities’ that audiences are consuming in relation to issues of disability.

Furthermore, if mass media has the ability to help to shape the way in which the public perceives the ‘realities’ of disability, then it would make sense to assume that they have the means to create positive portrayals of disability through their content. It can be argued that this has been attempted through news coverage of sport. Over the years, there has been an increase in the number of educational news stories about the lives of athletes with disabilities. These stories have gone some way in emphasizing their ‘fight’ in overcoming adversity and their achievements in accessing a group perceived to be elite (Purdue and Howe, 2012). However, much of the coverage of disability and sport continues to highlight the biological differences between Olympic and Paralympic athletes through the ‘supercrip’ frame, thus focusing on ‘ableist’ perspectives of disability (Ellis, 2009).

The ‘supercrip’ frame, the ‘medical’ frame and the ‘charity’ frame, which focus on the ‘tragedies’ of individuals, are traditionally used in news media accounts of disability (Clogston, 1990). Explanations of this could potentially be found in the sources used by journalists. Many scholars argue that journalistic norms favour “primary definers” when gathering their information, that is, authoritative sources such as those from government and politics, law and business (Hall et al, 1978: 8). For example, recent discussions on welfare

reform have been based predominantly on medical assumptions of what a disabled body can and cannot do; which has wider implications for how news media cover the issue, and therefore the issue of disability more generally (Garthwaite, 2011). Thus, traditional frames of disability have the potential to ‘cascade’ down from the authoritative levels to the public level through the mass media (Entman, 2003), as journalists tend to rely on familiar understandings of disability, rather than seeking out ‘new’, or what Clogston (1990) terms, ‘progressive’ frames of disability.

According to those from within the field of disability studies, this is problematic as traditional perspectives of disability fail to fully portray life for those with a disability. Disability studies have moved away from these perspectives of disability, instead focusing on the “underlying attitudes, values and subconscious prejudices and fears” of disability in society (Shildrick, 2012: 35). This paper seeks to analyse whether or not these progressive perspectives of disability have infiltrated the content of news media. The period of chosen study witnessed disability rights activists campaigning against Government welfare reforms and cuts, whilst at the same time people were celebrating the glory and triumph of the London Olympics and Paralympics. As mentioned previously, the media have the potential to redefine images of disability. Studying news media content will allow us to gauge which frames of disability are being used within UK newspaper coverage, and thus, whether or not progressive perspectives on disability, which are more rights based and less focused on an individual’s impairment, have made their way into UK newspaper coverage.

In order to accurately develop these ideas and draw firm conclusions, the literature which exists on the topics discussed must firstly be reviewed. This study will then explain the methods used to carry out the data analysis before proceeding to analyse the findings concerning the identification of frames, the language used, the valence of frames, and the sources cited. Lastly, it will discuss the results of the study, state the limitations, and suggest ideas for future research.

Literature Review

Firstly, we need to look at how issues of disability are constructed within the disability studies literature. Three typologies of disability emerge from this: ‘The Medical Model’, ‘The Social Model’, and ‘Critical Disability Studies’. These different ways of looking at issues of disability give us some insight, from a theoretical standpoint, into the identities associated with disability and how these identities have changed over time. It is then necessary to analyse the literature surrounding framing theory. This will give us an understanding of the theory behind frame analysis and the concepts and measurements that will help us to identify disability frames within media texts.

As a result from studying the literature surrounding disability studies and framing theory, we will have the information allowing us to analyse current studies on disability and the media. Looking at these studies will help us to identify frames that have previously been used by UK newspapers to represent issues of disability. Subsequently, we will be able to apply this knowledge when exploring recent newspaper coverage of disability in order to identify the frames being used to represent issues of disability.

Typologies of Disability

Prior to the 1970’s, disability was discussed using the medical model of disability. This model conceptualises an ‘impaired’ body as being an ‘abnormal’ form. Talcott Parsons (1951) conceived that to be ‘sick’, and by implication have an impairment, was to evade societal responsibility. Therefore, the medical model was concerned with trying to ‘cure’ people of their impairments. Since the medical model’s development, disability scholars have attempted to explain not only the medical, but also the social dimensions of living with a disability. Bury (2000) acknowledges that disability is the result of the effects of impairment; however, he further contends that disability also stems from the interactions with disabilities and the wider ‘normal’ community. People with disabilities are seen as ‘different’, painted as being a threat to “able-bodied values” (Barnes and Mercer, 2010: 28). From this there is the assumption, “in health terms, that disability is a pathology and, in welfare terms, that disability is a social problem” (Oliver, 1990: 30).

From the 1970's, advocates of the civil rights based 'social model of disability' sought to revolutionise "rather than reform" the dependency of disability on the medical and charity sectors; areas perceived to have little impact on the political (Thomas, 2004: 571). They criticise the strict focus of the medical model on the pathological aspects associated with the lives of people with disabilities. Thus, the social model attempts to redefine disability from a purely social oppression stance, adding a politicised dimension to its meaning (Finkelstein, 1980). Within this, the social model encompasses three crucial elements: disabled people are oppressed by society; disability and impairment exist as distinct phenomena; and disability is the result of a person's social oppression, and not from their impairment (Watson, 2004).

However, in capturing disability from a social oppression stance, the social model neglects the role played by impairment in the lives of people with disabilities. Thomas (2004) stresses that every person with a disability is different and no amount of social change will completely remove the problems and psychological effects associated with a person's impairment. Furthermore, issues of identity are important when considering the representations of people with disabilities. The social model contends that disability can be captured within the 'collective'; a homogenous, unified group. However, this is not the case in reality; all disabled people are different with unique needs and requirements. Ultimately, social model literature, in neglecting the effects of impairment and constructing disability as a homogenous group, ignores the realities of living and identifying with disability (Shakespeare and Watson, 2001).

Scholars within the newly emerging Critical Disability Studies (CDS) attempt to build upon and overcome the shortcomings of the social model of disability (Shildrick, 2012). Meekosha and Shuttleworth (2009) advise that understandings of disability should be challenged not only at social, economic and political levels; but also on such levels as the cultural, discursive and psychological - areas where the media play an important societal role. This is necessary to overcome passive notions often attributed to representations of disability. CDS denounces the way in which policy makers still conceptualise issues of disability through a 'diagnostic' lens, thus stressing that policy makers need to include a thorough "critique of disabling structures into their approaches" (Meekosha and Shuttleworth, 2009: 51).

A key theme that emerges from the disability studies literature is the importance of constructing a positive identity. It would appear that people with disabilities experience two sides of the identity coin. One side is the imposition of negative assumptions, attitudes and stereotypes coming from outside perspectives; while the other relates to the formation of identity through their own social, economic, political, psychological and cultural experiences of living with a disability. It would seem that only by tackling the stigmatising elements contained in all of these dimensions of society, as well as how they are portrayed by governments and in the news media, can we move forward with positive representations of disability. Thus, this paper takes into consideration two key questions when studying change in relation to the way in which people with disabilities are represented in newspapers: to what extent do negative, medicalised, and homogenous representations of disability identity still exist; and is there evidence to suggest that more progressive identities of disability are emerging, which are positive, fluid, and reflexive?

Framing Theory

Unfortunately, frame analysis is a “scattered” theoretical paradigm with no clear methodological approach (Entman, 1993: 51). Entman (1993: 51) argues that the difficult process of discerning what frames are, the effects that frames have, and how they are identified within news texts, hinders the “disciplinary status” of framing analysis.

Notwithstanding the confusion surrounding this debate, what pieces all the different studies in framing analysis together is a connection to the work of Ernest Goffman (1974). While not applying frame analysis to the media specifically, his concept of a ‘frame’ set the wheels in motion for future framing studies looking at the media. Goffman (1974: 10-11) defines frames as “principles of organisation which govern events [...] and our subjective involvement in them”. From this, frames contain specific representations and meanings of reality which shape our perceptions of the social world. Generally, Goffman (1974) asserts that frames are not consciously constructed; rather they are unconsciously accepted by actors when communicating with one another.

Todd Gitlin (1980: 6) expands suitably on Goffman’s definition, stating that “frames are principles of selection, emphasis and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens, and what matters”. However, Gitlin’s conceptualisation of frames

still raises issues in terms of how frames are identified and measured. Following his definition, frames merely imply certain opinions and theories without stating them explicitly. Therefore, it becomes difficult to pin-point when frames occur (Maher, 2001). It is argued that this has led scholars, especially within media studies, to conclude that journalists deliberately construct and select certain parts of reality, whilst excluding other parts, in an attempt to organise how their audiences view the social world (Koenig, 2005; De Vreese, 2003).

Entman (1993) has made substantial contributions to this area of study and is commonly used throughout the literature as a starting point in frame analysis. He maintains that certain issues are purposely selected and made to appear prominent within news media, in a way which “*promotes[s] a particular problem definition, casual interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation*” for the issues selected (1993: 52: italics in original). Although this stance is widely agreed upon among scholars (D’Angelo, 2002; Tankard, 2001; Reese, 2001), it drifts away from Goffman’s (1974) original definition, as he contends that framing is involved in the organisation of all processes in the social world, not just those which are actively constructed (Koenig, 2005). Nevertheless, this still leaves ambiguity surrounding the concept of a frame and what a frame holds together. Indeed, Goffman (1974) refers to frames as ‘frameworks’; however, it may be better suited to think of a frame as a ‘conceptual scaffold’ which allows journalists’ perceptions of reality to be communicated to their audiences (Snow and Benford, 1988). Thus, whilst Entman’s (1993) definition remains useful in explaining what a frame ‘promotes’, in relation to issues of disability, it would seem reasonable to conclude that frames are both consciously and unconsciously adopted by journalists. It appears likely that a journalist’s preconceptions of what it is to be disabled, and the identities associated with disability, will be unconsciously influenced by the society they live in, but also, consciously used to communicate their perceptions and representations of the realities of disability to their audiences.

Nonetheless, there still remains confusion as to how frames are identified and measured within media texts (Scheufele, 1999). Framing analysis can be conducted using quantitative and/or qualitative content analysis, and most studies also tend to borrow techniques from linguistic studies; such as discourse analysis, semiotic analysis, and so on. Due to the nature of this process, framing analysis is a highly interpretative task. As a result, theorists invoke different theoretical concepts to suit their method and guide their

interpretations of which frames are present, further adding complexities to the ‘scattered’ paradigm of framing.

Recent framing studies have looked at the framing concept of a ‘generic’ frame, arguing that generic frames are drawn upon routinely by journalists to structure their news stories (Semetko and Valkenburg, 2000; De Vreese, 2003). Running parallel to generic frames are what Iyengar (1991) classifies as ‘episodic’ and ‘issue-orientated’ frames. These frame concepts look at *how* media coverage is framed. Episodic framing focuses on initial events and individuals involved with the issue, taking a snapshot rather than looking at the bigger picture. On the other hand, issue-orientated framing makes an attempt to explain the wider context surrounding the issue. Williams and Kaid (2006) further assert that frames can differ in their levels of ‘substance’; that is, frames can appear substantive or ambiguous. This means that frames are either full of information and context, or that they lack detail. Thus, substance deals with *what* is being framed. Furthermore, the ‘valence’ of frames can be measured. Koenig (2005) argues that valence framing is drawn upon rarely in media studies; instead, being used predominantly in management studies. Nevertheless, in terms of media studies, measuring the valence of a frame is a case of looking at the overall tone of a frame(s) in a news article and identifying whether or not it conveys the issue in a positive, negative or neutral light (De Vreese and Boomgaarden, 2003).

What these concepts highlight is that there are many operationalisations from which to draw upon within the framing literature. As this paper is attempting to identify change in relation to how issues of disability are portrayed in UK newspaper coverage, it reasons that valence framing should be utilised. Using the concept of valence we will be able to measure whether or not issues of disability and the identities associated with disability are portrayed positively, negatively, or whether the frames being used in each article are neutral in the sense that they display both negative and positive portrayals.

With this in mind, the literature stipulates that certain ‘framing devices’ need to be determined in order to assist in identifying frames within news texts. Gamson and Modigliani (1989: 2) highlight that journalists often use framing devices such as “metaphors, catchphrases, visual images, moral appeals, and other symbolic devices” to embody their text. Entman (1993: 52) elaborates on this, explaining that frames are “manifested by the presence or absence of [...] sources of information, and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing

clusters of facts or judgements”. Therefore, identifying the dominant disability frames used within news stories in newspapers can be done by systematically analysing the content.

Framing, Influence, and Journalistic Practice

The literature on framing theory suggests that journalists have the ability to influence how audiences view the realities around them, by contributing to how frames come to be understood. Yet, what factors further influence a journalist’s conscious and unconscious decision-making when choosing certain frames over others? Van Dijk (1983: 28) argues that “the construction of news is most of all a reconstruction of available discourses”. More often than not, journalists are put under time constraints and pressure to get the job done, which means they often have to rely on existing narratives and frames when producing content for news stories (Brindle, 1999). Thus, although frames may appear often within news stories, it does not necessarily mean they have been constructed via objective journalism. Gamson and Modigliani (1987) contend that the use of certain frames can be explained by the relationship between journalistic norms and practices and the influence of interest groups. Arguably, all groups involved in public policy use frames to gain power and influence over policy and debate. Journalists looking for stories that are newsworthy often resort to using frames that have been pre-packaged and diluted by public relations specialists, yet contain the emotion, disagreement and culpability that they need for their stories (Franklin and Parton, 1991). Brindle (1999) asserts that the rise of the PR industry has made it harder to argue against the frames proposed by government and large interest groups. To be able to properly scrutinise these frames would mean looking for more complex alternatives, which arguably, journalists simply do not have the time to do. Consequently, journalists tend to rely on these ‘primary definers’ as sources of information (Entman, 2003).

This has consequences for the field of disability studies and for disability rights organisations campaigning to spread their message of a need for broader societal change. Brindle (1999) argues that those in the social policy field, including disability organisations, do not sell their frames well enough through public relations tactics. Perhaps, this could be because they have little control over the coverage they receive, as it is harder for smaller interest groups to have any effect on policy debates when news organisations and journalists rely heavily on elite sources. At the same time, however, these interest groups rely on the media to communicate their perceptions and representations of reality to their audiences. In

other words, they need the media to spread awareness and legitimise their cause (Terkildsen et al, 1998).

As mentioned previously, it is often the case that journalists and news media are the main means through which audiences learn and understand about disability. Therefore, the frames that journalists use have the potential to impact on public understandings of the realities of disability. If journalists and news organisations depend on elite sources for information, who continue to use negative, medicalised and homogenous frames to represent issues of disability, it will make it difficult for disability rights organisations to infiltrate the media with more positive, fluid, and reflexive representations of disability. Thus, taking into consideration the two key questions identified above: if audiences are only presented with negative coverage of disability, and this is the only way that the audience receives information on issues of disability, then audiences will only know disability negatively. Golden (2003) argues that a lack of journalistic understanding of the use of stereotypes associated with disability, such as ‘scrounger’ or ‘superhuman’, contributes to the continued use of elite sources and the negative coverage associated with disability.

Current Studies of Media and Disability

It has been previously highlighted in this paper that the reporting of disability by news media often carries a negative tone. Several organisations in the UK and the rest of Europe, including SCOPE, the Greater London Action on Disability (GLAD) and the European Congress on Media and Disability, have produced guidelines for media organisations and journalists that outline ways in which disability can be framed more positively in their reporting. Cooke et al (2000) argue that certain words act to objectify people with disabilities. The use of the term ‘the disabled’, for example, depicts disabled people as a homogenous group who can be subjected to stereotyping. However, by using the term ‘disabled people’ journalists can portray people with disabilities “as active individuals with control over their own lives” (Cooke et al, 2000: 43). Through their coverage of issues surrounding disability, the media have the power to inform and perpetuate preconceptions regarding the different ways a person can be disabled in society. Thus, the media play an important role in the construction of “meanings about disability and the meanings associated with this identity” (Misener, 2012: 7).

The time period this study focuses on witnessed several disability-related events that were highlighted in the media; such as the introduction of disability welfare cuts and the London Paralympics. Previous studies on disability and the media have utilised different methods of research to look at these disability-related issues, with the majority of studies demonstrating the negative presuppositions associated with disability. Two separate studies looking specifically at issues of disability and welfare in the media were conducted by Garthwaite (2011) and Briant et al (2011). Garthwaite (2011) looked at the language used in UK newspaper headlines to describe and represent those claiming sickness-related welfare benefits. She found that negative language associated with people on benefits has been common throughout history, thus asserting that the use of words such as ‘workshy’, ‘scrounger’, and ‘cheat’ “is not a new phenomenon” (Garthwaite, 2011: 370). The use of these terms depicts people with disabilities as being: a burden on the state, a group of people who need to be punished for being fraudsters, and underserving of help from the state (Golding, 1999).

Similarly, Briant et al (2011) conducted a study looking at Government welfare cuts using content analysis and audience reception analysis, which came to the same conclusions as Garthwaite’s study. They both found that newspapers used pejorative language to attack those claiming sickness-related benefits. What these studies reinforce is the way in which disabled people are ‘othered’ in society. People with disabilities are often grouped together with ‘scroungers’ despite the fact that many do not have the physical or mental capacity to work. Furthermore, as Briant et al (2011) reveal, themes of ‘fraud’ do not match up with the realities of the very small number of people who are actually fraudulent in their claims. Ultimately, both studies demonstrate how newspapers often frame debates about disability and welfare around medical model distinctions; that is, disability as a social problem. It would appear that the problem is framed around the Government’s goal of getting people into employment. By doing so, the media focus not on each individual’s health, but rather the wider issue of benefit fraud (Welshman, 2006).

Another area discussed within the literature is that surrounding issues of disability and sport in the media. Brittain (2004) carried out a study analysing feedback from twelve Paralympians and their experiences of the Sydney 2000 games. He makes it clear that he is writing from a social model stance as opposed to a medical model approach. Brittain’s research highlights that Paralympic athletes are looked at differently to other athletes, as journalists focus on their impairments. Sport is arguably about the biological functioning of

the human body, thus, those with disabilities are sometimes looked upon as not being “fit for sport” (Brittain, 2004: 438). Interestingly, the study found that this was reinforced from within different disability groups, with those closer to having ‘normal’ bodies discriminating against those with more profound impairments. Although Brittain’s study does not utilise framing analysis as a method of research, it emphasises that whilst Paralympic coverage may appear positive, in that it shows the ways in which athletes have overcome their impairments, it still focuses on what a disabled body can and cannot do. Consequently, this reinforces negative medical model attitudes.

Moreover, issues of empowerment are raised in relation to disability and sport in the media. Studies by Braye et al (2012) and Purdue and Howe (2012) focus on this side of the media coverage. As above, neither study utilises framing analysis as a method of research; nevertheless, they offer some insights into how people with disabilities are portrayed in the media. Purdue and Howe (2012) conducted interviews with some key figures in the Paralympic movement, and found that Paralympic athletes are shut off from other people with disabilities, in the sense that only those participating in the Paralympic games “can feel empowered by it” (Purdue and Howe, 2012: 910). It is argued that whilst media coverage highlights that some people with disabilities can take part in sport, it focuses on this through a “narrow lens of disability” (Purdue and Howe, 2012: 911). As a result, it is not representative of all types of impairments. This raises questions as to whether Paralympic coverage allows disability rights campaigners to spread their message of a need for broader societal change. Paralympic coverage appears to undermine the social model of disability, in that, it does not represent all impairments collectively.

Braye et al’s study compliments Purdue and Howe’s study in this respect. Braye et al conduct a thematic analysis on the views of disabled activists. They contend that the focus on the ‘heroic’ side of disability is counter-productive. Underlying the heroism is the fact that the Paralympics and the athletes involved still rely on the charitable acts of non-disabled people, who are there to empower people with disabilities (Braye et al, 2012; Peers, 2009). Subsequently, Paralympic athletes are disengaged from the ‘politics of disablement’, as they are portrayed as an elite disability group. Like Purdue and Howe’s study, Braye et al show that disabled people can often be misrepresented in the media’s coverage of sport, which further misrepresents the realities of living with a disability.

Of the literature on disability and sport in the media specifically, there is only one study which has used framing analysis as a research method. Misener (2012) looks at the framing of the Paralympic Legacy discourse in the newspaper coverage of the 2010 Winter Paralympic Games in Vancouver. Her study involves a deductive content analysis using the work of Van Gorp (2007) followed by an inductive manual holistic frame analysis. Misener approaches this issue from a CDS standpoint; the only study thus far to do so. Consequently, she seeks to find out if there have been changes in attitudes towards “social constructions of disability and broader issues of accessibility” (Misener, 2012: 4). Misener contends that the journalist norms of the media have to be fully understood in order to change the negative attitudes associated with disability. She found four frames related to the Paralympic Legacy discourse: the ‘othering/supercrip frame’, the ‘opportunities frame’, ‘the political frame’, and the ‘neglected frame’. The ‘othering’ or ‘supercrip’ frame deals with the issues of empowerment discussed above; the ‘opportunities’ frame stresses the need to get disabled people into sport; the ‘political’ frame looks at the economic and tourist potential of the Paralympics; and the ‘neglected’ frame highlights the way in which the media have failed to make the most of the principles of accessibility and inclusion for people with disabilities. Misener argues that throughout all of these frames, people with disabilities are compared to their ‘able-bodied’ counterparts; thus reiterating the medicalised distinctions drawn upon by journalists. Ultimately, her findings suggest that journalists do not tend to discuss in depth the wider societal issues of disability, and therefore fail to use Paralympic coverage as an avenue for social change (Misener, 2012).

Another study which utilises framing analysis as a research method is conducted by Haller et al (2012). Although they also analyse the frames used during the 2010 Paralympic Games in Vancouver, their study is not restricted to issues of sport and disability. Using data collected by the Toronto-based Disability Rights Promotion International (DRPI), Haller et al explore change in the nature of disability coverage within Canadian newspapers between 2009 and 2010. Like Misener, they found four frames that were employed by journalists to frame issues of disability: the ‘medical frame’, the ‘heroic frame’, the ‘charity frame’, and the ‘rights frame’. They argue that the first three frames are ‘traditional’ frames used to frame issues of disability (Haller et al, 2012; Clogston, 1990; Haller, 2010). However, these all contain stigmatising elements with negative implications for how people with disabilities are portrayed in the media. Furthermore, these frames ignore the wider societal barriers that people with disabilities face in everyday life. Thus, they are frames which look at issues of

disability from a narrow, individualised, and medicalised perspective. Conversely, the 'rights frame' adds a theoretical and political dimension to discussions about disability.

From the results of their analysis, Haller et al argue that there has been a shift in how people with disabilities are being represented within Canadian newspaper coverage. They assert that journalists are beginning to frame issues of disability through a "disability rights lens" (2012: 44). As a result, their study implies that disability studies and disability rights advocates are starting to influence the ways in which journalists report on disability. This further suggests that more progressive perspectives of disability are making their way into Canadian newspaper coverage.

Although Haller et al's study demonstrates similarities with this research paper, there are differences between disability studies theory in the UK as compared to the U.S. and Canada. Canadian and U.S. disability studies have taken a different direction to British disability studies as the former is more rights based, whereas the latter attempts to influence policy in order to change welfare. It can be argued that the rights based philosophy and analysis will not necessarily translate from a culture of individualism and self reliance to one where disadvantaged groups look to the state for support and welfare to address economic and social inequalities (Barnes and Mercer, 2010). Thus, Haller et al's analysis and results will not equate to, nor explain, the British context.

What is evident is that whilst there are several studies looking at how disability is portrayed in the media, there are few studies using framing analysis to explore this issue and none that have considered valence framing. Moreover, with the exception of Misener, none of the studies reviewed approach the subject from a CDS perspective. The literature would also suggest that the frames presently being used in news stories are less progressive than the theory being discussed by disability studies scholars. As a result, the frames being used to represent people with disabilities are negative, medicalised and homogenous with little evidence to suggest that more positive, fluid, and reflexive representations of disability identity are emerging. However, as there is a lack of empirical evidence, this study will explore these suggestions further in an attempt to prove or disprove the current literature. It will also add something new to the analysis with the employment of valence framing.

From the literature, four frames have been developed with which to analyse news articles. These are the 'medical', 'supercrip', 'charity' and 'political' frames. They have been derived from elements found in studies by both Misener and Haller et al. The definitions,

which will be discussed in the methodology, were further pieced together using Entman's definition of news frames: problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation.

Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative study is to use framing analysis to uncover the dominant news frames employed by national print news media in the coverage of issues of disability in the UK. It will do this by employing a deductive frame analysis approach using frames derived from the literature review, and coding them using content analysis. As such, the following research questions were considered when carrying out this process:

RQ1: What are the dominant frames used by *The Guardian* and *The Daily Telegraph* to represent issues of disability?

RQ2: What language is being used by each newspaper to describe people with disabilities?

RQ3: What is the valence of frames being used by each newspaper to represent issues of disability?

RQ4: What are the sources cited in the media coverage of each newspaper, and are people with disabilities active or passive within the news text?

The answers to each research question will give us an insight into the different ways in which *The Guardian* and *The Daily Telegraph* cover issues of disability. This will allow us to make an assessment as to which frames are being used to represent issues of disability, and thus, whether or not progressive perspectives on disability have made their way into UK newspaper coverage.

Sample

This study analysed a sample of articles from *The Guardian* and *The Daily Telegraph* using the *NewsBank* database accessed through the University of Glasgow. In particular, these two broadsheets were chosen as they have common classifications of the 'left' (*The Guardian*), and the 'right' (*The Daily Telegraph*), thus, in theory, they should be representative of the broadsheet landscape. In terms of audience figures, *The Guardian* is the third most popular broadsheet in the UK with an average readership of 1,027,000 per year, whereas *The Daily Telegraph* is the most read broadsheet in the UK with an average readership of 1,352,000 per year (NRS, 2013).

The period used in the *NewsBank* search was from the 1st March 2012 to the 31st October 2012. The initial search with the words “‘disabled people’, OR ‘the disabled’, OR ‘people with disabilities’”, yielded 1,160 articles for *The Guardian* and 920 articles for *The Daily Telegraph*. As framing analysis is intrinsically subjective, it is essential that the coding process is methodical, valid, and reliable (Krippendorff, 2004). To help ensure this was the case, the initial search results were ‘cleaned’ by deleting duplicate, irrelevant and ‘false positive’ articles (Deacon et al, 2007). Furthermore, as *The Guardian* has a separate Sunday newspaper (*The Guardian Observer*), the articles that fell on a Sunday for *The Daily Telegraph* were discarded. Finally, every tenth article was chosen, resulting in a final sample of 61 and 58 articles for each newspaper respectively (*Total: N=119*).

Collecting the Data

A thorough review of the disability frame analysis studies conducted by Misener (2012) and Haller et al (2012) identified four frames which can be used to analyse newspaper coverage relating to issues of disability. Often, news articles will contain several frames which compliment or clash with one another (Schlesinger et al, 1983). However, only the two main frames within each article will be coded for in this study. This will give us a clearer idea as to what frames are being primarily relied upon by journalists to communicate their perceptions and representations of issues of disability to their audiences.

Making up the frame definitions are elements from frames found in studies by both Misener and Haller et al. The definitions were further pieced together using Entman’s definition of news frames: problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation. The four frames are as follows:

- (1) *The Medical Frame*: Defines disability in terms of a medical condition, consequently presenting disability as illness or malfunction (*problem definition*). Individuals are considered ‘disabled’ through their physiological or psychological conditions (*causal interpretation*). There is a focus on what a person can or cannot do (*evaluation*), which can be ‘treated’ or explained through medical knowledge and intervention (*treatment recommendation*).
- (2) *The Supercrip Frame*: Defines disability in terms of a heroic or superhuman event. Disability is presented as a tragedy that has been embraced bravely (*problem*

- definition*). Individuals are resilient and have the ability to overcome their disability (*causal interpretation*). As a result, they are portrayed as ‘deviant’ because they can go beyond expectations of what it is to be disabled (*evaluation*).
- (3) *The Charity Frame*: Defines disability in terms of charity and helplessness. As a result, it presents disability as disadvantage (*problem definition*). Individuals are thus considered as victims, objects of pity (*causal interpretation*), and in need of care and support (*evaluation*). This is best provided through charity or state intervention (*treatment recommendation*).
- (4) *The Political Frame*: Defines disability in terms of the wider social, political, and economic conditions that may have an impact on disability (*problem definition*). Those with disabilities are seen as part of a community with legitimate civil rights grievances (*causal interpretation*). There is less focus on the individual’s impairment(s); rather it is wider societal barriers and conditions that create barriers for people with disabilities (*evaluation*). Thus, these barriers need to be addressed and removed through the challenging of policy on welfare (*treatment recommendation*).

The fourth frame is issue-orientated and progressive, and is based primarily on the aims associated with the social model of disability. Therefore, when the political frame was identified in news articles, two questions were then coded for: (i) Does the article also make reference to the wider cultural, discursive and psychological conditions that affect disability?; and (ii) Does the article refer to people with disabilities collectively, thus characterising them as a homogenous group? Asking these questions allows for the analysis of whether or not aspects of CDS theory have been incorporated within the ‘political frame’.

In order for the coding of each frame to take place, framing devices must be identified. The framing devices employed in this study were based around the elements which Entman (1993: 52) argues are utilised by journalists when framing news stories; that is, “certain key words, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information, and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgements”. The process of identifying each frame involved analysing each article with Entman’s framing devices in mind. To give an example, one article discussed a Paralympic athlete’s life achievements. Within this article, it was decided that the supercrip frame was present. It was identified by a series of sentences: “[...] was born with Spina Bifida [and] by the age of seven had lost the use of her legs [nevertheless], being in a wheelchair never stopped her from doing anything she wanted to do

[as] she learned quickly to fight back against condescension and prejudice” (Butler, 2012). The article frames her achievements through the supercrip frame, as the tragedy of her disability is highlighted, yet she is portrayed as a ‘superhuman’, in that, she is able to overcome her disability to become a Paralympic athlete.

When carrying out content analysis with regards to disability, Haller (2010) argues that the researcher should be looking for ‘manifest’ and ‘latent’ content. Manifest content is associated with the language used to portray disability, whereas, latent content is associated with the meanings and implications of the use of that language. Through looking at the manifest and latent content within the UK press’ representations of disability, we will be able to gauge the extent to which progressive representations of disability have emerged.

To assist in this process, the following words, phrases and terms to describe disability, and disability related issues, were coded for:

The Disabled	Disabled People	People with Disabilities
Impaired	Impairment	Person(s) with impairment(s)
Blind People	Partially Sighted	Visually Impaired
Handicapped	Cerebral Palsy	Suffer
Sufferer(s)	Tragic	Heroic
Brave	Wheelchair	Wheelchair Bound
Wheelchair User	Disability Rights	Disability Discrimination

These were selected from Cooke et al’s (2000) study. Each article was analysed for the two main keywords. The idea of coding for these was to assess whether or not certain terminology links back to the different frames of disability, thus forming a ‘package’ of how issues of disability are represented in UK newspaper coverage.

Furthermore, this study not only coded for the presence or absence of a frame, but also for the valence of a frame. Valence framing refers to the overall tone of a frame (positive, negative or neutral). In relation to this study, frame valence was measured to be:

- (1) *Positive* – discussed issues of disability favourably, with positive overall tones, language and imagery used to represent those with disabilities.

- (2) *Neutral* – discussed issues of disability in a balanced way, with both positive and negative tones. Those articles which could not be defined as positive or negative also fell into this category.
- (3) *Negative* – discussed issues of disability unfavourably, with negative overall tones, language and imagery used to represent those with disabilities.

Coding for the valence of the two dominant frames in each article will allow us to explain and identify any changes in the overall tone with which journalists represent individuals and groups of people with disabilities, and issues of disability more generally.

Lastly, this study coded for the two main sources cited in the news article. This will give us an idea as to the sources which are being dominantly used by journalists to cover issues of disability. These included:

Unspecified Individual with Disabilities	Specific Individual with Disabilities
Specific Group of People with Disabilities	Journalists
Governments Officials	Medical Staff/Doctors
Charity Organisations	Man on Street
All Other Sources	

A second question was then posed regarding whether or not people with disabilities are ‘active’ or ‘passive’ within news texts. People with disabilities are ‘active’ within an article if they are drawn upon as a source of information or they have contributed to the article, and conversely, they are deemed ‘passive’ if they are reported or commented upon by others, thus having no input in the text. This is important to measure as people with disabilities are often ignored as a source of information (Goggin, 2009). Thus, if it is found that people with disabilities are being used as a source of information at any point, it may suggest that we are witnessing a change in societal attitudes towards disability.

Coding

Having established the research questions and finalising the methods for data collection, code sheets were developed (See; *Appendix A*). To help further ensure validity and reliability, a pilot analysis of ten articles was conducted. This was necessary in order to test for any inadequacies and inconsistencies in the coding process (Hansen et al, 1998). Once

satisfied, the total sample of 119 articles was coded for manually. The coded data was then inputted into SPSS and analysed to reveal the results below.

Results

This study examined *The Guardian* and *The Daily Telegraph* news coverage of issues relating to disability over an eight-month period. It aimed to explore recent newspaper coverage of disability, in order to: identify the frames being used to represent issues of disability, and to assess the presence and/or absence of progressive perspectives on disability in newspaper coverage of disability. When analysing each article five research factors were considered: 1) the dominant frames being used to represent issues of disability; 2) the language being used to describe people with disabilities; 3) the valence of frames; 4) the sources cited; and 5) whether people with disabilities are active or passive.

Frames Identified

The total sample population for this study was 119 articles. These articles were analysed for four frames: the ‘medical frame’, the ‘supercrip frame’, the ‘charity frame’, and the ‘political frame’. Frequency of the two main frames present in each article was calculated. A total of 95 frames were identified in *The Guardian* articles and a total of 84 frames were identified in *The Daily Telegraph* articles. Every article had at least one dominant frame, however, 27 articles in *The Guardian* and 32 articles in *The Daily Telegraph* did not have a secondary main frame to code for. This was because it was either absent entirely, or it was too vague to be considered as a dominant frame.

RQ1 asked which dominant frames were being used by *The Guardian* and *The Daily Telegraph* to represent issues of disability. The ‘Medical frame’ was present in 27.4% of *The Guardian* articles (n = 26) and 39.3% of *The Daily Telegraph* articles (n = 33). The ‘Supercrip frame’ was present in 20% of *The Guardian* articles (n = 19) and 23.8% of *The Daily Telegraph* articles (n = 20). The ‘Charity frame’ was present in 22.1% of *The Guardian* articles (n = 21) and 27.4% of *The Daily Telegraph* articles (n = 23). Finally, the ‘Political frame’ was present in 30.5% of *The Guardian* articles (n = 29) and 9.5% of *The Daily Telegraph* articles (n = 8).

Table 1

Number of Frames					
Guardian Frames	N	%	Daily Telegraph Frames	N	%
Medical Frame	26	27.4	Medical Frame	33	39.3
Supercrip Frame	19	20	Supercrip Frame	20	23.8
Charity Frame	21	22.1	Charity Frame	23	27.4
Political Frame	29	30.5	Political Frame	8	9.5
Total	95	100	Total	84	100

Interestingly, the ‘political frame’ was identified most within *The Guardian* articles. Although the ‘political frame’ was identified least in *The Daily Telegraph* articles, it does suggest to some extent at this point that *The Guardian* is using more progressive frames to cover issues of disability. Nevertheless, it should be acknowledged that when you combine the frames found in each newspaper; the ‘medical frame’ was identified 59 times, the ‘supercrip frame’ 39 times, the ‘charity frame’ 44 times, and the ‘political frame’ 37 times. This suggests that the three traditional frames are still predominantly featuring in news articles.

Moreover, when the ‘political frame’ was identified within the news articles, two further questions were posed (See; *Table 2*): (1) Does the article also make reference to the wider cultural, discursive and psychological conditions that affect disability?, and (2) Does the article refer to people with disabilities collectively, thus characterising them as a homogenous group? The purpose of these questions was to assess whether or not aspects of CDS theory have been incorporated within the political frame.

With regards to the question of whether articles utilising the ‘political frame’ also reference wider cultural, discursive and psychological conditions, analysis revealed that out of the twenty-nine times the political frame was identified in *The Guardian* articles, the answer was ‘yes’ 6.9% of the time ($n = 2$) and ‘no’ 93.1% of the time ($n = 27$). For *The Daily Telegraph*, out of the eight times the political frame was identified, the answer was ‘yes’ 12.5% of the time ($n = 1$) and ‘no’ 87.5% of the time ($n = 7$). In terms of whether the articles referred to a homogeneous ‘disabled’ group (Question 2), the analysis showed for *The Guardian* articles that 72.4% of the time ($n = 21$) the answer was ‘yes’, and that 27.6% of the time ($n = 8$) the answer was ‘no’. Similarly, for *The Daily Telegraph* the answer was ‘yes’ 75% of the time ($n = 6$) and ‘no’ 25% of the time ($n = 2$).

These results suggest that when the political frame was identified within the news articles, it was primarily based upon the aims associated with the social model of disability. For both newspapers it appears that there was a lack of reference made to the wider cultural, discursive and psychological conditions that affect disability, and also, they primarily referred to people with disabilities as a collective, thus characterising them as a homogenous group. Subsequently, there appears to be little evidence to propose that aspects of CDS theory have been incorporated within the political news frame. Therefore, at this point, *Table 1* combined with *Table 2* would suggest that the frames presently being used in news stories are less progressive than the theory being discussed by disability studies scholars.

Table 2**Extension of the Political Frame**

Column1	Guardian	N	%	Daily Telegraph	N2	%2
Question 1	yes	2	6.9	yes	1	12.5
	no	27	93.1	no	7	87.5
	Total	29	100	Total	8	100
Question 2	yes	21	72.4	yes	6	75
	no	8	27.6	no	2	25
	Total	29	100	Total	8	100

* Q1) Does the article also make reference to the wider cultural, discursive and psychological conditions that affect disability?

Q2) Does the article refer to people with disabilities collectively, thus characterising them as a homogenous group?

Language and Disability

Alongside identifying the frames which were being used by each newspaper, the language being used to describe people with disabilities was analysed. In doing so, the aim was to assess whether or not certain terminology links back to the different frames of disability, thus forming a ‘package’ of how issues of disability are represented in UK newspaper coverage. The two main words, phrases, or terms to describe disability and disability related issues in each article were taken into consideration. A total of 73 keywords were found in *The Guardian* articles and a total of 60 keywords were found in *The Daily Telegraph* articles. Every article had at least one keyword, however, 49 articles in *The Guardian* and 56 articles in *The Daily Telegraph* did not have a secondary keyword to code

for. This was because it was either absent entirely, or it did not match the keywords coded for exactly.

Cooke et al (2000) assert that there are certain ‘negative’ words commonly used by UK newspapers to describe people with disabilities. The negative words from the list of keywords that were coded for are: ‘handicap’, ‘the disabled’, ‘brave’, ‘heroic’, ‘wheelchair bound’, ‘sufferer(s)’, ‘suffer’, and ‘tragic’. These words are “passive, ‘victim’ words” which are disrespectful towards those with disabilities (Cooke et al, 2000: 33). Instead, journalists are advised to use words such as, ‘people with disabilities’, and ‘disabled people’. It is also recommended to describe people with as having a disability; for example, it is better to say that a person ‘has cerebral palsy’, as opposed to ‘suffers from cerebral palsy’. Moreover, the keywords – ‘impaired’, ‘impairment’ ‘person(s) with impairment(s)’, ‘visually impaired’, and ‘partially sighted’ – were coded for to represent the social model’s distinction between impairment and disability.

Taking this into consideration, the results from both newspapers leave a degree of ambiguity as to what conclusions can be reached (see; *Appendices B and C*). There is very little usage of all but one of the keywords that were coded for. The term ‘disabled people’ was identified 34 times (27.9%) in *The Guardian* articles and 21 times (18.1%) in *The Daily Telegraph* articles. At first glance, this could suggest that there is greater awareness among journalists to use more positive terms when describing disability and disability issues. However, the results also show that the term ‘the disabled’ was identified 13 times (11.2%) in *The Daily Telegraph* articles. This represents very little difference when compared to the number of times the term ‘disabled people’ was identified in *The Daily Telegraph* articles.

Nevertheless, in order to fully assess the significance of the keywords identified, it is necessary to look at the frames that they were discovered alongside (see; *Table 3*). This will help to develop the idea of whether or not the use of certain language contributes to an overall ‘frame package’. It is evident that the majority of the ‘negative’ keywords appeared when the ‘medical’, ‘supercrip’, and ‘charity’ frames were identified. We can also see that some of the more ‘positive’ keywords such as, ‘cerebral palsy’, ‘partially sighted’, and ‘visually impaired’, all appear when the first three frames are identified, but not when the ‘political frame’ is identified. In terms of the keywords ‘the disabled’ and ‘disabled people’, the correlation between their usage and the frames they are found alongside appears to be ambiguous. The term ‘disabled people’ is more ‘positive’ than the term ‘the disabled’;

therefore, it would be expected to be found primarily when the 'political frame' is identified. However, when the results are combined for the 'traditional' frames ('medical', 'supercrip', and 'charity') the term, 'disabled people', appears 36 times out of the 52 times it was identified.

There is also uncertainty surrounding the terms 'disability rights' and 'disability discrimination'. When the political frame was identified, 'disability rights' was found 8% of the time, and 'discrimination' 3% of the time. However, this only equates to 3 times out of 37 and 1 time out of 37, respectively. Thus, it suggests that there doesn't appear to be any conclusive relationship between the uses of these terms and the identification of the political frame, as if there were, we would expect to see these terms appearing more frequently.

Furthermore, although the keywords 'wheelchair', 'wheelchair bound', and 'wheelchair user' were coded for together, when inspected further, 'wheelchair' (n = 11) and 'wheelchair bound' (n = 1) were found alongside the 'medical', 'supercrip', and 'charity' frames, and 'wheelchair user' (n = 1) was identified alongside the political frame. Thus, neither the negative phrase 'wheelchair bound', nor the more positive phrase 'wheelchair user', was used distinctly more than the other. Ultimately, what the analysis reveals is that the evidence is too ambiguous to suggest that the language used contributes to an overall 'frame package'.

Language Found in Each Frame
Percentage of frames that included each term

Table 3

Unit of Analysis/Keyword	Medical	%	Supercrip	%	Charity	%	Political	%	Total Terms (n)	% of frames found with each term
none/not defined	23	39%	9	23%	13	30%	7	19%	52	29%
the disabled	4	7%	4	10%	4	9%	4	11%	16	9%
disabled people	12	20%	9	23%	15	34%	16	43%	52	29%
people with disabilities	1	2%	2	5%	4	9%	2	5%	9	5%
impaired/impairment/person(s) with impairment(s)	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	3%	1	1%
handicapped	1	2%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	1%
blind people	2	3%	1	3%	0	0%	1	3%	4	2%
partially sighted	1	2%	0	0%	1	2%	0	0%	2	1%
visually impaired	2	3%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	2	1%
cerebral palsy	2	3%	6	15%	0	0%	0	0%	8	4%
suffer	2	3%	2	5%	2	5%	0	0%	6	3%
sufferer(s)	2	3%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	2	1%
tragic	1	2%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	1%
heroic	0	0%	2	5%	0	0%	0	0%	2	1%
brave	0	0%	0	0%	1	2%	0	0%	1	1%
wheelchair/wheelchair user/wheelchair bound	6	10%	3	8%	3	7%	2	5%	14	8%
disability rights	0	0%	0	0%	1	2%	3	8%	4	2%
disability discrimination	0	0%	1	3%	0	0%	1	3%	2	1%
Total Frames (n)	59	100%	39	100%	44	100%	37	100%	179	100%

Frame Valence

The purpose of RQ3 was to find the valence of frames being used by each newspaper to represent issues of disability. Overall, neutral frames were most prominent in the sample from *The Guardian* (61%, n = 58), followed by positive frames (21%, n = 20) and negative frames (18%, n = 17). Neutral frames were also the most prominent in *The Daily Telegraph* sample (58%, n = 49), followed by negative frames (27%, n = 23) and positive frames (14%, n = 12).

The valence of each individual frame found per article in both of the newspapers was then analysed. Analysis showed that there were digressions from the overall trend among the individual frames. The ‘medical frame’ showed neutral valence 18 of the 26 times it occurred in *The Guardian* articles (30%, n = 18) and 19 out of the 33 times it occurred in *The Daily Telegraph* articles (33%, n = 19). A medical frame with positive valence occurred twice in *The Guardian* (3%, n = 2) and once in *The Daily Telegraph* (2%, n = 1). Lastly, the ‘medical frame’ possessed negative valence 6 of 26 times in *The Guardian* (10%, n = 6) and 13 of 33 times in *The Daily Telegraph* (22%, n = 13).

Table 4 **Frame Valence**

Medical Frame	Guardian (N = 61)		Daily Telegraph (N = 58)		Total
	N	%	N	%	
<i>Positive</i> – discussed issues of disability favourably	2	3%	1	2%	3
<i>Neutral</i> – discussed issues of disability in a balanced way (Those articles which could not be defined as positive or negative also fell into this category)	18	30%	19	33%	37
<i>Negative</i> – discussed issues of disability unfavourably	6	10%	13	22%	19
<i>Not Present</i> – frame does not appear in article	35	57%	25	43%	60
	Total	61	58	100%	119

In terms of the ‘supercrip frame’, it was found with positive valence 11 of the 19 times it occurred in *The Guardian* articles (18%, n = 11) and 8 of the 20 times it occurred in *The Daily Telegraph* articles (14%, n = 8). A ‘supercrip frame’ with neutral valence occurred seven times in *The Guardian* (11%, n = 7) and twelve times in *The Daily Telegraph* (21%, n = 12). Finally, the ‘supercrip frame’ possessed negative valence once in *The Guardian* (2%, n= 1) and never in *The Daily Telegraph*.

Table 5 Frame Valence

Supercrip Frame	Guardian (N = 61)		Daily Telegraph (N = 58)		Total
	N	%	N	%	
<i>Positive</i> – discussed issues of disability favourably	11	18%	8	14%	19
<i>Neutral</i> – discussed issues of disability in a balanced way (Those articles which could not be defined as positive or negative also fell into this category)	7	11%	12	21%	19
<i>Negative</i> – discussed issues of disability unfavourably	1	2%	0	0%	1
<i>Not Present</i> – frame does not appear in article	42	69%	38	66%	80
Total	61	100%	58	100%	119

As for the ‘charity frame’, it occurred most frequently with neutral valence in both *The Guardian* (23%, n = 14) and *The Daily Telegraph* (21%, n = 12). A ‘charity frame’ with negative valence occurred seven times in *The Guardian* (11%, n = 7) and ten times in *The Daily Telegraph* (17%, n = 10) while a positive ‘charity frame’ only occurred once in *The Daily Telegraph* (2%, n = 1) and not at all in *The Guardian*.

Table 6 Frame Valence

Charity Frame	Guardian (N = 61)		Daily Telegraph (N = 58)		Total
	N	%	N	%	
<i>Positive</i> – discussed issues of disability favourably	0	0%	1	2%	1
<i>Neutral</i> – discussed issues of disability in a balanced way (Those articles which could not be defined as positive or negative also fell into this category)	14	23%	12	21%	26
<i>Negative</i> – discussed issues of disability unfavourably	7	11%	10	17%	17
<i>Not Present</i> – frame does not appear in article	40	66%	35	60%	75
Total	61	100%	58	100%	119

Finally, the progressive ‘political frame’ was found with positive valence seven times in *The Guardian* (11%, n = 7) and only two times in *The Daily Telegraph* (3%, n = 2). A ‘political frame’ with negative valence was identified least within both *The Guardian* (5%, n = 3) and *The Daily Telegraph* (0%). On the other hand, ‘political’ frames with neutral valence were most frequent, occurring 14 out of the 29 times they were found in *The Guardian* (31%, n =19) articles and 6 out of 8 times in *The Daily Telegraph* articles (10%, n = 6).

Table 7 Frame Valence

Political Frame	Guardian (N = 61)		Daily Telegraph (N = 58)		Total	
	N	%	N	%		
<i>Positive</i> – discussed issues of disability favourably	7	11%	2	3%	9	
<i>Neutral</i> – discussed issues of disability in a balanced way (Those articles which could not be defined as positive or negative also fell into this category)	19	31%	6	10%	25	
<i>Negative</i> – discussed issues of disability unfavourably	3	5%	0	0%	3	
<i>Not Present</i> – frame does not appear in article	32	52%	50	86%	82	
	Total	61	100%	58	100%	119

The analysis shows that among the individual frames, neutral frames were the most prominent in the articles from both newspapers, albeit with the exception of the ‘supercrip frame’ in *The Guardian*. Initially, this follows the overall trend of frame valence in each newspaper. However, it became clearer that there were deviations from the overall trend when it came to the positive and negative valences of each individual frame. For two of the traditional frames – ‘medical’ and ‘charity’ –negative valence occurred more often in both *The Guardian* and *The Daily Telegraph* than frames possessing positive valence. This suggests that when these two frames occur, they discuss issues of disability with a neutral or negative tone. This is unsurprising considering that traditional frames are associated with negative representations of people with disabilities.

In contrast, the ‘supercrip frame’ showed the opposite as it was positively valenced more frequently than it was negatively valenced in both newspapers. Positive valence also occurred more frequently than neutral valence in *The Guardian* articles. However, when the results were inspected further it became evident that the ‘supercrip frame’ appeared over a

very concentrated period of time, which suggests that the results may be skewed. Looking at the months in which the ‘supercrip frame’ was identified for both newspapers, it was found that over a two month period – August to September - the frame appeared 18 times with positive valence, 14 times with neutral valence and once with negative valence. This equates to 33 out of the 44 times it was identified in the entire sample (75%). Also, when looking at the subject area in which the ‘supercrip frame’ was identified for both newspapers, it was found that the frame appeared in sport related articles 15 times with positive valence and 14 times with neutral valence. This equates to 29 out of the 44 times it was identified in the entire sample (88%). Furthermore, 33 out of 36 sport related articles appeared in the months of August and September (92%). As the ‘supercrip frame’ is associated with heroic and superhuman events, and since there was a high volume of articles during August and September focusing on issues surrounding the London Olympics and Paralympics, this could explain why there was a prominence of ‘supercrip frames’ during this time. Nevertheless, what the analysis suggests is that when the ‘supercrip frame’ is used in news articles, issues of disability are discussed in an overall positive or neutral tone. Thus, although the supercrip frame is traditionally associated with negative representations of disability, there are hints that it may act as a platform for discussing positive representations of disability.

Finally, in terms of the ‘political frame’, positive valence occurred more frequently than negative valence. For *The Daily Telegraph* there were no articles where the ‘political frame’ possessed negative valence, however the lack of articles in this newspaper containing the ‘political frame’, means that the results still remain uncertain. Nevertheless, what it seems to suggest, especially for *The Guardian*, is that when the ‘political frame’ is identified in news articles issues of disability are discussed in an overall neutral or positive tone. This should be expected as progressive frames are meant to portray people with disabilities more positively.

Sources Cited

The first part of RQ4 deals with the sources that were used in the articles from both newspapers. The two main sources from a list of ten possible sources were coded for in each article. The results from *Table 8* reveal that the sources which occurred most frequently in *The Guardian* were government officials (18%, n = 22), specific individuals with disabilities (15%, n = 18), man on street (9%, n = 11), and charity organisations (8%, n = 10). For *The*

Daily Telegraph, there is a similar trend as the most frequently cited sources were government officials (17%, n = 20), specific individual with disabilities (13%, n = 15), and charity organisations (11%, n = 13).

Table 8 Sources Cited

Source Identified	Guardian	N	%	Daily Telegraph	N	%	Total
No source		46	38%		49	42%	95
Unspecified Individual with disabilities		0	0%		1	1%	1
Specific individual with disabilities		18	15%		15	13%	33
Specific group of people with disabilities		3	2%		1	1%	4
Journalists		3	2%		2	2%	5
Government Officials		22	18%		20	17%	42
Medical staff/doctors		4	3%		4	3%	8
Charity Organisations		10	8%		13	11%	23
Man on street		11	9%		4	3%	15
All other sources		5	4%		7	6%	12
	Total	122	100%	Total	116	100%	238

The second part of RQ4 addresses whether people with disabilities were passive or active within the text. People with disabilities are active within an article if they are drawn upon as a source of information or they have contributed to the article, and conversely, they are deemed passive if they are reported or commented upon by others, thus having no input in the text. The analysis from *Table 9* shows that people with disabilities were more frequently passive in both *The Guardian* (46%, n = 28) and *The Daily Telegraph* (43%, n = 25). Nevertheless, the results do not highlight a large gap between people with disabilities being active and passive within news texts, as they were still active 33% of the time in *The Guardian* (n = 20) and 31% of the time in *The Daily Telegraph* (n = 18).

Table 9 Were people with disabilities used as a source?

		Guardian		Daily Telegraph		Total
		N	%	N	%	
Were people with disabilities used as a source?	active	20	33%	18	31%	38
	passive	28	46%	25	43%	53
	non evident	13	21%	15	26%	28
	Total	61	100%	58	100%	119

Worth commenting on, is the frequency of which ‘specific individuals with disabilities’ are used as a source in both newspapers, and the number of times people with disabilities are active within the news texts. At first glance, this could suggest that we are witnessing a change in societal attitudes towards disability, as journalists are looking to people with disabilities as a source of information. However, like with frame valence, when the results were scrutinised further, it was found that 27 out of the 33 times specific individuals with disabilities were used as a source for both newspapers (82%), it was during the months of August and September. Moreover, 30 out of the 38 times people with disabilities were active in the articles from both newspapers (79%), was also during the months of August and September. Therefore, it can be argued that like frame valence, the results may have been skewed due to a concentrated focus on a disability-related event like the London Paralympics.

Conclusions

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine whether or not there has been any change in the way British newspapers frame issues of disability. It aimed to explore the frames being used to represent issues of disability, and thus, assess whether or not progressive perspectives on disability have made their way into UK newspaper coverage. From the review of the literature, two key questions related to these aims emerged: to what extent do negative, medicalised, and homogenous representations of disability identity still exist; and is there evidence to suggest that more positive, fluid, and reflexive representations of disability identity are emerging? In other words, are the UK press still using traditional frames (medical, supercrip and charity) or are they working towards using more progressive frames (political) when discussing issues of disability in their news stories. To help achieve the aims of the study, research questions were posed concerning four areas of analysis: the identification of frames (RQ1), the language used (RQ2), the valence of frames (RQ3), and the sources cited (RQ4).

Moreover, the literature review revealed that there are a lack of studies devoted to discovering frames in media texts through the use of framing analysis, and also, that there have been no framing analysis studies on disability and the media which have taken into consideration valence framing. Thus, conducting a content analysis of two leading UK broadsheet papers (*The Guardian* and *The Daily Telegraph*), which incorporates frame valence, not only contributes to our understanding of how disability is discussed and portrayed in the news media, but further helps to explain and identify any changes in the overall tone with which journalists represent individuals and groups of people with disabilities, and issues of disability more generally. This is of interest due to the nature of framing and the potential implications of its use. The literature on framing theory stipulates that frames contain specific representations and meanings of reality which shape our perceptions of the social world. Thus, journalists have the ability to influence how audiences view the realities around them, by contributing to how they come to be understood.

This study supports prior research concerning the prevalence of ‘traditional’ disability news frames. RQ1 asked, “What are the dominant frames used by *The Guardian* and *The Daily Telegraph* to represent issues of disability?”. All articles were analysed for four frames

– medical, supercrip, charity, and political – and all four of these frames were found in each newspaper. Overall, the medical frame occurred most frequently, followed by the charity frame, then the supercrip frame, and finally the political frame. In terms of each newspaper, *The Daily Telegraph* followed this overall trend; however, *The Guardian* deviated from it to a certain degree. *The Daily Telegraph* used the medical, supercrip and charity frames predominantly throughout their articles, with only 8 out of 58 articles being identified as containing the political frame. This implies that *The Daily Telegraph* focuses primarily on the ‘tragedies’ of disability, emphasising the biological features of what a disabled body can and cannot do. As a result, it can be argued that *The Daily Telegraph* tends to ignore the wider societal barriers that people with disabilities face in everyday life, and instead represents issues of disability from narrow, medicalised perspectives.

On the other hand, the political frame was identified as the most used frame throughout *The Guardian* articles. Although the three traditional frames were still featuring prominently in news articles, this suggests that issues of disability are more often being discussed in context of the wider social, political and economic conditions that have an impact on the lives of people with disabilities. It may further be implied that journalists writing in *The Guardian* are becoming more conscious about the way in which they are representing issues of disability. This could be an expected result of features in the newspaper like ‘*SocietyGuardian*’, which encourages the discussion of social issues, in addition to featuring articles from journalists and writers with disabilities.

These results show a step in the right direction for *The Guardian*. However, two further questions were posed in relation to the political frame: does the article also make reference to the wider cultural, discursive and psychological conditions that affect disability; and does the article refer to people with disabilities collectively, thus characterising them as a homogenous group? The results revealed that the wider cultural, psychological, and discursive issues associated with disability were not being discussed to any substantial extent. Furthermore, *The Guardian* showed a tendency to discuss people with disabilities as a collective, homogenous group. However, as already discussed, each disabled person is different with unique needs and requirements. Subsequently, in neglecting the effects of impairment and constructing disability as a homogenous group, both newspapers ignore the realities of living and identifying with disability. Thus, although representations of disability appear to be changing in a progressive way, the use of the political frame only incorporated ideas from a social model perspective, and not from a CDS standpoint. This confirms the

current literature, insofar as, the frames presently used in both newspapers are less progressive than the theory being discussed by disability studies scholars.

RQ2 posed the question, “What language is being used by each newspaper to describe people with disabilities?”. It is important to analyse the language used to portray disability, as the use of certain language can have specific meanings and implications attached to it. This study looked for certain keywords in each article in an attempt to determine whether or not disability-related language contributed to an overall ‘frame package’. The literature suggests that people with disability can be framed more positively in the media by using certain words over others. The use of the term ‘the disabled’, for example, depicts disabled people as a homogenous group who can be subjected to stereotyping. Conversely, by using the term ‘disabled people’, journalists can portray people with disabilities as individuals who have a say over what they do in their everyday lives.

This study challenges the literature to some extent. From the results, there was a high degree of ambiguity concerning the use of keywords, as there was no distinctive use of any keyword apart from the term ‘disabled people’. On a positive note, this revealed that the term ‘disabled people’ occurred more frequently in both newspapers than the term ‘the disabled’. Thus, it could be suggested that there is greater awareness among journalists not to use the term ‘the disabled’. However, this does not imply that positive terms like ‘disabled people’ are used to any effect when discussing issues of disability. Our analysis showed that the term ‘disabled people’ was not just confined to any particular frame. Since the term ‘disabled people’ is supposed to be a positive way of representing people with disabilities, one would expect it to be used primarily when the political frame is identified. However, it was identified as a dominant term in conjunction with the use of all four frames, thus suggesting that its use is not linked to a particular frame, but also, that its use will not guarantee positive representations of disability.

This can be exemplified by looking at an article from *The Daily Telegraph* sample. The article contained the medical frame and used the term ‘disabled people’ in the following sentence: “Research has found frail pensioners and disabled people [...]” (Ross, 2012). Thus, not only is it used alongside a traditional frame which portrays disability negatively, it groups people with disabilities with other vulnerable groups in society, such as the elderly, further portraying a negative representation of disability. This scenario was not just confined to this article, and examples like this arose with all of the other positively identified keywords that

were coded for. Therefore, ultimately, this study argues that the language used to portray people with disabilities does not necessarily contribute to an overall ‘frame package’.

Along with identifying the dominant frames and the language used in *The Guardian* and *The Telegraph*, this study looked at the valence of frames in articles from both newspapers. Subsequently, RQ3 asks, “What is the valence of frames being used by each newspaper to represent issues of disability?”. Valence was measured to indicate the overall tone of the news frame towards issues of disability. Measuring frame valence is important as it has been shown “that exposure to news frames with an inherent valence” can affect public opinion towards specific issues, such as disability (De Vreese and Boomgaarden, 2003: 366). Analysing public opinion is out of the scope of this study, however assessing the valence of newspaper coverage can give us an insight into possible correlations between frames and their impact on how the public perceive issues of disability.

Overall, frames found in the sample were predominantly neutral. Among individual frames, the only frame not to follow this trend was the ‘supercrip frame’. The most notable results in terms of the other two ‘traditional’ frames – ‘medical’ and ‘charity’ - were that negatively valenced frames occurred more frequently than positively valenced frames in articles for both *The Guardian* and *The Daily Telegraph*. In fact, *The Guardian* had three times more articles with negatively valenced ‘medical’ frames than positively valenced ‘medical’ frames. It also contained seven times more articles with negatively valenced ‘charity’ frames than positively valenced ‘charity’ frames. Similarly, *The Daily Telegraph* contained thirteen times more articles with negatively valenced ‘medical frames than positively valenced ‘medical’ frames. Furthermore, it had ten times more articles with negatively valenced ‘charity’ frames than positively valenced ‘charity’ frames. Arguably, these results were to be expected as traditional frames are associated more with representing people with disabilities unfavourably.

In contrast, the results for ‘political frame’ valence showed the opposite to those of the ‘medical’ and ‘charity’ frames. It was found that the ‘political frame’ was positively valenced more frequently than it was negatively valenced in both newspapers. However, there remains a degree of uncertainty surrounding the results for *The Daily Telegraph*. This can be said, as there were only eight articles containing the ‘political frame’ in the first place, of which just two were positively valenced. Nevertheless, for *The Guardian* at least, the dominance of neutrally valenced frames followed positively valenced frames suggests that

when the 'political frame' is identified, people with disabilities are portrayed either in a balanced or favourable way. This seems unsurprising, as the 'political frame' is a 'progressive' frame which is meant to portray those with disabilities positively.

However, what did come as a surprise were the results for the valence of the 'supercrip frame'. The 'supercrip frame' is a traditional news frame, therefore it was expected that it would be inherently negative. Instead, it was found that the frame was predominantly positive in *The Guardian* articles and neutral in *The Daily Telegraph* articles. Nonetheless, when the results were scrutinised further, it was concluded that the results may be skewed. The frame was identified over a short period of two months, during which the London Paralympic games took place. As previously mentioned, the 'supercrip frame' is based on the portrayal that people with disabilities are heroic or superhuman. Thus, it would appear logical to assume that a disability-related event, like the Paralympics, would cause an increase in the number of 'supercrip frames'. Nevertheless, the results suggest that when the 'supercrip frame' was identified in news articles, issues of disability were discussed in an overall positive or neutral tone. Therefore, although the 'supercrip frame' is traditionally associated with negative representations of disability, there are signs that it may act as a platform for portraying disability favourably. Worth commenting on however, is that there were only two 'supercrip' frames found in the month of October, both of which were neutrally valenced. This could suggest that positive discussions of disability fizzled out not long after the Paralympics.

Lastly, RQ4 asked, "What are the sources cited in the media coverage of each newspaper, and are people with disabilities active or passive within the news text?". This study supports several aspects of the research concerning the sources that newspapers utilise. All articles were analysed for the two main sources that were used to cover issues of disability. There were similarities in the sources used for both newspapers as results revealed that 'government officials' and 'specific individual with disabilities' were identified among the most frequently cited sources. The reliance on 'government officials' as a source suggests that journalists rely on 'primary definers' to cover issues of disability. This could be detrimental to disability news coverage, as the literature stipulates that policy makers continue to conceptualise issues of disability through a 'diagnostic' lens, thus focusing on medicalised distinctions of what a disabled body can and cannot do.

Part of RQ4 looked at whether people with disabilities were ‘active’ or ‘passive’ within the news articles. Analysis showed that people with disabilities were more frequently passive in both newspapers, yet there was no significant difference from the number of active disabled people. These results, along with the reliance on ‘specific individuals with disabilities’ as a source signalled that there may be some concerns with the findings. After further inspection, it was found that when ‘specific individuals with disabilities’ were used as a source, and when people with disabilities were active, it was predominantly during the months of the Paralympic games coverage. Therefore, as with frame valence, the results appeared to be skewed. These results support the literature concerning issues of empowerment in relation to disability and sport in the media, as the ‘specific individual with disabilities’ source was made up predominantly of disabled athletes. This confirms the argument put forward by Braye et al (2012) and Purdue and Howe (2012), that whilst media coverage highlights that some impairment groups can take part in sport, it does so through a narrow lens of disability. Thus, on the one hand media coverage is not representative of all impairment groups, and on the hand Paralympic athletes become disengaged from the ‘realities’ of disablement due to their status as an ‘elite’ disability group.

In sum, this study sought to explore the frames being used to represent issues of disability, and thus, assess whether or not progressive perspectives on disability have made their way into UK newspaper coverage. It was found that negative, medicalised, and homogenous representations of disability identity predominantly feature in the news articles from *The Guardian* and *The Daily Telegraph*. Thus, it can be argued that the UK broadsheet press continues to embody traditional media models that frame disability from a medical, supercrip, or charity perspective. However, it was evident that more positive, fluid, and reflexive representations of disability identity are beginning to emerge to some extent. Nevertheless, this study suggests that there is still a long way to go before progressive frames become the norm in news reporting on disability.

Limitations

Due to the nature of framing analysis, issues of objectivity will always be a concern. One way of dealing with this was to develop a repeatable coding system. However, this study could have benefited from a second coder and intercoder reliability tests. Furthermore, there were also concerns with the sample size. In comparison to other content analyses of news

media, the sample size for this study was relatively small. Lastly, the methodology itself was limiting. As a deductive approach was employed it left little room to account for new or emerging frames. However, this is also a positive as it makes the study more reliable and repeatable.

Future Research

There are several ways in which this topic could be developed. This study measured just one of the frame concepts discussed in the literature review – frame valence. Valence of the sources cited could also be measured to see whether specific sources are favourable, balanced, or unfavourable towards issues of disability. Furthermore, substance of each frame could be measured to assess how substantive or ambiguous the frames identified are.

This study focused on news coverage from two UK broadsheet papers. Instead, there could be a comparison between three or more newspapers – broadsheet or tabloid - across the UK. Moreover, future studies could develop the ideas found here by examining how issues of disability are presented in television news, the internet, or social media. Future studies may also benefit from interviews with journalists, in order to assess some of the reasons behind why journalists cover issues of disability the way they do. Finally, this could be further complimented by analysing how the public perceives media coverage of disability.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Code Sheet

Article Number (name of newspaper + hit in NewsBank search; e.g. DT920) -

Article Headline -

Month

- March (1)
- April (2)
- May (3)
- June (4)
- July (5)
- August (6)
- September (7)
- October (8)

Newspaper

- The Guardian (1)
- The Daily Telegraph (2)

Subject Area

- Health (1)
- Education (2)
- Community Care (3)
- Charity (4)
- Medical Negligence (5)
- Carers (6)
- Human Interest (7)
- Media and Arts (8)
- Employment (9)
- Benefits/Welfare (10)
- Legal/Crime (11)
- Local Authority (12)
- Rights (13)
- Services (14)
- Transport (15)
- Medical Research (16)
- Sport (17)

- Not Defined/Miscellaneous (18)

Units of Analysis/Keyword(s) – list the main 2

- None/not defined (0)
- the disabled (1)
- disabled people (2)
- people with disabilities (3)
- impaired/impairment/person(s) with impairment(s) (4)
- handicapped (5)
- blind people (6)
- partially sighted (7)
- visually impaired (8)
- visual impairment (9)
- cerebral palsy (10)
- suffer (11)
- sufferer(s) (12)
- tragic (13)
- heroic (14)
- brave (16)
- wheelchair/wheelchair user/wheelchair bound (17)
- disability rights (18)
- disability discrimination (19)

Main Frame Identified

- No Frame (0)
- Medical (1)
- Supercrip (2)
- Charity (3)
- Political (4)

Valence of Main Frame

- Positive overall tone, language and imagery representing those with disabilities (1)
- Neutral – balanced, had both positive and negative tones or undefined (2)
- Negative overall tone, language and imagery representing those with disabilities (3)

Secondary Frame Identified

- No Frame (0)
- Medical (1)
- Supercrip (2)
- Charity (3)
- Political (4)

Valence of Secondary Frame

- No Secondary Frame (0)
- Positive overall tone, language and imagery representing those with disabilities (1)
- Neutral – balanced, had both positive and negative tones or undefined (2)
- Negative overall tone, language and imagery representing those with disabilities (3)

If the ‘Political Frame’ was identified as either a main or secondary frame;

- (i) Does the article also make reference to the wider cultural, discursive and psychological conditions that affect disability?
 - Yes (1)
 - No (2)
- (ii) Does the article refer to people with disabilities collectively, thus characterising them as a homogenous group?
 - Yes (1)
 - No (2)

Sources (a)

Article cited the following sources of information (cite 2 main sources used);

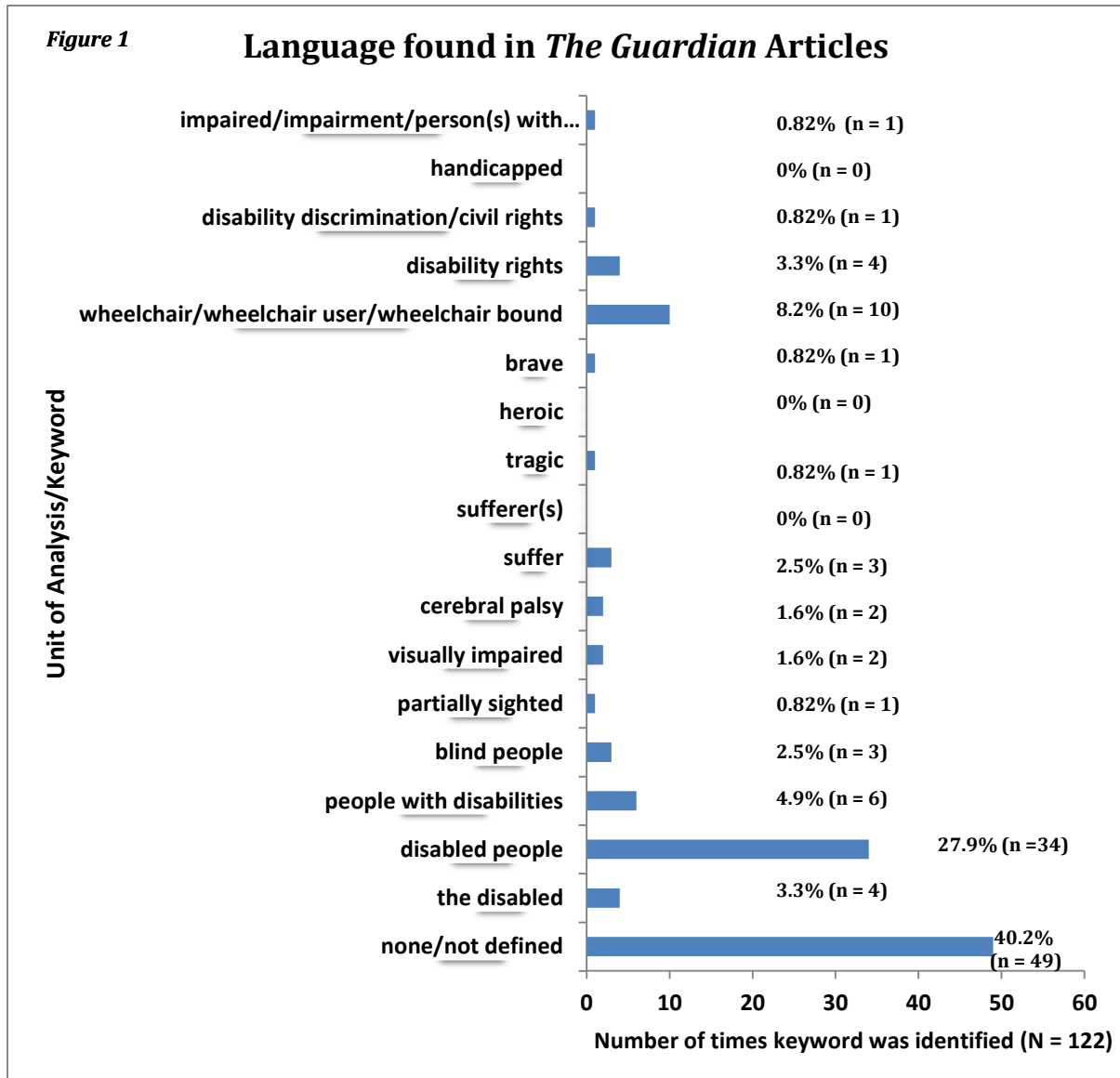
- None (0)
- Unspecified Individual with disabilities; (1)
- Specific Individual with disabilities; (2)
- Unspecified group of people with disabilities (e.g. the disabled); (3)
- Specific group of people with disabilities (e.g. disabled athletes); (4)
- Journalists; (5)
- Government officials; (6)
- Medical Staff/Doctors; (7)
- Charity Organisations (8)
- Man on street; (9)
- All other sources – specify (10)

Sources (b)

Were people with disabilities active or passive within the text? (Active – used as a source; Passive – reported or commented on by a third party)

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Not Evident (3)

Appendix B



Appendix C

Figure 2

Language found in *The Daily Telegraph* Articles