

BLADE RUNNERS AND DAREDEVILS

A case study on the representation of two Paralympians in *The Guardian*

Bachelor's Thesis

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Tiivistelmä – Abstract <p>Paralympialaiset ja vammaisurheilu jäävät mediassa usein “vammattomien” urheilun uutisoinnin varjoon. Aiempien tutkimusten mukaan median luomat representaatiot usein myös vahvistavat stereotyyppioita vammaisista. Erilaisilla kielenkäyttötavoilla, ts. diskursseilla, joilla näitä urheilijoita kuvataan, onkin olennaisesti vaikutusta esimerkiksi siihen, millaiseksi fyysisesti vammaiset kokevat tulevansa kohdelluksi yhteiskunnassa. Tämän takia onkin tärkeää kiinnittää huomiota median luomiin kuviin.</p> <p>Tutkielmassa käsitellään vammaisurheilijoiden representaatiota brittiläislehti <i>The Guardianissa</i>. Analysoin kahta lehden internet-versiossa julkaistua artikkelia, joista toinen käsittelee pikajuoksija Oscar Pistoriusta ja toinen alppihiittäjä Kelly Gallagheria. Tutkielman tavoitteena on selvittää kriittisen diskurssintutkimuksen teorian hyödyntäen sitä, millaisin eri diskurssein edellämämainittua kahta urheilijaa kuvataan kiinnittämällä huomiota tekstien sanastoon. Lisäksi artikkeleiden kuvitus on tarkastelun kohteena visuaalisen representaation näkökulmasta.</p> <p>Tutkimustuloksissa kävi ilmi, että vammaisurheilijoita kuvailtiin usean eri diskurssin näkökulmasta. Analyysissä eriteltiin näistä kolme huomattavinta: “supercrip” eli fyysisesti vammaisten representointi inspiroivina supersankareina, riippuvuus muista ihmisistä sekä tavallisuuden diskurssi, jolla pyritään rikkomaan mediassa yleistä supercrip-ajattelua. Tutkielman kuva-analyysi antoi samankaltaisia tuloksia, sillä Pistorius kuvataan tavalla, joka vahvistaa supercrip-ajattelua kun taas Gallagher-artikkelin kuvituksessa oli piirteitä sekä riippuvuussuhteesta muista ihmisistä että pyrkimys representoida hänet “naapurintyöksi”.</p> <p>Koska kyseessä on tapauskohtainen tutkimus, jättää se valitettavasti paljon ulkopuolelleen. Tässä tutkimuksessa ei esimerkiksi pystytty selvittämään representaatioiden vaikutuksia ihmisten asenteisiin, mikä olisi saatu selville vaikkapa kyselytutkimuksen avulla.</p>	
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1 INTRODUCTION

First held in 1948, the Paralympic Games have grown from a small archery competition for war veterans into a big international event offering both an important outlet for people with disability and an opportunity for technology to show off its new achievements (Public Broadcasting Service n.d.). However, even though it is held immediately after the Olympic Games for able-bodied people, the media coverage for the Paralympics is narrow compared to its counterpart (Chang et al. 2011). According to some studies (for example Thomas and Smith 2003), the coverage of the Paralympic Games also shows a representation of disability which reinforces harmful stereotypes. These representations are also at the centre of this research.

Even though there have been numerous studies on disability and representation, previous research on representations of the disabled have mainly focused on the portrayal of disabled people as “supercrips” who have managed to overcome their disability and thus become a full member of society. Even though the supercrip discourse is also present in this study, this paper aims to tackle the different kinds of media discourses and representations surrounding disability in addition to the supercrip discourse. These representations are examined with the help of critical discourse analysis (CDA), which is a theory suitable for studying power relations and ideologies in texts from the point of view of language. I also use visual social semiotics as a tool for image analysis.

The first athlete whose representation is analysed in this study is the South African sprint runner Oscar Pistorius. Having had both of his legs amputated below the knee, he uses prosthetic legs in order to walk and run. Pistorius was the first amputee runner to participate in both the Olympic Games for able-bodied people and the Paralympics (Geoghegan 2014). For some years, the athlete and his career were widely discussed in the media and he was considered the “poster boy” (Wilson 2012) for Paralympics and disabled sports. In recent years, however, this status has diminished, since in 2013 Pistorius mistook his girlfriend for an intruder in the couple’s home and shot her. This resulted in her death and the athlete was later condemned to imprisonment. As a result, the discussion around Pistorius has swifed from his disability to his personal life. His impact on the awareness on disabled sports is nevertheless a considerable one and the way he is represented is thus worth studying.

This study also focuses on the representation of Kelly Gallagher, a Northern Irish alpine skier who competes in several alpine skiing categories for disabled people: visually impaired super combined, slalom, giant slalom, Super-G and downhill skiing. Diagnosed with oculocutaneous albinism affecting her eyesight, she skis together with her guide Charlotte Evans, with whom she communicates via Bluetooth headsets on the slopes. In the 2014 Sochi Paralympic Games, she was the first ever winter Paralympian to win a medal for Great Britain, thus receiving attention in the British media. (Hudson 2014).

This case study examines the representation of Pistorius and Gallagher on the website of the British newspaper *The Guardian*. I investigate the different discourses present in the data, drawing from the theory of CDA, by focusing on the lexical choices made by the writers. Furthermore, the representation of the two athletes is studied from the point of view of visual social semiotics, i.e. a “visual grammar”. In the next section, the theoretical background of this study is described and previous research conducted on disability and Paralympians is introduced.

2 LANGUAGE IN THE MEDIA

In this section, I will describe the main theories behind this study – critical discourse analysis and visual social semiotics. Towards the end of this section I will also introduce some earlier research conducted on the representation of disability in the media. Finally, some common discourses regarding disability are described.

2.1 The basics of critical discourse analysis

According to Fairclough (1995b: 54), discourse analysis is a study of texts as social practice. By texts, he means both spoken and written language as well as other types of semiotic activity, for example images. Discourse analysis sees language as a social process which has multiple functions, happens in society and is conditioned in social terms (Fairclough 2001: 18-19, Wood and Kroger 2000: 5). In other words, we use language both as a means of interaction and as a way of creating meanings and shaping subjective interpretations of the social world. Because of this, discourse analysts view language and meanings as strongly dependent on context; when language is used in the “real” world by “real” people, it creates

discourses. Gee (1999: 6-7, 17) calls this language-in-use type of discourse the “little d” discourse. However, the “little d” discourses, as he explains, are combined with social practices and contexts, creating the “big D” discourse. These “big D” discourses are also at the core of this research. Furthermore, critical discourse analysis looks at the depictions of the world created by discourse from a socially and culturally critical point of view (Wood and Kroger 2000: 21). CDA is thus the best tool for studying underlying ideologies and power in texts.

According to CDA, representation, in other words the constructive practice of portraying someone or something in a particular way, as closely related to the concept of ideology (Fowler 1991: 25). Fairclough (1995a: 14) defines discourse as “a way of signifying a particular domain of social practice from a particular perspective” – it is thus a tool for producing and reproducing ideology. Furthermore, he points out (1995a: 71-73, 1995b: 59-60) that ideology can be studied from two different angles. First, it can be seen as a part of a wider structure as it is restricted by social conventions and norms; texts are always a part of a wider sociocultural context and practice. The second level of ideology is based on the way in which singular events are used to reproduce and represent ideologies. CDA, however, aims to combine these macro and micro levels of ideology. Not only do structures shape discourse, but discourse also transforms structures.

According to Fairclough (1995b: 103-122), CDA views language in the media not merely as a reflection of reality, but as a formed, constructed version of reality. The way in which something is portrayed is based on the interests and objectives of the language user. This is visible in the choices which the producer of the text makes in the writing process, for example. The writer can, for instance, exclude certain things from the text while including and implying others, or categorise the events which are being described in a particular way.

2.2 Visual social semiotics and representation through pictures

In addition to written texts, it is also possible to study pictures as texts representing social reality (Fairclough 1995a: 4, 1995b: 54). In their introduction to analysing pictures, Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) identify three different meanings in pictures as visual representation, which together create a socially constructed, a so-called ‘visual grammar’ of images. First of

all, the representational meaning is created through the identification of the participants in the image and by examining their motion or eyelines. In pictures, vector, i.e. the direction of the movement or glance, creates a narrative as the participants are portrayed as doing something. The second level of meaning is interactional meaning, which has to do with the amount of involvement the image creates between it and the viewer; for instance a participant looking directly in the camera implies a closer social distance than a person with his or her eyes closed. Furthermore, the size of the frame (close-up, medium shot or long shot) and angle also contribute to the interactional meaning. Finally, the third aspect of visual meaning, the composition as a whole, combines the first two aspects. Compositional meaning is created by three elements: information value (i.e. where a piece of information is located), salience and framing.

Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) theory of visual social semiotics is most commonly regarded as a tool for analysing advertisements. However, it can also help in studying representation and ideology in the media. Not only are images attached to articles to catch the reader's attention, but they are also a part of the portrayal of the topic and can affect the attitudes towards the subject of the image. For example, an image of a disabled person sitting in a wheelchair taken from a high angle may indicate inferiority; using this image in a newspaper article on disability may allude to a demeaning representation of the disabled. However, more commonly, the disabled, and especially disabled athletes, are described as a source of inspiration. The representation of disabled people as supercrips is the most widely researched aspect of disability in the media and will be introduced in the next section.

2.3 The supercrip discourse and the “pitiful handicapped”

Earlier research in the field of social sciences focusing on disability in the media show that the representation of disabled people is often narrowed down to a certain discourse – or in Gee's (1999) terms the “big D” discourse – that the researchers have named *supercrip*. In describing this phenomenon, Silva and Howe (2012: 175) explain that a person with disability is often viewed as “super” by succeeding in something that would be ordinary for an able-bodied person to achieve, which creates a divide between *us* and *them*. Furthermore, in this discourse disability is seen as a problem that has to be overcome. According to Berger (2008: 648), “supercrips are those individuals whose inspirational stories of courage,

dedication, and hard work prove that it can be done, that one can defy the odds and accomplish the impossible”. This discourse tends to portray Paralympians in a way that “may inadvertently reinforce stereotypical perceptions of disability and reaffirm a preoccupation with able-bodiedness”, as Thomas and Smith (2003:166) argue in their study on the coverage of the 2000 Sydney Paralympics.

Some researchers have, however, found some evidence against the prevalence of the supercrip discourse and the victimisation of Paralympians. Chang et al. (2011) compared the newspaper coverage of both the 2008 Olympic and Paralympian games and noticed no significant difference between the representation of able-bodied and disabled athletes except for one feature: Paralympians were often compared with able-bodied athletes. However, the lack of supercrip discourse is suggested to be due to the lack of coverage for people with disabilities, which results in “othering” disabled people and excluding them from society.

The supercrip discourse can also be regarded as a positive phenomenon. This view is put forward in a research conducted by Kama (2004), who interviewed disabled people regarding their opinions on the supercrip discourse. The study showed that many of the interviewees could relate to successful disabled people, such as athletes. They also held them in high respect. For many people interviewed, supercrips were role models. The study also indicates that contrary to the suggestion by Chang et al. (2011) of the supercrip discourse as a way of exclusion, the idea of supercrips is also a way for disabled people to feel *included* in society because it makes them feel accepted. Some interviewees, however, criticised the very nature of the supercrip discourse for dehumanising disabled people and being too focused on the success of an individual as a condition of acceptance.

Kama (2004: 458-459) also pays attention to another popular discourse regarding disability: the representation of disabled people as the “pitiful disabled”. This representation is often used to gain sympathy for a cause. The use of it also strips a disabled person of his or her agency because he or she, for example, is unable to live independently. The interviewees in Kama’s study all detested this view on disability as it can, for instance, be interpreted as dehumanising; the interviewees experienced that this way of representation suggests that the existence of disabled people is dependent on the pity of able-bodied people.

The way of representing Paralympians as ‘Hollywood-worthy’ superheroes has both its pros and cons, as the research by Kama (2004) suggests. On one hand, it raises awareness on disabilities, which may help the acceptance of disabled people into mainstream society. It can also serve as inspiration for both people who view their disability as a hindrance as well as for able-bodied people. On the other hand, it is questionable whether this portrayal of disabled people is an effective way of raising awareness because, despite its benefits such as aforementioned acceptance, it can be harmful for disabled people. Most disabled people will never be able to compete in the Paralympic games so by representing Paralympians in ways that portray them as a “typical” examples of the disabled will not in fact benefit the agenda of awareness-raising.

Earlier studies on the discourses surrounding disability and Paralympians have mainly been restricted to the supercrip discourse. A less restrained approach to the representation of disability is thus needed, as well as study on the aspect of visual representation in the media, of which I have found very little previous research in relation to disability (Pappous et al. 2011).

3 PRESENT STUDY

In this section, the details of this study are explained. First, the aim and the research questions are introduced. The second part of this section sheds light on the data and explains how it was gathered. Finally, the method of analysis is clarified briefly.

3.1 Aim and research questions

The aim of this study is to examine the representation of two disabled athletes in the media. However, it is important to keep in mind that the purpose of this paper is not to provide a clear-cut analysis on the representation of *all* disabled athletes or disabled people in general. Focusing on the representation of only two athletes in a restricted selection of data can, nevertheless, still be useful for future research on the overall representation of disability in the media.

The research questions guiding this study are the following:

1. How are Paralympians Oscar Pistorius and Kelly Gallagher represented in *The Guardian*?
2. What kind of discourses can be identified in representing the Paralympians?

3.2 Data

The data of this study consists of two articles published on the website of the British newspaper *The Guardian*. One of the articles is about the Paralympian Oscar Pistorius, while the other is about the Paralympian Kelly Gallagher. Despite both being disabled, the athletes selected for analysis are in several ways different: for instance, one is male and very well-known, while the other is female and relatively unknown. The focus of this paper, however, is not to compare the differences in the representation of the two athletes but to gain some overall understanding of the way these two athletes are represented in the media.

The data is limited to two articles: “Oscar Pistorius aims to take his inspiring tale to Olympian heights” (McRae 2011) and “Kelly Gallagher: ‘Skiing became everything after losing my father’” (John 2014). The texts are around 1900 and 1500 words long, respectively. Analysing online articles has several benefits: not only are they easily available, but the readership of online newspapers is also, considering that they are available on the internet all around the world, wider compared to a traditional newspaper. Taking account the wide readership of online newspapers, this makes the articles significant in shaping the public’s attitudes. It is also worth noting that the article on Pistorius was published before the public opinion on him changed dramatically as the focus of this study is on the representation of the two people as athletes and not on the representation of their personal life.

The Guardian, founded in Manchester in 1821, is one of the most read newspapers in the UK. The website of the paper also attracts a wide audience, for instance 38.9 million unique visitors in October 2012, making it the world’s third most read online newspaper (ComScore 2012). According to its website (2008), one of the main principles of the newspaper is to ensure perpetuity as a “quality national newspaper without party affiliation, remaining faithful to its liberal tradition” (The Guardian 2008) but it is, however, generally regarded as left-leaning and affiliated with the Labour party in the United Kingdom.

3.3 Methods

This study is based on qualitative research and analyses some linguistic features of two articles on Paralympian athletes published on the website of *The Guardian*. The main method used is textual analysis. The results are examined from the point of view of critical discourse analysis and visual social semiotics. First, I analyse the vocabulary and the ways in which both the athletes and their disabilities are referred to. Second, I will investigate how the athletes' careers are described from the point of view of narration and what aspects of their lives are emphasised. Finally, I will analyse the pictures used to illustrate the articles in terms of visual representation. Based on the findings, this study is an attempt to identify and name discourses in the texts regarding the athletes and, to some extent, disabled people in general. The discourses examined in this study are, therefore, the combination of textual and social, which Gee (1999:17) calls the “big D” discourses.

4 DISCOURSES OF DISABILITY

This section focuses on the representation of two Paralympians in two articles published on the website of the British newspaper *The Guardian*. First, I will investigate the data in the light of the supercrip discourse, which is a very common way of describing disabled people. Second, I will focus on the way disability is seen as a factor that forces a person to be reliant on other people. Third, the study examines how *The Guardian* attempts to raise awareness of disability and acceptance of disability in society. Finally, the pictures illustrating the articles are analysed in terms of visual representation.

4.1 Inspirational Paralympians and the supercrip discourse

Previous research on the representation of the disabled has mainly focused on the supercrip discourse (for example Silva and Howe 2012, Berger 2008). Hence, it is not a surprise that the depiction of disabled athletes as fighters who have had to overcome great difficulties in order to reach success is also present in the way both Oscar Pistorius and Kelly Gallagher are represented in *The Guardian*.

In the articles, both Pistorius and Gallagher are described in ways that represent them as superhuman and extraordinary. Kelly Gallagher, for example, is called a *heroine* and a *daredevil*. Pistorius, on the other hand, is referred to by his nickname the *Blade Runner*, which makes an allusion of the athlete as one of the rebellious androids in the science fiction film *Blade Runner* (1982). The use of these nicknames and labels is both a fun, playful way of referring to the athletes, but can also serve as reinforcement of the athletes' representation as supercrips whose courage and talent serve as justification for their acceptance.

Furthermore, the writer often calls Pistorius' prosthetic legs *blades* and '*Cheetah Flex-Foot*' *blades*, which not only is the name of the type of prosthetics the sprint runner uses, but which also creates an image of the athlete as non-human. The article also dedicates several paragraphs to describing Pistorius' prosthetic legs and their miscellaneous features, which tends to lead to a similar kind of allusion:

(1) I plugged my iPod into it and this scientist [in Reykjavik] came in. They're very serious and he shouted: 'No! You can't do that!' I said: 'Listen, you should put a memory stick in here and I could load my music into my leg.' I thought it was quite funny; he didn't. (McRae 2011).

In this example, by describing the technical features of the prosthetics, Pistorius' legs are represented not as a helping device for walking and running, but something that makes the disabled person using the prosthetic resemble a cyborg, thus distancing him or her from able-bodied people.

According to Cumberbatch and Negrine (1992, cited in Kama 2004: 2), the representation of the disabled often relies on the personal tragedy of the person. The "struggles" that disabled athletes have endured is often emphasised in the discourses surrounding disability, thus serving as a source of inspiration for others. However, the data does not see Gallagher and Pistorius' disability as the source of tragedy in their stories. Instead, their family history is described using nouns and adjectives provoking a strong emotional response from the reader. Kelly Gallagher's road to the Paralympics has been *tough and gruelling* and there has been *pain and hardship* due to a *family tragedy* [the death of her father]. This, according to the article, *left her with a stark choice*. Similarly, the article on Pistorius dedicates two paragraphs for a description of his childhood. For example, the writer mentions how his parents, too, had to *confront a stark choice* [on whether to amputate his son's legs] when

Pistorius was 11 months old. The divorce of the runner's parents and the death of his mother are also described.

The word choices in the previous paragraph's examples are full of emotion. In the representation of the two Paralympians, nouns and adjectives loaded with emotion are thus a way of engaging the reader in the stories of the athletes. The lexical choices transform the lives of the athletes into a story of an exceptional individual who manages to triumph despite the difficulties in his or her life. On the other hand, the tragedy in athletes' stories is not created through their disability, but through the events in their family life. Therefore, the tragic aspect of the athletes' stories is not a direct indicator of the supercrip discourse, but could perhaps be an example of a wider discourse which regards athletes in general (i.e. both disabled and able-bodied) as fighters who are able to overcome every obstacle in their life. However, put together with disability, the tragedy in the athletes' personal lives maximises the entertainment and inspiration value of the story.

As the interviews conducted by Kama (2004) suggest, the use of the supercrip discourse is highly problematic because it supports the representation of disabled people as superhuman fighters who have "overcome" their disability. On one hand, raising awareness of disabilities may help the acceptance of disabled people into mainstream society. As discussed earlier in this study, the representation of Paralympians as supercrips can also be an important source of inspiration and motivation for other disabled people who are struggling. On the other hand, the effects of representing the athletes as supercrips may also be negative as it may create an illusion that all disabled people should be able to reach outstanding athletic or other success and failing to do so means failing to become accepted as a full member of society.

4.2 Dependence on able-bodied people

Another discourse present in the article on Kelly Gallagher is that of disabled people as the "pitiful handicapped", a term introduced by Kama (2004). In this discourse, disabled people are seen as dependent on able-bodied people and are pitied. This discourse is also seen to imply that disabled people are in debt to people who help them and need to be grateful to them. The Paralympians' disabilities are viewed as a hindrance for living a normal life, which also distances them from able-bodied people by creating categories for human beings.

However, the article on Gallagher also attempts to problematise this representation by suggesting that sports are a way for a disabled person to be in control of his or her life. I also found no evidence of the “pitiful” side of the discourse, contrary to Kama’s perceptions of the discourse.

The lexical choices made in the representation of Kelly Gallagher put emphasis on her relationships with other people, such as her family and Charlotte Evans, her guide on the ski slopes. To some extent, this stems from Gallagher’s condition, which requires her to receive aid in some tasks, but also her own attitude and the way she herself constructs her identity. On skiing for the first time, Gallagher explains that “*I’d never in my memory experienced that ability to shoot off, without anybody else’s help*” (John 2014). Behind this statement is the idea of disability as a phenomenon that restricts a person from having a full life because he or she has to rely on other people’s assistance. Gallagher goes on to describe her fascination with downhill skiing: “*I don’t drive a car, I don’t get to control too many things. But this I really took to*” (John 2014). Furthermore, by emphasizing the control which a Paralympian gains from sports, he or she is given agency. It can be argued, however, whether this kind of control that Gallagher describes can be transferred into the everyday life of these athletes; the power they have while doing sports does not have value in society, where the Paralympian may be treated as a secondary citizen.

The representation of Gallagher also tends to place emphasis on the sacrifices those closest to her have had to make in order for the athlete to succeed. When describing Gallagher and Evans’ sports career together, the writer describes Evans’ commitment to being Gallagher’s guide as *unprecedented*, and mentions that she postponed her studies at university in order to act as Gallagher’s guide. In addition, Gallagher says that she is *really honoured to be able to ski with her [Evans]* (parentheses added) and John (2014) explains that Gallagher *hopes she can repay the dedication of her family*. The use of words such as *honoured*, *repay* and *dedication* and referring to Evans’ delayed university studies imply that those closest to a disabled person make sacrifices so that he or she is able to enjoy life. Because of this, the disabled person is required to express gratitude and places the Paralympian in an inferior position.

4.3 Paralympians as “average Joes” and “plain Janes”

In addition to the representation of disability as a source of superhuman powers, and on the other hand as a hindrance which forces an individual to become dependent on other people, the articles also attempt to raise awareness on disability. This is most significantly brought forward through the idea that Paralympians, as well as all disabled people, are like everyone else. The means include different strategies that both challenge and reproduce problematic issues through the (de-)categorization of people into *us* and *them*. As a result the two contradicting discourses are present, the “average Joe” discourse and the supercrip discourse..

A good example of the attempt to represent the Paralympians as “ordinary” is when the writer has decided to include a direct quote includes a direct quote by Gallagher in the text. In this quote, the athlete describes her fellow competitors in the Sochi Paralympic games of 2014:

(2) At the Paralympics you see so many people with interesting stories and you realise how everyone has their own unique story. So disability isn't really separate, there aren't able bodied [sic] and disabled people – it's just that everyone's experiencing life in a different way. (John 2014).

In this quote, the categorisation of people into disabled and able-bodied people, which implies that one difference in a person's characteristics changes him or her fundamentally, is challenged by Gallagher. By describing the athletes' stories as *interesting* and *unique*, she includes Paralympians into the category of human beings by pointing out that a disability does not devalue a person, but is a single feature of a person that distinguishes him or her from others and indicates that each person is an individual. This suggests that Paralympians, too, are agents, not dehumanised objects in society who have no will of their own. However, the use of the words *interesting* and *unique* can also be interpreted as a part of the supercrip discourse, as they further distance an individual from what is considered “normal” by society.

Contrary to the attempts of John (2014) and Gallagher to challenge the ideology of dividing people into *us* and *them* based on their physical abilities, the article on Pistorius, however, attempts to raise awareness of disability among the general public through slightly different means. The writer, in fact, calls increasing awareness a *responsibility* for the runner, which suggests that informing people of disability is beneficial. Moreover, this is also implied when

Pistorius mentions *educating* people about disability as one of his goals. Where Gallagher's choice of words indicates a humane aspect of awareness-raising, Pistorius' (and the journalist's) approach is more formal.

Despite the attempts in the data to raise awareness of disability by representing disabled people as ordinary "average Joes" and "plain Janes" by, for example, pointing out that Paralympians are just like everybody else or questioning the often latent and hierarchical categories of people, the "average Joe" discourse is undermined by the supercrip discourse used (perhaps inadvertently) in both texts. This is because the two can be seen as the opposites: one attempts to dispel the categorisation of people into those who are disabled and others who are able-bodied, while the other idolises successful disabled athletes. Efforts to define disability as one of many characteristics of a person while at the same time describing their stories as extraordinary and representing them in a heroic way creates a contradiction.

4.4 Visual representation

Pictures are often included in newspaper articles as illustrations. Even though the producers of media texts may not always consider carefully which picture to include in an article, the choice however has an important role in the overall representation of a certain issue. In this section, the three pictures used as illustration for the two *The Guardian* articles are analysed by using Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) methods for the analysis of visual representation, consisting of the representational, interactional and compositional meanings. First, I will study the picture used in the article written about Oscar Pistorius and then discuss how the findings relate to the analysis on the written part of the texts. Second, the two pictures in the article on Kelly Gallagher are examined in a similar manner.

4.4.1 Oscar Pistorius: the lean and sculpted hero



Figure 1. The image used in the article on Oscar Pistorius featuring the athlete on a running track. (Jenkins 2011)

According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), the representational meaning of an image, created by the characteristics of the actors and vectors in the image, is the first step into the analysis of visual representation. The picture attached to the article on Oscar Pistorius, shown in Figure 1, features Pistorius running on a running track. He is the only actor in the image but here are, however, several vectors in the image pointing to different directions, as can be seen in Figure 2. The position of the actor indicating movement to the left, as well as his gaze in the same direction creates the first vector in the image.



Figure 2: Vectors indicating the actor's direction of movement.

Although the actor's goal, in other words the target of the vector, is not visible in the picture, together with the article the image creates a representation of Pistorius as ambitious and someone who aims to move forward in his life. This is also supported by the vectors going from left to right. Moreover, the title of the article is "Oscar Pistorius aims to take his inspiring tale to Olympian heights" and the text focuses on his ambitiousness and plans for the future in detail, which is effectively supported by the image, as well.

According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), the interactional meaning of an image consists of the amount of involvement the image engages its viewer in. This includes aspects such as the social distance, which is determined by how far or close up the picture was taken, and the angle from which the target of the image is depicted. In the picture portraying Pistorius, the full body of the athlete is shown and the picture is taken from a low angle. The use of a long shot picture distances the viewer from the subject of the image, whereas the use of a low angle puts Pistorius in a powerful position.

As Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) argue, the compositional meaning of an image, consisting of location, salience and framing, combines the two layers of meanings discussed above. In figure 1, two of these aspects are worth studying: location and salience. Firstly, Pistorius is positioned close to the centre of the image, which focuses the viewer's attention to him. Furthermore, the direction of the athlete's movement indicates progress, as Kress and van Leeuwen's theory of the dimensions of space (2006: 197) suggests. Secondly, the colours in the image make the actor stand out: the background is of a stadium and a bright blue sky, whereas Pistorius' clothes are dark blue. The contrast between light and dark colours effectively makes the athlete salient.

The way in which Pistorius is portrayed in the picture also relates to the findings on the article it is attached to. For several reasons, the image can be considered as a part of the same discourses, especially that of Paralympians as supercrips. First of all, the low angle and the use of a full body shot represent the athlete as heroic, which is a central part of the depiction of the disabled as supercrips. The heroic portrayal is also emphasised by the blue sky behind Pistorius, which helps him stand out. Second, the viewer's attention is drawn to Pistorius' prosthetics, which creates an allusion of him as a cyborg. Even then, the athlete appears a superhero: the writer of the article describes Pistorius as *lean and sculpted*, which is a representation the picture supports.

It is impossible to say whether the visual representation of Pistorius is typical for Paralympians as only a few studies (for example Pappous et al. 2011) on the visual representation of athletes focus on both able-bodied and disabled persons. Moreover, these studies do not focus on whether the visual representation of disabled athletes differs from that of able-bodied athletes. However, the image of Pistorius fits the typical portrayal of a male athlete: Duncan and Messner (1998: 176) argue that sportsmen are more likely to be portrayed in pictures suggesting dominance, for example in a photograph taken from a low angle and depicting a position of distance, than women.

4.4.2 Kelly Gallagher: the sociable girl next door

While the picture attached to the article on Oscar Pistorius creates a portrayal of the sprint runner as a hero, the images used in “Kelly Gallagher: ‘Skiing became everything after losing my father’” (John 2014) form a very different kind of representation. The representation of the alpine skier appears on one hand to be similar to the representation of many able-bodied (female) athletes (for example Duncan and Messner 1998), but on the other hand the images also contribute to the overall representation of the athlete as a Paralympian.



Figure 3: Kelly Gallagher (on the right) with her guide, Charlotte Evans, after winning gold in women's Super G event at the Sochi Paralympics in 2014. (Walton 2014)



Figure 4: Gallagher with her late father. (Gallagher n.d.)

The two pictures in the article written about Kelly Gallagher after her victory at the Winter Paralympic Games in Sochi in 2014, shown in Figures 3 and 4, both display two participants. Figure 3 is of Gallagher with her guide, Charlotte Evans, in the medal ceremony after the Super G event, whereas Figure 4 shows Gallagher next to her father. As the participants look at something instead of performing an action, according to Unsworth (2001:76) they are thus called *reactors*.

Opposite to the interactional representation of Pistorius in Figure 1, the relationship between the viewer and the image is intimate, as several aspects of Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) interactional meaning suggest. First, the reactors in Figures 3 and 4 gazing directly at the viewer (i.e. the images are *demands*) results in a more interpersonal effect and allows the viewer to become involved in the reactors' lives. The smiles on the participants' faces also help construct a bond between the viewer and the image and create a representation of Gallagher as a happy "girl next door"; a stereotype used to describe a cute, honest girl who has a positive outlook on life. Second, the social distance of both pictures create intimacy, as they are medium shots, taken from either waist or chest up, which makes the participants seem like close friends with the viewer. Third, the eye-level angle and frontal point of view of the pictures indicate equality and togetherness.

There is, however, less emphasis on compositional meaning in the pictures featuring Gallagher. Gallagher and Evans' gold medals are the most salient part of Figure 3, as they are

in the centre of the image and stand out from the two athletes' dark outfits. The display of the medals, combined with the participants' bright smiles and the bouquets of flowers they are holding place great meaning to their success.

One of the most significant aspects of the visual representation of Gallagher is her relationship with other people; she is shown next to someone else in both Figure 3 and 4. This has three different kinds of effects. The first is that she appears as sociable and friendly, which emphasises the importance of her friends and family to her life. Second, however, is that the use of images which always show the skier with someone else may reduce her agency, as she is defined through her relationships with other people instead of the representation put forward in the picture featuring Pistorius. Third, by using a picture of Gallagher with her deceased father affects an emotional reaction from the viewer, increasing the tragic story of the athlete.

5 CONCLUSION

This study looked at the representation of Northern Irish alpine skier Kelly Gallagher and South African sprint runner Oscar Pistorius in two articles published online on the website of *The Guardian*. The focus of the analysis was on their disability. Gee's (1999) notion of "big D" discourses was also taken into account. The analysis paid attention to the lexical choices made by the writers of the text, as well as the representation conveyed through the images in the articles. Thus, the theories of CDA and visual social semiotics were in a central role.

The results of the study both followed earlier findings of studies on disability, but the data also proved to partly challenge the common representations. In this study, I identified three different discourses that were used in order to represent Pistorius and Gallagher. First, similarly to the findings of some previous studies (Hardin and Hardin 2004; Thomas and Smith 2003), the athletes were characterised as "supercrips" who are an inspiration to both disabled and able-bodied people. Second, the data appeared to represent Gallagher through the discourse of the "pitiful handicapped"; she is regarded as dependent on other people, but has also gained freedom through sports. She is also implied as being in debt to the people who have helped her during her life. Third, the articles attempt to strive away from representing the athletes as supercrips and raise awareness of disabilities by depicting

Pistorius and Gallagher as “average Joes” who are just like everybody else. However, the presence of the supercrip discourse in the text collides with the ‘average Joe’ discourse.

The images in the articles supported the representations present in the text itself. Oscar Pistorius was displayed in a superhero-like composition, which alludes to the supercrip ideology. Kelly Gallagher, on the other hand, was shown smiling happily next to other people, which creates an image of her as a sociable girl next door, thus a normal human being who just happens to have a disability. However, the portrayal of her next to other people also emphasises her relationships with other people.

All in all, the representation of Oscar Pistorius and Kelly Gallagher in *The Guardian* mainly relied on the supercrip discourse. The writers also attempt to humanise them by describing them as “ordinary” human beings, which creates a discourse of Paralympians as “average Joes” and “plain Janes”. However, the representation of Gallagher is also often restricted by the discourse of the “pitiful handicapped” by both in the written text and through the visual aspect of the article.

Because this is a case study and the use of critical discourse analysis guided the focus of the study into a certain direction, the results are not derived from an analysis of the representation of all disabled people or Paralympians per se. Due to the limitations of a BA thesis, I was also unable to account for gender differences in the representation of the two athletes. Neither do the results describe the effects of the featured representations on the attitudes of the people who read the texts. This could be done by broadening the topic or changing the research method to a questionnaire, for example. However, this study provides us with more information on the different discourses used in describing disability, as well as the ideologies and attitudes present in *The Guardian*. Identifying common discourses and evaluating their effects can also make problematic features in the language used by media transparent, thus improving the quality of journalism. This is also why CDA is extremely important in general. Specialists of CDA often report what is plain in sight in the texts we read every day; we might not notice the problematic ideologies present in the media until someone points them out.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: “Oscar Pistorius aims to take his inspiring tale to Olympian heights”

The South African, known as the “Blade Runner” is hoping to educate people about disability while continuing his journey to the London 2012 Games

Donald McRae

The Guardian, Wednesday 25 May 2011 16.05 BST



The South African Oscar Pistorius is determined to make history next year by becoming the first disabled athlete to compete in both the Olympic and Paralympic Games. Photograph: Tom Jenkins for the Guardian

A lean and sculpted Oscar Pistorius politely pushes aside a breakfast basket piled high with croissants and pastries. He stretches out his legs for the day and gazes at the London skyline as he thinks of his fridge back home in Pretoria. “I’ve got a little calendar on my fridge door and I’m ticking off the days until London 2012. That’s why I know we’re down to less than 430. It’s really getting close now.”

Pistorius laughs but it seems striking that he should highlight the fact that 428 days are left before the start of the London Olympics. As an athlete known as the Blade Runner, as the multiple Paralympic record-holder and serial gold medal winner, it might be assumed Pistorius would concentrate on a different opening ceremony. But the South African is determined to make history next year by becoming the first disabled athlete to compete in both the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

He knows that 461 days remain before the Paralympics because Pistorius also aims to surpass his achievement in Beijing where, in 2008, he won three golds. “I’m excited about running the 4x100m relay,” he says of a fourth medal chance to supplement his individual events in the 100m, 200m and, his best race, the 400m. “I ran it for the first time at the Paralympic world championships this January. We only practised for 20 minutes but ended up five-hundredths of a second off the world record. The relay could be a big highlight.”

At those championships Pistorius lost a 100m race for the first time in seven years – to his closest rival, Jerome Singleton. He responded magnificently and, in March, achieved the 400m Olympic “B” qualifying mark of 45.61sec. Over the next month, beginning on Friday at the BT Paralympic World Cup in Manchester, he plans to run the “A” qualifying time of 45.25 which would guarantee automatic entry into the Olympics.

“I’m on track to achieve it and the closer we get to it the hungrier I am. I’ve improved by nearly half a second

over the last year so I really should make it. The ability is there – and so is the focus. Last week in training I ran a 10.99 in the 100m. So I'd like to go under 11 in Manchester as it hasn't been in done in five years. It would send a message back to Jerome: 'What's up buddy? Come out and play.'"

An extraordinary story began in November 1986 when a baby was born in Johannesburg. Oscar Pistorius was perfect from his chubby thighs up to his bright little brain. But he had a genetic disorder in both his legs. Each was missing its fibula, the long bone running from below the knee joint and down to the ankle. His parents confronted a stark choice. Should they prepare their child for a life in a wheelchair or could they face sanctioning a double amputation?

When Oscar was 11 months old Henke and Sheila Pistorius decided on amputation. A South African surgeon, Gerry Versveld, successfully severed both legs and, within six months, a tottering toddler took his first step on a set of fibreglass pegs. Oscar's childhood was still bookended by heartache; his parents divorced when he was six and, far more devastatingly, his mother died when he was just 15. But he developed startling self-belief as, inspired by his mother, he played rugby, water polo and tennis not far below junior provincial standard. He only discovered running after he had been injured in a rugby match. During rehab he showed a rare talent for sprinting on prosthetic legs.

Pistorius competed at his first Paralympics in Athens eight months later. Aged 17 in 2004 he just lost the 100m final but won gold in the 200m. He might have made it to the Beijing Olympics in 2008 had he not been banned by the IAAF the year before. Showing the same insensitivity it would exhibit in 2009, during the gender furor surrounding Caster Semenya, who trains at the same Pretoria track as Pistorius, the IAAF stooped to spying on him and then announced its tests proved his "blades" provided an unfair advantage over able-bodied athletes. Pistorius refused to buckle. He gathered some renowned scientists around him and coolly demolished the IAAF case at the court of arbitration for sport. He was granted permission to run in world and Olympic competition.

"I thought I'd be ecstatic," Pistorius remembers, "but it was more a case that at last I could get back to doing what I'm meant to be doing. The IAAF and I are getting on quite nicely now."

Convinced that he will face no further legal challenges, he reacts with interest when told that David James, a sports engineer at Sheffield Hallam University, still argues that Pistorius's "Cheetah Flex-Foot" blades give him a "distinct advantage" over the last half of a 400m race. James appears to ignore the glaring disadvantage Pistorius encounters over the first 200m when, without ankles to power him from the blocks, his passive blades are of limited use. Instead, James suggests that advances in modern technology could lead to someone, wearing high-tech blades, running 100m in 8sec by 2016.

Pistorius, who has little hope of making a 400m Olympic final, acknowledges the rocketing rate of technology. "You probably could run 100m in eight seconds – because people are coming up with pretty radical ideas. But they'd never be legal. Whenever we make any modifications we have to send it to the IAAF. We have to submit the design, and explain the reasons for the modified composition, and then they test it and say whether or not it's fine. We can't just slap on changes and turn up to race."

Has Pistorius tried out any radical designs – just for fun? "The prosthetic companies we work with are medically based. They're not trying anything superhuman. But they do cool stuff with feet. One company makes an advanced foot worth thousands of pounds. It can make 55 readings a second so if you're walking uphill it senses the incline and lifts the [prosthetic] foot higher. It also has a USB in it, which I noticed when they asked me to test it."

Pistorius cackles mischievously. "I plugged my iPod into it and this scientist [in Reykjavik] came in. They're very serious and he shouted: 'No! You can't do that!' I said: 'Listen, you should put a memory stick in here and I could load my music into my leg.' I thought it was quite funny; he didn't. So I took it out but it had charged my iPod. That night we went for dinner and I still had these feet on. I was relaxed and had my legs crossed at the ankles. But, when it was time to leave, it turned out that the batteries in the one foot had gone flat. It wouldn't move and, of course, this was the foot that had charged my iPod."

He tells various airport anecdotes about the trouble he has run into with his legs. "At Heathrow the security guys thought my legs were rocket launchers. The worst was in Amsterdam [when Pistorius was suspected of being an international terrorist and handcuffed]. My phone was flat and I'd packed my wallet in my luggage so I couldn't call anyone or buy any food. In the end they'd only let me go if I got an affidavit from the police station – and I'd just told the police exactly what I thought of them. I had to go back and say: 'Sorry, I really didn't mean it –

and can I have an affidavit now?”

Pistorius has also fallen on the track. “We’ve had serious training accidents. Once a bolt came off the back of my leg. The guy who had changed the alignment on my leg had put in a different bolt and it was too short. The bolt stripped out and I hit the deck at 45kmh. The tartan is really dirty and disgusting and I had chunks of it in me.”

How did Pistorius cope when even bigger chunks were taken out of him? “Fifteen is a tough age to lose your mother. It’s strange. In her will she said we must throw a party when she passed away and so we did. We celebrate her every year but we [his brother and sister] make an issue of not calling each other that day and being all morbid. The way we handle her loss is that we’re more grateful for the time we had with her. My father wasn’t around much when we grew up. I saw him seldom – and it’s the same now. He lives and works very far from me on a dolomite mine.”

Do they talk on the phone? “Mmmm, not much. We chat about once a month. He’s a cool guy but he’s more of a mate. He’s not much of a parent. It’s just life.”

Pistorius shows the kind of bracing courage which attracts the glittering eye of Hollywood. Tom Hanks has, supposedly, long been beguiled by the Afrikaner’s Blade Runner story. “Oh, the movie stuff,” Pistorius shrugs. “I enjoy my privacy and so that’s something I never wanted – to be famous. And I like to think the story of my life is not yet over.”

He is already a remarkable athlete but, over the next 475 days, Pistorius might become a truly iconic sporting figure. As he strives to burst on to the Olympic stage with even greater impact than he has achieved as a Paralympian, the 24-year-old is aware of wider responsibilities. “One of my goals is to educate people about disability. I go to a shopping centre after training in my shorts and a kid will stare at my prosthetic legs. The mother or father turns the kid’s face away and says: ‘Don’t stare.’ But they don’t take time to explain it. So I’ll go up to the kid and say, ‘My name’s Oscar and I’ve got these really cool legs. My own legs got bitten off by this huge shark.’ If the mother’s good looking, I’ll say: ‘They fell off because I didn’t eat my vegetables.’ Then I’ll explain it so the next time they see prosthetic legs it won’t be so weird. My disability has never been a negative because the way other people perceive you is the way you perceive yourself.”

Pistorius rightly regards himself as a future Olympic athlete – and a Paralympic champion. “That’s how I want to be seen. I don’t want to be treated differently to any other athlete. If I do badly in a competition I want people to be honest. The same goes if I do well. That’s the only thing that motivates me – the fact that I’m an athlete. I’m a runner.

Oscar Pistorius is a BT ambassador. He is competing in the BT Paralympic World Cup on 27 May. Tickets are on sale at www.btparalympicworldcup.com

Appendix 2: “Kelly Gallagher: 'Skiing became everything after losing my father'”

Kelly Gallagher won Britain's first winter gold medal at the Sochi Paralympics last week. She reveals how she came back from family bereavement and injury to triumph



[http://www.theguardian.com/sport/2014/mar/16/kelly-gallagher-paralympic-gold-ski-sochi-in-interview - img-1](http://www.theguardian.com/sport/2014/mar/16/kelly-gallagher-paralympic-gold-ski-sochi-in-interview-img-1)

Kelly Gallagher, right, and her guide Charlotte Evans, celebrate making history for Great Britain with their first place in the women's Super G event. Photograph: Ian Walton/Getty

Emma John

Sunday 16 March 2014 00.04 GMT

Kelly Gallagher may have devoted a decade to winning a gold medal but, when it arrived, she didn't celebrate. After victory in the visually impaired Super G at the Winter Paralympics, the 28-year-old ski racer and her guide, Charlotte Evans, didn't enjoy so much as a sip of the good stuff. They still had four more disciplines to compete in, including Sunday's giant slalom. "In a way we haven't thought about our win at all," she says. "We've just been really focused on our next event."

The win by Gallagher and Evans was as historic as it was thrilling: the first British competitors to finish first on the slopes at a Winter Games, Olympic or Paralympic. But it also comes with the kind of backstory – and heroine – that would make Hollywood producers reach for their cheque books. Two years ago Gallagher, whose conversation tends to fizz with positivity, nearly quit the sport – and it was only a family tragedy that inspired her return to the piste.

There was nothing in Gallagher's early life that marked her out as a future sporting champion. Snow-capped peaks are notably absent in Bangor, Co Down, where she grew up; nor did she exhibit any particular sporting ability. "I was mediocre at everything, I couldn't compete in hockey or netball or the traditional school sports, I am definitely not a talented sprinter or cross country runner. But I enjoyed the play aspect and the camaraderie."

She was, however, "always a bit of a daredevil"; the fact that the genetic condition oculocutaneous albinism

severely limited her sight did not stop her cycling, rollerblading or doing gymnastics with friends.

Her mother Margaret might have been nervous, but her parents let her "hammer on ahead" and when the family took a driving holiday around Andorra when Gallagher was 17, they agreed to her suggestion that the three of them take a skiing lesson. "I'd never in my memory experienced that ability to just shoot off, without anybody else's help," she remembers. "I don't drive a car, I don't get to control too many things. But this I really took to."

She might have been a latecomer, but she was inspired by her father, Patrick, who had become a commercial pilot at 36. "He showed me that if you want to do something it's never too late. You just keep on, no matter how difficult something is, you can work for it." With limited funding for the sport in the UK, Gallagher had to combine her competitive passion with a day job as a civil service statistician (she has a maths degree from Bath University).

Four years ago she made her Paralympic debut in Vancouver, finishing fourth and sixth in two disciplines; the same year, her father was diagnosed with cancer in his left eye. He had the eye removed – then set about regaining his flying licences.

Gallagher says she never had any doubt he would fly again and when he did return to the air it was, she says, a really special time. She, meanwhile, was struggling on the slopes, and a bad concussion combined with a back injury shook her confidence so badly that she packed up and returned home to Northern Ireland.

"Nothing was going my way. I knew things were wrong because I'd ended up nearly fighting with Charlotte and it had reached a stage where I just hated it. We were in a five-star hotel, doing what I loved – and I didn't love it any more."

It was during that recovery time at home that a routine MRI scan revealed that her father's cancer had returned, and was inoperable. Gallagher was able to be with him for his last months – "maybe my own injury was fortunate" – and she felt relieved that his suffering wasn't prolonged. His death in 2012 left her with a stark choice. "I was either going to throw everything I had at my racing, or I was going to leave. And it didn't feel right to leave."



Kelly Gallagher with her late father, Patrick. Photograph: Courtesy of Kelly Gallagher

One catalyst for her return to competition was Evans, whose sheer will to win matches Gallagher's own. The two met after Vancouver; Gallagher's previous guide had left the sport and she was advertising for a new one. Evans, who was part of the England alpine ski team and English overall champion in 2009, was coaching while she recovered from a knee injury and somebody handed her the ad. "I don't think she was too keen," Gallagher laughs, "but her daddy talked her round."

In the intervening years, Evans – who was only 19 when they teamed up – has approached the role of guide with a level of unprecedented commitment and deferred her university studies to work with Gallagher both on and off the ski slopes.

"We're both very competitive, and it's easy to trust Charlotte," says Gallagher. "She was there when there was no funding. If somebody's willing to put that much effort in I'm really honoured to be able to ski with her."

While Gallagher throws herself down the slopes at 100kmh, Evans provides audio commentary, relayed through a Bluetooth earpiece; Gallagher can see only the vaguest orange blur of a bib in front of her. If it sounds dangerous, it is – Gallagher's injuries have included a broken foot, a torn knee and deep bruises to her spine; on one occasion, she skied into a rope, which ripped into her face. Then there are the more troubling concussions, the latest in September. "It's only been recently I could read again without losing focus and concentration," she says.

The physical injuries are draining, but the crashes leave a mental scar too. "I lose trust in myself," says Gallagher. "I have a lot of self-doubt." It's at these times she leans most on Evans, whose motto is "think less, live more" – the two even had it designed into a sticker that goes on their gear. "The love and support I've received from my family is unconditional. And now Charlotte and I have the same in each other. It's not just a professional relationship, it's not business in that sense. She's someone I care for – she's like family to me."

Still, it has been a tough, gruelling four years for them: "You get so down, sometimes there's not even any point in crying." And while last week's gold medal has made the pain and hardship worth it, it has been poignant because of her father's absence. "It'll never be what I wanted it to be," says Gallagher. "And it's very sad for my mum here. She's been very alone, all those people around her, and she's still getting used to the idea that she's not part of a pair."

There was more emotion when Gallagher endured early exits in her next two events, hitting a gate in the super-combined and crashing out of the slalom. "It hurts in your tummy ... hurts everywhere," she said afterwards. There remains a final opportunity to add to her gold in Sunday's giant slalom, when Gallagher hopes she can repay the dedication of her family – she has seven half-brothers and sisters, who all think she's "totally nuts" – who have been getting up in the early hours to catch her races.

"For most of them this is the first they've ever seen me racing," she says. "The idea that loads of people have accidentally turned on Channel 4 and seen these crazy girls coming down the course is so cool."

She is as delighted by the media coverage of the Paralympics as she is of her own experience of competing at the Games. "At home," she recalls, "I didn't feel any different from any other child. And I'm really delighted that my mum enrolled me in a mainstream school, but it was a struggle to be and look different, with my really thick glasses, squinting in the sun."

"At the Paralympics you see so many people with interesting stories and you realise how everyone has their own unique story. So disability isn't really separate, there aren't able bodied and disabled people – it's just that everyone's experiencing life in a different way."