

**IS THE PEN MIGHTIER THAN THE PODIUM?
AN ANALYSIS OF CANADIAN ONLINE NEWS ARTICLES AND THEIR
PORTRAYALS OF WOMEN ON TEAM CANADA DURING THE 2021 TOKYO
PARALYMPIC SUMMER GAMES**

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A Thesis Submitted to the School of Human Kinetics and Recreation Graduate Studies in partial
fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of

M.Sc. Kinesiology (Socio-cultural studies of physical activity and health)

Memorial University of Newfoundland

2023

St. John's, Newfoundland, and Labrador

Abstract

This thesis examined the portrayal of Women on Team Canada in online Canadian news articles during the 2021 Tokyo Summer Paralympics. The study sought to answer the primary research question: how were women athletes from Team Canada depicted in online Canadian news articles during the event? A qualitative content analysis was conducted using the spiral model, informed by feminist disability studies and the social model of disability. The sample consisted of 51 online news articles, including their text, titles, and photos. Three primary themes emerged: medicalized conceptions of disability, lack of intersectional identities, and reporting easy-to-understand information. It is important to acknowledge that there have been improvements from past coverage, including the text and titles focusing more on women athletes' athletic skills. Despite these improvements, more work is needed to incorporate social perspectives on disability in reporting, address intersectional identities such as race and sexuality, and include educational information about para-sports and events. This study contributes to the growing body of literature on the representation of Paralympic athletes in media and provides recommendations for more inclusive and equitable coverage in the future.

Acknowledgements

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to TA, my supervisor, for their unfaltering belief and invaluable guidance on this thesis. TA's mentorship served as a beacon even in my moments of doubt. My deep appreciation goes to my parents and partner. Your patience through endless discussions on the same 51 articles has been remarkable. You've been my emotional rock throughout this journey. Finally, a nod to the podcasts that provided a much-needed sanctuary during the editing process. These podcasts kept me grounded during the most demanding times. This journey would not have been possible without all of you. Thank you.

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Chapter One - Introduction

Are women elite-level athletes with disabilities being overlooked in media coverage?

While studies have examined how athletes who experience disability (AWED) are portrayed in the media, few have specifically addressed the unique experiences of elite-level women AWED (Weaving & Samson, 2018). This thesis addresses this gap by exploring the potential ramifications of current coverage and narratives and identifying ways to develop more empowering depictions that celebrate the strength and athleticism of elite-level women AWED (Shirazipour et al., 2017). This study delves into the complex world of media representation, explores how media coverage of disability sports can perpetuate stereotypes and limit opportunities for recognition and discusses more equitable and inclusive representations of women athletes who experience disabilities.

Compared to their male counterparts or even to women athletes who are able-bodied, elite-level women AWED are typically portrayed in the media differently (Ayvazoglu, 2015). Specifically, these elite-level women AWED are often assigned an asexual identity or portrayed in heteronormative and hyperfeminine ways that are frequently trivialized in the media (Pappous et al., 2011). According to Rees et al. (2018), sports coverage of elite-level AWED frequently uses medical terminology, and the focus of the narrative is their disability and medical diagnosis rather than societal stigmas, preconceptions, and barriers that influence them, their participation in sport, and other members of the disability community.

The media coverage of the Paralympic games has greatly influenced the public's opinion of disability and AWED (Shirazipour et al., 2017). Consequently, it is crucial to understand these pervasive and persevering narratives to help change them and produce more realistic ones that challenge harmful preconceptions rather than repeating them. In addition, it became clear

through a review of the literature conducted during the research for this thesis that there is a lack of research focusing only on elite-level women AWED. Weiller-Abels et al. (2021) called for further research in this area to examine narratives unique to elite-level women AWED. To address this gap, this study sought to understand better how women who are Paralympians are portrayed in the media and how they could be represented in a more genuine way rather than reproducing previously negative medicalized, heteronormative, and patriarchal depictions that have been the norm.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research study was to apply a feminist disability studies framework to conduct a qualitative content analysis of Canadian media coverage focusing on women Athletes with Exceptionalities (AWED) representing Team Canada during the 2021 Summer Paralympics in Tokyo. For the scope of this study, 'media' refers to online newspaper articles and photographs produced by Canadian online newspaper publications. The study gathered and examined media content within a specified timeframe, spanning from August 10, 2021 (two weeks before the games) to September 19, 2021 (two weeks after the games), encompassing the entire event. Through the analysis of this media content and its alignment with existing literature, the research aimed to identify prevalent narratives in the coverage of women Paralympians and explore strategies to challenge stereotypical portrayals of these athletes in future media coverage

Objectives of the Study

This study aimed to determine what narratives are present amongst the media coverage of women Paralympians during the most recent summer games. Based on the findings from the content analysis and literature review conducted this study has proposed alternative

representations that would be more accurate and constructive rather than trivializing for women athletes and women who experience disability more broadly.

Research Questions

How were women athletes from Team Canada depicted in online Canadian news articles leading up to, during, and just after the 2021 Tokyo Summer Paralympics?

Sub-Questions

1. What were the pervasive narratives in this coverage, and how do these narratives relate to past coverage?
2. Which factors contributed to the construction of these dominant narratives?

Researcher Background

I have grown up most of my life within an adapted sporting environment. My older brother has played wheelchair basketball since he was thirteen. I spent most of my adolescence on gym bleachers in different cities and provinces around the country, watching him play. Growing up in this environment gave me firsthand experiences with disability and what it means to be inclusive, as well as experience with ableism. My brother eventually qualified for the Canadian men's wheelchair basketball team. He went to the Paralympics in 2016, and that is when my interest in elite-level para-sport and the Paralympics was formed.

During my undergraduate degree, I received a research scholarship that allowed me to work on a personal project for a semester. I conducted interviews with the Canadian women's wheelchair basketball team and conducted interviews about their experiences within their sport. I was able to learn about these women's unique experiences first-hand and was made aware of the varying issues these women are currently facing regarding ableism in addition to sexism in their athletic career and the struggle they face to be recognized as serious elite-level athletes. So, when

it was time for me to choose my thesis topic, I felt I had a unique perspective on the issues these women face and some insider knowledge of disability sport and inclusivity, which would allow me to conduct this analysis with the required care and knowledge.

Theoretical Framework: Feminist Disability Studies

This study was heavily informed by feminist disability studies (FDS) and used this theory to aid in the media content analysis conducted. An FDS perspective encompasses more than the combination of gender and disability studies (Hall, 2011). Instead, FDS scholars seek to reimagine disability and gender and perhaps transform both fields of study (Knoll, 2009). Overall, FDS scholars challenge preconceived notions and stereotypes about individuals who experience disabilities (Garland-Thomson, 2005).

First, it is essential to note that the FDS perspective adopts a social rather than historically medical model of disability (Garland-Thomson, 2005). The medical model of disability is based on rehabilitation and focuses on the individual and the individual's biological problem (Areheart, 2008). The individual is seen as responsible for fixing their problem, often involving doctors and medicine (Areheart, 2008). The medical model of disability categorizes disability as an abnormality resulting from dysfunction in some parts of the body (Gomes et al., 2019). Within this medical model, individuals who experience disability are depicted and categorized as dependent and incapable who should focus on overcoming and finding a cure for their condition (Areheart, 2008). Gomes et al., (2019) argue that this lens and resulting narratives contribute to bodies who experienced disability being labelled as deviant. Furthermore, this has led to legitimized unequal allocation of resources, status, and power (Gomes et al., 2019).

The social model of disability argued instead that individuals who experience disability are not, in fact, "disabled" by their impairments but by barriers that exist in society (Oliver,

2013). This framework initially stemmed from the Fundamental Principles of Disability document initially published in the 1970s (Oliver, 2013). The social model suggested that societal barriers need to change instead of framing disability as a problem to be solved by the individual (Oliver, 2013). Overall, this newer model aimed to shift moral responsibility from the individual to society with a disability was no longer viewed as an individual's problem that is their sole responsibility to fix (Gomes et al., 2019). Instead, emphasis was placed on issues with architecture or societal attitudes and beliefs that impeded individuals who experienced disabilities from participating equally in society (Gomes et al., 2019). The social model of disability moved away from thinking that individuals needed to be rehabilitated to live fulfilling and normal lives; instead, society was the one that needed to change (Gomes et al., 2019).

The second component of this framework is that FDS scholars agree that disability and gender are socially constructed identities and representational systems (Knoll, 2009). FDS scholars question the dominant assumptions that cast disability as a physical problem to be addressed by normalization procedures rather than a socially constructed identity and a representational system (Knoll, 2009). FDS scholars explore the conceptual connections between gender and disability and aim to make the historical and current interconnectedness between all forms of oppression visible (Hall, 2011). This way, FDS scholars carefully problematize various materials and activities that engage bodies (Gomes et al., 2019).

FDS scholars like Garland-Thomson (2005) seek to question the category of 'woman', the term's coherence, limitations, and exclusions, and expand traditional definitions of 'gender'. Hall (2011) suggests that the most advanced feminist analyses show how race, ethnicity, sexuality, class structures, immigration status, body size etc., interact with gender. Additionally, issues associated with disability highlight several feminist concerns, such as the politics surrounding

appearance, the ethics of selective abortion and genetic testing, and issues related to access and inclusion (Garland-Thomson, 2005).

FDS scholars seek to identify and critique the different historical, cultural, and social forces that contribute to a lower quality of life for those who experience disability. Two core questions drive their research: 1) what relationship exists between disability and gender? and 2) how may gender affect the experience of disability? (Hall, 2011). The FDS perspective intends to expose how gender norms may play a role in rationalizing oppression for individuals who experience disability and provide new ways of thinking about and imagining the body (Hall, 2011).

Chapter Two - Literature Review

I used Memorial University's library database to search for and collect peer-reviewed articles for this literature review. The following search terms were used to try and collect a substantial volume of peer-reviewed articles to review including media representation of female disability athletes, media representation of female Paralympians, history of parasport, history of the Paralympics, history of women in the Paralympics, women with physical disabilities barriers to physical activity and barriers to sport, female athletes in the media, disability in the media and disability sport in the media. From those searches, fifty-one articles were retrieved and reviewed; of those initially reviewed articles, forty-five were determined to be related to the focus and the study and were examined in depth.

During this review, it became clear that the media significantly influences societal perceptions and beliefs regarding disability and women who experience disability (Weiller-Abels et al., 2021). Overall, the literature highlights several problematic narratives that continue to exist within the media coverage of elite-level AWED (Kietlinski, 2019). In the following literature review, I discuss how the history of the Paralympics is relevant to this study, as well as the influence of the media and its significance when it comes to the coverage of para-sport and women athletes. I then go on to discuss the five identified themes from past coverage that are most relevant to my study: the "supercrip" narrative, the hierarchy of disability, medicalized descriptions of disability, women athletes as passive, and (a)sexualization and hyperfeminine portrayals of women athletes.

The History of the Paralympics

The Paralympics was created by men for other men and still exists in this patriarchal structure that celebrates typically masculine traits which may influence the experience of women

athletes and how they are depicted (Wickman, 2011). The Paralympics was also created for rehabilitation and was built with a distinctly medical view of disability, affecting how these athletes are viewed (Peers, 2012). Therefore, it is critical to briefly analyze the Paralympic and Parasport movements' origins to understand how parasport was created and the history of women's participation in elite-level parasport events. Understanding its origins and the history of women AWED aids in the understanding of the media coverage and familiar narratives surrounding disability sports.

The Paralympic movement began with war veterans returning from World War II. Those who had suffered spinal cord injuries were surviving at higher rates due to advances in medical science, and thus, a desire for rehabilitative activities began (Legg, 2018). The most well-known rehabilitative facility was the Stoke-Mandeville Hospital, where Dr. Ludwig Guttman organized the first-known games for individuals who experienced a disability (Legg, 2018). The first modern Paralympics took place in Rome in 1960, initially named the 9th International Stoke-Mandeville Games. It was only later that these games came to be recognized as the first Paralympics (Legg, 2018). It was not until 1976 that individuals experiencing disabilities other than spinal cord injuries competed; individuals with cerebral palsy did not compete until 1980 (Legg, 2018).

In recent years, the Paralympics have been recognized as a sporting event that can provide a global platform for challenging hegemonic ideas about masculinity, sexuality, and physicality (Silva & Howe, 2012). Silva and Howe (2012) argued that the Paralympics, combined with subsequent media coverage, have the power to challenge ableist ideologies of disability. Such coverage can do this by showcasing high-quality images of individuals who

experience disability consistently and regularly, which could significantly impact social conceptions of disability (Silva & Howe, 2012).

However, it is essential to note that the history of the games has made those positive and critical representations challenging to produce consistently (Peers, 2012). One must look critically at the history of the Paralympics and dissect its history fully to understand disability and disability sports. It is vital to acknowledge that in the beginning, the Paralympics were used as a rehabilitation tool and put men on display to showcase how these various sports were helping them return to normal (Peers, 2012). The Paralympic movement was born out of this biomedical discourse reinforcing the idea that individuals who experience disability need to be rescued and rehabilitated with the help of sport (Peers, 2012).

When looking at the inclusion of women in the Paralympics, their history is turbulent, and they continue to fight for equal participation and recognition in the games. Forty-five women participated in the first modern Paralympic Games in Rome in 1960 (Kietlinski, 2019). When looking at women's participation in the Paralympics since 1960, there is a large discrepancy between the number of women and male athletes attending the Paralympics (Oggero et al., 2021). While it cannot be denied that women's participation has been steadily climbing since 1960, it has consistently stayed below 50% at each summer Paralympic Games from 1960-2016 (Oggero et al., 2021). In 2016, women accounted for just 38.7% of Paralympians who attended the games, and this was the highest participation rate for women since the beginning of their participation (Houghton et al., 2017). It is also important to note that 42 delegations did not send a single women athlete to the 2016 Paralympic Games (Houghton et al., 2017).

In addition to the overall participation numbers in the games, women are also excluded from specific events at the Paralympics (Houghton et al., 2017). Women can compete in 20 out

of the 22 sports because both football 5-a-side and 7-a-side only have men's teams competing (Houghton et al., 2017). One explanation given by the International Blind Sports Federation (2020) is that there is simply a lack of women participants at the elite levels of football 5-a-side and 7-a-side. Certain events are also mixed events where both men and women can compete. However, these events often cater to male athletes and have fewer opportunities for women as they are considered more masculine sports (Houghton et al., 2017). For example, wheelchair rugby had 94 male participants in the 2016 games and only two women participants (Houghton et al., 2017). While women's participation has been increasing in recent games, they continue to face barriers to participation and are consistently underrepresented and marginalized.

These women athletes face additional barriers including a lack of programs, coaches, and role models for young women athletes entering the disability sport community (Kietlinski, 2019). These barriers may be due to a historical lack of resources and funding allocated to women in sports, hindering athletes' ability to pursue leadership positions or develop programs for future women athletes (Itoh et al., 2018). Women also face barriers regarding proper media representation in the Paralympics (Kietlinski, 2019) and often must negotiate a male-dominated and patriarchal structure (Wickman, 2011). For example, many successful women Paralympians do not get the same amount of media coverage allotted to them as their male or able-bodied counterparts, even if they have won more medals (Kietlinski, 2019). This lack of coverage contributes to a lack of visibility of these women athletes (Kietlinski, 2019). It contributes to a lack of positive role models, which can lead to girls and women interested in pursuing their Paralympic team with fewer opportunities, coaches, and resources (Kietlinski, 2019). Throughout the history of the Paralympic Games, there has been a lack of women representation at all levels of the organization (Itoh et al., 2018).

The Role of the Media

Media is crucial in understanding specific issues and influences societal attitudes and beliefs (Ayvazoglu, 2015). The media, including print media like newspapers, can affect public perceptions of what is appropriate, reasonable, and standard (Ayvazoglu, 2015). Media coverage can shape public perceptions of an issue, such as the Paralympics, by creating or reinforcing reality from a particular perspective (Shirazipour et al., 2017).

In many ways, contemporary writing and reading about disability have been a way to shift beliefs and attitudes worldwide (Silva & Howe, 2012). It has also been suggested that because of how the media portrays social groups and categories, audiences are likely exposed to messages that contribute to forming prejudices and stereotypes, reinforcing how society should understand and think about them (Weiller-Abels et al., 2021). Much of the public's knowledge and attitudes about people with disabilities are formed indirectly through mass-media messaging (Shirazipour et al., 2017).

Media depictions are one of the fundamental mechanisms responsible for continuing social beliefs regarding disability, particularly its construction as Otherness (McPherson et al., 2016). Media depictions are one of the most potent vehicles for perpetuating many social myths about disability (Silva & Howe, 2012). In addition, these representations often reproduce hegemonic conceptions of disability based on the medical model (McPherson et al., 2016).

The Role of the Media Specific to Women Athletes

Sports media has been documented as a powerful influencer of societal attitudes toward women athletes and contributes to understanding the relationship between women and sports (Weiller-Abels et al., 2021). Sports media and its journalists often can act as gatekeepers as they can emphasize certain elements and contribute to the presentation of women athletes, which can,

in turn, affect public perception (Weiller-Abels et al., 2021). Historically, women athletes and women's sports teams receive minimal media coverage compared to male athletes' coverage (Weiller-Abels et al., 2021). Women are frequently considered intruders in sports, and their coverage is often gendered (Weiller-Abels et al., 2021).

Overall, these different representations of women athletes are manifestation of hegemonic masculinity, which pushes the idea that women are inferior in the sports world and that women athletes matter less (Weiller-Abels et al., 2021). Hegemonic masculinity is present in other aspects of the experiences of women athletes as well, such as the pressure women athletes at the elite level experience to conform to specific beauty standards and ideals and are not represented as aggressive or assertive athletes (Weiller-Abels et al., 2021). There were also issues with women athletes being described as girls despite their adult age (Kolotouchkina et al., 2020). Being referred to in this way, primarily by men and boys, reinforces the idea that women athletes are secondary to male athletes (Weiller-Abels et al., 2021). Describing women athletes in this way can also contribute to the infantilization or trivialization of these athletes (Kolotouchkina et al., 2020). Whether it is able-bodied women athletes or women athletes who experience disabilities, many of these trends in media coverage tend to be true (Weiller-Abels et al., 2021).

These continued issues with the representation of women athletes and women athletes who experience disabilities may be tied to the fact that women are severely underrepresented in the workforce in sports journalism and sports news (Weiller-Abels et al., 2021). In 2018, a report found that when looking at 75 major media organizations, 90% of their sports editors and 88.5% of their sports reporters were men (Weiller-Abels et al., 2021). These numbers highlight that

coverage is made up of mainly male voices, which again may affect the type of representation we are exposed to as a society (Weiller-Abels et al., 2021).

The "Supercrip" Narrative

One central theme that was heavily present was the idea of the "supercrip" and how this narrative can be damaging to the broader community of individuals who experience disability as well as the athletes who are given this label. The literature describes the supercrip narrative as portraying a person with a disability or sickness in the media as someone overcoming obstacles to become a contributing member of society and living a normal existence (Tynedal & Wolbring, 2013). They are seen as inspirational for their ability to, in a way, beat their disability and do things that a normal person can do (Tynedal & Wolbring, 2013). It has also been described as a stereotyping process by which individuals are seen to fight against their impairment and must overcome that impairment to achieve unlikely success (Silva & Howe, 2012). Elite-level disability athletes are often portrayed as heroic for overcoming their disability and providing hope for others (Hellwege & Hallmann, 2020). This supercrip framework is often prized in the media for attracting a large audience (Shirazipour et al., 2017). This type of narrative may also lead to stories of elite-level disability athletes becoming categorized as human-interest stories by the media and not represented as the elite-level sporting competitions that they are (Tynedal & Wolbring, 2013).

Some argue that inspiration is not necessarily negative (Shirazipour et al., 2017). While this representation may offer a glimmer of hope and visibility for those who participate in disability sports (Silva & Howe, 2012), the supercrip concept has received criticism for promoting the idea that people need to overcome their disabilities to achieve unexpected success (McPherson et al., 2016).

The criticism surrounding the supercrip narrative does not mean that significant accomplishments should not be respected; instead, the tendency to undervalue or overvalue the accomplishments of those individuals and AWED should be denounced (Silva & Howe, 2012). The problem with this narrative occurs when athletes are classified as super because of their disability; in any other context, an athlete would just be recognized as an athlete (Silva & Howe, 2012). In this way, participation in disability sports is marketed as something extraordinary in and of itself (Silva & Howe, 2012). These depictions may create the perception that individuals who experience disability are only worthy of recognition when they perform outstanding acts, such as competing in the Paralympics (Hellwege & Hallmann, 2020).

Shirazipour et al. (2017) suggest that individuals with impairments may perceive these inspiration-focused supercrip messages as marginalizing, disempowering, and demotivating. The literature also suggests that this narrative stems from social expectations for people with disabilities being exceedingly low (Silva & Howe, 2012). Hence, their ability to perform an activity deemed typical for an able-bodied person may elicit much praise from others. (Silva & Howe, 2012). Reinforcing these low expectations for those who experience a disability makes the now icon supercrip image problematic (Silva & Howe, 2012). Another possible problem with this imagery and narration is that the achievements of individuals who experience disability are frequently measured in their ability to conform to able-bodied norms. (Silva & Howe, 2012).

Overall, this narrative focuses on the individual and their ability to overcome while downplaying the significance of the societal barriers and challenges that most individuals who experience disability confront daily (Kolotouchkina et al., 2020). This narrative also presupposes that disability can be overcome solely through individual effort, which may overlook the diverse and complicated realities of disability. (Silva & Howe, 2012). The literature also argues that the

supercrip narrative places individuals who experience disability at the bottom of the social hierarchy and absolves society of accountability for its ableist infrastructure (Tynedal & Wolbring, 2013). According to Silva & Howe (2021), we must be able to "question whether praise is always positive" and critically analyze if these supercrip narratives can be more detrimental than anything, especially to the athletes that these narratives are intended to empower (p.175). Promoting representations and coverage that accurately portray Paralympic athletes as having the same work ethic, training, skill, and talent as Olympic competitors is extremely important (Weiller-Abels et al., 2021). As Weiller-Abels et al., (2021) state they must be treated with respect, accuracy, and equality.

The Hierarchy of Disability

Another theme throughout the literature was how the media portrayal of elite-level disability sports supported a distinct hierarchy of disability among the athletes (Rees et al., 2018). The hierarchy of disability refers to the idea that some disabilities may be deemed more desirable than others, assuming individuals are more comfortable with something not too different from their norm (Rees et al., 2018). Studies have found that the attitudes of individuals who are able-bodied seem to favour specific types of impairments (Rees et al., 2018). It should be noted, though, that these attitudes do not just exist within those who are able-bodied but are also found among different subgroups of elite-level para-athletes; athletes with more minimal impairments, for example, are accepted more readily (Rees et al., 2018). AWEDs often internalize this hierarchy and see being able-bodied as the ideal (Weiller-Abels et al., 2021).

Other studies have shown that certain types of athletes who compete at the Paralympic Games are perceived as more lucrative when compared to others who may have more "severe" impairments (Purdue & Howe, 2013). Some athletes appear to have more capital than others,

depending on the type of impairment they experience (Purdue & Howe, 2013). Within that hierarchy of disability, most often, men who use wheelchairs are seen as the ideal competitor (Buysse & Borchering, 2010). These athletes tend to receive higher amounts of media coverage. One study that conducted a content analysis of the 1996 Paralympic Games noted that there was a higher amount of coverage for wheelchair athletes compared to athletes with amputations or who were blind; in addition, it should be noted that athletes who experienced cerebral palsy were not covered at all (Rees et al., 2018).

According to Purdue & Howe (2013) athletes with cerebral palsy and those with more noticeable impairments are often left out of coverage because they are not seen as marketable or relatable to the public. The IPC (International Paralympic Committee) may have a role as they may not push for more coverage of these athletes due to wanting more cooperate sponsors and funding (Purdue & Howe, 2013). Those sponsors may also feel these athletes are not marketable or do not align with previous notions of being an elite athlete with a disability (Purdue & Howe, 2013).

This hierarchy has obvious negative implications for athletes and the disability community; the public is prevented from seeing the athleticism of these different groups absent from the media, such as athletes who experience cerebral palsy (Rees et al., 2018). Athletes may not be featured in the media and can be left out and marginalized because they are "too disabled," and their impairment is too noticeable and, therefore, not relatable to the public (Purdue & Howe, 2013). This hierarchy can harm the athletes, who may worry that they are not considered elite athletes and not held in the same regard as their peers (Purdue & Howe, 2013).

Medicalized Reporting of Disability

Another issue detailed in the literature is that there is often an overarching medicalized reporting of AWED or disability sporting events (Rees et al., 2018). Often media coverage surrounding AWED is centred on a medicalized conception of disability (Weiller-Abels et al., 2021). These descriptions often involve the athlete's disability becoming the primary focus of the media coverage rather than their athletic accomplishments (Rees et al., 2018). In addition, athletes are often portrayed as patients and parasport itself is seen as having a curative role (Shirazipour et al., 2017).

This type of media reporting is often informed by the medical model of disability, which was previously discussed; the medical model, which stresses personal tragedies, was the most popular in media coverage of the Paralympics until the end of the twentieth century (Kolotouchkina et al., 2020). Unfortunately, even in recent Paralympic Games, such as the Games in 2018 held in PyeongChang, the coverage and discussion of the athletes competing was heavily focused on medical terminology and definitions (Weiller-Abels et al., 2021). Athletes were often introduced and described in terms of their impairment or disability, and in-depth descriptions of their disability were given along with specific medical information (Weiller-Abels et al., 2021).

Medicalized reporting can damage public perceptions and attitudes toward individuals who experience disabilities (Shirazipour et al., 2017). For example, medicalized messages may limit an audience's awareness of people with disabilities and the other elements, such as social factors, that influence the disability experience (Shirazipour et al., 2017). In addition, media portrayals that heavily focus on the athlete's disability may create negative perceptions of individuals who experience disability (Rees et al., 2018).

Women Athletes as Passive

Moving more specifically into issues related to Paralympic athletes who are women, one raised in the literature was how elite-level women athletes are often portrayed as passive in the media. One study focused on the ESPN (Entertainment and Sports Programming Network) body issue and the problematic ways elite-level women athletes featured in the magazine were portrayed (Weaving & Samson, 2018). Elite-level women athletes who participate in the body issue are often portrayed as passive, harming credibility and athleticism (Weaving & Samson, 2018).

Being represented as passive is the extent to which these elite-level women athletes are portrayed in ways that are related to their sport; in the case of the body issue, the women athletes were portrayed off the field and the court and in the more visually pleasing background (Weaving & Samson, 2018). For example, in the images analyzed in the study by Weaving and Samson, athletes were photographed off the court and without equipment, which often made it hard to ascertain what sport they played (2018).

This passive coverage is not just limited to the ESPN body issue; it also occurs in media coverage of major disability sporting events. A study that analyzed photographs from the 2008 Paralympic Games found that male Paralympians were portrayed as being on the court 77% of the time, and women Paralympians were only shown on the court 60% percent of the time (Buisse & Borcharding, 2010). There were further discrepancies in the action shots of male Paralympians who featured in action shots 53% of the time compared to 40% of the time for women Paralympians (Buisse & Borcharding, 2010).

This theme was also represented in other studies; one study focused on the media coverage of elite-level women athletes who experience disabilities in Turkey noted that women were depicted as passive in the media, with 56.2% of the articles analyzed depicting them as

passive (Buysse & Borcharding, 2010). In contrast, elite-level male athletes were depicted as active in 64.1% of the articles analyzed (Ayvazoglu, 2015). The literature suggests that elite-level women athletes are often seen in poses that suggest submission and minimize their remarkable stature (Buysse & Borcharding, 2010). In contrast, elite-level male athletes are usually perceived as dominant and pose in strong positions (Buysse & Borcharding, 2010).

Depicting elite-level women AWED as passive and not within their sporting environment may reinforce the idea that women who experience disability are passive, unathletic, or weak (Ayvazoglu, 2015). On the other hand, the literature points out that depicting elite-level male players who experience disability in active poses and within their sporting environment reflects a cultural perception of strength and masculinity in the sporting body (Ayvazoglu, 2015).

(A) Sexuality and Hyperfeminine Portrayals of Women Athletes

Another issue within media coverage of elite-level women AWED is their sexualization or lack thereof in the media. In previous studies of the coverage of elite-level women athletes, they were portrayed as being asexual and genderless and reported on in a way that stripped them of their sexual and social identity (Pappous et al., 2011). Other scholars have noted that women who experience disabilities occupy a space where they are not the object or subject of desire (Pappous et al., 2011). This framing of women who experience disability as asexual could be due to widespread social beliefs about sex, sexuality, and body image, limiting sexual expression for people who experience disability (Gomes et al., 2019). It has been observed in previous studies that elite-level women AWED receive fewer sexist remarks in the media compared to elite-level able-bodied women athletes (Pappous et al., 2011). However, this lack of sexism may not be a step forward toward equal treatment but rather that women who experience disability are perceived as aesthetically unpleasing or asexual (Pappous et al., 2011). It has been argued that

the continued assumption that those who experience disability cannot be sexual beings is a "feature of disability oppression" (Hall, 2011, p.4).

It has also been suggested that there is a higher social pressure for women who experience disability to live up to specific criteria of femininity, which may not be the same for women who are able-bodied (Buisse & Borcharding, 2010). Often elite-level women AWED are never asked about their personal lives; they are denied their sexuality and the ability to discuss whether they have families or personal relationships (Schell & Rodriguez, 2001). Instead, the focus remains on their disability (Schell & Rodriguez, 2001).

On the other hand, there are instances where studies have found that elite-level women AWED are not portrayed as asexual but rather featured in the media to show off their physical attractiveness without necessarily making them sexual objects for male viewers (Brooke, 2019). One study that analyzed the representation of Paralympic athletes who are women in Southeast Asia showed that several athletes were photographed in daily attire that showed off their shoulders, arms, or other parts of their body that portrayed them as feminine (Brooke, 2019). In media representations, there is a persistent problem of women being represented in sexual poses in media coverage and images that seem to be geared toward the male gaze (Weiller-Abels et al., 2021). Looking at a previously mentioned study regarding the ESPN body issue, this magazine featured several elite-level women AWED in naked photographs; the goal of the ESPN body issue was to celebrate different women body types, including women who experience disability (Weaving & Samson, 2018). This magazine was heavily criticized for presenting these women in hypersexualized ways that were objectifying (Weaving & Samson, 2018).

When researchers analyzed several images featured in the magazine, they found that the women were in poses that often hid their muscularity, making them appear smaller or non-

threatening (Weaving & Samson, 2018). The women featured were styled with make-up and usually long hair and were often thinner, further contributing to a hyperfeminine image that conforms to heteronormative ideals (Weaving & Samson, 2018). In this study, the pictures were not criticized for the women wanting to pose naked but for how the magazine portrayed them (Weaving & Samson, 2018). The magazine was criticized for not highlighting their athleticism or strength and arguably turning them into sexual objects for male viewers (Weaving & Samson, 2018).

There are other instances of elite-level women AWED reduced to feminine attributes and appearance (Weiller-Abels et al., 2021). During the 2018 games in Pyeongchang, announcers often described women Paralympians in stereotypically feminine and heteronormative ways (Weiller-Abels et al., 2021). One skier had her beautiful and flowing hair described by the commentators, and many were described as graceful or having beautiful form, male Paralympians, on the other hand, were described as strong, powerful, or aggressive on the course (Weiller-Abels et al., 2021).

These hypersexual and heteronormative representations have negative implications, just like depicting women who experience disability as asexual. This objectification and depiction seem to support the idea that the media reflects a hegemonic idea of what it means to be an elite-level women athlete experiencing disability (Weiller-Abels et al., 2021). Objectifying these women again trivializes their accomplishments as elite-level Paralympic athletes and reduces them to stereotypical portrayals of women, and these portrayals are often directed at a male audience. These athletes deserve to be celebrated for their athleticism, strength, and skill and not simply defined by their gender.

Chapter Three – Methods

The study consisted of a qualitative media content analysis investigating the narratives produced within Canadian media regarding women AWED on Team Canada in the 2021 Summer Paralympics, which were held in Tokyo. Feminist disability theory, chosen as the theoretical framework of this study, is influenced by post-modernism, which has shaped my understanding of society and the direction of this study (Leavy, 2007). Post-modernism focuses on the prevalence of dominant ideology and power discourses that legitimate this ideology (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). A core idea of post-modernism is that knowledge claims must be contextualized in today's world, considering multiple perspectives, including class, race, gender, and other group affiliations (Creswell, 2007). Post-modernism recognizes the value of various discourses and marginalized individuals and groups (Creswell, 2007). The desire to "deconstruct" texts in terms of language, reading, and writing, as well as the examination and bringing to light hidden hierarchies, dominances, inconsistencies, and contradictions, are all part of post-modernism (Creswell, 2007). Dominant ideologies exist surrounding women athletes. The media perpetuate these ideologies and need to be analyzed along with the hegemonic masculinity within elite-level disability sporting events such as the Paralympics, which can also influence media coverage (Weaving & Samson, 2018).

Feminist theories and feminist research often take on a postmodern lens and centre their research and work toward creating research studies that challenge binary thinking about gender (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Feminist research includes challenging what it means to be a woman and providing alternative ways of thinking, which this study aimed to do (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). When analyzing media coverage of women Paralympians, I considered that certain traits are attached to or associated with individuals who experience disabilities and

individuals who identify as women (Garland-Thomson, 2005). These traits are not always factual or biological but come from social constructions of terms such as 'woman' and 'disability' (Garland-Thomson, 2005). These constructions impact the lives of women who experience disability and may also impact the media coverage women Paralympians receive (Garland-Thomson, 2005).

A qualitative content analysis was chosen for the study because it provided the greatest understanding of the research topic. Feminist scholars have been using content analysis to better understand society through interrogating different texts and cultural artifacts (Leavy, 2007). The qualitative content analysis allowed me to understand the societal norms and values reflected by the cultural artifacts analyzed in this study and how these different texts shaped these norms and values (Leavy, 2007). Mass media has also been identified as an arena of cultural artifacts that need to be analyzed by feminist researchers because media can reaffirm hegemonic masculinity and depict socially acceptable and ideal body types for women (Leavy, 2007). A qualitative media content analysis was also chosen because the literature has highlighted that it is not just about the amount of coverage athletes receive; the type of coverage and stereotypes it may be reproducing must be analyzed (Weiller-Abels et al., 2021). Like other content analyses, this study relied on my engagement and involvement with the documents chosen related to the study topic to identify and analyze these different narratives (Altheide & Scheider, 2013).

The purposeful sampling of Canadian news articles and photographs focusing on Team Canada women athletes was chosen because few studies specifically focused on narratives produced by Canadian news outlets about Canadian women AWED. Focusing on this sample allowed me to provide depth and cultural context. I also chose to focus on athletes from multiple

events. Examining coverage from multiple events allowed me to uncover whether certain events were highlighted more often and discuss potential reasons for this.

Data Collection

The data for this study was collected from Canadian media coverage of women athletes participating in the 2021 Tokyo Summer Paralympic Games. Specifically, the sample was comprised of online news articles from national or provincial Canadian newspapers that publish online articles. These news articles were gathered by searching online newspapers' websites. For example, by going to the National Post's website (www.nationalpost.com), I used the search bar function to locate their published articles about women Paralympians from Team Canada. The news articles had to include one or more photographs to be used in the study and were published between August 9 and September 18, 2021. This data collection period covers two weeks before the start of the games, during the games (August 24-September 5, 2021), and two weeks after the games finished. I chose to analyze online newspaper articles because they were accessible, included both text and visual components (photographs), and I wanted to analyze data with more than one component to aid with validity, which is discussed later. This type of data was also of personal interest to me as someone who reads online newspaper publications frequently.

To begin the process of data collection I analyzed three different components of the data: 1) the headline of the article, 2) the text of the article, and 3) the contents of the image. To be included in the study, the articles had to feature women Paralympians from Team Canada. I assessed the sample and determined the types and breadth of narratives created about women participants during the Tokyo Paralympic Games. Articles with photographs were collected until data saturation was reached (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Data saturation was determined to be reached when further data collection and analysis no longer generated new codes, themes, or

concepts. As the researcher, I reached a point where I felt data saturation had been achieved in my study. This was evident as I continued to analyze articles and found that no new insights or themes were emerging. The repetition of concepts, patterns, and ideas in the data suggested that the collection of further articles was unlikely to yield additional unique information. This saturation point is crucial in qualitative research, as it indicates a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter, ensuring that the analysis covers the breadth and depth of the themes and insights relevant to the study.

Inclusion Criteria:

To be selected for inclusion in the data for this study, an article must have met the following criteria:

- The article must have included one or more photographs.
- The article must have been published between August 9, 2021, and September 18, 2021.
- The article must have been published/produced online by a national or provincial-circulated Canadian newspaper.
- The article must have been written in English.
- The article must have been publicly accessible.
- The article must have featured a Canadian woman Paralympian or women's Paralympic team who competed in the 2021 Tokyo Summer Paralympics.

I began the search by determining which news articles had the highest circulation in Canada. The top three online newspapers were the National Post, Globe & Mail, and the Toronto Star (News Media Canada, 2020). I started with these three media sources and accessed news articles by going to their online publication websites and using the search bar to access their online archives and searching for Tokyo Paralympics or Tokyo Paralympics 2021. Then, I

selected articles that featured women Team Canada athletes in the title or text. Aside from finding articles through search results, I looked at the bottom of articles for related articles or related topics and found other articles through that process, usually articles about the same athlete or sport.

The initial search provided 30 articles from the National Post, Globe & Mail, and the Toronto Star. The National Post and Globe & Mail are two national newspapers in Canada. The Toronto Star is a local newspaper distributed in the Greater Toronto Area and primarily covering Toronto news; however, anyone can access the online newspaper publication. Twenty-six met the full criteria (included photos) and were read fully and initially coded. After this, I looked for online newspapers and newspapers from other provinces to try and get a wider scope for all of Canada. As the Globe & Mail, National Post, and the Toronto Star are all based in Ontario, I wanted more representation from different provinces to provide a complete picture of what has been included in Canadian news articles. I collected articles from the Calgary Herald and Edmonton Journal based in Alberta, the Toronto Observer based in Ontario, The Star Phoenix based in Saskatchewan, the Goldstream News Gazette based in British Columbia, and Saltwire, a collection of online newspapers all based in the Atlantic Provinces.

It was difficult to find articles fitting my criteria that were published in Quebec, Nunuvut, Yukon, and The Northwest Territories online newspaper publications. One explanation for the lack of articles from Quebec is I was unable to access articles written in French as I do not read or speak the language. For the other provinces, it is possible they did not send athletes to the games and therefore, there was less interest in their local communities; this was not able to be verified and warrants additional future research. After searching for articles, reading through them, and coding them, the final sample was 51 articles from different online newspapers across

Canada. Each article was around a two-to-five minute read and was often not longer than a page or a half. Many of the articles included a note stating that they were a two-to-five-minute read, and this seemed accurate based on the amount of time it took me to read the articles. Table 1 illustrates how many articles came from each news source and the region each news source serves (i.e., if it is a provincial or national online news publication).

Table 1

Breakdown of Article News Source and Region

Title of Online Newspaper	General Coverage Region	Number of Articles	Percentage
Globe & Mail	National	7	13.7%
National Post	National	3	6 %
Toronto Star	Ontario	16	31.3%
Toronto Observer	Ontario	14	27%
Edmonton Journal	Alberta	1	2%
Calgary Herald	Alberta	3	6%
The Star Phoenix	Saskatchewan	1	2%
Goldstream News Gazette	British Columbia	3	6%
Saltwire	Atlantic Provinces	3	6%
Total		51	100%

Validity

While there is no one size fits all approach to creating validity and rigour for qualitative analysis, this study employed previously recognized techniques to aid in this process (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Data gathered for content analysis has two unique qualities, the data is naturalistic, meaning that it is collected from real-life situations, and the data is not interactive

because it is pre-existing and as the researcher, I cannot alter it (Leavy, 2007). These unique characteristics provide a certain level of authenticity "afforded to pre-existing artifacts" (Leavy, 2007, p. 227).

Another way that I added validity to the research was by using data triangulation (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Triangulation can be used as an effective validity tool within qualitative research (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Data triangulation refers to the process of using multiple data sources, theories, methods, or investigators to approach the research question (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). In qualitative content analysis, triangulation helps in confirming the consistency of the findings derived from textual or content-based data (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Data triangulation in the study was achieved by collecting and examining two types of data; 1) the text of each article and 2) the imagery captured in the accompanying photograph(s). By analyzing these two different data types, I determined if the themes that emerged from this study are found in both data sets (text and visual) or if there are differences. For example, a text-based narrative may tell one story, while an image-based one could convey another. Comparing the analysis of the two types of data helped to enhance the validity of the research (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011).

Another validation strategy used was clarifying researcher bias (Creswell, 2007). I positioned myself and identified potential biases or assumptions that may impact this research (Creswell, 2007). In an earlier section regarding my background, I stated how past experiences and my positionality had shaped the parameters of this inquiry (Creswell, 2007). Specifically, it is essential to note that I have previous experience in the disability sport community and have a personal connection to disability sports through my older brother. These experiences have shaped my understanding of disability sports and concepts such as ableism and inclusivity. I also

kept a detailed journal throughout the analysis, including a record of what was done daily and general thoughts and feelings about my research.

Additionally, I used a trusted friend, an experienced news reporter from a local television station, to discuss ideas and get feedback on the themes and information I was analyzing. This conversation allowed me to uncover and understand different perspectives surrounding my sample. I showed her some of the articles I analyzed along with my coding categories and received her feedback about them. She also deepened my understanding of how stories are chosen, pitched, and written.

Triangulation, clarifying researcher bias, and the use of a reflexive journal were instrumental in establishing the trustworthiness of the research. Triangulation was achieved by integrating multiple data sources (Carter et al., 2014). By acknowledging and clarifying researcher bias, this study aimed to reduce the potential influence of my personal experiences, assumptions, and preconceptions on the research outcomes (Berger, 2015). Finally, using a reflexive journal and conversations with a trusted friend allowed for continuous self-monitoring and reflection throughout the research process, thus contributing to the transparency and credibility of the findings (Etherington, 2004). In conclusion, I employed various strategies in this study to help ensure the validity and trustworthiness of my findings.

Data Analysis

I analyzed the articles and their accompanying photographs to identify and understand the different narratives they contain. This process was aided and shaped by coding and previous research results. Specifically, the study utilized the spiral model of qualitative content analysis (Creswell, 2007). This method begins with identifying the chosen topic area for the study, which in this case is examining the narratives produced by the media about Canadian women

Paralympians during the 2021 Summer Paralympic Games (Leavy, 2007). After I collected the data, the articles and their accompanying photographs were analyzed by me. Analysis began by reading through the sample of articles and analyzing the content of the different photographs. Throughout the process, I took notes and wrote memos using an inductive approach (Weiller-Abels et al., 2021). This approach meant that codes and categories emerged throughout the analysis rather than being developed beforehand (Leavy, 2007).

I specifically analyzed three different components of the data. First, I examined the article's headline, noting information included and information not included. For example, if the athletes were referred to by name, if inspirational language such as words like "brave" or "courageous" were used or if the athletes' athletic accomplishments were mentioned. Second, I scrutinized what was included in the text of the article. This analysis explored how the subjects were discussed and how their athletic accomplishments were portrayed. In addition, I noted if any previously noted stereotypes were present.

Similar to the headline analysis, I also queried what may not have been included in the articles such as athletes who experienced certain types of disabilities or if certain aspects of athletes' identities were being left out such as their sexual orientation or race. Noticing what is not included in the articles is as essential as noticing what is included (Leavy, 2007). Third, I studied the images by coding them for different features, including the subjects' stance, pose, clothing, and prominence in the picture (Leavy, 2007). I relied on descriptive analysis when gathering information about the images, including focusing on whether the subjects in the photos in action or motionless (Leavy, 2007).

Using the spiral model, I coded the articles' text, headlines, and photographs during data analysis, utilizing several techniques outlined in previous content analysis studies (Hesse-Biber

& Leavy, 2011). I began by coding the data with descriptive codes, including literal and interpretive analytical codes (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). I coded information using specific words and sentences from the text and by general insights and interpretations of the articles and images I made (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). From there, I used categorical coding to aid in identifying patterns that emerged from the media sample (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011).

Following coding, the articles' text, headlines, and photographs, the data was re-analyzed, and the codes were refined and organized; this process happened more than once (Leavy, 2007). After doing this I did some brief quantitative analysis of the data to help communicate the results, when looking at the coding categories, after determining how many articles fell into the different coding categories, I created percentages to aid with the understanding of the data and to highlight what coding categories were the most prominent. After looking at my notes and the quantitative data that emerged from the coding process I began identifying significant categories and themes (Leavy, 2007).

The spiral model allowed me to jump in and out of the data throughout the process, analyzing data more than once and gathering additional data, if necessary, throughout the process (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). The spiral model allowed me to double back and gather more information when necessary (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Once the overall themes were developed and refined, those themes were discussed in greater detail using previous literature to aid in the discussion. While doing the analysis, I read about five articles a day and then took 1-2 days off between reading batches of articles in the hope that the similarities between articles would not significantly influence my reading as I continued analyzing. I also did not read the articles in the order they were collected to ensure I was not reading all articles from one

publication at a time again in the hope that I could keep my mind fresh and open to any possible narratives that would jump out at me.

Chapter Four – Results

In this chapter, I present the findings from my analysis of online media articles focusing on Canadian Paralympic athletes who are women during the 2021 Tokyo Summer Paralympics. I collected, reviewed, and analyzed 51 articles, including their titles and 63 photographs. This media sample was collected from nine different online newspaper publications from across Canada. In the following sections, I report on various aspects of the data, such as the types of sports covered by the articles and the individual athletes reported. The thematic codes applied to the data are described in depth, including how they were applied to the three types of data (article text, titles, and photographs). Finally, before moving into the discussion section of this thesis, I will introduce the themes I identified in the data.

Sports Featured in Articles

Table 2 outlines which sports were covered in the articles as well as whether each article featured an individual or team sport. Nine of the articles covered multiple sports, so they were placed in their own category. For an article to be categorized as a single sport article (as opposed to multi-sport), it had to include multiple paragraphs discussing the sport or the athlete who competed in the sport.

The articles in the sample featured a variety of sports including six individual sports (30 articles) and four team sports (12 articles). Certain sports, such as swimming (14), cycling (9), and wheelchair basketball (7), appeared more often than other sports such as goalball (2). Most of these sports have an able-bodied equivalent that can be found in the Olympic games except for goalball, which is a team sport created by people who are visually impaired and involves two teams trying to score on each other by throwing a ball into their opponent's net. The goal ball has a bell inside to make noise when being thrown.

The sports that were covered in the study were those that were reported on the most. It appears that sports where Canadian athletes or teams were more successful were reported on more often than sports where athletes fared less well. For example, swimmer Auriele Rivard featured heavily in the coverage due to her accomplishments during the games. The discussion section explores potential reasons why certain sports/events were covered more than others.

Table 2:

Sports Featured in a Media Sample from Canadian newspapers about the Tokyo 2021 Summer Paralympic Games.

Article Focus	Sport	Number of Articles	Percentage
Individual Sports			
	Swimming	14	27.4
	Cycling	9	17.6
	Judo	2	3.9
	Para-dressage	2	3.9
	Track & Field: Running	2	3.9
	Track & Field: Throwing	1	1.9
Total		30	59
Team Sports			
	Basketball	7	13.7
	Goalball	2	3.9
	Volleyball	2	3.9
	Badminton	1	1.9
Total		12	23
Multi-Sport		9	18
Total Articles		51	100

Athletes Featured in Articles

Table 3 details the athletes that were featured in the articles, along with their sports. Note that some articles focused on a team or a large group of athletes; these were classified as multi-athlete articles, which is reflected in the table below, whereby the total is 70 rather than 51.

Table 3

Athletes and the Sports they competed in that were Featured in a Media Sample from Canadian newspapers about the Tokyo 2021 Summer Paralympic Games.

Sport	Athlete	Articles
Swimming	Aurélie Rivard	12
	Danielle Doris	4
	Katarina Roxon	2
	Stephanie Dixon	2
Cycling	Kate O'Brien	7
	Keely Shaw	5
	Shelley Gautier	2
Wheelchair Basketball	Kady Dandeneau	7
	Arin Young	2
	Cindy Ouellet	1
	Tara Llanes	1
	Tamara Steeves	1
Triathlon	Jessica Tuomela	3
	Kamylle Frenette	1
Judo	Priscilla Gagne	3
Para-Dressage	Jody Schloss	2
Para-Canoe	Andrea Nelson	2
Wheelchair Racing	Jessica Frotten	2
Running	Marissa Papaconstantinou	2
Multi-Sport	Multi-Athlete	2
Volleyball	Annie Fergusson	1
	Jennifer Oakes	1
Goal Ball	Amy Burk	1
	Megan Mahon	1
Badminton	Olivia Meier	1
Long Jump	Amy Watt	1
Discus	Renee Foessel	1
Total		70

Certain athletes were featured more than others. The top featured athlete was Aurelie Rivard, who was featured in 23.5% of articles, followed by Kady Dandeneau and Kate O'Brien, who were both featured in 14% of the articles and finally, Keely Shaw, who was featured in 10% of articles. Many of the most featured athletes share certain similarities in their physical appearance, and some of their photos have been included below to highlight the similarities that were noticed. The most featured athletes (Auriele Rivard, Keely Shaw, Kate O'Brien, and Kady Dandeneau) appear to be white or have light skin, are mostly blonde (except Rivard), have longer, more feminine hair, and are of a slim build. I have included some of their photos below to illustrate these similarities between photographed athletes. Potential reasons for why these athletes were featured more than others and how athlete appearance affects their potential coverage in photographs are discussed in the following discussion chapter.

Figure 1



Note: Auriele Rivard on Podium with Medal After Competing in Swimming at the 2021 Tokyo Paralympic Summer Games (Canadian Press, 2021)

Figure 2



Note: Keely Shaw holding the Canadian flag after Winning a Medal in Cycling at the 2021 Tokyo Paralympic Summer Games (Lapierre, 2021)

Figure 3



Note: Kate O'Brien (Right) with Teammate After Competing in Cycling at the 2021 Tokyo Paralympic Summer Games (Babych, 2021)

Figure 4



Note: Kady Dandenau Competing in Wheelchair Basketball at the 2021 Tokyo Paralympic Summer Games (Peninsula News Staff, 2021)

Thematic Codes

The articles were analyzed using eight thematic codes to group them into categories according to the foci of each article. Please note a list of all codes as well as a list of all articles have been provided in Appendix A (list of articles) and Appendix B (list of codes) as needed. These codes were applied to either the title of the article, the text of an article, the photos accompanying an article, or a combination of the above. The codes were created during the first round of analysis of the data. They related to ideas that were evident to me, as the researcher, in the articles. As more articles were gathered and analyzed, this led to the codes being refined, changed, or combined. Certain codes were not applied as often as others. These codes were left as is rather than being combined with others to also show how there might be a shift in the narratives compared to previously done research. One example of this is seen with the Tragedy Focused (TF) code and is discussed further in a later chapter.

Three codes related to both the titles and the text of articles: Tragedy Focused (TF), Inspiration Focused (IF), and Athletic Skills Focused (AS). The code TF was applied if either the text or title of an article depicted the athlete's experience with disability revolving around trauma or tragedy and linked their disability predominantly with sadness or pain. The code IF captured if an article's title or text focused on how much the athlete was an inspiration because they overcame their disability and made it to the Paralympics. Such titles and articles included using words/phrases like "brave," "courageous," or "overcame adversity" when discussing their journey to the Paralympics. The code of AS recognized whether an athlete's skills and abilities

were portrayed as powerful and masterful. It was applied when the title or text provided a positive narrative surrounding the athletes' athletic abilities, such as when they were praised for how well they did or celebrated if they won a medal. Two codes, Sport Focused (SF) and Life Outside of Sport (LOS), related specifically to the text of the articles. SF meant that the text of the article included discussing how disability classification works and/or detailing the rules and/or regulations for the sport/event. This code specifically highlighted discussion around the parasport/event rather than discussing the athletes' individual experiences or their disability/medical diagnosis. The final code that relates to the text of articles is LOS. LOS was used when articles mentioned the athletes' lives outside of their sport or training, such as their family, their marital or parental status, education, or any activities they do that are not part of their sport.

The code Disability Focus (DF) could be applied to either an article's text and/or its photograph. Regarding the text, this code was applied when an article discussed the athlete's disability extensively and focused on their disability or disability experience more than anything else. The use of DF centred on whether the photo focused more on the athlete's disability or highlighted the disability more than the athlete. For example, the photo was a close-up picture of an amputation.

I used two codes that were specific to the photographs accompanying the articles. Examining the photographs, I analyzed whether the athletes were depicted In Action (IA), meaning that the athlete was actively playing or engaging in their sport, or was there No Action (NA), meaning the athlete was not actively playing or engaging in their sport. NA included scenarios such as the athlete just finished competing, but they are no longer moving or actively playing their sport, or they might be on the podium accepting their medal. A second aspect I

analyzed related to photographs was referred to as Environment, Equipment, and Uniform (EEU). Specifically, I was looking for whether the athletes were captured in their sporting environments, such as a pool or arena, as well as if they had the necessary equipment for their sport with them, such as their sport wheelchair, basketball, or shot putt, and if they were in their appropriate uniform for their sport (e.g., a swimsuit). Table 4 highlights the distribution of codes applied to article titles. As mentioned, each title could be coded into multiple categories.

Table 4

Coding of Article Titles from Various News Sources Regarding the 2021 Paralympic Games: Organized by Media Outlet and Code Category

News Source	Tragedy Focused (TF)	Inspiration Focused (IF)	Athletic Skill (AS)
Globe & Mail	0	3	4
National Post	0	1	2
Toronto Star	0	4	12
Toronto Observer	0	0	14
Edmonton Journal	0	0	1
Calgary Herald	1	0	2
The Star Phoenix	0	0	1
Goldstream News Gazette	0	0	3
Saltwire	0	0	3
Total Titles: 51	Total: 1 Percentage: 2%	Total: 8 Percentage: 16%	Total: 42 Percentage: 82%

It is important to note that 82% of titles were coded as AS. They detailed the athletic skill or prowess of the athletes or discussed their performance in their event, whether they received a medal or how they felt following competing. As part of understanding the collective messaging in the article titles, a word cloud was generated. This word cloud visually represents the most

frequently occurring words in the titles, with more common words appearing larger in the graphic, thereby providing a quick and clear overview of the predominant words and focus areas in the titles. The AS focus was evident in the word cloud as seen in Figure 5, with words like “medals,” “smashed,” and “performance” being emphasized.

Figure 5

Comprehensive Word Cloud Illustrating the Most Frequently Occurring Words in Article Titles from Media Sample.

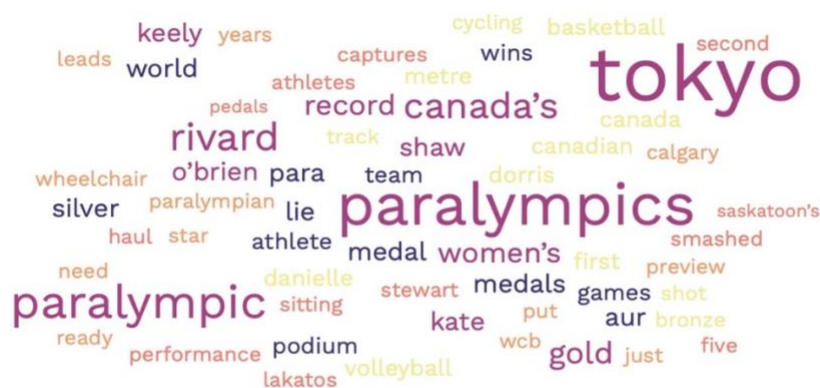


Table 5 details how the text of each article was coded into the following categories: DF (Disability Focused), TF (Tragedy Focused), IF (Inspiration Focused), AS (Athletic Skill), SF (Sport Focused), and LOS (Life Outside Sport). Each of the 51 articles analyzed could be coded into multiple thematic codes. For example, an article might be considered DF and TF, therefore receiving two codes.

Table 5

Coding of Article Texts from Various News Sources Regarding the 2021 Paralympic Games: Organized by Media Outlet and Code Category

News Source	Tragedy Focused (TF)	Inspiration Focused (IF)	Athletic Skill (AS)	Sport Focused (SF)	Life Outside Sport (LOS)	Disability Focused (DF)
Globe & Mail	4	4	1	1	2	4
National Post	2	1	0	0	0	2
Toronto Star	6	3	7	1	3	6
Toronto Observer	1	2	14	0	2	1
Edmonton Journal	1	1	2	1	1	1
Calgary Herald	3	2	3	1	0	3
The Star Phoenix	0	0	1	0	1	0
Goldstream News Gazette	1	1	3	1	0	0
Saltwire	0	0	3	3	1	1
Total	18	14	34	8	10	18
Percentage of Articles	35%	27.5%	67%	16%	20%	35%

Table 6 details how the photographs were coded into the following categories: DF, IA, NA and EEU. Please note that some articles had multiple photos included so the total number of photos that were analyzed is higher than the total number of articles in the media sample. Please note the photographs could be coded into multiple categories, however, no photograph was coded as both IA and NA. Specifically, the athletes who were IA in their photos participated in the following sports: volleyball, basketball, cycling, triathlon, track (running), discus, judo, goalball, badminton and swimming. Basketball and swimming had the most IA photos, and they were the sports reported on the most.

Table 6

Coding of Photographs from Various News Sources Regarding the 2021 Paralympic Games: Organized by Media Outlet and Code Category

News Source	Number of Photos	Disability Focused (DF)	In Action (IA)	No Action (NA)	Environment, Equipment, and Uniform (EEU)
Globe & Mail	6	0	2	5	6
National Post	2	0	1	1	1
Toronto Star	16	1	8	9	12
Toronto Observer	20	0	8	12	14
Edmonton Journal	2	0	0	2	1
Calgary Herald	3	0	1	2	3
The Star Phoenix	3	0	3	1	3
Goldstream News Gazette	3	0	2	1	3
Saltwire	8	0	6	2	8
Total Photographs	63	1	31	35	51
Percentage of Articles		1.5%	45.5%	51%	75%

The photos from the IA photo category also fit the EEU requirements; they occur in the athlete's sporting environment, with relevant equipment and the athletes being in uniform. Fourteen other photos met the EEU requirements as well; they might not have been actively engaging in sport, but they were in uniform, in their sporting environment, and with their applicable equipment. Out of all the photographs featuring women athletes, 46% of the photographs show the women smiling, either because they are posing for the camera or cheering and celebrating after competing. Also, 35% of photos showed close range images of the women competing and showing some emotion like aggression or focus. Six percent of the photos of

women competing in their sport were shot from such a distance that it was difficult to determine their facial expressions.

After completing the coding process, I discerned three themes from the data through my analysis. The data from the article texts, titles, and photos coded as a part of the DF, TF, and IF categories informed Theme 1: Medicalized Conceptions of Disability. Data from the article texts, titles, and photos coded as a part of the DF, IA, NA, EEU, and LOS categories led to Theme 2: Lack of Intersectional Identities. Finally, data from the article texts, titles, and photos coded as a part of the DF, TF, IF, AS, SR, IA, NA, and LOS categories gave rise to Theme 3: Reporting Easy to Understand information.

In conclusion, the results section of this thesis has presented my comprehensive analysis of the media coverage of Canadian Paralympic athletes who are women during the Tokyo 2021 Summer Paralympics, as gleaned from 51 online newspaper articles, 51 titles, and 63 photos from those articles. These results reported how many articles came from each online newspaper publication, how the article's text, titles, and photos were coded, what athletes were featured, and which sports were featured. Throughout this section, some of these results match up with previous research on media coverage and how in other ways, they differ. It is essential to recognize that some of these online newspaper publications are beginning to create more athlete-focused stories emphasizing skill over disability.

Chapter Five – Discussion

In this discussion chapter, I delve deeper into the three salient themes reported in the results: 1) the medical conceptions of disability, 2) the lack of intersectional identities, and 3) the tendency to report easy-to-understand information. I critically examine these themes with existing literature and theoretical perspectives and explore their implications for the portrayal and representation of Paralympic athletes who are women in the media and their effect on broader societal perceptions of disability and inclusion.

Medicalized Conceptions of Disability

The first identified theme discussed is the medicalized conceptions of disability. As previously discussed, this study took a feminist disability perspective when analyzing the data, meaning that I adopted a social model of disability rather than a medical one. The medical model of disability is based on rehabilitation and focuses on the individual and the individual's biological problem (Areheart, 2008). Within this model, individuals who experience disability are depicted and categorized as dependent and incapable and should focus on overcoming and finding a cure for their condition (Areheart, 2008). Throughout my analysis, it became clear that many articles in the sample perpetuated this model and conception of disability.

Throughout the articles, the authors that discussed athletes' disabilities, emphasized medicalized terms and descriptions. When discussing disability, the authors focused primarily on the physical aspects of the athletes' experiences with disability, such as the origins of their disabilities or the medical care they received. The authors of the articles did not acknowledge social factors contributing to the athletes' experiences of their disabilities, such as any facility accessibility issues, financial barriers to sport participation and training, travelling to a competition, and how that can be attuned by experiencing a disability. Furthermore, when stories

discussed an athlete's disability, the focus was often on specific medical conditions or treatments received rather than focusing on their athletic achievements.

For example, one Globe and Mail article covered the women's sit volleyball team where, throughout the article, the author detailed the various accidents and injuries the athletes experienced. When discussing the player's backstories, the author detailed how "Setter Jennifer Oakes lost her right leg in a boating accident" and "Both Payden Vair and Julie Kozun had one leg amputated because of lawnmower accidents" (Klinkenberg, 2021, p.1). In another Globe and Mail article that featured cyclist Kate O'Brien, the author described her injuries following a cycling accident, "She cracked ribs, broke a clavicle, punctured a lung and suffered a serious head injury" (Klinkenberg, 2021, p. 1). This approach reinforces the idea that people with disabilities are defined primarily by their medical conditions rather than as individuals with various abilities and talents (Peers & Stewart, 2016).

Beyond just describing the athlete's disabilities in medical and physical terms, the articles with a disability focus also tended to be tragedy focused. This again perpetuates medicalized conceptions of disability, the idea that disability is a problem and must be overcome by the individual or as something that is a tragedy and inherently negative. For instance, in one article from the Toronto Star, the athlete's accident and acquired disability was described negatively. After describing Andrea Nelson's accident, the author stated, "When doctors confirmed the worst — that Andrea Nelson was paraplegic resulting from a skydiving mishap in 2017 — her first order of business was recovery" (Cudmore, 2021, p.1). Using language such as "confirming the worst" when discussing becoming paraplegic categorizes disability as an awful physical and medical tragedy. It emphasizes that once someone is injured and becomes paralyzed, their sole focus should be to recover and get back to normal.

Another facet of this theme is that athletes who can "overcome" their disability are seen as inspirations and role models for their community. While celebrating these athletes is vital, if the only focus is on how they overcome the physical and medical aspects of their disability, there is a risk of perpetuating the "supercrip" narrative, which has been highlighted as problematic by Tynedal & Wolfbring (2013). Specifically looking at how this theme or medicalized conceptions of disability relates to previous research, 27.5% of articles focused on narratives of inspiration and overcoming, thus framing these women's disabilities as individual and medical problems that can be overcome if one tries hard enough. Thirty-five percent of articles were coded as disability-focused, and 35% were coded as tragedy-focused. This trend is consistent with previous research discussed in the literature review, where often the media categorizes disability as an individual medical program rather than discuss any outside social influences or barriers that are a part of their experiences (Gomes et al., 2019).

Articles from the National Post, for example, when describing different Paralympic athletes, using sentences such as "But few people are more familiar with overcoming obstacles than Paralympians" and "Overcoming challenges, in other words, is kind of their thing" (Stinson, 2021, p.1). Another example is from the title of a Toronto Star article: "Niagara Falls native Shelley Gautier overcame adversity to become a para-cycling powerhouse" (thestar.com, 2021, p.1). Describing Paralympic athletes as "inspirational" or "courageous" can be seen as reinforcing the idea that people with disabilities are exceptional or extraordinary rather than simply part of the diversity of human experience (Peers & Stewart, 2016). This type of narrative also places the responsibility of disability and the disability experience on the individual rather than acknowledging or focusing on any societal barriers that affect the individual's experience (Areheart, 2008).

Overall describing AWED with this medicalized focus can be problematic for several reasons. First, focusing on athletes' physical disabilities and the medical reasons for their disabilities and then framing them in these tragedy narratives rather than focusing on athletic skills or accomplishments can lead to these stories being seen as human-interest stories rather than sports stories. This type of reporting can lead to athletes being perceived as not serious athletes. Instead, they are used for heart-warming stories of overcoming adversity. Second, this style of narrative can frame disability as an individual problem for these athletes to overcome through medical intervention. The articles failed to identify other aspects of the athletes' disability journey, such as the social and environmental components. As a result, they present a one-dimensional conception of what disability is and how it affects individuals who experience it. Such a narrow view overlooks the complex interplay between a person with a disability and their environment, including the physical, social, and institutional barriers they may face. This not only absolves society from the responsibility of making necessary changes to become more inclusive but also reinforces the misconception that disabilities are solely personal challenges.

Third, framing the athletes as inspirations for simply living or doing everyday tasks and being able to "overcome" their disability could negatively impact other individuals in the disability community. For example, imagine an individual who cannot overcome specific barriers for several reasons. Without acknowledging the often societal-based nature of most barriers, individuals in the disability community who fail to achieve higher levels of success in their sport or other aspects of their lives due to such social or environmental barriers may be labelled as a "failure" or "not trying hard enough" to overcome their disability.

Perhaps instead of focusing on the medical conceptions of disability, the authors of these articles could have highlighted other social aspects of the disability experience, such as

accessibility issues or financial and transportation barriers. The authors could have even encouraged conversations about how specific barriers that individuals who experience disability face might be dismantled, thus helping to advance the general public's knowledge and conception of disability.

Lack of Intersectional Identities

The second theme that I identified was the lack of intersectional identities.

Intersectionality is the understanding that every person can experience oppression and discrimination differently, considering aspects of people's identities like gender, race, class, sexual orientation, and physical ability that can create systems of discrimination or disadvantage that are overlapping and interrelated (Hall, 2011). Recognizing and acknowledging intersectional identities is an essential aspect of inclusive reporting. By acknowledging the multiple identities of athletes, such as race, gender, and sexuality, news articles can avoid reinforcing stereotypes and stigmas related to specific groups (Hall, 2011). Women with disabilities experience intersectional identities shaped by their gender and disability and other factors such as race, ethnicity, sexuality, and socio-economic status (Hill & Toffoletti, 2015).

Women with disabilities are often overlooked or marginalized in media coverage of disability sports (Hargreaves & Hardin, 2009). This lack of women who experience disabilities being included in media coverage can be attributed to the intersection of gender and disability, which can reinforce stereotypes and assumptions about what women with disabilities can and cannot do in sports. As a result, women with disabilities may experience a lack of recognition and opportunities in sports (Hargreaves & Hardin, 2009). The data analyzed during this study also showcases a lack of recognition of women's intersectional identities and representation regarding their diverse experiences.

However, it should be noted that the analysis of the photographs revealed that 45.5% of photographs represented athletes in action, while 51% did not. Having the action photographs closer to 50% suggests that the media are starting to use more photographs of women AWED in action, which differs from previous research discussed in the literature review. For example, in a study about the 2008 Paralympics male Paralympians were featured in action shots 53% of the time compared to 40% of the time for women Paralympians (Buysse & Borcharding, 2010). When looking at this data, there seems to be a trend toward having more in-action shots of women AWED, which is a sign there is movement in the right direction regarding including more empowering images of these women.

When looking at the coding category LOS (life outside sport), I wanted to see if these athletes' families were discussed and if any part of their identities as moms and women exist outside of being an athlete. Only 20% of articles included information about these women's personal or family lives, such as if they had children or partners or had hobbies, their educational background, or other parts of their identity that could have affected their disability experiences, such as race or sexual orientation. One article briefly mentioned that the athlete had met her husband through the sport they played and that they had children (Simmonds, 2021). However, most women were not categorized as romantic partners or mothers. Moreover, they were often categorized as someone's child or daughter. For example, an article from the Edmonton Journal involved an interview with an athlete's father rather than with the athlete herself. The father detailed his daughter's accident and how tragic it was for their family. The article described the accident by stating, "Lawyer Barry Schloss, the father of Jody Schloss, was in shock at hearing news of his daughter, who had been in a motor vehicle collision" (Lees, 2021, p.1). Examples such as the Edmonton Journal article, where the only other aspect of the

athlete's identity that is discussed is that they are someone's daughter, could serve to infantilize them. This dynamic has been categorized as a previous issue in past coverage of Paralympic athletes who are women (Kolotouchkina et al., 2020).

Not including information about women's relationships outside of sports in these articles is consistent with previous research, which has stated that women who experience disabilities are seen as asexual (Hall, 2011). The public may seem uninterested in whether the athletes have families because they do not expect them to have partners or children (Hall, 2011). It may also mean that the public does not understand how AWED experiences with their families may differ from able-bodied women athletes or male athletes who experience disability. It is also important to note that the one athlete whose partner and family were mentioned seemed heterosexual, as she is in a relationship with a man. Only including the personal details of athletes with heteronormative relationships can reproduce heteronormative expectations. For example, there is no discussion of athletes who might identify as being queer. This lack of representation of the LGBTQ2IA+ might be because none of the featured athletes identified as such. However, if some athletes identify as queer, not including those experiences again erases particular aspects of their identities.

A few athletes' outside interests and accomplishments were mentioned in the articles. For example, one article in the Globe and Mail about para-dressage (horseback riding) athlete Jody Schloss detailed that she had recently published a book and planned to write a second (Attfield, 2021). Some articles mentioned athletes' educational backgrounds, such as an athlete recently receiving her Ph.D. in Kinesiology (Lapierre, 2021). Including these types of details about athletes can be helpful to see them as more than just their sport but also to explore their identity as women who experience disability.

No articles discussed athletes' ethnicities or experiences with race. This erasure may be because athletes who experience disabilities and are from marginalized racial or ethnic groups experience intersectional discrimination and marginalization in sports and media coverage (Dorer et al., 2020). While it appears most of the women photographed were seemingly White, it could not be conclusively determined what the women's ethnic or racial backgrounds were as that information was not easily accessible and became outside the scope of what was possible for me to include in this study. However, it is essential to note that there was no discussion of how ethnicity or race may or may not affect these athletes and their experiences of disability in the text of these articles.

This lack of intersectional reporting might lead to erasing the experiences of different athletes by assuming they all have had the same experience based on one common aspect of their identities, which is a disability. It may lead to a lack of acknowledgement that other aspects of an athlete's identity might affect their experiences, including types of oppression or discrimination they have experienced or the types of barriers they might have faced when it comes to participation in sport (Guthrie, 2018).

Reporting Easy-to-Understand Information

The last central theme that was identified is reporting easy-to-understand information. The other two themes highlighted the types of information included in the reporting of these athletes. The articles reported information that might be considered accessible, normalized, and "common sense" to the public because it is likely easier to understand and thus could reproduce pre-established norms regarding gender, heteronormativity, and disability. The news articles tended to report on easy-to-understand information regarding disability, sports, and athletes, possibly due to several factors.

Firstly, familiarity bias may play a role in news coverage of disability sports, where journalists may prefer to report on disability sports that are already popular and well-known, such as wheelchair basketball or wheelchair racing (Whannel, 2012). Familiarity bias is seemingly present in the sample analyzed in this study, as most articles featured wheelchair basketball or swimming. In addition, only 16% of the articles' texts were coded as SF (sport focused). Most of these articles did not take the time or space to include additional information about classification systems or rules and regulations of events that exist solely within the para-sport community, such as goalball. This lack of sport-focused content in the article may be due to journalists having limited knowledge about disability sports and disability issues, making it difficult to provide accurate and informed coverage of less popular or less understood disability sports (Hill & Toffoletti, 2015). Overall, this bias may be reinforced by the media's preference for "feel-good" stories designed to evoke emotional responses from readers rather than to inform or educate them (Pagnano-Richardson & Darcy, 2018). This idea is also consistent with previous coverage discussed in the literature review, where certain sports that are like able-bodied sports or easier to understand for the public are featured more often in media coverage (Rees et al., 2018).

However, it is important to note that there were not many photos that were close-up images of an athlete's amputation or that just focused on their affected limb, with only 1.5% of photographs being coded as disability focused. This could be positive as perhaps these athletes are categorized as athletes rather than just inspirational stories of someone who experiences a disability. On the other hand, a potential risk exists in completely erasing someone's disability in these photographs. This idea of not acknowledging an individual's disability could potentially align with the third theme, reporting only common-sense information.

A tangible example of this could be the omission of photographs that highlight an athlete's disability. For instance, a photographer might capture an athlete with a prosthetic leg from the waist up, making the image seemingly more palatable for public consumption. This type of photograph could inadvertently erase a significant aspect of the individual's identity. This idea warrants more extensive exploration as determining the motives behind such photographic choices and their inclusion in articles is challenging,

When media outlets do not provide adequate information about the intricacies of para-sport, it can perpetuate misconceptions and hinder the growth of public interest (Schneider, 2010). As a result, limiting the public's understanding of the rules, regulations, and classification of athletes in para-sport can contribute to reduced acceptance and interaction with groups of people experiencing disability (Misener et al., 2013). A lack of knowledge about the unique aspects of para-sport may make the public less likely to engage with and support these events, which could negatively impact the opportunities and recognition available to para-athletes (Misener et al., 2013).

The athletes who featured the most in photographs were Aurelie Rivard, who was featured in 23.5% of articles, followed by Kady Dandeneau and Kate O'Brien, who were both featured in 14% of the articles and finally, Keely Shaw, who was featured in 10% of the articles. All of these athletes were either wheelchair users, experienced an amputation, or in the case of Aurelie Rivard, experienced a visual impairment. All these athletes still had significant use of their upper bodies. This trend is consistent with previous findings that athletes with more visible disabilities, such as those who use wheelchairs or prosthetics, especially those who have lower body or lower limb impairments, may receive more attention and recognition, as they experience disabilities that are easy for the general public to understand (Guthrie, 2018). Also, all these

athletes do not experience what could be considered severe disabilities, for example, having limited use of all four of their limbs; based on their photographs and the sports they compete in, they are relatively independent and able to participate in their sport without significant aid from other people.

These athletes featured the most in the photographs in the news articles adhered to the disability hierarchy. The concept of disability hierarchy refers to how different impairments are perceived and valued in society, with some impairments being considered more legitimate or deserving of attention and support than others (Shakespeare, 2006). This hierarchy can also influence media coverage of disability sports, with specific sports and athletes receiving more attention and recognition than others. In the case of AWEDs, there is evidence that they may be subject to multiple layers of marginalization due to their gender and disability status (Hargreaves & Hardin, 2009). This marginalization can be exacerbated by the disability hierarchy, where specific impairments or disability types are prioritized over others in media coverage and public attention; this was undoubtedly the case in the news articles analyzed for this study.

AWED, featured in photographs, also adhered to the most common-sense conceptions of gender norms and heteronormative beauty standards. For example, the women featured the most in photographs and articles mentioned above shared a number of physical similarities; they were seemingly White, often with long or medium-length hair, a slim to medium body shape, and a typically feminine appearance. These photographs may reinforce the idea that women with disabilities are expected to conform to conventional standards of beauty and femininity to be considered successful or worthy of attention (Guthrie, 2018). In addition, photographs like the ones analyzed that prioritize certain types of bodies or appearances can enforce the hierarchy of disability that prioritizes certain types of impairments over others based on their perceived ability

to conform to mainstream beauty standards (Guthrie, 2018). These photographs can reinforce ableist assumptions about what is normal or desirable regarding appearance and ability and limit opportunities for recognition and success for athletes who do not fit these norms (Guthrie, 2018).

Limitations

Some limitations of this study should be noted. First, this data was collected from a Paralympic Games during the COVID-19 Global Pandemic. As a result, the Pandemic was mentioned throughout the articles several times, and often athletes spoke about how COVID-19 affected their training or other aspects of their journey to the Paralympics. Overall COVID-19 was mentioned or talked about in 25 of the 51 articles, meaning discussion of the Pandemic was in 49% of the articles analyzed. The Pandemic might have affected the results of this study in some ways, as other information might have been included in these articles if COVID-19 had not been a factor in these Paralympic Games.

Due to the Pandemic, no spectators were present at these games, which may have affected how information was reported in the articles and photographs. Second, this research was conducted by one researcher. Therefore, there was a specific sample size that was feasible to analyze. As a single researcher, I felt my sample size was large enough to be analyzed to the point of data saturation for me, but if there had been more people working on this study, we might have been able to analyze more articles. This data was also from one specific type of media (online newspaper articles) and within a specifically Canadian context (I looked at coverage related to Canadian women athletes from Canadian online newspapers). It would be difficult to say if these themes can be generalized to media coverage from other media outlets or coverage from other countries or national teams.

Also, I could not find articles from online newspaper publications from all provinces in Canada. This could be partially due to the fact that the articles that were accessed were in English, there is potential for other articles from Quebec that could have been written in French that were not able to be analyzed. Doing a more in-depth search could be valuable to see what coverage may have been missed. Also, I did not research the authors of the articles. It could be fruitful to look at their backgrounds, gender, whether they are able-bodied or experience a disability, and discuss how their identities and experiences might have affected the articles they wrote.

One final limitation of this study is its reliance on a single form of media for data collection. While the findings provide valuable insights, it is important to acknowledge that exploring other platforms, such as video clips or social media postings, could yield different or similar results. These alternative media forms might offer richer, more diverse perspectives or present unique patterns of discourse that were not captured in this study. Consequently, future research could benefit from incorporating these varied sources to possibly validate, contrast, or enhance the findings of this study, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the subject matter.

Implications for Future Research

After analyzing these articles and photos, it is evident that while media coverage is starting to include more information regarding these women's athletic skills, a vital step in the right direction, the media reports are still missing critical elements of their identities. This research points to the way to improve future coverage. Ideally, these newspaper publications will strive to highlight the intersectional identities of these athletes and embrace a more social conception of disability, which could foster a greater understanding of their unique experiences.

Additionally, there is a pressing need to report on the intricacies of para-sport, including rules and regulations, as this can enhance the public's knowledge and appreciation of these events. The media possesses the power and responsibility to achieve this, and by doing so, can contribute to a more inclusive and informed society that recognizes and celebrates the achievements and stories of Paralympic athletes in all their complexity.

Several questions came to mind while doing this research that I could not answer due to the scope and purpose of this study but would be interesting to explore in the future. For instance, how many women of colour are on Team Canada? How might this relate to the choosing of women that were photographed the most? Why are there no women of different body types relating to their shape and size? Why is there little to no reporting about the rules and regulations of these sporting events? Why are certain sports reported on more than others? Are there potential barriers to participation for certain groups of women? It would also be interesting to compare media coverage of male Paralympic athletes vs Paralympic athletes who are women, along with Paralympic athletes who are women and able-bodied male and women athletes.

Forty-six percent of the sample photographs featured women smiling, cheering/celebrating after competing in their sport/event. Also, only 35% of photographs featuring women actively competing in their sport showed their faces enough to see their expressions, which could be categorized as aggression, dominance, and focus. Theoretically, by focusing on their positive expressions or photographs taken from a distance so their faces are unclear, the media may inadvertently deny them the authenticity and complexity that is afforded to their male and able-bodied counterparts, who are often depicted in various states of intensity and passion during their performances (Jones & Murrell, 1999). Considering this, it would be valuable to compare these photographs in this study and other sport-focused photographs of male

Paralympians from the same timeframe to explore the similarities and differences in how they were portrayed.

Another avenue for future research is to involve media outlets and work towards creating more positive and accurate depictions, possibly creating knowledge or teaching tools to educate media staff on how to represent these athletes and teach them about para-sport accurately. When speaking with my trusted friend, an experienced television reporter, we discussed that reporters bring stories to their editors that they feel they can accurately report. More accurate stories could be told if media staff and journalists knew more about the Paralympics, Para-Sport, and AWED. Overall, the findings from this research can be used to start conversations about these topics and contribute to the knowledge base surrounding these issues regarding media coverage of these Paralympic athletes who are women.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the analysis of Canadian online newspaper articles and their portrayals of Canadian Paralympic athletes who are women during the Tokyo Summer Paralympics reveals a promising shift towards representations that focus on these women as serious athletes, moving away from only including inspirational narratives. Coverage has encompassed more photographs of athletes in action that are not solely disability focused. However, more work must be done to achieve equitable and empowering media coverage. Future efforts should prioritize incorporating the intersectionality of these athletes, acknowledging their experiences related to race, sexuality, and other identity dimensions, and, if possible, including more diverse photographic representations to highlight varied portrayals of femininity. Moreover, it is essential to challenge the asexual stereotype and highlight these women's diverse societal roles, such as being wives

and mothers and discussing their family lives, to acknowledge that these women can lead fulfilling lives.

Additionally, media outlets must take responsibility for reporting more educational information about the social barriers these athletes face concerning their disabilities to move away from discussing disability in just medical terms and providing comprehensive coverage of the rules and regulations of their sports and events. By doing so, the public's knowledge and awareness about para-sport in general can be elevated, leading to empowering, well-rounded, and enduring representations of Canadian Women who are Paralympic athletes.

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Appendix A: List of Articles from Sample by News Source

Toronto Star:

- “Niagara Falls native Shelley Gautier overcame adversity to become a paracycling powerhouse”. Anon. (2021, August 24).
- “‘I felt like I had failed.’ Aurelie Rivard turned bitter disappointment into five medals at Tokyo Paralympics”. Armstrong, L. (2021, September 3).
- “Orangeville Renée Foessel set to compete in discus throw at Tokyo Paralympics”. Babiera, A. (2021, August 25).
- “Tamara Steeves of Mississagua eyes Paralympic gold in Tokyo”. Colpitts, I. (2021, August 14).
- “Markham’s Andrea Nelson ready to make waves at Tokyo Paralympic Games”. Cudmore, J. (2021, August 25).
- “Para swim star Rivard buoyed by performance of Canadians at Tokyo Olympics”. Ewing, L. (2021, August 16).
- “Anderson, Lakatos, Rivard among Canadian athletes to watch at Tokyo Paralympics”. Ewing, L. (2021, August 24).
- “Rivard smashed own world record, captures Canada’s first gold at Tokyo Paralympics”. Ewing, L. (2021, August 28).
- “After years in basketball, volleyball, Stewart switched to shot put - - and is golden”. Ewing, L. (2021, September 1).
- “Auriele Rivard still floating on a cloud after record medal haul in Tokyo”. Geoffrion-McInnis, A. (2021, September 8).
- “Carleton Place’s Annie Fergusson awaits first match with women’s sitting volleyball team at Tokyo Paralympics”. Kulp, A. (2021, August 28).
- "Spirit in Motion: Markham athletes take on Tokyo at Paralympic Games". Riedner, H. (2021, August 23).
- “Silver medal a symbol of perseverance for Canadian Para judo athlete Priscilla Gagne”. The Canadian Press. (2021, August 25).
- “Canada’s Danielle Dorris wins Paralympic silver in 100-metre backstroke”. The Canadian Press. (2021, August 30).

- “Rivard, Lakatos add to medal haul with silver medals at Tokyo Paralympics”. The Canadian Press. (2021, September 2).
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Toronto Observer:

- “GOLD: Danielle Dorris flies to world record in Paralympic pool”. Holder, B. (2021, September 3).
- “Keely Shaw, Kate O’Brien riding for their second medals in Tokyo”. Lapierre, C. (2021, August 30).
- “Saskatchewan’s Keely Shaw just misses para-cycling podium”. Lapierre, C. (2021, August 31).
- “Keely Shaw’s inaugural Paralympics a success, but she’s just getting started”. Lapierre, C. (2021, September 2).
- “Solid defence leads to impressive WCB victory for Canada over Japan”. Lewis, J. (2021, August 27).
- “Canada’s wheelchair basketball teams move to Tokyo classification round”. Lewis, J. (2021, September 1).
- “Preview: Nine swimmers in action for Canada Tuesday”. Mcgoey, S. (2021, August 30).
- “Canada’s top five moments at the 2020 Tokyo Paralympics”. Perri, A. (2021, September 8).
- “Bad weather compromises Frotten’s performance in the 400 metre track final”. Ramirez, L. (2021, September 2).
- “Emerging star Papaconstantinou gets well-deserved podium at Tokyo”. Ramirez, L. (2021, September 3).
- “Olivia Meier relying on experience to navigate way through Tokyo badminton”. Sumner, R. (2021, September 2).
- “B.C.’s Watt places 5th in women’s T47 jump”. Wronski, B. (2021, September 3).
- “Preview: Women’s wheelchair basketball team looks to stay unbeaten vs Germany”. Zanchetta, W. (2021, August 27).

- “Women’s WCB has medal hopes dashed by United States”. Zanchetta, W. (2021, August 31).

Edmonton Journal:

- “Nick Lees: Edmonton dad cheers for daughter in Tokyo for Paralympic equestrian event”. Lees, N. (2021, August 22).

Calgary Herald:

- “Celebratory installation coming to Calgary to inspire support for local para-cyclist Kate O’Brien at Tokyo”. Babych, S. (2021, August 18).
- “Calgary athlete eager to put years of training to test at Tokyo Paralympic Game”. Babych, S. (2021, August 23).
- “Calgarian Paralympian Kate O’Brien wins silver in cycling”. Short, D. (2021, August 27).

Goldstream Gazette:

- “Saanich triathlete leaves Saturday for Tokyo Paralympics”. Atkins-Baker, M. (2021, August 19).
- “Pender Island’s Kady Dandeneau dazzles in Tokyo tip-off games”. Peninsula News Staff. (2021, August 27).
- “US bounces shot at the podium for Pender Island’s Kady Dandeneau”. Peninsula News Staff. (2021, September 2).

The Star Phoenix:

- “Saskatoon’s Keely Shaw pedals to Paralympic bronze in track cycling”. Deibert, D. (2021, August 25).

SaltWire:

- “Newfoundlander Katarina Roxon ready to get busy at Tokyo Paralympics”. McCarthy, B. (2021, August 27).
- “P.E.I athlete Amy Burk’s decision to return to goalball leads to fourth Paralympic Games”. Simmonds, J. (2021, August 25).

- "Para-triathlete Kamyille Frenette feels free to soar at Tokyo Paralympics". Spurr, B. (2021, August 18).

Globe & Mail:

- "Para dressage rider Jody Schloss confident in new horse ahead of second Paralympics". Attfield, P. (2021, August 16).
- "Aurélie Rivard, Greg Stewart win Paralympic gold medals for Canada". Ewing, L. (2021, September 1).
- "Canadian Danielle Doris wins Paralympic gold in 50-metre butterfly, sets world record". Ewing, L. (2021, September 3).
- "Canada's Paralympic women's sitting volleyball team squad knows how to survive and adapt". Klinkenberg, M. (2021, August 23).
- "Paralympian Kate O'Brien tells her tale of survival, recovery and unique transition". Klinkenberg, M. (2021, August 25).
- "Paralympic silver a symbol of perseverance for Canadian judo athlete Priscilla Gagne". The Canadian Press. (2021, August 27).
- "Aurélie Rivard smashed own world record, captures Canada's first gold at Tokyo Paralympics". The Canadian Press. (2021, August 28).

National Post:

- "Everything you need to know about Canada's chances at the Paralympics in Tokyo". Scace, M. (2021, August 24).
- "Paralympics 2020: Your guide to Canada's para athletics team". Scace, M. (2021, August 26).
- "Scott Stinson: Why you need to be watching the Paralympics". Stinson, S. (2021, August 25).

Appendix B: List and Description of Thematic Codes

- **DF (Disability Focused):** Regarding the text, this code was applied when an article discussed the athlete's disability extensively and focused on their disability or disability experience more than anything else. The use of DF centred on whether the photo-focused more on the athlete's disability or highlighted the disability more than the athlete. For example, the photo was a close-up picture of an amputation.
- **TF (Tragedy Focused):** applied if either the text or title of an article depicted the athlete's experience with disability revolving around trauma or tragedy and linked their disability predominantly with sadness or pain.
- **IF (Inspiration Focused):** if articles' title or text focused on how much the athlete was an inspiration because they overcame their disability and made it to the Paralympics. Such a titles and articles included using words/phrases like "brave", "courageous," or "overcame adversity" when discussing their journey to the Paralympics.
- **SF (Sport Focused):** the text of the article included discussing how disability classification works and/or detailing the rules and/or regulations for the sport/event. This code specifically highlighted discussion around the parasport/event rather than discussing the athletes' individual experiences or their disability/medical diagnosis.
- **AS (Athletic Skill):** recognized whether an athlete's skills and abilities were portrayed as powerful and masterful. It was applied when the title or text provided a positive narrative surrounding the athletes' athletic abilities, such as when they were praised for how well they did or celebrated if they won a medal.
- **LOS (Life Outside Sport):** within the articles, if these athletes' families were discussed and if any part of their identities as moms and women exist outside of themselves being an athlete, do the articles discuss their hobbies, interest, educational background?
- **IA (In Action):** in the photographs, the athlete was actively playing or engaging in their sport.
- **NA (No Action):** in the photographs the athlete was not actively playing or engaging in their sport. NA included scenarios such as the athlete just finished competing, but they are no longer moving or actively playing their sport, or they might be on the podium accepting their medal.
- **EEU (Environment, Equipment, and Uniform):** in the photographs whether the athlete was captured in their sporting environment, such as a pool or arena, as well as if they had the necessary equipment for their sport with them, such as their sport wheelchair, basketball, or shot putt, and were they in their appropriate uniform for their sport ex. Swimsuit.