

Media Analysis Report 2013

# Stories Have Consequences

Misinterpreted!  
Media's Take  
on Disability Issues:  
Undermining or  
Promoting Rights?

**Disability Rights Promotion International – Canada**

## **MEDIA ANALYSIS REPORT 2013**

**STORIES HAVE CONSEQUENCES**

**MISINTERPRETED! MEDIA'S TAKE ON DISABILITY ISSUES: UNDERMINING OR PROMOTING RIGHTS?**

**The Disability Rights Media Monitoring Study: Critically evaluating news media coverage of disability issues from a human rights perspective.**

Prepared by:  
Disability Rights Promotion International

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## **Abstract**

The paper responds to a monitoring requirement of United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) by developing and testing (within Canada) a model to analyze how mainstream news media cover disability issues from a human rights perspective. While a significant literature exists examining the media portrayal of people with disabilities, very little has been done from a human rights perspective. The methodological 'toolbox' developed was designed to be implemented by a disability community, administered by a research committee and research manager within a jurisdiction defined by the community in order to advocate for disability rights with the media and policy decision-makers using evidence-based research. The model employs a three-stage process of analyzing text: an initial computer text-analytic portion to determine an effective sample, a human content analytic stage to determine the portrayal of people with disabilities and the coverage of 19 CRPD rights concerning people with disabilities, and a final critical discourse analysis of the key texts involving disabilities rights. The model was tested over a one-year period in Canada examining nine major newspapers. The test results indicated a notable difference in how the media portrayed disability. Four major perspectives were identified: the bio-medical perspective, the heroic or overcoming perspective, the charity or 'feel good' perspective and the rights perspective. This study provides a benchmark from which we are able to begin to monitor any change in the media representation of people and issues related to disability to see if it is changing.

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## **Introduction**

In March 2010, Canada ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) – a document that was adopted by the UN General Assembly in December 2006 and now has 153 signatories and 112 ratifications (UNEnable website, 2012). The CRPD recognized the “paradigm shift” that had already occurred within the disability community and marked a new stage in the efforts to convey disability rights to the broader public. This paradigm shift was a move “from viewing persons with disabilities as ‘objects’ of charity, medical treatment and social protection towards viewing persons with disabilities as ‘subjects’ with rights, who are capable of claiming those rights and making decisions for their lives based on their free and informed consent as well as being active members of society” (UNEnable website, 2012). The CRPD is more than a simple declaration – it sets out several specific challenges to signatory countries concerning the monitoring and implementation of its articles. As outlined in Article 33, the UN CRPD protocol tasks countries who have ratified, with monitoring the implementation of the CRPD, and reporting to the U.N. thereby envisioning a process that would involve a close working relationship with national human rights institutions and other national stakeholders. Articles 4(3) and Article 33 (3) of the CRPD call specifically for including

persons with disabilities at all stages of the implementation, to build the capacity of organizations serving people with disabilities and Article 8 discusses the need to raise public awareness of the paradigm shift in order to convey to elites, decision-makers and the larger public the importance of ensuring that people with disabilities are treated with dignity (UNEnable website, 2012).

The media plays an important role in the implementation of the CRPD. While individuals can come to learn about the unique issues facing people with disabilities either firsthand or in close proximity through friends and colleagues in the disability community, many people will also be influenced through some mediated form of communication, including books, film, television, radio and digital media. Mediated forms of communication have unique aspects in terms of influence that set them apart from direct contacts with persons with a disability. First, media convey a *publicly-shared* perception of a disability issue or a person with a disability. A person watching a newscast about the exploits of an athlete with a disability is implicitly aware that their perception of that athlete is not a personal one but one shared with a broader public. This, in turn, has certain implications as to the weight and influence of the perception. The second important difference is the *agenda-setting* ability of the media – primarily but not exclusively the news and information media. The media can determine not only the rank-order of issues important to the disability community within the larger hierarchical structure of issues brought to the public's attention, but also *which* disability issues are highlighted. By extension, the media's influence on setting issue priority and shared public perceptions can thereby affect the impetus and policy direction regarding people with disabilities.

Effective media monitoring is a particular challenge posed by the CRPD. First, to reflect the principles of the CRPD, the monitoring function *must involve people with disabilities and the disability community throughout the monitoring process*. Second, the monitoring must be conducted by viewing and analyzing coverage of people with disabilities *from the unique perspective of human rights*. Examining coverage from a disability rights perspective has rarely been conducted in the past and has tended to focus primarily on framing language, as well as source and information accessibility. Third, the monitoring function must ultimately provide the disability community and those tasked with implementing the CRPD with a *credible, effective means of tracking the portrayal of disability rights over time and across different regions* in order to help inform members of the media as well as policy makers concerning the overall portrayal of people with disabilities and disability rights and also to be able to compare results between jurisdictions (Disability Rights Promotion International 2009). DRPI uses media monitoring as an integral part of its holistic monitoring approach (see Figure 1 below).



Figure 1: Venn diagram representing the three broad areas for monitoring: monitoring systems, monitoring individual experiences and monitoring media (DRPI website, Disability Rights Monitoring).

The objective of this work was to take up this methodological challenge and to design a media monitoring methodology that meets these three criteria and to carry out this study as a pilot. If successful, stakeholder groups invested with the task of monitoring how the media within their jurisdiction covers issues pertaining to people with disabilities will have at their disposal a research strategy that will involve people with disabilities in the process of monitoring and evaluating how their rights as outlined in the CRPD are represented in the media. It will also provide them with findings that they can use to better inform the media, government and the general public over the rights of a group that comprises 10% of the global population. This research used the Disability Rights Media Monitoring Strategy (DRMMS), see Appendix A for the complete DRMMS methodological approach. This study provides a benchmark from which researchers are able to begin to monitor any change in the media representation of people and issues related to disability to assess if it is evolving and moving towards a more rights based perspective.

## **Methodology**

The sample selected for the study was comprised of a representative group of leading Canadian newspapers: the *Vancouver Sun*, the *Calgary Herald*, the *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, the *Ottawa Citizen*, the *National Post*, the *Globe and Mail*, the *Toronto Star*, the *Toronto Sun* and the *Montreal Gazette*. A sample period of one year was chosen from 1 July 2009 to 30 June 2010.

The sample was obtained using a Boolean search of the Nexis Lexus news archive database using a core search string on the terms related specifically to disabilities:<sup>1</sup>

*((Disability or disabled or disabilities or differently abled or handicapped or rehabilitation) and not disabled list).*

The results from Nexis Lexus were sorted by relevance and the 100 most relevant texts were selected to be examined using CATPAC (Woelfel, 1993). Excluding the root stem terms, the CATPAC program identified a total of 447 terms interpreted to have a significant associative relationship. The 447 terms fell into one of three categories:

1. The associative relationship was solely the result of structure of searching a newspaper archive. For example, “National” and “Post” was viewed to have a strong associative relationship, but that is because it is the name of one of the newspapers. Sixty of the terms (13% of the sample) fell under this category.
2. The associative relationship was not the result of searching a newspaper archive, but the terms could not be used for the second sampling phase as they were not unique to the issue of disabilities and would generate too many false positives even as applicable items would be caught by the root search. As an example of these results: “lack” and

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<sup>1</sup> Using Google News as a more cost-effective alternative was discussed but was decided against as a sampling resource for this pilot for several reasons. First, the intent was to highlight the most representative media reaching the target population, while Google News only provides digital media content, and does not provide broadcast or print stories other than through their digital equivalent. Second, Google News is not a true news archive, but rather is based on a cache of hyperlinks to digital news sources that exist within a 30-day window, which may have drawbacks in conducting historical searches. Third, the sample of news outlets surveyed by Google is not made public, so it cannot be reliably determined if the outlets chosen by the researcher are actually being cached regularly by Google. Fourth, in order that the results have the property of reliability and replicability, it would be necessary that the same sample be reproduced using the same search criteria at different times. In order to produce a valid sample, it is necessary that all coverage within the parameters set by the researcher be potentially available and replicable. This property is not available using Google News.

“enough”, “host” and “challenge”, or “inclusion” and “example”. Three-hundred thirty-four terms, or 74% of the sample, fell within this category.

3. The associative relationship was not the result of searching a newspaper archive and the terms could be used for the second phase as they may be sufficiently unique to the issue of disabilities and may not arise simply from the use of the root search. There were 52 terms, or 12% of the sample, under this category.

Of the 52 terms, 25 were in proximate pairs, while two of the terms (“autism” and “RDSP”) were not associated with another term. The pairs identified tended to fall into two categories. The first and most common were concordant pairs that might better describe forms of disability or identifiers of people with disabilities, such as “disorder” and “attention” or “down” and “syndrome”, or “motor” and “skills”. A second group of terms formed proper names of people associated with disability topics, such as Howard Levitt, a noted Canadian employment lawyer. The search string employed in the second phase then incorporated these terms in addition to the root search, with the condition that paired the terms must be in proximity to each other (within three words). See Appendix B for the proximate terms in Nexis Boolean search language.

Items were considered inapplicable if the item did not identify a person with a disability or identify a disability issue. Persons with disabilities included those who have long-term physical, psychosocial, intellectual or sensory impairments, which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. The sample also excluded community event listings, indices, obituaries and brief references to

disability insurance plans. Inapplicable items comprised almost 72% of the items yielded by the second phase of the search string. This left a remainder of with 3066 applicable items, which comprised the sample, used for analysis purposes.

The sample was coded using three trained coders who were already familiar with disability issues.<sup>2</sup> The coding rules were designed to minimize coder opinion. A familiarity with disability topics and issues serves to reduce inter-coder reliability error.

The coding instrument was divided into three parts. The first part contained bibliographic variables that included the following: outlet, journalist, date, type of item, section, prominence of mention of disabilities, page, dateline and use of photo (See Appendix B for detailed list). The second part examined the scope of coverage of people with disabilities, and included a question on the form of disability, the source generating the news item about disability issues or people with disabilities, whether people with disabilities and their advocates were given a 'voice' in the news item by speaking or commenting on the issue rather than a person that does not have a disability summarizing the topic, the use of five key framing mechanisms, and the presence of certain hot-button topics around disabilities, such as the Robert Latimer case in Canada (R. v. Latimer, 2011). The contents of each are again listed in Appendix B.

The third part of the coding instrument focused specifically on the presence of the nineteen rights found in the CRPD. How the media report on issues pertaining to people with disabilities was assessed in terms of the portrayal not only of the subject of the article (*i.e.*, the person with

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<sup>2</sup> Students in York University's Critical Disability Studies program.

a disability and/or the issue), but also the outcome in the context of how Canadian audiences would see people with disabilities through the lens of the news media<sup>3</sup>.

## Discussion of findings

### A. Level of media attention to disability topics in Canada

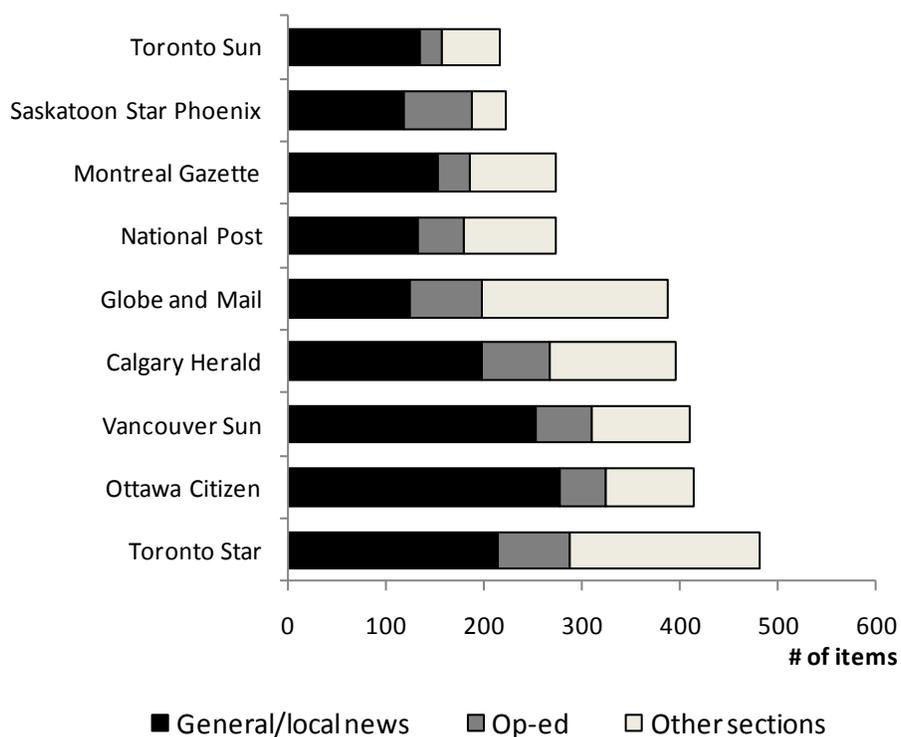
Newspapers in Canada devoted on average eleven news items per month to disability issues or profiling people with disabilities. The variance between the newspapers in covering disability topics was nominal (see Figure 2). Having said that, the country's largest circulation daily, the *Toronto Star*, stood out in devoting the most news items – 480 – over the twelve-month sample period. This was possibly reflective of the newspaper's philosophy<sup>4</sup> and of having a regular weekly column on disability. After the *Toronto Star* were a second tier of newspapers publishing approximately 400 items annually – including the *Ottawa Citizen* at 413, the *Vancouver Sun* at 409, the *Calgary Herald* at 396 and the *Globe and Mail* at 387. A third-tier published fewer than 300 items annually. This last group included the tabloid *Toronto Sun*, which published the least at 215 items, along with the *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix* (222 items) and the *National Post* and *Montreal Gazette* (272 items).

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<sup>3</sup> An audience weighting was added to the Canadian sample in order to better estimate the actual impact of certain news items and differentiate higher-impact from lower-impact items based on the reach of the news outlet and the placement and prominence of mention of disability issues within each newspaper. NADBank 2007 data – an industry survey of newspaper readership in Canada – was obtained to provide the estimated reach for both the newspaper and the individual section within each newspaper.

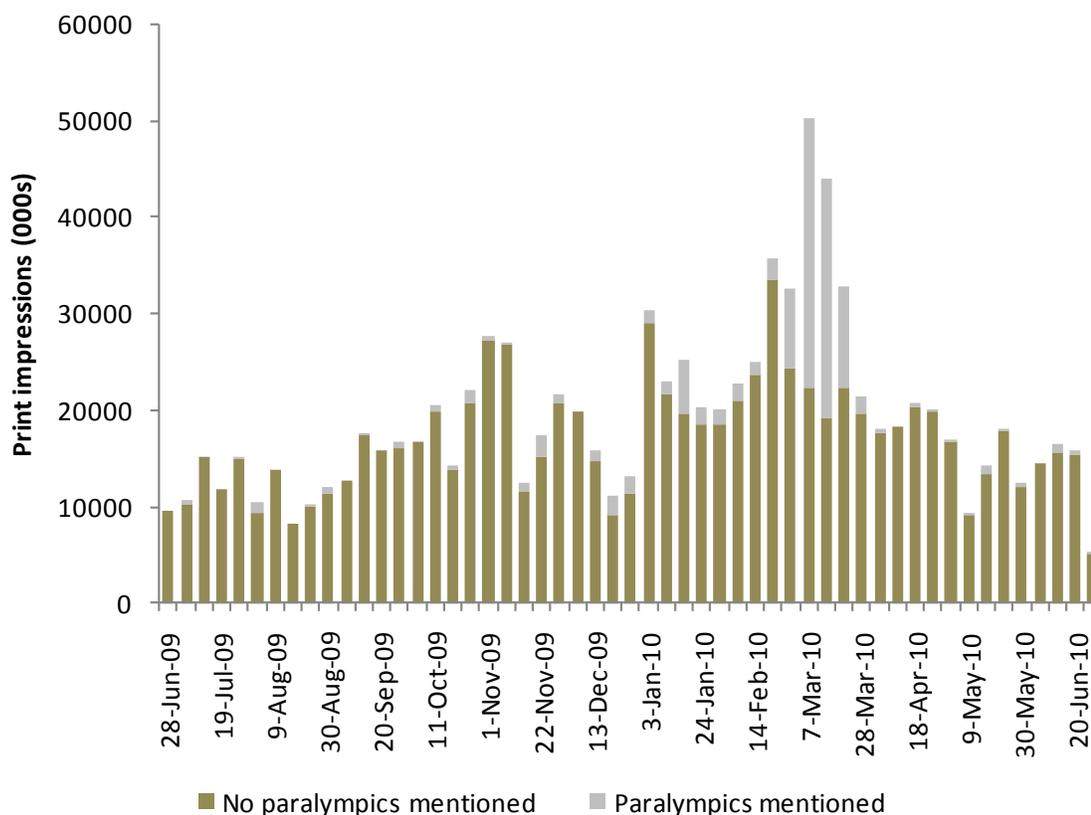
<sup>4</sup> The editorial policy of the newspaper is based on the “Atkinson principles” set by publisher Joseph E. Atkinson that the newspaper should further social, economic and political reforms and, in particular, tackle issues of injustice. <http://www.thestar.com/atkinsonseries/article/542441--the-atkinson-principles>.

Figure 2. Volume of news items concerning disability issues by newspaper and location of item in the newspaper between 1 July 2009 and 30 June



The tenth Paralympic Winter Games held in Vancouver in mid-March 2010 was a notable news event during the sample period that impacted coverage of disability topics in Canada. In total, items referring to the Paralympic Winter Games comprised 12% of the news items sampled and 11% of total estimated audience reach. Not surprisingly, that single event comprised a higher share in the *Vancouver Sun* (32% of estimated audience reach), while ranging from 4% to 12% in the other newspapers surveyed. Excluding the Paralympic Games, there was no particular story that garnered particular attention or which produced a spike in the estimated audience exposed to a disability topic. The biggest peak in coverage occurred in mid-February 2010

when audience exposure rose to double the weekly average. During this period, attention was significant because of three specific legal cases: the reporting of the case of the Barlagne family, who were denied permission to immigrate to Canada when it was found out that the family had lied about the condition of their teenage daughter who has a disability (Barlagne v. Canada (2010)); the ruling against Air Canada by the Canadian Transportation Agency, demanding that the airline provide an environment safe for people with peanut allergies (Canadian Transportation Agency, 2011) and reports on efforts to treat Haitian citizens, specifically those who acquired impairments following the January 2010 earthquake.



*Figure 3.* Volume of estimated audience exposed to a newspaper item concerning disability issues by week, between 1 July 2009 and 30 June 2010, by whether the item concerned the 2010 Winter Paralympic Games. Survey of nine Canadian newspapers. In thousands of impressions. N=3066.

Stories covering mental health or psycho-social issues comprised 28% of the total sample, a higher coverage than other types of disability. Within stories covering psycho-social issues, most items made straightforward references to labels such as: depression (32%); and addiction (30%), followed by schizophrenia (16%) and post-traumatic stress disorder (8%). Stories in this category were normally framed using a person with the disability as an example of the wider social implications of the mental health label. In many cases, news coverage of psycho-social

issues were found in the context of crime stories in which the perpetrator was labeled as having a psycho-social disability. High-profile criminal cases in a community often result in repeated references to an accused person labeled as having a psycho-social disability.

Mobility impairment was the second most-visible type of disability, and was particularly affected by the coverage devoted to the Paralympic Winter Games in Vancouver. In fact, the Paralympic Games comprised 24% of coverage about mobility disabilities. Excluding this event, mobility topics included 17% of total coverage of disabilities observed. Similarly, vision impairment, while covering 5% of the total sample, also saw a disproportionate level of media exposure because of the Paralympic Games. In all, 41% of coverage of low vision or blindness was found in the context of the Paralympic Games.

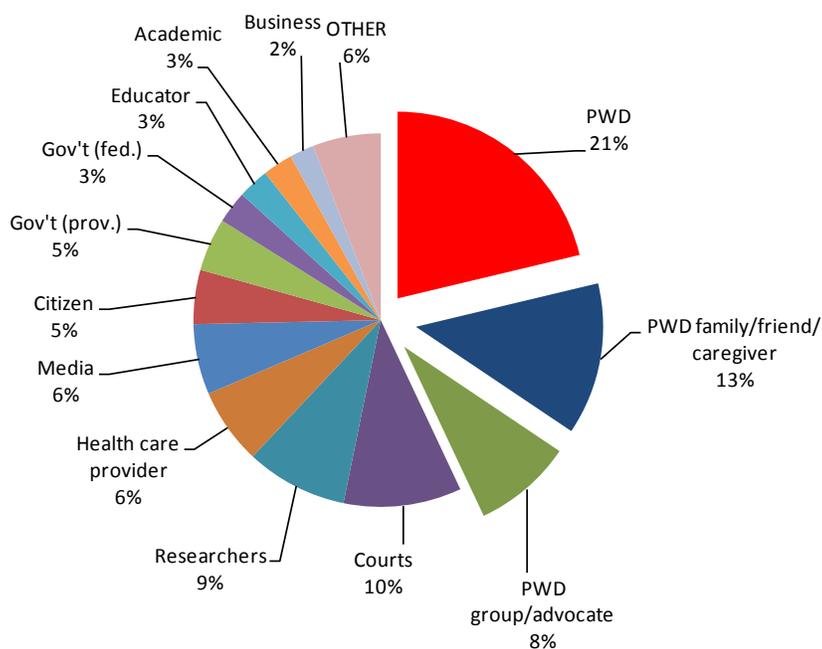
Intellectual or developmental disabilities were the next most-reported on category of disabilities, accounting for 14% of the sample of stories. Within this category, autism was the leading specific developmental disability garnering media coverage at 35% of the sub-category, with attention deficit disorders adding 7% and general references to learning disabilities incorporating dyslexia accounting for another 8%.

A notable share of the sample made reference to people with disabilities or “the disabled” without identifying the type of disability, while several news items referred to multiple categories of disabilities.

Analysis indicated that no particular media outlet paid particular attention to one form of disability more than another if the Paralympic Games coverage is excluded. Having noted that, coverage of issues pertaining to psycho-social disability was somewhat disproportionately

higher in the *Globe and Mail* (38% of total exposure) following that newspaper's particular attention to dementia and depression. As a share of total volume, intellectual disabilities tended to comprise a higher share of coverage in the *National Post* (18%) and the *Montreal Gazette* (19%), with the *Gazette* tending to devote more coverage to the topic of autism than other newspapers surveyed. Overall, however, the breakdown of coverage by type of disability was very similar among the newspapers sampled.

*Figure 4.* A breakdown by audience exposure of all coverage (excluding Paralympic Games) by major source categories, between 1 July 2009 and 30 June 2010. Survey of nine Canadian newspapers. N=3066.



## **B. Voice of people with disabilities in Canadian media**

### **Audience Exposure**

The level of input by people with disabilities in the media reporting of their issues was included in the analysis. Two variables identified “voice” associated with people with disabilities: a) whether a person with a disability, advocate or caregiver was the primary source of information generating the news item; and b) whether a person with a disability, advocate or caregiver was explicitly quoted or paraphrased in the news item.

Figure 3 provides a breakdown by audience exposure of all coverage (excluding the Paralympic Games) by major source categories. The chart indicates that individuals with a disability were the largest source of coverage about people with disabilities issues at 21%, and that people with disabilities, caregivers, supporters and advocates collectively generated 42% of total audience exposure.

In terms of exposure to ‘voice;’ in one-in-five stories in the press, the primary source was a person with a disability, and two-in-five Canadians read news item in which a person with a disability or a representative of a disability group or person was viewed as the primary source generating the article. Court rulings concerning people with disabilities made up an additional 10%, with researchers and health care providers combined providing 15%, and provincial and federal government officials adding 8%. The remaining one-quarter of the sample came from a variety of sources, including media opinion leaders, individuals, celebrities, business, educators and academic experts.

The *Toronto Star* tended to provide a higher share of coverage that included the voices of people with disabilities and their advocates compared to other newspapers.<sup>5</sup> People with disabilities were the source of 28% of coverage in the *Toronto Star*, followed by the *Ottawa Citizen* with 23% and the remaining papers providing less than 20% of coverage generated by people with disabilities. The *Toronto Star* also led in terms of coverage generated by other people with disabilities-related sources, including advocates and associations (11%) and caregivers and friends (15%, tied with the *Globe and Mail*). In all, 53% of coverage in the *Star* originating from sources related to people with disabilities, compared to 38% in the other newspapers surveyed.

A higher proportion of coverage contained explicit statements from people with disabilities and their advocates and caregivers. People with disabilities and their advocates and caregivers were quoted or cited in 64% of total exposure (excluding Paralympic events). Again, that share was observed to be higher in the *Toronto Star* (70%) than in other newspapers (60% average).

The following section explores the issue of voice and representation of people with disabilities in the media.

### **C. Coverage of disability rights**

A small percentage of the articles in the sample specifically talked about disability within a human rights context. Within that group of stories, the ratification of the UN Convention comprised only 7% of the stories, with the remaining scattered over a range of topics. These included: efforts by Nortel pensioners with disabilities to claim benefits citing the Canadian

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<sup>5</sup> Keeping in mind that the *Toronto Star* has a weekly column covering issues of disability.

Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Nortel Networks Corp, 2010); the Robert Latimer case (R. v. Latimer, 2001), coverage of the federal government's disability report (Federal Disability Report 2011); and a number of funding-related stories involving people with disabilities. There was marginal variance among the newspapers (range of 4% to 9%) in the newspapers that specifically highlighted disability rights as an issue.

This study, in examining the media coverage of disability, has divided stories into five cluster areas based on volume of stories on each theme. The first cluster, the right of people with disabilities to have equal access to health care and rehabilitative services, included in CRPD Articles 25 and 26, was portrayed in 22% of all coverage of people with disabilities within the sample. The second cluster was coverage of disability in culture, sport and recreation (Article 30 of the CRPD)<sup>6</sup>. A third cluster included the rights found in Articles 28, 13, 9, 24 and 19 of the CRPD; Accessibility, access to justice, standard of living; independent living; education) was evident, comprising between 6% and 9% of the sample. The fourth cluster of rights comprised Article 10 (right to life) and Article 15 (freedom from torture). The fifth cluster included the remaining articles of the CRPD, which saw relatively little visibility in the media's coverage of people with disabilities, each representing less than 3% of the sample and, as a result, reflected little media attention or audience exposure relating rights. The stories in each cluster were then analyzed to determine the perspective or lens used to frame the story.

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<sup>6</sup> Note: Coverage of the Paralympic Games was excluded from the study.

## **Disability Rights Analysis**

There were four distinct perspectives that framed the stories analyzed for this study. These are the bio-medical perspective, the heroic or overcoming perspective, the charity or 'feel good' perspective and the rights perspective (adapted from Haller 2003, 2010).

The first of these perspectives – the bio-medical perspective - frames disability as a biological, genetic or medical story, characterized as an individual physiological or psychological condition understood through medicine or medical knowledge (Oliver, 1990). In the second perspective, disability is framed as a heroic individual story or a story of a person who has overcome a disability. Emphasis is often placed on individual resilience, and the ability to overcome a disability or achieve high standards despite the disability. The third perspective characterizes disability within a charitable context and often individuals are portrayed in the news stories as victims (Barnes & Mercer, 2010). These types of stories are alternatively framed as 'feel-good' stories about charity work that is provided for programs or events for people with disabilities or frame stories as events that suggest that someone without a disability rescues or saves the individual with a disability. Four, there are a group of stories that are concerned with social, political and economic conditions that impact disability. This perspective is characterized as a rights perspective (Rioux 2003). From this perspective, the individual story is placed in the larger whole of the structural conditions that impact or create disabling barriers for people with disabilities.

The first three perspectives; bio-medical, heroic/overcoming and charity/'feel good' are all more conventional approaches to disability as they are reflected in the media (Oliver 1990,

Oliver & Sapey 2006). While they do raise the issue of disability they do not address the complexity of disability and disabling conditions. The last perspective, the rights perspective is the emerging theoretical and political direction found in the international and national disability movement and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations Enable website, 2011; Rioux 2003, 2010; Quinn & Degener 2002). This perspective is starting to emerge in news stories but is still too rare. This perspective provides a holistic and inclusive lens to look at issues faced by people with disabilities on a day-to-day basis. The first three perspectives focus more singularly on the individual person with a disability, with less attention to the complex structures of society and their impact on the lives and rights of people with disabilities. A rights perspective looks at the larger picture, the social pathology that needs to be addressed in order to understand the complex issues pertaining to, and that create, disability (DRPI website, 2011). This study provides a benchmark from which we are able to begin to monitor any change in the media representation of people and issues related to disability to see if it is changing.

There are five key principles on which a rights approach is grounded: dignity; autonomy; inclusion, participation and accommodation; equality and non-discrimination; and respect for difference (DRPI website, 2011). Finding these in media stories suggests that both the journalist and the audience are gaining a wider perspective on the understanding of disability as a social justice issue, as part of the fabric of groups who are entitled to rights and justice. In reviewing stories in the media, an important element in characterizing stories is whose voice is heard in the story as it is presented. In a rights based story, the voices of people with disabilities are included and validated.

Another important issue in reviewing the media is the language used to describe disability and supports or accommodations related to disability. Even in the stories that were framed by a rights perspective in this study, the language used was often far from respectful and perpetuated negative stereotypes and stigma (Derkson, ---). When someone with a disability was mentioned, it was often stated, for example, that the person 'suffers' from the disability, creating a negative subtext towards the person and the disability. When someone who uses a wheelchair was mentioned, the person was often described as 'wheelchair bound', characterizing the person as his or her disability device. A movement away from such language may be an indicator of a rights approach. There needs to be a recognition that cognitive, physical, sensory, mental and intellectual differences are a natural part of the human condition and therefore media stories should reflect this reality and use appropriate language in their coverage.

### **Cluster 1 – Health and Rehabilitation**

The largest numbers of stories found in this media study were on issues related to the topic of health. The coverage of health, found in **Article 25 and 26 (concerning the right to health, habilitation and rehabilitation)** of the CRPD, only in some cases reflected the spirit of the Convention, which affirms that:

Persons with disabilities have the right to the highest attainable standard of health without discrimination on the basis of disability. They are to receive the same range, quality and standard of free or affordable health services as provided other persons, receive those health services needed because of their disabilities, and not to be discriminated against in the provision of health insurance (Article 25). To enable persons with disabilities to attain maximum independence and participation within their community, countries are to

provide comprehensive habilitation and rehabilitation services in the areas of health, employment and education (Article 26) (UNEnable, 2011)

There were three general perspectives reflected in the health-related media stories: medical, heroic/overcoming, and rights. Although the majority of the stories could be classified as having either a medical or heroic perspective many still incorporated a rights angle, while some stories had a predominantly rights perspective.

A prevalent theme within the bio-medical stories was that of medicine as health. Most stories from a primarily medical perspective focused on new and emerging medications, treatments, research, programs, and funding opportunities. An example of such a story is that of the innovative medications being developed, which will personalize medical treatments for patients with psycho-social disabilities:

The DNA testing will provide doctors with a 'genetic blueprint' that will help them with their prescriptions, while the brain imaging tests will be able to show a more 'complete current picture' of where and how much of the medication reaches the brain, [he] said. 'These tests will tell their doctor how their body manages or does not manage, given medications,' he said. 'The doctor can then use the information to decide whether to give higher or lower doses (Nguyen, 2009).

Although this story brings good news of potentially helpful medications, its emphasis is on the medical advancement rather than the impact on individuals and the systemic implications for the rights of persons with disabilities. The journalist did not make explicit the links between the situation the individual experienced and the CRPD Article 25 right to access drugs and health options specific to their disability. The story did not highlight the potential of new technologies in promoting the rights of individuals with disabilities.

The stories that adopted a 'heroic' or 'overcoming' perspective often focused on an individual's ability to triumph over a challenging disability or difficult medical situation. One example of a heroic story of resilience is that of an accomplished author and journalist, who joined the military and "suffered" (sic) a severe brain injury while serving as a community liaison officer in Afghanistan. The neurological rehabilitative efforts concerning the mobility and speech of the person were the subject of a documentary airing on CTV and also drew notable coverage from CBC and other leading news outlets:

Canadians were horrified at the news that a fighter had driven an axe into his brain, but are heartened by how far he has come - and impressed by the woman who cheered every baby step along the way... One physician told her to put him in a long-term-care home. She told herself, 'They didn't know [him].' She was right... It takes a lot of willpower to retrain the brain, to put in the hours of physical and occupational therapy he does every day. He said he is motivated by his love for [his wife] and their four-year-old daughter. 'Willpower is willing your body to do things you can't do,' he said. 'When I was an athlete, I would use willpower to go beyond the pain. Now I'm willing my legs to flex when I push up (McIlroy, 2009).

Although the journalist described a successful and impressive medical recovery, there was no mention of the significant and appropriate health and rehabilitation services the person received, which he is entitled to in accordance with the CRPD. Without those services, which contributed to his successful recovery, he might not have had such a remarkable recovery. Instead the journalist implies that the person's successful recovery was driven by his determination and the support he received from his wife. The article implies that individual motivation and struggle will lead to "recovery" for significant disabilities, leaving the reader with the false impression that anyone can achieve this goal.

The stories found in the press with a predominantly rights perspective typically referred to policy changes, protests, and changes to health programs or services. The following story is an example depicting the struggle in Alberta to ensure hospital beds remain available for people with psycho-social disabilities:

Psychiatrists at Alberta Hospital Edmonton are urging the federal health minister to make sure hospital beds for the mentally ill aren't closed. They also raised the specter of it becoming an international human-rights issue. In a letter sent to [a Federal MP] 19 doctors at the mental hospital warned that depleting health services to mentally ill and marginalized populations could put Canada in line with Australia, which was found by the UN last month to have violated human rights by providing inadequate health care to its aboriginal peoples...the letter outlines how bed closures at Alberta Hospital would not only affect Albertans, but could have dire consequences for aboriginals from the northern territories who rely on the hospital's psychiatric intensive care unit -- one of only two such units in Alberta (Sinnema, 2010).

The journalist pointed out clear rights violations that are the consequence of restricting access to health services, especially for vulnerable aboriginal groups.

Another media article that can be characterized as taking a rights perspective is a *Toronto Star* article that profiled the innovative services of Toronto's Community Care Centre. The article outlined the Community Care Centre's non-institutionalized care programs for people with disabilities, which allows them to attain independence, while promoting inclusion in society:

It is one of 14 regional hubs in the health-care system, responsible for providing non-hospital services - ranging from post-operative rehabilitation to palliative care - to thousands of Ontarians. Children who need an attendant at school, families who need home care, patients who need medical equipment and seniors who need long-term care are served by their local community care access centre (CCAC). They are the gatekeepers of the non-institutional

health-care system... One of the biggest is its 'home first' policy... we take patients home and provide whatever services and supports they need. 'Since this policy was implemented last December, 50 per cent of seniors have found they didn't need to go to a nursing home. They are now receiving care in their home or living in a retirement residence (Goar, 2009).

This article provided a rights perspective in focusing on the Centre's health services that promote independence and community inclusion, which are principles of autonomy and participation found in the Convention. The author painted a picture of a community health service that is leading the way in offering health services by promoting individualized care and support.

Although the heroic and medical stories are often individually encouraging, they typically do not highlight the social and political structures that either enable or deny a person with a disability the right to access health and rehabilitation services. Fortunately, the finding of this study in the area of health care suggests that media is moving in the direction of emphasizing rights elements and the social and economic issues of stories on which they are reporting. They appear to be recognizing that rights are important to issues related to people with disabilities when health is concerned.

## **Cluster 2: Sport, culture and recreation**

The coverage of **Article 30 (concerning the right to participate in sport, recreation and cultural activities)** did not, in most cases where stories were identified in this study, support the spirit of the CRPD. Article 30 of the CRPD declares that:

Countries are to promote participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport by ensuring provision of television programmes, films, theatre and cultural material in accessible formats, by making theatres, museums, cinemas and libraries accessible, and by guaranteeing that persons with disabilities have the opportunity to develop and utilize their creative potential not only for their own benefit, but also for the enrichment of society. Countries are to ensure their participation in mainstream and disability-specific sports (UNEnable, 2011).

Stories related to sport, culture and recreation reflected mainly the heroic or overcoming perspective. A typical example of this type of coverage is an article from the *Montreal Gazette* entitled, *Having her SYTYCDC moment; [Name] has Down's syndrome; but that's no obstacle for the 33-year-old aspiring dancer* (Greenaway, 2010). In this article Down's syndrome is characterized as an obstacle, something that needs to be overcome in order for the dancer to dance. Another example is found in a story from the *Ottawa Citizen* entitled, *A life to write; A high school football accident left Paul Legault; a promising athlete; a quadriplegic in 1975. Since then; the Carleton Place man has married; earned two university degrees; raised two children; coached softball and written books of poetry* (Duffy, 2009). The underlying narrative that, even with a disability, a person can achieve exceptional outcomes in life against the odds holds centre stage in this story. Also typical in this area were stories of celebrities who have beaten or overcome their disability to do achieve outstanding things, *'The Fonz' shows kids it's cool to read; Star beat undiagnosed dyslexia to succeed at school; build his acting career and; now; pen children's books* (Lafaro, 2009).

Another perspective that was common in this cluster were “feel-good” charity features, such as stories about special camps for children with disabilities. At first glance these seem to represent the spirit of the CRPD, but closer reflection suggests they are more aligned with the charity

model, which portrays people with disabilities as victims of their disability and recipients of charity and pity. These stories are characterized by their focus on an individual story of a person or program and do not pay attention to the larger political, social and economic barriers that exclude people with disabilities from exercising their rights. An example is this story from the *Ottawa Citizen* entitled, *Magical day at Disney has kids flying high* (Thaw, 2009). This story highlighted a volunteer organization that organizes trips to Disneyland for children with disabilities; it is characterized by an individual focus on a volunteer group and story of individual experiences. These articles, and others like it, do not include a larger discussion on why charity groups arise and in response to what social injustices; this structural analysis is missing from the news coverage.

Some stories were explicit in their coverage of a human rights issue for people with disabilities. One such article was entitled, *Vacationing a human right; EU chief says* (Laidlaw, 2010). Other times a story had a rights perspective because it not only echoed the spirit of the Convention, but it paid attention to the diversity of issues surrounding this right, *Theatre groups aim to change attitudes about disability* (Renne, 2010) and had an emancipatory aspect to them, *Everyone has a role on life's stage; Inclusive theatre company draws out and works with talents that aren't always obvious* (Birnie, 2010).

Most media stories in this cluster area were from the heroic and overcoming perspective while others were framed as issues about “feeling good” or providing charity. There were a smaller number of stories from the rights perspective, which is encouraging, but these stories were still quite small in number. Many of the stories written from the charity “feel good” perspective

could be easily re-written from a rights perspective. By including a larger narrative on the issues that looks at why charity groups arise in the first place, what gaps charity organizations are filling in response to government policy and programming that does not meet the needs of certain groups of citizens, barriers that exclude people with disabilities from sport and culture in our society, and an emphasis on the voices of people with disabilities in the story would help this shift in perspective.

### **Cluster 3 – Accessibility, access to justice, standard of living; independent living; education**

Coverage of the issues related to those covered in **Article 9 (concerning accessibility)** of the CRPD largely did reflect the spirit of the Convention, which guarantees that:

On the fundamental issue of accessibility (Article 9), the Convention requires countries to identify and eliminate obstacles and barriers and ensure that persons with disabilities can access their environment, transportation, public facilities and services, and information and communications technologies (UNEnable, 2011).

Most stories were written from a rights perspective, taking into account the larger social, political and economic factors that should be included to understand this broad area of rights. In a story from the *Ottawa Citizen*, the issue of accessibility in Ontario is framed from a rights perspective, and highlights the voice of people with disabilities and their position on this important issue,

[The] chairman of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act Alliance, says ... 'We are now four years down the road, and we are behind schedule,' he said. 'Yes, progress is being made, but things aren't moving as fast as we would like.' ... [He] said his group will review the proposed rules on built-form accessibility over the coming weeks and will have submissions to make to the

government. He said it's been a struggle to get things to this point, and that there are still people who think the cost of making things accessible for disabled people is too high. However, he said, these people should think twice.' We all end up with a disability at some point as we age,' he said. 'All these things, like bus-stop announcements and ramps, help everybody. We are worse off as a province without these things.' (Rupert, 2009).

Many of the stories highlighted the importance of the removal of barriers, which disable people in the built environment, an issue which is important from a rights analysis and an encouraging trend in terms of media coverage of these issues.

Media stories portraying people with disabilities in the context of **Article 13 (access to justice)** were a mixture of stories from more traditional perspectives, with a few from a rights perspective. The CRPD states that people with disabilities are to have access to justice “on an equal basis with others (Article 13)” (UNEnable, 2011).

A significant number of stories about justice were stories about people with psycho-social disabilities who committed crimes and portrayed the person as a danger to society. In a story in the *Calgary Herald* entitled, *Killing 3 kids an 'altruistic' act; court told; psychiatrist says father was mentally ill* (Koopmans, 2009), the focus of the story was entirely on the individual, and no other external or structural factors are recognized or explained. While the crime is clearly troubling and horrific, this type of coverage solely focuses on the person who committed the crime and does not place the event in the larger context in which it happened, which would highlight the complexity of such events, allowing for a more comprehensive analysis.

Furthermore, stories such as these portray psycho-social disability as something inherently dark, dangerous and deviant and re-entrench these negative stereotypes.<sup>7</sup>

In most of the media stories the larger structural factors were not included, with coverage principally directed to the individual who committed the crime. A smaller number of articles did acknowledge the structural factors, for example pointing out that the justice and mental health systems were not effective and can exclude or discriminate against people with psycho-social disabilities and are a part of the back story for an understanding of these crimes. In a story from the *Toronto Star*, this was made explicit,

“If this guy had looked like a run-of-the-mill person without a mental illness, a Crown attorney might have been more apt to release the person,' says Dr. Helen Ward, clinical director of the forensic program at Royal Ottawa Mental Health Centre in Ottawa. 'But once he's been labeled or seen to be mentally ill, they are less likely. It actually works against him getting released on bail, especially if he's not getting treatment” (Freed, 2009).

Here the story had a rights perspective, highlighting the larger picture and not just focusing on the individual as the perpetrator of a dangerous action. It included a balanced discussion of the barriers and stigma that society creates.

There were a number of stories from the rights perspective found in media coverage of the justice system and jurisprudence related to access to justice for people with disabilities. There were legal cases that had been reported to various human rights commission bodies in Canada. A story in the *Ottawa Citizen* reported on a Federal Court ruling on a human rights case about

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<sup>7</sup> For an interesting recent discussion on the issue of deviance and psychosocial disability from the perspective of one Globe and Mail journalist, see Picard 2012.

accessibility that was being appealed. The story featured the voice of a person with a disability and his opinion of the accommodations that were proposed by the city of Ottawa,

Ottawa activist [BB], who has been fighting for equal access to the York Street Steps since August 1999, doesn't believe the elevator is a reasonable solution. 'We don't want to go someplace down the street,' said Brown, who has used a wheelchair since 1972 when he was disabled in a car crash. The human rights complaint against the NCC is one of dozens [he] has pursued during the past two decades. But it is among the most important, he said, because it deals with access for the disabled at an outdoor, public place (Duffy, 2009).

This type of article portrayed the voice of a person with a disability who was affected by the Federal Court ruling. It located the story in a larger picture moving beyond the focus on just the individual to looking at all of the factors that are involved in trying to live inclusively in the community. These types of stories are persuasive in enabling people with and without disabilities to be exposed to a richer and more balanced picture of what causes disablement, the processes of disablement, and how these processes can be addressed and changed by implementing structural solutions

The media coverage of the right to education found in **Article 24 (concerning the right to education)** largely did not reflect the spirit of the CRPD, which guarantees that:

States are to ensure equal access to primary and secondary education, vocational training, adult education and lifelong learning. Education is to employ the appropriate materials, techniques and forms of communication. Pupils with support needs are to receive support measures, and pupils who are blind, deaf and deaf-blind are to receive their education in the most appropriate modes of communication from teachers who are fluent in sign language and Braille. Education of persons with disabilities must foster their participation in society, their sense of dignity and self worth and the

development of their personality, abilities and creativity (Article 24).  
(UNEnable, 2011)

Many stories had an underlying perspective that emphasized heroic individuals or the stories had the sense that they were telling a story of charity. Although there were a few stories with a rights perspective, they were rare.

These stories often portrayed an individual's struggle to overcome an unaccommodating school system, social stigma, or a battle to defeat a medical condition in the face of obstacles while attending school. An example of this perspective is an article entitled, "Little big man: The making of a health care crusader". The story is about a man who had always "struggled" (sic) with Hunter's syndrome, but with determination, empathy, resilience and promising abilities, he has become an inspiration to many. His story captures this idea:

A few months into eighth grade, a group of boys sent Simon a cartoon strip that depicted him in a wheelchair (he's never used one). The caption read: 'This school is not for the deformed. 'The four students were caught and threatened with expulsion. But he convinced the headmaster to keep them in school, so that they could learn to get over their prejudices. Weeks later, after the headmaster had told the rest of the school about the incident, he was running a race at a school track meet. Everyone else had crossed the finish line, but Simon still had two laps to go. 'By the time Simon was finishing the fourth lap, the entire school was standing, shouting 'Si-mon, Si-mon'. After that, they had an incredible level of respect for him (Ogilvie, 2009).

The journalist who wrote this article presented the story as the individual's ability to overcome social stigmas within a school setting. However, the journalist did not address the larger social and political forces that influence either positively or negatively the right to education without discrimination. A key issue of this story, the intimidation and bullying faced by the young man

at school is not highlighted or even mentioned in the story and appears to have escaped the journalist's attention.

The charity ethos that underlined many of the stories about education portrayed situations in which a lack of accommodation or funding was met with alternative private schools, NGO programs, or generous donations. An example of this coverage is an article entitled, "A significant difference in one life; the present of an education for a single mother's son was a pure gift" (O'Brian, 2009). The story was about one woman's empathetic generosity to pay for another woman's child to attend a private school that specializes in teaching kids with dyslexia and other learning disabilities. The donor wanted to make a significant difference in one person's life. In turn the recipients promised to pay-it forward to others in need. The journalist told the story of a generous donation that allows a child to have access to a specialized education. However, it did not cover the underlying concern that the child would not have to attend a private specialized school if the public education system recognized and accommodated his individualized learning needs, things to which Article 24 of the CRPD entitle him.

The articles written from a rights perspective typically portrayed a struggle against a school that had not fully provided the support to ensure equal and inclusive access to education. An example of such a story was that of a mother who challenged the human rights infringements experienced by her son in his being denied an appropriate education. The article is entitled, "Her son's education is a David and Goliath battle right to learn" (Gordon, 2010). The author wrote, "She has spent eight years trying to get services and accommodations for her son who

was diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) when he was in Grade 1. Instead, she alleges, in a complaint before the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario, he languished in a system that refused to recognize his disability or provide the special education services he needed” (Ibid). The article clearly took a systemic perspective, in the way the journalist highlighted the injustice in an education system which did not recognize that his learning needs required accommodations and individualized learning protocols. The article focused on the difficulties encountered by the student, not because of his personal limitations, but due to the lack of accommodations he encountered within his school. Most importantly, this story is not presented as a singular, unique story, rather is presented a problem with a school system that is not addressing the needs for educational support for all Ontario students with ADHD and learning disabilities.

The media coverage of the rights to an **adequate standard of living, and independent living** found in **Articles 19 and 28** predominantly did reflect the spirit of the CRPD:

Countries recognize the right to an adequate standard of living and social protection; this includes public housing, services and assistance for disability-related needs, as well as assistance with disability-related expenses in case of poverty (Article 28). Persons with disabilities must be able to live independently, to be included in the community, to choose where and with whom to live and to have access to in-home, residential and community support services (Article 19). (UNEnable, 2011)

The majority of the stories in this cluster of stories suggested a need to overcome challenging situations for both individuals and their families. There were many stories that covered topics such as; changes to funding entitlements, social subsidy cutbacks, and loss of services or programs. An example of an article with this perspective is one headlined “Cutbacks for funding

for mentally ill too deep: critics” (Fekete, 2010). This story outlined the harsh funding cutbacks scheduled for agencies serving adults with developmental disabilities in Calgary. The author explained, “The Calgary-region board that allocates funding and contracts out to service agencies in the city is projecting a \$4.8-million shortfall, which has pervasive development disorder groups fearing they'll be forced to turn away new clients and may even have to shut down their operations” (Ibid). Although the author recognized that important services are in jeopardy, the journalist failed to discuss the importance of the funding cutbacks from a rights perspective. The rights perspective would suggest that without these support services, Individuals with disabilities would not be able to continue living independently within their communities, which is what they are entitled to, as outlined in Article 19 of the CRPD.

Many other newspaper articles in this cluster were concerned with community programs, fundraising events, supportive services for seniors, and breakthrough initiatives. This type of story suggests that disability is about charity and explores how people may feel good about helping people with disabilities rather than understanding that people with disabilities have a right to the same things as those without disabilities. An example of such coverage is reflected in a story headlined, “Good deeds served hot daily” (Caldwell, 2009). This article told the story of a Meals-On-Wheels veteran volunteer who found satisfaction in giving to others. The volunteer explained, “I wanted to do something charitable” (Ibid). The journalist described the service of Meals-On-Wheels as providing appropriate and adequate meals to people in need, including people with disabilities. No doubt the story offers a warm description of a dedicated volunteer, and a program that is desperately needed. However, it failed to recognize that

people with disabilities are entitled to access to food within their homes, which accompanies the right to living independently and having an adequate standard of living.

Of the stories addressed to standard of living and independent living, a fair number did reflect the importance of people with disabilities being able to exercise their rights. These stories often referred to accommodations, discrimination, and actions taken through Human Rights Tribunals. An example of this coverage is a story entitled, “Snubbed renters get foot in the door” (Balkissoon, 2009). The story described the prejudice faced by marginalized groups in finding a home, and the ultimate responsibilities of a landlord to provide accommodation:

Housing is a human right, according to the United Nations. But it can be a complicated issue for landlords to grasp. That's why the Ontario Human Rights Commission issued a new document Monday, coinciding with Global Habitat Day, to clarify its policy and interpret the vague and spotty references to rental housing in the Ontario Human Rights Code. 'We're presenting processes and ways of meeting your responsibilities if you're a landlord' (Ibid).

The story presents to the public a recognition that housing is a right; that people with disabilities are entitled to housing, and should be able to decide where they live, and should not be discriminated against in housing due to their disability.

It is an encouraging sign that many of the media articles in this area were written from a rights perspective. The disability movement in Canada has worked hard in the area of deinstitutionalization and claiming rights to independent living, and has made significant achievements in this area. This is clearly reflected in the number of media stories that come from a rights perspective when covering this issue (Council of Canadians with Disabilities 2004, People First of Canada 2006, Independent Living Canada n.d).

#### Cluster 4: Right to life, freedom from torture and abuse

The spirit of the Convention was found to underlie the coverage of rights found in **Article 10 (the right to life)**, and **Article 15 and 17 (security and freedom from torture and abuse)** of the CRPD. The CRPD states:

Countries are to guarantee that persons with disabilities enjoy their inherent right to life on an equal basis with others (Article 10) ... Countries must protect the physical and mental integrity of persons with disabilities, just as for everyone else (Article 17), guarantee freedom from torture and from cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, and prohibit medical or scientific experiments without the consent of the person concerned (Article 15) (UNEnable, 2011).

Many of the stories in this cluster covered the issues of euthanasia and suicide, and were written from a rights perspective, or included a rights perspective. During the time frame of the study there was considerable coverage of Bill 384, introduced in the Canadian parliament to legalize euthanasia and assisted suicide in Canada, and could have implications on the rights of people with disabilities. A number of articles in this area were letters to the Editor and added a rich rights perspective to the coverage,

Bill 384 allows euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide to 'competent' people and, shockingly, those with the 'appearance of lucidity.' It seems the public could be convinced that we should have the option to make that appointment, but it is all smoke and mirrors. We will learn what those in the disabled community already have -- that others make the choices and the appointments based on their judgment, not on our quality of life (Jakki, 2009).

First-person stories highlighted the importance of external factors in discussions of rights, *Make life the first choice; ... but not the only choice; 'My own wish to be euthanized changed as I*

*began to receive support from those around me'* (Fletcher, 2009).

Also prevalent were articles on suicide and psycho-social disabilities, with a number of articles taking a rights perspective in their coverage, advocating for increased services, de-stigmatization and support, *Honest talk about suicide is the best method of prevention; Nearly 4,000 Canadians take their lives every year; making suicide the second leading cause of death among people between ages of 15 and 34* (White, 2010). Euthanasia and suicide are complex and intricate issues, and most stories reflected this in their coverage, stories included a variety of voices and perspectives and were generally from a rights perspective.

Over half of the CRPD articles were not found to be portrayed in coverage of people with disabilities by the media in the time period of this study, including **Article 14 (security of person)**, **Article 11 (prevention from risk from calamities)**; **Article 12 (legal recognition)**; **Article 17 (freedom of movement within and outside of borders)**, **Article 21 (freedom of expression)**. However, other rights that would be more likely to garner coverage within a Canadian domestic context, such as **Article 22 (privacy)**, **Article 23 (participation in home and family life)**, and **Article 29 (participation in political life)** also saw little media visibility during the period of the study. Among the rights most often covered by the media in this theme was **Article 27 (right to employment)**, which was featured in 3% of total volume. This coverage tended to profile innovative employment programs and/or employers that included accommodations for people with disabilities. There were very few news reports featuring efforts to promote employment among people with a physical disability.

## Conclusion

From analyzing the stories found in the press it is apparent that the majority of stories were not written from the rights perspective, a perspective that would have reflected the requirements of the CRPD. Indeed, the predominant perspectives in media stories during the period of this study were either from the perspectives of ‘heroic/overcoming’ or “feel good” /charity. The journalists who wrote these stories often portrayed a situation of hardship, of overcoming obstacles, of individual heroic achievements, of medical frontiers, and of stories that make the reader “feel good” about what someone has done for those with disabilities. Although there is nothing inherently wrong with these types of stories, they often ignore the greater social stigmas, discriminations, and inequalities that are faced by people with disabilities. Instead of discussing potential rights violations or injustice, the journalists interpreted events as struggles, cryptic heroic tales, or victimization which are associated with a charitable, medical and individual model of disability. Furthermore, the voice of the person with a disability was usually left out of the story, the story interpreted by either a journalist or by a friend or family member. The absence of the individual’s narrative not only disconnects the reader from the subject of the story, but can also lead to false interpretations, and silence the perspectives of people with disabilities in the media. In the coverage covered in this research the rights perspective was often an afterthought, or was not included at all. However, within specific topic areas, especially areas where the disability movement has been actively seeking change, the rights perspective was predominant, including the areas of: health, access to justice, right to live, living standards, or independent living. Although the rights perspective emerges in some

stories, the media seemed, in the period covered by this study, to shy away, whether from lack of knowledge or lack of interest, from incorporating and affirming the spirit of the Convention within stories that discuss disability in Canadian media.

The Canadian pilot study was a first and very constructive step that should yield further research in four key priorities. First, there needs to be **further refinement of the research model** from a research design standpoint so that it can be used more easily and more effectively by other researchers to examine media coverage in their jurisdictions. Second, but related to the first priority, is that the DRMMS should be augmented by other forms of textual analysis, including critical discourse analysis, which can probe aspects of specific stories highlighted by the content analysis in more detail. This research did do this critical discourse analysis, which strengthens the approach and deepens the analysis. Third, further research and commentary is required to show how **empirical research of the news media from a human rights perspective has in terms of previous media research involving disability issues**. Fourth, the unique quantitative as well as qualitative results of the media study should be applied **constructively and proactively to advance the issue of disability rights as a public issue**, particularly with members of the media surveyed, as well as with the disability community at large.

DRPI uses a holistic human rights monitoring approach that integrates media monitoring as an important element, “Monitoring media involves tracking media imagery and coverage of disability. The media have a powerful influence on the way disability is perceived and on the attitudes of the public towards people with disabilities. It is important to document myths and

stereotypes perpetuated by media portrayals of persons with disabilities and also highlight effective reporting of disability issues” (DRPI website, Disability Rights Monitoring). This study will be useful as a benchmark for further research into Canadian media and its representation of issues relating to disability. People with disabilities are in the best position to represent their issues and positions on issues relating to disability rights, supports and needs. The media should strive to include the voices of people with disabilities in all stories covering issues of disability.

## Appendix A

### **Disability Rights Media Monitoring Strategy: A unique methodological approach**

The DRMMS, a piece of empirical research, must meet specific academic criteria concerning validity and reliability, while remaining useful for the larger disability rights community. The DRMMS involves the analysis of mediated text and, as a result, proceeds using one of three broad approaches usually undertaken by social researchers in analyzing text: a) the use of a computer-generated textual analysis program designed to identify patterns and test a set of hypotheses; b) a content analysis using coders that also identify patterns based on a set of rules, and c) a qualitative reading of the text from a critical perspective. All three approaches have benefits and drawbacks that require internal and external validity, reliability and their relative accuracy in describing a generalized phenomenon from a specific sample. Recognizing the strengths and weaknesses of all three approaches, the DRMMS incorporates all three approaches. During the sample development stage, the DRMMS used a computerized textual analysis software program called CATPAC, developed by researchers at the University of Buffalo (Woelfel 1993). Once a valid sample corresponding to disability terms was established, the second stage involved human coding of the sample that corresponds to the rights identified in the CRPD as well as other key variables. Finally, the third stage involved a critical discourse analysis of media items identified from the human coding process, and then went deeper into explaining how news media, when they did cover questions of disability rights, either reproduced or resisted the power structures of social, economic and political inequality.

To address the unique challenge of implementing a media monitoring function that involves people with disabilities and provides a constructive tool for disability rights communities, the DRMMS ensures that people with disabilities play a central role in all stages of the research.

The actual research design of the study involved a ten-step process, outlined below.

- Step 1.** The disability community responsible for the study selected a research committee and a research coordinator.
- Step 2.** The research committee determined the basic composition of the media sample in terms of the sample period and the desired target media outlets. The media outlets should be representative of the news media of the territory in which the disability community has its interest. The source of the news media sample is important and it is assumed that the disability community has the resources to obtain a valid sample either through individual monitoring or through access to a commercially-available database such as Factiva or Lexis-Nexis.
- Step 3.** A preliminary sample was conducted using a combination of terms denoting the subject of disabilities. Typically, the terms are derivatives of the term “disability,” while using appropriate filters to eliminate false positives (*e.g.*, athletes on the “disabled list”).
- Step 4.** The researchers applied the CATPAC program against the corpus generated from the preliminary sample.<sup>8</sup> The CATPAC program identified relevant terms based on frequency, cluster analysis and multi-dimensional scaling, and groups and ranks associative terms. The associative terms are segmented into high, medium and low association based on the CATPAC rankings.
- Step 5.** From the CATPAC output, the associative terms were added to the search string that was used to generate the primary media sample used for coding and analysis. These associative terms are added to the core search string (derivatives of the term “disability”) to construct Boolean search criteria that was applied by the primary researcher against the full list of media outlets to be sampled over the designated period, thereby generating the full media sample for human coding.
- Step 6.** The coding schematic was developed, divided into three general areas: 1) an initial area identifying mostly bibliographic variables (date, outlet, reporter, type, use of photo, etc.); 2) an area concerning the portrayal of people with disabilities (type of disability, source of information, topic, common models/frames employed in describing people with disabilities such as the ‘medical model’ or the ‘supercrip’ model), and 3) a section in which the coders identify the relationship of the story to a rights analysis.

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<sup>8</sup> Doerfel, M.L., & Barnett, G.A. (1996). The use of CATPAC for text analysis. *Field Methods*, 8, 4-7.

- Step 7.** After the full sample is coded, the research team provided the data and Stage 2 results to the research committee for review and interpretation.
- Step 8.** The research committee and researchers determined a filter to apply to the main sample in order to generate a subsample that would be most effective for the purposes of critical discourse analysis.
- Step 9.** The research team conducted a critical discourse analysis on the identified subsample.
- Step 10.** The researchers presented Stage 3 findings of the critical discourse analysis to the research committee.

In order to determine the utility of the DRMMS, an experiment was devised using the Canadian media. The objectives of the experiment were three-fold:

1. To determine patterns in how the Canadian media cover people with disabilities from the relatively unique perspective of human rights;
2. to stress-test the utility and practicality of the DRMMS research design, and where strengths and weaknesses may exist, and finally
3. to identify the type and utility of the findings generated by the DRMMS approach for groups that may want to use the DRMMS in the future to advance disability rights with the media within their jurisdictions.

### **CATPAC generated media sample**

Table 1  
*Initial CATPAC-generated media sample, broken down by applicable versus non-applicable items, and presence of “disability” root stem*

		Not applicable	Applicable	Total
No mention of root term	Count	5206	1418	6624
	% of Total	48.1%	13.1%	61.2%
Root term mentioned	Count	2549	1648	4197
	% of Total	23.5%	15.2%	38.8%
	Count	7755	3066	10821
	% of Total	71.6%	28.4%	100.0%

N=10821. Root term is any mention of the words “disabled”, “disabilities” or “disability” within the body of the article. Twelve months ending June 30, 2010, from nine newspapers.

## Implementing the Canadian Study

Marcia Rioux was the Project Director, Miha Dinca-Paneschescu was the Research Coordinator and Andrew Laing, President of Cormex Research, a Toronto-based media content measurement and analysis firm, was selected as the Principal Researcher. A research committee of 4 members was established solely to advise the research in the pilot project in Canada:

- i. Stephen Trumper, an instructor at Ryerson University and a wheelchair user;
- ii. Raymond Cohen, President of the Canadian Abilities Foundation;
- iii. Dr. Beth Haller, a professor at Towson University in Maryland and a leading academic studying disability issues;
- iv. Sheyfali Sanjani; a broadcaster producer with CBC Radio and an active member of the Toronto disabilities community;

## Appendix B:

The proximate terms, expressed in Nexis Boolean search language, were as follows:

(INCLUSION w/3 EXAMPLE)	(PARALYMPIC w/3 COMMITTEE)
(SECOND w/3 REHAB)	(SYNDROME w/3 DOWN)
(DISORDER w/3 ATTENTION)	(QUESNEL w/3 JOANNE)
(EDUCATIONAL w/3 ASSESSMENTS)	(SKILLS w/3 MOTOR)
(PHYSICAL w/3 DEVELOPMENTAL)	(MENTAL w/3 HEALTH)
(TESTS w/3 COGNITIVE)	(PATCH w/3 EYE)
(STUDENT w/3 ABILITY)	(REHABILITATION w/3 PROGRAM)
(STEVEN w/3 JONES)	(TRIBUNAL w/3 ACCOMMODATE)
(TURIN w/3 PARALYMPICS)	(LEVITT w/3 HOWARD)
(BUILDING w/3 ACCESS)	(WHEELCHAIR w/3 ACCESSIBLE)
(LEARN w/3 DIFFERENTLY)	(LIVING w/3 COMMUNITY)
(VANHERPE w/3 DEAN)	(FRANCOEUR w/3 CAPILANO)
(BRAIN w/3 AREA)	

It resulted in the following Boolean search string, which when applied to all identified Canadian media outlets in Nexis over the twelve-month sample period yielded a sample of 10,829 individual news items.<sup>9</sup>

*((INCLUSION w/3 EXAMPLE) OR (SECOND w/3 REHAB) OR (DISORDER w/3 ATTENTION) OR (EDUCATIONAL w/3 ASSESSMENTS) OR (PHYSICAL w/3 DEVELOPMENTAL) OR (TESTS w/3 COGNITIVE) OR (STUDENT w/3 ABILITY) OR (STEVEN w/3 JONES) OR (TURIN w/3 PARALYMPICS) OR (BUILDING w/3 ACCESS) OR (LEARN w/3 DIFFERENTLY) OR (VANHERPE w/3 DEAN) OR (BRAIN w/3 AREA) OR (PARALYMPIC w/3 COMMITTEE) OR (SYNDROME w/3 DOWN) OR (QUESNEL w/3 JOANNE) OR (SKILLS w/3 MOTOR) OR (MENTAL w/3 HEALTH) OR (PATCH w/3 EYE) OR (REHABILITATION w/3 PROGRAM) OR (TRIBUNAL w/3 ACCOMMODATE) OR (LEVITT w/3 HOWARD) OR (WHEELCHAIR w/3 ACCESSIBLE) OR (LIVING w/3 COMMUNITY) OR (FRANCOEUR w/3 CAPILANO) OR autism or rdsp or disability or disabled or disabilities or “differently abled” or handicapped or rehabilitation)) and not “disabled list”)*

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<sup>9</sup> Using only the root “disability” search string yielded 6815 items over the same sample period and outlets.

## Appendix C:

### Media Monitoring Project: Content Analysis Codebook

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#### A) Bibliographic variables

**Applicable:** code as inapplicable (0) if:

- Item does not identify a person with a disability, *or*
- Item does not identify a disability issue (see definition below)
- Community event listings
- Index
- Obituaries
- Brief references to disability insurance plans

Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments that in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. If meets this definition, code as **applicable=1**.

**A8) Prominence** (how prominently does the item mention a person with disabilities or a disability issue)

- 0. Not prominent (mentioned once, not critical to story)
- 1. Prominent (mentioned more than once, or in headline, or critical to the story)

#### B) Disability variables

##### **B1) Type of disability**

- 1. Mobility impairment (MS, stroke, polio, amputation, brain injury)
- 2. Vision impairment
- 3. Cognitive/intellectual impairment (Stroke, Downs, Autism, Aspergers,
- 4. Hearing impairment
- 5. Mental impairment (Schizophrenia, PTSD, bi-polar\_
- 6. Medical impairment (diabetes
- 7. General reference
- 98. Multiple impairments noted
- 99. Other specific (if Other specific, use field to indicate type of disability).

**B2) Second Type of disability** (Second field, use list above)

**B3) Topics** (What is the main topic of the article as it concerns disabilities?)

1. Children with disabilities
2. Government/private funding
3. Education issues
4. Health care access/costs
5. Discrimination - general
6. Jobs/employment/accessibility
7. Aging/elderly
8. Recreation/sports
9. Mobility/accessibility
10. Transportation
11. Independent living
12. Disability benefits
99. OTHER (please specify in field provided)

**B4) Source** (What is the main source of information used in the news report concerning people with disabilities or disability issues? What is generating the story about disabilities?)

1. Individual – person with a disability
2. people with disabilities group/association
3. Family/friend/caregiver of a person with a disability
4. Health care provider (doctor, nurse, hospital, care facility employee, therapist, public health authority)
5. Government – federal (agencies, departments, ministers, staff, PM)
6. Government – provincial
7. Government – local/regional
8. Government – International (non-Canadian)
9. Political opposition party (federal or provincial)
10. Health care advocacy group (non-disability related – not representing disability above).
11. Courts
12. Media opinion leaders (columnist, editorial)
13. Individual (non-disability related)
14. Celebrity
15. Business
16. Expert (academic)
17. Medical researcher
18. Educator
99. OTHER (please specify in field provided)

**B6) People with disabilities voice** (Who within the disability community most expresses in the item the view of the person with a disability. It must be a quote or paraphrased statement.)

0. No person with a disability quoted or paraphrased
1. People with disabilities
2. Family

3. Advocate/advocacy group - people with disabilities

**B7) Hot-button topics** (Is it about a story that has particular resonance regarding people with disabilities?)

0. Not hot-button story noted
1. Robert Latimer
2. CTA/SCC ruling – VIA Rail
3. CTA ruling – Air Canada
4. CHRC Tribunal victory re: National Capital Commission
5. Honda v. Keys Supreme Court case
6. Cancellation of Court Challenges Programme
7. Paralympic Games
8. Ratification by Canada of the **Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**

## C) Disability rights conditions

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The following section outlines rights for people with disabilities as established under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which was ratified by Canada in 2007. How the media report on people with disabilities is being assessed in terms of the portrayal not only of subject (*i.e.*, the person with a disability and/or related issue), but also the outcome in the context of how Canadian audiences are seeing people with disabilities either achieving and/or asserting their rights, or are seeing their rights denied.

The intent of the coding exercise is to determine which, if any, of the following rights is addressed in the news item as it pertains to the situation of the person with a disability that is reported. In order to be applicable, there must be two conditions:

- the issue and/or subject concerning disabilities that makes the article applicable must be mentioned in the context of the right; and
- there is a clear outcome as to whether the issue/subject encounters a positive or negative experience in terms of satisfying the right.

There are two possible options:

1. Issue/subject mentioned in context of the right and the **right is achieved and/or affirmed favourably**. Possible examples of a right being affirmed favourably would include:
  - (i) Problem is identified and there is an adequate response
  - (ii) Needs are met
  - (iii) Funding is allocated
  - (iv) Innovative solution found to issue

2. Issue/subject mentioned in context of the right and the **right is denied or left unmet.**

Possible examples of the right not being affirmed favourably would include:

- (i) Case of discrimination
- (ii) Problem identified, no or inadequate response
- (iii) Negative live/work situation for people with disabilities

**C1) Accessibility:** [Art. 9] ensure access, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment, to transportation, and to other facilities and services open or provided to public.

**C2) Life:** [Art. 10] every human being has the **inherent right to life** and shall take all necessary measures to ensure its effective enjoyment by persons with disabilities on an equal basis with others.

**C3) Protection in situations of risk:** [Art. 11] ensure the protection and safety of persons with disabilities in situations of risk, including situations of armed conflict, humanitarian emergencies and the occurrence of natural disaster.

**C4) Legal recognition:** [Art. 12] people with disabilities have the right to recognition everywhere as persons before the law, including owning property, and control financial affairs.

**C5) Access to justice:** [Art. 13] ensure effective access to justice for people with disabilities on an equal basis with others, including through the provision of procedural and age-appropriate accommodations, and promote training for those working in the justice system in dealing with people with disabilities.

**C6) Liberty and security of the person:** [Art. 14] ensure that people with disabilities enjoy the right to liberty and security of person and are not deprived of their liberty unlawfully or arbitrarily.

**C7) Freedom from torture or inhuman treatment; from exploitation , violence and abuse:** [Art 15 & 16] ensure measures to prevent people with disabilities from being subjected to torture, inhuman treatment or punishment; to medical or scientific experimentation without consent; to protect people with disabilities from all forms of exploitation, violence and abuse.

**C8) Freedom of movement and nationality:** [Art. 17] can choose their country of residence and nationality on an equal basis with others, and are not deprived of their nationality on the basis of their disability.

- C9) Live independently and being included in the community:** [Art. 19] people with disabilities have the opportunity to freely choose their place of residence on an equal basis with others, where and with whom they choose and are not obliged to live in a particular arrangement.
- C10) Personal mobility:** [Art. 20] ensure personal mobility of people with disabilities in the manner and time of their choice, and at affordable cost; access to quality mobility aids, devices, and forms of live assistance as well as training in mobility skills.
- C11) Freedom of expression and opinion, and access to information:** [Art. 21] people with disabilities provided devices and resources to allow for freedom of expression equal to others, all at an affordable cost (info in accessible formats; alternative communication accepte din official interactions).
- C12) Respect for privacy:** [Art. 22] protect people with disabilities against arbitrary or unlawful interference with their privacy, family, home, correspondence or other forms of communication; protect the privacy of their personal, health and rehabilitation information.
- C13) Respect for home and family:** [Art. 23] people with disabilities have equal rights relating to marriage, family, parenthood and relationships.
- C14) Education:** [Art. 24] people with disabilities have right to education and opportunities for life-long learning on equal terms with others. To be included in regular education system with reasonable accommodation of individual requirements.
- C15) Health and rehabilitation:** [Art. 25,26] people with disabilities have right to access highest standard of health care without discrimination based on their disability, including rehabilitative services.
- C16) Employment:** [Art. 27] people with disabilities have right to work on equal basis with others in a profession of their choosing free of impediments and discrimination, with equal opportunities for advancement
- C17) Adequate standard of living and social protection:** [Art. 28] people with disabilities have the right to an adequate standard of living (food, clothes, shelter). Right to social protection includes access to poverty reduction, public housing and retirement programmes.
- C18) Participation in political and public life:** [Art. 29] ensure that people with disabilities fully participate in political and public life, directly or through freely chosen representatives (right to vote; to be elected; forming and joining organizations).
- C19) Culture/recreation:** [Art. 30] people with disabilities have equal opportunity to take part in cultural life. (accessibility to cultural materials and places; cultural and linguistic identity), in recreational, leisure and sporting activities (mainstream and disability-specific).

## D) Framing mechanisms

The following questions determine whether the author of the news story uses one of four common **framing mechanisms** that allow the story to be better understood by a wider audience. The common mechanisms are: *medical; heroic/overcoming; economic/charity; rights.*

0 No framing mechanism

**1 Medical model:** Disability is framed as a medical story, characterized as an individual pathology that is a physiological or psychological condition understood through medicine or medical knowledge

**Question to ask:** IS DISABILITY PRESENTED AS AN ILLNESS OR CONDITION DEPENDENT ON HEALTH PROFESSIONALS OR THERAPISTS FOR CURES OR MAINTENANCE?

**2 Heroic/Overcoming model:** Disability is framed as a heroic or superhuman event. Emphasis is placed on individual resilience, and the ability to overcome a disability.

**Question to ask:** ARE PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES PORTRAYED AS SUPERHUMAN, INSPIRATIONAL, OR "SPECIAL" BECAUSE THEY LIVE WITH A DISABILITY? ARE THEY PORTRAYED AS EXAMPLES OF PEOPLE WHO CAN MAKE IT DESPITE THEIR DISADVANTAGE?

**3 Economic/Charity model:** Disability is framed within a charitable context and often individuals are portrayed in the news stories as victims. These types of stories are alternatively framed as “feel-good” stories about charity work that is provided for programs or events for people with disabilities.

**Question to ask:** ARE PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES PRESENTED AS DISADVANTAGED AND RECOGNIZED AS NEEDING TO LOOK TO THE STATE OR TO SOCIETY FOR ECONOMIC SUPPORT, OR ARE PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES AND THEIR ISSUES PRESENTED AS EXPENSIVE AND COSTLY TO SOCIETY? IS THERE A SENSE IN THE STORY THAT PEOPLE WHO OFFER CHARITY OR ASSISTANCE TO PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES ARE BETTERING SOCIETY AND THEREFORE ARE MORE WORTHY THEMSELVES?

**4. Rights model:** Disability is placed within a larger social, political and economic context. The individual story is placed in the larger whole of the structural conditions that impact or create disabling barriers for people with disabilities.

**Question to ask:** ARE PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES PRESENTED AS PERSONS ENTITLED AND DESERVING OF EQUAL RIGHTS?

The screenshot shows a web browser window with the following details:

- Address Bar:** <http://10.2.2.1000/...>
- Page Title:** DRPI Coding Sheet
- Browser Tabs:**
  - Home
  - DRPI Coding Sheet
- Main Content Area:** A table with multiple columns and rows, representing the DRPI coding sheet. The table has a header row and several data rows. The columns are labeled with various categories, and the rows contain numerical data.
- Browser Interface:** The browser shows standard navigation buttons (Back, Forward, Home, Stop) and a search bar.

Figure 5: Screen shot of the web interface of the DRPI coding sheet.

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