
CHANGING LEGACIES FOR SPORT MANAGERS: DISABILITY, GENDER AND CANADIAN MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE 2014 PARALYMPIC GAMES

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Type: Scientific

Category: K: Elite sport organization and management for world class performance

Abstract

Prior to the 1990s disability and rights in sport received little attention in Canada. There was limited attention paid to athletes with disabilities, there were few local recreational sport opportunities and only limited funding was available for athletes to participate in international competition. A profound shift gradually took place the past twenty years as disability rights in sport became increasingly recognized, especially after the passage of the 2006 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Rioux, 2012). Government funding through Sport Canada supported participation in the Paralympic Games and successes in international sport raised the profiles of disability in sport, and of the athletes themselves. This research uses the same framework as that the author used for the Canadian research that was part of the 22-country 2011 International Sports Press Survey (Horky & Nieland, 2013). It included an analysis of three Canadian newspapers (national, regional and tabloid) and the use of a broad range of diverse variables/categories and this paper presents the initial analysis of the Canadian media coverage of disability and gender and the 2014 Winter Paralympic Games.

Unlike the USA, with its Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA, 1993) enforced by the Federal Justice Department, disability rights are not entrenched by national legislation in Canada. Provincial rights have been put in place in some provinces. The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) was passed in 2005 under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Community and Social Services (www.mcscs.gov.on.ca/en/ca/en/mcscs/programs), but Customer Service is currently the only Standard (out of five) where compliance is required by both the public and private sectors; the final deadline for compliance in the other four areas of accessibility (Employment, Information and Communication, Transportation, Design of Public Spaces - Built

Environment) covered by the legislation is 2025.

Sport managers are increasingly aware of the need to make disability programs mainstream (Thomas and Smith, 2009) and the built environment more accessible, reflecting the need to comply with the coming AODA Standards, the increasing number of persons with disabilities on television programs (Glee and Coronation Street) in popular culture and in the news, and the significant increase of students and the general public using technology (scooters, walkers, wheelchairs) for greater participation in sport activities and the wider society. Toronto hosting the Pan American and ParaPan American Games in 2015 with its Accessibility Advisory Council (AAC) has further raised accessibility issues and the inclusion of changes to the new accessibility-based regulations of the Ontario Building Code for venues and the Athletes' Village. Sport managers now pay greater attention to accessibility, providing better opportunities for both young athletes and the growing number of seniors with disabilities. However the study found that in spite of these societal changes there has not been a great deal of change in 'traditional' media coverage (with the exception of sledge hockey, and the murder trial of Paralympian Oscar Pistorius) related to gender and disability, except for the use of new platforms as discussed by Hansen (2010). Here we find the impact of social media has allowed for greater public participation in disability in sport issues of diverse kinds.

References

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