
Sport and physical activity participation in the digital age: attitudes and media usages of disabled and non-disabled Torontonians prior to the Toronto 2015 Pan

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Synopsis:

Analysis of sport and physical activity participation: attitudes and media usages of non-disabled and disabled Torontonians prior to the Toronto 2015 Pan Am and Parapan American Games

Abstract:

Participation in sport and physical activity has been found to contribute to more healthy lifestyles, and in addition can also contribute to social integration, although the statistics for the inclusion of persons with disabilities in sport and recreational activities indicate few participate. This paper presents the initial findings from an ongoing study on attitudes towards disability in sport and media/technology conducted in London, UK and in Toronto, Canada.

The aim of the research was to examine the attitudes of both disabled and non-disabled residents of the Greater Toronto Area before and after the Toronto 2015 Pan Am and Parapan American Games. This paper presents the initial results of surveys conducted in Toronto in early 2015. The research included questions related to participation in sport and physical activity, the reasons for participation, the sports preferred and at what competitive level the participants were involved. Also participants were asked to describe what technologies/platforms they used to follow sport and if they watched sport, the Pan Am/Parapan American Games, and the Olympic and Paralympic Games in the past.

Surveys typically do not include the variable of disability along with the standard questions of gender, age and income as part of the profiles of participants, but this survey included questions about disability and the nature of any disability. It also included enquiries about a participant's self-identity related to nationality/ethnicity/race, and identification with national sport teams. This research is informed by the literature from Critical Disability Studies about expectations and exclusions tied to hegemonic perceptions about the 'normal'

body and ableism (Linton, 1989), accessibility (Titchkosky, 2011) and the bias in sport media in reference to Paralympic athletes (Silva & Howe, 2012) and the commonplace exclusion of disability in the media (Haller, 2010; Riley, 2005).

Data for this part of the international research project was collected in the spring of 2015 in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) in Ontario, Canada. The survey included both multiple-choice questions and short answer questions that were completed in the presence of the researcher (no on-line surveys were used). Also one-on-one interviews were conducted with participants of diverse ages and disabilities, using NVivo software for analysis.

The paper only addresses the preliminary survey results from the questionnaires. A second survey and series of interviews will be administered after the Parapan American Games end (August 15, 2015) in September and October of 2015. Additional information will be included from the second part of the research project for the final analysis. However at this time – before the mega-sport event of the Pan Am and Parapan American Games - it appears that many people in the Toronto region have a limited interest in sport of any kind. The participants know very little about the Paralympic Games and the Parapan American Games, and a minority use diverse devices to follow sport. This research indicates that further studies are necessary as assumptions about participation and interest in sport may be over-rated even in times of new devices and platforms for easier and more accessible information access. Further details will be provided at the presentation of the paper at the conference in Dublin.

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