

## **Representing disability:**

A research focusing on the representation of athletes with a disability in the Dutch public broadcasting system over the last six years.

Student Name: Eva van't Hoog

Student Number: 578566

Supervisor: Déborah Antunes, PhD

Masters Media Studies- Media & Business  
Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication  
Erasmus University Rotterdam

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Representing disability: A research focusing on the representation of athletes with a disability in the Dutch public broadcasting system over the last six years.

## **ABSTRACT**

Studies about the representation of athletes with a disability started to emerge in the 1990s when Barnes (1992) wrote one of the first studies on disability and stereotypes (Garris & Johannsen, 2020). However, it has only been since the past two decades that a major change has evolved within the representation of athletes with a disability (Howe, 2008). According to previous research these representations are often stereotypical or based on prejudice (Howe, 2008; Burch, 2020; Ellis et al., 2019; Goethals, 2018). Media have a significant role in the representation of athletes with a disability. Moreover, media play a part in the reflection of public attitudes, and perceptions on disability and in shaping these (Goethals, 2018).

Based on this importance, this thesis addresses how athletes with a disability are represented in the Dutch public broadcaster NOS.

In total a number of 50 articles were analyzed to answer this question using a qualitative research method, namely critical discourse analysis. Apart from analyzing the texts within the news articles, a focus was also given to the visuals included in the news articles. From the selected sample, 30 articles also included visual analysis. Based on the findings it can be noted that athletes with a disability are often represented in a stereotypical way, using the supercrip stereotype or as object of pity.

This analysis provides evidence for four existing patterns “*athletes with a disability as inspiration, how ableism is represented, athletes with a disability as strictly positive athletes with a disability as more than athletes.*”

**KEYWORDS: Disability, Representation, Public broadcasting system, the Netherlands**

## 1. Introduction

In September 2016 I was watching the Paralympics in Rio de Janeiro on NOS sports, which took place right after the Olympic games. I was (blissfully) unaware that this was the first time that the Paralympic ceremony and four different live streams were shown by the NOS. In previous years during the Paralympics significantly fewer sporting events were shown and the ceremony was always disregarded during broadcasting. In contrast, the Olympic games have been displayed by the NOS ever since 1964 (NOS).

The Paralympic games are considered the primary sporting event for elite athletes with a disability and have recently become the central topic of numerous research within the field of sport and disability studies (Ellis et al., 2019). An important researcher and four-time Paralympic athlete who writes about the representation of athletes with a disability is called David Howe. In his work he mentions how it has only been since the past two decades that a major change has occurred within the representation of athletes with a disability (Howe, 2008). Moreover, the Paralympics converted over the last twenty years into a spectacle which nowadays attracts substantial media attention (Howe, 2008). It was only in the late summer of 2012 that this significant shift in media attention propelled a minority of unknown athletes into the popular media (Jackson-Brown, 2020). From this point, the Paralympics and athletes with a disability have received more media attention than ever, but this media attention is still significantly less than the Olympics or abled athletes.

### 1.1 Research Questions

But how are these athletes with a disability represented in the media, specifically in the Netherlands? In order to investigate this issue, the following research question was framed:

*How are athletes with a disability portrayed in the Dutch public broadcasting system?*

This investigation will be further supported by three sub questions stated as:

- *In what ways have athletes with a disability been portrayed in a stereotypical way in the news articles from the Dutch public broadcaster NOS over the last six years?*
- *How is ableism represented in the news articles from the Dutch public broadcaster NOS over the last six years?*

- *How do the visuals implemented in the news articles from the Dutch public broadcaster NOS play apart in representing athletes with a disability over the last six years?*

These questions will be answered by using the qualitative research method Critical Discourse Analysis and visual analysis of fifty news articles. CDA is used by researchers to analyze the connection between language and power (Wodak & Meyer, 2001). Moreover, CDA also focuses on investigating hidden patterns between language, ideology and power (Fairclough, 1989). Therefore, the guidance of this analysis will be by asking questions such as ‘what words are used to describe the athletes in the news articles?’, ‘how do the visuals show the representation of the athletes with a disability?’ and ‘how are notions of stereotypes seen in the articles?’

In order to answer this question and for this research, the definition of the word ‘representation’ is important to explain. According to Hall (1997) representation is the construction of meaning through language. Moreover, representation is examined as depictions, explanations and interpretations about understanding the world and why and how it works in certain ways (Hall, 1997).

Within our current society, media play a key role in the representation of different groups, such as disabled people. Athletes with a disability are often represented in the media in a stereotypical way. Media do not simply represent the existing reality or distribute knowledge, instead they produce knowledge and the construction of commanding discourses on disability (Goethals, 2018). Apart from representation, media also is important for the reflection of public attitudes and the shaping of perceptions on disability.

In addition, in this analysis the representation of people with a disability is investigated through three different stereotypes, the super cripple, disability as pathology and disability as object of pity. These stereotypes are chosen based on their relevance for this research.

Otherness is another way representation regarding disability can be interpreted by. This concept plays a key role to multiple forms of exclusion or prejudice (Garland-Thomson, 2005a) . This concept also shows how the normality of the observer is reaffirmed and a distance occurs towards the person that is the outcast. These terms used to guide the analysis of this research is ableism. These stereotypes and the representation as Otherness

mentioned create a differentiation between the abled body and the body with a disability. Therefore, in the results of the analysis this will be further investigated whilst analyzing the news articles.

Furthermore, the values and purposes of the public broadcasting system are defined, whilst the specific focus for this research will be on the Dutch public broadcasting system. To be more precise, the Dutch public broadcaster NOS will be the source of all fifty news articles. Moreover, the principle of public broadcasters used for this research is defined by the aim to contribute to diversity and equality in broadcasting, providing a platform to discuss, and contribute to national culture (Leurdijk, 2014). The frameworks from the BBC and the European Broadcasting Union are used to provide a basis on what frameworks public broadcasters use to broadcast their values and purposes.

## **1.2 Scientific and social relevance**

This research aims to explore the representation of disabled athletes within the media. This representation is often heavily reliant on stereotypes (Dolmage, 2014). This is a problem in contemporary society as this negative narrative reinforces prejudices towards people with a disability. These misrepresentations are created, challenged and influenced by the media. Therefore, representing people with a disability in a certain way through stereotypes reflects on society whilst considering what is normal and abnormal (Garland Tomson, 2005b). People with a disability are not often seen as included in society, and a negative, incorrect media representation can result into the ways society think about inclusion (Goethals, 2018). Moreover, misrepresentations are disastrous as it obstructs both people with a disability and abled people. Firstly, people with a disability are affected negatively as they will not have reasonable expectations for what they can achieve, and their self-development will be obstructed. Secondly, abled people may become reluctant to start to build relationships with people with a disability because of the negative depiction amongst media.

These cultural practices relate to power structures. This research hopes to analyze the way disability is represented by Dutch public broadcasters and will aim to expose these power structures by providing cultural discourses that structures the view on disability and athletes with a disability in the Netherlands. By doing so, it aims to contribute not only to

academic discussions at the intersection of media and disability studies, but also to societal debates about perceptions of disability, mainly athletes with a disability, in the Netherlands. Additionally, it also incorporates a discussion about public service media and how they deal with disability as part of one of the minorities group that they should represent. The Netherlands have not done much research on sports and disability as this field is relatively unexplored by Dutch scholars.

### **1.3 Thesis Outline**

This thesis will first discuss the theoretical foundations of the research. These involve a description of representation and media, disability, stereotypes, and ableism and Otherness. In the third chapter the methods that are applied to conduct this research will be described. Next, the data that is collected through purposive sampling will be analyzed and the findings will be presented in chapter four using Critical Discourse Analysis. Then, a conclusion on how athletes with a disability are represented by the Dutch Public Broadcaster NOS will be formulated and discussed. Last, the limitations and opportunities for future research will be described and the social and theoretical implications of this research will be mentioned.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

In this chapter a variety of perspectives and stereotypes towards disability are addressed using Dolmage (2014) and Howe (2011). First, representation will be defined by using Hall (1997). Moreover, together with Garland-Thomson (2005) a description of representation and media is explained. Next, a discussion of the Paralympics is given using works from Burch (2020) and Howe (2008). Third, definitions of stereotypes using three myths about disability are explained by Dolmage (2014). Following this, particular focus within this research will be on one stereotype called 'the supercrip' (Hardin & Hardin, 2004; Silva & Howe (2012). Lastly, the values and purposes of the public broadcasting system are explained by Rodríguez-Castro et al., (2021) and Leurdijk (2021).

### **2.1 Media and Representation**

The sociologist Stuart Hall (1997) is a key figure regarding representation. Representation can be understood as "the production of meaning through language" (p. 16). In order to understand the concept of representation, Hall (1997) differentiates between two systems of representation involving the overall process of constructing meaning. The first system explains how all types of objects, people and events are correlated with a set of notions or mental representations. This connotes that meaning relies on these systems that are formed within our thoughts, having the ability to represent the world (Hall, 1997). An example of such systems within disability studies is referred to as stereotypes. Garland Thomson (2005) in her work on disability studies states "representation structures, rather than reflects reality" (p. 523). Therefore, representing people with a disability in a certain way through stereotypes reflects on society as a whole, noting what is considered normal and abnormal (Garland-Thomson, 2005).

Language is the second system of representation noted by Hall (1997). Different forms of media are rising and becoming more significant in society. To be able to understand images and narratives deriving from different forms of media means to centre on issues of representation (Garland-Thomson, 2005). Language used in representation can structure society and their views on certain topics, such as the representation of disability. Thus, Hall's concept of representation, in association with Garland-Thomson's ideas, will be used to analyze the language amongst the news articles and see how these produce meaning.



Representation is considered as “images, descriptions, explanations and frames for understanding what the world is and why and how it works in particular ways” (Hall, 1997, p. 12). This definition of representation can also apply to illustrations of communities, groups and sporting events (Dayan & Katz, 1994) and is therefore relevant for this research. Hall (1997) describes the aim of representation as creating otherness by producing boundaries between groups of people by dividing the regular and acceptable to the irregular and unacceptable (Hall, 1997). This results in exclusion of groups amongst society who do not fit this norm.

Furthermore, in this research media is important as this is what the public broadcasting system shows and produces. The definition of media representation is described by Hall (1997) as manners in which the media depict reality based on a set of “values, ideology or other distinct perspectives” (Jackson-Brown, 2020, p. 24). Currently, media is very powerful as they choose to highlight or ignore certain public issues (Fürsich, 2010). This power is seen in mass media as it serves as a normalizing framework in forming social construction of reality as their choice of broadcasting or disregarding certain societal issues results into what the public sees in the end.

The study of representation is significant for this research as it is only through considering how and where images of the world are created that society begins to understand it (Kidd, 2016). Furthermore, media representations can create cultural, political, historical and social issues (Kidd, 2016). These media representations can cause for “many groups, communities and individuals consider themselves to be dangerously misrepresented” (Kidd, 2016). This is particularly the case for people with a disability (Howe, 2008) and therefore important for this research.

## **2.2 Disability and Media**

Within nowadays society, media play a key role in representing different groups, such as people with a disability. The representation of people with a disability in the media started to emerge in the 1990s, when Barnes wrote one of the first studies on disability and stereotypes regarding people with a disability in the media (Johanssen & Garrisi, 2020). Moreover, media do not simply represent the existing reality, reproduce or distribute knowledge rather, “they are active producers of knowledge and construct and constitute the

very core of our social existence and dominant discourses on disability” (Goethals, 2018, p. 110). With the rise of media, especially online, it gets increasingly more powerful in society. Therefore, the way media presents bodies can impact individual’s lives as they are one of the main agents of socialization (Moore & Kosut, 2010).

In addition, media play a significant part in the reflection of public attitudes, and perceptions on disability, but also particularly in shaping these (Goethals, 2018) and continue to revolutionize and change the social world (Burch, 2020). An example of this is seen within contemporary Western news media by making the readers imagine disability, a term defined by Ellis et al., (2019) to discuss the construction of disability in media. In such cases, the reader is formulated as non-disabled and is supposed to encounter disability as a problem that “disrupts the flow of ordinary life and to find this interesting” (Ellis et al., 2019, p. 14). This means that imagining doing normal everyday activities and having a disability, it becomes extraordinary (Ellis et al., 2019). Furthermore, imagining disability is a way in which news media represent people with a disability as they provide the reader with information, whilst contrastingly assisting them to produce ideas about disability and what it entails to be human (Goethals, 2018). This disability imaginary will be applied within the analysis of the sample of news articles, by looking at the words that are used to describe athletes with a disability and how they are framed. Moreover, this concept is based on Western news media and this research focuses on Dutch news media from a public broadcaster and will therefore be further explored.

Apart from imagination, people with disabilities are often represented in a stereotypical manner in the media (Johanssen & Garris, 2020). These stereotypical media representations help to develop stigmatizing views of disability influencing an individual’s perception of the self and one’s relation to others (Worrel, 2018). Furthermore, digital media can either empower an individual or group of people, or it can make them feel excluded and silenced. As Johanssen and Garris (2020) mention, the representation of disability amongst different forms of digital media is still problematic and therefore this group of individuals can feel excluded or silenced. Additionally, this exclusion is caused by attitudes towards disability that are formed and reframed by normative expectations about the human body and mind and the issues that arise when one does not meet these expectations (Burch, 2020).

In addition, digital media have played an important role in developing and exemplifying the nation state in Europe and America (Fürsich, 2010). A national identity arose defined by the media by noting the boundaries of a community that is part of the nation identity and therefore excluding minority groups as Others (Fürsich, 2010). In this research the focus is on the Netherlands and this country is part of the emerged national identity noted by Fürsich (2010). Furthermore, this shows how the media is influential in creating boundaries for certain groups within society. As mentioned, people with a disability are part of a minority group within society. These boundaries can lead to stereotyping and issues of power between 'others' and the mainstream society, both will be analyzed within the news articles used in this research.

### **2.3 The Paralympics**

The representation of athletes with a disability in the media is most apparent during the Paralympics. The Paralympics is the most elite event for athletes with a disability and currently receives significant media attention (Howe, 2008). Although the Paralympics has received more media attention and is seen as an empowering event for athletes with a disability, an increase in empowerment is still needed for this group (Howe, 2008). The representation of athletes with a disability in the Paralympics is notably different than other sporting events for abled athletes. Paralympians are considered the ultimate top of the athletes with a disability. However, they are still considered as different and lesser than abled athletes (Bruce, 2014). In a mainstream sporting event, the media highlights both positive and negative elements, but during the Paralympics only positive media coverage was present (Howe, 2008). This means a misrepresentation occurs in the media about disability sports. Within this research, the Paralympics are chosen as the main event amongst the chosen sample of news articles, as forty of the fifty articles are about this sporting event. Therefore, how athletes with a disability are represented during the Paralympics will be examined developing on the previous stated theories.

In contrast, it is important to note that it is possible for journalists to represent disability sports in a similar way as elite sports. Bruce (2014) explains two discourses that seem to portray a similar coverage manner for able-bodied and athletes with a disability. First is the discourse of able-bodiedness, in which the athletes with a disability are able to

compete with the abled athletes, and therefore receive significant media attention (Bruce, 2014). The second discourse is nationalism, this notes that athletes with a disability who make the nation proud get a lot of media attention (Bruce, 2014), similar to abled-bodied athletes. These discourses are not enough; however, it is a start of treating athletes with a disability similar to abled athletes. The difference in the portrayals is clearly seen during the Paralympics as they are often compared to the Olympics and the media coverage surrounding these two events is notably different. This is mainly seen in the fewer sporting events and the lower number of participants in the Paralympics (Bruce, 2014).

Howe (2008) notes how the media coverage surrounding the Paralympics is frequently “patronizing in its discourse” (p. 135). This is shown in Paralympic sports as they are seen as of “greater purity” (p. 135) than mainstream sports. Moreover, most of the media coverage of the Paralympics is often only detrimentally positive (Howe, 2008b). Examples of such coverage are seen during the Paralympics as the focus has to often lie on the “heart-breaking, feel-good stories of overcoming disability” (Perdue & Howe, 2012, p. 4). This is an extreme contrast with the normal Olympics as there the media coverage is of positive and negative nature. Furthermore, media representation of disability and sports often reveals different theorisations such as “others, inspiration, and spectacle” (Jackson-Brown, 2020).

As previously mentioned, change surrounding media coverage and representation of people with disabilities is needed. In order for change to happen within the representation of people with disabilities, disability studies aim to reimagine disability (Garland-Thomson, 2005). This means, to show how narratives of disability are continuously invented and reinvented within society (Garland-Thomson, 2005). Moreover, disability studies focus on challenging the common representation of disability, as it reveals this system as exclusive and oppressive (Garland-Thomson, 2005).

Furthermore, the representation of people with disabilities in the media in ways such as imagination and stereotyping will be used to guide this analysis. Additionally, the theory on ableism and disablism will be implemented in the explanation of the analysis on the news articles.

## 2.4 Stereotypes and prejudice

As previously mentioned, people with disabilities are often represented in a stereotypical manner. Historically, it is known that ableism receives less attention than other types of prejudice, such as racism or sexism (Howe 2008a). Prejudice and stereotypes about people with a disability arise because “being physically and intellectually able is the social norm” (Coleman et al., 2014, p. 177). Therefore, a sense of discomfort appears towards people with a disability (Coleman et al., 2014). This results into irrational fears such as disability being contagious or a lack of similarities with the individual with disabilities (Parker et al., 2003).

Dolmage (2014) mentions multiple of these stereotypes regarding people with disabilities. These stereotypes, also referred to as disability myths, work to mark and construct disability as “surplus, improper, lesser, or otherwise other” (Dolmage, 2014, p. 31). Similar to Dolmage (2014), Colvet et al., (2007) mention that people with a disability are frequently stereotyped as having an absence in strength and endurance, weakness and dependence. One of the main descriptors associated with people who have a disability is incompetence (Colvet et al., 2007). A second descriptor related to people with a disability is as superheroes. This descriptor refers to how athletes with disabilities are often described as having super-human (Martin, 2018). Therefore, the media may portray people with a disability as dependent figures or, as superhumans to be appraised (Stamou & Pedeliadu, 2009) and this can result into people feeling compassion towards others (Colvet et al., 2007)

The stereotypes discussed within this framework are chosen based on the relevance regarding this research. The first stereotype introduced by Dolmage (2014) is called disability as pathology in which people with disability are historically labelled according to their differences from standardized norms (Dolmage, 2014). Second, is the myth regarding disability as object of pity and or charity, people with disabilities are represented as sad and powerless, problems that can be solved through charity (Dolmage, 2014).

The last myth is referred to by Dolmage (2014) as overcoming or compensation. This stereotype is relevant for this research as this myth is often applied to athletes with a disability. Moreover, this stereotype mentions how an individual with a disability “overcomes their impairment through hard work or special talent” (Dolmage, 2014, p. 39) and is also referred to as ‘super cripple’. This myth will be further explained in section 3.4 and is the most important stereotype often used when describing athletes with a disability.

## 2.5 Ableism, Disablism and Otherness

In addition to the prejudice and stereotypes regarding people with a disability mentioned above, three other important concepts will be explained: ableism, disablism and Otherness. Goodley (2014) states the definition of disablism as the “social, political, cultural and psycho-emotional exclusion of people with physical, sensory and/or cognitive impairments” (p. 10). This concept of disablism creates problems about disability as it enforces barriers on people with a disability whilst at the same time increasing the processes of ableism (Burch, 2020). Furthermore, disability is viewed on the periphery of society as views about disability are a convincing feature of nowadays culture (Burch, 2020). However, this positioning of disability within culture does not only rely on the difference in problematization. Therefore, “systems and tools of measurement have been established to show the distance between those considered normal and abnormal” (Burch, 2020, p. 22).

In contrast, ableism is defined as the current ideals in which the abled, independent, vigorous individual is favoured (Goodley, 2014). Ableism and disablism both stem from prejudice about disability. For the purpose of this research the concept of ableism will be further explored by analyzing news articles.

Both ableism and disablism help to develop a differentiation between the abled body and the body with a disability. A key notion is the representation issue between abled bodies and bodies with a disability. According to Shakespeare (2013), the abled bodies seem “more threatened by portrayals of disability than they are by other depicted anomalies because of the risk of becoming disabled themselves” (p.28). Furthermore, disability causes uncomfortable viewing (Jackson-Brown, 2020). An individual at all stages of their lives can develop a disability by illness or unexpected injury (Jackson-Brown, 2020), and therefore watching people with disability within the media can cause prejudice and stereotyping. However, differences such as race and gender are less likely to become threatening to one as they do not normally suddenly affect an individual (Jackson-Brown, 2020). This is important to note, as this partially explains how stereotypes and prejudice towards disability emerges amongst society.

In this research the different prejudices and stereotypes towards people with a disability such as ableism and disablism will be used to guide the analysis. Apart from these prejudice, Silva and Howe (2012) note that representation can be interpreted as Otherness. Otherness is Silva & Howe, 2012). This view results into a construction of society in which

disability is seen as the opposite to a functional norm (Silva & Howe, 2012). Within this view of Otherness several extremes exist such as “surprise, admiration, compassion, pity, fear, and so on” (Silva & Howe, 2012, p. 177). In this research the concept of Otherness will be further investigated in the analysis of the news articles by exploring what words are used to describe athletes with a disability.

The concept of othering as a form of prejudice is connected to power and shows how some individuals or groups gain power at the expense of others (Garrisi & Johanssen, 2020). Furthermore, the negative stereotypes contribute to the low expectations that society has of people with disabilities and therefore make any achievements accomplished by people with a disability seem easily glorified (Silva & Howe, 2012). An example of this is previously mentioned by Ellis et al. (2019) in which every day normal activities are noted to be extraordinary simply because the individual has a disability. Therefore, every ‘normal’ activity performed by a person with disabilities is seen as exceptional.

These prejudice and stereotypes are used in this research to evaluate how people with a disability are currently viewed amongst society and how the media portrays them. Additionally, within the results of the analysis reference to these stereotypes and prejudice will be made and explained regarding the Dutch public broadcasting system.

## **2.6 Supercrip and Paralympics**

Stereotyping achieves a certain display of others, by changing the power structure deliberately between the group with more power and less power (Jackson-Brown, 2020). This form of representation results into shaping culture and makes society reconsider what is normal (Jackson-Brown, 2020). This spectacle of others is often seen within the Paralympics. The main focus point is that a spectacle is “made of others because the others are different” (Jackson-Brown, 2020). There are two consequences of this difference. First, this variance can be implemented as a form of entertainment for the mainstream group (Garland-Thomson, 2020). Second, this difference can cause a distance between in order to protect those not being represented (Howe, 2008a). Both of these consequences are seen within the stereotype of the supercrip.

The supercrip stereotype refers to the super-human qualities that are often attributed to athletes with a disability (Martin, 2018). Mitchell & Snyder (2015) mention that

disability is portrayed in the news by “making the ordinary windrow, or windrow exotic” (p. 20). This means, the windrow is the athlete with a disability, however portraying them as extraordinary athletes makes their achievements even more incredible. All athletes are seen as having qualities only super-heroes obtain. This effect is extremely profound within the community of people with a disability. The reader encourages themselves that if a person with disabilities tries significantly, they can appear ‘normal’ (Barnes, 1992). According to Berger (2008), supercrips are often the inspirational stories of athletes with a disability whose hard work and determination results into achieving the impossible. Therefore, these stories can cause unrealistic expectations about people with a disability and what they are able to accomplish (Berger, 2008).

Creating these superhero stereotypes for athletes with a disability as a media representation, disempowers these athletes (Howe, 2011) because the super-hero narrative can be seen as the expression of society’s low expectations about people with disabilities (Silva & Howe, 2012). Therefore, disability is often viewed as something that is broken or incidental (Ellis & Goggin, 2015). As a result of this interpretation, social expectations are severely lower for individuals with a disability and therefore any positive action will be praised by others (Silva & Howe, 2012). However, this should not always be true (Ellis & Goggin, 2015). In certain cases, a disability could represent a part of an individual’s positive identity. If this is considered true, the individual’s identity should be accepted positively and not be perceived as a weakness (Ellis & Goggin, 2015). Moreover, Hardin & Hardin (2004) note that the supercrip stereotype involves introducing the athlete with a disability as heroic as a result of what they are able to perform and is normally not possible for someone with disabilities. Therefore, according to Silva & Howe (2012) this stereotype can be contesting the dominant views about disability, and therefore can be interpreted as a positive change.

The examples stated above about the supercrip stereotype show how the different opinions are divided. Therefore, both negative and positive sides are important to note within this research. Additionally, the supercrip stereotype also adds to the discussion about ableism and disablism noted earlier. This is seen amongst discourses surrounding disability in which people with a disability become extraordinary whereas an abled-bodied individual would just be seen as ordinary (Silva & Howe, 2012). Furthermore, a difference between these the abled body and body with a disability is seen significantly during the Olympics and Paralympics as they are both events in which the athletic body is central (Jackson-Brown,



2020). This differentiation of bodies can be interpreted as problematic. As the portrayal of abled-bodies and disabled-bodies are televised do not carry similar “connotations because of their different historical connotations” (Jackson-Brown, 2020). Therefore, often the Paralympians are seen as supercrips as opposed to Olympians. This is a result of the media representation of both types of athletes.

As mentioned, the supercrip stereotype that creates unrealistic expectations and success stories are often based on Paralympic athletes. The Paralympics is the biggest sporting event for athletes with a disability (Howe, 2008). This event currently receives significant media attention (Howe, 2008). Within nowadays society, the media plays a very important part of how people and groups are represented. Howe (2008) notes how the media coverage surrounding the Paralympics is frequently “patronizing in its discourse” (p. 135). Therefore, the myth that Paralympians are superhumans and their accomplishments are greater than those of mainstream athletes is perpetuated (Howe, 2008). Disability sports can change the way disability is seen in society due to the disruptive potential (Silva et al., 2012).

In short, the supercrip stereotype disempowers athletes with a disability as it appeared from the low expectations society has of these athletes. Although there are elements of positivity where the dominant negative views have been contested, the overall expectations of society overrule this. Within the analysis of this research the negative elements will be mainly explored. In addition, the stereotype creates unrealistic expectations for other people with a disability. This stereotype is most apparent during the Paralympics as this event is seen as the biggest event for athletes with a disability. Additionally, media coverage has been significantly more than ever for this event but is still less than the Olympics.

## **2.7 The Dutch Public Broadcasting System**

The focus of this thesis is to explore how the Dutch public broadcaster NOS represents athletes with a disability. Therefore, a general introduction of the Dutch public broadcasting system and their values will be discussed in the following paragraph.

The current media environment constantly changes, and therefore public broadcasters are under continuous pressure to validate their public funding and reconstruct

their area of responsibility (Leurdijk, 2021). Additionally, the principle of public broadcasters has stayed the same: “contributing to diversity and equality in broadcasting, providing universal access to independent information, offering a platform for debate, and contributing to national culture and identity” (Leurdijk, 2021). Such purposes have currently still been the most frequent objectives for public broadcasting services in Europe (Leurdijk, 2021). However, how these objectives are obtained is shifting as television and radio are not the main focus anymore, digital platforms and online services are becoming more important (Leurdijk, 2021). This shift shows that public broadcasters are slowly transforming into suppliers and aggregators of public content for diverse and digital platforms (Leurdijk, 2021).

Public broadcasting service media is relevant and has value in nowadays digital landscape. This is verified by trends in commercial broadcast media (Jakubowicz, 2007). An example of this is shown in the British multichannel television environment. Within this large television market, the commercial television fails to reach the needs public service broadcasters are expected to meet (Jakubowicz, 2007). These failed needs are seen within the arts, education, and multicultural programs (Jakubowicz, 2007). Moreover, the BBC defined three elements that they (and multiple other public broadcasters) use regarding the functioning of public broadcasting services (Rodríguez-Castro et al, 2021). These elements are informing, educating and entertaining the public (Rodríguez-Castro et al., 2021). However, alongside these values more core values should be implemented in order to serve the needs of nowadays society (Rodríguez-Castro et al., 2021). Therefore, the European Broadcasting Union developed a new framework regarding the value of public broadcasters in which six essential values are stated: “universality, independence, excellence, diversity, accountability, and innovation (Rodríguez-Castro et al., 2021, p. 9).

As noted, multiple public broadcasters use the frameworks from the BBC and the European Broadcasting Union. This is seen in the Dutch public broadcasting system as they use parts of these frameworks in order to describe their core values. Moreover, the Dutch Public Broadcasting system notes five important roles in their mission statements: “a commitment to universal service, diversity and representativeness of content in political, social and cultural terms, democratic accountability, significant elements of public financing and non-profit goals” (McQuail, 1992, p.18). Within this mission statement a clear overlap is seen with the frameworks of the other noted public broadcasting systems.

For this research, the specific aim will be on how athletes with a disability are represented in the Dutch public broadcasting system NOS. This broadcasting system has three main channels and a wide reach all over the Netherlands with radio, television and online services (Rijksoverheid, YEAR OR n.d.). Therefore, the public broadcasting system is important for representing people with a disability in the Netherlands. In addition, the services provided by this broadcasting system are very popular (Leurdijk, 2021). Thus, it is important to understand what is expected from a public service broadcaster and also how they operate in the Netherlands.

This system in the Netherlands has a particular aim, to serve as a platform in which every social group can come together, every opinion can be debated and all point of views are allowed to be aired (Daalmeijer, 2004). The Dutch public channels are publicly accessible and free and independent for the entire population. Moreover, representing disability is part of diversity and social representativeness. Ever since the Paralympics in 2008, changes have occurred in the way athletes with a disability are seen amongst the Dutch population (Van der Lindert, 2011). More media coverage surrounding this event was apparent and therefore a broader audience was able to watch this. Thus, part of the Dutch public broadcasting system purpose is to give attention to underrepresented groups and therefore convert the way they are seen in society. The Dutch public broadcasting system provides society with entertainment, social opportunities, political awareness and education (Koeman et al., 2005). In addition, minority groups are represented amongst the Dutch public broadcasters as they try to portray all groups within society equally (Koeman et al., 2005). This theory is used to understand the public broadcasting system in the Netherlands as this is the main focus of this research.

The Dutch public broadcaster called the NOS shows and writes a significant amount about sports. With regards to the Paralympics however, more should be learned in the Dutch broadcasting system (Sterkenburg, 2013). In the Netherlands, mainly reporters without a disability and who lack knowledge about this area are in charge of the publicly addressing news about athletes with a disability (Coakley & Pike, 2009). More attention and knowledge is therefore needed within this region. Following the Paralympics in 2012, the NOS is more aware of paying attention to athletes with a disability (Sterkenburg, 2013). However, this was still significantly less than the Olympics (Sterkenburg, 2013). The NOS will be the broadcaster that all the news articles will be analyzed from.

## 2.8 Summary

To summarize, media represent athletes with a disability currently based on stereotypes such as the supercrip or as object of pity. The supercrip stereotype is most apparent during the Paralympics, and therefore also the most seen stereotype in media representation. This stereotype will be used to guide the analysis about how the NOS represents the athletes with a disability as super-heroes. In addition, representation as object of pity is another way people with a disability are shown by media. To investigate if this stereotype is shown in the news articles, critical discourse analysis will be used to see what words are used to describe the athletes with a disability.

Another way of representing people with a disability is by Otherness, in which a separation has emerged between the abled body and the disabled body. The focus is on reaffirming the normality of the observer whilst creating a distance towards the other (outcast). The theory about Otherness will be used in the results on how ableism is represented amongst the sample of news articles. Additionally, the values and purposes of the (Dutch) public broadcasting system are defined and will be used to guide the analysis of the representation of athletes with a disability in the media.

### 3. Methodology

First, the primary goal of this research was to find what ways athletes with a disability have been portrayed by the Dutch public broadcaster NOS over the last six years. Therefore, the following research question will be addressed:

- *How have athletes with a disability been represented in the Dutch public broadcasting system over the last six years?*

Furthermore, this research aimed to provide a thoroughly developed and affirmed interpretation of the way athletes with a disability are portrayed by the Dutch public broadcasting system. In order to develop conclusions, the following sub-questions will be answered below:

- *In what ways have athletes with a disability been portrayed in a stereotypical way in the news articles from the Dutch public broadcaster NOS over the last six years?*
- *How is ableism represented in the news articles from the Dutch public broadcaster NOS over the last six years?*
- *How do the visuals implemented in the news articles from the Dutch public broadcaster NOS play apart in representing athletes with a disability over the last six years?*

The next sections explain the analytical and sample methods used for this investigation.

#### 3.1 Research design

In order to answer this research question, a qualitative research method was chosen. Language is an essential aspect of qualitative research (Brennen, 2014). Moreover, “qualitative research strives to understand the traditions, contexts, usages and meanings of words, concepts and ideas” (Brennen, 2014, p. 15). Within this research the texts of news articles are analyzed, thus a qualitative research method is suitable. Furthermore, qualitative research includes multiple interpretative techniques to report, decode and interpret concepts (Hennink et al., 2020). Three concepts, the supercrip stereotype, values and purposes of public broadcasting and other stereotypes about disability are used in this research to guide the analysis.

The specific qualitative research method chosen is Critical Discourse Analysis. This is a suitable method as it allows the researcher to analyze power structures. CDA is particularly focused on the connection between language and power (Wodak & Meyer, 2001). Moreover, within the theory of this study about disability and the media a severe difference in power is suggested amongst athletes with a disability and abled athletes (Burch, 2020).

The differences that occur within the abled body and disabled body show the power relation between the two bodies. Furthermore, the stereotypical way used to represent athletes with a disability suggests a power structure between the reader and the athlete. CDA is the best suitable method to further investigate these structures of power. In addition, Fairclough (2013) notes that CDA investigates hidden patterns between language, ideology and power. Therefore, the questions that guide the analysis ask search for meanings behind the text and hidden patterns will arise.

Researchers conducting a Critical Discourse Analysis ask questions in order to guide the analysis and search for meanings (Brennen, 2014). Therefore, questions like ‘What words are used to describe athletes with a disability?’, ‘How are the athletes with a disability portrayed in the visuals?’, ‘How are words used in the articles representing stereotypes about athletes with a disability?’ and ‘How is ableism depicted?’ will guide the analysis. These questions were constructed based on the knowledge that the focus of discourse analyst is the way people use language for meaning making and construction of ideas and identity (Flick, 2007). Therefore, these questions guide the analysis.

CDA has been performed by analyzing a sample of fifty news articles. Moreover, ten of the fifty news articles focus on athletes with a disability in general, and not on Paralympians. This choice was made as it allowed for further investigation on athletes with a disability as the Paralympians are only one part of this group. Apart from analyzing the text within the news articles using CDA, critical visual analysis was performed when an article includes pictures to analyze. Therefore, the number of images visually analyzed depends on how many articles have visuals, in this case 30 visuals. No extra visuals were analyzed other than the ones implemented in the news articles.

### **3.2 Sampling and data collection**

The sample of news articles used for this analysis consist of fifty news articles from September 2016 till May 2021. This time frame was chosen as in 2016 the most recent Paralympics took place, and Paralympic athletes are the main focus of the analysis. Additionally, because of COVID—19 the Paralympics are moved to August 2021 instead of August 2020, therefore it is expected that news articles will come out about this event these coming months. The news articles that include pictures were analyzed, no extra pictures

were added, therefore the number of visuals analyzed is 30. Amongst the news articles a lot of individual images of athletes were implemented, that denoted just an athlete in the setting of where they practice their sport, connotating happiness as they smiled in most of them. In order not to pollute the text, the referencing of the sample of articles was carefully chosen. The choice was made to mention the year of the article and the name of the broadcaster. It is known that this is not following APA 7<sup>th</sup> rules, however this choice was necessary to make in order to keep the text clean and improve the quality for the reader.

The sampling strategy used for this analysis is called purposive sampling. The purpose of purposive sampling is to appropriately select cases that include a great amount of information that provide the best perception into the research question and will therefore persuade the audience (Emmel, 2013). Within this analysis a total sample of fifty news articles were analyzed. The articles are picked based on the following criteria; the year it was written (needs to be between 2016 and 2021), the topic as it needs to be about athletes with a disability, and the public broadcaster NOS. The choice for the Dutch Public Broadcasting system has been made as there is an apparent gap in research. There has not been much research about disability and the Dutch public broadcasting system, therefore this research aims to add new insights by building on existing theories and concepts. The choice for the NOS was made as is the only Dutch public broadcaster that produces news articles about sports and disability frequently and substantially.

The Nederlandse Omroep Stichting (NOS), focuses particularly on news and sport. Moreover, from 1995 the media law required the NOS to improve their vision. This was done by having to include different cultures and extend their program repertoire. Therefore, apart from broadcasting news and sport, the NOS also has the main job of reaching special target audiences and youth through their programs (NOS). As sport is the main focus of this analysis and athletes with a disability are part of a specific target group amongst society, this public broadcaster is suitable for this research.

The NOS has been broadcasting programs ever since 1951, when it was known as NTS. However, in 1956 the NOS started to broadcast the news and in 1959 the first sports were broadcasted. The NOS consists of radio, television and (social) media channels such as Facebook and Youtube. According to their website, the NOS claims to be the primary source of information in the areas of news, sports and events (NOS). The aim of the NOS is to help all the Dutch citizens to be aware of the developments that happen in the world in order to

form an opinion and determine their behaviour based on this. Furthermore, the NOS uses high journalistic requirements in the domains of carefulness, unbounded, pluralism and objectivity (NOS).

### 3.3 Operationalization

In order to perform CDA, sensitizing concepts were defined in order to guide the analysis. The first sensitizing concept referred to as the super-cripple stereotype. This stereotype is defined by the super-human qualities that are often assigned to athletes with a disability (Martin, 2018). Moreover, as Berger (2008) mentions, super-crips are often based on inspirational stories of athletes with a disability in which their hard work and determination results into achieving the impossible. This stereotype is the most apparent amongst athletes with a disability. This concept will be guiding the analysis by the question *'how are athletes represented as super-humans?'* . This stereotype refers to the super-human qualities often assigned to athletes with a disability (Martin, 2018). The media portray athletes with a disability as supercrips with the aim to encourage the reader to think that if a person with a disability tries significantly, they can appear as normal (Barnes, 1992). Furthermore, creating this superhero stereotype for people with a disability disempowers these athletes (Howe, 2011), as they feel different than abled athletes. This results into an environment in which the difference between two bodies is (the abled and disabled) is severe. During the Olympics and Paralympics this contrast is most apparent as in both events the athletic body is central (Jackson-Brown, 2020). Throughout these events the Paralympians are seen as supercrips whereas the Olympians are seen as 'normal' athletes. This is the effect of the media representation of both types of athletes.

Apart from the super-crip stereotype, there are other stereotypes about people with a disability. These other stereotypes are described by Dolmage (2014) and are chosen based on their relevance for this research. To start, Dolmage (2014) notes a stereotype called 'Disability as Pathology'. This stereotype is explained as how people with a disability have been labelled by their difference from standardized norms (Dolmage, 2014). An example of this stereotype in narrative is how a character with a disability is often thoroughly described by a professional medic (such as a nurse or doctor) who provides an overview of their pathology (Dolmage, 2014). In order to see if this stereotype is present in the representation



of athletes with a disability amongst the sample, the question '*how are athletes with a disability described by the NOS?*' was answered to guide the analysis.

Next is the stereotype called 'disability as object of pity and or charity' (Dolmage, 2014). This stereotype notes that a lot of language about disability is symbolized by pity (Garland-Thomson, 2002). Moreover, this means "myths of powerlessness that demand to be answered with charity" (Dolmage, 2014, p. 40). If stereotype can be seen and further explained within the results of the analysis the question "*what words are used to describe athletes with a disability?*" will guide the analysis of the sample of news articles.

The next principles that are defined in order to guide the analysis are ablism and Otherness. Both concepts have developed through prejudice towards people with a disability. Ableism is defined by Goodley (2014) as the current ideals in which abled bodies are preferred over disabled bodies. Ablism has been investigated amongst the articles by answering the question '*how is ableism shown in the visuals of athletes with a disability by the NOS?*'. Otherness is defined by creating a distance towards the 'outcast' by confirming the normality of the observer (Silva & Howe, 2012). Therefore, within this analysis an investigation on how the normality of the observer was performed.

The last guiding idea is based on the value and purpose of public broadcasting services. As the contemporary media landscape is ever-changing, the value of public broadcasting services in this environment has been a main point of discussion (Castro et al., 2021). Within this research the purpose of public broadcasting services is referred to as promoting diversity and quality in broadcasting whilst also producing independent information available universally and offering an objective for debate and representing national and cultural identity (Leurdijk, 2021). The NOS was the public broadcaster of focus. In addition, according to Leurdijk (2021), digital platforms and online services are more important than the television and radio public broadcasting. It is therefore good to note that amongst this research, only online news articles are used. This guiding idea will be used to show how the Dutch public broadcaster NOS makes use of these values and principles that broadcasters claim to apply.

Furthermore, for this research the major focus will be on the Dutch public broadcasting system as the NOS will be used within the analysis of a sample of fifty news articles. Similar to the general media landscape, the public broadcasting system in the Netherlands is dynamic and continuously changing (Daalmeijer, 2004). The Dutch system

also has particular aim, related to the purposes of public broadcasting services noted above. This aim is to distribute as a platform in which every social group amongst society can come together, every different opinion can be discussed and all beliefs are allowed to be aired (Daalmeijer, 2004).

This concept is significant as it gives an idea of how public broadcasters values are in general and how these are applied within the Dutch public broadcasting system. It also offers background information on how the public broadcasting system's values and purposes contribute to how people with a disability are represented in the media. Moreover, people with a disability are part of a minority group within society and therefore is part of diversity and social representativeness within the public broadcasting system. Furthermore, the values and purposes of the Dutch public broadcasting system is used in order to properly investigate and analyze the news articles. Based on this sensitizing idea, the question that will guide part of the analysis is *'how are these values and purposes seen amongst the news articles?'*.

In short, the stereotypes about people with a disability and the values and purposes of the public broadcasting system were used to guide the analysis of this research. These stereotypes help guide the analysis of the representation of people with a disability in the media. CDA aims to "expose strategies that appear normal or neutral on the surface, but which may in fact be ideological and seek to shape the representation of events and persons for particular ends" (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 5). Thus, questions have been stated and answered in order to lead the analysis, in order to find the underlying meanings of the language within the news articles. reality

### **3.4 Data Analysis**

Critical discourse analysis considers 'language and social practice' (Fairclough & Wodak, 2001), and deliberates the context of language use to be pivotal (Wodak, 2014). Moreover, CDA takes a specific interest in the connection between language and power (Wodak & Meyer, 2001) whilst also mainly focusing on denaturalizing common-sense ideas and revealing hidden assumptions. Currently, the word CDA is used to refer more precisely to the "critical linguistic approach of scholars who find the larger discursive unit of text to be the basic unit of communication" (Wodak & Meyer, 2001). This research in particular examines "institutional, political, gender and media discourses" (Wodak & Meyer, 2001),

which declares struggles and conflicts within relations. Furthermore, according to Fairclough (2010), CDA is always relational as it does not focus on individuals but rather on social relations. These relations are complicated as they are layered and include multiple relations within relations (Fairclough 1989).

Furthermore, the relations noted according to Fairclough (2013) are dialectical, which means relations are relations between objects that are dissimilar from another but not discretely similar as one does not fully excludes the other. This is seen particularly well within power and discourse and relates to this research of athletes with a disability as a significant power relation and discourse are shown. As noted above, stereotyping is a way the media portray athletes with a disability amongst the current public broadcasters. Digital media can either empower an individual or group of people or it can exclude and silence them. Moreover, stereotyping accomplishes a certain spectacle of others in the media, in which the power structure is deliberately changed between the group with more power and less power (Jackson-Brown, 2020). This spectacle of others is seen in the supercrip stereotype and it shows how athletes with a disability are represented significantly different than abled athletes within the media. As the representation of Olympians and Paralympians is significantly different this superhero stereotype disempowers athletes with a disability (Howe, 2011).

In order to appropriately perform CDA, five different tools have been used. These are: word connotations, overlexicalization, suppression, structural opposition, and lexical choices and genre (Machin & Mayr, 2012).

The first tool is word connotation, this is defined by looking at the choice of words and what this says about a particular perspective the speaker may have. This instrument was implemented whilst looking at how the media uses certain words in order to show their perspective towards athletes with a disability. The power structure in choices of words has been analyzed whilst also looking at what words are used to describe the stereotypes representing athletes with a disability. Words mentioned in the articles such as 'inspiring', 'overcoming' and 'extraordinary' are examples of this. The usage of these words within the articles connote a symbolic meaning that one cannot see on a surficial level.

Second is overlexicalization, in which searching for overemphasis of certain words is significant. This was completed by observing how the media persuades readers to develop a certain opinion or view about athletes with a disability. Within the articles this is seen by the

extreme emphasis on using positive words when describing athletes with a disability. Examples seen amongst the articles are 'very great mental state' and 'particularly positive'. These words persuade the reader to develop a positive opinion about the athletes with a disability described in the articles.

Next is suppression, the opposite of overlexicalization. This means, noting when some words are left out on purpose. What words are left out when describing athletes with a disability and abled athletes? And what would be the underlying reason for this?

The fourth tool is called structural opposition, this tool allows for this research to explore ableism in the articles. Therefore, the question is *how is ableism depicted within these articles?* Ableism and disablism are both concepts that stem from prejudice towards disability. Within the sample of news articles structural opposition is seen when athletes with a disability are compared to abled athletes in the text. Investigating the news articles and looking at the differences between this power struggle between the representation of athletes with a disability and abled athletes was done by using structural opposition.

The last tool used for CDA is lexical choices and genre, in which it is important to look into how the Dutch public broadcaster NOS makes use of different connotations of authority regarding the audience. This allowed an opportunity for this research to further explore how the DPB represent athletes with a disability towards their audience by looking at what language they use, is it everyday language or scientific language? And what does this choice connote? An example of this within these articles is seen as a thorough explanation of what the Paralympics are and what some of the classifications entail within this event is explained. Moreover, the visuals that are present in the article were analysed with the help of critical visual analysis. The following tools were used, also as proposed by Machin and Mayr (2012). Denotation and connotation, objects, settings, and salience. For denotation and connotation, observing what is present in the images of the athletes with a disability (denotation) and what the underlying meaning of these visuals can be (connotation). To do so, it was significant to view the objects present within the images of athletes with a disability, in what setting these images take place, and what compositional choices are made (Machin and Mayr, 2012). Moreover, it was investigated if there is more attention paid to the disability or to the athlete itself. Furthermore, looking at what objects are lit out and foregrounded is important.

To summarize, CDA takes a particular interest the relation between language and power. Therefore, by using questions to guide the analysis and finding symbolic meanings and patterns behind the text was done in the analysis of the news articles.

### **3.5 Credibility**

In order to achieve credibility within this research two central concepts are important to discuss, validity and reliability (Silverman, 2013). Reliability is defined as the steadiness of findings, and validity represents the veracity of findings (Altheide & Johnson, 1994). While reliability generally refers to how findings of a study are independent of random circumstances of their production (Kirk & Miller, 1986).

Reliability also examines replicability, the question if a study can be replicated in the future, whilst coming up with the same results (Silverman, 2013). Within this study CDA is the specific research method and therefore complete replication was difficult to achieve, as the coding process includes a rather subjective element, which is acknowledged by the researcher. However, as all the news articles for this analysis could be found online and it was clear which characteristics these articles will have to meet in order to be of use for this research, random circumstances can be avoided.

Furthermore, Moisander & Valtonen (2006) note two criteria in order to achieve reliability within qualitative research. First, the research process needs to be transparent by thoroughly reporting the research strategy and data analysis method in detail within the research report (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006). Second, observing the theoretical transparency and therefore noting the theoretical stance the explanation and interpretation of results is coming from and describing how this constructs certain interpretations and excludes others (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006). In this research, the data analysis is explained in a sufficient way, achieving transparency. Moreover, the theoretical stance is adequate as well as within the theoretical framework it is clear which other research and methods this analysis has made use of. Therefore, theoretical transparency is also accomplished. Reliability occurs through the categories used to analyze the text (Silverman, 2013). Therefore, the categories should be applied in a standardized manner (Silverman, 2013).

Validity in qualitative research refers to the “appropriateness of tools, process and data” (Leung, 2015). First, the research question stated for this analysis has been

appropriate as an answer to the research question has been provided. Next, the choice for purposive sampling within this research was applicable as this is often based on a certain framework or aim (Leung, 2015). This sampling was based on a certain framework and criteria and therefore enhances the validity of this research. Last, the analysis of the articles was well-documented, this also increases the validity of the research.

Additionally, although the sample of fifty news articles is not large, it was a suitable representation of related articles and can therefore potentially increase the reliability of the study. This sample size used was appropriate as it allowed enough articles to be compared to each one another, to get a more credible outcome. This research uses CDA as research method of text and visuals of news articles. Important to note is that similar to other qualitative methods, textual analysis does not produce generalizability. However, researchers make use of textual analysis to “understand how people try and make sense of their lives” (Brennen, 2014). ). Therefore, within this research it is important to understand that generalizability is not possible.

### **3.6 Ethical Considerations**

In qualitative studies, ethical considerations are essential to mention due to the in-depth nature of the process of study. Moreover, in general qualitative researchers draw on the fitting context for their specific textual analysis in order to recognize how each different text suits the dominant cultural worldview (Brennen, 2014). Within this research the analysis is based on theoretical and conceptual frameworks. However, it is important for researchers to stay open to findings new possibilities that can be different than what was thought to be found (Brennen, 2014). Furthermore, in this research I remained open to findings new patterns and did not let the frameworks obstruct these.

Apart from these ethical considerations, the role of the researcher is also important to note. As I do not have many athletes with disabilities in my close surroundings, I do not have any personal ideas of how these athletes feel they are being represented in the media. Moreover, a choice had to be made between mentioning athletes with a disability or disabled athletes when noting the athletes in the articles. As the National Disability Authority (2014) states, the appropriate term to use is ‘people with a disability’ therefore this choice has been made in this research. The NDA explains this as disabled people means

identity first, and therefore does not reflect on the 'individuality, equality, or dignity' of people with disabilities.

### **3.7 Summary**

In short, the qualitative research method of Critical Discourse Analysis was chosen to analyze the sample of fifty news articles from the broadcaster NOS, including 30 pictures. The news articles stem from 2016 till now as the most recent articles about athletes are of interest for this research. Whereas the public broadcaster was chosen based on the broadcasting of sports. Moreover, the research question, sub-questions and the interpretation of several concepts allow for qualitative research to be an applicable method of research. CDA was a suitable method as it particularly focused on the relation between language and power, and the meaning behind the text. Throughout this research, there was a focus on the text and the visuals within the news articles. Additionally, whilst carefully considering the validity in terms of triangulation and reliability in terms of achieving transparency the news articles were analyzed. Apart from validity and reliability, the ethical considerations are explained as well.

## 4. Results

In the following paragraph the results of this research will be explained. The main research question is stated as *'how are athletes with a disability represented by the Dutch public broadcaster NOS?'*

The results show that athletes with a disability are represented by the NOS in a stereotypical way using the supercrip stereotype, disability as object of pity and disability as pathology. Furthermore, the visuals within this sample of articles show these stereotypes. In the following paragraphs the stereotypes of this representation are shown in the news articles. During the analysis of the sample of fifty news articles by the NOS, patterns seemed to arise. Four themes have been found as a result of the analysis and will be further explained below answering the three sub questions.

### 4.1 Athletes with a disability as inspiration

The first pattern seen amongst the news articles is that of athletes with a disability represented as an inspiration. This pattern answers the subquestion "in what ways have athletes with a disability been portrayed in a stereotypical way in the news articles from the Dutch public broadcaster NOS over the last six years?". Furthermore, in fifteen of the articles this pattern is shown and creates a difference in power regarding the athlete with a disability and the reader. In these articles mentioning athletes with a disability words are used to connote that these athletes are an inspiration for others and have overcome their impairment and have therefore achieved something impossible. The words that are used to describe that these athletes are an inspiration are 'inspiring', 'unbeatable', 'wonderful' and 'extraordinary'. With a frequency of seven the word 'extraordinary' are used the most, three four times inspiring and three times unbeatable was noted.

In a few articles all of these words were used in the same article. An example of this is seen in the following quote: "Martin Wijnen finds the athletes with a disability very inspiring. It is wonderful to see how unbeatable they are, how small they got and how they grew" (NOS, 2020b).

This shows how there is an overlexicalization of positive words when describing athletes with a disability. Another example of this is the article about Paralympic champion in formula 1 racing Zanardi. Within this article his sporting career is described as the 'most



inspiring person of all times' and he is described as having 'extraordinary powers'. This representation is also seen when sporting events that involve athletes with a disability are presented. An example of this is when Raymond Blondel, the director of the National Paralympic Committee in the Netherlands described Paralympic sport in general as inspiring (NOS, 2021c).

Looking at the news articles within this sample this pattern of describing athletes with a disability as inspiration often corresponds with these athletes overcoming their disability through working hard or having an extraordinary talent. According to Dolmage (2014) this is part of the super-crip stereotype. A clear example of this is seen in the article about the Paralympic athlete Jetze Plat, he is described as being a top athlete 'regardless of his disability' (NOS, 2021d). This shows how even though he has a disability Plat is represented as if he overcame his disability and therefore is a top athlete. Another example is seen in the article on Alex Zanardi as this note how he 'overcame obstacles' because of his 'extraordinary powers'.

As mentioned before, the super-crip, or super-hero stereotype is defined by the super-human qualities that are often attributed to athletes with a disability (Martin, 2018). Apart from using words such as extraordinary powers, words such as 'all-rounder', 'capable of anything' and 'unbeatable' are used to describe the athletes. These words add to the connotation of representing athletes with a disability as super-heroes. The article about Paralympic athlete Ronald Hertog is an example of this, as he is described as being 'capable of doing anything' and 'an all-rounder' (NOS, 2019e). Another example is seen in the article about the Paralympic track cyclist Bangma. In this article the word extraordinary, revolutionary and fantastic are used to describe his athletic career (NOS, 2020a). These words attribute to these athletes being represented as super-heroes.

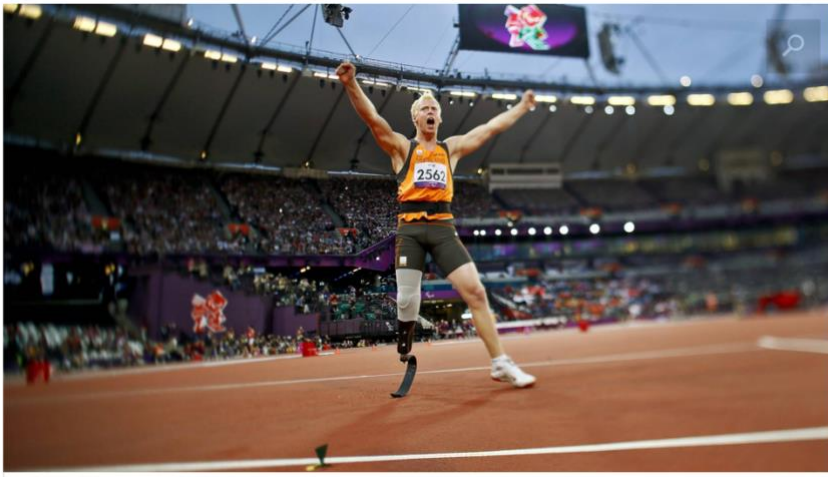
Additionally, the visuals amongst these articles add to the super-hero representation of the athletes displayed. Within eleven articles individual athletes are portrayed without any other athletes around. All of the athletes are portrayed as strong, their muscles are seen and they are foregrounded in the article. In the article called '*Vergeer doesn't doubt about the Games: messages we receive aren't unstable*' (NOS, 2021a) the female athlete Fleur Jong is denotated, see figure 4.1. She looks strong as her muscles are well shown. Moreover, the setting is on the track whilst she is performing her sport the long jump. The background is blurred out and therefore the clear and visible focus is on the athlete portrayed. This also

makes her look even more powerful. Her blades are half covered in sand which connotes that this is an action shot. In addition, her face looks focused and therefore it can be assumed she is attending an important race.



*Figure 4.1 Para-athlete Fleur Jong (NOS, 2021a)*

Another example of this is seen in the visual shown in figure 4.2 of the article about Paralympic athlete Ronald Hertog. Again, Ronald is by himself, his muscles are clearly visible and the background is blurred out. He is standing in a power stance, which is with your arms in the air and legs wide on the ground. This stance is often associated with being powerful. However, a closer look into this image shows that not only the background but also his left leg is blurred out. His right leg is his prosthetic leg, and this one is clear to see. This makes the reader look at the prosthetic leg more than his other leg, simply because this is clearer to see. Therefore, the focus of the reader automatically goes to this leg, and the focus is put on the athlete's disability rather than his achievement. This image shows how the super-crip stereotype is depicted and focuses mainly on the athlete's disability whilst achieving athletic accomplishments. Furthermore, as mentioned by Jackson-Brown (2020) media representation of disability and sport often reveals different theorization such as "others, inspiration and spectacle" (p. 6). This image of Paralympic athlete Hertog shows disability and sport as others as the focus is mainly laid on his disability, as this is what is foregrounded and not blurred out.



*Figure 4.2 Paralympic athlete Ronald Hertog (NOS, 2016a)*

Another example of this supercrip stereotype amongst the visuals is seen in figure 4.3 from the article about Alex Zandari. He is shown by himself on the image, holding his hand bike up in the air whilst on the ground. This symbol of Zandari whilst lifting his hand bike in the air shows how his disability has been shown as something powerful. One can clearly see that Zandari does not have legs, however by lifting his hand bike in the air this symbolizes how he has ‘overcome’ his disability by his sporting achievement. As Dolmage (2014) notes, the supercrip stereotype often represents how an individual with a disability overcomes their disability through hard work or even extraordinary talent. This image shows a muscular, sweaty athlete, connotating that they have worked hard. The bike placement shows how he overcame his disability through this hard work.



*Figure 4.3 Paralympic athlete Alex Zandari (NOS, 2020e)*

The visuals, texts and words used in this article show a pattern of the supercrip stereotype are present in this representation of athletes, by using an overlexicalization of words such as 'inspiring' and 'overlexicalization' and by using foregrounding, and salience within the visuals to show what the emphasis within the image is specifically on.

#### **4.2 Ableism represented by normalization of abled bodies**

As previously mentioned, two other ways people with disabilities are represented based on stereotypes is by ableism and Otherness. Ableism is defined by Goodley (2014) as the current ideals in which the abled, independent, individual is favoured.

In the sample of articles analyzed this is seen in different ways. In the article called *'Sponsoring the Paralympic sport first a taboo, now a wonderful story'* (NOS, 2016a), the Paralympic athletes are described to be 'now developed into real top athletes' and therefore worthy of being sponsored. The words combined 'now' and 'real' are significant in this description as this connotes that they were at first 'not real' top athletes and therefore not worthy of being sponsored. This shows the connection between the abled body and the disabled body as athletes with a disability were first not seen as real athletes, only abled athletes were seen as real athletes. In the same article and in the article about Paralympic athlete Oberoi (NOS, 2019b), the word 'ordinary' is used to explain the athletic achievements of these athletes. The use of 'ordinary' connotes that athletic achievements of athletes with a disability are not seen as the norm yet. This is contrary to abled athletes in society and therefore the emphasis is needed on the word ordinary.

Another way ableism is represented is seen in the article about an athlete with a disability called Noah. The article is titled "Noah (19) lost his leg last year, now he runs faster than you" (NOS, 2018a). By giving a title as such, a distance occurs between the reader and the athlete with a disability. This distance can be explained by the use of the concept of Otherness. As Silva and Howe (2012) mention, representation can be interpreted as Otherness. With regards to disability, Otherness stems from reaffirming the normality of the observer which results in the creation of distance towards the 'outcast' (Silva & Howe, 2012). The outcast in this case is Noah and the observer is the reader of the article. Therefore, a distance between the reader and the athlete with a disability has occurred.

Furthermore, Ellis et al. (2019) have introduced the readers to imagine disability. As mentioned, this means that the reader is formulated as non-disabled and is expected to encounter disability as a problem that causes a disturbance in ordinary life and to find this fascinating (Ellis et al., 2019). Every day normal activities are imagined instead to be extraordinary simply because the individual has a disability (Ellis et al., 2019). For example, the every-day notion of travelling to a shop or even getting up in the morning becomes something incredible. The reader perceives these activities to be so out of the norm that they become fascinated.

This theory applies to this article as the reader is stimulated to understand that Noah has a disability that disturbed his flow of ordinary life. However, at the same time the readers are also encouraged to imagine that he can run faster than you (the non-disabled reader) despite of his disability.

Additionally, another example is seen in the article about Paralympic track cyclist Bangma. In this article words such as 'not different than every other cyclist' are mentioned to explain what he looks like on the track. The formulation of the words 'not different' creates the idea that one would otherwise infer that an athlete with a disability must look in some form, different to abled bodied athletes. Because of this, these words again show how ableism is represented by noting how 'every other cyclist' is consider the normal standard and athletes with a disability are compared to this standard. Furthermore, these articles help develop the idea that the abled body feel superior over the disabled body based on assumptions and processes of the 'normal' body (Burch, 2020). The reader is made to presume that due to the difference in their body's, these athletes cannot naturally and sub-consciously be considered normal. Instead, the articles must continue to push for this thought process. By constantly showing how athletes with a disability are ordinary, the articles actually show assumptions and processes of the normal body.

Authors write about the athletes with a disability, however in some of the analyzed articles interviews with the athletes themselves are implemented. An example of this is seen in the article called '*My 2016: Van Rhijn has done what she had to do*' (NOS, 2016b). In this article van Rhijn uses words such as 'painful' and 'not proper' when describing her nomination for the Paralympic athlete of the year award. She also mentions words such as 'no difference' and 'integration' when she notes that she hoped that the Netherlands would not make a separate category for Paralympic athlete of the year.

Van Rhijn mentions: “It is quite painful that you put someone into a separate category. It feels less important, and I don’t think it is proper” (NOS, 2016b).

Besides Paralympic athletes, the sample of articles used to discuss athletes with a disability use similar descriptions. This is shown in the article called *‘People with a disability sport relatively less and change needs to happen’*. Within this text, an athlete with a disability called Bart Pijs is interviewed, he uses words as “very important to be all together” “no distinction” and “games for athletes with a disability should take place at the same time as ordinary athletes” (NOS, 2016c). This overlexicalization of words that show that athletes with a disability and abled athletes should be treated the same leads to a pattern of persuasion. The persuasion can be defined as athletes with a disability want to be considered in the same way as athletes with an ability. Last, an example of this is seen in the article about Jetze Plat. He mentions that if he could “he would love to compete with abled athletes”. Again, the athlete is wanting to be seen as ordinary.

Moreover, the visuals amongst five articles also show how ableism is represented in the sample. The primary article that shows this is the one called *‘Hand biker Plat and wheelchair tennis player De Groot have chance to win the Laureus Award’*. Within this article four different visuals are implemented. All of the visuals have a similar setting, denoting six different circles in which individual nominees for athletic achievements are portrayed. The first visual is represented in figure 4.4 has the text ‘Sportsperson of the year with a disability’ foregrounded, as it is portrayed right at the top in capital letters attention is drawn to this text. The second visual is shown in figure 4.5, has the text ‘Sportsman of the year’ “foregrounded, for the same reason as the first visual, whereas on top of the third visual ‘Sportswoman of the year’ is made to stand out.



Figure 4.4 Sportsperson of the year with a disability



Figure 4.5 Sportsman of the year nominees

Within these visuals the ideas and values that are communicated about athletes with a disability is portrayed. To start, as all the visuals have the same setting, this connotes that there is an attempt to not make any distinctions between the portrayal of the different nominees. However, the salience of the representation shows a contrast. This is mainly displayed in the titles of the different awards that have been made to stand out 'sportswoman of the year, sportsman of the year and sportsperson of the year with a disability'. A clear distinction is made in the category for athletes with a disability. There is a separate category stated for these athletes that already connotes that these athletes with a disability are different than abled athletes. In addition, another difference is that by naming categories sportsman and sportswoman of the year, a distinction is made between gender. However, this is not the case for the sportsperson of the year with a disability award. The value of this award therefore is different as only one person can win it, and not a woman and a man.

The connotation within the visuals, the overlexicalization of words used to describe athletes with a disability as ordinary, and the structural oppositions within the news articles gives an overview of how ableism is portrayed in these articles.

### 4.3 Athletes with a disability as strictly positive

Apart from the athletes with a disability being described as super-heroes and inspiring, amongst the sample of fifty articles strictly positive words are used to describe the athletes. This is also apparent within the visuals implemented in the articles.

Words such as 'positive', 'happy' and 'very positive mood' are used to portray the athletes. Howe (2008) in his work mentions that the wide majority of the media coverage of



the Paralympics is often only detrimentally positive. As noted, this is the case for the articles about the Paralympics in this sample as well. Examples within the articles are the continuous notion of how many successes the athletes with a disability have achieved, such as in the news articles about Hertog and Alkemade.

Within this sample no articles describe any negative content or notions around the athletes and the Paralympics. Furthermore, there is a focus within the sample on the athletes who win the Gold medals and who achieve greatness, such as in the news article about Van Rhijn and Jetze Plat.

Within all the articles, only one article does note a negative side of the Paralympics itself. This was solely based on s problems with money and sponsoring and therefore nothing to do with the athlete. None of the articles notes any negative comments or language about the athletes with a disability.

Moreover, the visuals that are part of the sample play a part in the overly positive representation of athletes with a disability. The articles about Bangma, Van Rhijn, Hertog, and Oberoi all denote an individual athlete in the setting of where their sport takes place, this being on the track, in the sand, or indoor hall. All of these athletes are smiling which connotates them being happy. These pictures are taken after a won game or race, hence the positive mood the athletes are in, an example is shown in figure 4.6. However, it is stereotypical that in none of the pictures they are not smiling. This also relates to the topics being discussed amongst the articles as they are all of positive nature.



*Figure 4.7 Paralympian Ranki Oberoi*



In addition, representing athletes with strictly positive words and images add to Howe's (2008) research that media coverage surrounding athletes with a disability is often patronizing. Achievements of athletes with a disability are seen as more significant than abled athletes, because of the low expectation's society has of athletes with a disability. Therefore, this pattern is seen amongst the news articles as the word connotations used to describe athletes with a disability are positive of nature as the symbolic meaning behind it is that society has low expectations of these athletes.

#### **4.4 Athletes with a disability have a social mission**

As previously mentioned, athletes with a disability are often seen as an inspiration or superhero and media coverage surrounding these athletes is frequently of positive nature. Furthermore, ableism is represented within the analyzed articles and shows how a separation has developed between athletes with a disability and abled athletes. Apart from these representations, there is another pattern that is seen within the sample of news articles and will be further explained in this pattern. This pattern is seen amongst six articles, the words 'societal mission' appear with a frequency of three, whereas the words 'personal stories' appear with a frequency of five amongst the sample. In addition, within this sample and is defined by how athletes with a disability are often seen as more than just athletes and as having a social mission. Furthermore, this shows how athletes with a disability are seen as different or lesser than abled athletes.

This pattern appears in the article called '*Vergeer also at the Paralympics games 2022 in Beijing chef the mission*' (NOS, 2021b). In this article ex-Paralympic athlete Esther Vergeer mentions how the Paralympics have a 'social mission' and that sports are 'part of society' also for athletes with a disability. Additionally, in the article called '*The Netherlands want to organize first combined European Championship for Para-sports*' (NOS, 2021n), similar words are used to describe the mission of Paralympic sports "*important for the country*" and "*significant for the rest of the world*". These words are used to show how the Paralympics and Para-athletes are significant for other reasons such as societal figures of strength and hope, than sports. Moreover, Paralympians are seen as the elite athletes amongst athletes with a disability. Although as Bruce (2004) mentions, they are still considered dissimilar and

peripheral compared to abled athletes. In this article it shows that the focus is not just on their sport, but also on their stories and social mission behind the athlete.

Another example of this pattern is seen in the article called *Sponsoring the Paralympic sport first a taboo, now a wonderful story*. Within this article words such as real athletes with 'wonderful personal stories. Therefore, using these words to describe Paralympians and their athletic achievements shows how the focus is not primarily on the accomplishment itself, rather it is on the story behind the athlete with a disability. This shows again that athletes with a disability are seen as different than abled athletes.

Furthermore, apart from being seen as lesser than abled athletes, Paralympic sport is seen as of greater goodness than mainstream sports (Howe, 2008). By implementing not only the Paralympic achievements of an athlete, but also adding the personal story, the reader is forced to focus not only on the sport accomplishments of an athlete with a disability, but also to see them as symbols of strength. Therefore, the Paralympic sport is seen as something bigger and of better purity than mainstream sports.

In addition, amongst this pattern the values and purposes of the public broadcasting system is shown. As stated above, diversity and innovation are two of the six important aspects mentioned by the European Broadcasting Union developed (Rodríguez-Castro et al., 2021). This is seen by the focus of the NOS on the social mission behind the athletes. It is clear that there is an overlexicalization in focus on the personal stories of the athletes and the social mission athletes with a disability have. The extreme emphasis on disability sports looking good for a country, and the significance for the rest of the world (NOS, 2021n) shows how the values and purposes of the public broadcasting system is achieved by the NOS within the articles.

#### **4.5 Summary**

In short, CDA was used to analyze a sample of fifty news articles published by the Dutch broadcaster NOS. During the analysis four relevant patterns occurred that were used to guide the analysis and answer the sub questions. The first pattern was identified as athletes with a disability as inspiration. This pattern occurred by the overlexicalization of words such as 'inspiration' 'extraordinary' and 'able to do anything'. Moreover, this pattern reveals how the NOS makes use of stereotypical ways of describing and representing athletes with a disability within this sample of fifty articles.

Secondly, the pattern of how ableism is represented was mentioned. This pattern shows how structural opposition is used amongst the articles about athletes with a disability in order to show the qualities of abled athletes and how athletes with a disability are constantly compared to these. Furthermore, word connotations such as 'faster than you' show how the reader is asked to imagine what disability is and this impacts themselves.

Next, a pattern identified as athletes with a disability as strictly positive is mentioned. This shows how by using an overlexicalization of positive words, athletes with a disability are empowered and not taken seriously. This overlexicalization of positive words stems from the symbolic meaning that athletes with a disability are in the periphery of society and therefore the expectations for their achievements are very low.

The last pattern described was the idea of 'more than athletes'. This pattern arose as word connotations such as 'significant for the rest of the world' and 'personal story' were used to describe why athletes with a disability should be represented in media and are relevant. Therefore, this pattern symbolizes how athletes with a disability cannot always only be valued for their athletic achievements, rather they are important for more than just their accomplishments. This takes away from the focus of the athletic achievement, and therefore also disempowers athletes with a disability.

## 5. Conclusion

Media play a significant part in the reflection of public attitudes, and perceptions on disability and in shaping these (Goethals, 2018). Ever since the past twenty years, athletes with a disability have gotten more attention from media (Howe, 2008). In this research an investigation on representation through different stereotypes has been constructed. Therefore, the main research question was stated as following:

*How have athletes with a disability been represented in the Dutch public broadcasting system over the last six years?*

The results have shown that athletes with a disability are still represented in a stereotypical way over the last six years. Furthermore, the frequent use of certain words amongst the sample of articles has resulted into four identified patterns. Words such as “inspiring” have caused for a pattern to emerge called *athletes with a disability as inspiration*. In addition, the explanation of ableism is represented in the articles by a focus on how abled bodies are considered the standard, and disabled bodies are often compared. Therefore, a second pattern occurred called *ableism represented by normalization of abled bodies*. The third pattern is called athletes with a disability as strictly positive. This is explained by having only positive coverage of athletes with a disability included in the sample. Last, the pattern referred to as *athletes with a disability have a social mission* has been found. This pattern is based on the notion of athletes with a disability paired with social missions. Therefore, it makes them known for more than just their athletic achievement, this is also different than in ordinary athletics. These results show three different discourses regarding the representation of athletes with a disability: as superheroes, as object of pity and as inspiring.

Whilst analyzing the 50 articles these discourses were apparent using forty articles about Paralympians and ten about athletes with a disability in general. Even though four patterns were found, only three discourses were identified during the analysis. As media representation functions as shaping perceptions and reflecting public attitudes about disability, the three discourses limit the role of athletes with a disability in society.

To conclude, this research focused on how athletes with a disability were represented by the Dutch public broadcaster NOS over the last six years. Based on the findings it can be concluded that athletes with a disability are represented based on stereotypes and in the texts often notions and comparisons are made to abled athletes. Furthermore, there seems

to be a difference regarding the way Paralympians are represented and the way other athletes with a disability are represented. Within the representation of Paralympians the superhero stereotype is often included, whereas for other athletes with a disability they are often seen as object of pity. Moreover, the patterns that have been found relate back to the stereotypes described by Dolmage (2014) and Howe (2008), therefore these match the theoretical assumptions. In addition, the Paralympics has gained a lot of media attention over the years, but not even close to the attention there is for sporting events including abled athletes, therefore, a change is needed.

### **5.1 Limitations and future research**

Though data shows that athletes with a disability are still represented in a stereotypical manner, the study has a number of limitations that should be addressed. First, the aim in the beginning of this research was to find information on different Dutch public broadcasters and being able to compare results. However, during the research, the only public broadcaster that fit the description needed for this research (this being, broadcasting sports) is the NOS. Therefore, a limited amount of news articles could be analyzed as only one public broadcaster produced relevant content. In addition, the researcher did not perform quantitative research, which would have allowed for this research to gain more information on exactly how the impact of these representations in society is verified. This would have potentially given the research a more all-round insight. Furthermore, this could be a discussion for future research.

Another element future research should add is a more thorough look at other sporting events. For the purpose of this research, only 10 articles of the 50 included these events, this made it not possible for the researcher to include much information on this topic. Thus, although the aims of this research were achieved, it is recommended that new research focus on a large dataset and on exploring the possibilities of quantitative methods to understand the impact of the representations of disabled athletes in the Dutch society.

### **5.2 Theoretical and social implications**

A few theoretical implications were developed within this research. In order to answer the research question: how are athletes with a disability represented by the Dutch

public broadcaster NOS over the last six years, a variety of theories were used within this research. As mentioned, Hall (1997) was used to define representation as “images, descriptions, explanations and frames for understanding what the world is and why and how it works in particular ways” (p.12). This definition of representation was used to investigate the news articles. Furthermore, this was used to see what the images and explanations by the public broadcaster NOS represented. In addition, the aim of representation according to Hall (1997) is to create otherness by the production of boundaries between groups of people by dividing the regular and acceptable to the irregular and unacceptable. This results into exclusion of groups amongst society who do not fit this norm. Within the results of this research, it is clearly seen that this aim of representation noted by Hall (1997) is present. This is mainly seen in the news articles mentioning the difference between athletes with a disability and abled athletes. As mentioned in the results section, when describing athletes with a disability their achievements are often compared to those of abled athletes.

In addition, the theory that is mentioned in this research by Ellis et al. (2019) called the imagination of disability is seen in this research. The reader is formulated as non-disabled and is supposed to encounter disability as an issue that causes a disruption within normal life and to find this interesting (Ellis et al.,2019). The example given by Ellis et al. (2019) is that the reader in this case has to imagine doing ordinary everyday activities and to find this extraordinary. This theory is found in the news articles about the runner Noah. This articles title is “Noah (19) los this leg last year and now he runs faster than you” (NOS 2018a). This title itself implies that the reader is ‘non-disabled’ and that Noah who has a disability is able to run faster than the reader. Therefore, the non-disabled reader is asked to imagine what it is like to do an activity such as running but whilst having a disability. Furthermore, the reader finds runner Noah’s achievements extraordinary as a result of his disability. To add to this theory, based on this research no ordinary everyday activities are asked to be imagined by the reader, only athletic activities.

Moreover, this theory of imagining disability leads to the theory of the supercrip. As athletes are made out to be extraordinary super-humans. This is a result of the reader being formulated as non-disabled. Therefore, the imagination of the extraordinary achievements athletes with a disability can accomplish was developed. This leads to the creation of the super-cripple. The super-cripple stereotype is defined by these super-human qualities that are often assigned to athletes with a disability (Martin, 2018).

Apart from theoretical implications this research also adds to the social implications of disability research. This research primarily focuses on athletes with a disability. First, there is only one Dutch public broadcaster who writes and broadcasts athletes with a disability. As the Dutch public broadcasting system consist of eleven broadcasters, this is not a lot. In addition, as mentioned in the results section, athletes with a disability often have a social mission rather than just an athletic mission. This is the case because there is not yet enough visibility and integration amongst the Dutch society for athletes with a disability. Therefore, the Netherlands now are trying to create more sporting events and broadcast more live streams during the Paralympics. However, it has only been since this last decade that this change has started, and this is not enough. This research shows how more integration is needed amongst the Netherlands for athletes with disabilities.

Another impact on society this research has is seen in the stereotypical way athletes with a disability are currently represented by the Dutch public broadcaster NOS. As previously noted, athletes with a disability are still being represented by stereotypes and prejudice. This creates several misconceptions and issues of power amongst the abled body and body with a disability. This research highlights this problematic way of representation.

According to Garland Thomson (2005), representation not only structures society rather it reflects reality. Therefore, the way athletes with a disability are represented by the NOS through stereotyping reflects how society is shaped, mentioning what is considered normal and abnormal (Garland Thomson, 2005). Therefore, this research hopes to influence a change within this way of representation. Instead of the continuous comparison with abled athletes, this could be changed into the same representation for both abled bodies and bodies with a disability within news articles from the NOS.

As clearly stated in this research, media play a key role in the representation of groups such as people with a disability. Media is continuously growing and becoming more dominant in society, therefore, a change in representation for athletes with a disability should be achieved.

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## 8. Appendix

A1 Article: Nederland wil eerste gecombineerde EK voor parasporten gaan organiseren

1. Word connotations; key words

2. Overlexicalization

3. Suppression

4. Structural oppositions

5. Lexical choices and genre

'Met paralympisch EK willen we publiek kennis laten maken met parasport'

In een periode waarin veel sporten hinder ondervinden van de coronapandemie, is ook een nieuw sportevenement aangekondigd. In 2023 moeten er voor het eerst gecombineerde Europese kampioenschappen voor parasporten worden georganiseerd, met Nederland als gastheer.

In Azië en Amerika bestaat een dergelijk evenement al, maar in Europa is er nog geen paralympische tegenhanger voor de Europese Spelen. "Heel mooi dat Nederland met een innovatief idee is gekomen", laat Jiske Griffioen, ambassadrice van het evenement en zelf voormalig rolstoeltennisster, weten. "Dit is echt iets nieuws voor de paralympische sport."

Ook Raymon Blondel, voorzitter van het Nationaal Paralympisch Comité, is enthousiast over het initiatief. "Ik vind dat de parasport in Europa een dergelijk evenement verdient."

"Heel veel EK's van paralympische sporten worden gehouden op plaatsen ver buiten de bewoonde wereld en in matige accommodaties", legt Griffioen uit. "Het is ontzettend belangrijk om de paralympische sport te laten zien aan het publiek, omdat het inspireert. Er wordt binnen de parasport namelijk gekeken naar wat er wél kan en niet naar wat er niet kan. Daardoor raken andere mensen geïnspireerd om in beweging te komen."

Naar de mensen toe

De organisatoren van het evenement hebben het plan opgevat om de sport ook echt naar de mensen te brengen. Blondel: "De initiatiefnemers zijn bijvoorbeeld ook betrokken geweest bij de WK parahandboogschieten in Den Bosch in 2019. Een prachtig mooie setting was dat, midden in de stad. Die vorm is ook voor deze EK heel interessant."

Griffioen schetst alvast een beeld hoe het er in de zomer van 2023 uit moet gaan zien. "We willen het in een grote stad organiseren en dan komen er in het centrum van die stad *centre courts* te liggen. Ik denk dat dat voor de paralympische sport dé manier is om het zichtbaar te maken en het grote publiek kennis te laten maken met deze sporten."

Hoe groot het evenement precies gaat worden, is nog onduidelijk. "In het voortraject hebben we met een negental sporten gesproken en zij hebben al aangegeven er positief tegenover te staan", aldus Blondel. "Dat zijn onder andere wielrennen, rolstoelrugby, rolstoelbasketbal, rolstoeltennis, rolstoeltafeltennis, parajudo en boccia. Er wordt gekeken of er nog een aantal andere sporten kunnen aanhaken."

Kwalificatiemoment

"Voor atleten gaat het zeker interessant worden om aan de EK mee te doen", vertelt Griffioen. "De sporters kunnen zich namelijk op dit evenement kwalificeren voor de Paralympische Spelen."

Er moet nog behoorlijk wat gebeuren de komende jaren om de Europese kampioenschappen ook daadwerkelijk van de grond te krijgen, zowel financieel als logistiek, maar Blondel en Griffioen hebben er alle vertrouwen in dat Nederland in 2023 ruim een week het middelpunt zal zijn van de Europese parasport. "Wij geloven erin dat dit een eerste editie wordt van een hele serie en dat de Europese parakampioenschappen elke vier jaar terugkomen."

## A2 Picture Malou van Rhijn



Denotation: Individual female athlete, Dutch team on jersey, arms spread as in running, focused facial features.

Setting: During race, audience in back, other athletes on left and right of her. Foregrounded individual athlete, background blurred out.

Connotation: Her arms, the setting, and her clothes make it look like she is running. The blurred-out background shows how the main focus is on Malou van Rhijn. The picture is very zoomed in and therefore connotes how her disability isn't the focus of the picture. It seems like her legs with the blades on it are purposely cut off the picture. The choice made to use this picture clearly shows how the NOS aims to not let the focus lay on the disability. However in the text disability is discussed.