

Disabling Prejudice

Attitudes towards disability and its portrayal on television

A report of research undertaken by
the British Broadcasting Corporation,
the Broadcasting Standards Commission and
the Independent Television Commission

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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research sheds light on viewers' different expectations with regard to disability representation and offers indicators to assist programme makers and broadcasters in making judgements about material to ensure that, as far as possible, it does not cross the offence boundary. The findings are not prescriptive directions to programme makers, but are offered as a resource tool.

The key issues to emerge from this research are:

- that accuracy in portrayals is extremely important to disabled viewers;
- that the provision of aspiring role models for young disabled people is vital;
- that barriers to acceptance exist for some non-disabled viewers, which need to be reduced in order to facilitate acceptance;
- that the industry recognises that disability, as a political concern, is not yet as advanced as others issues such as ethnicity or gender equality, and that senior management must be at the helm of any initiative to effect change;
- that progressive thinking broadcast professionals consider it crucial that disabled people need to be at the heart of the creative process to move things forward.

1.1 Different types of viewers

The three phases of the research examined attitudes towards disability and representation of disability on television held by the audience, both disabled (including disabled children) and non-disabled, and by professionals in the broadcast industry.¹

Phase one involved interviews with those with mobility and sensory impairments and non-disabled carers. Mental illness was beyond the scope of the study. Reactions to a wide range of stimulus material showing disability portrayals were probed. Opinions were sought, in particular, on the boundaries for humour, which may be considered controversial in relation to sensitive areas of political concern such as disability.

Phase one identified five distinct groups according to attitudes and proximity to disability as an issue, among mainly disabled participants. Phase two consisted of a survey of 4,000 respondents, which was used

¹ To distinguish between the different phases of the study, 'participants' are used for phase one, 'respondents' for phase two and 'professionals' for phase three.

to establish the likely proportions of these groups within the general viewing audience, together with estimates of the proportions within each group who are disabled. Categorising viewers in this way helps us to more fully understand viewer reactions to disability portrayals. In addition, a sample of 27 broadcasting professionals was interviewed qualitatively, a number of whom were disabled (phase three). These were segmented according to the five attitude types also. (Note: the following percentages indicate the proportions of each attitude type in society.)

The five attitude types are:

a) *Issue Driven* (14%)

- older disabled people and non-disabled carers
- approximately 15% are disabled themselves
- group most likely to have a close family member who is disabled
- vocal and active on behalf of disabled groups
- focused on the existence of prejudice
- see television as an influential medium for education
- want a 'tell it like it is' approach
- sensitive to inaccuracies and tokenism
- will complain if television gets it wrong

b) *Transformers* (9%)

- younger people, including children
- approximately 16% are disabled
- disability a fact of life, but not the primary determinant of their identity
- looking for role models
- see importance of television as an employer
- want more opportunities for disabled people at every level
- recognise there has been progress, less critical than *Issue Driven*
- want more normalisation of portrayals

c) *Progressives* (36%)

- mainly non-disabled, educated, more middle class
- approximately 9% are disabled
- early adopters of changing attitudes and behaviour
- aware of diversity within disability
- reactive rather than proactive
- see role of television to educate and normalise
- recognise importance of not misleading or miseducating public

d) Followers (26%)

- mainstream, primarily non-disabled people and some carers
- no specific interest in disability, no awareness of diversity within it
- passive but influenced by society's values
- television primarily about entertainment
- fail to notice normalisation or incidental inclusion
- surprised by more hard-hitting portrayals

e) Traditionalists (15%)

- older viewers
- approximately 17% are disabled (linked to average age being older)
- embedded firm beliefs
- exhibit prejudice and stereotyping of minority groups
- see disabled people in limited ways eg, as victims, disadvantaged
- stuck in the past and resistant to change
- television primarily about entertainment
- clear boundaries for taste – shocked by more hard-hitting portrayals

Issue Driven, Transformers and Progressives see television as a voice with a duty to inform and educate the public about disability. *Followers* and *Traditionalists* believe television's main duty is to entertain. These two roles are not mutually exclusive of course, but *Followers* and *Traditionalists* are more receptive to being educated via entertainment genres, rather than factual (styled) programming.

1.2 Key barriers to overcome

The research found that many people show a high degree of acceptance of the principles for increased inclusion, and positive attitudes towards increased representation of disabled people on screen; 61% agreed that there should be more portrayals of disabled people on television in a wider variety of roles. For those groups that are less progressive, it may be important to determine the reasons for their resistance. In the first instance, a key resistance to overcome is low interest, particularly among *Followers* and *Traditionalists*. There are a number of psychological barriers which contribute towards this. These barriers need to be conquered in order to facilitate increased acceptance, especially by these two groups of viewers.

- i) The first of these is cultural conditioning, and society's obsession with physical attractiveness. Professionals tend to believe that viewers expect actors and presenters on television

to be traditionally good-looking. There were only one or two professionals who fell into the *Traditionalist* category, but slightly more who could be classified as *Followers*. This small sample of broadcasting professionals (producers, commissioning editors, casting directors etc) were reluctant to admit it, but said that disabled people can make uncomfortable viewing. They described them as being ‘untelevisual’. But this study indicates changing attitudes among the viewing audience, suggesting that television is lagging behind cultural shifts.

- ii) The second barrier is related to the notion that when people are confronted by something other than themselves, their initial response can be one of discomfort or even fear. Rather than seeing past the difference, they reject it out-of-hand. This research highlights the fact that for some attitude types it is important to reduce the sense of ‘difference’ between disabled and non-disabled people, in order to facilitate acceptance.

1.3 Issues of portrayal

A wide variety of programme clips from different genres were used to look at how these barriers manifest themselves in programming. The reactions of disabled and non-disabled participants were probed in depth to determine the core principles both for avoiding offence, and for increasing the acceptance of portrayals.

The two core principles for those for whom television is a voice – *Issue Driven*, *Transformers* and *Progressives* – are ‘realism’, with attention to detail, and ‘the avoidance of stereotypes’. These groups are sensitive to portrayals that show disabled people as victims, disadvantaged, brave, etc.

Lack of realism especially irritated children in the sample. They gave examples, which included miraculous cures, lack of attention to the day-to-day realities of life eg, getting up stairs, and never seeing disabled people working. Teenagers consider there are insufficient programmes which inform non-disabled people about disability without drawing attention to it or focusing on it unnecessarily.

Avoiding negative stereotypes is important for those for whom television is entertainment (*Followers* and also *Traditionalists*). Emphasising a disabled person’s bravery, however well intentioned, can serve to exacerbate difference, which in turn reinforces a perceived sense of distance for these particular groups.

1.5 Triggers for acceptance

Five triggers with the potential to increase acceptance across all attitude types were identified:

- i) **Matching** – demonstrating ‘you are like me’. Showing characterisations that go beyond disability to indicate that disabled people are, in most respects, just like everyone else.
- ii) **Likeability** – creating emotional connections through the use of universally shared qualities eg, engaging personality, achievement, sense of humour.
- iii) **Celebrity** – use of a famous actor to play a disabled role. This is a controversial technique. Some consider it old-fashioned, and *Issue Driven*, especially, believe that only disabled people should play disabled roles. But a famous name can attract attention to a programme and offers some assurance that it is likely to be watchable. With the exception of *Issue Driven*, participants were relatively open to the idea of non-disabled actors playing disabled roles, as long as the portrayals are accurate and done well. This finding contrasts with a study carried out in 1995² where there was universal dislike of able-bodied actors playing disabled characters. This latest research perhaps demonstrates a shift towards greater acceptance by disabled people of representation in a broader sense, although importantly, it is likely to be linked to the desire to raise awareness and to see an increase in the number and variety of portrayals generally.
- iv) **Incidental inclusion** – disabled people’s involvement in all levels of programming and production. Programming with characterisations and storylines that feature a disabled character, but which do not highlight or focus on the character’s disability.
- v) **Educational/information ‘shorts’** – the use of short, educational or information programming to tackle a particular issue and to convey it from a disabled person’s perspective in palatable chunks. Programmes that are part of special disability seasons typify this trigger.

² *Perspectives of Disability in Broadcasting*, Andrea Millwood Hargrave, Broadcasting Standards Commission, 1995.

1.6 Comedy

The study focused on the genre of comedy as it pushes boundaries and is a controversial area for references to disability. But how far can boundaries be pushed before offence occurs? Cultural changes have resulted in emphasis being placed on diversity and inclusion, which appear to be reflected in public opinion. While around four in ten people feel that virtually anything is fair game when it comes to comedy, this must be tempered with the fact that a similar, if not slightly greater, proportion of the viewing public (48%) feel broadcasters should not show anything which is likely to offend sections of the audience. It is a difficult line to tread. Phase one of the research identifies elements of programmes which can assist programme makers keep on the right side of the line, thereby avoiding widespread offence.

The research points to a number of conditions that can contribute to offence. The first two are referred to as the primary conditions. If either or both of these are present in humour, in relation to disability, it is a strong indication that offence will be caused.

a) Primary conditions for offence

- i) **Encouraging anti-social behaviour**, including physical abuse and mimicry. One clip showed a guest on an entertainment show imitating, in an exaggerated fashion, a deaf person signing. This was regarded as highly offensive by most participants as it was seen to be mocking the normal mode of communication for deaf signers.
- ii) **Laughing at disabled people** where the focus of the humour is aimed at their disability. A clip from a spoof sketch where the presenter imitated the movements of a disabled child was judged to be guilty of this.

In addition to the two primary conditions, there are a number of secondary conditions in comedy programmes that have the potential to arouse offence. These signifiers are not as strong as the primary conditions, but can cause problems.

b) Secondary conditions for offence

- i) **Violation of programme norms** – where the humour is out of step with viewer expectations of the specific programme, the time it is scheduled, or the channel. This mismatch of expectations, when coupled with a primary condition, can

enhance a perception of offensiveness. If a programme is known to be prerecorded, and something offensive fails to be edited out, this increases the likelihood of offence.

- ii) **Disability as a stooge** – where disability is perceived to be used as a stooge or as a platform to deliver humour. One clip was criticised for the way a character with cerebral palsy was felt to be sidelined rather than a fully integrated member of his family.
- iii) **Extreme irony** – where the irony is missed and politically incorrect views are taken at face value. (It is only irregular or chance viewers of a particularly irreverent or spoof portrayal who are likely to be misled.)

c) **Diluting factors**

The research found that the potential for both primary and secondary conditions to offend can be reduced, or offset, by a number of ‘diluting factors’. Eight were identified.

- i) **Familiarity** – where the character is known to be politically incorrect or irresponsible. If a comedian positions himself as someone who lacks standards it can render politically incorrect humour more acceptable. Similarly, if a show is known to be a parody it is unlikely to offend.
- ii) **Genre** – particular genres, such as stand up comedy, raise expectations of more hard-hitting material, which lessens the likelihood of viewer offence. Viewers expect things to be pushed to the limit and anticipate extreme forms of humour in this type of programming.
- iii) **Disabled comedian** – if jokes about disability are told by a disabled comedian this gives the audience permission to laugh.
- iv) **Accessible irony** – making the irony accessible, where the primary butt of a joke is clearly a particular character.
- v) **Low proximity/identity** – where the disability featured is not relevant to the audience. A joke by a comedian about leprosy was not found to be funny by participants, but lacked offensive impact because leprosy is not a culturally relevant condition in the UK.

- vi) **Convolution** – where there is so much going on in a programme, so many multiple layers to a joke, that it either diminishes the funniness because it takes too much effort to unpick the layers, or the point is easily lost.
- vii) **Channel** – the channel that a programme is broadcast on makes a difference. There is a perception that BBC2 and Channel 4 can broadcast riskier comedy than mainstream channels like BBC1 or ITV1 because viewers feel the former channels have a more self-selecting audience.
- viii) **Scheduling** – if a potentially controversial or challenging comedy show is shown late at night ie, post 10.00pm, this is far less likely to cause offence.

1.7 Seasons

There were mixed opinions about the idea of special seasons as a means of representing disability, both among participants and professionals. For some, the word ‘season’ conjures up the notion of fringe programming, scheduled late at night. Seasons tend to be seen by *Issue Driven* as tokenistic and to marginalise disabled people. Others feel that they do offer a vehicle for tackling disability issues, which is important while disability has not yet achieved full integration in society. On balance, the idea of integrated programmes and portrayals on mainstream channels during peak viewing is the preferred goal. Seasons are regarded as having a role to play in achieving this aim.

1.8 Advertising

The fact that disability is starting to be represented in advertising, in itself, is seen to be a positive step forward. It is especially welcomed if the advertisement challenges negative stereotypes, or actively promotes positive images of disabled people. And the acknowledgement of disabled people as a consumer group in their own right is regarded as progressive.

But, as with programming, there are elements of advertising that can raise barriers. Advertising that promotes or reinforces stereotypes eg, disabled people as victims, or that uses disability to position a product as a caring brand, is seen as patronising and causes offence. Insensitivities, such as using deaf signers in an advertisement which does not carry subtitles, are regarded as tokenistic.

The survey found a high degree of acceptance among the general population for advertisements featuring disabled people. Sixty-five percent said they would not be put off buying a product advertised by a ‘severely’ disabled person (‘severely’ used in the sense of the disability being visible); just 6% said they would be, while 29% were unsure.

1.9 Language

In terms of the appropriate language to use in relation to disability, there were varying preferences across the attitude types. *Issue Driven* have a large list of words and terms that they find offensive, and their list of acceptable words is very precise. *Followers* and *Traditionalists*, who lean towards being less politically correct, are more tolerant of a wider variety of terms, while *Transformers* and *Progressives* fall somewhere between the two ends of the spectrum, but have a sense that some terminology is ‘*more pc than meaningful*’. Many of the professionals interviewed admitted to a lack of knowledge over what was the appropriate terminology to use. For some, this prevented them from engaging with disability issues. (Guidance on terminology can be found in Section 13 of this report and also in *Adjusting The Picture – a producer’s guide to disability*³.)

1.10 The views of broadcasting professionals

The impression among the qualitative sample (27 individuals) of broadcasting professionals was that general awareness about disability as a political issue has risen among those holding more progressive attitudes. Other prejudices, however, such as racism and sexism, were considered to be further ahead in terms of inclusion and integration.

Many of the broadcasting professionals interviewed fell into the *Progressives* and *Followers* categories. Most *Progressives* had a history of addressing disability on television, while most *Followers* claimed to be supportive of increased inclusion, but had no experience of tackling disability issues. *Issue Driven*, *Transformers* and *Traditionalists* formed much smaller groups within the sample, and tended to inhabit more extreme positions.

Professionals are vocal about the key barriers to representation, although there is a tendency for most not to take ‘ownership’ of the issues, but rather to place the blame away from themselves and on to other factors. These include: audience ratings, commercial constraints, the structure of the industry and other people’s prejudices.

³ *Adjusting The Picture – a producer’s guide to disability*, Employers’ Forum on Disability and the Independent Television Commission, 2001.

However, one of the crucial factors preventing professionals from engaging more with disability is ‘fear’. Many professionals fear tackling what they perceive to be a contentious issue, and getting it wrong. They feel ill-equipped to discuss disability issues because they are not confident about the ‘correct’ or most up-to-date terminology to use, and are wary of criticism.

In general, professionals underestimate the number of disabled people in the UK, so are likely to marginalise the issue, defining it as a medical, rather than as a political or social, concern.

Progressive professionals believe that the situation is changing, albeit gradually. Some feel that developments such as the move to greater integration of disabled people in mainstream education will result in a shift in how society sees people with disabilities and this will affect acceptance of greater television portrayals. But they believe that without a directive from ‘on high’ ie, senior management taking a lead and giving direction, the impetus for change will not filter down to their level.

There is very little awareness of changing legislation, for example the Disability Discrimination Act, and the repercussions for the industry, or of specific initiatives like the Broadcasting and Creative Industries Disability Network Manifesto and the BBC’s Extend Scheme. Recommended action focused on: raising awareness and facilitating better relationships between the media and lobby groups; addressing the supply of disabled actors; encouraging greater employment of disabled people in the industry; and training and education.

1.11 Frequency and type of portrayals

Representation of disability has remained stable since 1999 at around 11% of programmes. Viewer perceptions of portrayals, therefore, are based on their extremely limited experience of this low level of inclusion.

Viewers perceive there to be greater representation in some genres such as documentaries, news stories, and drama, but feel some programme types, eg, game and quiz shows, demonstrate very little inclusion. Content analysis confirms viewer perceptions that portrayals are most frequent in fiction and factual programming, followed by news and film.

Additionally, viewers perceive bias in the types of disabilities shown, and that marginalisation of certain groups, for example, those with

disfigurements, remains. This perception is endorsed by content analysis which shows that portrayals, especially in major roles, are mainly limited to mobility impairments e.g. wheelchair users. Some disabilities, of course, are hard to represent because they are not visible eg, diabetes.

Viewers demonstrate a high degree of acceptance of greater visibility of disabled people on screen. Seventy nine percent of respondents said it would not bother them if a disabled person read the main evening news, and 63% thought it would be good to see more disabled presenters on different programmes.

All the children interviewed in phase one were categorised as *Transformers* in terms of their outlook and attitudes. They are searching for disabled role models on television, but it is likely that they are struggling to find many examples. It is vital that children are provided with positive portrayals of disability, particularly within the children's genre.

The professionals interviewed are inclined to believe that audiences are not ready to accept an increase in disability portrayals yet, but this research suggests that the majority of viewers are open to greater representation than they are seeing on screen at present.

2 BACKGROUND

Thinking and policy in relation to disability has moved on over the last few years. The main broadcasters and other stakeholders have renewed their commitment to greater representation of disabled people on screen (and air) through more portrayals, and by increasing the number of disabled people working within the industry. This commitment took the form of a manifesto which was launched in May 2002 by the Broadcasting and Creative Industries Disability Network (BCIDN). The full impact of this manifesto may not yet be visible on our screens, but to assist broadcasters and programme makers in achieving its long-term aims, the Independent Television Commission (ITC), Broadcasting Standards Commission (BSC) and the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) jointly commissioned some new research in this area. This new study sought to move beyond current learning by segmenting the viewing audience according to attitudes and expectations as a means of determining what the key barriers are for different viewers in terms of their acceptance of greater representation of disabled people on screen, and how any barriers might be overcome.

The research consisted of three phases.

- i) The first phase involved focus groups, mini groups, paired depths and individual interviews with members of the public, mainly disabled people, but including some non-disabled participants as well as non-disabled carers. Disabled participants varied in age, gender and whether they had been born with a disability or acquired a disability through illness or accident. Participants included those with mobility impairments and/or sensory impairments. The area of mental health was beyond the scope of this study and not included in the research. The sample of 96 participants was segmented into different categories according to their attitudes towards disability, and taking account also of their opinion of the role of television. These categories were used throughout the various stages of this project. Phase one was conducted by Define Solutions Limited. Fieldwork took place in January and February 2003.
- ii) The second phase consisted of a self-completion postal survey which was sent to a broadcast industry panel of over 4,000 people recruited to be representative of the UK population (see Appendix II for sample and methodology) in terms of age, sex, socio-economic class, working status. Disability is not a

recruitment criteria, however, so the sample was not expected to be completely representative of the true prevalence of disabled people in society. The total sample was split into the categories identified in the qualitative phase to provide an indication of the proportions of each group in society. Phase two was managed by Daniel Lewis of Ipsos-RSL.

- iii) The third phase involved executive interviews with a selection of professionals working within the broadcast industry. The specific objective was to review the representation of disabled people on television from the viewpoint of broadcasting professionals. Professionals were selected to ensure a mix by job function, channels and experience of the issues. They represented a broad spectrum from ‘commentators’, who included individuals recognised to be knowledgeable about disability and its representation eg, journalists who write about disability issues, disability experts or spokespeople who work within the broadcast industry, and disability activists who are members of relevant lobby groups, think-tanks, non-governmental organisations or charities; to casting directors and commissioning editors with no particular interest in the issue. The latter were important given the need to reflect the industry as a whole (see Appendix II for details of the sample). Opinion Leader Research was commissioned to conduct 23 in-depth interviews during March/April 2003.

Additionally, Appendix I contains an analysis of disability portrayals on terrestrial television for the years 1997 to 2002, published as part of a long-running series of content analysis studies conducted by the Broadcasting Standards Commission, more recently in conjunction with the Independent Television Commission⁴ and British Broadcasting Corporation. The analysis samples two weeks of programming between 1730 – midnight. It provides a ‘snapshot’ (not a full) picture of the level and types of portrayal of disability on television over the last five years.

⁴ eg, *The Depiction of Violence on Television; The Representation of Minorities on Television*.

3 OBJECTIVES

3.1 Phase one (qualitative): Disabled and able-bodied participants

The key objective of the first phase was to provide a thorough and comprehensive understanding of the representation of disabled people on television.

Other specific objectives included:

- To look at differences in attitude and acceptance between different types of viewer.
- To explore disabled and non-disabled people's perceptions of the representation of disabled people across different genres.
- To identify current barriers to acceptance and inclusion and provide specific direction on how obstacles may be overcome.
- To look more specifically at comedy to evaluate the boundaries for humour, which can be controversial in relation to sensitive issues such as disability.
- To provide guidance on what language is considered appropriate in reference to disability.
- To look at the acceptance of representation in advertising.

3.2 Phase two (quantitative): General public

The objectives of the quantitative survey were:

- To discover what proportions of the population fall into the different attitude types identified in phase one.
- To identify any statistical differences between these different groups in their attitudes towards representation.

3.3 Phase three (qualitative): Broadcasting professionals

The overriding objective for phase three involving executive interviews was to understand how broadcasting professionals from different backgrounds and genres see the representation of disabled people on television, and offer direction to increase inclusion.

The detailed objectives were to explore:

- Perceptions of changes in the industry eg, is there a growing acceptance of disabled actors?
- The issue of ‘inclusion’, specifically the barriers to having more disabled people on screen.
- Anecdotal experience of where representation of disabled people has worked well, and where it has been less successful.
- Recommendations for the future.

4 DIFFERENCES BETWEEN VIEWER TYPES

4.1 Phase one

Ninety-six members of the public were recruited via local disability groups and through street recruitment to take part in the initial qualitative phase of the study. The sample included a mix of men, women and children, socio-economic groups, and light, medium and heavy viewers of television. Disabled participants included those who had been born disabled and those who had acquired a disability. Those with mobility impairments differed in terms of the severity of their impairment. Some were 'self transferers' in that they could get themselves in and out of their wheelchair, while others required assistance. Deaf participants included both deaf lip readers and deaf signers. All held a range of attitudes towards their disability. Political activists (those representing particular organisations, or lobby groups) and rejecters of television were excluded.

In addition to disabled participants, two groups were held with voluntary carers and relatives of those with disabilities, as well as two groups with non-disabled members of the public. See Appendix II for more detail of the sample and methodology.

The entire sample was segmented according to attitude towards disability and also towards the role of television and disability representation. See Appendix II for the defining attitude statements.

Five core attitudinal types were identified among the 96 participants, who varied distinctly in their reactions to disability and to media representation of it. The defining characteristics of each group of people are summarised here.

a) *Issue Driven*

Issue Driven tend to be older disabled people, but non-disabled carers also feature in this category. The members of this group are quite angry with society, which they feel is prejudiced against disabled people. They see disability and the representation of disability within society as a ‘cause’ that needs to be promoted and supported. They feel society needs to be educated regarding every aspect of different disabilities. They believe it is important to promote understanding, empathy and inclusion. *Issue Driven* think that the majority of non-disabled people do not accept disabled people and do not understand them. They are focused on the existence of prejudice and, therefore, come from a defensive standpoint. This group tends to be vocal and active about disability issues within, and on behalf of, the disabled community.

“There’s a great deal to say. I could write you an epic.”
(Female, 30-60, carer, Midlands)

The qualitative research deliberately screened out strong political ‘activists’, so the discussion groups did not comprise hard core lobbyists, but this is where such people would naturally sit. The group of *Issue Driven* participants were lobbying to some extent – complaining in writing, signing petitions, etc. Many in this group were undertaking training in areas such as public speaking; taking advantage of the greater number of opportunities for speaking out on behalf of disabled people that have presented themselves in recent years.

“We get involved with various types of voluntary work to promote awareness of disabled issues...and do disabled awareness training with able-bodied people.”
(Female, 35-60, mobility impairment, North)

In terms of the role of television, the *Issue Driven* see it as an important and influential medium for change in society in relation to disability. Their focus is on education – on what it is like to be disabled, and on demonstrating integration, for example, by showing disabled people on a par with non-disabled people in every possible way.

“Everybody watches TV. It’s very important that people see what it’s like for disabled people and how they want to be treated.”
(Female, 50-70, mobility impairment, South)

“In soaps like Emmerdale with Chris Tate in a wheelchair, they don’t show reality. You never see him struggle to get in a building or through a doorway or out of his chair or anything like that. Small things that would help the public realise what it’s like. Otherwise it’s tokenism.”

(Female, 25-55 years, mobility impairment, South)

The survey found that *Issue Driven* viewers have a perception that there is less representation on television than other groups perceive there to be. They are dissatisfied with current portrayals and are seeking to drive society towards full integration and normalisation, which is perhaps why they have a greater sense of disabled people being underrepresented.

Issue Driven professionals interviewed in phase three consisted primarily of disabled commentators and activists. The members of this group were keenly aware of low levels of representation on television and unhappy about the dominance of non-disabled actors in disabled roles eg, Kenny, a disabled character in the Channel 4 drama *The Book Group*. They were critical also of what they perceived to be poor, unrealistic and negative portrayals. They cited the example of Chris Tate in *Emmerdale* who is bitter about his impairment and never seen struggling up the steps of the local pub.

b) *Transformers*

The second group are called *Transformers* and are distinctly different from *Issue Driven*. The group comprises mainly younger disabled people, and includes many of the children who took part in phase one. Some carers also fitted this category. The focus of *Transformers* is on creating and taking advantage of opportunities and maximising their potential. *Transformers* present themselves as agents of change, so their emphasis is very much on inclusion, rather than representation, and on being able to prove themselves as people who can compete on the same level as non-disabled people.

“I go to drama classes. I’m the only disabled person there. I go to karate and do what I can. I don’t like to feel I can’t do the things I want to do.”

(Female, 18-35, mobility impairment, North)

Disabled *Transformers* see their disability as a part of life, but they do not define themselves by it. In many instances, particularly among the young people interviewed, they associate themselves

primarily with non-disabled society. *Transformers* recognise disability as an issue in flux and are, therefore, more open-minded than *Issue Driven*. They see disability as an integral part of their life. They recognise shifts in representation and inclusion in general, and are aware of the conflict over the blanket labelling of people with a variety of impairments as ‘disabled’. *Transformers* are tuned to the need to acknowledge the huge degree of variation within disability and the diversity between different individuals.

“Using the word ‘disability’...sometimes there’s an advantage – like when it comes to the Disability Discrimination Act. But we do have our own specific needs too, which are important to recognise in their own right, or we’re still really marginalised.”
(Male, 30-40, sensory impairment, South)

In terms of their level of activity, *Transformers* are working to create and take advantage of opportunities. They are looking also for role models. They understand the power of role models in changing people’s mind-sets and will present or see themselves as inspirational examples.

“You may need to take a few knocks but if you’re really persistent you can cut right through – look at some of those athletes.”
(Female, 30-60, carer, South)

Television is seen as a critical vehicle to assisting change at all levels. But where *Issue Driven* participants talk of television as a means to educate and promote integration, *Transformers* concentrate on television as an employer, and on the advancement of opportunities for disabled people at all levels. They are interested in the educational content of programming, but, additionally, they are looking specifically for both role models and normalisation.

“There should definitely be more disabled actors – then I’d stand a chance of being one.”
(Boy, 9-10, mobility impairment, South)

“I would hate to go on a show with all disabled or all visually impaired. Then it becomes a goldfish bowl. We don’t want a gawping circus. What we want is to be shown living ordinary lives with ordinary people.”
(Female, 30-45, sensory impairment, South)

There were a few *Transformer* professionals in the sample interviewed in phase three. These were disabled professionals

working within the broadcast industry. They pointed to their own successful careers within television as evidence of how disability need not compromise an individual's ability to make a valued contribution to society. They are often a point of contact for programme makers wanting the considered opinion of a disabled person, to inform the production of a programme. But they believe that quality of portrayal and level of representation will only improve if disabled people are involved at every level of the creative and production process. They consider that levels of representation would rise significantly if there were some disabled commissioning editors.

“Yes, okay there are people stuck at home on benefits and there are people who have got problems getting from A to B, or who can't find a disabled parking space in a supermarket, but equally, there are disabled journalists, lawyers, doctors, etc. And where are they on our screen?” (Producer)

c) *Progressives*

The third group is *Progressives*. This group tends to consist of younger, non-disabled people, and some carers. Overall, *Progressives* are more educated, and middle class; demographic data from the survey tend to support this. *Progressives* contain the highest proportion of ABs (professionals and managers) out of all the attitude types. This is a key socio-economic group sought after by advertisers.

Like *Transformers*, *Progressives* see disability as an issue in flux. They can see change in representation and inclusion and they applaud it. These people are the early adopters of changes in thinking and behaviour. They embrace change in practice and take notice of things they can do to support inclusion and representation.

“Versus 20 years ago, there have been some real improvements. I think people will listen and make an effort. There'll always be some prejudice, which is a shame. But I think we'll probably have to put up with it.”

(Female, 30-45, sensory impairment, South)

Progressives are also aware of diversity within disability. They are able to recall different types of physical and mental disabilities and they recognise people as having different needs, within the broad category 'disabled people'. They appreciate that there is enormous variation in intellectual capability, for example,

including high achievers. They certainly see mental health impairment as a separate issue, one which may be combined with a physical disability, but which, in most cases, is not.

Progressives are very reactive. They are not proactive like *Transformers* or *Issue Driven*. The strength of their activity is in word-of-mouth support. They observe society and comment as they go along. But this low level activity is encouraging change of behaviour, so they are demonstrating progression at another level.

“I’m all for it...I don’t have much contact with anyone who’s disabled, but anyone should be able to have a go and if I can help I will.”

(Male, 20s, non-disabled, North)

Again, they regard television as a powerful medium to assist progress. They are focused on both education and normalisation, with a desire for both, rather than a concentration on one or the other.

“You do see more now, and yeah it’s good. We’ve got a disabled guy at work and it’s just not an issue. People respect him – that’s probably got something to do with better representation all round.”

(Male, 20-35, non-disabled, South)

Most of the professionals interviewed were classified either as *Progressives* or *Followers*. *Progressive* professionals included non-disabled script writers, directors, producers and commissioning editors who had worked on programmes engaged with the issue of disability, and/or had cast disabled actors in specialist or mainstream television dramas and comedies eg, *Flesh and Blood*, *Yes Sir*, *I Can Boogie*, *Celebrity Wheelchair Challenge*, *Holby City*, *Wish You Were Here* and *The Heaven and Earth Show*. The members of this group are extremely keen for television to be representative of its audience and they are well informed of the arguments that call for greater visibility of disabled people, ethnic minorities, gay people and women. They sometimes acknowledge that they have a typical non-disabled, white, middle class, liberal perspective and that their outlook is limited given that they themselves are not disabled people. However, they are well motivated to adopt change. They believe that interesting and engaging stories can be told about barriers, prejudice and the development of human relationships between disabled and non-disabled people. They place a great deal of emphasis on casting disabled actors and performers and on opening up opportunities to disabled people who would like to work in television production.

They have positive relationships with lobby groups who they may consult for research purposes.

“I believe that TV should reflect all parts of our society...At its best it overrides and transcends race, colour, people’s social circumstances, people’s intellectual abilities and any disabilities they have, so I think it’s enormously important to reflect everybody in society on television.” (Commissioning Editor)

d) Followers

The fourth group is called *Followers*. These people identify primarily with mainstream, non-disabled society. There are some carers who are *Followers*, but these tend to be family members who inadvertently have fallen into caring for someone with a disability, rather than chosen it as a vocation. There are very few disabled people in this group (just 1% according to the survey in phase two).

Followers lack a specific interest in disability. It may be that, as with carers in this group, they have come across disabled people in their life and have learnt to deal with it, but beyond that it is not a cause or an issue. As far as they are concerned it is incidental to the rest of their lives. This is illustrated by their lack of awareness of diversity within disability. They tend to focus very much on obvious disabilities, talking about ‘people in wheelchairs’, or ‘the blind or deaf’. They are unable to recall specific conditions or how these might vary.

“Well, I don’t know anyone with a disability. I’ve nothing against them, I just don’t know much about it.”
(Male, 20-35, non-disabled, South)

Followers are passive, but they will accommodate change as they follow the flow of opinion leaders. They represent around a quarter of the viewing audience (26%) according to the survey conducted in phase two, and their opinion and behaviour is mainly influenced by what is going on in society at large.

Television is very important here in terms of influencing their opinion. But *Followers* themselves see the role of television as primarily about entertainment. It has an educational role because of the existence of programmes such as documentaries and the news, but these are of low interest to them. They would not choose to watch a documentary specifically on disability, but

would not necessarily reject an entertainment programme that contained a disabled participant, for example.

“I think TV is really about entertainment. I don’t want to watch things that aren’t entertaining. What’s the point?”
(Female, 50-70, mobility impairment, South)

Follower professionals are non-disabled professionals who produce or commission mainstream programming and have little or no experience of depicting disabled characters or working with disabled people in a professional capacity. They are open to the suggestion that the level of representation of disabled people on television is low and may support the idea that television should be more representative of the different groups in society. However, they are not particularly engaged in disability as a political issue as it is not top-of-mind for this group.

“Well if I’m honest, I suppose it’s not something I’ve given a massive amount of thought to, which may be partly because of my genre [Sport], or maybe because of other things that you’ve just mentioned – ethnicity and issues of sexual representation – these seem to loom larger in my own life generally and are more regular themes of discussion in my life I suppose.”
(Commissioning Editor)

Follower professionals are aware of the educative power of television, but they think the primary function of the medium is to entertain and to cater for the widest possible audience. They are not particularly sensitive to portrayals which may perpetuate paternal myths. For example, they do not think it is offensive to emphasise ‘bravery’ and ‘determination’ when depicting disabled people in sports coverage or entertainment shows. They tend to think that disability is largely defined by ‘loss’ and feel realistic portrayals will show how awkward and difficult it is to be disabled. They regard disabled viewers as having specialised interests and different needs to non-disabled viewers, so they see the solution to catering for a disabled audience as ‘stand alone’ disability seasons and specialist programming.

e) *Traditionalists*

The last relevant group are the *Traditionalists*. They are represented strongly among the older non-disabled, including carers, but there are also disabled people in this category. The survey in phase two suggests that 17% of those holding traditionalist attitudes are disabled people. (Note: disabled people

are underrepresented on the survey; 9% as opposed to 14-15% in society.) The thing that sets *Traditionalists* apart is that they have embedded, firm beliefs about a whole range of other prejudices, for example, sexism and racism. They are set in their ways and exhibit a lot of prejudice and stereotyping, irrespective of whether they are disabled or not. This prejudice or stereotyping is not necessarily directed at disabled people.

“Well, we’ve got black people reading the news now – people like Trevor McDonald.”

(Female, 30-60, carer, South)

“When people get a disability they lose their quality of life.”

(Female, carer, 45-65, Midlands)

The classic disabled stereotypes prevail among non-disabled *Traditionalists*. They tend to see disabled people as victims, as being disadvantaged and, at worst, as second class citizens. They have limited awareness of disabled people as people in their own right. They have a tendency to see them as a homogenous group and to view them simplistically as wheelchair users or as needing a structural prop of some kind, such as a white stick. Very often they will assume that people with physical disabilities also have mental disabilities.

Effectively, disabled *Traditionalists* are stuck in the past. They are focused on traditional issues. When asked about representation and inclusion they often still talk primarily about access and transport issues, referring to areas where, in many cases, there have been progress, which they have not necessarily recognised. They are unable to address or think about inclusion and representation at any higher level.

Non-disabled *Traditionalists* are passive. But they differ from *Followers* in that they can be quite resistant to change. They are set in their ways and do not like their beliefs and perceptions to be challenged. They tend to have closed social circles of like-minded people. Disabled *Traditionalists* will be vocal within their own community, but are unlikely to voice opinions beyond it. And, as stated above, their views tend to be traditionally based, rather than progressive.

As with *Followers*, the role of television for *Traditionalists* is primarily about entertainment. Nevertheless, there is an acceptance that television also has an educational role through factual genres, and for non-disabled *Traditionalists* in particular,

television is one of the few means by which their belief system may be challenged. However, they are prone to switching away from material that they feel is not for them or that challenges what they think they already know or believe.

“I turn that off – don’t like it. I don’t like the way he moves his head – no.”

(Female, 35-60, non-disabled, South)

Only one or two professionals interviewed showed evidence of a *Traditionalist’s* perspective. These were mainly engaged with casting on popular mainstream commercial channels. Their views and opinions demonstrate that they are fearful of disability, especially people with mental health problems. They define disabled people *by* their disability and see them as facing challenges as a result of their impairment, rather than society’s failure to accommodate difference. They are uncomfortable with the politicisation of disability and suspicious of ‘political correctness’. They think language describing disability or impairment is there to ‘catch them out’. They view barriers to inclusion, such as inaccessible film sets, time and money for extra support, the lack of suitable roles, etc, as insurmountable problems and are disengaged from initiatives in the industry aimed at promoting the inclusion of disabled people.

f) *In-Stasis*

A sixth category was named *In-Stasis*, but is excluded from the research analysis. These people have become disabled recently. For them, disability, as an issue, is just too difficult a concept at the moment. They are still trying to find ways to come to terms with being disabled, so they find it hard to consider disability objectively. This group, at present, are completely focused on themselves, understandably so because of the emotional trauma they have experienced and are still dealing with.

“Sorry, I don’t want to elaborate on my disability – it all happened recently and I don’t like talking about it in detail.”

(Female, 35-60, mobility impairment, North)

“I only lost my sight last year. I don’t think of myself as disabled. I’ve gone blind and I’m finding it very difficult. I lost my job. It’s changed my life.”

(Male, 30-45, sensory impairment, South)

Where television is concerned, the *In-Stasis* group actively choose not to connect with representations of disability because it is too painful for them to identify themselves as disabled. For these reasons, although those *In-Stasis* took part in the research, their attitudes have not been included in the analysis of responses to representations of disability on screen.

g) Children

The children interviewed were classified mainly as *Transformers* in terms of their outlook. To a degree this reflects current trends in education, support and schooling, which encourage disabled children to consider themselves as having special abilities and parity with non-disabled society. Indeed, some of the more mildly disabled children preferred to identify with the non-disabled population.

“We’re quite lucky with what we’ve got. The only difference is that we may find things slightly harder than the average Joe Bloggs... We’re not really that disabled at all”.

(Boy, 14-15, mobility impairment, Midlands)

“It doesn’t really stop me doing anything really, I just get on and do it...”

(Boy, 13-14, mobility impairment, Midlands)

“We try and ignore it [disability]. We try and act ‘normal’.”

(Girl, 13-14, mobility impairment, South)

Their viewing habits were in line with non-disabled children; they watch programmes which reflect their general interests. Younger children like programmes associated with their favourite toys and activities and they enjoy cartoons, wrestling, robots, etc. Older boys (aged 12+) like natural history programmes, music, sci-fi, and military topics. *Holby City* and *Casualty* were enjoyed by some but others disliked the reminder of being in hospital, especially if they attended hospital on a regular basis. Girls aged 12 years and over like programmes such as *Friends*, *Buffy*, *Stars in their Eyes*, *Hollyoaks*, *Airport*, animal documentaries and even *Footballers’ Wives*.

There were differences in viewing habits for the more severely visually impaired children, whose programming needs are slightly different. They require more audio-commentary, or particularly well-executed story telling to be able to follow ‘stories’. They felt there was a lack of programming available for them.

“I think they ought to have more audio commentaries on the telly like the ones I’ve got. Then I could follow it more and watch more TV. I hate the ones where I can’t understand, I have to shout at everyone to shut up and then Mum gets cross with me!”
(Boy, 9-10, visually impaired, South)

The issues disabled children raised were linked to the fact that they feel there are too many stereotyped portrayals of disabled people that they cannot aspire to. Examples mentioned included characters such as Chris Tate in *Emmerdale* who bemoans his lot, or ‘victims’ like Adam in *Hollyoaks*.

Lack of incidental inclusion was a particular issue for teenagers because of their desire, most of all, to be treated like everyone else. They want other people to be shown coverage that encourages them to treat disabled people like everyone else.

“Show me at a party. Show me eating chocolate. Don’t treat me differently or show someone talking over me.”
(Girl, 14-15, mobility impairment, Midlands)

“Otherwise other people won’t really see what disabled people are like.”
(Girl, 13-14, mobility impairment, South)

Lack of realism also irritated. Teenagers believe there is not enough use of programmes to educate non-disabled people about disability, without drawing attention to it or focusing on it unnecessarily. Examples of lack of realism included, miraculous cures, lack of attention to the day-to-day realities of life eg, getting up stairs, never seeing disabled people working, etc.

Teenagers expressed a desire for ‘strong, independent role models’. They are exceptionally sensitive to portrayals which they deem to be patronising. As much as anything, this seems to reflect personal issues around friends/family taking over, or others deferring to parents/friends rather than talking to them personally.

“Sometimes when they have disabled people on TV they talk over them.”
(Boy, 14-15, mobility impairment, Midlands)

“People should let disabled people talk not talk over the top. They need to listen.”

(Girl, 13-14, mobility impairment, South)

4.2 Phase two

4.2.1 Quantitative demographics

A self-completion, postal survey was placed on a broadcast industry panel of over 4,000 people, recruited to be representative of the UK population in terms of sex, age, socio-economic class, etc. Disability is not a recruitment criteria so disabled people are underrepresented on the panel. Nine percent claimed to be disabled as opposed to the correct level of between 14-15% in society. The panel members are recruited to provide broadcasters with feedback on programmes and related broadcast issues. They are not asked to change their viewing habits in any way, so aside from completing a questionnaire once a week, they are no different to other members of the public. The response rate for the survey was around 75% of questionnaires mailed out.

The aim of the survey was to validate some of the findings of the qualitative research by segmenting respondents into the five category types: *Issue Driven*, *Transformers*, *Progressives*, *Followers* and *Traditionalists*, to provide some indication of the proportions of these groups in society.

Responses to the defining attitude statements for the five identified groups resulted in the following proportions: *Issue Driven* (14%), *Transformers* (9%), *Progressives* (36%), *Followers* (26%) and *Traditionalists* (15%). Initially, at phase one of the research, it was thought that *Followers* and *Traditionalists* were the groups most likely to form the majority of the general viewing public. But the survey found that there are many more *Progressives* (36%) in the population, ie, people embracing diversity principles, than anticipated.

There are no significant demographic differences between the groups. *Progressives* contained the most even spread of socio-economic groups with a slight bias towards ABs. Nine percent of the sample (358 people) claimed to be disabled themselves, rising to 16% of those aged 65+ as a result of the fact that many people acquire a disability with age. Disability was strongly linked to lower socio-economic status with 15% of DEs claiming to be disabled compared to 6% of ABs. This reflects the fact that disabled people are likely to be older, but also have more difficulty finding employment than similarly qualified able-bodied people.

4.2.2 Proximity to disability

Overall, 20% of the sample (762 people) said a close member of their family was disabled. 34% said they knew someone who was disabled, and 7% said they worked in the area of disability or with someone who was disabled. Thirty-nine per cent had no association with anyone who was disabled. This was particularly the case for those aged 25-34, almost half of whom (49%) had no connection with a disabled person.

Looking at proximity to disability across the five attitudinal types, *Followers* are the least likely to know anyone with a disability; 74% say they do not know anyone who is disabled, while the *Issue Driven* are the most likely to have a close family member who is disabled (30%). (Note: respondents were not given a definition of disability, but left to their own interpretation. As a result, many may not realise how embracing the term is by legal definition, eg, they may not realise it includes mental illness, diabetes, dyslexia, etc.)

Disabled people are more likely to fall into the categories *Traditionalists* (of whom 17% are disabled), *Transformers* (of whom 16% are disabled), and *Issue Driven* (of whom 15% are disabled). *Progressives* (9%) and *Followers* (1%) contain far fewer disabled people, therefore, these groups tend to represent more of the mainstream (ie, non-disabled) audience.

5 CURRENT REPRESENTATION OF DISABILITY

5.1 Perceived levels of representation

The types of disability that most participants in phase one felt attracted greatest awareness, in society and on television, were mobility impairments, especially wheelchair users, amputees, and those with cerebral palsy. These types were the ones participants felt most aware of and considered to be fairly well represented. It is important to bear in mind that these are the perceptions of mainly disabled members of the public and carers. This may not be the case among the more general viewing population.

Variation starts to exist with more marginalised disabled groups, however. Participants could give limited examples of particular programmes they had seen which featured a specific disability. For example, there was spontaneous recall of a documentary about people with a condition caused by Thalidomide, but this was more anecdotal. Some disabilities such as heart disease and muscular dystrophy were thought to have been brought to the fore via the existence and profile of charities or organisations campaigning on their behalf. But representation on television of these kinds of disabilities was felt to be minimal.

Mental disability was an interesting area where there was seen to be quite a high level of representation overall, both in society generally and on television, but this was teamed with a lack of detail or knowledge about the diversity within this category of disability. (Note: the whole area of mental health was beyond the scope of this study and not covered in the research.)

Sensory disabilities such as blindness and deafness was another area where it was felt there was room for improvement in terms of representation. The main perception was that blindness is still not included enough on television or in society. Blind people felt ostracised.

“Things with audio commentary have improved watching telly a lot but they’re few and far between really... blind characters? Can’t recall any – one or two in films perhaps.”

(Female, 30-45, sensory impairment, South)

Deafness was seen to be more included on television, for example, there was awareness of specific programmes targeted at deaf audiences, such as the BBC’s *See Hear* and *VeeTV* on Channel 4.

Nevertheless, deaf people still felt excluded in terms of the range of representations on screen. Views varied among deaf participants. Deaf signers, for example, saw themselves as incredibly marginalised and excluded from society, which to some extent is a result of the fact that their main channel of communication is a language other than spoken English ie, British Sign Language. For lip readers it was a little different. Their main channel of communication is English, so the lip readers we spoke to felt less cut off from the non-deaf population and had more of a sense of inclusion. Deaf lip readers were happy that increased subtitling meant that they had more access to programmes but they felt that in terms of representation, portrayals of deaf people in a variety of roles was sorely lacking.

“There is very little representation of deaf people in society generally. We are not well understood by the hearing community.”
(Female, 30-40, deaf signer, South)

“I would say that there just aren’t deaf people on TV except on See Hear. I can’t think of any examples except in the occasional film.”
(Female, 30-40, deaf signer, South)

5.2 Spontaneous recall of examples

There was a high number of programmes that participants could talk about, but much of the recall was general programming, rather than documentaries or special seasons such as the autumn 2002 BBC collection of programmes called *What’s Your Problem?* specifically about disability issues, which had taken place just prior to fieldwork. The sorts of things participants spontaneously remembered included programmes and characters from a considerable time ago, such as Sandy, a character in *Crossroads* who ended up using a wheelchair as a result of an accident. *Mark Sabre* and *Malcolm in the Middle* were also mentioned spontaneously.

But, additionally, there were more recent examples recalled across a range of genres. All groups sensed that there are more roles with a focus beyond the character’s disability emerging.

“In The Bill they had that Downs Syndrome girl and she was fantastic.”
(Female, 30-60, carer, South)

“I was stunned...an anaesthetist in Holby City...about bloody time!”
[an anaesthetist in the programme is a wheelchair user]
(Female, 25-55, mobility impairment, South)

There is felt to be quite strong representation in drama and documentaries, as well as in some current affairs programming, for example, via a disabled guest speaker or expert. But the limitations of some of these examples were mentioned. For example, respondents commented on the fact that characters in soaps are usually only temporarily disabled.

Reference to a character in *Home & Away*:

“They didn’t think about it did they? He didn’t look like he needed a wheelchair; he never left the room.”

(Male, 14-15, mobility impairment, Midlands)

Recall of representation of disability among children was mostly confined to soaps, which feature heavily in their viewing, together with the occasional special interest documentary. Children are keen for disability to be normalised within society, but do not feel that soaps do a very good job. They perceive storylines to focus on the disability rather than on the character.

The genre children were most positive about was sport eg, coverage of the Commonwealth Games in Manchester, and programmes where disabled people are seen to have physical capabilities comparable with non-disabled people.

“It’s good to show that disabled people can throw just like everyone else.”

(Girl, 13-14, mobility impairment, South)

There are some genres, such as game shows, where participants feel there is very little representation of disabled people, which rankles. They feel they are being put at an unfair disadvantage and unable to access the sorts of opportunities that non-disabled people are given. *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?* was cited as an example of a show where it was rare to see a disabled contestant.

“I think the fastest finger thing is one of the unfairest things I’ve seen. Suppose you’ve either got arthritis in your hand or you’re someone with no hands. Why shouldn’t such people be able to participate? They couldn’t do the fastest finger. They should be testing people’s mental capacity, not whether they can press a button.”

(Female, 30-45, sensory impairment (blind), South)

Children also spontaneously raised poor levels of representation in game shows and felt similarly that they were being denied the same opportunities as non-disabled viewers.

“I’d really like to be on The Weakest Link to show what knowledge disabled people have.”

(Girl, 14-15, mobility impairment, South)

Awareness of ‘ground breaking’ programmes, where disability has been portrayed for the first time, was high among professionals, but they struggled to recollect a large number of portrayals depicting disability as normalised and fully integrated.

“I think there’s probably not a wide enough range of disabled characters – you don’t see a lot of disabled characters in drama do you? And I’m hard pressed to think of any disabled presenters.”

(Commissioning Editor)

Messiah was mentioned as one example of normalisation. This BBC1 television drama featured a deaf character who signed to her husband, but her hearing impairment was a non-issue within the storyline and never explained. Another example cited by professionals was a character in the BBC’s *Grange Hill* with cerebral palsy, played by actress Francesca Martinez. The character attends a mainstream school and is fully integrated into society. Another example, provided by professionals, was the child in *Malcolm in the Middle* (BBC2 and Sky), who is in a wheelchair but whose condition is never expanded upon. These portrayals are seen by most professionals as fostering inclusion and acceptance through the depiction of fully developed characters without reference to their disability.

5.3 Perceptions of the frequency of portrayals in different genres

Respondents in the postal survey were presented with a list of different types of programmes and asked for each type how often they thought it featured people, characters or actors with a disability.

The genre thought to show disabled people most often was factual programming in the form of documentaries, with discussion shows like *Kilroy* or *Trisha* perceived to be the next most likely genre to include disabled people. News programmes were felt to cover stories about disabled people or issues relating to disability on a fairly regular basis by an average of just over four in ten viewers. Around a third, or slightly more, viewers thought disabled people featured in film and drama fairly often. Other genres were seen to have far fewer portrayals with some genres such as cookery and gardening programmes and quiz and game shows being perceived to contain minimal representation (see Table 1 for a full list of responses). Representation of disabled people in children's programming was considered rare also.

Importantly, the survey data reinforce the qualitative findings (phase one), that there are significant differences between what the various types (*Issue Driven* versus *Traditionalists*, etc) think of the quality of portrayals, and the extent to which they meet their expectations. *Issue Driven* were found to be critical viewers with a strong sense that current representation is 'not good enough'. Across all programme genres, they are the group most likely to point out the infrequency of portrayals of disabled people or characters. In particular, they perceive far fewer portrayals compared to other groups in: news stories – 37% think news frequently/often contains disability representation; film – 30% think film frequently/often contains disability representation; and drama – 22% think drama frequently/often contains disability representation.

Transformers, however, perceive a greater level of representation than other viewers. Disability is a significant issue to them because they are disabled themselves, because a close family member is disabled, or because they know someone with a disability. Young disabled people from the qualitative research mainly fell into this category. They are looking for role models on television and are actively seeking out representation.

The BSC, ITC and BBC conducted a content analysis study which documents the actual levels of disability representation across the five terrestrial channels between 1997 and 2002 (see Appendix I). The analysis is based on a two week sample of peak time programming (1730 – midnight) for each year. This study used broader genre categories, and the data are not completely comparable, but some comparisons with viewer perceptions are possible (see Table 1). The analysis shows that representation of disability is extremely modest overall; just over one in ten programmes contain some level of representation.

Factual programmes contain the highest representation, followed by fiction and then news and film. The genre 'entertainment' has consistently contained very little representation. This picture is broadly in line with viewers' impressions.

Importantly, due to the time period sampled (1730-midnight) most children's programmes were excluded, so it is difficult to know how much representation there is in this genre. Portrayals of disability are extremely important for the child audience, however. All the children interviewed in phase one were categorised as *Transformers* in terms of their outlook and attitudes. They are seeking positive role models, so it is vital that their audience needs are served.

Additionally, the content analysis reveals that mobility related disabilities are the most commonly represented overall, particularly when it comes to major roles (see Appendix I for more detail).

Table 1 Perceived frequency of portrayal of disabled people in different genres versus actual portrayals

| Survey programme categories | Total % saying frequently or often contain portrayals | Content analysis genres | Actual % portrayals in programming 2002 |
|---|--|--------------------------------|--|
| Base = 3,274 – 3,632 | | | |
| Documentaries | 60 | Factual | 25 |
| Chat show | 47 | | |
| News (stories) | 43 | News progs | 17 |
| Films | 37 | Films | 9 |
| Drama | 32 | Drama | 16 |
| Magazine | 32 | | |
| Soaps | 28 | Soaps | 18 |
| Religious | 27 | Religion | - |
| Comedy | 15 | Comedy | 11 |
| Children's | 14 | Children's | n/a |
| Arts | 13 | | |
| Quiz | 13 | Entertainment | 5 |
| News (the news reader) | 9 | | |
| Gardening | 8 | Sport | - |
| Cookery | 6 | | |
| DIY programmes | 5 | | |
| NB: Content analysis data is taken from: <i>Content Analysis 1997-2002. Representation of Disabled People On Terrestrial Television</i> (Appendix I), BSC, ITC and BBC report, June 2003. | | | |

6 EXPECTATIONS OF TELEVISION

The different attitude types vary in their perceptions of the quality of representation on and their requirements and expectations from television.

6.1 *Issue Driven's* expectations

Issue Driven are 'tick box driven' – they are looking to tick off ways in which a particular representation has got it right, or, alternatively, got it wrong. When talking about representation in the qualitative research, *Issue Driven* refer to things like inaccuracy, lack of realism, and are sensitive to detail and irritated by mistakes. *Issue Driven* are the ones most likely to complain if television gets it wrong. They also refer to wanting representation 'warts and all'. They want graphic details and do not believe in hiding things from non-disabled people about what it is truly like to be disabled.

They also talk about tokenism. They see incidental inclusion – which for other people is a way of normalisation – as tokenistic. They also see a lack of diversity within disability and want more types of disability to be shown. They perceive that often disabled characters are portrayed at opposite ends of the spectrum – either as goodies or as baddies. They want more than one-dimensional characterisations. *Issue Driven* are appalled at blunders which they regard as evidence of prejudice and a lack of consideration for disabled people, such as the *BBC Sports Personality of the Year* awards where there was no ramp to allow Tanni Grey Thompson to collect her award on stage like the other winners. They also mention the lack of opportunities for disabled people to appear on television, for example, as contestants in game shows. And they feel there is not enough explicitly educational programming showing disabled people as happy or as experiencing family life, having fun, etc; that the emphasis is too much on negative stereotypes and on the sadness associated with being disabled.

"I think TV has the responsibility to educate society first. People's perceptions will not be normalised until they are educated about the issues. Current attempts at normalisation come across as tokenism."
(Male, 25-55, mobility impairment, South)

"There's just no reality...so superficial the coverage and so often the disabled people are victims or vulnerable. It's not very encouraging to disabled people. You so rarely see successful disability."
(Male, 45-65, carer, Midlands)

So the stance of *Issue Driven* viewers is that representation on television currently is not good enough, and tends to be caricatured. *Issue Driven* professionals hold similar opinions. They point to low levels of depiction, negative portrayal and a reluctance to address sensitive issues such as mental health, and areas such as sexuality.

6.2 *Transformers'* expectations

Transformers are also 'tick box driven', but they are not quite as critical as the *Issue Driven*. Their standpoint is that 'a start' has been made, but that it is still not good enough. But when they talk about representation, their criticisms are more around the lack of opportunities for disabled people across the board, in terms of employment as actors and directors, featuring in story-lines, etc. They have noticed an increase in normalisation, but they want to see more. They also detect inaccuracy and lack of realism, but this is a secondary concern and is seen as something which will be overcome in the long term. In particular, *Transformers* are looking for role models on television to motivate more disabled people to have roles throughout the broadcast industry at every level.

"Until you portray disabled people in different roles then disabled people can't get these types of jobs."

(Female, 25-55 years, mobility impairment, South)

"There needs to be more disabled people on TV who are positive. Too often they are portrayed as too dependent, housebound people who don't do anything, promoting the idea that society should pity disabled people."

(Female, 18 years, mobility impairment, South)

Transformer professionals see television as a key educative tool in the fight against prejudice and in moving towards greater inclusion. They suggest that prejudices and misrepresentations from the past can be redressed through a conscious effort to depict disabled people in active and positive roles. The inclusion of disabled people in the creative process is seen to be crucial.

Both *Issue Driven* and *Transformers* are 'tick box driven' and are actively evaluating what they view. They notice every representation of disability and look to see how it fits in with their expectations.

6.3 *Progressives'* expectations

Progressives are slightly different. Their standpoint is more positive – ‘well done for what has been achieved so far’. Again, they talk about the importance of accuracy and realism, because they recognise the importance of not misleading or misinforming. They are very much aware of the danger of miseducating people, for example, by blurring the boundaries between mental and physical disabilities. *Progressives* are appreciative of recent changes, such as the move to greater inclusion, and they are more forgiving of mistakes. But, like the *Issue Driven*, they recognise that there is not that much light-hearted coverage of disability and they feel that too often the handling of the representation is done in an overly sensitive manner.

Sometimes *Progressives* are actively evaluating what they see on television; sometimes their viewing is far more passive than this. It is certainly not as active as *Issue Driven* or *Transformers*. Programme makers who are *Progressive*, however, acknowledge that they have a responsibility to make television as inclusive as possible.

These three types – *Issue Driven*, *Transformers* and *Progressives* – fall into the same camp in terms of their collective belief that the role of television is very much about giving all groups in society, including disabled people, a voice.

Followers and *Traditionalists* fall into a different camp, where television is almost exclusively about entertainment; note this does not preclude these groups being ‘educated’ via entertainment-based programming.

6.4 *Followers'* expectations

Followers say they do not notice normalisation or incidental inclusion, but nevertheless show some signs of being affected by it, subconsciously; 70% agreed in the survey that it was good to see more disabled people on television these days. But *Followers* will notice distinctive, ground-breaking portrayals and this prompts surprise. Where representation starts to get more radical there is variation within this group about how they will handle it, or where they think the line should be drawn. Many *Followers* will simply turn off through low interest. There is occasional interest in explicit, educational content but it is unlikely to be first choice viewing or material that they would actively opt into. This group has attitudes akin to shifting sands which will change slowly over time, in line with society at large.

Follower professionals within commercial broadcasting feel that their channels have to be more conservative in their creative decisions, and more ratings focused because they have to rely on being able to “*sell the ad space between programmes*” for their income. Churn (viewers switching away) is a greater concern and this is felt to inhibit creativity and risk-taking in programmes.

“I’m not sure about the BBC but the world of ITV is very cut throat. The BBC has more of a remit to educate.” (Producer)

Followers are less engaged in ‘pushing the boundaries’ and challenging expectations. Disability is not seen as ‘their’ topic and there is no sense of ownership of the issue. For them, appealing to the widest possible audience through quality entertainment is key. Education is seen to have its place in factual and specialist programming but they do not think it should be woven into mainstream programming necessarily. *Follower* professionals within commercial broadcasting think that their programme can become more representative of disabled people over time, but that this will be the result of a ‘trickle-down’ effect from the non-commercial public service broadcaster, the BBC. They suggest that if, for example, the BBC introduced a popular disabled character in a soap or mainstream drama, commercial broadcasters would be compelled to follow suit.

“The BBC obviously are streets ahead of other broadcasters when it comes to looking after minorities and the inclusion of the wheelchair dancers as one of their station idents was interesting.” (Producer)

6.5 *Traditionalists’* expectations

Traditionalists have much less tolerance and are shocked by more radical television portrayals, such as those shown in special disability seasons. They exhibit much stronger discomfort. In terms of what they notice, they tend only to consider content which reflects their current belief system, such as documentaries showing disabled people as ‘victims’. *Traditionalists* have clear boundaries surrounding issues of taste in visual representation. They consider showing ‘warts and all’ to be unnecessary and even voyeuristic.

For this group, viewing anything to do with disability is largely accidental. It is not something that they choose to watch and does not fit with the way that they consume television, which is mainly for entertainment. But there is some effect of normalisation within this group. Their evaluation of change is very much at a passive level where they may hardly notice it, but they do have a sense that there is a greater level of representation these days.

The one or two *Traditionalist* professionals interviewed believed that audiences are likely to switch away from programming containing disabled people. They did not consider it to be television's role to 'normalise' disability. They think people expect to be able to 'relax' when watching television and do not want to be challenged by 'depressing issues'. They feel audiences simply want to be entertained and that television should deliver what they expect and what they enjoy.

6.6 Education versus entertainment

It is clear then that television has to fulfil a dual role in relation to disability. The role of being a voice for disability by informing, explaining and promoting disability issues, but also the role of being a provider of entertainment. From an audience perspective, programming must reflect both education and entertainment in balance. This research suggests that taking an overly hard line towards education will not succeed in informing *Followers* and *Traditionalist* viewers about disability, as they will simply end up turning away or switching off. But through gradual exposure, and normalisation – more portrayals in a variety of roles – cultural changes do take place and the thinking and attitudes of these more conservative viewers will gradually evolve, along with the rest of society.

6.7 Opinions of survey respondents towards different representation

The survey offered an opportunity to assess the views of a much larger sample. Respondents in phase two were asked to say whether they agreed or disagreed with a range of statements covering the appearance of disabled people or characters within different types of programming or in advertising.

It is interesting to look at total responses before examining any differences in opinion between types of viewer. One of the most striking findings is that the vast majority of respondents (79%) say they would accept a disabled person in the major role of reading the main evening news, with far fewer registering their uncertainty about this than for other statements. Table 2 shows that around a third of the sample are unsure of their viewpoint for many of the statements, rather than being rejecters; although it must be acknowledged that culturally it is difficult for people to display prejudice, even in a self-completion, postal questionnaire.

There was strong support too (six in ten viewers) for an increase in other kinds of presenters with disabilities, and for more portrayals of disabled people generally. And 65% said they would not be put off

buying a product advertised by a ‘severely’ disabled person (‘severe’ was not defined but is used to indicate a disability that is visible or obvious); 6% said that they would while 29% were unsure.

But inevitably some groups are more positive than others. As expected, *Traditionalists* were the least likely to want to see more disabled presenters (47%), or to agree that there should be an increase in portrayals generally (45%).

But even these viewers demonstrate considerable acceptance in some areas. Whereas *Traditionalists* may not have a strong desire to see more disabled people on screen in general, the vast majority (72%) say they would accept a disabled person reading the news, and 57% claim that they would not be put off buying a product that was advertised by a ‘severely’ disabled person. The main barrier appears to be the area of sexual representation. For example, they are far less willing to tolerate disabled people in sex scenes in peak-time viewing, reinforcing the qualitative finding that *Traditionalists* hold very conservative views about sex scenes on television in general. And they are not keen for those with ‘severe’ disabilities (noticeable impairments) to appear as characters in soaps or quiz shows. This group, however, make up a minority of the viewing audience (15% of the sample of 4,000 people in this study) and their views are not those of the majority.

Table 2 Views about disability within different programming

| Statement | Total agree % | Total neither agree nor disagree % | Total disagree % |
|---|----------------------|---|-------------------------|
| Base = 3,662 | | | |
| It would not bother me if a disabled person read the main evening news | 79 | 15 | 6 |
| I think it's good that you see more disabled people on television these days | 72 | 24 | 4 |
| It would be good to see more disabled presenters on different programmes | 63 | 32 | 5 |
| I think there should be more portrayals of disabled people on television in a wider variety of roles | 61 | 33 | 6 |
| I would object to seeing disabled people in sex scenes in dramas on peak-time television | 34 | 37 | 29 |
| I don't want to see people with disfigurements or 'severe' disabilities in mainstream programming such as soaps or quiz shows | 15 | 30 | 55 |
| I would find it offensive to see a disabled person hosting a programme like a chat show | 14 | 32 | 55 |
| I would be put off buying a product that was advertised by a 'severely' disabled person | 6 | 29 | 65 |
| NB: Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding. | | | |

7 PSYCHOLOGICAL BARRIERS TO ACCEPTANCE

In terms of barriers to representation on television, a key one is the apparent low level of interest towards the greater inclusion of disabled people among a significant segment of the viewing population – *Followers* and *Traditionalists* (41% of the total viewing population). The picture is far from bleak, however. The survey findings examined in the previous section indicate that attitudes among these viewers show a capacity to accept disabled people in major roles on television, such as reading the evening news. It would seem, therefore, that acceptance of greater representation among these groups is a realistic goal.

This section addresses some of the barriers that might inhibit acceptance.

7.1 The psychology of difference

When people are confronted by something very different to themselves, often the first response – the so-called fear response – is to reject it. Difference, as a psychological phenomenon, is something of a challenge that some people need to overcome in order to reach acceptance.

Difference is an important consideration to be thought through when it comes to portrayals of disability. People vary in how willing they are to accept difference simply for what it is and incorporate it into their thinking and attitudes. It cannot be assumed that everyone must and always will like those who are different to themselves. One way past this psychological barrier is to make the difference less important; to portray it as secondary to other characteristics of the person, such as their sense of humour, intelligence, personality, etc. One example might be the soldier, Simon Weston, who suffered severe burns in the Falklands conflict. For many participants, his facial disfigurement is simply no longer salient or significant compared to how people view him as a person. This kind of inclusion is more likely to be practised by *Traditionalists* and *Followers*, ie, those who are unfamiliar with and less interested in disability issues.

What is important then is that there are different ways of approaching integration and different kinds of inclusion. The research shows that we must try to understand how to reach those who need to reduce the salience of ‘difference’ in order to move past it. This must be

understood in order to assist acceptance and inclusion for all groups in society, including people with disabilities.

7.2 Aesthetic ‘norms’

It is hypothesised that society is predisposed to find certain things attractive. What these things are changes over time as cultural influences redefine them. But television, as a medium, is likely to lag behind societal changes, particularly in relation to the acceptance of disability on screen. Phase three of this study – the executive interviews with broadcasting professionals – found evidence of a belief among some, albeit reluctantly expressed, that disabled people are not aesthetically pleasing and that viewers would not accept a significant increase in portrayals. *Follower* and *Traditionalist* professionals euphemistically describe disabled people as ‘untelevisual’ because they feel they make uncomfortable viewing.

“Well yes, because unfortunately people do have this thing that they don’t want to look at disabled people.” (Writer)

It was recognised by almost all professionals that television and programme makers are obsessed with physical attractiveness. They tend to believe that viewers expect television actors and presenters to be traditionally good-looking. One sports programme maker said that he chose a less knowledgeable presenter over one with more expertise because *‘she looked good’*. ‘Fantasy Television’, where everyone is young and attractive, is widely thought to minimise viewer ‘churn’. It perpetuates the myth, however, that anyone of value is physically perfect. The result is ‘Body Fascism’, which excludes many groups such as older people (women in particular), overweight people and those not considered conventionally attractive because they are too short, have the ‘wrong’ hair, colouring, teeth, skin, etc. Professionals who are *Followers* and *Traditionalists* tend to believe that ‘Fantasy Television’ and ‘Body Fascism’ is a fact of life in the entertainment industry, and that this intolerance of ‘imperfection’ is an impossible barrier to overcome.

“It’s beautiful people and beautiful things, and disability’s not seen as beautiful I guess. We’re obsessed with image, in the media particularly.” (Producer)

But, in contrast to this view, 61% of the sample of 4,000 viewers said they agreed that there should be more portrayals of disabled people on television in a wider variety of roles. This research offers a strong indication that the attitudes of the viewing public are much more accepting than perhaps some programme makers and producers

believe them to be, and that the principles of inclusion and diversity are widely shared.

This is not to say that viewers have reached the stage where there are no barriers to representation at all. A considerable proportion currently are unsure, so it is important not to alienate these viewers by showing them too much too soon. One area that the research highlighted as extremely controversial was the area of disability and sexual representation.

7.3 Sexual representation

The research included stimulus material of a number of sex scenes featuring disabled characters/people. It should be pointed out that such scenes are fairly rare on television, but some of the material was taken from a special season which deliberately tackled a number of thorny issues. In one clip from a drama, an actor with Thalidomide impairment is depicted with a beautiful girl in a bedroom scene where they are about to make love. In another drama, a woman of small stature is portrayed in a romantic scene with a man of 'regular' height. Within a group context, most participants were culturally driven to state that they found these scenes acceptable, but when individuals were spoken to in single depth interviews, some non-disabled participants admitted that they struggled to put themselves in the shoes of the people in the scenes without feeling extremely uncomfortable.

"It does just make you put yourself in their shoes and the honest answer is I just wouldn't go there."

(Male, 20-35, non-disabled, South)

There were more mixed views among disabled participants, some of whom applauded such representation, but others for whom it was unnecessary, especially disabled *Traditionalists*.

"I think that's really good – shows we have sex just like everybody else."

(Female, 25-55, mobility impairment, South)

"It's a bit too far – I'm not sure we need to show that."

(Female, 50-70, mobility impairment, South)

The problem is that the extent of this discomfort can end up reinforcing feelings of difference and rejection, and rather than encouraging inclusion, can promote continued exclusion through pushing people further away. But inevitably it will be the case that for some people with more conservative views, and *Traditionalists* are

likely to be in this group, any scenes on television of a sexual nature, regardless of disability, are going to make uncomfortable viewing. This is a very contentious and difficult area for broadcasters. *Issue Driven* and *Transformer* professionals want to push boundaries and challenge ‘norms’, but most professionals were much more wary about the whole area of disability and sexuality.

7.4 Disability reminds us of our mortality

For *Followers* and *Traditionalists*, both participants and professionals, disability is something that happens to you when you are either old or ill. They define it as a medical, rather than as a social or political, issue. There is a sense, therefore, that anyone could become disabled, which brings with it a fear that disability might be contagious. This fear is something which has been highlighted in previous research, *Images of Disability* (2001⁵). It is a psychological barrier that is hard for people to admit to, but which nevertheless works at a deep-rooted level to undermine personal acceptance.

⁵ Images of Disability, COI Communications, November 2001

8 INDUSTRY BARRIERS TO REPRESENTATION

In addition to psychological barriers, professionals offered insight into some of the industry barriers to increased representation which they perceive to exist.

8.1 Cost

Television is regarded as a competitive industry where budgets and schedules are extremely tight. For professionals, one of the key barriers impeding greater inclusion in the industry for disabled people is cost. There was a general perception among the professionals interviewed that disabled people require longer to do the same tasks as non-disabled individuals. It was thought that additional production days would have to be ‘factored’ in to accommodate a disabled member of the production team, causing added expense. There was a tendency to view disabled people as less efficient, as requiring more rest breaks and possibly not being able to work the same hours as an able-bodied person. *Issue Driven* professionals, however, feel that the television industry is generally intolerant of special needs and requirements, such as time flexibility for childcare, and that there is a strong need for cultural change.

“They’re having to accommodate what they’re not sure about – whether the person needs longer time to get ready. If they need shorter hours because they can’t do a whole day. If they need rest periods or whatever. So all of that needs to be factored in and we as broadcasters keep the budgets as low as possible. That’s another excuse for them to turn around and say, ‘well we have to have a pretend disabled person’.” (Personnel Manager)

8.2 The broadcast environment

Another perceived barrier was the difficulty of the broadcast environment itself. Programme makers felt that it was not well adapted to accommodating disabled people, and often they described their experience of working with people with sensory or mobility impairments in terms of the challenges which had to be overcome, rather than the benefits, abilities and different perspectives which these individuals brought. *Followers* and *Traditionalists* associate disability with equipment, such as wheelchairs and guide dogs, which require adjustments to the workplace. Access and orientation issues are perceived by these professionals to be a major obstacle to the employment of disabled people on location. Similarly, they view

communication as a potential difficulty and one which is expensive to overcome, eg, by the use of personal assistants.

“Practical barriers of communication. If you’ve got a deaf actor, how do you cue him, and what about the safety aspect? You know, it’s an extra palaver.” (Producer)

Progressive professionals see these barriers as surmountable, but it is strongly felt that it is commissioning editors who should take the lead in making inclusion easier. They are regarded as having the financial control and the political clout to enforce change.

8.3 Supply issues

Transformers, Progressives and *Followers* point to a supply problem within the wider entertainment industry as a possible reason for the low number of disabled people on screen. They feel there is a dearth of talented disabled actors. There is seen to be a much larger pool of black and minority ethnic actors, for example. Programme makers, and even politically sensitive *Progressives*, will claim that they are often faced with a difficult choice when casting a disabled role – whether to choose a disabled actor who is less experienced, less well-known, less qualified and less versatile, or to choose a non-disabled actor who can be relied upon to deliver a quality performance. *Progressives* and *Followers* are keen to point out that they do not believe that disabled people are inherently less talented than their non-disabled counterparts, but that there are not enough of them to choose from.

“In this kind of ever reducing pool of talent, it is hard to find...an actor in a wheelchair. You’d have to go out and make a point of looking for them. You can’t just go out and find the best actor, so immediately you’re limiting your options.” (Producer)

Many theatre schools are not considered accessible to disabled performers and recruitment is dependent upon physical attractiveness, perceived versatility, past experience and expectation to succeed. Actively inclusive schools like The Chicken Shed and Graeae Theatre Company are regarded as exceptional. Consequently, there are still very few disabled role models and this problem is self-perpetuating.

“Well it’s chicken and egg stuff a lot of it. You’re not going to go in to do acting if you don’t see that there’s any opportunities on telly to do it.” (Personnel Manager)

8.4 Demand issues

Professionals admit that there are demand issues too. Often, casting directors would rather cast a non-disabled person because he or she is perceived to be more reliable. In the case of a part for a character with learning difficulties, for example, there is the expectation that a non-disabled actor can be relied upon to fully understand the creative process and to perform well. Casting people with learning difficulties in dramas which explore hard-hitting or disturbing material is also thought to be controversial. Programme makers say they cannot be sure that actors with learning difficulties know it is 'pretend'. One such example was cited of a non-disabled actress playing the role of a young child with learning difficulties who was subjected to sexual abuse. The casting director thought viewers would find the piece too disturbing if an actress with a learning impairment was cast in the role.

"I suppose mental disability is the hardest one to crack. So the minor physical disabilities I think are much easier to cope with." (Producer)

Some believe that audiences will not find the portrayal of a disability credible unless it is central to the plot or character. They feel unable to cast a disabled actor without putting him or her in a 'disabled story'. Professionals are worried that showing disabled people functioning daily without any major obstacles might be seen as unrealistic. The fear among professionals is that such portrayals will be seen as 'distracting' or 'tokenistic', and indeed, *Issue Driven* viewers do see them in this way.

"It doesn't feel integral to what the piece or drama is about. It feels just jammed in there, stuck on as a piece of political correctness." (Script Writer)

"The other thing is, if you're telling a story...unless it's a specific red herring or something like that, if you bring in other things which are going to distract the audience for whatever reason, then you are not going to be able to tell that story." (Casting Director)

8.5 Disengagement

Followers willingly admit that, for them, disability is not a prominent top-of-mind concern. They are more engaged with other issues such as gender equality, ethnicity and sexuality, which as 'political issues' have been around longer. Inclusion of disabled people is seen by *Followers* as something that is 'nice to have' rather than essential. There is a sense that the issue is 'too big' for effective engagement. They feel programme makers will only be 'scratching the surface' if

they try to tackle it. There are so many different types of impairment, each with their own set of challenges and issues, that they feel broadcasters cannot hope to please everyone. They also do not perceive a political will within the industry to address levels of representation.

8.6 Getting it wrong

The majority of professional *Followers* interviewed, and also the majority of *Progressives*, do not feel close enough to disability to provide an accurate portrayal that will do it justice and not cause offence. So they shy away from it. Many see disability as a bit of a minefield. Programme makers are fearful of negative press and of attacks from lobby groups if they get it wrong. Professionals fear that they may put off viewers from watching a programme or channel if a portrayal has generated bad press. Additionally, they feel there are difficulties in representing disability in a way which will appeal both to disabled and able-bodied viewers.

8.7 Language

Language was seen to be a huge barrier to representation because, again, professionals are aware that the ‘wrong’ words will cause offence. They recognise the power of language and realise that some words have negative connotations and can place individuals or groups in inappropriate roles eg, ‘invalid’, ‘victim’. But many programme makers do not feel engaged enough with the issue to know which words are currently deemed acceptable by forward-thinking groups, and which are now considered out-of-date, or offensive. Consequently, some programme makers would rather avoid the subject entirely, than engage with it and risk criticism.

9 ISSUES OF PORTRAYAL

It was apparent, from showing stimulus material to participants in phase one, that offence is linked to two key principles and that if these are up upheld, offence can be avoided. The research also identified triggers which have the potential to accelerate acceptance.

9.1 Principles to uphold

The two key principles, dictated largely by those for whom television is a voice (*Issue Driven*, *Transformers* and *Progressives*), are ‘realism’ – accurate and realistic portrayals with attention to detail – and ‘the avoidance of stereotyping’. These principles are absolutely critical because there is not only the potential to offend a significant part of the viewing audience, but the potential of creating a longer term problem by misinforming audiences about disability.

Any negative stereotyping, however unintentional, exacerbates a sense of difference and, therefore, also exacerbates perceived distance. It does not help to close the gap.

9.2 Triggers to accelerating acceptance in different genres

This research suggests that there are a number of triggers to accelerating acceptance of disability portrayals on television. These are not offered as prescriptive directions, but as helpful tools.

a) Matching

The first of these is ‘matching’, which, at its simplest, is demonstrating ‘you are like me’. It means sharing interchangeable qualities through portrayals. Particularly relevant here are story-telling type genres such as dramas, film, soaps, etc, in which disabled actors or characters demonstrate intrinsic qualities that both a disabled person or a non-disabled person can relate to. In this way, the characterisation goes beyond disability. There is a role also for matching in factual genres by balancing ‘difference’ with ‘the same’, ensuring that any effort to explain the difference is equally matched with information and reinforcement that disabled people are, at many levels, the same as everyone else. In terms of the genre ‘entertainment’, it is finding opportunities to show shared values, and in comedy, it means showing humour that is shared by disabled and non-disabled people alike. If both groups find the same things funny, it emphasises that disabled and non-disabled people are similar to each other.

b) Likeability

The second trigger, 'likeability,' is similar to matching. At its base level, it is the ability to create emotional connections. For example, use of qualities that most people have respect for, such as intelligence, a sense of humour, engaging personality, achievement etc. Again, it is about emphasising values that are shared by disabled and non-disabled people. The implications for the different genres are the same – to emphasise and clarify likeable traits. Non-disabled participants singled out how presenters are a particularly powerful vehicle because the audience has a chance to get to know them as 'real' people, not just characters or actors playing somebody else.

c) Celebrity

The third trigger is 'celebrity'. This is a contentious and old-fashioned technique, but it is recognised as a tool for attracting attention to a programme or film. If a famous actor is playing the part of a disabled person, eg, Daniel Day Lewis in the film *My Left Foot*, it generates greater interest in the role and in the actor's ability to play it effectively. This approach is resented by the most politically correct (*Issue Driven*) who feel it is only disabled actors who should be playing these roles and that using celebrity actors is exploitative. Generally speaking, other attitude types were more accepting of non-disabled actors playing the part of a disabled character as long as the roles were accurate and well acted. This contrasts with previous, earlier research, perhaps suggesting greater acceptance of a broader range of representation⁶. The implication for drama is that including a famous name in a disabled role will create a high level of interest. Entertainment programmes can offer the opportunity to combine an able-bodied celebrity with a disabled presenter. This is an effective way of firmly placing both within the same field, which demonstrates true inclusion.

d) Incidental inclusion

The fourth trigger is 'incidental inclusion'. This is about demonstrating true integration. It entails having disabled people in all kinds of roles where their characterisation is not dependent upon their disability. Everyone is treated the same and has

⁶ *Perspectives of Disability in Broadcasting*, Andrea Millwood Hargrave, Broadcasting Standards Commission, 1995.

involvement in programming and production regardless of disability. This applies across all the genres and is of particular importance to *Transformers*, many of whom are young disabled people looking for television to show them role models.

e) Educational/Information ‘shorts’

The last trigger that may contribute towards acceptance is something exemplified by specialist seasons, which often pick a particular disability issue and, in a short piece or drama, demonstrate how it feels from the disabled person’s viewpoint. Effectively, a season can create a set of simple parables on different issues, showing a variety of disabilities. As a trigger, the way this works is by delivering messages in palatable chunks (approximately 10 minutes). The downside is that the issues are inevitably polarised, so there is a danger that the message is too obviously about disability, losing less-interested viewers before the programme even begins. Because it is clear what each short drama or informational piece is about, it is easy to decide ‘it is not for me’.

10 REACTIONS TO STIMULUS MATERIAL

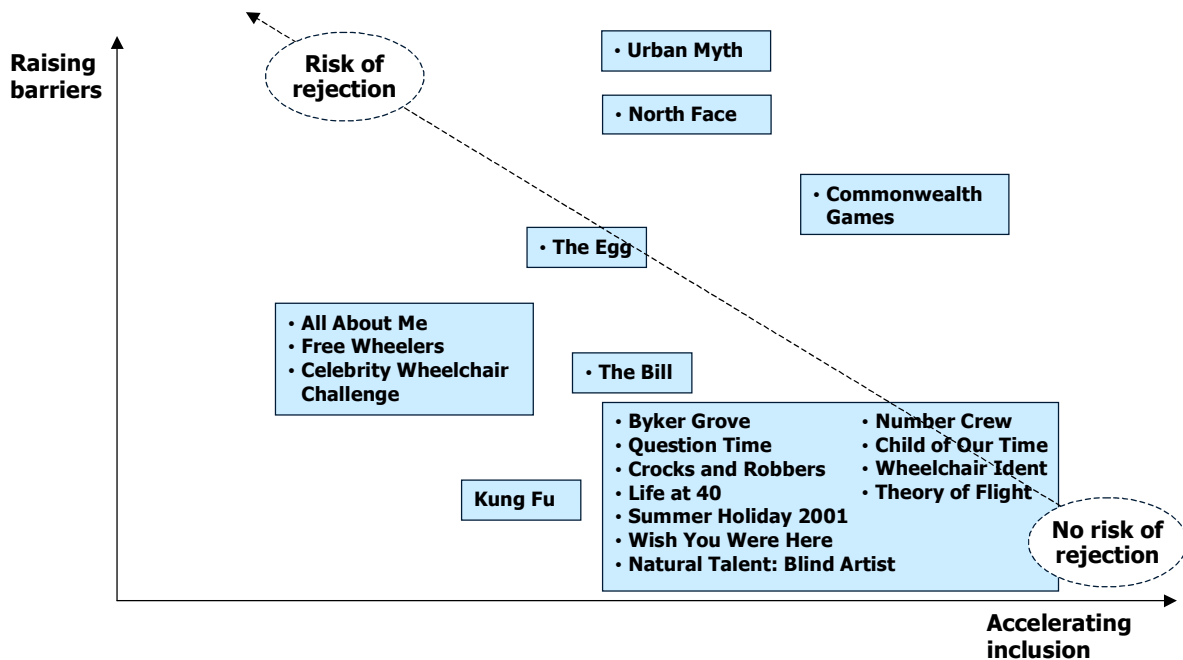
A number of clips were used as stimulus material in phase one. The clips had a very specific purpose, which was to prompt reactions across a range of different genres and explore the types of programming that were successful or less successful at demonstrating inclusion. Descriptions of the composition of the material on each of the reels can be found in Appendix III.

There are always difficulties in taking material out of context and in some cases the programme clips were chosen to illustrate a particular scene or issue which, in the broader context of the whole programme, may not have been quite as strong as it appeared when isolated in a short clip. This should be borne in mind. Reactions to the clips cannot be taken as reactions to the programmes, or even individual episodes of programmes. Nevertheless, the clips serve to illustrate the barriers, principles and triggers and how these work and interact together to promote or work against acceptance and inclusion.

10.1 Participants' views of clips

Chart 1 maps the clips both against their ability to accelerate acceptance and their ability to raise barriers for viewers. The risk of viewers rejecting the clip moves from the bottom right across to the top left. Chart 1 shows that the clips from a specific season on disability, which tackled contentious issues from a disabled person's perspective, are high on raising barriers, alongside, perhaps surprisingly, a clip from sports coverage of the Manchester Commonwealth Games, a comedy, and other documentary programmes. There is a large chunk of programming in the bottom right hand corner of the chart which was widely accepted by all groups.

Chart 1 Overall performance of clips and risk of rejection



10.2 Overview of accelerators, principles and barriers

To recap, there are five accelerators to inclusion, which are: matching, likeability, incidental inclusion, celebrity and educational/information ‘shorts’.

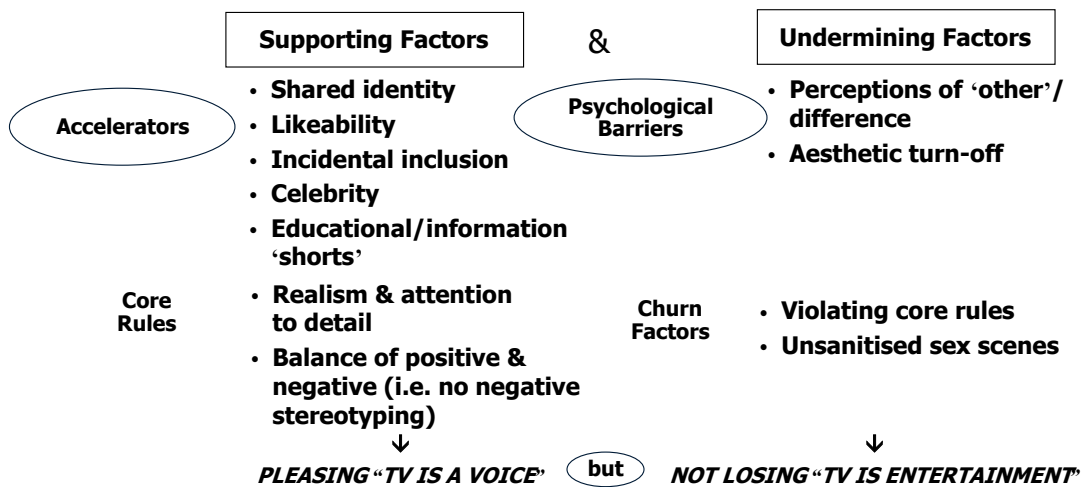
In addition, there are two core rules: realism, and the avoidance of negative stereotyping. This is necessary to please those for whom television is a voice. Failure to adhere to these core principles will reinforce ignorance of the facts, or prejudicial views. Violation of these core principles is likely to result in viewers switching away or writing in with complaints. These factors are shown in Chart 2.

Programming that brings to the fore psychological barriers such as perceptions of difference is likely to lead to certain groups, notably *Followers* and *Traditionalists*, switching away. It can serve to reinforce preconceived notions of what is aesthetically pleasing among these viewers. While there may be a place for such programming (as part of the process of inclusion, public information and artistic expression), care needs to be taken to ‘signpost’ and schedule it in order to attract its audience, ie, viewers outside these two groups.

These relatively straightforward principles can be used to predict the likelihood of successful representation in programming. In simple terms, the more supporting factors the better provided the majority of viewers who want television as entertainment are not alienated by too much too soon.

Chart 2 Overview

- **Success of a programme can depend on a balance of:**



10.3 Successful examples

A clip that was well received was the BBC's *Summer Holiday 2001*. It has all the accelerators:

- **Celebrity** (well-known programme) – the disabled presenter Lara Masters is one of a number of mainstream presenters.
- **Likeability** – the presenter is intelligent and attractive.
- **Matching** – it is about enjoying riding holidays with plenty of interest for non-disabled people who enjoy riding. It promotes the message that disabled and non-disabled people enjoy the same things.
- **Incidental non-salient inclusion** – it is positioned within a non-disabled mainstream programme. There were no restrictions as to how the presenter was shown.
- It delivers to the two core rules – 'realism' and 'attention to detail'. Even though the presenter is appearing on a

mainstream programme, nothing is missed in terms of explaining the facilities for a disabled person, yet there is no negative stereotyping or room for indignity.

- Overall, there were no undermining factors.

“She looked good and spoke clearly – what you want from a presenter.”

(Female, 25-55, mobility impairment, South)

“That interested me – looked like a good holiday. I know she was talking about it catering for the disabled, but it might as well have been for us.”

(Female, 35-60, non-disabled, South)

“They showed her on the horse and stuff but they didn’t do anything OTT like show her getting on.”

(Male, 20-35, non-disabled, South)

Participants in the research were positive too about a storyline in the *The Bill* (ITV) which featured a female actress with Down's Syndrome. Many applauded the portrayal of this character in a peak-time drama.

There were two main accelerators:

- Likeability – she was considered to be a good actress, and participants liked her character which showed an independent spirit, a sense of mischief and humour.
- Matching – the storyline was about pregnancy and showed a party, both things all viewers could relate to.

Undermining factors included the fact that both her mother and a policeman displayed very patronising attitudes; and it could be criticised for highlighting difference in the way disabled children were shown, but these factors were almost entirely offset by the accelerators.

Another successful clip was from the Channel 4's schools programme *The Number Crew*. Classified as animation, it features plasticine figures who teach children about numbers and mathematics. One of the plasticine characters is a girl in a wheelchair. This is an excellent example of incidental inclusion and normalisation. Often the children and young people who watched this clip were not even aware that one of the characters was in a wheelchair. The clip had the supporting factors of likeability, matching and incidental inclusion. There were no undermining factors.

Its appeal, however, was seen to be limited as it is targeted at a younger audience. Some teenagers in the South said they were rather tired of this programme as it as had been overused at school – an indication perhaps that there are limited examples for schools to use of disability portrayals of children.

“It is good but they should have different ones – I’ve seen that a million times.”

(Girl, 12-13, mobility impairment, South)

The core factors for these programmes are summarised in Chart 3.

Chart 3 Highly inclusive

| | Supporting Factors | Undermining Factors | Other beacon examples |
|---------------------|---|---|---|
| Summer Holiday 2001 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Celebrity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – amongst mainstream presenters • Likeability <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – attractive, intelligent presenter • Matching <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – enjoying riding holidays • Incidental inclusion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – within non-disabled/ mainstream programme <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Strengthened by realism</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aesthetic issues avoided <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – no dignity issues | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Question Time • Crocks and Robbers • Child of Our Time • Life at 40 • Wish You Were Here. |
| The Bill | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Likeability <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - good acting • Matching <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - parties, pregnancy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difference and negative stereotyping of 'patronising' mother & policeman balanced by accelerating factors | |
| Number Crew | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Likeability <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – cute animation • Matching <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – family, cooking, maths | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None | |

10.4 Room for improvement

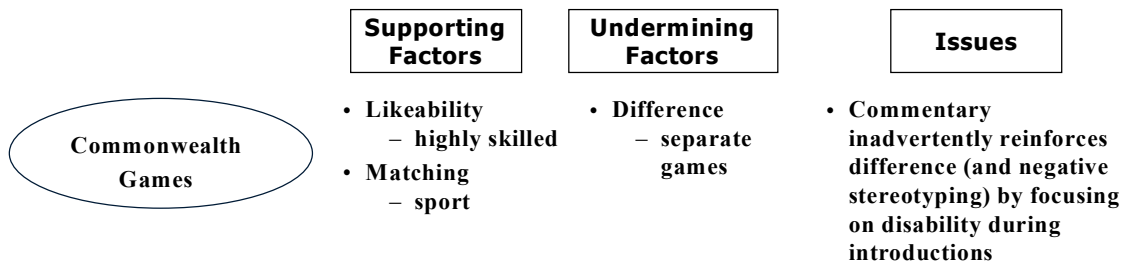
The Commonwealth Games held in Manchester in 2001 was the first time disabled events had been included alongside the able-bodied events. Television coverage of these events was extremely well received, but lessons can still be learned. The clip shown to participants was a disabled swimming event featuring South African swimmer Natalie du Toit. It contained some key accelerators such as:

- Likeability – it was apparent that the disabled athletes were highly skilled.
- Matching – they were participating in sports that able-bodied people could relate to.

But the undermining factor of difference was reinforced inadvertently in the clip shown by the commentary, which focused on Natalie's accident where she lost a leg, and her bravery in returning to the pool, rather than on her sporting achievements. Within the context of the whole extensive coverage of the Games this would have been far less of an issue, but within a short clip the commentary had much more of

a negative impact (something not anticipated – the stimulus had been included in the research as an example of progress and inclusion). But in fact, this particular clip illustrated a paternalistic style, which some disabled people found patronising. (See Chart 4.)

Chart 4 Room for improvement



10.5 Poor examples

There were mixed reactions to the Free Wheelers stimulus, a documentary that was part of the BBC *What's Your Problem?* season. The clip was about a young girl with a progressive congenital disease. It had some accelerators:

- Matching and likeability – a very gifted child, who was articulate and bright, and certainly very likeable.

More severely disabled teenagers thought it was realistic and could relate to it. They liked the positive tone of the child's voice. They felt she spoke knowledgeably and sensitively about living with a disability; that she provided a role model and was inspirational.

"It's really sensitive. It's talking about what it's really like. It will help us to be like her. It will help other people to understand and hopefully teach non-disabled to listen and ask."

(Girl, 14-15, mobility impairment, South)

But critically the positive side was very much outweighed (at least in the clip) by the negative side of being disabled, with sad anecdotes accompanied by solemn, incidental music. Children comfortable with their own disability, and those with less severe disabilities, felt that the girl was very much positioning herself as a victim. They feared that this type of portrayal would encourage others to pity them, something

they desperately wanted to avoid. It must be pointed out that reactions are confined to the clip shown in the research – the tone of the whole programme may have been very different and could have produced different responses when watched in its entirety.

“That was sad. She didn’t talk very lively and I didn’t like the music...it made me feel sad.”

(Boy, 9-10, mobility and sensory impairment, South)

A clip from *All About Me* (comedy drama series) with Jasper Carrot and Jamil Dhillon, an actor with cerebral palsy, was criticised for the same reasons. While the humorous dialogue and inclusion of the disabled character in a ‘normal’, funny, family was well-received, working against this was a sense of ‘poor me’ – “You’ll get used to it [reference to his disability], *I had to*”. This did not sit comfortably with many participants, particularly with young disabled people and those for whom television is a voice.

“I think that’s good – it shows you can think even when you can’t move or speak...dispels some myths.”

(Female, 18-35, mobility impairment, North)

“That wasn’t very good – what he said. It doesn’t make you feel good about yourself, it reminds you of the bad bits.”

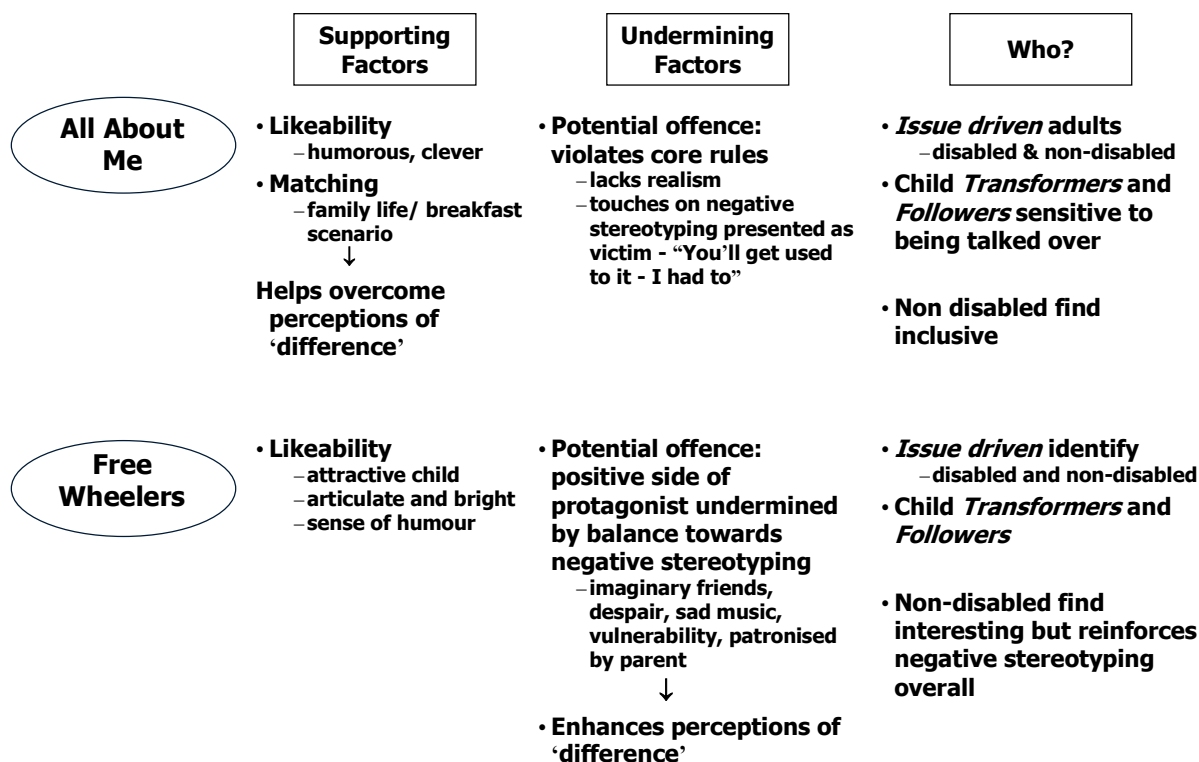
(Boy, 12-13, mobility impairment, South)

“Where he said, ‘you’ll get used to it’ that was good, but when he said ‘I had to’, I thought that was a bit sort of quite nasty.”

(Boy, 14-15, mobility impairment, Midlands)

Additionally, there were issues around the use of disability in the context of comedy, which will be covered later in the report. These clips are summarised in Chart 5.

Chart 5 Clips: poor examples polarising views with risk of offence



10.6 Examples of stimulus thought to show 'normalisation' of disability

The Bill

The clip from *The Bill* featuring a storyline about a girl with Downs Syndrome was generally familiar to participants. They thought it was well acted by the actress. The patronising policeman was shown up by the character with Downs Syndrome, which children found a refreshing portrayal. Some of the teenagers used Downs Syndrome as an example of a disability involving facial disfigurement. They suggested that often people feel uncomfortable when they first meet people that look 'different', but that increased exposure helped normalise disfigurements. They felt this created an argument for showing more disfigurement/deformity on television.

"When you first see something like that you feel a bit uncomfortable, but then you get used to it."

(Boy, 14-15, mobility impairment, Midlands)

BBC1 wheelchair dancers ident

The BBC1 ident of young wheelchair users dancing was seen as strong and positive. It was considered to show wheelchair users as capable, skilled and graceful. It fitted particularly with *Transformers*' desires for strong role models

"It gives us confidence as they're just like us."
(Boy, 14-15, mobility impairment, South)

Celebrity Wheelchair Challenge

Children liked this clip because it was mainstream and focused on the day-to-day issues encountered by wheelchair users. It was hoped it would educate the general public and the celebrities involved.

"That showed you what it was like and how hard it is for the disabled...I like it because they get a better understanding."
(Boy, 14-15, mobility impairment, Midlands)

Byker Grove

The clip from *Byker Grove* showed a character in a wheelchair discussing girlfriend problems. The topic was well received as it was felt to show that young people who are disabled have boyfriends and girlfriends too.

"He was no different to the other person..."
(Boy, 13-14, visual impairment, South)

One in Seven

This clip from a documentary about deaf people was felt by teenagers to be trendy and more about youth culture than disability, which was seen as a positive angle.

"That was interesting and the music was really good."
(Boy, 14-15, mobility impairment, South)

Wish You Were Here

A clip from this holiday programme, which featured disabled and non-disabled children on a football holiday was praised by children in the research. It was seen to promote 'equal opportunity' for disabled

people, but it was also regarded as a good example of incidental inclusion in that disability was not the focus of the programme.

“It was good, because really we’re all people, we’re not really different...”

(Boy, 13-14, mobility impairment, Midlands)

10.7 Effect of genre

Good examples exist across different genres, notably ‘storytelling’ genres, factual, and a few children’s programmes. But the stimulus material that received the best reactions was from the factual genre.

Participants had more mixed reactions to genres where disability is less well represented overall, such as sitcoms and educational/informational ‘shorts’. Viewers hold certain expectations of what a particular genre should deliver. If the content is too much of a surprise, they may turn away.

10.8 Seasons

It is interesting to look at the BBC’s collection of short dramas which formed part of the *What’s Your Problem?* season in autumn 2002, broadcast just prior to fieldwork. They featured a variety of actors with different disabilities. The ‘season’ was designed to challenge people’s perceptions of disability.

The idea of a season polarised participants’ views. For a minority, having a season was seen to be paying lip service to disability. It was considered tokenistic and the word ‘season’ conjured up expectations of screenings at obscure times, rather than anything mainstream. On balance, more regular programming on mainstream channels was preferred. Most felt this made less of an issue of the subject matter, and, therefore, gave viewers less of a reason to avoid such programmes, or turn away from them.

“Bet they were on really late though, weren’t they?”

(Female, 30-45, visually impaired, South)

Three clips from the *What’s Your Problem?* autumn 2002 season were shown to participants. They were received positively at many levels. They were considered highly inclusive, they had many accelerators and they delivered to the core rules. Plus they had a very clear purpose. But they raised some queries and issues. The fact that they

set out to push the boundaries to the limit significantly raised the risk of rejection for key groups. This was especially so when it came to scenes of a more sexual nature (see section 7.3) These made many participants feel quite uncomfortable, bringing psychological barriers to the fore.

“Well, the issue’s clear as clanging crystal isn’t it?”
(Male, 20s, non-disabled, North)

11 COMEDY

Comedy has a special role in offering different perspectives on changing cultural norms and trends in society. It is also a genre that pushes boundaries with the potential to be controversial, especially in relation to sensitive issues. For these reasons it was seen as an interesting and important genre to look at with regard to disability, in terms of discovering where viewers draw the line. Do the public think that some areas, such as disability, should be protected?

Respondents were asked to say how much they agreed or disagreed that “*any aspect of society is fair game when it comes to comedy*”. Responses across the five types were broadly similar. Around four in ten agreed that comedy could tackle any issue, with *Issue Driven* viewers being least likely to agree (39%), and *Traditionalists* showing most agreement (46%). Regardless of viewer type, there were some demographic differences, with men (46%) being more likely to agree with this statement than women (36%), and younger people (49% of 25-34s) being more likely to agree than older viewers (30% of 65+s).

However, societal changes have resulted in a new emphasis being placed on diversity and inclusion and this appears to be reflected in respondents’ views with just under half (48%) agreeing that “*broadcasters have a duty to ensure they show nothing that is offensive to any element of their viewing audience*”. *Issue Driven* are the members of society who are most sensitive to the interests of minority groups with over half (54%) agreeing with this stance. (See Table 3.)

So, while around four in ten people feel that virtually anything is fair game when it comes to comedy, this has to be tempered with the fact that a similar, if not slightly greater, proportion of the viewing public also feel broadcasters should not show anything that is likely to offend sections of the audience. Clearly it is a difficult line to tread. But the qualitative phase of this research has identified elements of programmes, which can assist programme makers keep on the right side of the line, thereby avoiding widespread offence.

Table 3 Viewer attitudes towards balancing liberality with responsibility

| Statement | Agree % | Neither agree nor disagree % | Disagree % |
|---|---------|------------------------------|------------|
| Base = 3,656 | | | |
| I think any aspect of society is fair game when it comes to comedy | 41 | 23 | 37 |
| Broadcasters have a duty to ensure they show nothing that is offensive to any element of their viewing audience | 48 | 24 | 28 |

11.1 Offensive humour

In order to try and establish where disability fits, relevant to other groups in society, respondents were asked about the likelihood of offence being caused by tasteless humour in connection with different groups.

It was explained to respondents in the survey that different people find different things offensive and that what may be offensive to one person, may be acceptable to another. In addition, respondents were asked to bear in mind that some things may be more or less acceptable depending on the circumstances. They were then asked to consider a number of different groups of people in turn and to indicate how acceptable they would find a tasteless joke on television about each group.

What Table 4 shows is that ‘disability’ is currently an extremely sensitive issue. Sixty-five percent of respondents said they would find a tasteless joke on television about disability either very or quite offensive. Such jokes would cause more offence than jokes about black people, Muslims or homosexuals.

Issue Driven respondents are the ones most likely to be offended by jokes directed at any group in society. The vast majority (71%) of *Issue Driven* would see jokes about disability as being tasteless and offensive. These more politically aware viewers are the ones most likely to complain if they see something on television that offends them.

While others have taken on board cultural changes and attitudes, *Traditionalists* tend to hold on to prejudice and to stereotyped views of minority groups. They are the group least likely to be offended by tasteless jokes directed at minority groups (see Table 4). Even so, over

half (57%) say they would be offended by a joke directed at disabled people, which demonstrates the sensitivity of disability as an issue even among more prejudicial attitude types.

The fact that the majority of respondents (65%) would find jokes about disability under certain circumstances offensive means that broadcasters and programme makers involved in comedy must tread very carefully when it comes to such material.

Table 4 The offensiveness of jokes about different types of people by viewer type

| Object of humour | Percentage saying very or quite offensive | | | | | |
|--------------------|---|--------------|--------------|--------------|-----------|-----------------|
| | Total | Issue Driven | Transformers | Progressives | Followers | Traditionalists |
| Base = 3,555-3,600 | | | | | | |
| Disabled | 65 | 71 | 65 | 65 | 63 | 57 |
| Overweight | 44 | 50 | 45 | 44 | 40 | 38 |
| Black | 41 | 53 | 43 | 40 | 39 | 31 |
| Asian | 34 | 46 | 39 | 34 | 31 | 25 |
| Muslims | 35 | 43 | 37 | 35 | 32 | 26 |
| Homosexuals | 35 | 44 | 41 | 35 | 33 | 25 |
| Older | 34 | 40 | 34 | 35 | 30 | 30 |
| Jewish | 32 | 39 | 37 | 33 | 29 | 24 |
| Christians | 31 | 37 | 32 | 31 | 28 | 27 |
| Lesbians | 31 | 40 | 36 | 30 | 30 | 25 |
| Women | 29 | 36 | 29 | 30 | 24 | 24 |
| Chinese | 29 | 40 | 31 | 29 | 25 | 22 |
| Short | 23 | 27 | 21 | 24 | 19 | 20 |
| Welsh | 22 | 29 | 27 | 22 | 19 | 18 |
| Bald | 23 | 27 | 20 | 23 | 21 | 22 |
| Irish | 21 | 29 | 22 | 20 | 18 | 18 |
| Men | 18 | 23 | 17 | 19 | 16 | 16 |

11.2 How programme context affects offence

This research set out to understand the context under which offence may be caused. Survey respondents were asked to consider different programming contexts for humour connected to disability. They were reminded that the circumstances under which a joke is told can, of course, make a big difference, that jokes can be more or less offensive depending on how they are told, when they are told and who is telling them. Respondents were asked to think about a number of different scenarios and to say how likely they would be to find a potentially offensive joke about disability or disabled people on television acceptable under each scenario.

Tasteless jokes about disability were considered unacceptable by the majority regardless of context. The most acceptable context for telling a tasteless joke about disabled people was if it was told in a late night comedy show on a channel such as Channel 4; 47% of respondents said it would be, or was more likely to be, acceptable. In this kind of context, viewers are much less likely to be taken unawares by risqué material. They might expect jokes to be more controversial and hard-hitting; even so, where disability is concerned there is still a danger that almost half of viewers would find it unacceptable. *Followers* are the most likely to endorse this context (50%).

A similar proportion (45%) thought that jokes about disability were more likely to be acceptable if they were told by a well-known and liked comedian. This suggests that if viewers know something about the person telling the joke and are familiar with their style, it can render a potentially offensive joke inoffensive. Presumably, this is because viewers understand that the person does not really hold the views being expressed in the joke and, therefore, they feel permitted to laugh. *Transformers* are the least likely to endorse this scenario (40% versus 45% average across all respondents). And the majority (55%) still feel that this scenario would be unacceptable.

Telling jokes about disability becomes far less acceptable to many more respondents if it is told in a programme before the watershed, particularly if it occurs in a show where there is no expectation of such material, for example, a quiz show or lunchtime chat show. (See Table 5.)

Table 5 The acceptability of jokes about disability or disabled people in different television contexts

| <i>A potentially offensive joke about disability or disabled people...</i> | Acceptable or more likely to be acceptable (total %) | Probably not acceptable/still not acceptable (total %) |
|--|---|---|
| Base = 3,660 | | |
| ...being told in a late night comedy show on Channel 4 | 47 | 53 |
| ...being told by a well known and liked comedian eg, Billy Connolly or Jonathan Ross | 45 | 55 |
| ...being told in a prime time quiz show such as <i>They Think It's All Over</i> (after the 9pm watershed) | 37 | 63 |
| ...being told in a comedy show before the 9pm watershed | 11 | 89 |
| ...being told on an entertainment show on Saturday evening before the watershed eg, <i>Ant and Dec's Saturday Night Takeaway</i> | 9 | 91 |
| ...being told by a guest on a lunchtime chat show on ITV1/BBC1 | 7 | 93 |

11.3 Stimulus material (qualitative)

a) Primary conditions for offence

A more in-depth understanding of the context for offence was sought in the qualitative phase, where eight clips based around comedy were used to identify what makes a programme likely to cause offence.

The research identified two primary conditions for causing offence in comedy. Where a programme delivers to either one of these primary conditions or to both, there is strong reason to think that it will cause offence.

i) Encouraging anti-social behaviour

The first primary condition is encouraging anti-social behaviour, which includes things like physical abuse, and mimicry. A clip from *They Think It's All Over* offered an example in which a guest on the show imitates, in an exaggerated manner, a deaf person signing. This was felt to be

highly offensive as it was seen to be mocking deaf signers' normal form of communication.

Similarly, widespread offence was caused by a clip from *The Armstrong and Miller Show*, which depicted a mock presenter appealing for money for a disabled child. Participants felt tricked into thinking it was a serious appeal, but the illusion is shattered where the comedian starts to imitate the movements of the fictional child 'Martin'. Even though this sketch was mocking political correctness, it was hugely disliked for the way it made fun of someone with a disability, particularly as this person was a disabled child. Regardless of the fact that it was a fictional character, participants felt it was too close to the bone and that this kind of mimicry could easily be imitated in real life.

Professionals who were shown this clip showed a similar reaction. Most thought the sketch relied on '*playground mimicry of a spastic*' to raise a laugh. *Issue Driven* and *Progressive* professionals could see that it was trying to poke fun at overtly politically correct culture but they did not find it funny.

"A cheap gag, in bad taste." (Producer)

ii) **Laughing at disabled people**

The second primary condition is laughing directly at disabled people, where the focus of the humour is aimed at their disability. Again, the clip from *They Think It's All Over* was considered guilty of this – the butt of the joke was directed at deaf people's means of communication and the difference between how they communicate and how hearing people communicate. The clip from *The Armstrong and Miller Show* also met this condition because the spoof presenter mimics a disabled child by pulling faces and making noises. Again, the crux of the humour is about him laughing at somebody's actual disability (even if it is via a character).

But, of course, it is not as simple as all that. The two primary conditions are, in many instances, part of what makes a comedy. The research found there are a number of diluting factors, which help make the difference between comedy being offensive or acceptable. Before discussing these, it is important to mention the 'secondary' conditions.

b) Secondary conditions for offence

If either or both of the primary conditions are present, there is good reason to suspect that offence may be caused, but in addition to the two primary conditions, there are a number of secondary conditions which inadvertently can cause problems for comedy programmes. These secondary reasons are not considered especially problematic in themselves, but in combination with the primary conditions they increase the likelihood of offence.

i) Violation of programme norms

The first of these is where the comedy violates viewer expectations and programme norms. For example, if the humour is out of line with what is expected, or if it violates scheduling expectations, this can lead to offence. If a programme is known to be prerecorded, rather than live, and a guest makes an offensive joke, participants said they would expect it to be edited out before the show is broadcast.

The strength of this mismatch of expectations is that it raises perceptions of offensiveness, so where a primary condition is present, violation of the programme norm will make the offensiveness worse, or less likely to be mitigated by diluting factors (more of these later).

ii) Disability as a stooge

In some instances, disability is perceived to be used as a stooge or platform to deliver humour. The clip from *All About Me* was mentioned in this context. The character with cerebral palsy was perceived by some participants to be on the outside of family life looking in. His character was viewed as a means of delivering humour rather than being shown as a fully integrated member of the family. Some children and young people in the study were critical of this portrayal, which they felt showed him as too passive.

iii) Extreme irony

The third factor is extreme irony, which can be missed by viewers unfamiliar with a particular programme style, as was evidenced by some reactions to a clip from *The Office*. Even though the main thrust of the humour of this series is about a very politically incorrect character, the realism of David Brent's character was so good that his prejudices were

mistaken for his actual feelings and point of view by those unfamiliar with the series. Of course, those likely to be misled by extreme irony of this nature are not the target audience, but there may be other instances such as the sketch from *The Armstrong and Miller Show* where extreme irony can cause offence even to those familiar with a particular programme format.

c) Diluting factors

Mitigating against these primary and secondary conditions are a number of programming elements (diluting factors) which serve to reduce the likelihood of offence. Eight diluting factors were identified, which diminish the impact of both the negative primary and secondary conditions. The stronger factors are at the top of the list. The strength of each factor to dilute offence diminishes towards the lower end of the list (see Chart 6).

i) Familiarity

The first of these factors is ‘familiarity’, where the character is known not to be politically correct or responsible etc. For example, the comedian in *The Stand Up Show* positions himself as someone who lacks standards. He calls himself “*a shiny convict bastard*” and says “*you don’t find me funny*”, which renders his politically incorrect humour more acceptable overall.

Similarly, if the show is known to be a parody – for example, it is apparent to regular viewers of *The Office* that the humour stems from the deeply insensitive and out-of-touch central character – it signifies a strategy to bypass potential offence. Or if the programme is positioned as a situation comedy and established as humorous by the inclusion of a well-known comedian, for example, Jasper Carrot in *All About Me*, this will help avoid the risk of misinterpretation.

“It’s good – he’s not just a vegetable – he’s got a sense of humour too. They are not taking the mickey out of him.”
(Boy, 12-13, sensory impairment (blind), South)

ii) Genre

The second diluting factor is the genre, and relates to viewer expectations of what a particular genre will contain. For example, stand up comedy in itself raises expectations of

potential offensiveness for most people. They are expecting things to be pushed to the limit, anticipating extreme humour and, to some extent, ‘unfunny’ humour. *The Stand Up Show*, scheduled as a late night comedy show, is a good example.

iii) Disabled comedian

The third, strong, diluting factor is if the jokes are told by a disabled comedian as this gives the audience permission to laugh. A clip featuring a comedian with Thalidomide impairment was a good example. The comedian told jokes about his disability and there was clearly relief among the non-disabled audience at being able to laugh with him.

“He was great, turned it to his advantage...they were laughing with him, not at him.”

(Female, 50-70, mobility impairment, South)

“He’s using his disability, but if he can laugh at himself and he doesn’t mind others laughing with him, then that’s fine.”

(Male, 30-60, carer, South)

iv) Accessible irony

The fourth diluting factor is making the irony accessible, where the primary butt of the joke is clearly a particular character. For people who were familiar with *The Office* and *Armstrong and Miller*, the irony was appreciated. The clip from *Absolutely Fabulous* is also relevant here. Knowing how the character Eddie gets herself into ridiculous scrapes, the audience are able to laugh at her after she has caused temporary paralysis to her face through allowing Patsy to give her home-made botox injections.

“But she’s always pulling stupid faces and launching herself around – it’s not anything specific.”

(Girl, 13-14, mobility impairment, South)

v) Low proximity/identity

Another diluting factor has been termed low proximity or identity, where the disability featured is not actually relevant to the people who are watching. For example, the comedian in *The Stand Up Show* makes a joke about leprosy and pulling a leper's fingers off. For most people, while the joke itself is not funny, part of the reason it lacks impact is that leprosy as a condition is something that is distant to the UK. It is something which is associated with the past and with foreign countries. It is not culturally relevant and not something that hits home as a disability today.

vi) Convolution

A sixth diluting factor is convolution, where basically there is so much going on within the programme, so many multiple layers to a joke, that it either diminishes the funniness because it takes so much effort to unpick the layers, or the point is easily lost. *The Big Breakfast* clip is a good example of this. The banter goes on and on and most respondents were not quite sure who was actually being made fun of and missed the point of the joke.

But the other way convolution works as a diluting factor is where there are lots of simultaneous jokes going on. *Absolutely Fabulous* epitomises this. The simultaneous jokes support the content as being ridiculous, so when Saffy slaps her mother, who her guest thinks is disabled, her behaviour is seen as funny by the audience.

vii) Channel

The channel on which the programme is broadcast makes a difference. There is a perception that BBC2 and Channel 4 can show riskier comedy than more mainstream channels like BBC1 or ITV1. This is because audiences feel that those who watch these channels are more self selecting, and discriminating; therefore, they are thought more likely to appreciate the irony.

viii) Scheduling

If a potentially controversial or challenging show is broadcast late, ie, post 10.00pm, people feel it is more acceptable. Participants talked about 10.00pm being the watershed for

more hard-hitting comedy programmes. They accept that there is always a danger of young teenagers and children seeing something unsuitable, but they feel there is only so much broadcasters can do to protect impressionable audiences.

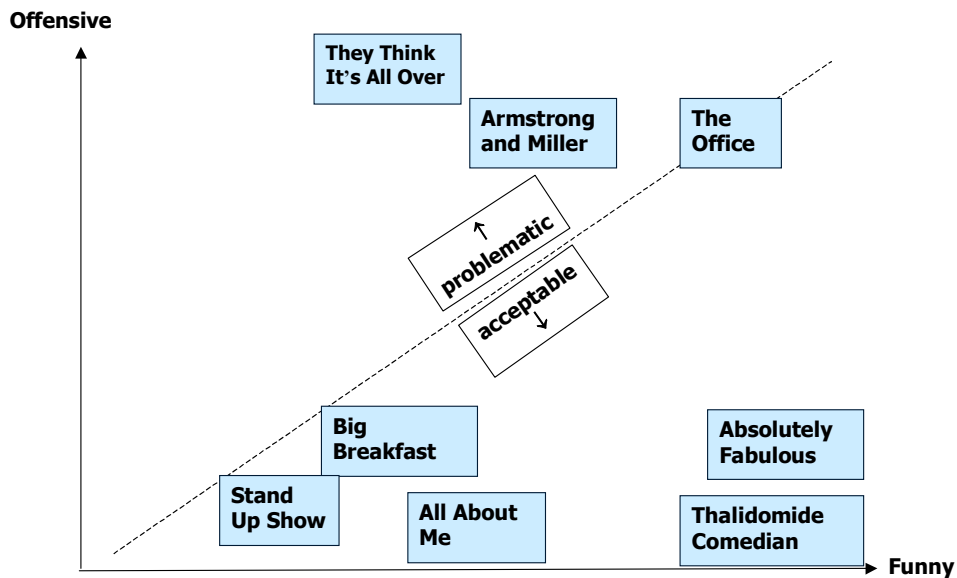
Chart 6 Diluting factors

- Diluting factors exist which can diminish impact of primary condition

| | | Examples | |
|----------------------|--------------------------------|---|---|
| strength of dilution | Familiarity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Character known as un-PC or irresponsible • Comedian positions self as lacking standards • Show known as parody | [Absolutely Fabulous] [Stand Up Show] [The Office] |
| | Genre | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stand up comedy raises expectations of offensiveness/ extremeness (uncensored/ not PC) • ‘Silly’ banter/ bad jokes of light entertainment | [Stand Up Show] [Big Breakfast] |
| | Disabled Comedian | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Position of ‘laugh with me’ rather than ‘at me’ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – ultimate permission to laugh | [Thalidomide Comedian] |
| | Accessible Irony | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary butt of joke is other character | [The Office] [Armstrong & Miller] [Absolutely Fabulous] |
| | Low Proximity/ Identity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disability featured not relevant <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – not under disability umbrella | [Stand Up Show] |
| | Convolution | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiple layers to joke which diminish ‘funniness’ through effort to unpick/ miss the point • Simultaneous ‘jokes’ which support content as ridiculous | [Big Breakfast] [Absolutely Fabulous] |
| | Channel | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broadcast on BBC2 & Channel 4 increases acceptability due to perception of smaller & more middle-class audiences (discriminating) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – ∴ irony less likely to be missed | [Armstrong & Miller] [Office] |
| | Scheduling | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Past 10 o’clock diminishes offence <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – expectations of more risqué programming – more impressionable audiences (children) should not be watching | Correct assumption? |

Chart 7 shows participants' reactions to the various comedy clips, and their relative positions on a scale of how offensive to how funny they were perceived to be. Many of them fall into the acceptability half of the scale, with just two of the clips being considered problematic and one, *The Office*, being evaluated as borderline. **It is important to point out that it is each isolated clip that is being evaluated, not the programme itself.**

Chart 7 Clip evaluation: Comedy



d) In summary

Analysis of the comedy stimulus material reveals a pattern. Where the primary conditions for offence exist, as they do in a number of the clips, the presence of at least *three* diluting factors appears sufficient to reduce offence for most people. Where only secondary conditions are present, just *two* diluting factors are required to mitigate offence being caused.

The clip from *The Office* was considered borderline only because some participants had never seen the programme before and were inclined to take the politically incorrect views of the central character David Brent at face value. The two clips found to be most offensive by the majority of participants, both disabled and able-bodied, were *They Think It's All Over* and *The Armstrong and Miller Show*. The latter is the most interesting in that while there

are some diluting factors, very clearly it contains the primary condition of encouraging anti-social behaviour through mimicry because this is at the heart of the joke. In this case, the diluting factors fail to mitigate against offence being caused.

“It was quite amusing, but I felt uncomfortable about laughing as I didn’t know the actor or the show. Some might think it’s out of order as the butt of the joke is the disabled population. I mean, if you think of Martin as a real life person it’s not at all funny and mimicry is like racism, but I was laughing at the contrast of how it starts off deadly serious and then turns into something very silly.”
(Male, 20s, non-disabled, North)

“It’s taking the mick out of political correctness but it’s not going about it in the right way. He’s still making a mockery of something people have got to live with...that’s distasteful.”
(Male, 30-60, carer, South)

“That is visually offensive. I didn’t like that at all, especially as it was about a kid.”
(Male, 25-55, mobility impairment, South)

12 ADVERTISING

Images of Disability (COI Communications Research 2001) states that when it comes to disability representation in advertising, “people tend to look for a fit between the story of the advertisement, the message of the brand and the imported meaning of the disability. If there is a clear integration into the narrative context, some feel the execution is successful. If not, some consider it gratuitous, even tokenistic.” This was the case in this research.

When it came to the acceptability of particular stimulus material there were a number of issues that participants raised. Due to the short length of advertisements, most felt that the disabled person would be strongly linked with the product. The use of a disabled actor or character to advertise a product, therefore, was seen to be making a statement of some kind and participants had varying reactions to this.

12.1 Factors which increase acceptance

There were four factors which emerged as important in enhancing viewers’ acceptance of disabled portrayals in advertising either to sell or promote a brand.

a) Challenging negative stereotypes

The first was if the advertising campaign challenged negative stereotypes. An example of an execution that were felt to do this was the *Virgin* mobile phone advertisement featuring Mat Fraser, an actor with Thalidomide impairment. He is seen sitting on a bus apparently talking to himself and becoming annoyed at some injustice. Other passengers are either embarrassed or staring at him. It emerges that he is not talking to himself, but is using a hands-free phone. He turns to a young woman who is looking at him and says, in a friendly way, “You all right?” She looks away shame-facedly. The commercial closes by offering bonus airtime to heavy phone users. The advertisement contains a story designed to wrong-foot the viewer by setting up a discriminatory frame of reference. While not all participants understood the key message ‘see red’, get angry and change to the red service ie, *Virgin*, they felt it offered a non-stereotypical portrayal of a disabled person.

b) Promoting positive disabled images

The second factor was promoting a positive disabled image. An example of an advertisement that was perceived to do this well was *Freeserve*. This commercial, which uses the theme of independence, is a complex montage of images intercut with shots of Aimee Mann, a real-life model who has lost both of her lower legs, but continues to walk and run wearing a range of dramatically designed leg extensions. Participants felt this execution linked disability with freedom and beauty and was seen to offer a positive role model.

“I remember that [Freeserve]...it’s a very positive image showing how she is a model and obviously has no issues with her disability.”

(Female, 18-35, mobility impairment, North)

c) Sheer representation

The inclusion of a disabled person in an advertisement was in itself seen to be a positive step. Advertisements shown to participants which were applauded for doing so included *Burger King*. A *Burger King* employee explains that she is learning to sign because she felt that her deaf customers (of whom there are several because there is a nearby ‘Centre’) were not getting the service they deserved. Her story is intercut with appreciative comments from deaf customers. The commercial closes with the voice of a company spokesman saying “This may seem a little unusual for a fast food restaurant but at *Burger King* we go out of our way so you can have it your way, right away.” The inclusion of deaf signers in the advertisement was greeted positively by participants.

“I watched that and thought wow, people signing on an advert, how brilliant.”

(Female, 30-40, deaf signer, South)

d) Targeting disabled consumers

Treating disabled people as a consumer group in their own right was applauded.

A foreign commercial for *Telia* mobile phones features a father and daughter communicating in sign language. (Their conversation is subtitled.) The father has broken some crockery and wants the daughter to tell her mother that she did it. She says she will if her father will tell her what she is getting for her

birthday. When he eventually agrees and says it is a mobile phone, she signs that that is what her grandmother is giving her. The advertisement ends with the caption “Remember when mobile phones were only used for talking?” The *Telia* advertisement was seen to demonstrate how a product feature – text messaging – was relevant to the deaf community; a form of communication that deaf people could participate in just like the hearing population.

“It’s appropriate use of disability. It challenges the idea that we’re all miserable and angry.”
(Male, 35-60, mobility impairment, North)

12.2 Factors which raise barriers

But, in addition to the factors which assist viewers to accept the inclusion of disabled representation in advertising, there are other factors that do the reverse.

a) Promoting negative stereotype

The first of these opposing factors is the promotion of negative stereotypes. The drink driving advertisement shown was seen to accentuate the idea of a disabled person being entirely dependent on others. Following a car crash, a man is shown in a wheel chair, being fed by his mother with a spoon. This was a difficult area for many participants. While they agreed that the campaign might act as a deterrent, warning people of the consequences of drink driving, it was also thought to reinforce the view that disabled people are victims. They found it difficult to criticise the aim of the campaign but felt that it did perpetuate a negative view of disability. *Images of Disability* (COI Communications, 2001) also found that ‘victim imagery’ calls for very careful use.

“I can see that they need to shock you into not drinking and driving, but it only propagates us as dependent.”
(Female, 25-55, mobility impairment, South)

b) Using disability as a signifier of ‘caring brand’

The *Burger King* advertisement, although seen positively by some participants for its ‘sheer representation’ of a disabled person, was heavily criticised for the way it appeared to use the portrayal as a means of positioning itself as a caring brand. This caused offence among the sample, many of whom saw it as patronising. Also, the fact that Burger King did not consider providing subtitles for the advertisement was seen effectively to exclude many deaf viewers.

“It’s so awful. They’re just using the deaf community to try and say Burger King is a caring company...so condescending. And they can’t even be bothered to use subtitles.”

(Male, 30-40, deaf lip reader, South)

c) Misrepresentation

Some advertisements were perceived to be inaccurate in the way they had used disability. For example, the *Telia* advertisements used deaf signers but a number of deaf participants felt they were signing nonsense. They commented on the fact that they did not recognise the sign language being used, which resulted in them feeling the portrayals were tokenistic and offensive. (This may be because this was a foreign commercial and it was not British Sign Language being used.)

“As I watched I thought she wasn’t probably even deaf. She wasn’t signing properly. I can’t believe it...they were just waving their hands around.”

(Female, 30-40, deaf signer, South)

13 LANGUAGE

In terms of language around disability and how disability is referred to, there are varying preferences across the difference types. For *Issue Driven* participants there is a long list of what they find offensive (see Chart 8), including words or terms like ‘handicapped’, ‘spastic’, ‘invalid’ and ‘wheelchair bound’. The same is true for the *Transformers* and the *Progressives*. *Transformer* children, however, showed more tolerance towards the use of language, although they drew the line at certain terms.

“I don’t think you should be angry about something they say wrong, because they don’t know much about what is out there or what people have.”

(Boy, 14-15, mobility impairment, Midlands)

“I think cripple is a bit harsh...”

(Boy, 14-15, mobility impairment, Midlands)

Followers and *Traditionalists* are more tolerant of a much wider range of terminology and have a smaller list of words that they consider unacceptable, which includes ‘spastic’ and ‘cripple’. For this group, the use of terminology such as ‘handicapped’ is not seen necessarily as offensive.

For *Issue Driven* the acceptable language is also a tight list eg, ‘wheelchair users’, ‘visually impaired’, ‘audio impaired’, ‘non-disabled’ and ‘disabled people’. *Transformers* and *Progressives* are a little more liberal, but they are aware of sub groups, distinguishing between deaf signers and deaf lip readers, for example, rather than classing them all as ‘audio impaired’. It is the *Followers* and *Traditionalists* who tend to lean towards being less politically correct, being at ease with terms like ‘normal’ people, the ‘disabled’ and ‘dwarves’.

For *Transformers* and *Progressives*, there is a small group of words that has slipped into the ‘more pc than meaningful’ category, which includes ‘visually impaired’ and ‘audio impaired’ for the deaf and blind. Disabled people themselves sometimes feel that political correctness has gone too far.

“Blind, visually impaired...I mean I’m blind and that’s it. I don’t have any vision for it to be impaired. I’ve been told you shouldn’t say blind. Who says you shouldn’t say blind? The politically correct lobbies. When I describe people I describe them as blind or partially sighted. I don’t describe them as sight impaired, visually impaired because I’m not comfortable with either of those.”
 (Female, 30-45, sensory impairment (blind), South)

Chart 8 Language

- Preferences for general usage across genres largely determined by attitude type

| | <i>Issue Driven</i> | <i>Transformers/ Progressives</i> | <i>Followers/ Traditionalists</i> |
|----------------------------------|---|--|--|
| Offensive | Handicapped Spastic Cripple Dumb Blind Invalid | Wheelchair-bound/ confined Victim Brave The Disabled | Spastic Cripple ? Handicapped |
| Acceptable | Wheelchair user Visually impaired Audio impaired Non-disabled Disabled people | Wheelchair user Blind Deaf signer Deaf lip reader Disabled people Able-bodied people Non-disabled people | ? Handicapped ? Dumb Blind Deaf Normal people The Disabled Dwarves |
| More 'pc' than meaningful | | Visually impaired Audio impaired | for deaf and blind Able-bodied people Non-disabled people |
| Problematic | Special needs Learning difficulties | ‘Unhelpful’ generic terms which imply stupidity | |

A few of the terms mentioned are used as industry labels, such as ‘special needs’ and ‘learning difficulties’. While these are well established within particular sectors, eg, education and legal areas, they raise issues for disabled people. For people being categorised in this way, some of these labels are unhelpful. They are generic terms which are felt to muddy the waters between physical and mental disability, confusing the very important point that the two are not necessarily linked.

“I can’t stand the term ‘special needs’ because it’s so patronising and it gives the public a really bad impression.”
 (Male, 18-35, mobility impairment, North)

14 LOOKING FORWARD

There is a strong sense that representation is changing and that it will become more inclusive over time. Comparisons with other minority groups, particularly ethnicity, suggest that disability representation is likely to follow a similar path to the representation of minority ethnic groups.

Most professionals are fairly confident of change in the future (although for many this is in the very long term) and point to developments in society such as moves to integrate education systems. Professionals feel that as young people become more accustomed to seeing disabled peers in mainstream education, they will become increasingly comfortable with images of disabled people on television.

14.1 Progressing representation

Professionals were asked to think about how change could be progressed for the future. They considered a number of different initiatives and ways of taking things forward.

a) Seasons

Issue Driven, Progressives and *Follower* professionals consider there is a place for disability seasons as they give space for disability issues to be explored in depth on television. The BBC autumn 2002 season *What's Your Problem?*, for example, was praised for casting disabled actors in quality short dramas which tackled challenging issues such as prejudice and sex. However, many do not see disability seasons as a means of furthering inclusion. To some *Issue Driven* professionals they are a poor substitute for integration into mainstream programming. Seasons are perceived by these professionals to be symptomatic of the marginalisation of disability on television, showing a limited number of programmes, which are often screened late at night.

"They're not inclusive. If the whole issue was dealt with as part and parcel of every programme, that would be inclusive."
(Commentator)

b) Broadcasting and Creative Industries Disability Network

Those active in the promotion of disability inclusion within the industry are aware of the Broadcasting Disability Network manifesto launched by the Broadcasting Disability Network, now

the Broadcasting and Creative Industries Disability Network (BCIDN). But as yet, the organisation does not have a sufficiently high profile among professionals generally. Activists within the industry hope the BCIDN will raise the profile of disability representation in the same way the Cultural Diversity Network initiative has secured the increased inclusion of ethnic minorities in mainstream programming. But they perceive some limitations, which they highlighted during the interviews.

They mentioned that there is no one initiative that addresses disability representation in totality. It is covered by the Disability Discrimination Act as well as the Broadcasting and Creative Industries Disability Network and they feel this lack of cohesion dilutes impact. However, they also stated that it is too soon to offer a final judgement on its success and that this will be measured over the forthcoming years by the increased visibility of disability in mainstream programming.

“We do get very, very cynical. I think the launch is, you know, the great new thing: ‘yes, we’ll do this then it’ll all work’, but it didn’t work in the past so why is it going to work now? The advantage is you keep it on the agenda really and things do change but they change at the rate that society changes.” (Commentator)

“Fine, I mean no problem with the manifesto. I think there were many of the chief executives of TV companies there. I think if they’re prepared to put it into practice that would be great.” (Commentator)

Comment was made about the importance of ensuring that the BCIDN is able to involve key players and that it is grounded ie, that regulatory bodies and broadcasting professionals are given the opportunity to contribute to the debate.

“You need the right people around the table if you’re going to be wanting to move any issue forward. There’s no point in just talking about portrayal - let’s get some programme makers here [at the BCIDN].” (BCIDN member)

c) Facilitation of liaison

Perceived problems in communicating with lobby groups, and the disabled community more widely, were cited by several professionals. They feel that the broadcasting industry as an entity does not have a good relationship with these parties and that both sides have a lot to learn in terms of the issues faced by each, and how best to communicate with each other.

d) Increased employment of disabled people in the industry

Most feel that increasing the number of disabled people in the industry will help reduce barriers to inclusion. Having people with disabilities on set/location would reduce the ‘fear factor’ and also, importantly, encourage creativity.

“I think tokenism can best be avoided by having the people that are in charge of programming, both the people that decide what programmes will be made and the people that produce the programmes, to actually have real experience of disability.”
(Commentator)

e) Training/education

Training and education within the industry is felt to be key, given widespread misconceptions about disability and the low awareness of new legislation etc. More widespread disability awareness training is encouraged in order to increase familiarity with disability issues and reduce the ‘fear’ factor.

“Just making it clear that overall 15% of the population have disabilities, and they educate...retraining, training, awareness training or whatever. To make sure that the people making the individual decisions have got that as an awareness of life, rather than just awareness of employment law.” (Commentator)

f) Supply issues

Professionals point to a number of current examples of famous disabled people who are pushing boundaries, such as Mat Fraser. Many programme makers praised Mat Fraser’s talent as a comic performer, actor, commentator and documentary maker. His relatively high profile across different genres is thought to help break down audience prejudices, because his talent allows people to see past his disability. However, they note that eminent disabled actors are exceptional. Professionals recognise the need for more disabled performers and/or characters in popular, prime time television programmes.

There is a perceived limited pool of disabled actors. Professionals suggest that action could be taken to raise awareness among agents so that disabled actors are given the same opportunities and profile as other actors and that their CVs ‘end up in the trays of casting directors’.

Mainstream drama schools are criticised for not being proactive in terms of encouraging disabled people to apply for places – some go as far as suggesting quotas for entry to drama schools. It is felt also that acting schools specialising in training disabled people can be fairly introspective. They are seen to provide a safe, but enclosed environment, which could do more to foster links with others in the industry. Consequently, disabled actors are not particularly visible in the wider profession.

“They’re not very approachable and they don’t seem to like their people getting jobs, which seems very strange. They have this idea that it’s exploitative and that what they’re providing is a safe environment.” (Casting Director)

Mention was made of a Disability Register established by *Equity*, although professionals were unsure if it was still in operation. In fact, a new Disability Register has been produced and published for *Equity* by *Spotlight*.

g) Harness personal enthusiasm of key individuals

Several professionals thought it would be a good idea to identify key individuals active in the broadcasting industry and use their drive to move the issues forward. There is a feeling that it is only through the action of such influential people that change will occur and filter out to the remainder of the industry.

“You need to pinpoint certain individuals you feel have a sympathy [for disability issues], and just try and work with them, knowing the pressures they face and what practically is a solution.” (Commissioning Editor)

h) Quotas

Most professionals spontaneously mentioned the idea of quotas or targets. There was a mix of views spread across different categories with some professionals endorsing greater intervention by the industry. *Followers* and *Traditionalists* tended not to support the implementation of quotas. Positive discrimination was seen by these professionals to be counter-productive because there is the danger that portrayal can become forced and tokenistic. Also, they think that set quotas will bring representation levels up to an unnaturally high level. However, they are generally unaware of the extent of disability in society.

Some professionals think set quotas would be a good idea because they would force representation to be measured, thereby ensuring

full compliance by programme makers reluctant to address disability.

Some think positive discrimination can encourage claims of tokenism and this is detrimental to disabled actors and the progression of disability as an issue. If an actor is pushed forward on a 'politically correct' agenda they will be remembered for their disability and not their talent. Also, dissenting professionals said the use of hard quotas could potentially compromise creative decisions.

"If we were to start having a person with a disability of any kind in every single show, I think we'd be missing the point. It wouldn't be accurate or fair. It would have gone into an era of trying to make a point. It would be to the detriment of what we're trying to achieve." (Commissioning Editor)

"I have mixed views because working in comedy I find that people from minority groups are often fast-tracked through without being ready...I think there's a whole question about whether you have grades of talent. Should a disabled actor be as talented as an able-bodied actor or is it enough for them to be okay but the disability is the thing that gives them the edge and the airtime?" (Writer)

i) Top-down pressure within the industry

Others see a possible compromise in the establishment of 'targets' rather than 'quotas'. Professionals from across the different channels pointed to the need for a 'directive from on high', indicating that senior management are taking the issue seriously and that the current situation in terms of representation will not be tolerated.

"It has to be a BBC policy like with ethnic minorities. That's the way it has to be, and our boss signed up to that so whole-heartedly that, again, we have the support. Now if the BBC, as part of this research, is as committed to better representing disabled people as they were about ethnic minorities, then it should come about in exactly the same way." (Casting Director)

Many programme makers believe that real change can only come about within the television industry if directives and guidelines are implemented 'from above'. They believe that broadcasting professionals at the Controller, Divisional Head or Commissioning

Editor levels are the only individuals with the power and influence needed to secure a greater representation.

“I think if you’re looking for advice and routes and things to make this happen, then it’s got to come in the same way as moves towards addressing ethnicity.” (Casting Director)

15 APPENDIX I CONTENT ANALYSIS 1997-2002: REPRESENTATION OF DISABLED PEOPLE ON TERRESTRIAL TELEVISION

I.1 Summary

Since 1997, the representation and portrayal of disabled people in peak-time programmes on the five terrestrial channels has been captured in a 'snapshot' of television output⁷. This analysis focuses on a sample of peak-time output (from 1730 hours to midnight) over two composite weeks. In 2002, 802 programmes were monitored. (Note the time period excludes most children's programming.) This monitoring exercise was carried out by the Communications Research Group in Birmingham, as were previous content analyses.

The analysis notes the role played by each speaking person in the sample. These snapshots of peak-time television have shown that disabled people appear infrequently, with little increase in representation noted over the years.

- In 2002 disabled people were identified in just over one in ten (11%) programmes and contributed less than one percent (0.8%) of the overall television population.
- Repeat appearances by a small number of disabled individuals (N=10) boosted the total disabled appearances by almost one third (30%).
- Disabilities portrayed were heavily clustered among the more easily recognised forms such as difficulties with walking or vision.
- The majority – almost six in ten appearances – portrayed the disability as central to the participant's role.
- Disabled people are seen most frequently in fiction and factual programming, followed by news and film.
- In factual programmes, disabled participants were far more likely to contribute to topics relating to minority issues, or to discuss their personal experiences than a base sample.
- They were far less likely to contribute to everyday topics such as cookery, gardening, motoring, DIY or country pursuits.

⁷ Since the earliest monitoring, the categorisation of disability has followed that used by the Office of National Statistics (OPCS, 1988), a medical-based categorisation which allows various comparisons with population demographics. The content analyses include the representation and portrayal of people with mental health-related disabilities, not addressed in the main body of this report.

- In 2002, the proportion of disabled people in major, rather than minor or incidental, roles was almost a third of the roles portrayed, a significant increase from the previous year.
- Disability was rarely portrayed as an everyday, incidental phenomenon.
- More than four in ten (42%) appearances were considered to highlight issues of prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination.

I.2 Methodology issues

The data presented here provide an opportunity to consider, quantitatively, the levels and type of on-screen representation of disabled people in terrestrial television. Further, they offer an insight into the way these portrayals have changed over time. It must be recognised that the view they offer forms a snapshot in time, and the nature of the findings cannot address all the qualitative aspects of such portrayals. Those issues have been covered more fully elsewhere in the report. However, every participant who showed, or was identified in other ways as disabled, was profiled. In this a note was made of demographic details and participants were examined in terms of the role enjoyed (and subject of contribution in factual programmes). Each participant was also considered in terms of issues of stereotyping and discrimination and whether disability was relevant to their role within the programme. Profiles of disabled participants were compared with a sample of participants who were not a member of a minority group (that is not an ethnic minority, not disabled and not gay or lesbian). This base sample was drawn by selecting the first male and the first female to appear five minutes from the start of each programme.

Due to the nature of the sampling methodology, individual events may not be captured necessarily. For example, the Commonwealth Games held in Manchester in 2001 are not included in the sampling period, which falsely gives an impression that sports programmes contained no disability representation that year.

I.3 Trends in representation and portrayal of disabled people

Since 1999, the proportion of programmes containing disabled people has remained stable at 11-12% (see Table I.1). The level of representation has also changed little, accounting for one per cent of the speaking population in general.

Table I.1 Representation of disabled people in programmes compared to the overall television population

| Year | % of programmes | % of TV population | Number of disabled people |
|-------------|------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1997 | 13 | 1.0 | 148 |
| 1998 | 7 | 0.7 | 101 |
| 1999 | 11 | 0.9 | 122 |
| 2000 | 11 | 1.1 | 146 |
| 2001 | 12 | 1.1 | 150 |
| 2002 | 11 | 0.8 | 120 |

Base: All participants identified as disabled.

[It is difficult to compare these overall figures directly with the real world population since disability may not necessarily be overtly disclosed or observed on television even when present. None the less, national statistics for the UK suggest a disability incidence of between 14% (OPCS, 1988) and 18% (2001 census). However, using a somewhat different definition, Labour Market trends (2001) suggest that one in five people (19.3%) of working age have a disability covered by the 1995 Disability Discrimination Act. These various statistics all suggest a considerable under-representation of people with disabilities on television.]

Table I.2 shows that disabled people are most frequent in fiction and factual programming, followed by news and film. Very few are featured in entertainment. Since the sample focused on peak-time programmes, very little children's output was captured (0.5% of transmission time in 2002). Thus, the prevalence of disability in this production type cannot be reliably gleaned. Similarly, religious programmes comprised a very small proportion of output across the years (between 0.2% and 1.1% of programmes). Disabled people were absent in every year in sport except for 2000 when 21 disabled people (14%) appeared in two programmes covering the Paralympics in Sydney. In 2002, the Commonwealth Games did not fall within the sampling dates, but the monitoring exercise attempts to capture a typical cross-section of programming rather than atypical events which might produce anomalous results.

In fiction, there was a steady decline across the first five samples from 39% of all disabled people in 1997 to less than half that proportion (18%) in 2001. However, the current sample saw a significant increase to 44%. In factual programmes, the proportion rose in each of the first three years from 24% in 1997 to 29% in 1998 and 32% in 1999. This was followed by a decline in the last three years to 27% in 2000 and 2001 and 25% in the current sample (2002).

In news programming, there was an overall increase over the first five years from 15% in 1997 to just over a quarter (26%) in 2001, followed by a decline in the current sample to 17%. Films fluctuated more, where in the first two years there was a rise (from 14% to 17%) followed by a fall in the next two (12% each) and then a further rise to the highest proportion yet in 2001 (21%). This was helped by two films which, together, contained 13 disabled people who contributed 41% to the total number of disabled people in film in that year. In the current 2002 sample, the proportion declined once more to just 9%.

Table I.2 Representation of disability in programmes between 1997 and 2002

| Programme type | 1997 | | 1998 | | 1999 | | 2000 | | 2001 | | 2002 | |
|----------------|----------|------------|----------|------------|----------|------------|----------|------------|----------|------------|----------|------------|
| | <i>N</i> | % | <i>N</i> | % | <i>N</i> | % | <i>N</i> | % | <i>N</i> | % | <i>N</i> | % |
| News | 22 | 15 | 12 | 12 | 23 | 19 | 30 | 21 | 39 | 26 | 20 | 17 |
| Factual | 36 | 24 | 29 | 29 | 39 | 32 | 39 | 27 | 40 | 27 | 30 | 25 |
| Entertainment | 8 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 9 | 7 | 7 | 5 | 8 | 5 | 6 | 5 |
| Sport | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | 21 | 14 | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| Religion | 4 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 2 | -- | -- | 1 | 1 | -- | -- |
| Children's | -- | -- | -- | -- | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 2 | -- | -- |
| Fiction | 58 | 39 | 35 | 35 | 33 | 27 | 31 | 21 | 27 | 18 | 53 | 44 |
| Film | 20 | 14 | 17 | 17 | 15 | 12 | 17 | 12 | 32 | 21 | 11 | 9 |
| TOTAL | 148 | 100 | 101 | 101 | 122 | 100 | 146 | 101 | 150 | 100 | 120 | 100 |

NB: Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

Table I.3 shows the frequency of types of disability portrayed in each two-week sample captured over the last six years, as a percentage of the occurrence of disability within the sample. Overall, the categories *cannot walk* and *lame*⁸ were the most frequent in each sample. In the first five years there was an overall decline from 26% in 1997 to 18% in 2001, followed by an increase in the current sample to 29%.

On the other hand, sensory disabilities (blind, deaf) increased over the first three years to peak in 1999 at nearly one quarter (24%) of all disabilities. In the next two years, the proportions declined to 13% in 2000 and 10% in 2001, but the current sample saw an increase once again to 23%. Similarly, facial or bodily disfigurement increased over the first four samples from 7% in 1997 to more than double that proportion in 2000 (16%). This was followed by a decline in 2001 to 9% and then an increase in the current sample to 14% of all disabilities.

Conversely, mental illness declined from 14% in 1997 to 9% in 2000, increased sharply in 2001 to an all-time high of 21%, and then declined in the current sample to the lowest proportion yet recorded (6%). The high proportion of disabled people in 2001 was due to the two films referred to above, where all the disabled characters had mental health problems.

⁸ These were assigned where the disability that caused the mobility problem was not portrayed. Other disabilities which may also have produced mobility problems were given their specific category (eg, cerebral palsy) in order to capture as much detail as possible.

Table I.3 Types of disability shown

| Type of disability | 1997 | | 1998 | | 1999 | | 2000 | | 2001 | | 2002 | |
|-----------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|-----------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| Blindness (inc. temporary) | 11 | 7 | 12 | 11 | 7 | 5 | 10 | 6 | 5 | 3 | 20 | 16 |
| Partially sighted | 4 | 3 | 7 | 7 | 8 | 6 | 5 | 3 | 5 | 3 | 5 | 4 |
| Deafness (inc. temporary) | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 13 | 10 | 1 | 1 | 6 | 4 | 1 | 1 |
| Partially deaf | 2 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 3 | -- | -- | 2 | 2 |
| Limbs missing | 10 | 7 | 8 | 7 | 6 | 4 | 11 | 7 | 11 | 7 | 7 | 6 |
| Malformed limbs | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 3 |
| Seriously disfigured body/face | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 7 | 5 | 14 | 9 | 1 | 1 | 11 | 9 |
| Slightly disfigured body/face | 7 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 11 | 8 | 11 | 7 | 12 | 8 | 6 | 5 |
| Complete paralysis | -- | -- | 2 | 2 | -- | -- | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Partial paralysis | 8 | 5 | 7 | 7 | 8 | 6 | 6 | 4 | 6 | 4 | 1 | 1 |
| Cannot walk | 17 | 11 | 22 | 21 | 16 | 12 | 19 | 12 | 16 | 10 | 25 | 20 |
| Lame | 23 | 15 | 5 | 5 | 7 | 5 | 15 | 9 | 13 | 8 | 11 | 9 |
| Mute | -- | -- | -- | -- | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Autism | -- | -- | 2 | 2 | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| Speech problem | 2 | 1 | -- | -- | 2 | 1 | -- | -- | 1 | 1 | -- | -- |
| Dwarfism | 2 | 1 | -- | -- | 5 | 4 | -- | -- | 4 | 3 | 6 | 5 |
| Gigantism | -- | -- | -- | -- | 2 | 1 | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| Arthritis | -- | -- | -- | -- | 1 | 1 | -- | -- | -- | -- | 1 | 1 |
| Cerebral palsy | -- | -- | 2 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 1 | -- | -- | 4 | 3 |
| Down's syndrome | 7 | 5 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Mentally ill dependent | 3 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 4 | 3 | 8 | 5 | 1 | 1 |
| Mentally ill independent | 19 | 12 | 10 | 9 | 12 | 9 | 10 | 6 | 25 | 16 | 6 | 5 |
| Senile dementia | 3 | 2 | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| Serious learning disability | 3 | 2 | -- | -- | 1 | 1 | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| Moderate learning disability | 4 | 3 | 1 | 1 | -- | -- | 2 | 1 | -- | -- | 1 | 1 |
| Mild learning disability | 3 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 17 | 11 | -- | -- | 3 | 2 |
| Brain damage, severe | 2 | 1 | -- | -- | 1 | 1 | -- | -- | 9 | 6 | -- | -- |
| Brain damage, independent | -- | -- | 1 | 1 | -- | -- | 2 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| Multiple sclerosis | -- | -- | 1 | 1 | -- | -- | 4 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Other | 15 | 10 | 5 | 5 | 9 | 7 | 15 | 9 | 23 | 15 | 4 | 3 |
| TOTAL | 153 | 100 | 107 | 103 | 134 | 99 | 159 | 102 | 154 | 101 | 125 | 103 |

NB: The number of disabilities may exceed the total number of disabled people since one person may have more than one disability.
NB: Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

Table I.4 shows that the prominence of disabled people declined between 1998, when 29% were in major roles, and 2001, when just half that proportion (16%) appeared in major roles. More recently, however, this downward trend has been halted. Data for 2002 show a doubling of the proportion of disabled people in major roles to 32%.

These figures should be contextualised by noting that, in the current 2002 sample, the distribution of the television population as a whole (ie, non-disabled) was 15% in major roles, 18% in minor roles and 67% in interviewees or incidental fictional characters.

Table I.4 Level of appearance of disabled people

| Level | 1997 | | 1998 | | 1999 | | 2000 | | 2001 | | 2002 | |
|---|----------|------------|----------|------------|----------|-----------|----------|------------|----------|------------|----------|------------|
| | <i>N</i> | % | <i>N</i> | % | <i>N</i> | % | <i>N</i> | % | <i>N</i> | % | <i>N</i> | % |
| Major role | 37 | 25 | 29 | 29 | 27 | 22 | 27 | 18 | 24 | 16 | 38 | 32 |
| Minor role | 23 | 16 | 16 | 16 | 14 | 11 | 16 | 11 | 18 | 12 | 15 | 13 |
| Incidental | 88 | 59 | 56 | 55 | 81 | 66 | 103 | 71 | 108 | 72 | 67 | 56 |
| <i>TOTAL</i> | 148 | 100 | 101 | 100 | 122 | 99 | 146 | 100 | 150 | 100 | 120 | 101 |
| NB: Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding. | | | | | | | | | | | | |

1.4 In the year 2002

This final section looks more closely at data from the sample in 2002.

Stereotyping, discrimination and prejudice

In 2002, over four out of ten (42%, *N*=50) of disabled people were considered to highlight issues of stereotyping, discrimination or prejudice, appearing in 30 programmes (32% of all programmes containing disabled people).

Country of production

People with disabilities occurred more frequently in USA productions in 2002 (1.1% of the overall population versus 0.8% UK), where they were also featured in a somewhat higher proportion of programmes (16% versus 11% UK).

UK – 72 programmes (11% of all UK programmes) featured 95 disabled people (79% of all disabled people), who comprised 0.8% of

all those who spoke or made an individual contribution to UK programmes.

USA – 18 programmes (16% of all USA programmes) featured 23 disabled people (19% of all disabled people) who comprised 1.1% of all those who spoke or made an individual contribution to USA programmes.

Australia – two programmes (11% of all Australian programmes) featured two disabled people (2% of all disabled people) who comprised 0.7% of all those who spoke or made an individual contribution to Australian programmes.

‘Other’ – no disabled people.

Channel comparisons in 2002

People with disabilities appeared most frequently on BBC1 and BBC2 at 1.1% and 1.0% of each population respectively. Representation on other channels produced a range of 0.6% to 0.8%. BBC1, ITV1 and Channel 4 were level in terms of the proportion of programmes containing disabled people (all 13%). BBC2 and Five contained 9% and 8% respectively.

BBC1 – 24 programmes (13% of all programmes on BBC1) included 37 disabled people (31% of all disabled people in the sample), who comprised 1.1% of all those who spoke or made an individual contribution to the programme in which they appeared.

BBC2 – 14 programmes (9% of all programmes on BBC2) included 22 disabled people (18% of all disabled people in the sample), who comprised 1.0% of all those who spoke or made an individual contribution to the programme in which they appeared.

ITV1 – 22 programmes (13% of all programmes on ITV1) included 25 disabled people (21% of all disabled people in the sample), who comprised 0.7% of all those who spoke or made an individual contribution to the programme in which they appeared.

Channel 4 – 18 programmes (13% of all programmes on C4) included 18 disabled people (15% of all disabled people in the sample), who comprised 0.6% of all those who spoke or made an individual contribution to the programme in which they appeared.

Five – 14 programmes (8% of all programmes on Five) included 18 disabled people (15% of all disabled people in the sample), who

comprised 0.8% of all those who spoke or made an individual contribution to the programme in which they appeared.

APPENDIX II SAMPLES AND METHODOLOGIES

II.1 Phase one

Phase one consisted of 96 participants, the majority of whom were disabled. Participants with disabilities were recruited using both local disability groups and via the usual methods of street recruitment. All of the disabled groups contained:

- A mix of men/women, socio-economic groups and lifestages.
- A mix of those born with their disability and those who acquired a disability later in life.
- A mix of different attitudes to their own disability from active through to passive.
- A spread of levels of frequency of television viewing.
- A spread of those with access to multichannel television and those with analogue terrestrial only.

All of the groups excluded political ‘activists’ and rejecters of television watching.

People with different disabilities were represented, such as those with mobility problems as a result of cerebral palsy, polio, muscular dystrophy, and severe arthritis, and those with sensory impairments, such as blindness or partial sight, and deafness. People with a mental health condition were regarded as such a diverse group within their own right that they fell beyond the scope of this study, and so were excluded from the research. See Table II.1 for a full breakdown of participants.

a) Mobility impaired

Four extended group discussions lasting two hours of between four and six people were conducted amongst those with mobility problems with varying degrees of dependence. For example, some participants were termed self transferers in that they could get themselves in and out of their wheelchair by themselves, while others required the assistance of a carer or other helper. In addition, two depth interviews were conducted.

b) Visually impaired

One group was conducted with six blind or partially sighted adults. All were experiencing television in some way. People with very mild visual impairments eg, tunnel vision were excluded. In addition, two of the children included in phase one were registered blind.

c) Interviews with deaf people

Four paired depth interviews lasting 1½ hours were conducted with participants who were deaf. There were a mix of deaf signers and deaf lip readers.

d) Disabled children

Individual depths and single sex paired depths were carried out among 18 children aged between 8 and 15 with mobility and/or sensory impairments. Both children in the pair had a similar disability. The interviews lasted 1½ hours.

e) Non-disabled participants

Two extended group discussions of two hours were held with between six and eight non-disabled members of the public, as well as five depth interviews.

In addition, two extended group discussions were conducted with carers and relatives of those with severe disabilities, which included both mobility and sensory impairments. Professional, paid carers were excluded, so all those taking part in the research were looking after relatives or friends on a voluntary basis.

The criteria for these groups included:

- A mix of men/women, socio-economic groups and lifestages.
- A spread of levels of frequency of television viewing.
- A spread of those with access to multichannel television and those with analogue terrestrial only.

There were a number of distinct sections to the discussions.

1. After introducing each other, all participants were warmed up with a general discussion about their viewing habits and what they expect from television. The subject of disability was then introduced and participants were asked to explore images of disability, and their feelings and experiences of disability in a free association session. They were asked what they classified as a disability and why.
2. Having asked participants to spontaneously recall and discuss any examples of disability portrayals, they were shown a range of stimulus material in the form of programme clips from different genres featuring a variety of portrayals, which included both disabled actors and able-bodied actors playing the role of a disabled character. Three

different 'Mixed Reels' with a broad range of material were rotated throughout the groups. Reactions were explored in-depth to establish any objectionable elements, as well as any mitigating factors.

3. In addition to the 'Mixed Reels' other stimulus reels were used to pinpoint the boundaries for offence. These included a 'Harder Hitting Reel' which contained more controversial programming, a 'Comedy Reel' which aimed to tackle where viewers drew the line when it came to humour, and a number of groups saw an 'Advertising Reel', which contained a selection of advertisements containing disability representation. The children in the study watched a 'Children's Reel' with examples of representation in children's programming and programmes popular with the child audience.

The research took place in the South of England, the North of England and in the Midlands between 21 January and 17 February 2003. The study was designed by Janine Braier and Joceline Jones of Define Solutions Limited. Fieldwork was conducted by Joceline Jones, Claire Vernon and Keri Crowson.

Table II.1 Breakdown of participants in phase one

| QUOTA | LOCATION | DATE |
|---|-----------------|-------------|
| Sensory impairment | | |
| Visual group – 30-45 | Croydon | 21.01.03 |
| Audio paired depth - Female signers – 30-40 | Sutton | 04.02.03 |
| Audio paired depth - Male lip readers – 30-40 | Sutton | 04.02.03 |
| Mobility impairment | | |
| Mobility group – 18-35 | Stockport | 27.01.03 |
| Mobility group – 35-60 | Stockport | 27.01.03 |
| Mobility group – 50-70 | Edmonton | 12.02.03 |
| Mobility group – 25-55 | Hillingdon | 12.02.03 |
| 1 x mobility depth – 18 | Harrow | 05.02.03 |
| 1 x mobility depth – 50 | Harrow | 05.02.03 |
| Children with range of disabilities | | |
| Children’s paired depth – 9-10 | Maidstone | 12.02.03 |
| Children’s paired depth – 9-10 | Stroud | 05.02.03 |
| Children’s paired depth – 10-11 | Stroud | 05.02.03 |
| Children’s audio paired depth – 11-12 | Sutton | 04.02.03 |
| Children’s paired depth – 12-13 | Maidstone | 12.02.03 |
| Children’s paired depth – 13-14 | Maidstone | 12.02.03 |
| Children’s paired depth – 13-14 | Birmingham | 23.01.03 |
| Children’s paired depth – 14-15 | Birmingham | 23.01.03 |
| Children’s paired depth – 14-15 | Maidstone | 12.02.03 |
| Mixed group – children, carers and parents | Maidstone | 18.02.03 |
| Carers | | |
| Carers group – 30-60 | Sutton | 21.01.03 |
| Carers group – 45-65 | Birmingham | 23.01.03 |
| Able-bodied | | |
| Able-bodied group – 35-60 | North London | 31.01.03 |
| Able-bodied group – 20-35 | North London | 31.01.03 |
| 3 x Non-disabled depths – Male 20s, Female 50s, Female 40s | London | 14.02.03 |
| 2 x Non-disabled depths – Male 20s, Female 30s | Sheffield | 17.02.03 |

II.2 Defining attitude statements

The attitude statements drawn up to segment participants, respondents and broadcast professionals into different attitude types. Care was taken to try to convey neutrality as far as possible.

| | |
|--|-------------------------------|
| <p>It's society and its lack of access, awareness and inclusion that 'makes' people disabled. TV is a vital means of ensuring people see what it's like for disabled people and how they want to be treated. Unfortunately, things are simply not good enough at the moment – not diverse enough, often 'tokenist' and really inaccurate at times.</p> | <p><i>Issue Driven</i></p> |
| <p>Disability, rather than preventing development, can help individuals to discover new opportunities for personal growth and life achievement. There's more opportunity on TV these days and representation on the whole really does seem to be improving but it still needs to go some way before disabled people have achieved equality.</p> | <p><i>Transformers</i></p> |
| <p>As people become more aware of disability they listen more and make an effort to accommodate disabled people in day-to-day life. TV is doing a much better job these days of showing disability alongside non-disability, and we are starting to get a sense of the diversity within the disabled population.</p> | <p><i>Progressives</i></p> |
| <p>I don't know many people with a disability and don't know a lot about it but I think it's good that there are more disabled people on TV these days. I think everyone though, including disabled people, thinks that TV is really about glamour, fantasy and entertainment. So I'm not sure there's a lot of point making too big a deal of it, otherwise it might be counter-productive and people will just switch over.</p> | <p><i>Followers</i></p> |
| <p>It's unfortunate enough to have to deal with a disability in life. If you try too hard to make it completely 'normal', you're underestimating the suffering of people and possibly even reducing their chances of being able to get the help they need. And TV really ought not to make entertainment out of people's suffering by including in ordinary TV the worst kinds of illnesses and disfigurement that people will just gawp at.</p> | <p><i>Traditionalists</i></p> |

II.3 Phase three

Twenty-three face-to-face interviews were conducted in total, although in some cases more than one individual attended the interview.

Twenty interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis; two were paired depths and one was a trio. Therefore, in total 27 individuals were consulted, all currently working in the broadcasting industry or with recent experience of the industry. A breakdown is provided in Table II.2.

Table II.2 Breakdown of interviews with broadcasting professionals

| Job title | Interviews completed |
|---|-----------------------------|
| Commissioning Editor | 5 |
| Producer | 5 |
| Commentator | 6 |
| Casting Director | 4 |
| Script Writer | 2 |
| Drama School Director | 1 |
| <i>TOTAL</i> | 23 |
| NB: See sub-section 2 iii) for an explanation of ‘commentator’. | |

The following genres were represented: Arts, Children’s, Comedy, Drama, Entertainment, Factual, Religious, Soaps, and Sports. Representation was made from the following channels: BBC1, BBC2, ITV1, Channel 4, Five, E4 (and BBC Radio). Participants were selected to represent a broad spread of experience and attitudes. They included a number of activists in the field, those who have worked on programmes about and with disabled people and those who have had no prior experience in the area of disability. It was particularly important to engage the latter group in the consultation, in order that the sample reflected the full spectrum of opinion within the industry. Confidentiality was assured in order to encourage respondents to give their opinions without fear of censure.

A semi-structured discussion guide was used for the interviews. This replicated the discussions with the public in phase one as far as possible.

APPENDIX III: DESCRIPTIONS OF STIMULUS MATERIAL

a) Mixed reel 1

Top Ten Arts (Music documentary)

Programme about singer Whitney Houston where a critic says that her facial expressions look as if she is having an epileptic fit.

The Bill ITV1 (Drama serial)

Episode features an actor with Downs Syndrome who portrays a character who is pregnant.

The Theory of Flight BBC2 10.15pm 28.01.01 (Film)

Film with Helena Bonham Carter playing a disabled character in a wheelchair who wants help to lose her virginity.

They Think It's All Over BBC1 9.30pm 15.02.02 (Entertainment)

Kevin Flynn, a former American soccer player who presents the US equivalent of *Match of The Day*, is a guest on the show. He makes a joke based on sign language. The incident resulted in audience complaints, which were upheld by the BBC's Programme Complaints Unit.

Absolutely Fabulous (Comedy series)

Patsy gives Edina homemade botox injections, which result in her face becoming paralysed. She staggers downstairs looking as if she is physically disabled.

BBC1 wheelchair dancers ident (various times)

Dynamic images of young people in wheelchairs.

Commonwealth Games BBC2 8.30pm 2.08.02 (Sport)

Disabled swimmers event featuring Natalie du Toit who lost a leg in an accident.

The Office BBC2 10.00pm 28.10.02 (Spoof comedy series)

Disabled Benefit Fraud parodying the patronising attitude taken towards people with disabilities. Actress Julie Fernandez features as a wheelchair user.

Crocks and Robbers C4 9.00pm 16.12.02 (Documentary)

Documentary about five disabled criminals convicted for serious crimes.

What's Your Problem?: North Face BBC2 9.50pm 26.09.02
(Drama 'short')

Romantic scene between a woman of small stature and a man of 'regular' height. The scene comes to an abrupt end when the woman suggests they go out on a date in public.

b) Mixed reel 2

Sports Personality of the Year 2000 BBC1 7.00pm 10.12.00
(Entertainment)

Wheelchair athlete Tanni Grey Thompson is awarded third prize but is unable to come on stage to the podium to collect her trophy like other winners because there is no wheelchair ramp.

The Stand Up Show BBC1 11.45pm 30.11.01 (Comedy series)
Comedian Brendan Burns launches into a part of his routine which involves telling a joke about leprosy.

The Armstrong and Miller Show C4 28.02.01 (Spoof comedy series)

Irreverent sketch which shows what appears to be a serious appeal to camera for donations for a disabled child 'Martin'. The presenter then mocks the physical movements of 'Martin'.

Child of Our Time BBC1 9.00pm 20.08.02 (Documentary series)
Alison Lapper has Phocomelia – a congenital condition which means she was born without limbs. She is one of the mothers featured in Robert Winston's series about parents and child development. This clip shows how she successfully gets her two-year-old out of the car and across a road.

BBC1 wheelchair dancers ident (various times)

Dynamic images of young people in wheelchairs.

Question Time BBC1 10.30pm 24.01.02 (Current Affairs)

Professor Tom Shakespeare, who has the genetic condition Achondroplasia causing restricted growth, speaks as a panel member about the NHS.

Wish You Were Here? ITV1 (Factual)

The clip features a football holiday for able-bodied and disabled children, including deaf children.

What's Your Problem?: Urban Myth BBC2 9.50pm 3.10.02
(Drama 'short')

The clip shows a bedroom scene between a very attractive girl and an actor with Thalidomide impairment.

Size Don't Matter Clip 1 (Documentary)

Napoleon, who has restricted growth, discusses his career in the porn industry.

c) Mixed reel 3

Kung Fu Fighters Drama (unknown source)

Japanese actors with Thalidomide impairments engage in fighting scenes.

Summer Holiday 2001 BBC1 7.00pm 14.08.01 (Factual)

Disabled presenter Lara Masters from *'That's Esther'* is guest reporter for a riding holiday.

What's Your Problem?: The Egg BBC2 9.50pm 2.10.02 (Drama 'short')

Waitress in a truck-stop cafe who, despite being well intentioned, uses un-pc terminology and has a patronising attitude towards a customer with cerebral palsy played by a disabled actor.

BBC1 wheelchair dancers ident (as above)

The Big Breakfast C4 (Entertainment)

Banter and joking about Adam Ant being in a 'mental ward' and being a 'dimwit'.

Celebrity Wheelchair Challenge C4 9.00pm 17.12.02 (Education)

Various celebrities use wheelchairs for a day and are given different tasks, such as travelling from one part of the country to the other.

All About Me BBC1 8.30pm 8.03.02 (Comedy drama series)

The programme features Jasper Carrot. This scene around the kitchen table introduces the family members, which includes Raj who has cerebral palsy, played by a disabled child actor.

Thalidomide: Life at 40 BBC2 9.00pm 2.10.02 (Documentary)

Marking 40 years since thalidomide.

Clip 1 – Jeanette Cook one of the most severely affected babies

with a condition caused by Thalidomide marks her 40th birthday.
Clip 2 – A comedian with Thalidomide impairment delivers jokes based around his disability.

Natural Born Talent: Blind Artist C4 (Arts series)

Series featuring disabled artists. This clip shows the work of a blind artist.

d) Children's reel

What's Your Problem?: Free Wheelers BBC2 11.20pm 01.10.02 (Documentary)

How people's lives have changed via accident or illness. Clip is about a young girl who has a degenerative disease and now has to use a wheelchair.

Byker Grove BBC1 5.00pm 30.10.01 (Children's drama series)

Greg Watson's character uses a wheelchair and he discusses whether girls he wants to have a relationship with just feel sorry for him.

One In Seven BBC2 11.25pm 25.09.02 (Documentary)

Different deaf people describe their sign name, speaking in sign language that has been voiced over.

Wish You Were Here...? (as above)

The Bill (as above)

BBC1 wheelchair dancers ident (as above)

All About Me (as above)

Celebrity Wheelchair Challenge (as above)

The Big Breakfast (as above)

The Number Crew C4 (Schools)

Plasticine characters teach fractions – one is a little girl in a wheelchair.

e) Advertisement reel

Virgin mobile with Mat Fraser

A man with Thalidomide impairment is on a bus. He appears to be talking to himself and people are staring. It turns out that he is using a hands-free mobile phone.

Anti-Drink Drive Campaign (head injury)

A man is seen in a wheelchair being spoon fed by his mother after the result of a car accident.

Freeserve with model Aimee Mann

A montage of images is intercut with shots of a model who has lost both of her lower legs, but continues to walk and run wearing a range of dramatically designed leg extensions

Burger King

A Burger King employee is learning to sign to improve the service for her deaf customers (there is a nearby 'Centre'). Her story is intercut with appreciative comments from deaf customers.

Telia

It features a father and daughter communicating in sign language; their conversation is subtitled.

f) Harder hitting reel

What's Your Problem?: North Face (as above)

The Office (as above)

What's Your Problem?: Urban Myth (as above)

The Armstrong and Miller Show (as above)

What's Your Problems?: The Egg (as above)

Desirability: Size Don't Matter

Clip 1 Male porn star Napoleon (as above)

Clip 2 Female porn star

g) Comedy reel

Absolutely Fabulous (as above)

The Office (as above)

The Stand Up Show (as above)

They Think It's All Over (as above)

The Armstrong and Miller Show (as above)

The Big Breakfast (as above)

All About Me (as above)

Thalidomide: Life at 40 (as above)

APPENDIX IV REMITS OF SPONSORS OF THE RESEARCH

IV.1 British Broadcasting Corporation

The British Broadcasting Corporation is the world's largest public service broadcaster providing programmes and content through digital, analogue, cable and satellite services, as well as on-line. It aims to be the world's most creative and trusted broadcaster, seeking to satisfy all of its audiences with services that inform, educate, entertain and enrich their lives in ways that the market alone will not. The BBC also aims to be guided by its public purposes, to encourage the United Kingdom's most innovative talent, to act independently of all interests and to aspire to the highest ethical standards. The BBC has a global reputation for setting standards and the corporation's Editorial Policy team advises programme makers across the BBC on the most difficult editorial issues and helps them to achieve the highest editorial and ethnical standards as set out in its public statement of standards and values, the BBC Producers' Guidelines. Editorial Policy also acts as the point of contact for outside bodies on editorial matters and, as with this report, undertakes research to enable the BBC to stay in touch with the views of its audiences on a wide range of broadcasting issues.

IV.2 Broadcasting Standards Commission

The Broadcasting Standards Commission is the statutory body for both standards and fairness in broadcasting. It is the only organisation within the regulatory framework of UK broadcasting to cover all television and radio. This includes the BBC and commercial broadcasters, as well as text, cable, satellite and digital services.

As an independent organisation, the Broadcasting Standards Commission considers the portrayal of violence, sexual conduct and matters of taste and decency. It also provides redress for people who believe they have been unfairly treated or subjected to unwarranted infringement of privacy. The Commission has three main tasks set out in the 1996 Broadcasting Act:

- Produce codes of practice relating to standards and fairness;
- Consider and adjudicate on complaints;
- Monitor, research and report on standards and fairness in broadcasting.

This research working paper is published as part of a programme into attitudes towards standards and fairness in broadcasting. This research, which was carried out by independent experts, is not a

statement of Commission policy. Its role is to offer guidance and practical information to Commissioners and broadcasters in their work.

IV.3 Independent Television Commission

The Independent Television Commission licenses and regulates all television services broadcast in or from the United Kingdom, other than services funded by the BBC licence fee and S4C in Wales. It operates in the interest of viewers by: setting standards for programme content, advertising, sponsorship and technical quality; monitoring broadcasters' output to ensure that it meets those standards and applying a range of penalties if it does not; ensuring that ITV, Channel 4 and Five fulfil their statutory public service obligations; planning frequency allocation and coverage for digital terrestrial services; ensuring that viewers can receive television services on fair and competitive terms; and investigating complaints and regularly publishing its findings.