

REPRESENTATIONS OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITY IN IRISH BROADCAST MEDIA

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Disclaimer

The Broadcasting Commission of Ireland (BCI) and the National Disability Authority (NDA) have funded this research. Responsibility for the research (including any errors or omissions) remains with the organisation who conducted the research. The views and opinions contained in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views or opinions of either the BCI or the NDA.

Executive Summary

1 Background

This document reports the results of a research project into the representation of people with disabilities in broadcast media in the Republic of Ireland. The research was commissioned by the Broadcasting Commission of Ireland (BCI) and the National Disability Authority (NDA) and was carried out by an eight person research team led by Dr. Roddy Flynn at the Centre for Society, Information and the Media (SIM) in the School of Communications, Dublin City University (DCU). The research was carried out by means of a content analysis of 408 hours of programming broadcast (804 programmes) by Irish television and radio stations from February to July 2007. The sample was drawn from prime time television broadcasting (6-10pm) and from weekday and Sunday radio broadcasting. This was supplemented by a discourse analysis examining how different forms of disability are discussed across Irish broadcast media.

2 Research Methodology

Content Analysis

Five researchers (“coders”) watched and listened to the programme sample. That programming was then categorised in terms of both extent and nature of the representation of people with disabilities. For the most part the data results inputted by the coders were based on observation of clearly observable content such as the presence or absence of individuals with disabilities in radio or television programmes.

In this context “clearly observable” presents an obvious difficulty on radio since physical disabilities are inaudible: in examining radio material then, the coders could only count spoken references to disability or comments which identified an individual as having a disability. However, the coders also categorised less overt content such as whether the representation of individuals with disabilities in a given programme was stereotypical, prejudicial or discriminatory.

Agreement between coders about how the various representations examined should be categorised was facilitated by disability awareness training led by the Head of the DCU Disability Services, Pat Hoey.

Working for eight weeks, the coders produced a set of data capturing information such as the number of people with disabilities in the programmes watched, and the number of references to disability. Information on the roles played by people with disabilities, and the nature of their representation was also captured by the coders. The analysis of this data by Dr. Roddy Flynn forms the basis of the main body of this report.

Discourse Analysis

In addition to the content analysis, programming identified as featuring a person with a disability or referring to disability was examined by Dr. Debbie Ging to establish if there were recurring themes in the language used to talk about disability. Her findings form the basis for Section 5 of this document.

3 Key Findings

The findings outlined below summarise both the “extent” of the representation of people with disabilities i.e. the number of times people with a disability appear or are referred to, and the “nature” of this representation i.e. the manner in which people with a disability and disability issues are discussed. We have distinguished between results referring to “extent” and to “nature” as appropriate.

In determining whether programme material included representations of disability, the research adopted a “common-sense” approach to identifying disability. Thus appearances of people with disabilities were categorised according to whether they experienced one of the following impairments:

- Visual
- Hearing
- Physical
- Generalised Learning Disability
- Mental Health
- Other

A full outline of how the research defined and categorised various forms of disability is included at the close of the report in Appendix II, section 13d.

In considering these summary findings, it is important to understand how the research distinguished between “appearances” of a person with a disability and “references” to disability as a subject. “Appearances” included individuals who were obviously present. However, “appearances” also included clearly identified individuals with a disability who, though not actually present, were extensively discussed in terms of their disability e.g. a radio sermon on Helen Keller or a radio news bulletin making reference to a particular individual in terms of their disability.

“References” to disability as a subject were limited to discussions which primarily focused on disability in the abstract e.g. discussions of alcoholism, autism etc., rather than on the individuals with these disabilities.

Extent i.e. the number of times people with a disability appeared or were referred to:

- 20% of all radio and television programmes coded made some reference to disability either by featuring a person with a disability or including a spoken reference to disability.
- 67 of the 804 programmes examined (8% of the total) featured the appearance of a person with a disability. 39 (or 58%) of these 67 programmes were television programmes and 28 (or 42%) were radio programmes. In other words, 10% of all television programmes featured a person with a disability compared with 6.5% of all radio programmes.
- A further 95 programmes (12% of the total) included a spoken reference to disability **only** i.e. these programmes did not feature any individual with a disability. 13% of all television programmes featured a spoken reference compared to 11% of all radio programming.
- 88 (1.1%) of the total number of individuals appearing in the programme sample (7,723) were coded as in some way as having a disability. 51 of these appeared on television and 37 on radio. Since a total of 5,011 individuals appeared on television and a total of 2,212 on radio, people with disabilities coded accounted for 1% of all individuals on television and 1.8% of all individuals on radio.
- Only 5, of a total of 804 programmes examined, (i.e. less than 1%) were coded as disability-focused i.e. programmes which were entirely

and explicitly on and about the subject of disability. 3 of these programmes were broadcast on television and 2 on radio.

- People with disabilities are more likely to be obviously present in Drama, Comedy and Lifestyle programming and are less evident in News, Sports and Music programming.
- Two-thirds of the people with disabilities in the programme sample were regarded as playing “minor/incidental” roles in the programmes in which they featured. People with disabilities were more likely to play minor/incidental roles on radio: on television, 30 people (59% of the total represented on television) with disabilities were regarded as playing “minor/incidental” roles. On radio, 31 people (84% of the total represented on radio) with disabilities were regarded as playing “minor/incidental” roles.
- Of all disabilities represented in the programme sample through appearances and references, depression is the most commonly represented form of disability, followed by representations of autism and addiction.
- In occupational terms, people with disabilities appearing in programming are most likely to be represented either as students or as experiencing unemployment as a direct result of their disability. However in one third of cases, insufficient information is offered about individuals to allow the audience to determine the occupational role played by the individuals with a disability.
- Programming acquired from outside Ireland is significantly more likely to feature both people with disabilities and references to disability than domestically-produced programming.

Although domestically-produced shows accounted for more than 80% of the total number of programmes looked at during the research, they accounted for less than 60% of programming featuring a person with a disability and just under 70% of those programmes referring to disability but not featuring a person with a disability. This is accounted for by the fact that drama and comedy, which appear to feature a relatively high proportion of people with disabilities and references to disabilities, dominate imported programming broadcast on Irish television.

Nature i.e. the manner in which people with a disability and disability issues were discussed:

- In 80% of the appearances by a person with a disability in the programme sample, disability was represented as central to the individual's identity.
- In terms of the types of roles represented, when people with disabilities are physically present during a programme, they are generally presented in serious roles. By contrast, spoken references to disability as a subject (made in the absence of a person with a disability) are twice as likely to be made in a comedic or light-hearted tone.
- Of the 88 people with disabilities identified as appearing in the programme sample, 73 were represented in a stereotypical fashion e.g. as "pitable" and "pathetic" or "sweet" and "innocent" etc.
- Despite this, the majority of programming adopted a neutral attitude towards individuals with disability in that most representations adopted neither a discriminatory attitude towards individuals with a disability nor were they assessed likely to create prejudice towards people with disabilities as a group.

As discussed in more detail below, it is important to understand that extensive stereotyping of individuals does not necessarily imply that they are represented in a discriminatory or prejudiced manner at least insofar as those terms were defined for the purposes of this research (see section 4.9.3 below). References to disability as a general subject (rather than to specific individuals with disabilities) are also mainly characterised by a neutral – i.e. non-discriminatory, non-prejudicial - attitude.

- The words used to describe disability as a subject in non-fiction programmes, both on radio and television, complied with guidelines endorsed by the NDA and produced by People with Disabilities in Ireland (PWDI).¹ 'People with disabilities' was the favoured term. The word 'impairment' was never used. These programmes were nearly all Irish-produced.
- Words used to describe disability in fictional genres such as comedy, sitcoms, soap operas and cartoons often did not comply with the PWDI guidelines referred to above. Casual or comic references to mental illness and instability were by far the most prevalent. Most of these programmes were imported from the United States.
- The treatment of mental illness differed radically in fictional (e.g. drama) and non-fictional programme genres (e.g. News):

In News programmes, mention of mental illness focussed on disruptions to mental health services caused by the nurses' strike and discussions of the mental health of figures such as the lone gunman who, in April 2007, killed 33 people at the Virginia Tech College, in the United States.

¹ People with Disabilities in Ireland (2000) 'Making Progress Together, 2000', cited in National Disability Authority (2002) Ask Me: Guidelines for Effective Consultation with People with Disabilities (Dublin,: NDA).

In non-fiction radio and television programme genres such as chat shows and current affairs programmes, mental illness, depression, substance abuse and suicide were dealt with in serious terms. There was strong evidence of a social-model discourse i.e. disabilities were primarily discussed as socially constructed problems and/or as personal traumas requiring holistic, therapeutic solutions rather than as conditions “suffered” by individuals who thus required medical treatment

In fictional programme genres, however, such as soaps, dramas and sitcoms, mental illness was dealt with in more individualised and medicalised terms. Negative stereotypes were more common here than in non-fiction, exemplified by references to disability in terms of “freakishness” and “evil”.

- On television, representations of physical disability (i.e. both appearances of people with disabilities and references to disability) were far more common in fiction than in non-fiction. In fiction there was a preoccupation with unusual medical syndromes, particularly in hospital and crime dramas. Negative stereotypes, in particular ‘freak’ imagery, were also more common in fictional programmes compared to non-fiction ones.
- The disabling conditions of alcoholism and drug addiction were discussed in radically different ways in fiction and non-fiction programme genre:-
 - In non-fictional programme genres, in particular on radio chat shows and current affairs programmes, addiction to drugs and alcohol was presented as a social problem related to a variety of issues including, increased prosperity, peer pressure, lack of spirituality, glamorous media images and adults leading by bad example. These programmes were all Irish-produced.

- In fictional programme genres (or quasi-fictional such as 'Reality-TV' programmes and "Judge Judy") which dealt with alcoholism or drug addiction), these problems were framed as hereditary / genetic problems or as evidence of a weak or selfish personality. These programmes were all imported from the US.
- Disability was rarely portrayed as incidental in the programme sample. There was therefore little evidence in the sample of the kind of "mainstreaming" developments which have been noted by some theorists in relation to the British media. Mainstreaming implies featuring people with disabilities in all varieties of programmes without necessarily drawing attention to their disability. In other words, in only a handful of examples in the sample where a person with a disability made an appearance was their disability irrelevant to their presence in the fiction or non-fiction programme.
- There were very few apparent examples of people with disabilities, either as presenters or as makers of programmes. Only two examples of disability-focussed programming were captured in the sample, on NEAR FM and Ros FM, both community radio services.

1.Introduction

This report is the result of a research project jointly commissioned by the Broadcasting Commission of Ireland and the National Disability Authority. The Broadcasting Commission of Ireland (“BCI”) was created by statute and has responsibility for, among other things, the regulation of radio and television in Ireland. The National Disability Authority (“NDA”) was created by statute and has responsibility for collaborating in research projects and activities on issues relating to disability.

In the public good, and in particular with a view to advancing knowledge that will assist in improving the lives of people with disabilities, the BCI and the NDA commissioned a series of parallel research projects into attitudes to such people in radio and television broadcasting in the Republic of Ireland.

In order to gain an objective understanding of how people with disabilities are currently represented on Irish broadcast television and radio, the BCI/NDA commissioned a research team from the Centre for Society, Information and the Media (SIM) at the School of Communications, DCU, to conduct a content analysis of Irish broadcasting. The research addressed the following questions with regard to the representation of people with disabilities in Irish Broadcasting:

- What proportion of television and radio programming contain representations of people with disabilities?
- What proportion of all people on television and radio programming had a disability?
- What proportion of programming is disability-focussed and what proportion is mainstream?

- How many different people/characters (in the case of fictional/dramatic content) contribute to the representation of people with disabilities?
- In which genres of programmes are people with disabilities most and least often represented e.g. sport, news etc.?
- In programmes that represent people with disabilities, what is the level of appearance of the person/people with disabilities e.g. minor, major roles?
- What types of disability are represented?
- How does the representation occur (i.e. stereotyped, etc.)?
- What types of occupations are fulfilled by a person/people with a disability?
- To what extent is the experience of disability relevant to that person's role as represented in a programme?
- To what extent is the experience of disability relevant to the occupation of the person represented in a programme?
- In which types of role are people with disabilities most and least often represented?
- Is there a difference between Irish programming content and imported programming content? And if so, what is the nature of this difference?

The questions were in large part based on a set of criteria devised for a similar piece of research carried out in the UK in 2005 on behalf of OFCOM, the British office of communications regulation.² The BCI, NDA and the DCU Research Team customised the questions to take account of the broader focus of this research. OFCOM's research examined actual appearances of people with disabilities on television broadcasting only, whereas this research examined both radio and television, and examined all "references" to disability in addition to actual appearances by people with disabilities in these media. Thus, questions were added to take account of programmes where disability was verbally referred to without featuring a person with a disability. For the most part these questions paralleled questions relating to programming which did feature a person with a disability:

- What proportion of television and radio programming contain references to disability?
- Which genres of programmes contain the most/least references to disability?
- What tone characterised the reference to disability?
- For programming featuring references to disability but not actual people with disabilities, code the importance of those references within the programme item.
- Is there a difference between Irish programming content and imported programming content in this regard? And if so, what is the nature of this difference?
- Did discussions of disability play a major or minor role in the programme?

² Ofcom (2005), The representation and portrayal of people with disabilities on analogue terrestrial television (London: Ofcom).

The structure of the first part of this report addresses these questions at a largely quantitative level (that is, in terms of numbers of representations). Section 2 below outlines the methodology adopted for the research project and more detailed information relating to the content analysis questionnaire and the manner in which it was applied can be found in Appendix 1 and 2. Section 3 outlines the key findings of the content analysis and Section 4 teases out any broader conclusions deriving from those results. The last section (Section 5) is a discourse analysis of the sample which examines the manner in which disability and people with disabilities are discussed and referred to across Irish broadcast media, drawing on examples from the research sample.

2. Methodology

2.1 The Sample

The content analysis sample was chosen by the BCI and the NDA in advance of the research team's involvement. The programme sample consisted of a mix of national, commercial and public service radio and television broadcasters, local radio from an urban and rural background and community radio from both an urban and rural background. The sample also included Ros FM, a community station in Roscommon Town with a particular emphasis on people with disabilities. The 408 sample hours were made up of 167 hours of television and 361 hours of radio. These were sourced as follows:

Station	Sample duration	Total hours in sample
National Television		
RTÉ1	26 Feb – 15 April 2007	33
RTÉ 2	27 Feb – 16 April 2007	35
TV3	10 April – 28 May 2007	35
TG4	11 April – 29 May 2007	35
Channel 6	5 May – 30 May 2007	30
National Radio		
RTÉ Radio 1	18 April – 22 April 2007	24
Today FM	7 March – 11 March 2007	24
Newstalk 106	6 June – 10 June 2007	24
Local Radio		
Galway FM	20 June – 24 June 2007	24
Highland Radio	27 June – 1 July 2007	24
South East Radio	11 April – 15 April 2007	24
LMFM	18 April – 22 April 2007	24
Cork's 96 and 103 FM	13 June – 17 June 2007	24
Community Radio		
Connemara Community Radio	12 March – 15 March 2007	12
Cork's Campus Radio	2 July – 5 July 2007	12
NEAR FM	2 April – 5 April 2007	12
Ros FM	25 June – 28 June 2007	12
TOTAL		408

The sample was drawn from the period between February 2007 and July 2007. In the case of the television stations sampled, it was drawn from material broadcast between 5pm and 10pm over the course of composite weeks.³ Similarly, in the case of radio stations, 50% of the material was drawn from weekdays and 50% from Sundays. Thus Saturday is not represented on either medium. The radio broadcast hours in the sample are drawn from the hours between 7am and 7pm. In effect then, the sample is based upon those hours of the day when the respective media of television and radio are attracting their largest audiences. Radio listenership peaks in the morning and slowly declines until 7pm. Meanwhile television only begins to pick up significant viewership as it approaches the primetime hours after 6pm. In sum, this research reflects representation of people with disabilities during those hours when the consumption of the media examined are at their respective peaks rather than the sum of all broadcasting in Ireland.

Although the research looked at 408 hours of material, advertising was not examined as part of the project. Thus 29.5 hours consisting of advertising were excluded from the sample and final analysis was conducted on the basis of a sample size of 378.5 hours.

2.2 The Coding Process

The first stage of the research involved “coding” the 408 hours of programme material. This was conducted by five researchers using the questions laid out in the coding questionnaire (the questionnaire is included in the Appendix 1 to this report). For the most part, the coders only applied the coding questionnaire up to the point where it was established whether or not the programme actually featured a person with a disability, referred to such a person at length, or referred to disability as a discourse (i.e. featured content which was relevant to the content analysis).

³ A composite week is a sample constructed by selecting material from a number of different weeks in such a way as to ensure that each day of the week is represented in the final sample.

Since the subsequent questions in the coding questionnaire examined the nature of this representation and because these representations occurred in a minority of the programmes examined during the research, the majority of programmes coded only recorded the following information:

- Title;
- Channel;
- Time and duration of broadcast;
- Programme Genre;
- Programme nationality;
- Number of characters/individuals featured.

For those programmes which either featured persons with a disability, made extensive reference to a person with a disability or which discussed disability, the coders were required to address a number of subsequent questions contained in the coding questionnaire relating to:

- Characteristics of those represented;
- Type of disability;
- Level and type of representation offered;
- Relevance of disability to the representation;
- Occupation of those represented;
- Role played by featured person with a disability;
- Subject of relevant person's contribution.

Their findings were directly inputted into SPSS, a social statistics software package. The analysis of this SPSS data was used to answer the research questions above.

The work of the coders was informed by reference to a coding guidebook, drafted by DCU and approved by the BCI and the NDA, which provided definitions and outlines of what was meant by each of the categories included in the questionnaire.

For further quality control purposes, inter-coder reliability (i.e. consistency amongst coders in the manner in which they categorised programme content) was tested at a number of stages by having all five coders separately code the same pieces of programme content and then comparing their results for agreement. Inter-coder reliability was comfortably within acceptable standards.

The coding process began in early August 2007 and was completed by the beginning of the second week of October 2007. In the interim the project leader conducted some mid-term analyses of the incomplete data and work began on examining the range of discourses thrown up by the content analysis. This work of data and discourse analysis was completed by the end of October 2007.

2.3 Some Definitions - Appearance vs. Reference

Throughout this document we refer both to “appearances” by people with disabilities and “references” to disability. It is important to clarify at the outset what we mean by these terms.

The word “appearance” implies the visual manifestation of a person. However this understanding was considered too narrow for two reasons:

- i) First on radio, for obvious reasons, a visual appearance is simply impossible.
- ii) However even on television, it is possible for an individual to be referred to – possibly at some length - without ever actually physically appearing. Nonetheless such references contribute to how the audience comes to understand those individuals.

Since the purpose of the research was to explore the nature of all broadcast representations of people with disabilities in the sample, (not just those actually on-screen or in-studio), it was decided to define “appearances” as referring both to individuals with disabilities actually present on-screen/in-studio **and** individuals with disabilities who were discussed in television and radio programming (i.e. “represented”) even if they were not actually present.

“References” then referred exclusively to those cases in which disability was referred to (or “represented”) without referring to a particular individual with a disability.

Definitions of Disability

In designing the questionnaire which the coders used to categorise the programme material under analysis, the research team spent some time arriving at working definitions of disability. These were agreed in advance with the two organisations which commissioned the research, the BCI and the NDA. For the most part the definitions fell within “common-sense” categories of disability. Thus appearances of people with disabilities were categorised according to whether they experienced one of the following impairments:

- Visual
- Hearing
- Physical
- Generalised Learning Disability

However, the definitions also included two categories which may not be quite as widely recognised:

- Mental Health
- Other

Mental Health, for example, includes individuals with bipolar disorder and/or depression. The category of “Other” includes conditions such as addiction (in all its forms) chronic illness and dyslexia. A full outline of how the research defined and categorised various forms of disability is included at the close of the report in Appendix II, section 13d.

3. Content analysis: Key findings

This section outlines the results of the content analysis in a largely quantitative fashion. Key statistical trends in the representation of disability and people with disabilities are identified in the programme sample. The implications of those results are also briefly referred to. A more in-depth analysis of the results is provided in Section 4.

3.1 What proportion of television and radio programming contain representations of people with disabilities?

This question examined the percentage of programming featuring appearances by individuals with a disability as defined above (i.e. who were physically present **or** who were referred to (i.e. “represented”) at length).

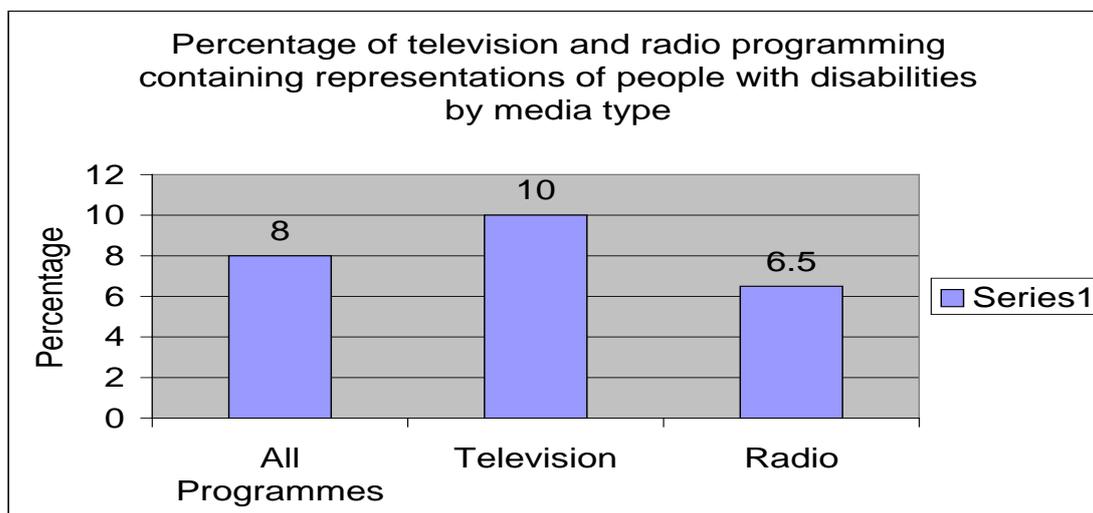
67 programmes out of a total of 804 (8%) programmes in the sample featured at least one person with a disability. As the table below shows, 39 of these were television programmes and 28 were radio programmes.

	Number of programmes featuring a person/ persons with a disability	Total number of shows in sample
Television	39 (58%)	374 (47% of sample)
Radio	28 (42%)	430 (53% of sample)
Total	67	804

Since only 47% of the programme sample were television programmes (374 programmes), the fact that 58% of programmes featuring a person with a disability were television programmes shows that such individuals were significantly more likely to evidently appear on television than on radio.

Amongst television programmes, 10% (39 programmes) featured a person with a disability as compared to 6.5% (28%) of radio programming.

Figure 1: Percentage of television and radio programming containing representations of people with disabilities by media type



It is important to stress that the difference in numbers of representations between radio and television may be due to the greater difficulty in discerning the presence of a person with a disability on radio in the absence of visual cues. This is particularly so for people with physical and sensory disabilities. On television, a person with a physical impairment may be identified by the presence of a walking aid or wheelchair. The same individual would not appear disabled to a radio audience unless attention was explicitly called to this fact. This should be borne in mind as the reader progresses through the report.

3.2 What proportion of television and radio programming contain spoken references to disability?

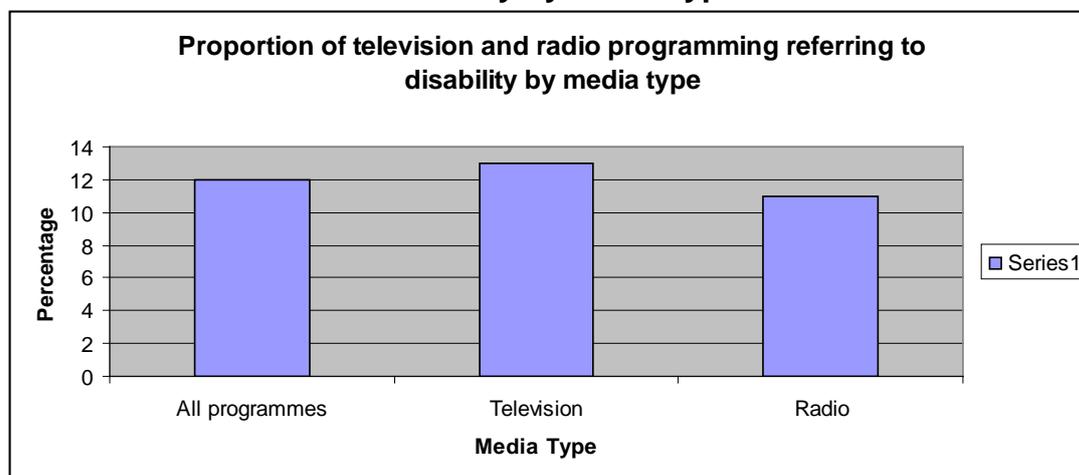
This question identified the percentage of programming which included verbal “references” to disability and impairment but did not feature an actual person with a disability in a programme.

In addition to the 8% of programmes which featured a person or persons with a disability, a further 12% (95 programmes) made solely spoken references (i.e. discussed) disability. These spoken references were more or less evenly split between television (which accounted for 48 programmes with references) and radio (47 programmes with references). Several programmes featured a large range of distinct references: the 95 programmes referred to included 108 spoken references in total.

Table 3: Programmes featuring reference to disability		
	Number of programmes featuring reference to disability	Total number of shows in sample
Television	48	374
Radio	47	430
Total	95	804

However, bearing in mind that radio programmes accounted for 53% of the total programme sample, it remained the case that spoken references were marginally more likely to feature on television than on radio: 13% of all television programmes featured a spoken reference (56 actual references) compared to 11% (52 actual references) of all radio programmes.

Figure 3 - Proportion of television and radio programming referring to disability by media type

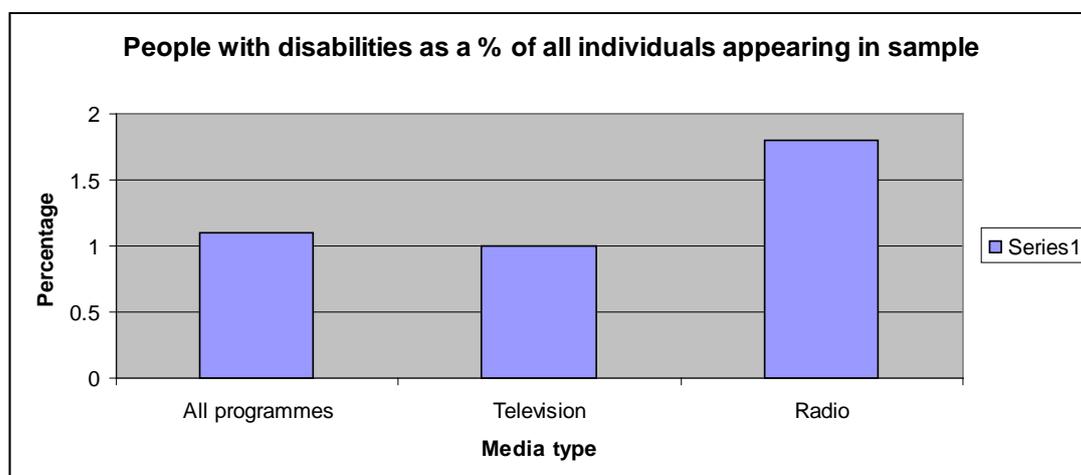


3.3 What proportion of all people sampled on television and radio programming had a disability?

This question sought both to count the number of people with disabilities who appeared (i.e. either in person or through being referred to) in radio and television programmes sampled and to quantify the significance of their appearance in relation to the overall programme sample.

People with disabilities accounted for 1.1% of people appearing in the total programme sample. The coders counted 7,223 individuals in total within the programme sample and 88 of these were identified as people with disabilities. 51 of these appeared on television and 37 on radio. Of the 5,011 individuals recorded by the researchers as appearing on television, 51 (or 1%) were identified as having a disability. For radio, people with disabilities accounted for 37 (or 1.8%) of the total of 2,212 people who featured. Given that people with a disability and spoken references to disability were more likely to appear on television, it is interesting to note that apparent people with disabilities constituted a higher proportion of the radio population than of the television population.

Figure 4 – People with disabilities as a percentage of all individuals appearing in sample



3.4 What proportion of programming is disability-focussed and what proportion is mainstream?

This question examined the difference between programmes aimed at a general audience (mainstream) and those aimed at a specific audience (disability-focussed). 5 of the 804 programmes (or 0.6% of the total) were specifically focussed on disability. On the television side these were made up of 3 News Bulletins for the Deaf (i.e. with Irish Sign Language) on RTÉ. On the radio side, two community stations were responsible for the remaining 2 disability-focused programmes. These were “Capability” (a programme from Ros FM) and “Equality Time” on NEAR FM. In addition, 1 mainstream show in the sample was considered to have been mainly focused on disability: 1 edition of “The Business” on RTÉ Radio 1, focused on the question of running Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) schools which offer one-to-one tuition for autistic children.

3.5 How many different people/characters (in the case of fictional/dramatic content) contribute to the representation of people with disabilities?

Taking the frequent appearances of some individuals during programmes examined into account, 72 separate individuals accounted for the 88 recorded appearances of people with disabilities. Cho, Seung-Hui, the so-called “Virginia Tech” shooter, for example, accounted for 11 appearances across 11 separate programmes.

In addition, the research identified 5 programmes featuring groups of people with disabilities where it was not possible to count the size of the group. For example, the edition of RTÉ Radio 1’s “The Business” programme which included an item on ABA schooling featured an unspecified number of children with autism in the background.

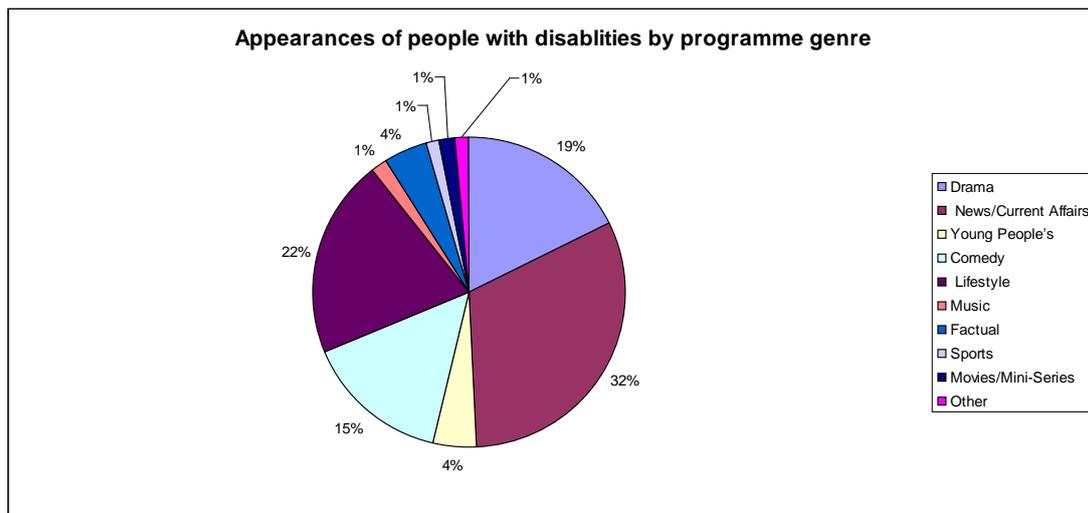
3.6 In which genres of programmes are people with disabilities most and least often represented?

This question broke down into two separate but related questions. Firstly, this question categorised the appearances of the 88 people with disabilities according to the genre of programme they appeared in across both radio and television e.g. News/Current Affairs, Drama etc. Four programme genres accounted for the vast majority (88%) of all appearances by people with disabilities across radio and television. They are in descending order:

1. News/Current Affairs (32%)
2. Lifestyle (22%)
3. Drama (19%)
4. Comedy (15%).

Six genres accounted for the remaining 12% of appearances by people with disabilities: Music (1%), Sports (1%), Movies/Mini-Series (1%), Other, (1%), Factual (4%) and Young People's (4%).

Figure 5: Appearances of people with disabilities by programme genre



However, this did not necessarily reveal much about the extent to which particular genres focused on people with disabilities. This was because those programme genres which were most prevalent in the programme sample as a whole would almost inevitably feature more appearances by people with a disability. For example, since news and current affairs accounted for 45% of all programmes in the sample, it was unsurprising that it accounted for the largest percentage of appearances by people with disabilities.

Given this, the question addressed a second issue: which programme genres were most/least likely to feature people with disabilities? i.e. if one was to watch an hour of each genre within the sample, in which genres was one most/least likely to encounter a person with a disability? This produced quite different results to the first question.⁴

In this context, one is most likely to encounter people with disabilities in the comedy genre, followed by drama and then lifestyle programming. By contrast one is least likely to encounter people with disabilities in music programmes, followed by sports and then – strikingly given its earlier prominence – news and current affairs.⁵

⁴ This was calculated by correlating the prominence of particular genres in the programme sample as a whole with those programmes featuring a person with a disability.

⁵ This requires some explanation. If, when comparing the distribution (spread) of genres across the sample as a whole with their distribution across those programmes featuring people with disabilities, one finds an identical pattern of distribution (i.e. news and current affairs accounting for 45% of the sample as a whole and 45% of those programmes featuring people with disabilities), then one can say that a person with a disability is equally likely to appear in all genres. However if some programme genres account for a greater percentage of programmes featuring people with disabilities than in the sample as a whole, then one can say that people with disabilities are more likely to appear in any given example (i.e. programme) of that genre. Similarly, if some programme genres are less prevalent in the subset of disability programming than in the sample as a whole, then one can say that people with disabilities are less likely to appear in that genre.

Television and Radio

The spread (distribution) of people with disabilities across programme genres is not surprisingly very different in radio and television given the predominance of certain programme genres on radio compared to television. More specifically, although all the programme genres used in the research are well represented on television, radio is dominated by music, news/current affairs and lifestyle programming which account for 87% of all radio programmes in the sample. The implications of this are outlined below.

Figure 6: Distribution of people with disabilities across genres - Television

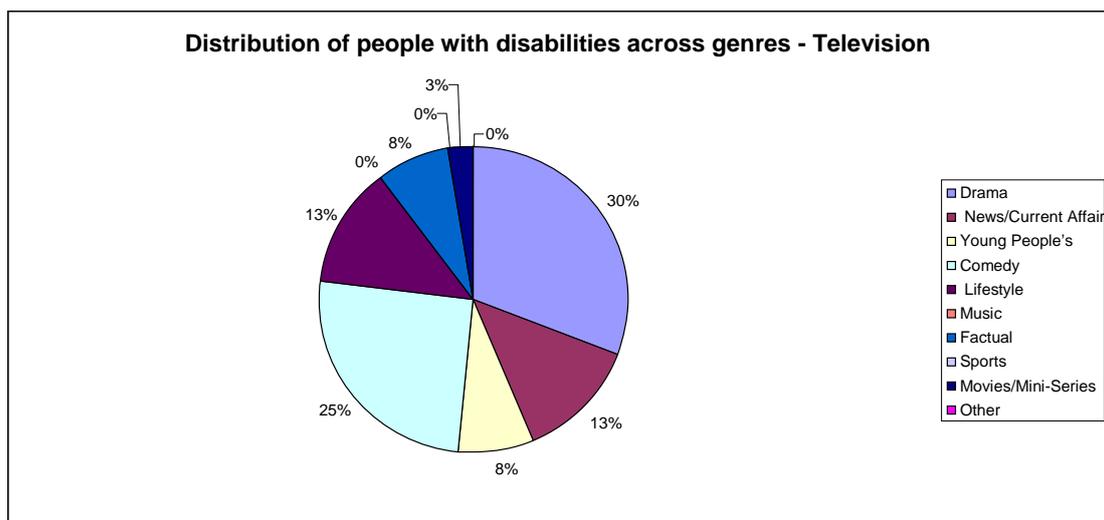
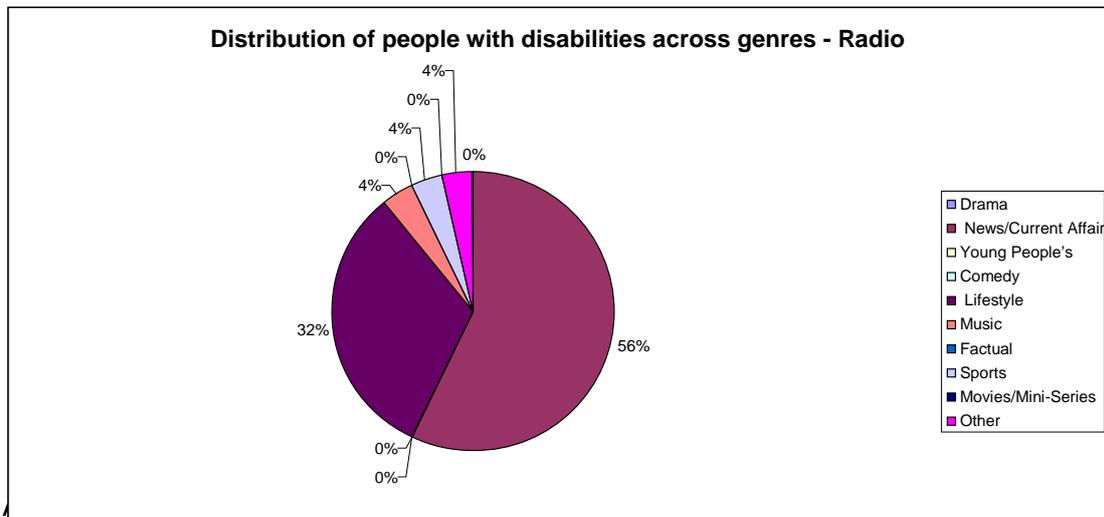


Figure 7: Distribution of people with disabilities across genres - Radio



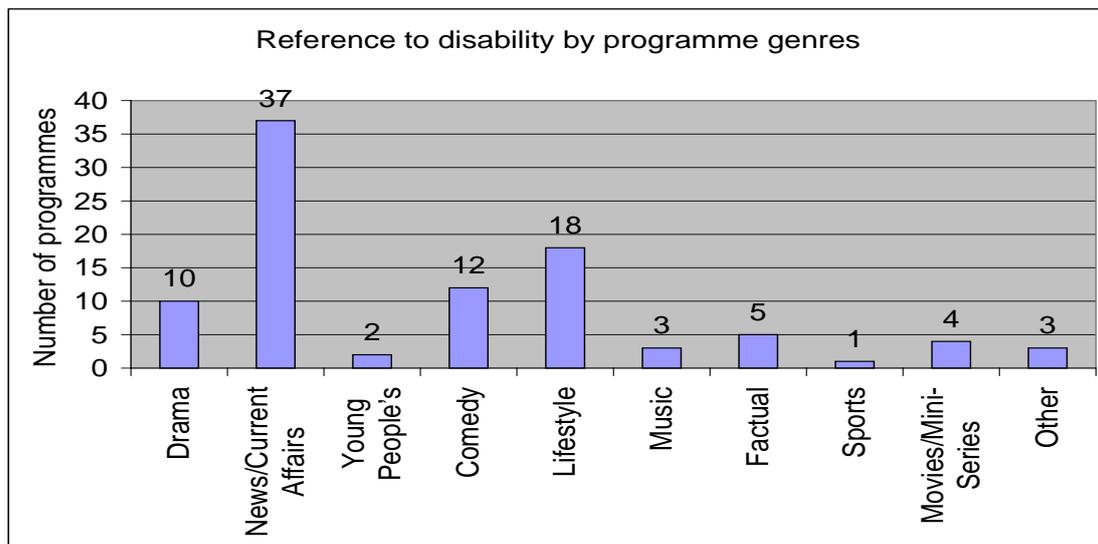
affairs and lifestyle - account for 81% of all television appearances of people with disabilities. Drama and comedy in particular dominate television, accounting in total for 55% of all screen representations of people with disability (despite the fact that the two genres together account for only 30% of the 374 television shows in the overall programme sample). In radio, however, 88% of appearances by people with disabilities occurred in just two genres: news/current affairs and lifestyle shows (and more specifically phone-in and magazine shows).

Both genres – news/current affairs and lifestyle – are also found on television. However, on television, they play a far less significant role in representing people with disability than the genres of comedy and drama. However, the prevalence of news/current and lifestyle in radio representations of people with disability reflects their prevalence in the overall radio sample where the two genres account in total for 73% of all radio shows (news/current affairs 60% and lifestyle 13%). Although music programming accounts for 14% of all the radio shows in the sample, it accounts for just 4% of the radio appearances of people with disabilities.

3.7 In which genres of programmes do references to disability appear most and least often?

This question adopted a similar approach to that asked in section 3.6 but was limited to references to disability (i.e. when a person with a disability was neither present nor referred to).

Figure 8: Reference to disability by programme genres



As with appearances of people with disabilities, four genres account for the vast majority (82%) of all shows on radio and television which only refer to disability and which do not include appearances by people with a disability. They are:

- News/Current Affairs (39%)
- Lifestyle (19%)
- Comedy (13%).
- Drama (11%)

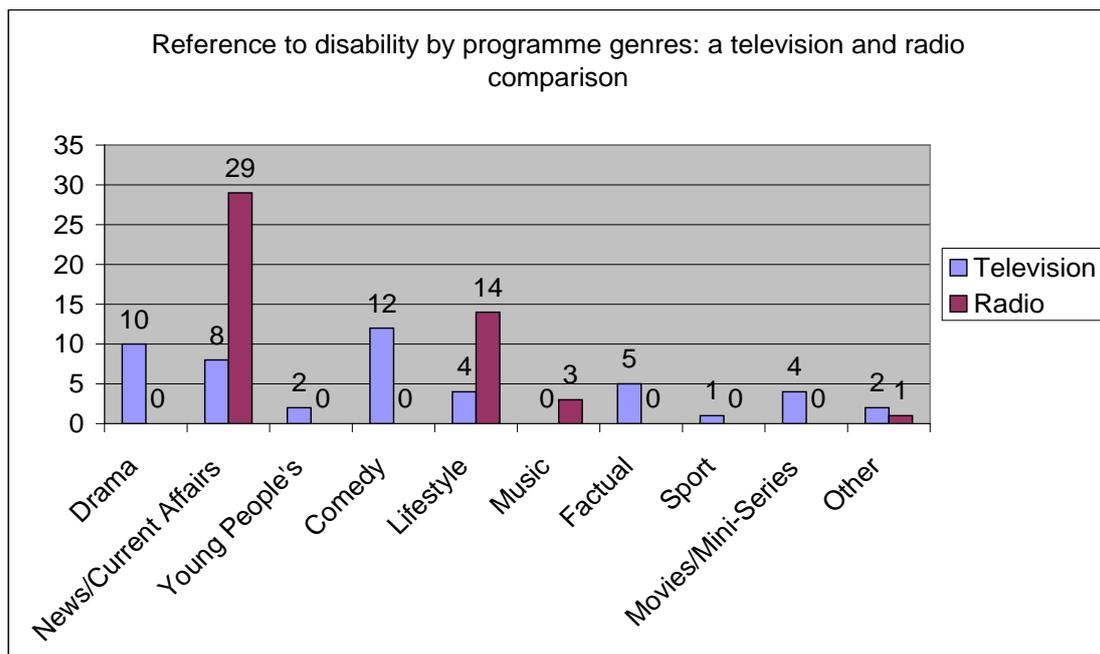
The remaining 18% is accounted for by

- Sports (1%)
- Young People's (2%)
- Music (3%)
- Other (3%)
- Factual (5%)
- Movies/Mini-Series (4%)

Television and Radio

The spread (distribution) of references among programme genres differs across television and radio. Again this apparently results from differences in the spread of genres across the two media. More specifically, although all the programme genres used in the research are well represented on television, radio is dominated by music, news/current affairs and lifestyle programming which account for 87% of all radio programmes in the sample. The implications of this are outlined below.

Figure 9: Reference to disability by programme genres: television and radio comparison.



It is immediately evident that although references to disability occur in all genres on television, in radio just three genres account for virtually all (98%) of disability references. News/current affairs accounted for 62% of all radio references, lifestyle programmes accounted for 30% with music accounting for a further 6%. A single radio reference categorised as “Other” accounts for the remaining 2%). The fact that these genres account for virtually all radio references to disability reflect the fact that such genres dominate radio schedules. This is not to suggest that references to disability are evenly spread across television genres, however. Four genres - comedy (25%), drama (21%), news/current affairs (17%) and factual (10%) - account for nearly three-quarters of all television references to disability.

In terms of the likelihood of references to disability occurring in a particular programme genre, references to people with disabilities were more evenly spread across genres than actual appearances of people with disabilities.⁶ Nonetheless, the contrasts between the programme genres remain stark. References to disability are most likely to feature in comedy programmes followed by movies/mini-series and then lifestyle programmes. References are least likely to appear in sports, music, and young people’s programming (in that order).

It is also notable that two of the genres which were respectively more and less likely to feature **people** with disabilities - Drama and News/Current Affairs—are not significantly more or less likely to feature **references** to disability.

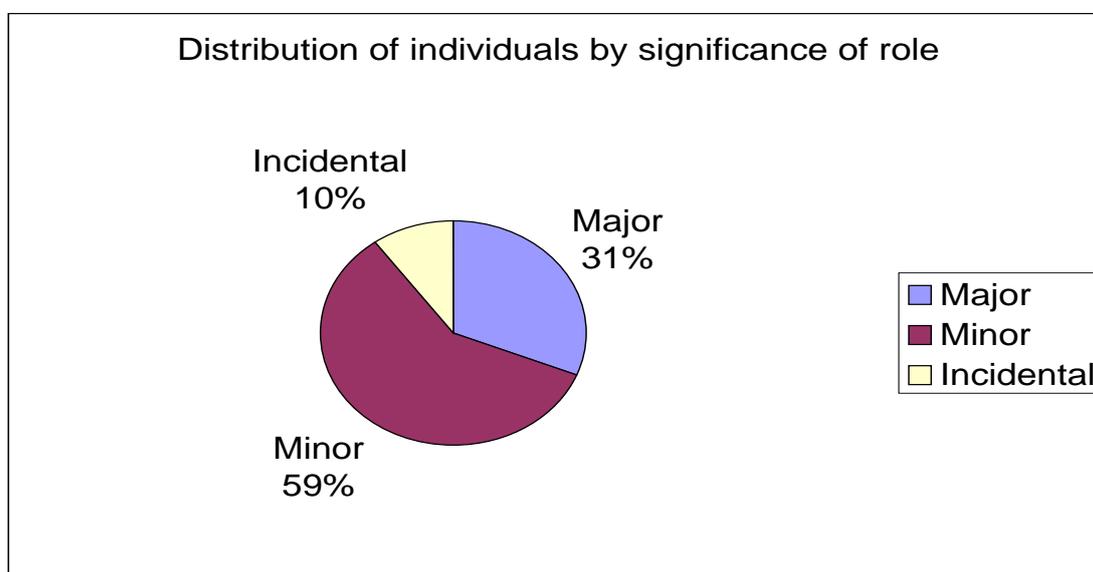
⁶ We have not broken “likelihood” into television and radio subsections because the scale of variation in the overall presence of genres across the two media is so substantial as to make direct comparison meaningless e.g. given the almost total absence of drama from the overall radio sample, it would make little sense to compare the likelihood of encountering references to disability in drama on radio only with drama on television.

3.8 In programmes that represent people with disabilities, what is the level of appearance of the person/people with disabilities?

In order to assess the significance of the role/contribution of people with disabilities in a given programme, the research examined whether the appearance of a person with a disability in a programme was major, minor or incidental. Appearances across both broadcast media were categorised as major, minor or incidental by applying a combination of four criteria relating to:

- the amount of on-screen time featuring a given character;
- the amount of speech/dialogue spoken by a given character;
- that character's role in developing the narrative, and;
- the extent of character development (although this largely applies to fiction).

Figure 10: Distribution of individuals with disabilities by significance of role.



The research found that in the 67 programmes featuring people with a disability on radio and television, 27 people with disabilities played major roles, 52 played minor roles and 9 were merely incidental. In other words, 69% of all representations were minor or incidental with the remaining 31% categorised as major.

Television and Radio

There were also stark differences in the roles played by people with disabilities on radio and television.

Figure 11: Distribution of individuals with disabilities by significance of role – Television

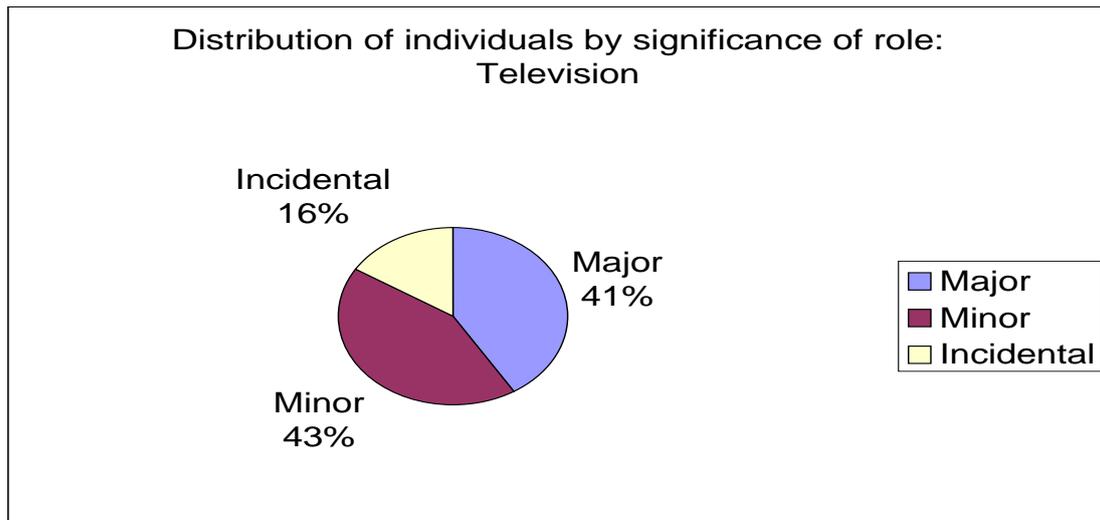
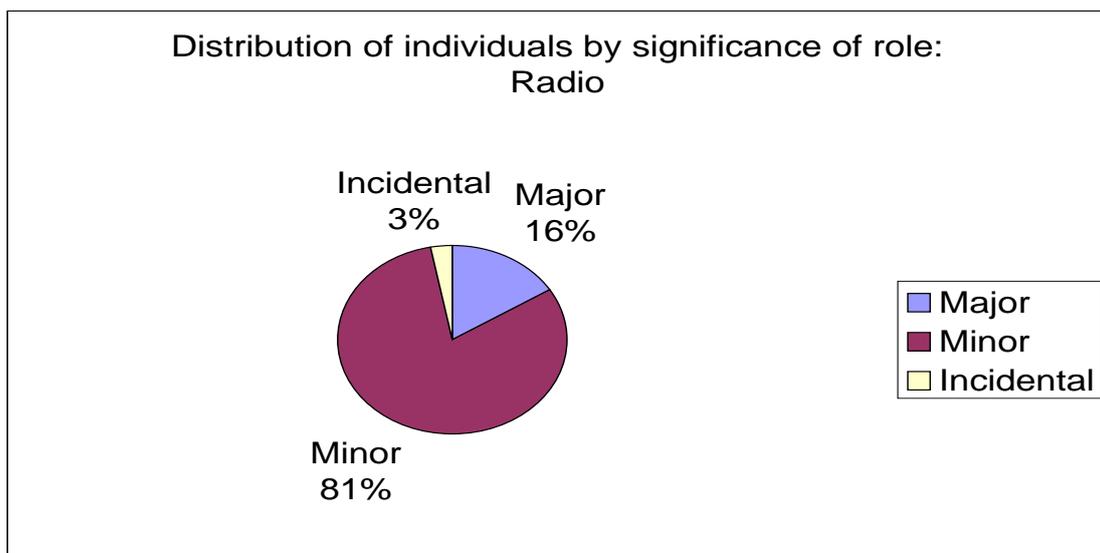


Figure 12: Distribution of individuals with disabilities by significance of role – Radio



Television representations of disability were much more likely to feature people with disabilities in major roles: 41% of those featured on television occupied major roles as compared with just 16% on radio.

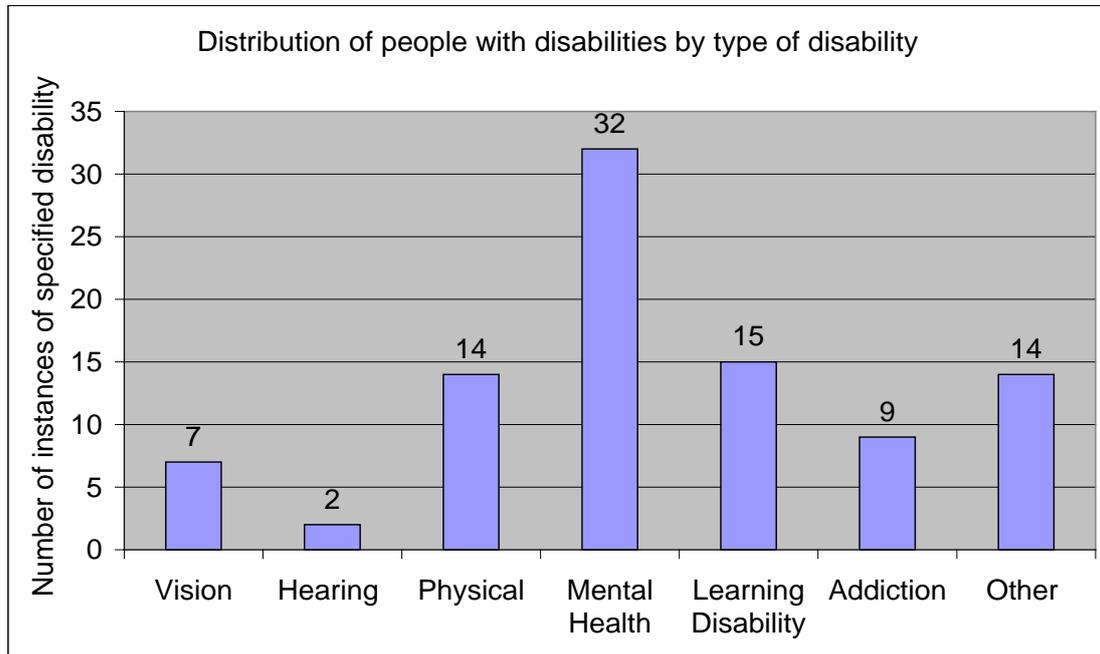
Furthermore, fully four-fifths (81%) of those appearing on radio were categorised as playing minor roles whereas on television the figure was only 43%.

3.9 What types of disability are represented?

The research categorised the conditions of all the individuals with disability using specific descriptions available (e.g. cystic fibrosis, schizophrenia, gambling addiction etc.) and then grouped them under pre-defined headings referring to categories of disability: Vision, Hearing, Physical Impairment, Mental Health, Learning Disability and Other. The categorising allowed for the possibility that a single individual might experience several forms of disability simultaneously. Thus, although there were only 88 individuals with disabilities identified by the research, they accounted for 93 incidences of disability. In terms of specific conditions, depression is the most commonly represented form of disability on radio and television (19 or 21% of the appearances represented depression), followed by autism (11 appearances or 12%) and addiction (9 appearances or 10%).

Looking at disability in more general terms, all of the pre-defined headings listed above were represented to a greater or lesser degree. The chart below outlines the relative prominence of different types of disability.

Figure 13: Distribution of people with disabilities by type of disability



Mental health clearly dominates with 32 instances (34%) of representations of mental health in the total programme sample. It is important to note that a third of all instances of representations of persons with a mental health condition were accounted for by news reporting on a single individual (Cho, Seung-Hui, the Virginia Tech shooter). Learning disability (15 instances or 16% of the total) was the second largest category, followed by physical disability (14 instances or 16%) and “Other” (also 14 instances or 16%). Addiction, vision and hearing disabilities accounted for 10%, 8% and 2% of the sample respectively.

Television and Radio

Figure 14: Distribution of people with disabilities by type of disability – Television

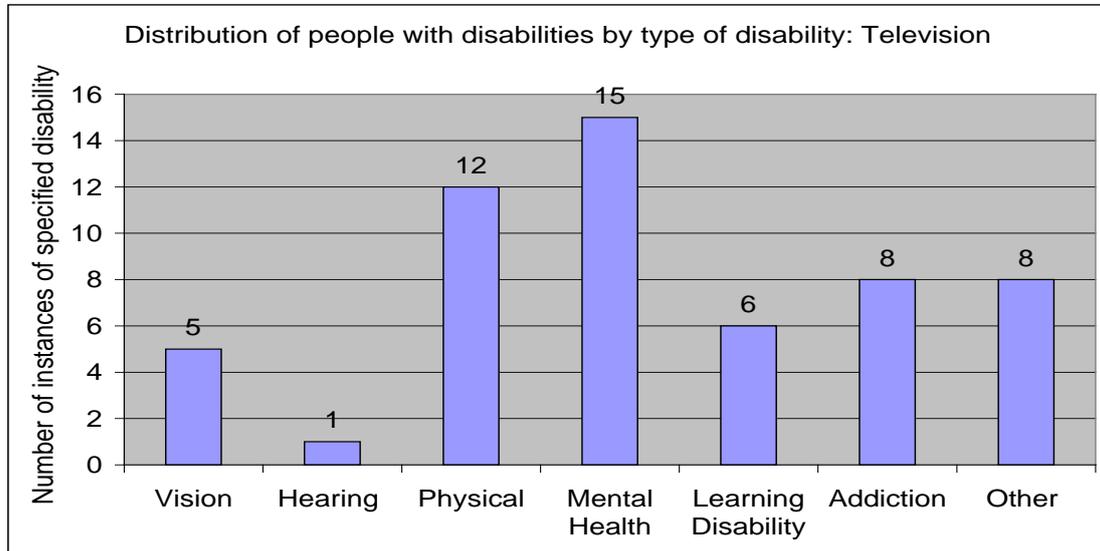
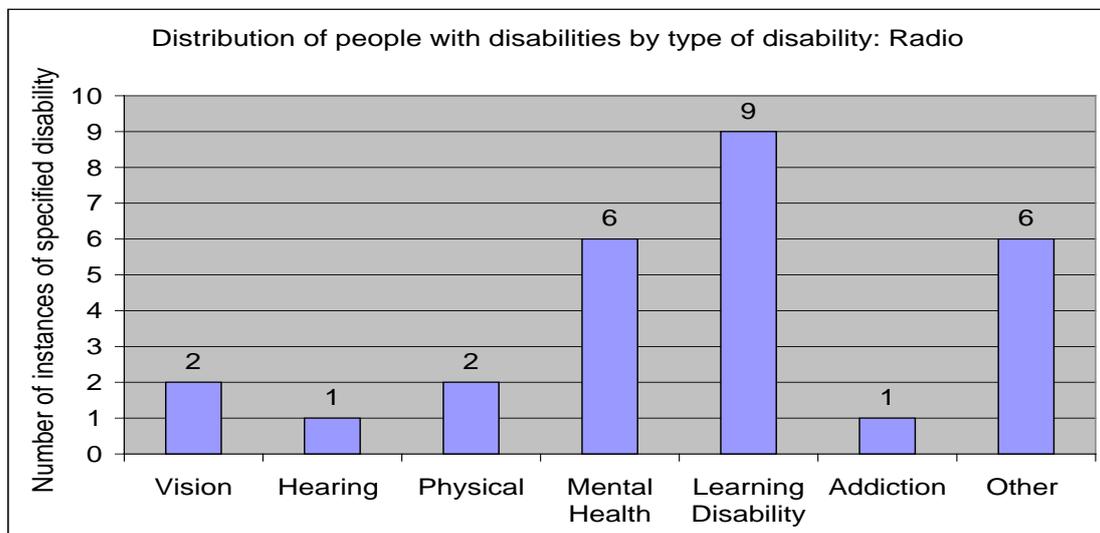


Figure 15: Distribution of people with disabilities by type of disability - Radio



In contemplating the distinctions in the range of disability types across radio and television, it needs to be borne in mind that physical/sensory disabilities are less apparent on radio. For example, coders noted the presence of six people on one radio show on NEAR FM, “Equality Time”. However, although all six people were clearly identified as disabled during the programme there was no explicit or implied description of the nature of their disabilities.

Physical impairments accounted for 22% (or 12 instances) of all those represented in the television element of the sample, but only 7% (or 2 instances) of those in the radio element.

In the case of representations of mental health across both media: representations of individuals with mental health issues accounted for 27% (or 15 instances) of all the disabilities coded on television and 22% of all disabilities coded radio.

3.10 How does the representation occur? (i.e. stereotyped etc.,)

This question was examined using of the following subsidiary questions:-

(1) the tone of references to persons with a disability present on a show (i.e. whether light-hearted or serious);

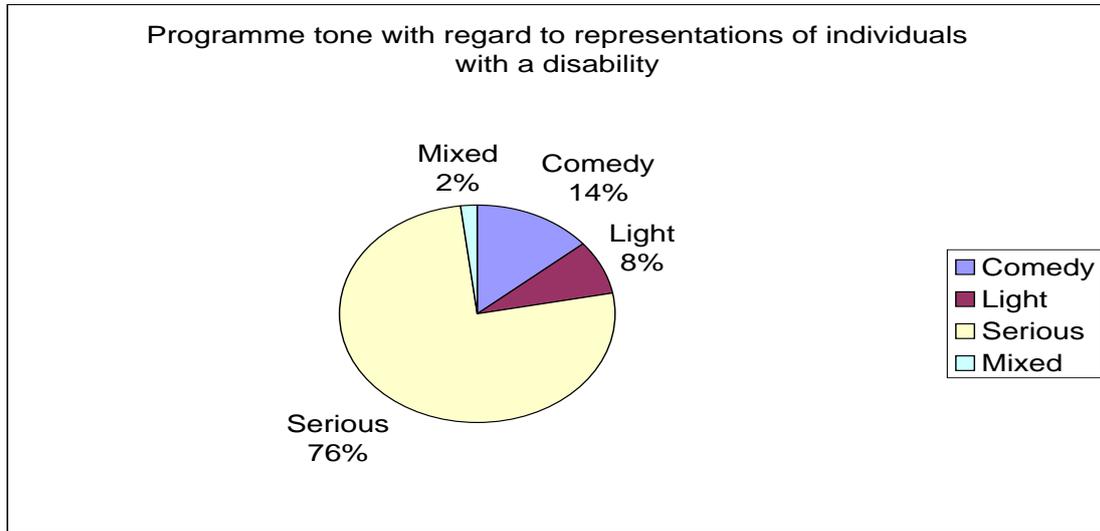
(2) the extent to which representations of people with disabilities fell into pre-defined stereotypical categories (outlined below), and;

(3) whether the programme had a neutral, prejudicial or discriminatory approach to the representation of people with disabilities.

3.10.1 Programme Tone

This question sought to establish the tone applied to particular representations of individuals with disabilities, regardless of the genre of the programme featuring the representation or the broadcast media involved (radio or television). The object of the question was to identify whether there was a particular tone associated with representations of disability. Though one might anticipate that a sitcom would adopt a comedic tone in dealing with a person with a disability, this is not necessarily the case. Furthermore, magazine-style programming such as “The Tubridy Show” on RTÉ Radio 1 may adopt a wide variety of tones depending on the subject of a given programme item.

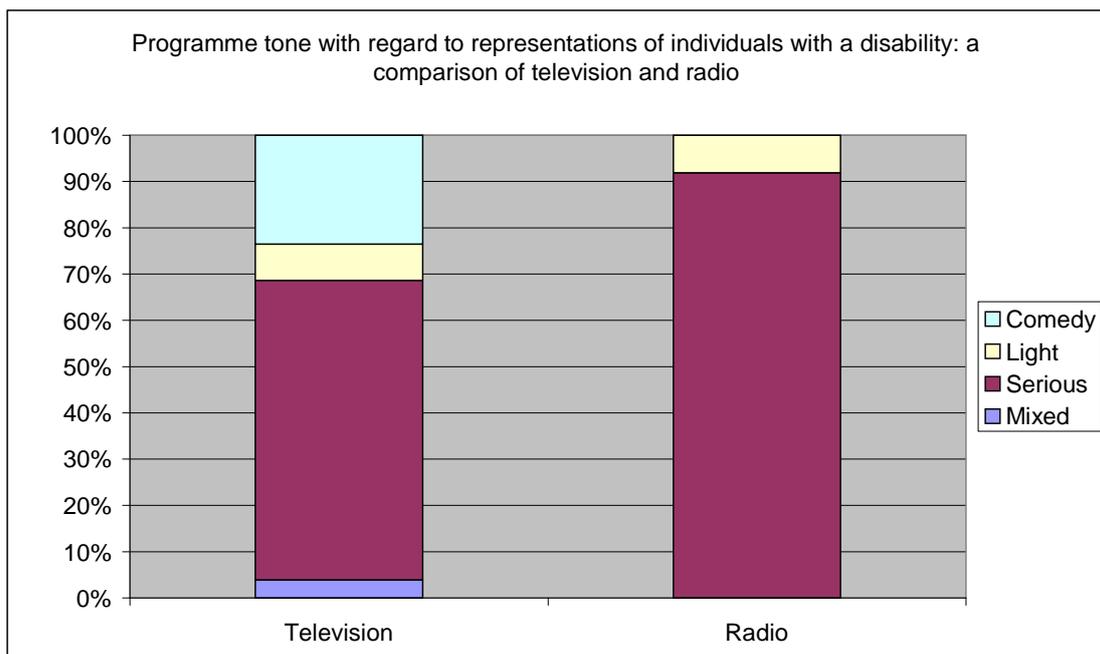
Figure 16: Programme tone with regard to representations of individuals with a disability/



For the most part (76% of instances) the tone adopted with regard to a person with a disability is categorised as “serious”. In only 22% of overall cases is a light or comedic tone adopted. This was particularly true of appearances by a person with a disability on radio, as the section below outlines.

Television and Radio

Figure 17: Programme tone with regard to representations of individuals with a disability: a comparison of television and radio



92% of radio representations were characterised by a “serious” tone whereas none of the radio representations were considered comedic. In this respect it should be recalled that the comedy genre is almost entirely absent from Irish radio. A lighter approach was far more likely to be encountered on television, where 32% of appearances by people with disability were categorised as “comedic” or “light”. Notwithstanding this finding, even on television, 65% of representations were regarded as being characterised by a “serious” tone. Interestingly, the likelihood of a serious tone was also far greater with regard to references to disability, as the chart below indicates.

Figure 18: Programme tone with regard to references to disability

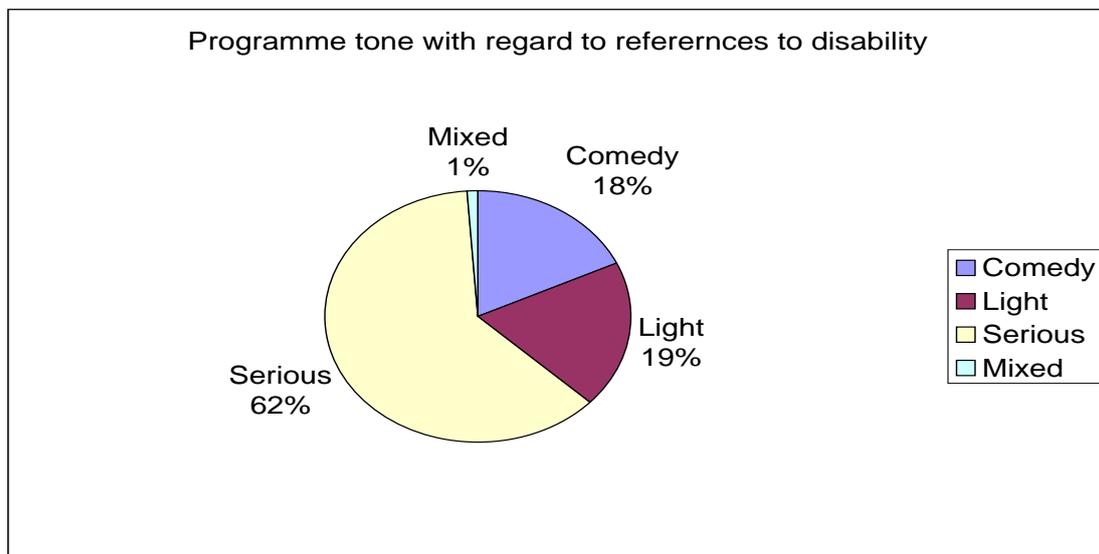
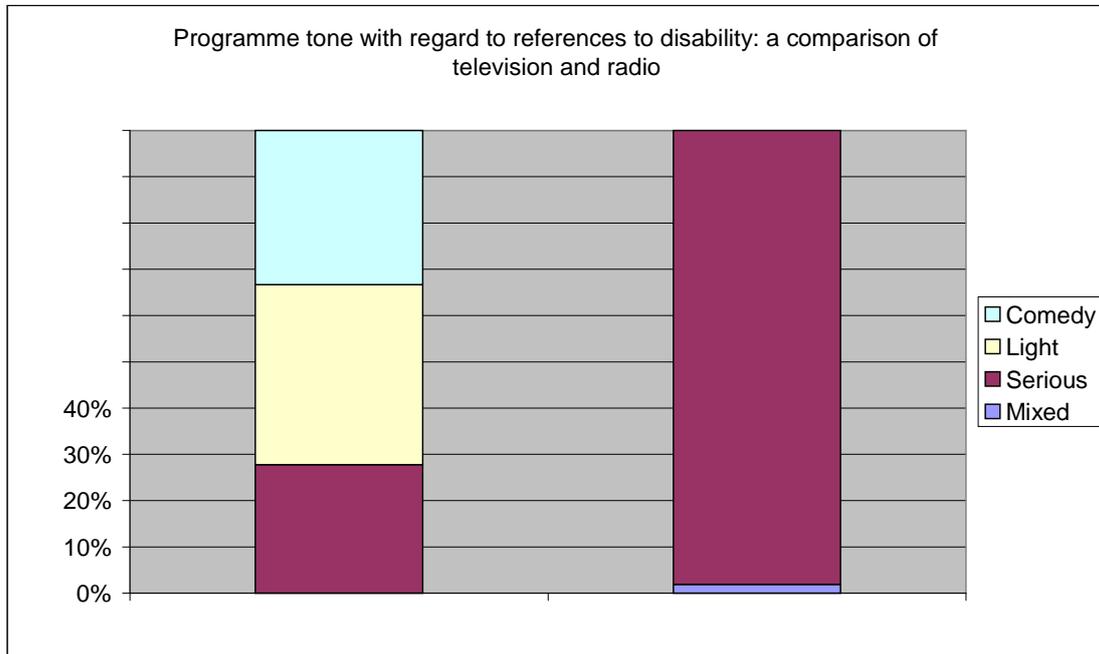


Figure 19: Programme tone with regard to references to disability – television and radio comparison



Nearly 40% of all references to disability were coded as comedic or light. However, there was again a difference between radio and television with radio taking a notably more serious tone. Of the 52 references to disability on radio, all but one (i.e. 99%) were characterised as “serious” whereas only 27% of references to disability on television were similarly categorised. Indeed, on television 73% of references were coded as “comedy” (34%) or light (39%).

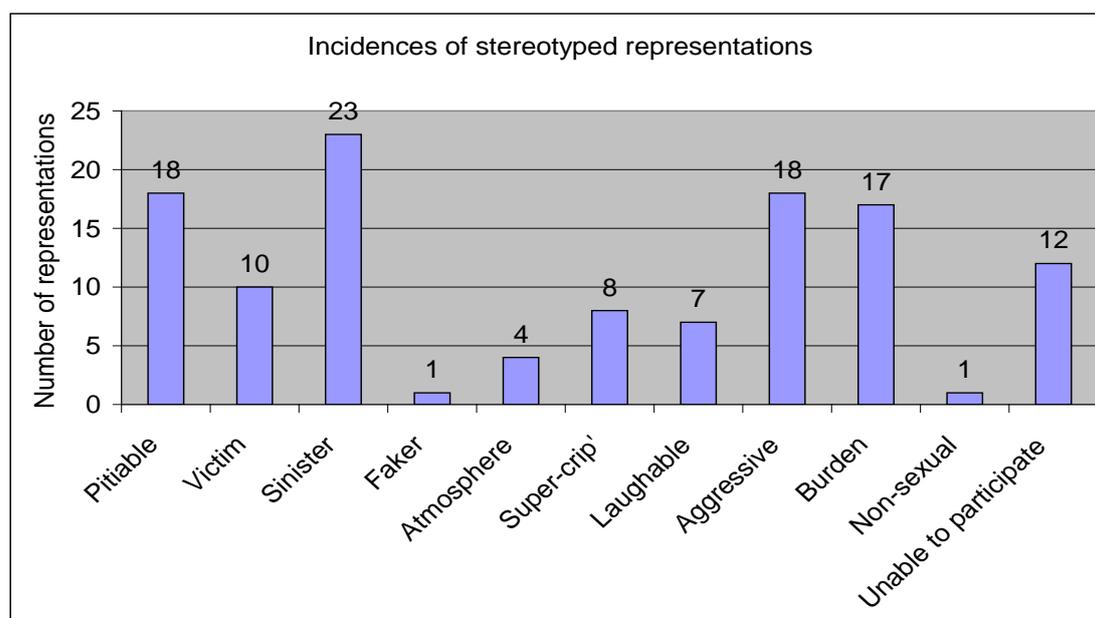
3.10.2 Stereotyping

With regard to stereotyping, we should note that researchers were able to assign the representation of individuals with disabilities to more than one of the eleven stereotype categories employed in the research. Hence, although there were 88 individuals with disabilities in the programme sample, the researchers noted 119 instances of stereotyping. In 23 of the 88 representations (26% of the total), no stereotype was noted.

The stereotype categories were:

- Pitiable and pathetic; sweet and innocent; a miracle cure
- Victim or an object of violence
- Sinister or evil
- Faking injury; lazy
- Atmosphere - curios or exotica
- 'Super-crip'⁷/ triumph over tragedy/noble warrior
- Laughable or the butt of jokes
- Having a chip on their shoulder/ aggressive avenger
- A burden/ outcast
- Non-sexual or incapable of a worthwhile relationship
- Incapable of fully participating in everyday life

Figure 20: Incidences of stereotyped representations



⁷ It is important to state that while the term 'super-crip' is occasionally used as a pejorative slang term, it is used in this research in the context of its established meaning within critical disability studies and the disabled community to describe a stereotype used to portray people with disabilities. In summary, the stereotype is a common means of framing disability stories (particularly in the news) whereby the person with a disability is portrayed as undertaking 'superhuman' acts e.g. sailing around the world. The use of the term in this research is not intended to devalue individual achievement but is rather intended to describe a stereotype whose impact is to present disability variably as; a challenge to be 'overcome' in order to be 'normal'; something that can be overcome by individuals who 'try hard enough' and; something for which the individual rather than society has the primary responsibility.

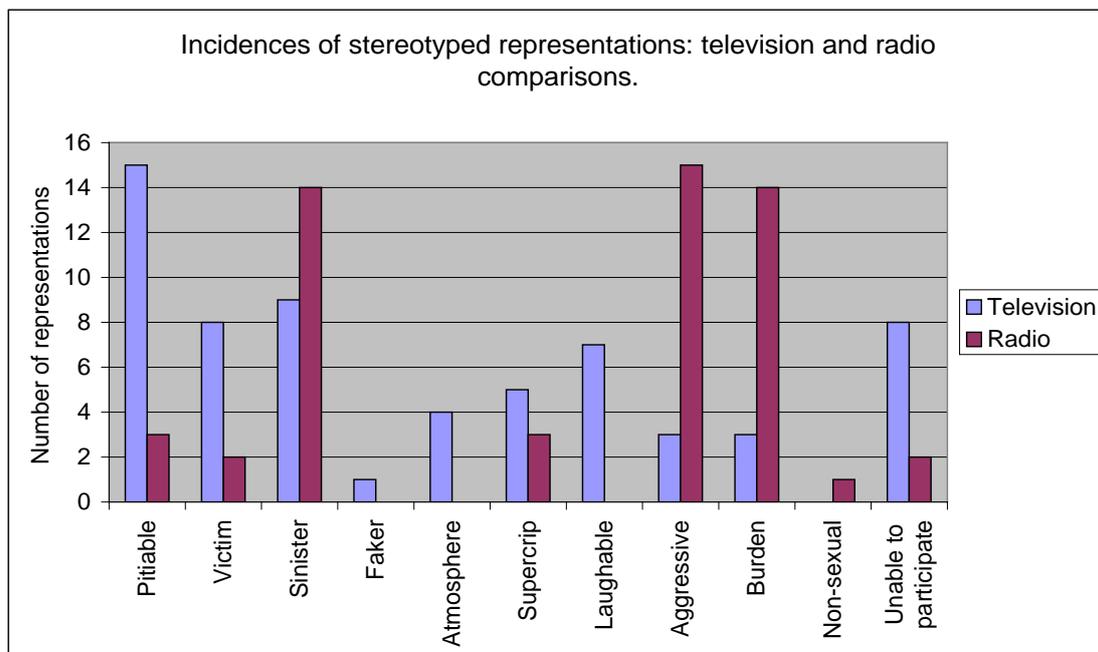
The bulk of the stereotypes can be grouped into two categories: 41 instances portrayed individuals with disabilities as either sinister or aggressive (35% of all of the applications of the stereotype category). A further 45 were categorised as pitiable, victims or burdens (38% all of the applications of the stereotype category).

These figures should be treated with some caution, however, for reasons which are discussed in more detail in section 4.9.3 below.

Television and Radio

With regard to comparisons of stereotyping across broadcast media, it is notable that 11 of the 51 people with disabilities (or 22%) that appeared in the television sample were regarded as non-stereotyped. By contrast 12 out of 37 (32%) of the people with disabilities on radio were categorised as non-stereotyped.

Figure 21: Incidence of stereotyped representations: television and radio comparisons



Of the 119 examples of stereotyping in the sample as a whole, 65 of these were television representations of disability and 54 were radio representations of disability.

At a glance, the chart above suggests a number of significant differences: perhaps most obvious is the large number of representations (43 in total) categorised as “sinister”, “aggressive” or “burden/outcast” on radio as compared with television. However, once again, Cho, Seung-Hui, the Virginia Tech shooter – who’s activities were reported on in news bulletin after news bulletin by RTÉ Radio 1 – accounts for nearly all (39 of the 43) of these categorisations. However, since the sample did not include television material from the same day, it cannot be safely concluded that radio representations in general are more likely to adopt such stereotypes in representing people with disabilities. However, the results show that television representations are significantly more likely to represent people with disabilities as “pitiable”, “victims” or “unable to participate”. Even allowing for the fact that there were more incidences of categorisation as stereotyped on television than radio overall, it is notable that 33 of the 65 (i.e. 51%) incidences of categorisation on television fell into one of the three categories referred to immediately above. By contrast, on radio only 7 of the 54 (i.e. 13%) incidences of categorisation applied the “pitiable”, “victims” or “unable to participate” stereotype.

3.10.3 Prejudicial/Discriminatory Approach.

The third element of section 3.10 asked whether particular representations of people with disabilities could be categorised as “prejudicial” or “discriminatory” (or neither and therefore neutral). The terms “prejudice” and “discrimination” are sometimes used interchangeably but there is a distinction. Prejudice refers to a tendency to pre-judge a particular individual or group unfairly. Prejudice may be passive, however, and does not necessarily lead to discrimination which refers to the actual unequal treatment of an individual or group on the basis of some aspect of their identity, be it gender, race, ability/disability etc.

As a basis for categorising representations of disability, however, such categories are difficult to use in practice. Therefore, the question sought to identify instances where a programme encouraged negative attitudes towards all people with disability (which was identified as prejudice) and instances where a programme encouraged negative attitudes towards a particular individual (discrimination). In practice, however, such distinctions are hard to maintain and the significant findings from this question related to whether a particular programme was, on the one hand, neutral towards a person or persons with a disability or, on the other hand prejudiced and/or discriminatory towards such individuals. As a result, the majority of appearances by people with disabilities and references to disability were not coded as either discriminatory or prejudicial.

Figure 22: Relative prominence of neutral, prejudicial or discriminatory approaches to the representation of people with disabilities.

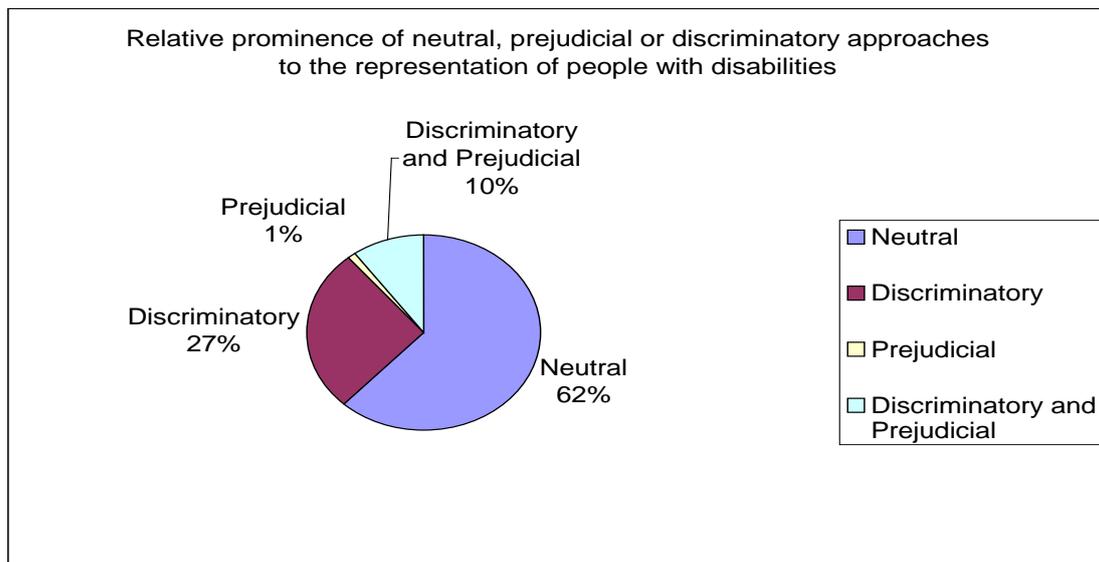
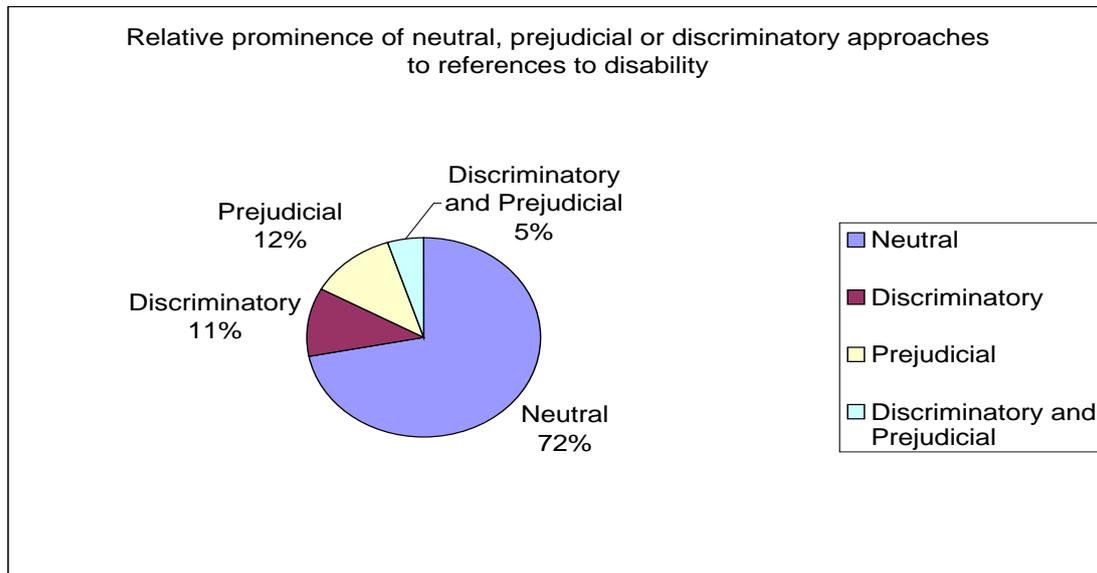


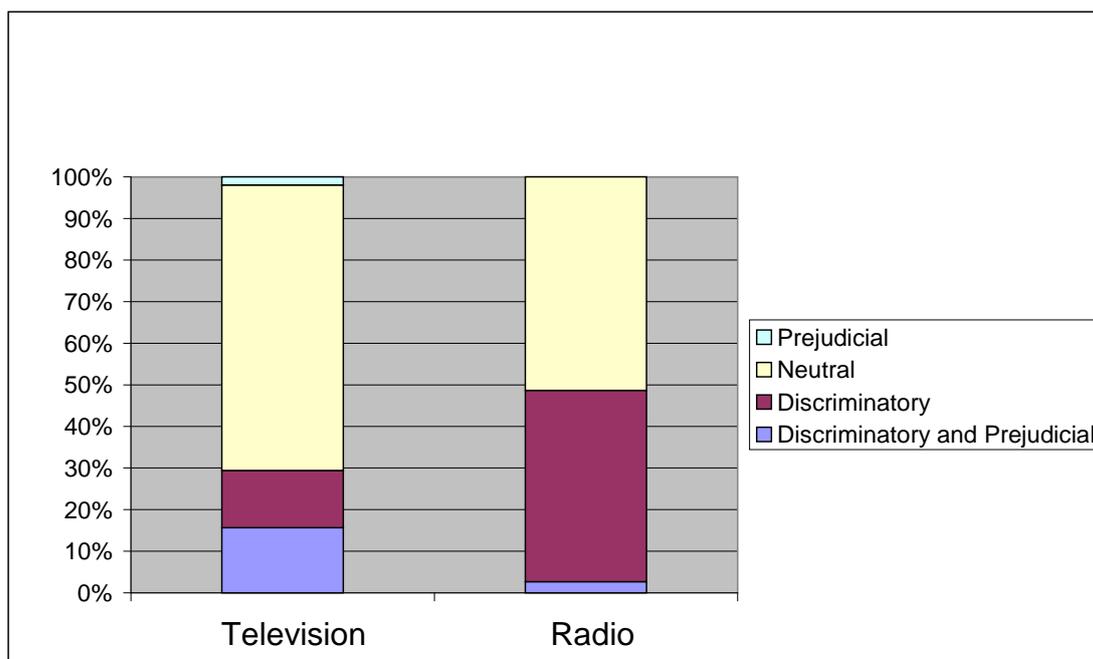
Figure 23: Relative prominence of neutral, prejudicial or discriminatory approaches to references to disability



A neutral attitude was adopted in 62% of the programmes on both media where a person with a disability was present. Similarly, 72% of spoken references to disability (i.e. where no person with a disability was present) across both television and radio were categorised as neutral. Where they were evident, discriminatory approaches (i.e. those encouraging negative feelings towards a particular individual) were more likely to be characteristic of programmes featuring representations of people with disabilities than programmes which made only spoken references to disability. 27% of the former were categorised as discriminatory as opposed to 11% of the latter. On the other hand, virtually none of the programmes (1%) featuring representations of people with disabilities were characterised as prejudicial. This compares with the finding that of programmes containing solely spoken references to disability 12% were regarded as encouraging negative attitudes towards people with disabilities as a class (i.e. prejudicial).

Television and Radio

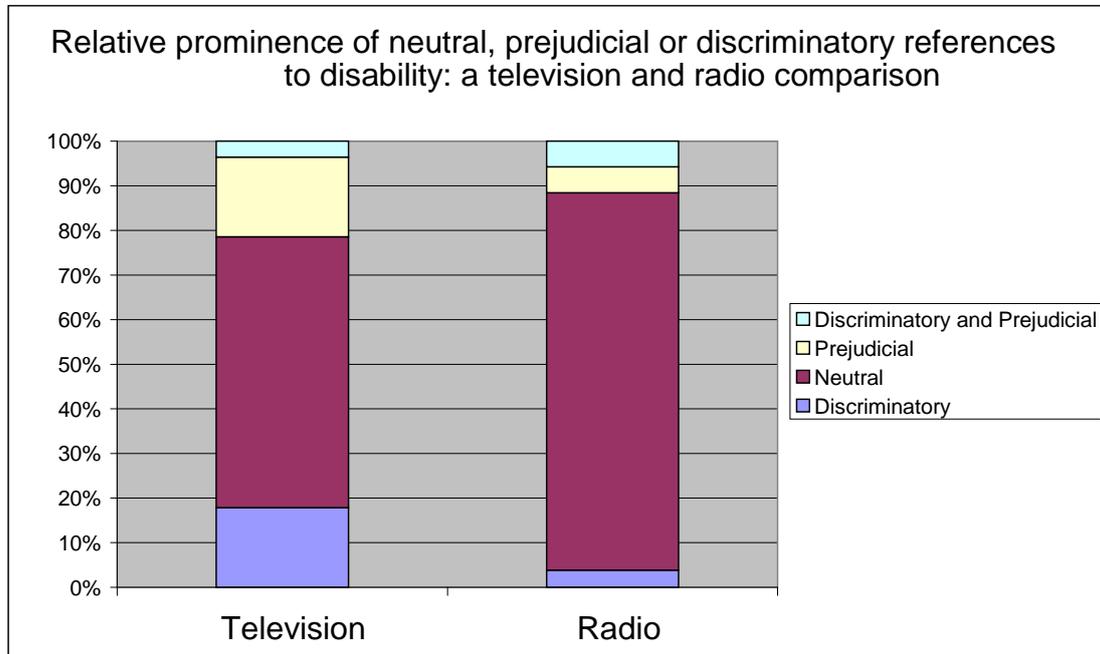
Figure 24: Relative prominence of neutral, prejudicial or discriminatory approaches to representations of people with disabilities: a television and radio comparison.



Use of a neutral attitude in representing people with disabilities rose to 69% (35 programmes) in the television part of the sample but fell to 51% (19 programmes) on radio. Indeed on radio 46% (17 programmes) of the programmes featuring representations of people with disabilities were considered discriminatory. However, Cho, Seung-Hui, the Virginia Tech shooter was again a factor here: 14 of the 17 cases categorised as discriminatory on radio related to that individual who, since he was simultaneously identified as a mass killer and experiencing mental health problems, was categorised as discriminated against (in terms of media coverage) explicitly as an individual with a disability.

In other words, in the absence of Cho, Seung-Hui, the radio results for representations of people with disabilities would have been overwhelmingly categorised as neutral. This is supported by the findings relating to those programming featuring only verbal references to disability.

Figure 25: Relative prominence of neutral, prejudicial or discriminatory approaches to references to disability: a television and radio comparison.



Here, 85% (44 of 52 references) of all radio references to disability were considered neutral. By contrast nearly 40% of television references were categorised as prejudicial, discriminatory or a combination of both.

3.11 What types of occupational role are fulfilled by a person/people with a disability?

To what extent is the experience of disability relevant to the occupation of the person represented?

These two questions were designed to establish the kind of jobs people with disabilities were depicted undertaking with a view to finding out if there was any bias in the occupations represented. The spread (distribution) of occupations represented in radio and television programmes is outlined below.

Occupation represented	Number of people with disabilities employed
White Collar	2
Blue Collar	2
Farming/extractive	0
Retired	2
Health/Caring professional	0
Political	0
Travel/Leisure/Catering/Tourism	0
Education	3
Arts/Media	5
Police/Emergency services	1
Unemployed	0
Unemployed explicitly due to disability.	2
Under 16	11
Other (specify)	6
Clergy	0
Unspecified (unable to code)	31
Student	23

The fact that it was impossible to determine the occupation of the people represented in so many cases made it difficult to adequately address the questions posed. In 31 of the total 88 appearances of a person with a disability, the coders found it impossible to identify the individual's occupation because of insufficient data. In other words it was impossible to identify the jobs of 35% of the individuals with disabilities who appeared in the sample.

Despite this 23 (26%) of the individuals were identified as post-secondary students and a further 11 (13%) were described as "under 16". These particular findings fit well with the age profile of those people coded as disabled within the sample: 60% were estimated to be 35 or younger and 43% of the total in that subsection of the sample were estimated to be in the 20-35 age range, i.e. of third-level education age.

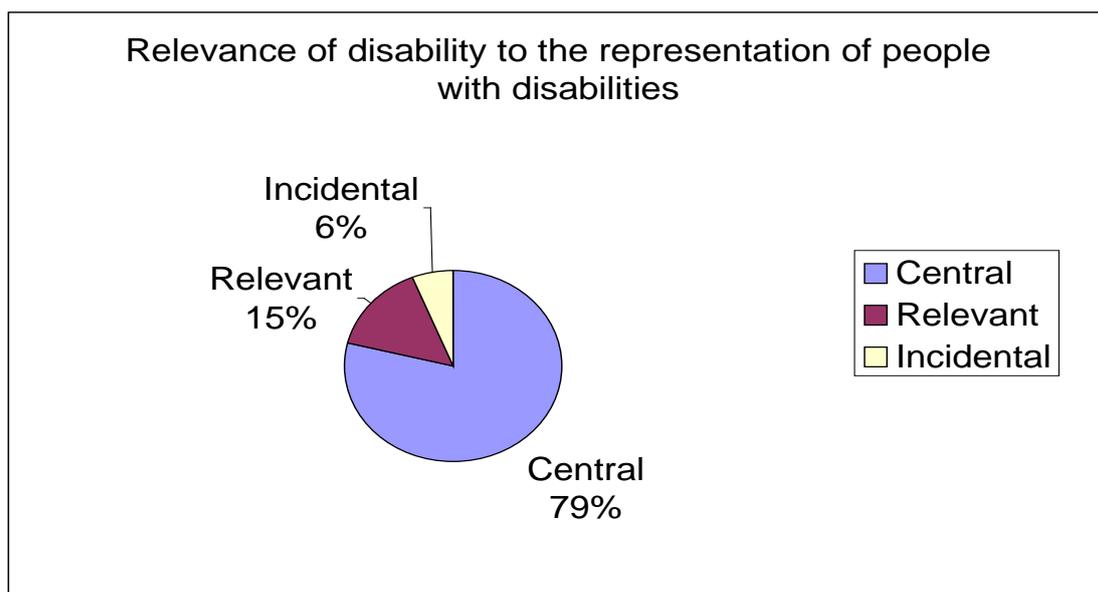
With regard to the second question - "To what extent is the experience of disability relevant to the occupation of the person represented?" - only two people with a disability in the sample were categorised as "unemployed due to disability". A statistically insignificant handful of the individuals who experienced addiction also referred to the fact that their condition affected their ability to carry out their job functions. However, for the most part, the fact that so much of the sample either could not be coded by occupation or were engaged in activities that might be regarded as training rather fully-fledged jobs (i.e. students) meant that there were very few "mainstream" occupations in the sample. Less than 15% of those individuals with disabilities who appeared in the sample were categorised engaged in "white collar work", "blue collar work", "working for police" etc. With such a low base to work from it is not possible to produce a statistically significant answer relating to the relevance of disability to the occupation of the person represented.

3.12 To what extent is the experience of disability relevant to that person's role as represented?

Question 3.8 sought to establish the prominence of the role played by people with disabilities in broadcast media. As such it took the fact of the individuals' disability as read. By contrast, this question sought to establish the extent to which disability constituted a major rationale for the inclusion of a person with a disability in a given radio or television programme. Researchers coded the significance of a given individual's disability as "central", "relevant" or "incidental".

These appearances were categorised by considering the impact of removing an individual's disability on their participation in a programme. If the individual's role was essentially unchanged when their disability was removed then their disability was coded as "incidental". If their role was substantially reduced by such a removal but not entirely irrelevant then their disability was "relevant". If, finally, their role was essentially reduced to nothing then their disability was coded as "central".

Figure 26: Relevance of disability to the representation of people with disabilities



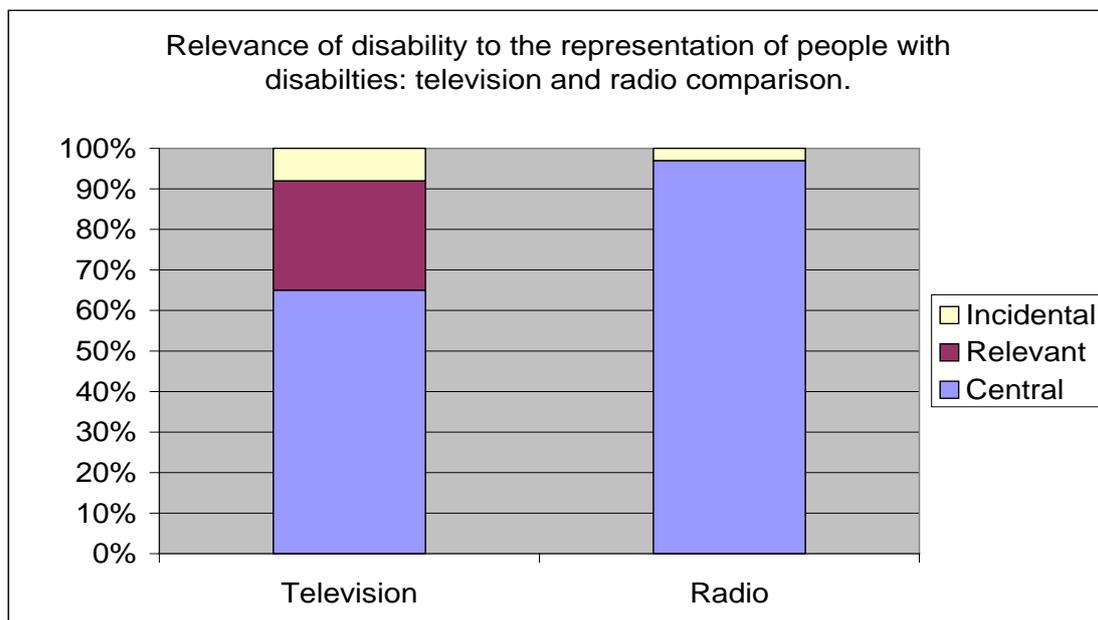
In a substantial majority (79%) of radio and television programmes which featured a person with a disability, the disability was considered “central”. For 70 of the appearances of people with disabilities (i.e. 80% of all representations of a person with a disability) their disability was “central” to their participation in the programme in question.

In only 13 occasions (15%) was the relevance of the disability coded as merely “relevant” and in only 5 (6%) as “incidental” or “irrelevant.”

Television and Radio

There were variations in this regard between television and radio representations.

Figure 27: Relevance of disability to the representation of people with disabilities: a television and radio comparison



Of the 37 appearances by people with a disability on radio, only one was not coded as “central”. In other words, in 97% of radio cases, the individual’s disability was regarded as central to their representation in the particular programme.

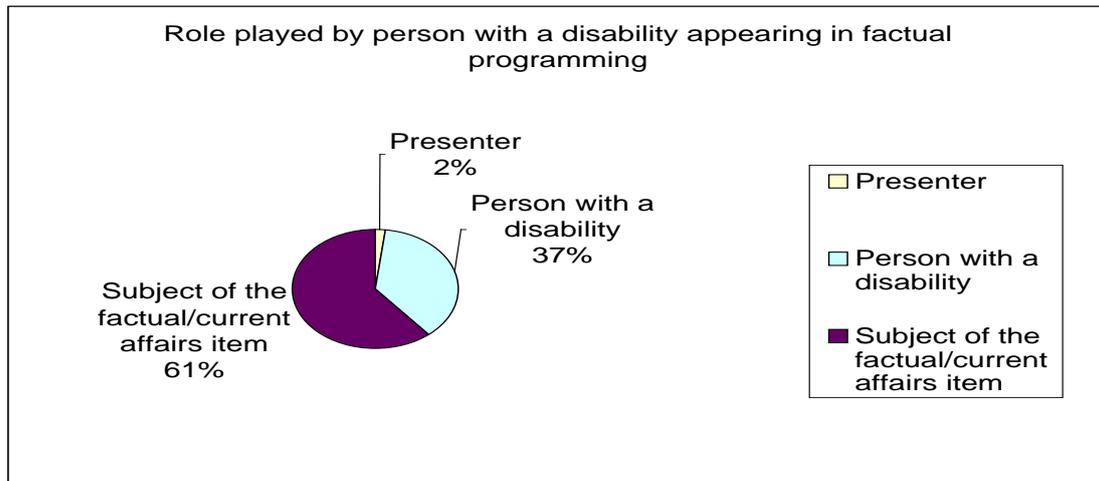
On television, by contrast, the percentage of appearances in which the individual's disability was coded as central to their representation fell sharply to 65%. In more than a quarter (27%) of television representations, the disability was coded as merely "relevant" and in 8% of cases it was considered "incidental".

The overwhelming centrality of disability to radio representations again needs to be viewed in light of the consideration that many conditions (and sensory and physical disabilities in particular) are not evident on radio unless the attention of the audience is expressly drawn to their existence. However, the very act of so drawing the audience's attention tends to bring the fact of the individual's condition to the forefront of any discussion. Again, although it is impossible to measure this, it is possible that the radio sample featured many individuals with a disability who were not identified as such to the audience: i.e. cases where the fact of an individual's condition was incidental.

3.13 In which types of role are people with disabilities most and least often represented?

This question sought to establish the position of the person with a disability within the "hierarchy" of the show on which they featured. Thus individuals were categorised as either "experts", "elected representatives", "presenters", "person with a disability" or "subject of the factual/current affairs item".

Figure 28: Role played by person with a disability appearing in factual programming.



The results suggest that people with disabilities generally occupy a secondary position within this hierarchy. A total of 54 people with disabilities appeared in factual programming within the sample and 33 of these (or 61%) were categorised as “subjects of the factual/current affairs item”. A further 20 (37% of sample) were simply coded as “person with a disability”. In sum, virtually none of the people with disabilities noted in the sample were presented in positions of authority, i.e. as experts or presenters within the context of the shows they appeared on. In fact, only 1 person was definitely coded as a programme presenter – a person with Down Syndrome presenting a music show on Ros FM. None of the people with disabilities identified within the sample could be coded as “experts” or “elected representatives”.

This presentation of people with disabilities in relatively passive roles was also evident with regard to five programmes in the sample featuring groups of people with disabilities, the numerical make-up of which could not be accurately established. .

In only one of these programmes (a segment on RTE 1's "Nationwide featuring a class of autistic children) was the group regarded as playing a major role in the programme segment they were involved with, despite the fact that segments of all five programmes identified as featuring these groups were expressly focused about disability-related issues. Thus, for example, one of the five programmes, "The L-Word" (screened on Channel 6), included a number of disabled characters in a dream sequence. However these characters appeared only briefly, had no dialogue and other than their collective symbolic function, played no substantial role in the narrative role.

3.14 Is there a difference between Irish programming content and imported programming content in terms of the extent of material including people with disabilities or references to disability?

Of the 804 programmes examined, 663 (81%) were of Irish origin, i.e. produced or commissioned by an Irish broadcaster. The remaining 151 programmes (19%) were purchased from overseas. (In practice this meant programming sourced from the US, UK and Australia.) All of the imported programmes appeared on television (and as a result we have not broken the results for this question into television and radio sections). The two charts below outline what percentages of Irish and imported television programmes feature people with disabilities or references to people with disabilities.

Figure 29: Breakdown of Irish produced/commissioned programmes

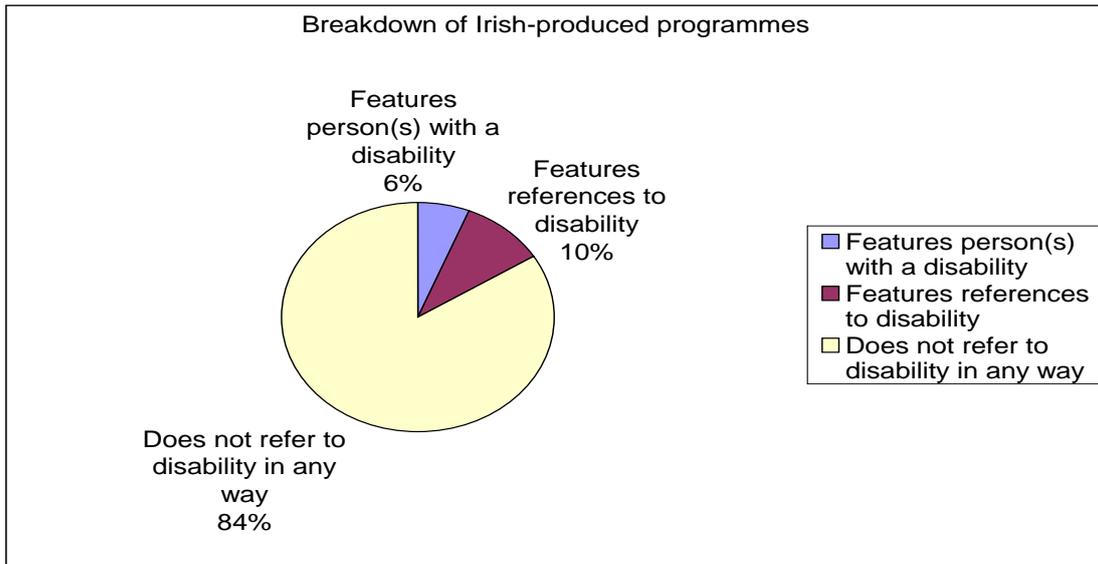
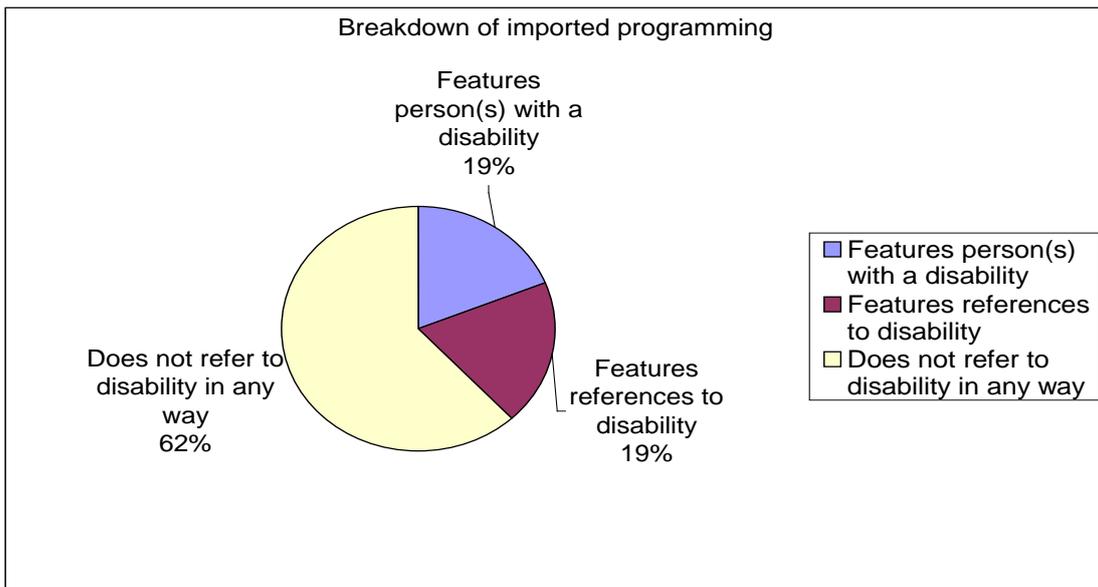


Figure 30: Breakdown of imported programming



Both appearances of people with disabilities and references to disability were far more likely to appear in imported television programming. 6% (39 programmes) of Irish programmes featured appearances by a person or persons with a disability. A further 10% of Irish programmes (66 programmes) referred to disability.

By contrast 19% (28 programmes) of imported programmes feature appearances by a person or persons with a disability. A further 19% of imported programmes (29 programmes) refer to disability. In sum only 16% of indigenous programmes made any kind of reference (through representation of people with disabilities or by including a verbal reference to disability) to disability as compared with 38% of imported programmes.

4. Secondary analysis

This section examines the same set of questions and addresses the same questions in the same order as set out in the last section. This is not to repeat the same analysis but rather to tease out some of implications of the key findings detailed in section 3 and to examine and explain how some of the findings were arrived at. In some cases, most notably with regard to stereotyping and the categorisation of representations as prejudicial or discriminatory (both section 4.9 below), it interrogates the findings, suggesting that any conclusions drawn from them should be used cautiously.

4.1 What proportion of television and radio programming contains representations of people with disabilities?

Beyond the central finding that 8% of programmes in the sample featured representations of a person or persons with a disability, the most striking discovery was the fact that 10% of all television programmes in the sample featured a person with a disability as compared with 6.5% of all the radio programmes looked at. The fact that television programmes are nearly twice as likely as their radio counterparts to feature a person with a disability needs some consideration. That radio and television are characterised by different genres characteristic (see below) may partially account for this. However, one cannot overstate the impact of the greater difficulty involved in identifying an individual with a disability in the absence of visual cues in the case of radio. Although, in most representations of people with disabilities across the sample (73%) the audience's attention was drawn verbally and therefore directly to the fact of an individual's disability, more than a quarter were identified by tacit or implied cues, e.g. a visual cue such as the fact that an individual is in a wheelchair or uses a cane or through an aural cue such as slurred speech. However the aural cues offered by radio do not permit the identification of disabilities which do not affect speech.

The matter is further complicated by separating the television and radio results for representations of people with disabilities. On television, 12 of the 51 representations of people with disabilities (or 24%) were identified through tacit signals. Surprisingly, however, an even higher percentage of radio representations – 41% or 15 of the 37 representations – are coded as tacitly signalled. This appears to undermine the suggestion that on radio only clearly signalled representations of people with disabilities are evident to listeners. However, if one examines closely the 15 tacit representations on radio, a slightly different picture emerges. 6 refer to Cho Seung-Hui, the Virginia Tech shooter. Although later news bulletins explicitly refer to his mental illness, the initial six described him only as “a troubled loner”. Since this was not a direct, overt reference to mental illness, the coders correctly opted not to code this as a direct reference. Instead they coded it as an implied, tacit reference.

However, strictly speaking this is not correct either since “tacit” is only intended to be applied to non-linguistic cues signalling impairment. In a similar vein, a further 6 tacit representations of people with disability are accounted for by the NEAR FM disability-focused show “Equality Time”. In this case, none of the six individuals are singled out as disabled, so the coders are again correct to refrain from categorising their impairment as being directly signalled. However, since it is made clear in the introduction to the programme that the show is for and about individuals with disabilities, it is reasonable to infer that the participants are disabled. Again, however, coding their disability as tacitly signalled could be regarded as somewhat misleading since it is a direct spoken reference at the outset which allows the listener to infer the status of the participants. Indeed, a close examination of the 15 radio representations of people with disabilities categorised as “tacit” suggests that only one – the person with Down Syndrome presenting a Ros FM music show – was not signalled by semantically overt statements.

All 14 radio representations then (the 15 referred to above minus the Ros Fm case), are examples of a situation which the questionnaire design did not anticipate. However, for the purposes of assessing the extent to which the presence or absence of people with disabilities may be disguised on radio, it would be more accurate to code all 14 instances referred to above as direct references to disability. In effect, this means that only 3% of representations of people with disabilities on radio are tacit in the same way that 24% of television representations are considered tacit. This appears to offer some statistical support for the hypothesis that some incidences of impairment are “invisible” on radio and therefore uncapturable for research purposes.

In this respect, it should also be noted that the research categorised as disabled only those individuals who were represented as such through direct or tacit cues. Thus even if an individual coder knew a particular individual featured in the sample to be in some way impaired, they would not code them as such since to all intents and purposes, that individual was not represented as disabled. For example, British Prime Minister Gordon Brown is technically disabled since he has a visual impairment (a false eye). However since this fact is rarely referred to in media coverage he is generally not represented as a person with a disability.

4.2 What proportion of television and radio programming contain spoken references only to disability?

The analysis found that 9% and 11% of all radio and television programming respectively contained spoken references only to disability. That spoken references to disability were more evenly spread across media than actual representations of people with disabilities appears to lend further weight to the thesis that the absence of visual cues may have been a factor in the relatively low proportion of radio programmes featuring people with disabilities.

Although 95 radio and television programmes (or 12% of the total sample) featured spoken references to disability where there was no person with a disability in immediate evidence, there were 108 separate references to disability across those 95 shows. The majority were very brief (usually no more than a sentence or phrase).

The researchers found only ten spoken references which constituted substantial discussions, on the basis of the amount of time/dialogue devoted to the subject and the role played by disability in structuring the programme a whole. These included:

- a substantial discussion around the subject of mental illness on LMFM's news programme in the context of the Virginia Tech shooting;
- a discussion of students with special needs on TG4's Nuacht;
- a monologue on the question of what constitutes "normality" in the context of a sermon delivered on a Mass broadcast in South East Radio;
- a discussion of autism on Cork's 96FM inspired by the deportation of Great Agbonlahore, a Nigerian boy who had sought asylum in Ireland and who was himself autistic;
- a recurring theme of faking impairment in an episode of "Seinfeld" on Channel 6;
- a discussion of suicide and mental illness on NEAR FM's "Northside Today", and;

- a discussion with Finian McGrath TD and his interest in education, disabilities and 'special needs' and a more generalised discussion about alcoholism and drug-taking in Ireland today on "The Wide Angle" on Newstalk 106FM.

Of course, this is not to suggest that there were no other substantive discussions of disability in the programme sample. Rather, it highlights the fact that most of the discussions about disability featured the participation of a person with a disability. The fact that there were so few substantive discussions of disability issues in the absence of people of disabilities points to an apparent preference on the part of broadcasters for ensuring that people with disabilities are invited to participate in more in-depth discussions of the broader subject of disability.

This point is lent further weight by the fact that the 24 references to disability which were categorised as "relevant" (rather than "central") were almost exclusively radio news items in which the disability theme was incidental to more central themes such as industrial action (in the health care sector) and deportation of immigrants (the Great Agbonlahore story).

However, arguably the most significant finding from this question was the extent to which disability is casually referenced in contexts which are otherwise unconnected with discussions around disability. The great majority of references to disability across television and radio (74 or 69% of the total) were considered "incidental". Such incidental references were particularly evident in drama programming (and in particular sitcoms) which used references to mental health, vision and hearing impairments in a colloquial fashion (e.g. "Are you crazy?" "You'd have to be blind not to see..." etc). However such references were also found in contexts as diverse as sports commentary and magazine shows. The fact that such comments are deployed, not merely so casually but also so widely, hints at the extent to which particular meanings are taken to be universally understood as associated with various forms of disability.

For example the sample includes an episode of “Seinfeld” on Channel 6 where one character exclaims “I can’t be blind, the blind are courageous.”

4.3 What proportion of all people sampled on television and radio programming had a disability?

The fact that only 1.1% of people identified as appearing in the total programme sample were categorised as disabled, indicates the under-representation of people with disabilities relative to their position in the population as a whole. Even if television offers marginally higher figures (1.8% of all people identified being categorised as a person with a disability), this is still far short of the 9.3% figure quoted by the Central Statistics Office as representing the proportion of people with disabilities in the population of the Republic of Ireland.

Fictional characters accounted for 34 of the total 88 appearances by people with a disability during programming examined, with the remainder made up by “real” individuals. All of the fictional characters appeared on television.

The vast majority of those people coded as a person with a disability in programming were physically present but in one or two cases, the researchers included individuals who, though not physically present were extensively discussed and therefore “represented”. For example, “Sounds for Sunday”, a church sermon broadcast on South East Radio referred at length to Helen Keller, the blind and deaf writer and activist. The discussion of Keller clearly presented her in a particular – saintly – light and thus contributed to the overall representation of people with disability in the programmes sampled. In total, the presence of people with disabilities was distributed as follows:

- 52 programmes featured a single individual;
- 7 programmes featured two individuals;

- 4 programmes featured three individuals, and;
- 1 programme (“Equality Time” on NEAR FM) had 6 individuals with disabilities.

Strictly speaking, the 1.1% may even be an overstatement of the proportion of people with disabilities in the sample as a result of the method adopted by the research for counting all individuals appearing in a given programme. In a bid to overcome the difficulties posed by groups or crowds where it would be difficult if not impossible to accurately count the number of individuals researchers only enumerated “individuated” characters, (the definition of which is outlined in the explanatory guide to the questionnaire included in Appendix 2). However this probably means that the figure 7,223 which describes the total number of people appearing within the sample as a whole is an understatement. Thus the 88 appearances form a larger proportion of the total number of people appearing in the programme sample than if a less conservative method of estimating the total number of all appearances was adopted.

However, the research also identified non-individuated groups of people with disabilities in the sample which were not included in the count of people with disabilities as it was not possible to establish how many people were in the group. These appeared on:

- “The ‘L’ Word” on Channel 6;
- “The Business” on RTÉ Radio 1 on Autistic Schools;
- “Nationwide” on RTÉ 1 segment, also focusing on a school for Autistic children;
- “Exorcist: The Beginning” on TV3, a motion picture partially set in an asylum, and;

- “Your Call With Brenda Power” on Newstalk 106, in the course of a discussion about Autism.

The fact that these individuals were not included in the estimate of the proportion of people with disabilities relative to the total number of individuals in the sample may partially compensate for the conservative estimate of the latter figure.

4.4 What proportion of programming is disability-focussed and what proportion is mainstream?

That only 5 programmes were considered as disability-focused out of a total of 804 is evidence of the peripheral status of disability-focused broadcasting. Arguably even the three editions of News for the Deaf are primarily news-focused in content even if their form is directly geared to the needs of hearing-impaired viewers. Similarly, the fact that the only radio programmes were found on community radio stations (Ros FM and NEAR FM) seems to reflect a reluctance on the part of mainstream broadcasters to provide programming actively targeting audiences with disabilities, in particular during mainstream hours.

It may be the case that general programming may well serve the needs of people with disabilities as much as anyone else’s, although it is beyond the scope of this research to establish whether or not this is in fact the case. Furthermore, there are programmes on mainstream broadcasters which are not included in this sample. But their absence from the sample reflects the extent to which such programming tends to be scheduled outside of prime time viewing (and outside the sampling frame). For example, RTÉ’s “Mind Matters”, “Outside the Box” and “Audioscope” are all broadcast after 7pm on radio. The only exception to this is RTÉ 1 television’s “360°” which is usually broadcast in a 7.30pm time slot but again this programme happened to fall outside the sampling period upon which the research was based.

4.5 How many different people/characters (in the case of fictional/dramatic content) contribute to the representation of people with disabilities?

The research found that the 88 representations of people with disabilities were based on 72 individuals. The nature of the sample which, in some cases included 12 hour blocks of consecutive programming ensured that any individual with a disability featuring prominently in news bulletins would make many appearances. The most evident example of this was Cho Seung-Hui, the university student who shot a number of students at Virginia Tech, who appeared 11 times in the sample, accounting for 13% of all instances of appearances of a person with a disability in the sample period. There were also three separate representations of Great Agbonlahore, an autistic boy who, along with his family, was deported to Nigeria. And finally there were also two programmes representing the autistic son of **Yvonne** Ó Cuanacháin, who sued the Department of Education in relation to her son's education.

However, the fact that the same individuals appear several times does not necessarily mean that they are somehow over-represented in the sample. Even the total headcount of the 7,223 individuals appearing in the overall sample includes many references to some high profile individuals. For example, figures like the then Taoiseach Bertie Ahern, may well appear in virtually every news bulletin.⁸

⁸ A research design whereby the appearance/presence of individuals would only be counted once regardless of how many times they appeared in programmes across the sample was considered but rejected because it could not offer an accurate reflection of the incidence of representation of people with disabilities which was one of the key foci of the research.

4.6 In which genres of programmes are people with disabilities most and least often represented?

The question of programme genre demands extensive consideration. In particular, it is important to note that genre is a key factor accounting for the differences in how radio and television treat disability. Understanding the significance of programme genre is also crucial for any understanding of the distinctions between the extent to which imported and domestic programmes represent disability. Both these points are taken up below and later on in the discourse analysis in the next section of the report.

The research used nine broad programme genre classifications to categorise programmes with an additional “other” category to capture any miscellaneous programmes. The genres used were:

- a. Drama
- b. News/Current Affairs
- c. Young People’s
- d. Comedy
- e. Lifestyle
- f. Music
- g. Factual
- h. Sports
- i. Movies/Mini-Series

To introduce clarity into our classifications we outlined sub-categories for “drama”, “young people’s”, “lifestyle” and “factual”. Drama included: -

- serious drama (“CSI”, “Wire in the Blood”, “The Sopranos”);
- comedy drama (“Ally McBeal”, “Sex in the City”, “Desperate Housewives”), and:
- soap opera (“Fair City”, “Coronation Street”).

“Young people’s” programming included:

- cartoons (“Rugrats”, “Transformers”);
- drama (“Sabrina, The Teenaged Witch”);
- mixed format programmes such as “The Den” or “Going Live” and;
- news programming targeted at youth audiences.

“Lifestyle” is a particularly broad category and is increasingly difficult to separate from factual programming. For the purposes of this research, however, “lifestyle” was defined as including:

- chat/talk shows (“The Late, Late Show”/”Oprah”/”Ricki Lake”);
- phone-in shows (“Liveline”, “Your Call”);
- magazine shows (“The Afternoon Show”/”The Tubridy Show”);
- quiz shows (“Winning Streak”/”The Price is Right”);
- “How-to” shows (diy/gardening/cookery/house buying/house upgrading/makeover – “Beyond the Hall Door”/”Ground Force”/Rachel Allen”/”Location, Location, Location”/”Room to Improve”/”Pimp My Ride”);
- Infotainment, and;
- Travel shows.

Thus “factual” programming referred to:

- “straight” documentary (“Hidden History”),
- nature programming (David Attenborough)
- reality programming (“You’re a Star”, “Celebrity Farm”)

Moving to the actual results, we begin by considering the apparent contradiction whereby news and current affairs accounts for the largest number of appearances by people with disabilities but is also a genre in which one is less likely to encounter such individuals. This clearly requires some explanation.

If the relative prominence of all the programme genres in the sample as a whole and in that subset of programmes featuring people with disabilities was identical (e.g. if news accounted for 45% of the overall sample and 45% of those programmes actually featuring people with disabilities) then one can say that the likelihood of a person with a disability appearing in that genre is evenly distributed across genres i.e. one is as likely to see a person with a disability in a given hour of news as one is in drama, comedy, lifestyle programming etc.

However if some programme genres are more prevalent in the subset of programmes featuring people with disabilities than in the sample as a whole, then one can say that people with disabilities are more likely to appear in any given example (i.e. programme) of that genre. Similarly, if some programme genres are less prevalent in the subset than in the sample as a whole, then one can say that people with disabilities are less likely to appear in that genre.

Three genres were noticeably more present in the subset of programmes featuring people with disabilities. One was 3.5 times more likely to encounter a person with a disability in a **comedy**, 2.4 times more likely to encounter them in **drama** and 1.75 times more likely to encounter them in a **lifestyle** programmes than if the presence of people with disabilities had been evenly distributed across programme genres.

Drama

Despite accounting for only 8% of the sample as a whole (or 64 programmes out of 804), the drama genre accounts for nearly 20% of all the programmes actually featuring a person with a disability. Within the different forms of drama, serious drama accounted for three quarters of all appearances of an individual with a disability with soap opera accounting for the remaining quarter. This may be considered a somewhat surprising result given soap's fondness for exploring difficult personal stories and given that there was 20% more soap than serious drama in the overall sample.

Lifestyle

Given the prevalence of magazine style shows (which accounted for 16 of the 28 lifestyle shows referring to disability) within the sample, the over-representation of lifestyle programming compared to the overall sample is less surprising. There were 97 lifestyle shows in the programme sample of which 14 featured people with disabilities. 7 of these were magazine shows along the lines of “Seoige and O’Shea” on RTÉ1 and “The Shaun Doherty Show” on Highland Radio.

Given that nearly a third of all the lifestyle shows in the sample referred to disability and a sixth actually featured a person with a disability, it is apparent that producers of such shows regard disability-related stories as reliable material for feature material on such programmes.

Comedy

However, the prevalence of references to disability within comedy is also striking: comedy shows are three times more likely to appear in the sample of programmes representing disability than in the programme sample overall. “Frasier” appears several times, in part because a recurring character uses a cane, but “The Simpsons” is also prevalent, featuring blind, “crippled” and one-armed characters. It is noticeable, however, that such shows concentrate on more socially acceptable/palatable impairments (such as blindness or a limp). Furthermore, there seems to be a tacit acceptance that certain kinds of disability are inherently funny: obsessive-compulsive disorder occurs more than once in a comedic context, for instance. The implications of this are discussed in more detail in the next section of the report - the discourse analysis.

Genres Least Likely to Feature People with Disabilities

Turning to the genres least likely to feature people with disabilities, one was 4.5 times **less likely** to encounter them in **music shows**, 3 times less likely to encounter them in **sports shows** and 1.55 times less likely to encounter them in a **news/current affairs show** than if the presence of people with disabilities was evenly distributed across genres.

Given **news/current affairs** programmes account for 45% of the total number of programmes in the sample, it is perhaps unsurprising to see that one third of all references to disability appear in that category. However, this still falls short of the overall sample figure for news/current affairs by some 10%. The gap becomes bigger still with regard to actual appearances by people with disabilities.

The nature of **music** programmes (i.e. the content of which is overwhelmingly music rather than talk) and the under-representation of people with disabilities in the popular music business made it unlikely that references to disability would feature strongly in the programme sample examined.

Sport, however, stood out as the genre with the greatest gap between the overall sample and that subsection referring to disability. Only 1% of sports programmes referred to disability in any way. This reflects the relative lack of coverage of sports events for people with disabilities in mainstream sports broadcasting, which is usually limited to high profile events like the Special Olympics (which took place outside the research time frame).

Taking this information about the genres **most** and **least likely** to feature a person with a disability and relating it to the relative prominence of those genres in radio and television (see Table 5 immediately below) throws substantial light on the substantial differences in television and radio representations noted in the key findings section above.

Table 5: Programmes genres as % of all programmes in sample.			
Programme Type	As a % of overall sample	As a % of all television programmes	As a % of all radio programmes
Drama	8	18	2
News/Current Affairs	45	25	54
Young People's	6	13	1
Comedy	4	10	5
Lifestyle	12	11	12
Music	9	1	13
Factual	5	9	2
Sports	6	5	6
Movies/Mini-Series	2	4	1
Other (Please Specify)	4	4	3

The three genres in which we have established are most likely to feature appearances by people with disabilities (comedy, drama and lifestyle) cumulatively account for 39% of all the television programmes in the total sample. However the same three genres only account for 19% of all radio programmes. Conversely, the three genres where people with disabilities are least likely to feature (music, sports and news/current affairs) account for 73% of all radio shows but only 31% of all television programmes. In short, based on the sample examined by this research, it could be argued that radio is dominated by genres which systematically exclude the representation of people with disabilities.

There is another possible way of looking at this. It might be counter-argued that because it is difficult to identify people with disabilities on radio, those genres which are associated with radio inevitably seem to feature fewer people with disabilities. This is not supported however by a direct comparison of the only genre of programming which is found in roughly equal proportions across television and radio: lifestyle programming which accounts 12% all radio and 11% of all television programming.

A comparison of the findings for television and radio does not suggest that appearances by people with disabilities are significantly less likely to be noted on lifestyle radio programmes as opposed to lifestyle television shows. The research noted the presence of a person with a disability on 5 of the 37 television lifestyle programmes (or 13.5%) in the sample. Meanwhile the research found the 9 of the 60 radio lifestyle programmes (or 15%) also featured people with a disability. In other words there is no statistically significant difference in the recorded level of appearances of people with disabilities across on the one hand radio lifestyle shows and, on the other, television lifestyle shows.

This raises further questions, however: is there any intrinsic particular reason why some programme genres favour the inclusion of representations of people with disabilities over others? Why should it be considered “natural” that drama and lifestyle programming feature more of such representations than for example, sports and news/current affairs? To tease this out, consider the example of sport as a genre. It might be taken for granted that the cultural meanings associated with sport, such as the emphasis on celebrating physical achievement, make it “natural” that sports programmes will not devote much attention to sport for people with disabilities.

However the reality is that people with disabilities participate in sports in Ireland on a daily basis. Although the NDA’s 2005 Report on **Promoting the Participation of People with Disabilities in Physical Activities and Sport in Ireland** noted the absence of reliable statistics on the subject, it also listed a myriad of bodies (including Irish Wheelchair Association Sport, the Paralympic Council of Ireland and even the FAI which is the only mainstream sporting body in the country with a development officer for people with disabilities) governing sports for people with disabilities. Thus there is nothing “natural” about the absence of people with disabilities in Irish broadcast media coverage of sports: rather it may be reflective of editorial choices made by broadcasters.

In this respect, it is interesting to note the NDA recommendation (contained with the 2005 report) that “the media should be more inclusive by developing strategies that allot space to a diversity of sports and should portray images of children and adults with a disability in publicity material regarding sport and physical activity.”

4.7 In programmes that represent people with disabilities, what is the level of appearance of the person/people with disabilities?

The majority (69%) of representations of people with disabilities were characterised as representing them in minor or incidental roles. This may be accounted for by reference to a combination of factors. Key amongst these are the procedures followed by researchers in assigning individuals to these categories and – related to this – the fact that news programming accounted for 29% of all appearances of people with disabilities. These factors may also account for the fact that, as noted in the previous section, people with disabilities are more likely to be represented in major roles on television than on radio.

Let us first outline how the coders determined which category to assign to given representations. Researchers applied a combination of four criteria relating to:

- Amount of on-screen/on-air time;
- Amount of speech/dialogue;
- Role in developing the narrative/story, and;
- Extent of character development (this mainly applied to fictional representations) plays some role in this.

In effect this meant that for the appearance of a person with a disability to be categorised as “major” in the context of news/current affairs programme, the item would have to be not merely focused on that particular individual but the individual would have to be in a position to play some role in shaping the manner in which the story was told.

For example virtually all the news bulletins about the Virginia Tech killings were focused on a person with a mental health disability. However, the person in question, Cho Seung-Hui, scarcely appeared on-air except in still photos (in television reporting), said nothing and, since he had killed himself by the time, the first bulletins went out, could not play any role in shaping the story. Thus although 24 news stories in the sample featured an individual with a disability those individuals generally played a passive role in the story. On-air interviews with a person with a disability were also almost entirely absent from news programming. Thus only 2 of the 27 appearances coded as “major” were drawn from news/current affairs.

This finding should be related to the point made in section 4.6 regarding the role of editorial decisions in shaping representations of people with disabilities. In contrast to other genres, such as drama, which may be produced at a relatively leisurely pace, news and current affairs production is commonly understood as fast-paced, responding to events as they happen. Even if, in reality, this is something of a caricature, it remains the case that news and current affairs production is governed by deadline pressures that do not apply to other genres. The question is whether this in any way accounts for the absence of major appearances of people with disabilities in news programming? Is there any perception on the part of news editors that finding an interviewee with a disability is too time-consuming and thus impractical?

The question is thrown into relief by the fact that genres with longer lead-in production times such as lifestyle shows (and in particular chat and magazine shows) frequently conduct set-piece interviews with individuals with disabilities as a means of discussing particular impairments. Indeed lifestyle shows accounted for more than a quarter of the appearances that were coded as “major”. Similarly, drama which has even longer lead-in times accounted for 22% of all “major” appearances.

Whatever the reason, the absence of “major” representations of people with disabilities in news and current affairs had a cumulative impact on their representation on radio in particular, since news/current affairs programming accounted for more than half (56%) of all radio representations of people with disabilities. Thus the nature of news coverage as outlined here immediately above may contribute to the relative absence of representations of people with disabilities in major roles on radio.

4.8 What types of disability are represented?

Representations of people with mental health issues during the programming sampled were the most frequent (accounting for one-third of all the people represented) while representations of sight and hearing-related disabilities were relatively scarce. Although these representations of mental health included representations of schizophrenia, obsessive-compulsive disorder and anorexia, depression accounted for 19 of the 32 appearances by individuals with a mental illness. The coverage of the Cho Seung-Hui story noted above was a factor here since in 10 of his appearances he is described as suicidal/depressed. However, even without his appearance, depression would account for a majority of the mental health appearances.

The figure of Cho Seung-Hui notwithstanding, the prevalence of representations of mental illness is also accounted for by the incidence of such representations within fictional genres of comedy, drama and movies/mini-series. These genres accounted for nearly a third of all such representations as Table 6 indicates.

Table 6: Breakdown of representations of people with mental health issues by programme genre	
GENRE	NUMBER OF PROGRAMMES
Drama	5
News/Current Affairs	15
Young People's	1
Comedy	4
Lifestyle	4
Music	0
Factual	2
Sports	0
Movies/Mini-Series	1

Although this is discussed at greater length in Section 5 below, it is evident that mental health conditions such as depression offer a wide range of possibilities to screenwriters. Long-established characters (as in a soap opera) can be reinvigorated by conjuring a storyline around the sudden emergence of a mental health condition. This is harder to do with a physical disability which is usually signalled as soon as the character is introduced to a given dramatic context. (It is not however, entirely impossible: in addition to the possibility that a character may become physically disabled as a result of physical injury there are a number of progressive physical illnesses such as Multiple Sclerosis, Parkinson's Disease and Arthritis.)

Furthermore, by contrast with a physical disability, a mental health condition is dramatically useful in that it can subsequently be written out (i.e. treated/cured), thus allowing the character to return to "normality". As a condition, addiction, offers similar dramatic possibilities: four of the nine representations of addiction occurred in television dramas or comedies.

The category of people with learning disabilities is similarly dominated by one impairment. 11 of the 15 appearances were by people with Autism although there are two instances featuring people with Down Syndrome. The prevalence of autism was partially related to news coverage of the Great Agbonlahore story, an autistic Nigerian boy deported to Nigeria.

However, news coverage of ongoing disputes between parents of Autistic children and the Department of Education also ensured that autism loomed large (three big stories about autism occurred during the sample period). It is difficult to account for the prevalence of autism by reference to anything other than timing i.e. the fact that several major news stories related to autism broke during the sample period.

The “other” category was also quite large. A single episode of the comedy show “Scrubs” on Channel 6 featured three narcoleptics while there were two individuals with cystic fibrosis on RTÉ 1 television shows “Pobal” (a community-oriented magazine show) and the “Seoige and O’Shea” chat show. Beyond that were a variety of chronic illnesses and unusual conditions such as AIS (Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome which featured in TV3’s medical soap opera “All Saints”) and Turner’s Syndrome, a disabling genetic disease (in police drama “Law and Order: Special Victims Unit” on TV3). 6 individuals included under the “other” category could not be coded. All appeared on “Equality Time” on NEAR FM and although it was inferred that all 6 participants had a disability, the specific nature of their individual disabilities was not disclosed and there were insufficient tacit cues to make a judgement possible.

The distinctions in the range of disability types in radio and television are were partially accounted for by the different characteristics of television and radio. The finding that physical impairments accounted for 22% of all those represented in the television element of the sample, but only 5% of those in radio element, reflects the fact that purely physical disabilities may not be discernible on the radio without a verbal cue.

Similarly, although hearing-related disabilities were solely found on television, this is less surprising when one considers the aural nature of radio.

4.9 How does the representation occur (i.e. stereotyped etc.)

4.9.1 Tone

The most striking finding with regard to the tone adopted in representing people with disabilities was the overwhelming incidence of “serious” tones. 76% of all representations were categorised as “serious”. This was particularly acute on radio where 97% of representations were considered serious. By contrast on television, although 65% of all representations were categorised as having a serious tone, nearly a third were considered “comedic” or “light”. In considering the reasons for these cross-media TV/radio distinctions it is important to bear in mind the type of genres which dominate the respective genres i.e. all of the programmes in the radio sample featuring people with disabilities were non-fiction (primarily news/current affairs and lifestyle programmes). In short, radio representations of people with disabilities occurred in a “real-world” context where ethical constraints (or what might more crudely be termed “political correctness”) limited the range of tones within which disability as a subject could be dealt with. In other words, non-fiction representations almost universally adopted the approach that disability is – by definition – a serious subject, not something to be made light of. Arguably, however, this serves to create a somewhat one-dimensional representation of people with disabilities, one which emphasises their perceived “otherness”.

By contrast, because television representations occurred across a range of both fictional and non-fiction programme genres, there was greater freedom to adopt less sombre tones.

This is particularly true of fictional representations, where attitudes towards people with disabilities which might be considered beyond the pale in non-fiction, can be expressed by placing them in the mouths of fictional characters. Virtually all of the comedic and light representations of people with disabilities on television occurred in the fictive genres of drama, comedy and movies/mini-series.

4.9.2 Stereotyping

In considering the stereotyping results, a degree of caution is required. Content analysis as a methodology is based on categorising overt programme content (in this case, representations of disability). However, some processes such as stereotyping are not always overt. Stereotyping can be thought of as a social process whereby one group holds ideas about the nature of another group based on the assumption that all members of the latter group share characteristics in common. In the 19th century for example, the Irish as a “race” were commonly stereotyped as stupid by both English and American writers.

For this research, the coders attempted to identify instances whereby the manner of representing people with disabilities implied that all other people with the same disability shared a number of characteristics unconnected with their disability in common. To facilitate the objective categorisation of instances of stereotyping, coders were asked whether a given representation of a person with a disability matched any one (or more) of 11 well-established stereotypes relating to disability (sinister, pitiable, unable to participate in society etc.) drawn from the existing literature on the subject of media representations of disability.

Thus, for example, coders confronted with the figure of Cho Seung-Hui, the Virginia Tech shooter, categorised his representation as simultaneously “sinister”, “aggressive” and an “outcast”. Thus one could reasonably argue that the representation of that individual conformed to a number of stereotypes relating to mental health.

However, in interpreting these figures, it is critical to understand that the same representation of a person with a disability could be categorised under many headings. Consider for example, the finding that 35% of all representations of people with disabilities were stereotypically sinister or aggressive. Of the 23 individuals categorised as “sinister”, 13 were also given a second categorisation of “aggressive”. Indeed, the same 13 individuals were also placed into a third category, that of burden/outcast. These were disproportionately accounted for by, the Virginia Tech shooter, who was consistently represented as sinister, aggressive and an outcast. If one takes into account the potential for multiple categorisations, then the 41 “applications” of the sinister or aggressive category were accounted for by only 28 individuals. This is still a substantial proportion of all the 88 representations (32%), but less dramatic than the initial glance at the chart suggests.

Similarly, the finding that 38% of all incidences of stereotyping noted fell under the categories of “pitiable”, “victims” or “burdens” also requires some amplification. This is due to the particular manner in which the “burden/outcast” category was implemented in practice. This category conflates two words which in practice may be understood in quite different ways. It might be assumed that to categorise someone as a burden is to cast them as a victim deserving of pity.

However, the fact that Cho Seung-Hui, the Virginia Tech shooter, could account for 13 of the 17 “burden/outcast” categorisations does not suggest that this category was understood as being analogous to “pitiable” or “victim” (quite the opposite in fact). However, the fact that there was virtually no overlap between those categorised as “pitiable” and those categorised as “victims” (there was a single instance of a representation being categorised as both), means that 27 people in total accounted for all applications of the “pitiable” or “victim” categories. Thus it may be safer to conclude that only 31% (rather than 38%) of the total of 88 representations were stereotyped as pitiable or victims.

In sum, the difficulties posed by stereotypical representations for content analysis highlight the importance of the more nuanced interpretation of the sample material which is contained in the discourse analysis in section 5 of this report (below).

4.9.3 Prejudice and discrimination.

62% of representations of people with disabilities were categorised as neutral (i.e. neither prejudiced nor discriminatory). An even higher percentage of references to people with disabilities (72%) were similarly categorised as neutral. How can this be accounted for given that the coders also categorised 75% of all representations of people with disabilities as stereotyped? Is stereotyping not a form of prejudice if prejudice refers to a propensity to pre-judge a particular individual or group unfairly?

There may be less of an apparent contradiction between the large proportion of stereotyped representations and low number of discriminatory representations highlighted in the previous section since it does not necessarily follow that holding an unfair opinion of a person or group will lead an individual to actually treat that person/group unfairly (i.e. to discriminate against them). Nonetheless, the relationship between stereotyping and prejudicial and discriminatory representations needs to be examined.

At the outset, we should state that although the word “prejudice” has generally negative connotations, it is possible to be positively prejudiced towards a person or group. However, this research was primarily concerned with identifying instances of negative prejudice.

It is also important to recall difficulty of implementing workable definitions of prejudice and discrimination for content analysis, an analytical method which seeks to identify and enumerate overt incidences of whatever content type is relevant to the particular piece of research. If, for example, one is assessing the extent to which, smoking is depicted on television, it is relatively straightforward to identify the number of instances in which a person is depicted smoking. However, the same is not true for the objective identification of prejudiced representation. Accepting the definition of prejudice as referring to “a propensity to pre-judge a particular individual or group unfairly”, a prejudiced representation may describe a programme where the researcher can identify a conscious intent to prejudice on the part of the programme maker. However, it may also refer to a programme which, in the opinion of the researcher, and regardless of programme maker intent, is likely to encourage the audience to make prejudgements. In sum, identifying prejudice or discrimination involves an element of subjective opinion on the part of the researcher which is not generally compatible with the notionally objective stance implied in choosing to use content analysis as a research method.

It is for these reasons that the research took the pragmatic decision to define a prejudicial representation as one likely to encourage negative attitudes towards all people with disability. Meanwhile, a discriminatory representation was one which was likely to arouse “active” antipathy towards a particular individual or set of individuals.

Bearing these factors in mind, it was entirely possible for a particular representation to be stereotypical but neither prejudicial nor discriminatory as those terms were defined for this research. For example, an episode of “The Bill” on RTÉ 1 featured a major plot strand around a female character experiencing postnatal psychosis. Her character was coded as “Pitiable and pathetic” and “unable to cope”. However, the treatment of the character was overwhelming sympathetic, portraying her as a victim of her condition and did not arouse viewer antipathy. Because of this, her representation was also coded as “neutral”.

However, there was a definite relationship between stereotypes and whether a representation was coded as prejudicial or discriminatory. Of the 54 representations coded as neutral, only one was also coded as stereotypically sinister or aggressive (a female character from “Heroes” on Channel 6 who was identified as schizophrenic). Of the remaining 53 neutrally-coded representations, the majority were either stereotype-free or coded as stereotypically pitiable, victims or unable to cope.

4.10 What types of occupational role are fulfilled by a person/people with a disability? To what extent is the experience of disability relevant to the occupation of the person represented?

As noted earlier, the large number of cases where there was insufficient data to allow the coders to identify the occupation held by the individual with a disability (36% of all people with disabilities represented during programmes sampled), makes it difficult to address these questions posed here. However, the fact of so many effectively uncodable cases is suggestive of a significant finding in this regard: in more than one third of the representations of people with disabilities, the representation is so overwhelmingly focused on these individuals **as disabled** that it could be argued that any further description of them is considered unnecessary by programme makers. Although this maybe a tendentious assertion, it is supported by the finding in section 3.12 to the effect that disability was centrally important in 76% of all representations of people with disability.

In other words, for the most part people with disabilities are featured on Irish broadcast media primarily because they are disabled. Based on the sample which informed this research, it is extremely unusual to encounter a person with a disability on television or radio in a context which is entirely unrelated to their disability.

4.11 To what extent is the experience of disability relevant to that person's role as represented?

In making these determinations about the relevance of disability to the individual characters, coders considered what the impact of removing an individual's disability would have on his/her participation in a programme. If the individual's role was essentially unchanged then their disability was coded as "incidental". If their role was substantially reduced by such a removal but not entirely removed then their disability was "relevant". If, finally, their role was essentially reduced to nothing – i.e. there would effectively be no reason left for them to feature in a programme – then their disability was coded as "central".

In section 3.8, it was reported that a third of all representations of individuals with disabilities placed them in major roles. This raised the possibility that their characters might be represented in a rounded fashion (i.e. that aspects of their lives other than their disability would also be stressed). In practice, however, in only 6% of cases was the fact of an individual's disability recorded as incidental to their representation. This points to a somewhat narrow focus on these individuals as disabled. Given this, the absence of any information about the broader lives of so many of the individuals in the sample (such as what they did for a living), noted immediately above, is scarcely surprising.

The extraordinary figures from radio (whereby 97% of cases of disability were considered centrally relevant to the representation) demand some further consideration. It is again important to recall that the absence of visual cues on radio ensured that researchers could only be aware of an individual's disability if attention was explicitly drawn to it.

This was particularly significant for radio appearances, since it made it extremely unlikely that any would be categorised as “incidental”. However, it could not be determined from the findings the reasons why there were no instances at all of radio appearances categorised as merely “relevant”.

4.12 In which types of role are people with disabilities most and least often represented?

The key finding here was a confirmation of the relatively passive roles for the most part played by people with disabilities on-air but also of the singular focus of most representations of people with disabilities in the sample on the disability rather than the person. To fully comprehend this it is important to understand how the categories were implemented in practice by the coders.

“Presenter” and “elected representative” were relatively straight-forward categories. However, since a “person with a disability” might by definition be regarded as an “expert” on their own impairment, for the purposes of coding, “expert” was considered to refer to a person with a disability who is overtly described as an expert in a particular field, i.e. an expertise over and above that acquired purely through lived experience such as academically certified expertise.

Thus “person with a disability” which accounted for 37% of all appearances by a person with a disability was taken as referring to an individual whose role was primarily to explain their everyday, lived experience as a person with a disability but who was permitted to provide their explanation in their own right.

This in turn was distinguished from “subject” of the factual/current affairs item, which described a person with a disability who was designated as a person with a disability by a third party (i.e. the programme makers) but not permitted/able to actively represent themselves. That 61% of the sample of people with disabilities fell into this category offers striking evidence of the extent to which people with disabilities are represented in passive roles.

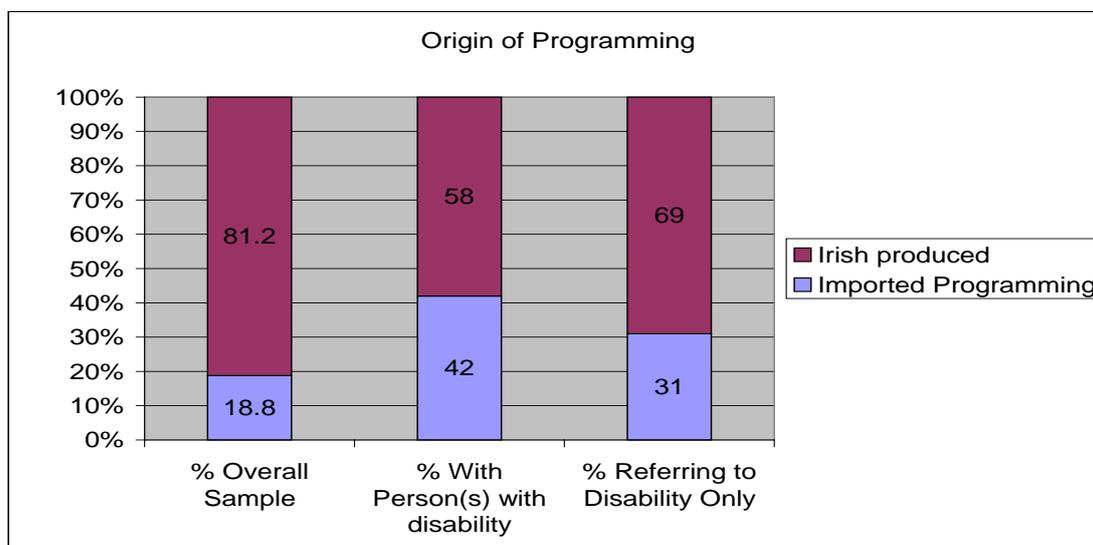
This treatment of people with disabilities as being the subjects of discussion (also known as 'subjectification') was also pointed to by the fact that, of the small number of non-individuated groups of people with disabilities identified in the sample, only one was regarded as playing a major role.

4.13 Is there a difference between Irish programming content and imported programming content in this regard? And if so, what is the nature of this difference?

81% of the programmes examined were produced in Ireland with the remaining 19% being imported. If this latter figure seems low given the prevalence of imported material on Irish television, it should be recalled that 54% of all programmes examined in the sample came from radio where virtually everything that is heard in Ireland is produced in Ireland. Furthermore, although Irish television is reliant on imported material to various degrees, broadcasters like RTÉ tend to schedule as much domestically-produced material as possible within the primetime hours which are the focus of the programme sample which forms the basis for this research.

The earlier findings noted that both people with disabilities and references to disability were much more likely to be found in imported material. As a consequence, although domestically-produced shows accounted for 81% of the total number of programmes looked at, they accounted for only 58% of programming featuring a person with a disability and just 69% of those programmes referring to disability only (as outlined in the chart below).

Figure 32: Distribution of appearances by people with a disability and references to disability by national origin of programming



This result needs to be considered in conjunction with the programme genre results. We have established that representations of disability are over-represented in comedy and drama and under-represented in news and current affairs programming. Given this, it is important to understand what kinds of programming dominate within imported material.

Table 7: Breakdown of all imported programming in sample by genre

Genre type	% of all imported programming
Drama	35
News/Current Affairs	0
Young People's	11
Comedy	27
Lifestyle	5
Music	1
Factual	11
Sports	1
Movies/Mini-Series	9
Other	1

As the table above shows, drama accounts for 35% of all imported programming in the sample while comedy accounts for a further 27%. Even if lifestyle programming (“Oprah”, “Ricki” etc.) only accounts for 5% of imports, the three genres identified earlier as being most likely to feature people with disabilities – drama, comedy and lifestyle - account for 67% of imports. Meanwhile the three genres least likely to feature people with disabilities – music, sports and news/current affairs, scarcely register among imports, accounting for only 2% of all imported programming.

In summary, representations of disability in the sample are over-represented in precisely those genres which are more likely to be imported. Thus the relatively weak showing of representations of disability in Irish made programming examined may be less a reflection of an absence of commitment to disability on the part of Irish broadcasters and more a reflection of the reality that Irish broadcasters rely on imported material for much of “their” drama and comedy output.

5. Discourse Analysis

5.1 Introduction

In media analysis, discourse can be defined as the parameters within which a particular issue is publicly discussed or framed by the media. More often than not, issues such as disability, ethnicity or gender are underpinned by several competing discursive frameworks. Discussions about and images of disability tend to be approached in very different ways by disability activists, sociologists, the media, politicians and medical experts, not just because these groups have different lexicons or areas of expertise but because they often have radically divergent understandings of how and why impairments are disabling and of how disability should be addressed. As well as mapping out the dominant discourses used by the media and society at large to address a particular issue, discourse analysis also draws attention to what is left unsaid, thus highlighting the often limited and limiting terms of reference within which a particular topic is being debated.

The quantitative approach characteristic of the content analysis undertaken above provides an excellent overview of how the Irish mass media currently treat the issue of disability: it demonstrates dominant representational trends and thus provides a good indication of the types of discourses that are prevalent. However, even a highly nuanced coding system cannot account for all of the complex contextual factors that shape media messages. Any discussion about the nature and impact of media stereotypes necessarily becomes more complex when media texts are considered in the context of their own unique codes and conventions.

To cite a hypothetical example, the representation of disability in British mockumentary series “The Office” would be coded as negative or stereotypical. The episode of “The Office” in question contains jokes about people with disabilities as well as scenes in which a character with a disability is variously ignored, pushed out of the way and abandoned on the stairs in a fire drill. She therefore fits very clearly into the stereotypes of “Victim” and “Laughable” or the “butt of jokes’/ object of ridicule”, as outlined above.

When the programme is viewed in the broader context of its production and intended reception, however, it is clear that it serves to highlight and critique David Brent’s ignorance about and insensitivity toward disability, rather than to endorse it. Brent’s faux-pas range from the blatantly non-politically correct to more subtle transgressions, and therefore allow the audience not only to laugh at the stupidity of prejudice but also to contemplate more nuanced incidents of discrimination recognisable from everyday experience.

According to British disability theorist Paul Darke, stereotypes used in this way have real value in the sense that they provide an honest account of how many people think about disability, and thus remind us of the institutional barriers faced by people with disabilities.⁹ Darke maintains that the lobby for more positive images of disability in the British media, on the other hand, is strongly linked to a trend toward media mainstreaming of the issue, which, he claims, depoliticises disability by removing it from its cultural and social context.¹⁰

9 Paul Darke (1999),The Cinematic Construction of Physical Disability as Identified Through the Application of the Social Model of Disability to Six Indicative Films Made since 1970. Unpublished PhD. thesis. Accessed at <http://www.outside-centre.com/darke/paulphd/content.htm> 11th January 2008.

10 Paul Darke (1999),The Cinematic Construction of Physical Disability as Identified Through the Application of the Social Model of Disability to Six Indicative Films Made since 1970. Unpublished PhD. thesis. Accessed at <http://www.outside-centre.com/darke/paulphd/content.htm> 11th January 2008.

The question of what media representations mean becomes even more complex when we consider the roles played by irony and parody in dramatic representations. To use another hypothetical example, the Andy and Lou sketch in British comedy series “Little Britain” can be viewed as mobilising both positive and negative stereotypes.

The representation of Andy, who pretends to have a disability, has been defended as a progressive image on the grounds that it disturbs the concept of ‘normality’ and satirises mainstream society’s fears of and prejudices about disability. However, numerous contradictory discourses can be at work within the same representation. For example, while Andy overturns limiting stereotypes such as the wheelchair user as a passive victim as well as that of the “supercrip”, his character presents other complexities, not least of which is the fact that he does not actually have a disability. Arguably, therefore, this representation could be interpreted as lampooning the social model of disability, by suggesting that it is exploited by ‘fakers’.

Another important question that is generally not addressed by content analysis is that of who produces images of or speaks on behalf of the disabled? According to Darke, dedicated disability programming on British television (made by and for disabled people) has been effectively diluted due to mainstreaming initiatives, whereby disability is placed within the mainstream of programme production and output. He argues that what now dominates the media in contemporary Britain is not disability imagery or representation but rather ‘impairment imagery’, which he describes as ‘imagery where disability is understood to be the impairment almost devoid of political significance of social construction’. As a result, he argues, “a significant de-politicisation of disability has taken place in favour of a fragmented impairment orientated broadcast output which is now, more than ever, linked to a charity or ‘freak’ philosophy.”¹¹

¹¹ Paul Anthony Darke (2004) “The Changing Face of Representations of Disability in the Media” in John Swain et al (eds), *Disabling Barriers, Enabling Environments* (Sage: London) p. 100-105, p. 100.

The overwhelming tendency for disabled fictional characters to be played by non-disabled actors is also a feature of contemporary media that is heavily criticised by disability theorists and activists, and which clearly has an important bearing on how the meaning of a particular film or programme is constructed by different audiences.

Thus for an able-bodied audience Jim Sheridan's "My Left Foot" is an inspiring triumph-over-adversity tale. However with a disabled audience, the fact that a character with a disability is played by an able-bodied actor, may lead to the film's being read as one more example of the marginalisation/disenfranchisement of people with disabilities within society.

Qualitative analysis of the programming sample under analysis revealed a number of noteworthy representational and discursive trends and absences that might be used to inform broadcasting policy on the issue of disability in future. These findings are categorised and analysed in detail below under the following headings, with reference to particular examples:

a) Language

b) Types of Disability

- Mental illness in news and current affairs
- Mental illness in current affairs
- Mental illness in fictional genres
- Learning disabilities in news and current affairs
- Learning disabilities in fictional genres
- Physical disability in news / current affairs
- Physical disability in fiction
- Alcoholism and addiction

c) Incidental disability / mainstreaming

5.2 Language

By and large, it is clear that disability activism and identity politics have influenced the words, terms and phrases used to describe disability in the Irish news media, both on radio and television. Terms such as “handicapped” or “cripple” are not evident in non-fiction genres such as news, current affairs or documentary. However, the term “impairment” is not evident either, with “disability” remaining the dominant or accepted term. It is not possible to determine, however, the extent to which this is due to the prevalence of a conscious social model of disability in Irish discourse, which overtly acknowledges the obstacles faced by people with impairments, or simply to the acceptance of standard or ‘correct’ terminology in instances of formal or professional communication.

The same cannot be said for fictional genres on television, in which casual or comedic references to a range of disabilities were common. Here, references to mental illness and instability were by far the most prevalent, with characters referring to both themselves and to others as “mad”, “crazy”, “insane”, “out of your box”, “cracking up”, “nut-job”, “maniac” and “not playing with a full deck”. These utterances occurred predominantly in British and Irish soaps and American sitcoms. The American sitcoms, in particular, were infused with a casual discourse of psychotherapy. For example, there were numerous references to various psychoses and conditions such as obsessive-compulsive disorder, sociopathy, kleptomania and pyromania and to medication and therapy (“I had to take a Xanax I was a little crazy that night OK”, “Before Prozac I was Mister Mood Swing” and “Hey crazy lady get some therapy”). The sample analysed indicates that casual or comedic references to mental instability are most frequently found in American sitcoms and are therefore much more prevalent on commercial television stations such as TV3 and Channel 6, which import significantly more American material than RTÉ 1, Network 2 or TG4.

Casual references to deafness, blindness and other disabilities were also common in sitcoms, soaps and films, where accusations of same were used to imply that a character was inattentive, lazy or stupid. In an episode of "American Heart" (Channel 6), a criminal mentioned that a jewellery store security guard was "deaf and blind". Comments such as "Has Bradley lost the use of his legs?" ("Eastenders", RTÉ 1), "Are you deaf as well as thick?" and "Are you deaf as well as chippy?" ("Emmerdale", TV3) also emerged from the sample. The association between masturbation and blindness was comically alluded to in the movie "The Parole Officer" (TV3), in which a character, when ridiculed by a female friend for being afraid to touch the penis of a fertility totem in a museum, replied "You're talking to a guy who's going blind here". This type of discourse was confined to fictional genres, with the exception of sports commentary. In the Heineken Cup Rugby commentary broadcast on RTÉ1, there were two separate instances of casual references to blindness: "it doesn't take a blind man [sic] to see the weakness is in the back line" and "The referee was on the blind side".

While the casual references to disability mentioned above might be regarded as discriminatory, the use of certain words and phrases must be viewed in context. At the outset it should be acknowledged that there is little to suggest any express intent to offend on the programme makers in the examples cited immediately. More broadly for example, in historical fiction a word such as "cripple" may be used in the interests of authenticity, as was the case in the feature film "Comes a Horseman" (1978) (TG4), which was captured in the sample. The film is set in 1940s America, when the word "cripple" would have been widely used and viewed as a neutral term. To a lesser extent, references to "midgets" in "That 70s Show" (Channel 6) may be interpreted as deliberate references to words and jokes that were acceptable then but are not now.

For example, in one episode, Dana's father on "That 70s Show" was doing a promotion in the electrical store where he worked. He was dressed as a ringmaster and there were others dressed as clowns, one of whom was a person of short stature.

When Dana asked him what he has learned about marketing, he joked, "One thing I've learned - midgets make money...I don't know why but people see a midget they want to buy a blender...I guess it reminds them that life is short". In another episode of "That 70s Show", Eric's fiancée's father referred to Eric as "a mental midget". However, irrespective of the era in which the programme was set, this discourse of the freak as an occasion for casual humour was most common in imported American sitcoms. For example in "It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia" (Channel 6), a character commented to his sister, "you wore a scoliosis back brace till you were twenty, everyone was afraid of you, you looked like a monster". This topic is elaborated on in more detail in section 5.3.vii (below) on "Physical disability in fiction".

5.3 Types of Disability

As noted above, certain forms of disability were particularly prevalent in the coding frame: mental illness and learning disabilities predominated (categories respectively dominated in news and current affairs by depression and autism). Furthermore, representations of addiction accounted for more than a third of the "other" category.

Vision	7
Hearing	2
Physical	14
Mental	32
Learning Disability	15
Addiction	9
Other	14

The following pages examine how particular types of disability were talked about in individual formats and programmes.

i. Mental illness in news and current affairs

There was a significant preoccupation across both fictional and non-fictional programme genres with mental illness, depression and suicide. Although the sample cannot support this, this may be attributable to rising suicide rates and increased public awareness about depression in Ireland.¹² The tendency of mainstream news bulletins to focus on murders, accidents and disasters (in other words to report predominantly 'bad news') or on changes in government policy or health service provision means that most items on mental health in the news tend to have negative associations. Where mental illness was reported in news items captured in the sample analysed, the main focus was on lack of mental health services for adolescents, the effect of work stoppages on mental-health services caused by the nurses' strike, the mental health of the Virginia Tech shooter and items on suicide caused by depression.

It is arguable that, collectively, this can create an impression of the mentally ill as dangerous, aggressive or violent, on the one hand, or as a burden to the taxpayer and the health system, on the other. In the sample analysed here, there was considerable focus on mental illness in relation to violent attacks, such as the Virginia Tech killings by Cho Seung-Hui or the case of a man, described as 'unstable', who attacked the Pope-mobile and was taken to a psychiatric unit. The radio discussions that were triggered by the Virginia Tech killings, in particular, focussed on the killer's antisocial behaviour. As the story developed, a media portrait emerged of a tortured, silent loner, whose fictional writings in his English-literature modules had already aroused suspicion and concern among his professors.

¹² Rising suicide rates and their association with stress, depression and substance abuse brought on by rapid socio-cultural transformations have been widely documented both in the academic literature (Smyth et al., 2003; Cleary, 2005) and in the media at large.

The only substantial exception within the sample, to this general tendency within news and current programming, came with a discussion between Pat Kenny and Carol Coleman about what might have driven Cho Seung-Hui, the Virginia Tech shooter to commit this crime (“Today with Pat Kenny”, RTÉ Radio 1). Here, there was considerable speculation about his family’s finances, the fact that he came to the US at the age of 8 and that he wrote about a young man’s dysfunctional relationship with his stepfather. This represents a significant shift away from the tendency within much media discourse on mental illness to focus on it as a problem of the individual (chemical, genetic) by looking instead at the social causes of depression, psychosis and other behaviours.

ii. Mental illness in current affairs

As the “Today with Pat Kenny” example above illustrates, the format of current affairs programmes and chat shows tends to allow for more contextualised discussion than is the case with standard news bulletins. Thus, although the exclusion of advertisements from the sample meant that public-awareness campaigns were not included - which tend to project positive, proactive or sympathetic discourses on depression and mental illness – the radio chat show and magazine programmes captured also leaned heavily toward a progressive discourse of de-stigmatization.

In the sample under analysis, several Irish-produced radio shows were explicitly concerned with the social causes of depression, mental illness, suicide and substance abuse. An edition of “The Breakfast Show” (Newstalk 106-108 FM) with Claire Byrne and Ger Gilroy was devoted to a discussion about schizophrenia and psychosis. The contributors to this discussion were consultant psychologist Dr. Michael Corrie and a man suffering from psychosis called Brian Hartnett, who founded a support group called Voices Ireland. What was of particular interest about this interview was the way in which a medical discourse was abandoned in favour of a social discourse to address schizophrenia.

People with this type of mental-health difficulty were described by both Hartnett and Corrie as ‘voice hearers’, which not only implied agency or active involvement but also served to render the condition less threatening.

Indeed, Dr. Corrie explicitly dismissed the pathologisation of schizophrenia, psychosis and mania suggesting that these were not in fact diseases. He claimed that if you went to a hospital with a history of psychosis, schizophrenia or mania, you would probably be told you had a disease. However, he argued that these conditions were not a disease but rather a “disorder of thought and a disorder of mood”, usually with an identifiable cause. Hartnett’s account of his diagnosis and subsequent coming to terms with his condition also presented a powerful counter-discourse to conventional medical and scientific understandings of schizophrenia. He reclaimed his own experiences from the realm of the irrational or of ‘insanity’ by talking about his voices as a meaningful part of his life:

“From my point of view it was very real to me...in a kind of a spiritual sense...I felt I was tapped into something very real, and eh I still do really, I don’t dismiss my voices as being necessarily just generated in my mind...I think that there are...I think that probably there’s more to it than just a diagnosis.

Any time you’d normally hear about hearing voices it’s usually in the context of...oh you know the guy is mad or that person is mad or that lunatic is on the war path you know hearing voices...but I mean for me it’s a daily way of life...for me it’s a daily way of life really and it’s taken a long time for me to come to terms with it and to deal with it on my own level.”

In this discussion, treatment of the condition was envisaged as an holistic intervention, which took into account the social causes and social conditions of the person’s life, rather than an isolated targeting of symptoms with medication.

Thus, although medication was perceived to be useful in the early stages of treatment and was recommended in small doses to keep the condition under control (or as Hartnett put it to “nullify the intensity of the voices”), the real focus was on understanding the traumatic experience(s) that caused the condition and on developing coping strategies that involved friends and family.

Psychosis was understood not as genetic, hereditary or pathological but as the aftermath of traumatic events. Implicit in this discourse was an acknowledgement of how society’s misunderstandings and fears of schizophrenia have constructed it as a much-feared illness and of the role that society must now play in removing the obstacles faced by ‘voice hearers’.

An item on depression on “The Shaun Doherty Show” (Highland Radio) addressed the topic in a similar way. Two callers, Paul and Patricia, both of whom were admitted to psychiatric care for depression and post-natal depression, respectively, were critical of the way in which medication is used to treat mental illness. While Paul acknowledged the importance of controlled medication in some stages of treatment, he claimed that his depression was caused by life events and that he had to deal with their after-effects through psychotherapy. He was critical of the fact that he had been given a 3-month supply of sleeping tablets when he was discharged from in-patient care, given that he had previously had serious problems with medication abuse and his doctors were aware of this. Patricia said that she understood how people could become institutionalised and claimed that she never would have come out of care without family backup. She also claimed that while she was in care she was heavily medicated and, by stealing one of her patient files, discovered that certain drugs had been tested on her. She also spoke of the stigma attached to mental illness and recounted a more recent experience, whereby she was admitted to hospital for an unrelated illness and was advised by the doctor attending her not to mention her psychiatric history, the implication being that this might encourage doctors to take her account of things less seriously.

The social causes of depression were also the focus of an interview on NEAR FM 90.3 FM with Fine Gael election candidate Brody Sweeney and a lengthy discussion on Newstalk's "The Wide Angle", which explored adolescent suicide and alcoholism and drug-taking, respectively.

Although Brody conceded in the NEAR FM interview that he was no expert on the topic of suicide, he mentioned factors such as the competitive pressures of being a young male, the changing nature of the modern nuclear family and the effects of bullying on young people. In "The Wide Angle", Karen Coleman spoke to solicitor and former president of the Irish law society Geraldine Clarke, Executive Director of the American Fulbright Commission, Colleen Dubey and columnist for the Daily Mail, Rónán Mullen about cocaine addiction.

Although there was little consensus about the causes of increased cocaine use, there was a general acknowledgement of drug-taking and alcohol abuse as disabling and an implicit framing of the problem as one which was socially-created and which therefore must be solved through social rather than individual intervention. Increased prosperity, peer pressure, lack of spirituality, glamorous media images and adults leading by bad example were all cited as causes of the problem. With the exception of Rónán Mullen, who saw selfishness at the heart of middle-class drug taking and suggested that alcoholism and drug-taking needed to be more stigmatised than they were in Irish society, the explanations and solutions suggested by the other contributors to the discussion stood out in stark contrast to the way in which alcoholism and substance abuse were addressed by the American fictional programmes from the sample (see section 5.3.viii on "Alcoholism and addiction" below).

Programmes such as this appear to play an important role in de-stigmatising mental illness. Persons with a mental health difficulty are represented as articulate, intelligent and coherent. They demonstrate that their conditions can be actively worked on and thus arguably empower other listeners with similar conditions.

To some extent, this constitutes the prioritisation of a social model over a medical one, since people are encouraged to deal with their conditions in the context of their lives, past and present, rather than through institutionalisation or medication. This implicitly puts an onus on the wider society to treat mental illness with sensitivity and compassion and to understand many of the problems faced by people with mental health difficulties as having social roots.

It also suggests that many of the obstacles faced by people with mental health difficulties are not due to symptoms inherent to their condition but rather to society's fear and intolerance of these symptoms. These programmes also educate about different impairments and advertise important support services such as Aware and Grow, a voluntary group offering therapeutic support to individuals with mental health-related disabilities.

Finally, mental illness, depression and substance abuse were sometimes referred to in lighter magazine or reality-television formats. Increasingly the preoccupation of reality-television programmes with famous individuals is played out not only through an interest in their properties or family life but also in their personal problems (see the section on alcoholism and addiction below). Nervous breakdowns, substance abuse and addiction, anorexia and depression are all aspects of celebrities' lives that are frequently reported on and examined. For example, one episode of TV3's magazine programme "Xposé" captured in the programme sample addressed Dolores O'Riordan's nervous breakdown and experience with anorexia caused by the pressures of starting her career so young. Although this is a positive representation of a real person overcoming personal difficulties, it could be argued that, unlike the more serious current-affairs and chat-show formats, such programmes serve to individualise disability in that the issues are presented in isolation and as challenges that individuals must overcome through inner strength, family support or therapy in order to regain a normal life (rather than considering the notion that these problems have predominantly social causes).

iii. Mental illness in fictional genres

As noted above, casual references to mental illness were common in American sitcoms, soaps and other forms of drama. However, mental illness was also noted as a significant theme in several serial dramas and soap operas. During the period in which the television sample was collected, post-natal depression / psychosis was a major plot strand in both “Coronation Street” (TV3) and “The Bill” (RTÉ1). In both cases, women suffering from extreme post-natal depression had acted irrationally, leaving their babies in public places, and had been questioned by the police about their behaviour. In the “Coronation Street” subplot, it emerged that Ashley’s wife Claire had been sectioned after the birth of her second child, placed in a secure institution for three weeks and put on medication.

However, it was not clear whether or not the viewer was supposed to sympathise with Claire. She had allegedly set fire to their house and even Ashley was having trouble believing her. However, the aggressive and unsympathetic manner in which she was treated by the police could also be interpreted as a critique of the law’s insensitivity to and ignorance about mental health issues.

In the episode of “The Bill”, on the other hand, the policewoman dealing with the woman who had abandoned her child was particularly sensitive and understanding. It transpired that she too was pregnant and that these events made her wonder if she herself would be able to cope with a baby on her own. Soap’s ability to deal with everyday issues means that it can address disability issues that relate to the lives of real people, and programmes are often followed by announcements about helplines and websites for viewers who have been affected by these issues. However, given the genre’s reliance on dramatic conflict and individual transformation, soap also tends to exaggerate mental and emotional crises.

In an episode of “Neighbours” (RTÉ2) in the sample, a ‘psychopathic’ young man was questioned in court. The solicitor ostensibly tried to demonstrate that he was not the ‘monster’ others had described him as but secretly wrote “she never loved you” on the palms of his hands, knowing that this would provoke rage. The young man flew out of control and had to be restrained, thus reinforcing the stereotype of people with mental illness as violent, dangerous, unpredictable and in need of institutionalisation.

The extreme dramatisation of psychosis and post-natal depression in the programmes mentioned here arguably serves to further stigmatise these conditions. Moreover, the genre’s tendency to focus on individual characters struggling to come to terms with and compensate for their impairments by adapting to ‘normal’ life could also have the effect of framing disabilities as problems to be overcome exclusively by the individual rather than by society.

It appears from the programmes sampled that the further one moves along the non-fiction / fiction continuum, the more licence is assumed to exist with regard to representations of mental illness. Thus while soap and reality TV attempt to present a somewhat realistic - if individualised and medicalised - account of these issues, fiction film, sitcom and cartoons are more likely to mobilise terms and images that are negative, politically incorrect and/or stigmatising. This is reflected not only in the proliferation of casual references to insanity mentioned above but also in terms of how mental illness is visually represented.

For example, in American drama series “Heroes” (Channel 6), a woman with a split personality is portrayed as two different but identical-looking people, one trying to kill her husband and the other trying to protect him. It is arguable that these highly mis-representative, simplistic images of a personality disorder do little to enhance understanding of these conditions but are used rather for dramatic effect. The film “Exorcist: the Beginning” (2004), which was captured in the sample, traded in yet another stereotypical representation of mental illness, as connected to evil.

In this film, when Father Merrin travelled to a sanatorium in Nairobi, he was confronted by horrific images of people wandering the halls, bewildered, frightened and distressed. The patient whom he had come to see was possessed by the Devil. Although such plots may allude to the historical demonisation of people seen as mentally ill, this staple of horror films may also reinforce the stereotype of people with mental health difficulties as 'touched' by the Devil or by evil forces.

iv. Learning disabilities in news and current affairs

In the sample recorded, most references made in news and current affairs programmes to learning disabilities, both on radio and television, related to the deportation of a six-year-old boy with autism, Great Agbonlahore, back to Nigeria and to inadequate provision within the educational system for autistic children. With the exception of a couple of instances in which the issues were discussed in more detail on chat shows or in current affairs programmes, these items tended to be repeated over and over as news headlines (on some days, on an hourly basis). This repetition may have helped create the impression in the quantitative data that Irish broadcasting devotes a relatively large percentage of airtime to learning disabilities.

The only reference made in newscasts to specific discourses on learning disabilities related to speculation that Great Agbonlahore, if deported back to Nigeria, would be treated as an 'outcast' or as a 'voodoo child who is possessed'.

The Disability Act 2005 was mentioned only once in the sample and this reference was in relation to learning disabilities. The subject arose on "This Week" with Gerard Barry and Joe Little (RTÉ Radio 1), following a complaint made by the father of a man with Down Syndrome to the Ombudsman Emily O'Reilly. Ms. O'Reilly was interviewed on the show about the inertia among public bodies in implementing the Disability Act since it became law two years ago.

Finally, in an episode of TV3's magazine programme "Xposé", Keith Duffy and his wife were interviewed about coming to terms with their daughter's learning disability. This format tended to lean more toward the personal and the individual rather than the political or the social but nonetheless represents an important development, whereby media celebrities are actively destigmatising and raising awareness about learning disabilities.

v. Learning disabilities in fictional genres

References to or representations of learning disabilities occurred infrequently in fictional genres. However, Down Syndrome was a major plot theme in two episodes of "Eastenders" (RTÉ 1) within the sample. In this subplot, Honey discovered she was pregnant and was concerned that she may have another baby with Down Syndrome. She was also concerned that, if her second baby did not have Down Syndrome, herself and her partner might treat them differently. When questioned by Pat, she revealed that she was worried people would think they should have been more careful or that people would assume they did this to try and "make up for Janet, you know, to have a 'proper' baby". She was also worried about putting her husband Billy through the same ordeal all over again and feared that she may lose him.

As the post-natal depression subplot of "Coronation Street" demonstrates, soaps frequently play out emotional crises in highly dramatic terms. However, these episodes of Eastenders did succeed in capturing a wide range of social responses to and fears about Down Syndrome. It is also significant that these fears and prejudices were ultimately dispelled by Pat's pragmatism, which convinced Honey that she had a happy, functional family. Because the episode covered a range of different responses – albeit mostly imagined by Honey – it is difficult to see this representation of Down Syndrome as fitting into any one specific discourse. Anyone who came into contact with Honey and the baby, however, made no reference to Down Syndrome and treated them both as they would treat any other mother and baby.

vi. Physical disability in news / current affairs

Images of or references to individuals with physical impairments were less frequent in non-fictional than in fictional programming. Because advertisements were not included in the sample, there were no road safety campaigns showing survivors of car crashes in wheelchairs or undergoing rehabilitation. Reference was often made in passing to specific impairments such as spinal injuries or Parkinson's disease but most of these were cases of fundraising events being advertised on community radio. Indeed the most specific references to disability occurred in the context of community radio.

For example, one show broadcast on Connemara Community Radio involved a discussion about a planned programme looking at health services and disability. The presenter explained that the programme was part of a national campaign to promote the rights of older people and that its purpose would be to inform them about medical cards, long-term illness schemes, payment of carers, public health nurses, home care, home carer grants, aids and appliances and nursing homes. There then followed quite a lengthy discussion about the benefits of community radio for disseminating important information to citizens.

In the sample there were two non-fiction television programmes which dealt explicitly and in detail with long-term illness. These were RTÉ1's "The Hospice" and an edition of "Seoige and O'Shea" on RTE 1, in which a young woman with cystic fibrosis and her father were interviewed. In "The Hospice", several patients with terminal illnesses were interviewed. They spoke about how they were coping with long-term illness and praised the staff of the hospice for their medical and emotional skills. In the episode analysed, two of the patients died. These touching stories of bravery and good humour were inspiring portraits of individuals faced with the inevitability of death. They also provided a welcome counter-discourse to the recent scandals in the news media about the inadequacy of services in private nursing homes.

However, there was no discussion about why terminally-ill people need to be institutionalised or whether this is desirable, nor was any reference made to the possibility of dying at home or caring for a dying relative at home.

Thus, although the programme itself presented positive and inspiring images of disability as well as a caring and sensitive approach to terminally ill patients, it is arguably part of a wider discourse which presents medical institutionalisation as an inevitability. As is the case with so many other conceptualisations of disability and illness, the impairment or illness is regarded as the problem and it is dealt with by a dedicated medical system, i.e. in a way that requires minimum change or adaptability on the part of the wider society.

In the “Seoige and O’Shea” interview with a young woman with cystic fibrosis, a number of different discourses on disability were evident. Interestingly, both father and daughter commented on how she never sought special attention compared to her siblings and how she never received it. Her father said she was treated the same as the others and was never pampered or let off chores because of her illness.

The interviewee spoke at length about the things she had to do in order to compensate for her illness and live a normal life:

“Everything took planning, if somewhere had stairs I had to think – god I hope there’s a lift ‘round here you know...”

This is a positive, admirable and empowering approach to disability. However, viewed in the context of the social-versus-medical model of disability, cystic fibrosis is considered more an illness than a disability here and it is the illness that is seen to disable rather than deficits in the social infrastructure.

Naturally medical intervention improves the quality of life for many disabled people and in many cases saves their lives. It is also desirable that people with disabilities should be fully integrated in a pluralistic society.

However, many media stories tend to confirm the notion that there is a 'normality' yardstick against which people with impairments should measure themselves as well as an archetype or template of what constitutes a 'normal life', which they should strive to achieve.

What these discourses tend to overlook is that, particularly in such a technology-driven age, all citizens are located on an ability–disability continuum, depending on a plethora of factors such as their age, weight and level of fitness and access to and ability to use cars, computers, DVDs, remote controls, alarm systems, mobile phones, credit cards and the internet (many of which are determined, in turn, by socio-economic income, level of education, etc.). There is a sense that, beyond the individual families affected, society does not have to change or adapt in any way – the impairment is dealt with by the medical system, while the disability is dealt with by individuals and their families.

This is not to suggest that the media conspire with government or the medical profession to keep disability within easily managed areas of responsibility. Indeed, it is important to acknowledge the significant role that the media's own codes and conventions play in the construction of particular narratives or discourses. What makes a good story, whether real or fictional, from a producer's perspective is often a strong individual overcoming difficulty.

Thus, an interview with an individual person with a disability or their family will inevitably facilitate a different type of discourse than a chat show involving a number of experts or numerous spontaneous callers: the former tends to focus on a personal narrative, while the latter generally encourages a more public or political debate.

vii. Physical disability in fiction

Physical impairments, genetic conditions and long-term illnesses only received any kind of sustained media attention in genres such as the hospital drama and, to a lesser extent, crime shows and cartoons. The hospital and crime dramas in the sample that featured disabilities demonstrated a fascination with the obscure and the macabre. However, it is important to acknowledge the role played by the specific codes and conventions of different media genres in shaping particular discourses.

The hospital drama, for example, has become such a popular and ubiquitous format that it has become essential to deal with increasingly rare psychological, physical and genetic conditions and to play on the audience's knowledge of and interest in physiology, pathology and medicine. For example, in an episode of "All Saints", an Australian hospital drama broadcast on TV3, a 17-year-old girl was diagnosed with a rare condition called AIS (Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome).

Taylor looked like a female but because her body was insensitive to male hormones, she had not developed a vagina or uterus and would have to have internal testicles removed. In addition to the obvious interest that insights into such a condition might evoke among audiences, there was also the added dramatic twist that Taylor's mother knew about her condition since she was four and tried to protect her from it.

The discourse of the freak was both rehearsed and critiqued in this programme. When Taylor's condition was first revealed by her consultant to the other doctors, they asked "Is it some sort of birth defect?" and "Any other abnormalities?" A doctor explained to Taylor that what she had was a "genetic glitch" but that it didn't change who she was. The same doctor also commented that, technically, her lack of male hormone "makes her a superwoman".

When Taylor discovered that her mother knew all along she was outraged. She screamed, “You knew I was a freak! How could you do this to me?” and to her doctor, “Maybe I could have a freakectomy when they take my testicles out!” Although the doctors were critical of Taylor’s mother for withholding this information from her and thus reinforcing her perception of self as taboo or unmentionable, they also mobilised medical discourses of ‘abnormality’ when talking among themselves.

In an episode of “Law and Order: Special Victim’s Unit”, also broadcast on TV3, a student was kidnapped who had Turner’s syndrome which, it was explained, made her appear much younger than she was. A classmate described Janie as “a freak” and said that “kids her own age don’t want anything to do with her”. Her friend also explained to the police that “Janie gets picked on, they think she’s a geek”. Because, it was explained, Janie was not developed physically and had problems connecting with children her own age, she was constantly referred to by the police, her teachers and her grandfather as ‘vulnerable’, ‘delicate’ and ‘needing supervision’.

In an episode of “CSI: Crime Scene Investigation” (Channel 6), it was revealed that a scientist had been conducting tests on innocent victims and this plot led to a series of ‘freak images’: when the police tracked down his victims, they were revealed to be a dead woman who had been given an eye implant and injected with a degenerative disease, a homeless man who was lobotomised and was missing an eye and a pair of Siamese twins in captivity in the scientist’s laboratory, one of whom was already dead.

Finally, in a scene from American lesbian drama “The ‘L’ Word” (Channel 6), a female character wrote the word monstrosity on a piece of paper and imagined a carnivalesque scene in which characters’ faces were disfigured to look like pigs.

Images of disability played for comic effect were evident in two episodes of “The Simpsons”. In one, there was a brief appearance by a robot in a wheelchair called Arty the Crippled Robot. The other featured a criminal with one arm, although this disability was never referred to. While “The Simpsons” trades in ironic stereotyping, featuring characters such as Apu the Indian storekeeper and Cletus the slack-jawed yokel, it is arguable that stereotypes, whether they are straightforward or ironic, still reinforce a particularly limited and limiting range of images of people with disabilities. Finally, while not all of the freak imagery described here relates directly to disability, it reinforces the notion that deviation from an imaginary norm is unacceptable or to be feared.

viii. Alcoholism and addiction

The preoccupation with alcoholism and drug addiction in the sample deserves particular mention. The categorisation of substance addiction as a disability is not as evident to most people as is, for example, multiple sclerosis or cerebral palsy. Much of the disagreement or confusion about addiction’s status as a disability appears to stem from divergent understandings of its causes. In the non-fiction television programmes that dealt with this theme in the Irish context, much attention was given to the social causes of substance abuse and its links with depression, stress and increased prosperity (see above).

In the drama and reality TV programmes that were captured in the sample, however, a significant counter-discourse emerged, in which addiction and substance abuse were framed either as genetically inherited or as the behaviours of selfish and irresponsible individuals.

For example, in an episode of the American drama series “Party of 5” (Channel 6), a teenage character called Bailey started drinking heavily and became irresponsible and out of control. Bailey’s younger sister grew worried as their father (now dead) was alcoholic. From a dramatic perspective, Bailey’s behaviour opened up old wounds and memories for all members of the family who variously struggled to remember or forget the details of their father’s alcoholism.

Implicit throughout the entire programme – played out through the anxieties of the younger sister - was that Bailey's alcoholism had been genetically inherited. This was confirmed rather than refuted by the older brother when he finally talked to his sister about the problem. He explained, "Even if Bailey did get the alcoholism from him, Dad couldn't help that...any more than Mom could help giving you her music". In prioritising a medical / genetic rather than a social model, this discourse did not address the role played by social problems in alcohol addiction.

In two episodes of "Judge Judy" (TV3), young working-class women were put on the stand for abusing drugs and alcohol while pregnant or caring for their children. Similarly, the treatment of addiction here focused on the individuals rather than on the socio-economic environments in which they had become substance abusers. Judge Judy adopted a judgemental, moralistic and ultimately unsympathetic approach to these women, framing their addictions as manifestations of selfish and irresponsible behaviour rather than as disabling conditions caused by complex psychological and sociological factors. This discourse of addiction as individual weakness was further consolidated by an item about David Hasselhoff in TV3 magazine programme "Xposé".

Hasselhoff's daughter videoed him drunk in an effort to encourage him to stop drinking and the video was released on the internet. The home-movie footage of Hasselhoff drunkenly consuming a sandwich and slurring his words was overlaid with the pleadings of his daughter, who said "it's not fair that you are doing this to your family" and "tell me you're going to stop drinking". While it is arguable that the emotional damage wreaked by substance addiction on families means that it is rarely viewed with the same sympathy or understanding as other disabilities, this focus on the individual serves to further consolidate a discourse of alcoholism / addiction as a personal psychological weakness or personality flaw rather than a symptom of childhood trauma, relationship dysfunction or depression.

Dominant social discourses on alcoholism both reflect and influence how governments, health practitioners and educators address both alcoholics and the treatment of alcoholism. The treatment of addiction by American television dramas – as a problem of the individual - differed radically from how it was treated by Irish radio chat-show and current affairs programmes – as the symptom of a range of other social problems.

5.4 Incidental disability / mainstreaming

One of the strongest pointers to the fact that disability remains a minority issue in the media was the absence of incidental characters who were disabled, either in (non-medical) dramas or in the audiences of talk shows and current affairs programmes (unless disability was the specific topic under discussion). Given this, an episode of RTÉ's "The Café" in which there were two audience members with Down Syndrome, stood out as a notable exception.

In an episode of American teen drama "The OC" (TG4), Taylor and a male friend were watching "The Hunchback of Notre Dame" (the original black-and-white version) and started up an interesting discussion about unrequited love. Taylor did not mention the Hunchback's impairment at all. Instead she talked about how tragic it was that he could not tell Ezmerelda how much he loved her and that if he had they could have had a relationship.

However, the incidental representation of disability raises questions about the benefits and disadvantages of mainstreaming. While for some this is a progressive portrayal of a pluralistic society which accepts difference, for others it represents a de-politicisation of disability in that it prevents disabled people from drawing explicit attention to the fact that society is not pluralistic and does not accept difference since it continues to disadvantage people with impairments in numerous ways (Darke).

In the sample under analysis, dedicated disability programming was only evident on community radio stations NEAR FM and Ros FM. In the case of NEAR FM, a programme entitled “Equality Time” was captured in the sample. This was part of a series of 10 programmes made and presented by people trained in the Central Remedial Clinic. The show captured in the sample included an interview with Louise McCormack who manages the CRC training programme and various interviews with people with disabilities about what aspects of their training courses they enjoyed and why, all presented by people with unspecified disabilities. The recordings of Ros FM also featured a show called “Capability”, in which an hour of music programming was presented by a young woman with Down Syndrome. These are both examples of dedicated disability programming made by and for people with disabilities. Outside of this, indigenous non-fiction genres such as current-affairs programmes and radio chat-shows and phone-ins would appear to constitute the next most useful interventions on disability in the current Irish environment.

APPENDIX 1

CODING SHEET

Coding Sheet

1. Coding unit ID
2. Title of Programme
3. Channel
4. Broadcast time (Weekend or weekday; hour of day broadcast)
- 4a. Is programme complete?
5. Duration
6. Programme Genre classified according to the system as follows

- A. Drama
- B. News/Current Affairs
- C. Young People's
- D. Comedy
- E. Lifestyle
- F. Music
- G. Factual
- H. Sports
- I. Movies/Mini-Series
- J. Other (Please Specify)_____

6a. If "drama" selected in previous question, specify whether:

- serious drama (CSI, Wire in the Blood, Sopranos),
- comedy drama (Ally McBeal, Sex in the City, Desperate Housewives)

or

- soap opera (Fair City, Coronation Street, .

6b. If “young people’s” selected in previous question, specify whether:

- cartoon (Rugrats, Transformers),
- drama (Sabrina, The Teenaged Witch)or
- mixed format (The Den/Going Live) serious drama, comedy drama or soap opera.
- news

6c. If “lifestyle” selected in previous question, specify

- chat/talk show (Late, Late Show/Oprah/Ricki Lake),
- phone-in show (Liveline, Your call),
- magazine show (the Afternoon show/Ryan Tubridy),
- quiz show (Winning Streak/The Price is Right)or
- “how-to” show (diy/gardening/cookery/house buying/house upgrading/makeover – Beyond the Hall Door/Ground Force/Rachel Allen/Location, location, location/Room to Improve/Pimp My Ride).
- Infotainment.
- Travel

6d. If “factual” selected in previous question, specify whether:

- “straight” documentary,
- nature programming or
- reality programming.

- 7.** Origin of production
- A. Irish broadcaster produced
 - B. Irish independently produced/broadcaster commissioned
Name of production company _____
 - C. Imported/purchased programming
Country of origin _____
 - D. Co-production with Irish partner (state other countries involved).
- 8.** Number of individuated characters in programme.
- 8a.** Is the programme live action, entirely animated, or a mix of both? Self-explanatory
- 9.** Does the programme refer to disability at any level or feature a person with a disability? If no, do not continue to the remaining questions.
- 10.** Is the programming specialised disability-focussed programming, mainstream or an episode of a mainstream show focused on disability for its entire duration?
- 11.** Does the programme include the presence of an individual with a disability (Yes/No). If “no”, go straight to question 15, if yes proceed to question 12.
- 12.** How many individuals with a disability are present?
- 12a.** Does the programme feature people with disabilities who are not individuated but who are clearly present? If so go straight to question 14.

13. For programmes containing participant(s) with a disability, give a coding for each participant:

a. Gender

- i. male
- ii. female

b. Observed Age

- i child (0-12)
- ii teenager (13-19)
- iii young adult(20-35)
- iv middle aged(36-50)
- v older middle-aged(51-65)
- vi elderly(over 65))

c. Is the individual's disability:

- i directly referred to (the subject of discussion)
- ii tacitly evident (character in wheelchair, using cane, speaking in slurred speech etc.)?

d Type of disability

- i. Vision
- ii. Hearing
- iii. Physical
- iv. Mental Health
- v. Learning disability
- vi. Other

- e. Level of appearance in programme (Coders should apply four metrics to determine the status of an individual on a given programme: Onscreen time, amount of speech/dialogue, role in developing the narrative and (although this largely applies to fiction) extent of character development).
 - i. Major Role
 - ii. Minor Role
 - iii. Incidental/background

- f. Role Type
 - i. Comedy
 - ii. Light
 - iii. Serious
 - iv. Mixed

- g. Is appearance:
 - i live,
 - ii pre-recorded
 - iii impossible to distinguish?

h. Relevance of disability (if any) to role (e.g. extent to which the participant's disability was important to the programme item). (To determine how to code this, coders should consider the impact on the individual's role of removing their disability. If the individual's role is essentially unchanged then their disability is irrelevant, if their role would be substantially reduced by such a removal then their disability is relevant. If, finally, their role would essentially be reduced to nothing – i.e. they did not feature – then their disability should be coded as central.)

- ii. Central
- iii. Relevant
- iv. Incidental

i. Occupation represented

- i. White Collar
- ii. Blue Collar
- iii. Farming/extractive
- iv. Retired
Specify former occupation if stated _____
- v. Health/Caring professional
- vi. Political
- vii. Travel/Leisure/Catering/Tourism
- viii. Education
- ix. Arts/Media
- x. Police/Emergency services
- xi. Clergy
- xii. Unemployed
- xiii. Unemployed explicitly due to disability.
- xiv. Under 16
- xv. Unspecified (unable to code)
- xvi. Other (specify)
- xvii. Student

- j. Occupation represented for retirees
 - i White Collar
 - ii Blue Collar
 - iii Farming/extractive
 - iv Health/Caring professional
 - vi Political
 - vii Travel/Leisure/Catering/Tourism
 - viii Education
 - ix Arts/Media
 - x Police/Emergency services
 - xi Clergy
 - xii Unemployed
 - xiii Unemployed explicitly due to disability.
 - xiv Under 16
 - xv Unspecified (unable to code)
 - xv Other (specify)

- k. For factual programming only state the participant's role (expert, elected representative, presenter, person with a disability, subject of the factual/current affairs item (Code 1-5))

- l. For factual programming only state the subject of contribution
 - 1. personal experiences
 - 2. minority issues
 - 3. discussion of political issues
 - 4. everyday topics such as cookery, gardening. DIY etc.
 - 5. gameshow contestant
 - 6. Other (please specify)
 - 7. Too brief to classify

14. For programmes containing non-individuated groups with disabilities, give a coding for the following questions:

a. Level of appearance in programme

- i. Major Role
- ii. Minor Role
- iii. Incidental/background

b. Role Type

- i. Comedy
- ii. Light
- iii. Serious
- iv. Mixed

c. Is appearance:

- i live,
- ii pre-recorded
- iii impossible to distinguish?

d. Relevance of disability (if any) to role (e.g. extent to which the participant's disability was important to the programme item).

- i. Central
- ii. Relevant
- iii. Incidental

15. For programming referring to disability as a discourse but NOT featuring any individuals with a disability code the following:

a. Level of appearance of discourse in programme (Judged according to their onscreen time, dialogue/talking time, role in the narrative, character development.)

- i Major Role
- ii Minor Role
- iii Incidental/background

b. Discourse Type

- i Comedy
- ii Light
- iii Serious
- iv Mixed

16. Relevance of representation to minority disability issues (e.g. lobbying/highlighting disability issues.)

a. Does the representation of the person(s) with disability/the discourse around disability fall into any of the following stereotypical categories?

- Pitiable and pathetic; sweet and innocent; a miracle cure
- Victim or an object of violence
- Sinister or evil
- Faking injury; lazy
- Atmosphere - curios or exotica
- 'Super-crip'/ triumph over tragedy/noble warrior
- Laughable or the butt of jokes
- Having a chip on their shoulder/ aggressive avenger

- A burden/ outcast
 - Non-sexual or incapable of a worthwhile relationship
 - Incapable of fully participating in everyday life
- b. Does the representation of the person(s) with disability/the discourse around disability discriminate against a particular person with a disability or is it prejudiced against people with disability as a group?

APPENDIX 2

**EXPLANATORY GUIDE
TO CODING SHEET**

Explanatory Guide to coding sheet

1. Coding unit ID.

To allow us to identify individual programmes, every programme is assigned an individual ID. This ID is constructed by combining two pieces of information: the ID number written on every individual tape or disc and the number relating to the order in which a given programme appears on a given disc. For example, a unit ID 25.03 would describe the third programme appearing on disc 25 (which in this case contains material from Connemara Community Radio). If programmes present with two or more discreet items which relate to disability (as may be the case on a news bulletin or a magazine show) we code those items separately. Thus the first item on the third programme of disk 25 would be coded, 25.03.01, the second 25.03.02 etc.

2. Title of Programme

This is largely for information only as the title of a given programme cannot be encoded in SPSS. Instead we have recorded that information, along with other uncodable data in a separate Excel spreadsheet. Since this spreadsheet also includes the unique coding unit ID, we can relate each SPSS entry to a particular named programme.

3. Channel

Channel: We identify individual stations by number – each is assigned a unique number. See Codebook

4. Broadcast time (Weekend or weekday; hour of day broadcast)

We code this in a two-stage manner, identifying whether an individual show is going out on a weekday or at the weekend and identifying which hour of the day (i.e. between 7am and 8am) the show is broadcast at.

4a. Is programme complete?

Given that the sample material starts on the hour in all cases, it is frequently the case that the sample includes the tail-end of some programme and the beginnings of others. These are coded as individual coding units.

5. Duration

We have measured this in minutes. In the event that the sample provided includes the tail-ends and/or beginnings of shows (i.e. shows which are incomplete), we measure only the duration included in the sample. In the case of non-current affairs radio shows (such as the Ian Dempsey Breakfast Show) which include news, sport and weather in their running order, we have subtracted the duration of the latter material (which are coded as separate programme units) from the overall duration of such magazine shows.

We have done so because we feel that such programming is generally characterised by a shift in tone from light-hearted to serious and that to code references to disability which appear in a news segment of, for example, the Ian Dempsey breakfast show, would give a misleading impression of how a reference to disability was being treated.

6. Programme Genre classified according to the system as follows

For the most part the categorisation of television in particular is relatively straightforward although there is some recent academic literature which notes that shifts in the political economy of broadcasting (i.e. pressure to reduce costs) has brought new “reality” genres to the fore, complicating “traditional” classifications. Given this, we have sought to introduce clarity into our classifications by sub-categorising the categories of “drama”, “young people’s”, “lifestyle” and “factual”.

Even so there remain some classifications that are somewhat arbitrary. Reality Shows such as “Big Brother” and makeover shows such as “How to Look Good Naked” for example may not necessarily be regarded as radically different from one another despite the fact that our classification places them in the category of factual and lifestyle respectively.

- a. Drama
- b. News/Current Affairs
- c. Young People’s
- d. Comedy
- e. Lifestyle
- f. Music
- g. Factual
- h. Sports
- i. Movies/Mini-Series
- j. Other (Please Specify)_____

6a. If “drama” selected in previous question, specify whether:

- serious drama (CSI, Wire in the Blood, Sopranos),
 - comedy drama (Ally McBeal, Sex in the City, Desperate Housewives)
- or
- soap opera (Fair City, Coronation Street, .

6b. If “young people’s” selected in previous question, specify whether:

- cartoon (Rugrats, Transformers),
- drama (Sabrina, The Teenaged Witch)or
- mixed format (The Den/Going Live) serious drama, comedy drama or soap opera.
- news

6c. If “lifestyle” selected in previous question, specify

- chat/talk show (Late, Late Show/Oprah/Ricki Lake),
- phone-in show (Liveline, Your call),
- magazine show (the Afternoon show/Ryan Tubridy),
- quiz show (Winning Streak/The Price is Right)or
- “how-to” show (diy/gardening/cookery/house buying/house upgrading/makeover – Beyond the Hall Door/Ground Force/Rachel Allen/Location, location, location/Room to Improve/Pimp My Ride).
- Infotainment
- Travel show.

6d. If “factual” selected in previous question, specify whether:

- “straight” documentary,
- nature programming or
- reality programming.

7. Origin of production

Coders identify as to whether a production is produced by an Irish broadcaster, commissioned from an Irish independent production company by an Irish broadcaster or imported. In the latter case, they record on a separate Excel sheet, the country of origin (determined by the headquarters of the production company). In the event that a production is a co-production involving an Irish partner we code this separately and also record (again on an Excel spreadsheet) the origin of the non-Irish production partner.

8. Number of individuated characters in programme.

We have used the term “individuated” to circumvent the difficulties posed by groups or crowds (such as those associated with sporting events) where it would be difficult if not impossible to accurately enumerate the number of individuals before the camera and, for similar reasons, where it would be difficult to isolate individuals with disabilities.

Our working definitions of “individuated” relate to the particular broadcast format and genre under examination. (i.e. we have devised definitions of individuated appropriate for radio and television on the one hand and drama and non-fiction on the other.)

Initially we had proposed counting fictional individuals by counting those listed in the pre and post credit sequences in radio and television drama. However, in practice it became clear that this was not reliable, given that some dramas include in their credits actors who may be involved in an ongoing storyline but who do not appear in a particular episode.

Similarly, in radio drama, it is commonplace for one actor to play several roles: thus relying on radio credits risked missing individual characters. Thus we defined as individuated in drama: characters with speaking roles whether physically present or not (i.e. we include characters whose appearance may be limited to a voice on a telephone), or characters without speaking roles who are nonetheless physically present and who overtly interact with other characters who do have speaking roles. Thus we do not include background characters (such as extras appearing in a restaurant, unless they are manifestly addressed by more overtly individuated characters).

Non-fiction television presents other challenges, not least the sheer number of people covered in relatively short periods in genres such as television news. In this case we enumerate all individuals who address the camera and/or a proxy for the camera such as a reporter either orally or through other means (e.g. someone using gestural language such as sign language). However, we also include those individuals in news and current affairs programming who are physically represented and who are overtly identified by the reporter/presenter, even if they do not directly address the camera/reporter. We also include individuals who, though not physically present (i.e. who do not speak, and of whom there are no images, moving or still) who are effectively individuated through substantial discussion (i.e. for a minute or more).

For non-fiction radio we have applied a similar schema as for television. We enumerate all individuals whose voices are individually distinguishable. We also include individuals who, though not physically present are substantively discussed (again for a minute or more). In effect this would mean that in a five minute radio news bulletin, brief references to individuals will not be coded. However, when an individual is discussed at length in their absence – i.e. a book review show discussing an author's work or a current affairs show discussing a figure of public notoriety as a programme item, then they are regarded as having been individuated for the purposes of this project.

In passing we should note that because we are coding at the level of individual programmes, the final headcount will include multiple references some high profile individuals. For example, figures like the Taoiseach may well appear in virtually every news bulletin. We did consider a research design whereby the appearance/presence of individuals would only be counted once regardless of how many times they appeared in programmes across the sample. However, on reflection and in consultation with the BCI and the NDA, we rejected such an approach because it would not offer an accurate reflection of the incidence of representation of people with disabilities but was likely to be skewed. There was also a more pragmatic difficulty about how to avoid double counting individuals, especially given that an hour of genres like television news may include upwards of 100 individuated but relatively low-profile characters who would not be easy to distinguish in later programmes.

8a. Is the programme live action, entirely animated, or a mix of both?

Self-explanatory

9. Does the programme refer to disability at any level or feature a person with a disability? If no, do not continue to the remaining questions.

This is a gate-keeping question. All coding units (programmes) will be coded by questions 1 – 9. However, only those programmes featuring people with disabilities or disability as a discourse will be coded under the remaining questions.

10. Is the programming specialised disability-focussed programming, mainstream or an episode of a mainstream show focused on disability for its entire duration?

The nature of the sample means that we are unlikely to encounter any disability specific programming. However we are open to the possibility that mainstream shows may devote individual programmes to the subject.

11. Does the programme include the presence of one or more individuated individuals with a disability? If “no”, go straight to question 15, if yes proceed to question 12.

This is a further gate-keeping question which effectively separates those programmes which feature people with disabilities from those which merely refer to a discourse around disability.

12. How many individuals with a disability are present/apparent?

Relatively straight-forward: “apparent” was introduced to account for the possibility of characters who though physically present in a given context may nonetheless participate in a programme (i.e. through phone-in participation).

12a. Does the programme feature people with disabilities who are not individuated but who are clearly present? If so go straight to question 14.

This question was added to address the possibility of programming which though featuring people with disabilities exclusively treated them as a group (such as a news report on a politicians visit to a centre for children with disabilities). It was felt that such a representation would be pertinent to the focus of the study and indeed that it was important to note such representations which – if found – might reasonably be described as sidelining people with disabilities.

13. For programmes containing participant(s) with a disability, give a coding for each participant:

13a. Gender

- i. male
- ii. female

Self-explanatory.

13b. Observed Age

- i child (0-12)
- ii teenager (13-19)
- iii young adult(20-35)
- iv middle aged(36-50)
- v older middle-aged(51-65)
- vi elderly(over 65))

We have stressed “observed age” here because in most cases the specific age of a given individual is unlikely to be identified. Clearly this raises the prospect of error. However, in broad terms we are less concerned with identifying the extent to which people with disabilities fall into such specific age groups and more the extent to which representations of disability concentrate on pre-adult, adult and elderly groups. Thus even if coders are unsure whether to place for example, a 14 year old, into the first or second category we will still be able to record the presence of a pre-adult representation.

13c.

This question asks whether the individual's disability is directly referred to or only tacitly evident. In practice "directly referred to" means mentioned in speech. "Tacitly evident" means evident through a visual cue such as the fact that an individual is in a wheelchair or uses a cane or through an aural cue such as slurred speech. The function of the question is to allow us to prepare for considering questions 16a and 16b relating to whether representations of people with disabilities are stereotyped, discriminatory or prejudiced. Commonsense suggests that the failure to directly advert to the presence of a person's impairment increases the likelihood that the representation will be neutral. However, this question will allow us to establish whether or not this is in fact the case.

13d. Type of disability

Given the nature of the research this category was obviously of key importance and we have gone to some effort to ensure that it is coded as accurately as possible. We have effectively sought to ensure accuracy through collating all representations for the examination of the Head of the Disability Service in DCU, Pat Hoey, to ensure that the final categorisations are carried out by an expert in the field rather than by our coders. However, in the pre-coding training, we expended some effort on introducing coders to the basic categories of disability. We should stress that we have only coded those incidences of disability which are made manifest through a visual or oral cue (see 13c). To do otherwise, would effectively place our coders in the position of having to make diagnoses: thus a character who is witnessed drinking a lot or even referred to as "having a drink problem" would not be coded as an alcoholic unless s/he is also overtly described as alcoholic, or was identified as alcoholic by other cues such as attending Alcoholics Anonymous.

i. Vision

Visual impairments: These include but are not limited to retinal degeneration, albinism, cataracts, glaucoma, muscular problems that result in visual disturbances, corneal disorders, diabetic retinopathy, congenital disorders, and infection. Impact of disability will depend on type / degree of impairment and timeline e.g. recent acquired impairment versus long term acquired impairment or congenital impairment

ii. Hearing

Deafness is the result of damage to any part of the ear and means that a person has some difficulty hearing sounds. The degree of hearing loss depends on the severity of the damage. Hearing loss is measured in decibels hearing level (dBHL). A person who can hear sounds across a range of frequencies is considered to have normal hearing. The thresholds for the different types of hearing loss are as follows:

- Mild 25 – 39 dBHL
- Moderate 40 – 69 dBHL
- Severe 70 – 94 dBHL

iii. Physical

In general terms we have elected to code any instances of enduring restricted mobility or dexterity as physical. However, we have drawn particular attention to the following, more common conditions:

- Cerebral Palsy
- Muscular Dystrophy
- Spina Bifida/Hydrocephalus

iv. Mental Health

We have grouped Mental Health under the following categories:

- Bipolar Disorder and Manic Depression
- Schizophrenia
- Anxiety
- Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)
- Eating Disorders

v. General Learning Disability

We have included in this category those people with Downs Syndrome or those individual with autism whilst recognising that the latter condition manifests itself on a spectrum and that not all autistic individuals have a general learning disability.

vi. Other

- People with a range of specific learning difficulties, including dyslexia, dyscalculia, dysgraphia, dyspraxia
- Chronic illness of a disabling nature.
- Alcohol, drug or gambling addiction.
- We have also included the following impairments under the heading of “other”: attention deficit disorder, ADHD, Asperger’s Syndrome, Acquired Brain Injury, Brain Tumour, Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, Cystic Fibrosis, Epilepsy, Motor Neurone Disease, Multiple Sclerosis, etc.

13e. Level of appearance in programme

Coders apply a combination of four metrics to determine whether an individual plays a major, minor or incidental role within a given programme/item. These are the amount of onscreen time, amount of speech/dialogue, role in developing the narrative and (although this largely applies to fiction) extent of character development).

13f. Type of Role

This question asks coders to identify the type of role played by the person with disability: comedic; light; serious or mixed. To a large extent this will be conditioned by the nature of the programme the person feature in, but it is possible, for example, that a comedy show may use a person with disability in a role that is both comedic and serious and hence the need for the mixed category. Furthermore, magazine programmes such as “The Tubridy Show” may switch from one tone to another depending on the particular item, so there is particular tone definitively associated with the show.

13g.

This question asks whether the appearance of a person with a disability is live, pre-recorded or impossible to distinguish. The function of the question is to examine the extent to which editorial decisions seek to control representation of people with disabilities. If, for example, representations of people with disabilities are disproportionately apparent in pre-recorded shows, this may suggest a concern at an editorial level that people with disabilities present a particular production risk (either in terms of the need to make special arrangements to facilitate their participation or because they may face particular communicative obstacles).

13h. Relevance of disability (if any) to role (e.g. extent to which the participant's disability was important to the programme item).

To determine how to code this, coders should consider the impact on the individual's role of removing their disability. If the individual's role is essentially unchanged then their disability is "incidental". If their role would be substantially reduced by such a removal but not entirely obviated then their disability is "relevant". If, finally, their role would essentially be reduced to nothing – i.e. there would effectively be no reason left for them to feature – then their disability should be coded as "central".

13i and j

Both questions ask coders to code the occupation of the person with disability. The second question asks coders to code the former occupation of those identified as retired in the first.

13 k.

This question asks the coders – with regard to factual programming only to code the person with a disability’s role under the following categories:

- Expert;
- Elected representative;
- Presenter;
- Person with a disability,, and;
- Subject of the factual/current affairs item

“Presenter” and “Elected Representative” are straight-forward categories. Since a “Person with a Disability” might by definition be regarded as an “expert” on their own impairment, we have defined “expert” as referring to a person with a disability who is overtly described as an expert in a particular field. If their expertise is in the field of disability it will be need to be clarified that this is an expertise over and above that acquired purely through lived experience (i.e. some kind of qualification will need to be identified). Thus “Person with a Disability” will be taken as referring to an individual whose role is primarily to explain their everyday, lived experience as a person with a disability but who is permitted to perform their explanation in their own right. This in turn is distinguished from “subject” of the factual/current affairs item, which describes a person with a disability who is represented as a person with a disability by a third party (i.e. the programme makers) but not permitted to actively represent themselves.

13l.

This question asks the coders to state the subject of contribution made by the person with a disability. The categories proposed are as follows.

- 1 personal experiences
- 2 minority issues
- 3 discussion of political issues
- 4 everyday topics such as cookery, gardening. DIY etc.
- 5 Gameshow contestant
- 6 Other (please specify)
- 7 Too brief to classify

Categories 4-7 are self-explanatory. However we feel the need to amplify our working understanding of 1-3. “Personal experiences” refers to personal descriptions of disability that remain largely descriptive and fall short of outright advocacy. “Minority issues” refers to discussion of disability-related issues (including talking about disability in the context of larger discussions about what constitutes “normal”) in an overtly political advocacy context. “Discussion of political issues” refers to a context where a person with disability discusses “mainstream” (i.e. non-disability related) political issues.

14.

Question 14 asks coders to apply the structures of questions 13e, 13f, 13g and 13h to programmes containing non-individuated groups with disabilities.

15.

Similarly question 15 asks coders to apply the structures of questions 13e and 13f to the discourses featured in those programmes which refer to disability as a discourse but DO NOT featuring any individuals with a disability.

16. Relevance of representation to minority disability issues (e.g. lobbying/highlighting disability issues.).

The first question in this section asks whether representation of the person(s) with disability/the discourse around disability fall into any of a series of specified stereotypical categories? We have adapted these from Colin Barnes' work.

Barnes' main stereotypes of people with disabilities

- a. Pitable and pathetic; sweet and innocent; a miracle cure – this representation is a regular feature of popular fiction, where the overtly dependent disabled person is included in order to depict another character's goodness and sensitivity.
- b. Victim or an object of violence – people with disabilities are often subject to violent abuse by non-disabled people and this contributes to the mistaken belief that people with disabilities are totally helpless and dependent.
- c. Sinister or Evil – one of the most persistent of stereotypes – exploits early beliefs about physical impairments' link to sin and sinners.
- d. Atmosphere – curios and exotica in 'freak shows', and in comics, horror movies and science fiction – included in the storyline to enhance a certain atmosphere, usually one of menace, mystery or deprivation or to add character to the visual impact of the production.
- e. 'Super Crip'/ triumph over tragedy/noble warrior – the person with a disability is assigned super human almost magical abilities – blind people are portrayed as visionaries with a sixth sense or extremely sensitive hearing, etc.

- f. Laughable or the 'butt of jokes'/ object of ridicule – 'laughing at disability' is not new – visits to Bedlam and other 'mental' institutions were a typical form of 'entertainment'.
- g. Having a chip on their shoulder / aggressive avenger – Their Own and Worst Only Enemy
- h. A burden/ outcast – this is connected to the view that people with disabilities are helpless and must be 'cared' for by the able-bodied people – it comes from the notion that their needs are profoundly different to those of the non-disabled community and that meeting those needs is an unacceptable drain on society's resources.
- i. Non-sexual or incapable of a worthwhile relationship. Sexual impotency looms large in many representations – the message is clear – people with disabilities are 'sexually dead' therefore their lives are not worth living.
- j. Incapable of fully participating in everyday life – mainly one of omission – people with disabilities are rarely seen as integral and productive members of the community at teachers, students, as part of the work-force or as parents.
- k. Their Own Worst and Only Enemy – full of self pity – could overcome their difficulties if they would stop feeling sorry for themselves and rise to the 'challenge'.
- l. Faker – inventing or exaggerating disabling condition for the purpose of evoking sympathy or for financially fraudulent purposes.

If the representation does not fall into any of these categories, the codebook offers a "null finding" category.

16b

This question asks whether the representation of the person(s) with disability/the discourse around disability discriminates against a particular person with a disability or is prejudiced against people with disability as a group? The codebook design also allows for the possibility that a given representation is either neutral or is simultaneously discriminatory and prejudicial.