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Framing disability : a content analysis of disability-related newspaper coverage from 1986 to 1994

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FRAMING DISABILITY:
A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF DISABILITY-RELATED
NEWSPAPER COVERAGE FROM 1986 TO 1994

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the School of Journalism
and Mass Communications
San José State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science

by
Kristin Anne Mick
May, 1996

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ABSTRACT

FRAMING DISABILITY: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF DISABILITY-RELATED NEWS COVERAGE FROM 1986 TO 1994

by Kristin Anne Mick

Through a content analysis of the *New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times*, this study analyzed the quantity and quality of news stories pertaining to physical disabilities during 1986, 1990, and 1994. This research predicted that the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act would affect the press' coverage of disabled individuals and groups, and as a result, notable changes would occur during the study's 8-year time period. Aside from measuring the content of disability-related newspaper articles, this research marked a first attempt at measuring context as well through the use of framing analysis.

The study's findings revealed that some variables in press coverage did change over time, while others experienced minimal or no variation. The overall amount of disability news stories increased over time, with the peak in 1990. Traditional reporting dominated the news articles, but a noticeable trend toward progressive reporting was observed. In addition, by 1994, disability coverage expressed a decline in news stories characterized by pity and an increase in disability stories framed by integration.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my husband, Sean. I want to thank him not only for his support and encouragement throughout this research, but also for acting as "my eyes" whenever needed. In many ways, this thesis is as much his accomplishment as it is mine.

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I. Introduction

Martin Luther King Jr., Betty Friedan, Mary Johnson. Each of these people played a fundamental role in carving out a niche in American civil rights history. Only two of these are household names. Why? Everyone knows that Dr. King led the fight for equal opportunity for black Americans and that Friedan's *Feminine Mystique* jump-started the women's movement. But how many people know that Mary Johnson, through her writing and political advocacy, has sought for decades to educate the public about disability rights?

July 25, 1990 marked the long-awaited passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the most monumental disability rights legislation to be passed in American history. According to statistics taken from the ADA, 43 million people in the United States (nearly 17% of the population) are living with a physical or mental disability. The term *disability* means, with respect to an individual, "a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities of such an individual" (*Americans with Disabilities Act*, 1990, sec. 3, p. 51). This group of 43 million people constitutes one of the largest "minority groups" in the country. The disabled population has recently become recognized as a minority group by scholars and political figures because of the marginalization and stigmatization disabled individuals face in our society. Not surprisingly, many disabled people feel that the biggest problem facing them is discrimination, not their physical

limitations (Elliot, 1989; Gartner & Joe, 1987; Johnson, 1989; Shapiro, 1989; Signorielli, 1993; Wehman, 1993).

Unlike previous disability-oriented legislation, the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act pushed for equal rights of persons with disabilities in all facets of life. The lofty goals established by the ADA sought to provide more than simply increased public access and transportation, changes in architectural structures, and equal employment opportunities:

The purpose of the ADA is to provide a clear and comprehensive national mandate to end discrimination against individuals with disabilities, and to bring persons with disabilities into the economic and social mainstream of American life; to provide enforceable standards addressing discrimination against individuals with disabilities, and to ensure that the Federal government plays a central role in enforcing these standards on behalf of individuals with disabilities. (p. 22-23)

Although the Americans with Disabilities Act is successfully mandating physical integration through its legal provisions, this does not automatically ensure social integration. Laws can be implemented to thwart discrimination, but can they change people's behaviors, attitudes, and belief structures?

Many scholars agree that in the absence of personal contact with, or knowledge about, a particular person or group, people turn to the mass media as a primary source of information about the unknown (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1980; Gross, 1988; Harris, 1988; Klobas, 1988; Signorielli, 1993). What happens when such media portrayals are scant, misleading, or

even grossly inaccurate? Often, these negative media portrayals are more familiar than the realities.

This thesis research was not a study of media effects. Rather, it marked an attempt to analyze and categorize media coverage. The content analysis focused on newspaper coverage of people with physical disabilities. News stories concerning people with mental, developmental, or learning disabilities were not included in this study because (1) mental illness is often ambiguously defined in the media and (2) portrayals of individuals with mental, developmental, or learning disabilities may differ from those of physical disabilities. Newspaper coverage was selected as the medium for analysis because unlike television or film, newspapers are non-fictional (i.e., they recount real events and issues) and, thus, *should* present realistic images of individuals with disabilities.

Two daily newspapers, the *New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times*, were selected for the purposes of this study. The reasons for selecting the two newspapers were threefold: (1) both are renowned as prestige newspapers, (2) both carry circulations of several million people, and (3) geographically, they represent metropolitan, bellwether cities in bipolar regions of the nation. Three years were chosen for the purposes of this study—1986, 1990, and 1994; thus, all physical disability-related news stories printed in the *New York Times* or the *Los Angeles Times* in 1986, 1990, or 1994 were collected, measured, and analyzed. The reason for selecting the peripheral dates stemmed from an important date of which they are both equidistant—1990, the year that the Americans with Disabilities Act was passed. This research attempted to discover whether journalists' treatment of

people with disabilities in terms of both the quantity and quality of news coverage has changed over the 8-year time period. Some general research questions are introduced here:

1. Has the total number of disability-related newspaper stories changed between 1986, 1990, and 1994?
2. What type of news stories (e.g., hard news, human interest) most appropriately categorize articles about disability?
3. How has the content or topics of disability-related newspaper articles changed over time?
4. What are the contexts, or *frames*, journalists use to describe people with disabilities, and how have they changed over time?

Another primary reason for this research was to present a solid, well operationalized content analysis on the topic of disability news coverage. Within the last 10 years, several similar content analyses have been conducted. Taken as a whole, this group of disability-related studies offered a high degree of insight and merit on the topic. However, when examined individually, most of the studies contained either methodological design flaws, poor operationalization of key variables, or overgeneralized and ambiguous results. Some of the research even reflected negative attitudes toward people with disabilities through the use of stigmatizing language and

value-laden variables. Most importantly, none of the previous disability-based research examined the distinction between the *content* and the *context* of newspaper stories. It is this researcher's perception that a newspaper may present the content of a disability story positively or favorably (e.g., a story presenting the benefits of mainstreaming), while simultaneously carrying an unfavorable context or tone (e.g., "don't these 'special' kids deserve our sympathy?"). This study, then, marked the first attempt to (1) distinguish the content and context of disability-related newspaper stories, and (2) argue that a relationship exists between the two variables.

II. Literature Review

Within roughly the past one hundred years, the press has become one of the primary sources of information in our society. As a result, the public learns how much importance to attach to an issue from the emphasis placed on it by the mass media (Breed, 1955; Graber, 1992; McCombs and Shaw, 1977; Rachlin, 1988; White, 1950; and others). The theoretical paradigm to explain this phenomenon is called *agenda-setting*. McCombs & Shaw (1977) defined the agenda-setting theory as follows: the press has "the ability to effect cognitive change among individuals—to structure their thinking" (p. 5). Thus, the press has the responsibility to report objectively. However, White's (1950) benchmark "gate keeper" case study of agenda-setting provided steadfast evidence that the selection of news is far from objective. The wire copy editor in White's case study disregarded 90% of the copy that came over the wire because he only had space for 10% of the information—thus, one inevitably realizes that the dissemination of news is heavily reliant upon value judgments.

According to White, journalists represent the "first media gate." It is the responsibility of the journalist to factually report on issues and events occurring around them. But even those reporters who are live at the scene of a riot or present at a political address inherently lack objectivity. Biklen (1987) explained this phenomenon in practical terms:

Because reporters must cover a multitude of different issues, they cannot achieve expertise in all or even a few of them . . . A reporter looks for 'handles' that can make for a salient, recognizable story. (p. 93)

Scholars have defined these "handles" in a number of ways. For example, Stocking & Gross (1989) used the term *categorization* to describe how journalists report events. According to Stocking and Gross, categorization is inevitable, and it occurs when a journalist matches a real event with a stored category or cognition of a similar event to achieve an understanding of the real event. These generic story types have also been referred to as *schemata* and *frames* (Biklen, 1987; Gitlin, 1980; Goffman, 1974; Rachlin, 1988; Thompson, 1991; Tuchman, 1978; and others).

The concept of news framing stemmed from a sociological and philosophical notion of organizing events and experiences (Gitlin, 1980; Goffman, 1974; Rachlin, 1988; Tuchman, 1978). Where agenda-setting scrutinizes the professional and organizational levels of news selection, framing adopts a macro-level approach by examining the packaging and dissemination of information at the social level.

Goffman (1974) described frames as "shadows of events" or more explicitly, "the principles of organization that govern events . . . and our subjective involvement in them" (p. 10-11). Similarly, Tuchman (1978) used a "news as a window" metaphor to describe framing: The size, number of panes, clarity, and view of news frames conjoin and influence one's perceptions of the world. Gitlin (1980) explained that the existence of news frames allows journalists to process large amounts of information quickly and routinely. He described the process of framing an event as follows: (1)

recognizing the event as information, (2) assigning it to cognitive categories, and (3) packaging it for efficient relay to its audience.

Framing theorists make the case that the way news is framed—what is asked and not asked, what is included and excluded, who is asked and who is not, what is assumed and not assumed—inherently serves to define or construct a subjective version of reality for its audience. Thus, the act of making news is the act of constructing social reality rather than a picture of it (Tuchman, 1978). But whose version of reality is presented? At the surface level, agenda-setting theorists would shift responsibility to the journalists and their organizations. Framing theorists, however, delve deeper and insist that the social construction of reality is hegemonic. In other words, the dominant economic, political, and social ideologies are perpetuated by the media in their attempt to reflect reality. The result is a legitimation and maintenance of the status quo, which Gross (1988) referred to as white, male, upper middle class, heterosexuals (without a disability).

Therein lies the power of the mass media. Gitlin (1980) further illustrated the power of news making as follows:

Media are mobile spotlights, not passive mirrors of the society: selectivity is the instrument of their action. A news story adopts a certain frame and then rejects or downplays material that is discrepant. (p. 49)

One of this study's original arguments is invoked by the concept of news framing—that unlike television and film, newspapers are supposed to be non-fictitious and, therefore, should present accurate images of disability. It would appear, however, that since each newspaper article can only provide

one interpretation of events, then newspapers are inherently fictitious. Gross (1988) further explained that the perspectives of minority groups are not presented often in the media, but even when minority images and interests are received by the majority, it is only when filtered through "mainstream lenses." One can, then, gain insight into present attitudes toward persons with disabilities simply by examining what exactly these lenses or news frames are and how they are presented.

Every news story can be framed in a number of ways. With planning and investigation, a journalist can transform a "poignant human interest story" frame into a hard-hitting, serious news piece about disability issues. As a hypothetical example, assume a journalist wrote an article that dramatically recounted the story of a teenage boy who must work after school to support his disabled, unemployed mother. This poignant human interest piece, if approached from a different perspective, can become an issue-oriented, "hard news" story. For instance, what if the reporter discovered that the mother was forced to quit her job after a paralyzing accident because no adequate transportation existed to help her get to and from work. Why? Perhaps the mother used a wheelchair and the local buses were not equipped with lifts. Why not? Perhaps public transportation funds were recently cut by State government in an effort to reallocate money for beautification of the state's public parks. And so on. Since one key factor of newsworthiness is temporal, both in terms of collection and dissemination of current events, perhaps it is understandable why journalists often succumb to the ease of such a prevalent angle. Consequently, if news framing is inevitable, then it is the

responsibility of the journalist to discover what essentially makes each story newsworthy and frame it accordingly.

Mass Media Images of Physical Disabilities

Much has been written regarding the mass media's presentation of persons with disabilities. In general, the majority of disability portrayals in newspapers as well as television and film are stereotypical and stigmatizing in nature (Bogdan, Biklen, Shapiro, & Spelkoman, 1982; Clogston, 1992; Clogston, 1993; Donaldson, 1980; Guleff, 1994; Haller, 1992; Harris, 1989; Johnson & Elkins, 1989; Klobas, 1988; Signorielli, 1993; Zola, 1985; and others). For example, physical disabilities are continually presented as an obstacle that, with hard work, can be overcome. Johnson and Elkins (1989) illustrated why this notion of overcoming obstacles should be avoided in journalism:

Using the term "overcome" inaccurately suggests that the task at hand for the disabled person is to somehow solve discrimination by herself. This is much the same as suggesting that a woman act like a man and a black person overcome race and try to act more white. (p. 24)

Another prominent theme in the mass media is that of the *bitter crip-super crip* dichotomy (Johnson, 1993; Klobas, 1988). Disabled individuals are often depicted as either cynical, sexless characters who blame society for their impairments or as courageous heroes who don't let disability defeat them. In either scenario, however, the impression left is one that the general public cannot easily relate to or empathize with. Persons with disabilities are seldom depicted as average citizens in an ordinary, everyday way (Klobas, 1988).

Because television and film are such pervasive media for disseminating images about American society and the people within society, it cannot be ignored in this research. It is the collective mass media that influence our impressions about the world; thus, the following section briefly outlines the depiction of disabilities in television and film. It is important to reiterate that these (negative) portrayals are often more familiar and more accepted than the realities.

Television and Film Portrayals

Many scholars opt to analyze the visual media's treatment of disabilities simply because the images are so visually transparent. As previously mentioned, a central theme in the mass media is that of disability as a personal problem that must be overcome. For example, when disabled characters are present in television or film, this notion of overcoming a disability is often the main plot of the story. On the other hand, in those instances in which the disability does not take center stage, the lives of disabled characters are quite empty (Klobas, 1988). Disabled characters are often depicted in the passive voice (i.e., not talking, but being talked about) which results in dehumanization and infantilization. Zola (1985) noted that three-quarters of the disabled characters on television were submissive in their interactions with others:

Thus, impotence and dependence characterize their relationships. Their personality traits parallel this. They were presented as uncultured, stupid, defensive, and lacking in self-confidence. Physically, they were shown as passive and weak. Gone were the saving graces of long-suffering patience and generosity of some bygone literature. Front and center were impatience, selfishness, and bitterness. (p. 8)

Blindness: Some Common Misrepresentations in Television and Film.

Blindness is the most common physical disability depicted in the mass media, and it is often the most inaccurately represented one. Standard is the impression of blindness as total darkness. Klobas (1988) found statistics collected by the Center for the Partially Sighted in Santa Monica, CA, which indicated that only 6% of the nation's visually impaired population is completely blind, while, ironically, less than 6% of visually impaired characters in television and film have any degree of usable vision.

Another common portrayal is the blind character who possesses a sixth sense. The popular sixth sense myth refers to a blind character's heightened use of one (or more) of his or her remaining senses. Two fairly recent examples of this ability are evident in the films *Scent of a Woman* and *Sneakers*. Both of the blind characters in the two films possessed numerous sixth sense abilities, such as detecting a precise geographic location by the sound a car wheel makes on a highway, and identifying the physical characteristics of a flight attendant by the smell of her perfume. Other inaccurate depictions of blindness in television and film include face feeling and the improper use of mobility canes.

Mass Media Stereotypes of Deafness. Although it is portrayed less frequently than blindness, dramatic images of deafness also appear on screen. As with blind characters, deaf characters play a fairly limited variety of roles in tiresome, recurrent themes (Klobas, 1988). Almost a prerequisite in a story about a deaf person is the "almost getting killed" scene. As the term conveys, these are scenes in which the deaf character narrowly escapes being struck by a car, a bus, a train, a horse, and so forth. This stereotypical scene of a brush with disaster suggests that deaf people are totally unaware of the dangers in their surroundings.

Another prevailing myth is that all deaf people want to learn to speak. In actuality, deaf persons are said to belong to the "deaf community" because of the cohesiveness of this group and its satisfaction with communication through sign language. Stories in which a deaf person musters the ability to speak vocally to communicate with the world imply that unless a person can effectively use his or her own voice, he or she will be unable to function in society. Other misrepresentations include poor use of sign language, misuse of interpreters, and deaf persons as unable to drive.

Wheelchair Users: A Host of Media Myths. In television and film, persons who use wheelchairs are visually the easiest to detect; thus, they are the easiest to scrutinize. According to Klobas, of all of the images of characters who use wheelchairs, the most dominant and recurring image illustrates the person in the wheelchair as sexually inept. The 1978 Academy Award-winning film, *Coming Home*, created much controversy as the first movie to incorporate an explicit love scene between a woman and a man with

paralysis. The progress toward public awareness gained by this film may have been lost by such perpetrators of the "lack of sexual capacity" mythology as *Thou Shalt Not Commit Adultery*. In this film, a paralyzed man allowed his wife to seek sexual gratification from another man because of his presumed sexual incapacabilities.

Similar to the portrayals of deaf characters whose life's ambition is to learn to speak, characters who use wheelchairs are frequently depicted as absorbed in learning to walk (Klobas). This image suggests that unless the wheelchair user can "conquer" his or her disability, he or she is doomed to an unfulfilling life. Other frequent misuses include wheelchair misrepresentation, i.e. wrong type and/or wrong size, and the use of stigmatizing language (such as "confined to a wheelchair" or "wheelchair bound"). The issue of appropriate language is discussed in more detail in the following section.

Newspaper Coverage of Disabilities

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 has been described as the most significant civil rights legislation to become law in 25 years (Strothers, 1992). However, many people not directly involved in politics or disability issues may be unfamiliar with the ADA because of its lack of press coverage (Johnson, 1993). Johnson extrapolated this argument by stating that "the U.S. media have studiously avoided covering disability-rights issues for years, in favor of the soft but ever popular story of the courageous individual who hasn't let disability slow her down" (p. 106).

For example, Canadian Rick Hansen's physical endurance amazed the world with his two-year trek across the globe in a wheelchair. According to Krossel (1988), who studied news coverage of the event, reporters abandoned their usual skepticism in their coverage of the Hansen story and instead acted like "promoters and PR people." "The press . . . failed to get beyond the hoopla," explained Krossel (p. 46).

Editor Susan LeTempio (as cited in John, 1991, p. 12) confirmed the difficulty in receiving coverage of hard news disability issues, when she stated: "There's only one way editors will cover disability stories, and that's the sympathy angle." LeTempio introduced a valid argument—that reporters themselves should not bear the brunt of a lack of coverage because they are not responsible for deciding which stories will appear in print. In the Krossel (1988) interview with Mary Johnson, Johnson explained:

While some reporters would prefer to write issue-oriented [disability] articles, their editors seem to think that readers are more interested in emotion-grabbing human interest stories. They feel that disability issues just don't affect a large enough segment of the population to interest many readers. (p. 47)

Later Johnson (1993) added: "One reporter was told by his editor that they'd 'done the disability story' and suggested that another one wouldn't be welcome for about a year" (p. 107). This statement reinforces the notion that the dissemination of news relies upon value judgments.

Biklen (1987) examined print journalism's treatment of two highly publicized stories in 1983—coverage of Baby Jane Doe and Elizabeth Bouvia. The Baby Jane Doe story involved an infant born with multiple disabilities; the hospital wanted to perform surgery to save the infant's life, but the

parents refused it. The Bouvia story involved a woman with severe cerebral palsy who attempted suicide via starvation while in the hospital; the hospital staff force-fed her to sustain her life, so she subsequently filed a lawsuit. Biklen described the press' coverage of the two stories in terms of the frames that were used. He noted that in the two stories mentioned, as well as most disability stories, the dominant frame is tragedy.

Much of what frames a news story is the type of language used. DeView, Elkins, Johnson, Jones, and Newbacher (1989) discovered that the first Associated Press stylebook entry under "handicapped" did not appear until 1987. In their own stylebook intended for journalism students, DeView et al. listed the following terms as ones to be avoided when reporting on disabilities: "handicapped," "handi-capable," "victim," "in spite of," "afflicted," "wheelchair bound," "confined to a chair," "overcome," "the disabled," and so on. In lieu of these terms which insinuate that disabled people are helpless and/or unequal, journalists should use less physically descriptive phrases such as "individual with a disability," "person in a wheelchair," and "wheelchair user."

In his article, *Tips for Improving Our Performance*, Stothers (1992) provided insight on how to write pieces about disabled individuals. He noted that reporters and editors ought to ask themselves two important questions: Would I do this story if the person did not have a disability? Is the story newsworthy, or is it just exploiting disability for some other end? Like other demographics such as age, race, and religion, a person's disability should only be included if it truly contributes to the story.

Review of Similar Content Analyses

The topic of quantitatively studying mass media and persons with disabilities is not a new one. Within the past 10 years, a number of content analyses have been published on this topic—six of them are examined in this section. Five of the studies used newspapers as the sole medium for analysis, while one study used feature films as its unit of measurement. The research studies were published between 1988 and 1993, and, although their timeliness was valuable to this research, most of them were problematic or flawed to some extent. Each study will be discussed as it relates to this thesis.

John S. Clogston's (1992) study of 16 prestige and high circulation dailies yielded a comprehensive examination of newspaper coverage of persons with disabilities. He established a theoretical framework for coding newspaper stories (which was adopted as a key variable in this researcher's study). Clogston hypothesized that story content for disability-related newspaper articles would follow more *traditional* rather than *progressive* standards (refer to the *Methods* section of this thesis for a detailed explanation of traditional vs. progressive stories). In addition, he studied the roles, issues, and headline language of disability stories with a focus on organizational and professional constraints.

Newspaper articles used in the study ($N=363$) were taken from the first three months of 1990. This factor itself can be considered problematic, however, because it occurred during final legislative actions for the passing of the Americans with Disabilities Act which came in July of that year. Coverage of the ADA would by nature center around issue-oriented topics rather than

human interest stories. Ultimately, this would likely skew coverage toward the progressive model. This, in fact, was the study's outcome.

In addition, Clogston administered a questionnaire to each of the journalists whose name appeared on the byline of the analyzed newspaper stories. He asked whether their newsrooms had style guidelines dealing with disabilities and whether they had a boss or coworker with a disability. He hypothesized that the presence of style guideline and/or the presence of a disabled coworker would result in more progressive disability coverage. Both hypotheses were supported with strongest support for the "contact with a disabled coworker" hypothesis. From the journalists who responded, the results were as follows: With "no contact with a disabled coworker," 43% of stories used progressive roles, while "contact with a disabled coworker" yielded 53% of stories with progressive roles. Respectively, progressive issues stories yielded 29% (no contact) vs. 44% (contact). Consequently, newsroom diversity may have a positive or progressive influence on the type of issues covered in disability-related stories, according to Clogston. It seems interesting, though, that he did not ask journalists whether they themselves had a disability or had a family member or close friend with one, as these factors are also likely to effect the journalists' sensitivity toward disability issues.

In the following year, Clogston (1993) conducted another, more extensive, content analysis which examined newspaper coverage of persons with disabilities. This time he studied newspaper articles over a period of time and narrowed his focus to three major U.S. papers—the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, and the *New York Times*. Utilizing the same

theoretical models of traditional vs. progressive stories (and the subcategories within each), Clogston collected articles from 1976, 1981, 1986, and 1991 (N=1,359). Overall results showed that the percentage of progressive stories rose from 40% in 1976 to 44% in 1981, then down to 41% in 1986 and up to nearly 57% in 1991. More specifically, he noted a decrease in the number of government support stories and an increase in the number of access/awareness and discrimination stories in 1991. Again, coverage was likely to be skewed because implementation of the 1990 ADA began in 1991. Thus, the 1991 coverage of persons with disabilities could easily have expressed a higher ratio of issue-oriented stories.

Catlett and Martin (1993) adopted a more psychological approach to studying newspaper coverage of persons with disabilities. They inquired: "(a) how are persons with disabilities presented to the public, and (b) what are the underlying attitudes or values toward persons with disabilities evident in the article descriptions?" (p. 2). Although at first this latent approach to a content analysis seemed too ambiguous, the study did generate interesting results. Catlett and Martin discovered that of the 227 news articles analyzed, 22.2% of the articles reflected pity, 17.8% reflected "super human" feats, 16.9% expressed a devaluation of disabled persons, 12.8% portrayed disabled persons as adversaries, and a mere 7.2% of the articles presented disabled persons realistically, equally, fairly, and intelligently. Only stories relating directly to a person or persons with a disability were included in the research—stories pertaining to disability organizations, entertainment, legislature, media reviews, and so on were excluded.

The categorical breakdowns mentioned above, although significant, were not well operationalized. Descriptions of what constituted each category were somewhat limited and convoluted, and these categories were neither mutually exclusive nor exhaustive. In addition, no detailed explanation was given regarding how intercoder reliability was accounted for. Moreover, Catlett and Martin's search parameters lacked thoroughness; articles were indexed by title only. That is, searches were conducted solely on the basis of keywords such as "handicapped," "blind," and "discrimination" found within a story's title. Thus, any disability stories that did not have a disability-laden title were excluded from the study. Catlett and Martin's newspaper portrayal categories did nonetheless prove relevant as a means for categorizing the *context* of newspaper articles. This thesis adopted a modified version of Catlett and Martin's contextual categories. A more detailed explanation is given in the *Methods* section.

Keller, Hallahan, McShane, Crowley, and Blandford (1990) content analyzed several concepts in their study of newspaper coverage of disabled individuals. In an attempt at representativeness, Keller et al. obtained a cluster sample consisting of 12 American newspapers (four geographic regions were established, and one newspaper was randomly selected from each region according to the following circulation size: less than 100,000, 100,000 to 500,000, and more than 500,000.) In addition, each of the 12 newspapers was analyzed on the basis of a randomly selected week (e.g., a randomly chosen Monday, Tuesday, etc.) which yielded a total of 428 disability-related newspaper articles. If coded and analyzed accurately, the study's results could have been generalized across the entire nation.

However, little attempt was made to define variables such as (a) story focus (choices were simply major or minor focus with no explanation of each); (b) type of story (which included such non-operationalized terms as features, news, soft news, and other); (c) portrayal (positive, negative, or neutral); and (d) possible improvement of disabled person's condition (which included yes, no, or neutral). From these four variables, the only well defined one was "possible improvement," which included such attributes as disability improvement because of charity, technology, education, social contacts, medicine, personal effort, therapy, religion, and other. The language of this article and the mere presence of the fourth variable (possible improvement) suggested that newspaper coverage *should* discuss possibilities for improving a person's disability. Thus, the common stigmatizing misconception that disability is something that must be overcome is ever present in the Keller et al. study.

Beth Haller's (1993) study focused attention on newspaper coverage before, during, and after a specific disability-related event. In 1988, Gallaudet University in Washington, DC, the world's only university for deaf people, drew national media attention when its protesting students shut down the school for seven days after a woman who could hear (and who did not know sign language) was appointed as university president over two qualified deaf candidates.

Haller content analyzed the *New York Times'* and the *Washington Post's* coverage of deaf persons before (1986), during (1988), and after (1990) the university protest. To discover whether the "Deaf President Now" protest resulted in changes in coverage of deaf persons in the *Times* and the *Post*,

Haller examined the following variables: (a) disability models (utilizing Clogston's *traditional* and *progressive* categories); (b) focus of story (issue, individual, or combination of the two); (c) type of story (news, feature, or news feature); and (d) placement of story (front section, metro section, or other section). Haller's explanation of the study's results are as follows:

This study . . . reveals that a disability group can break free of more stereotypical coverage when they promote their concerns vigorously enough. The traditional disability models were rarely reflected during the Deaf President Now movement, and stories maintained a more progressive presentation in the two years following the protest. (p. 177)

Although Haller's research showed a definite trend which supported her hypothesis, she assumed the presence of a correlation where one might not have existed. By stating: "This research shows how newspapers assimilated this new understanding to provide less stigmatizing coverage in subsequent years," Haller overlooked one important factor. The year 1990 marked the study's post-protest coverage, but no mention was made of the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act as a contributing factor toward more issue-oriented, progressive reporting. Thus, only Haller's analysis of 1986 and 1988 newspaper coverage are validated.

As a means of establishing more breadth, this research reviewed one additional content analysis—Byrd and Elliot's (1988) *Disability in full-length feature films: Frequency and quality of films over an 11 year span*. The research sample consisted of all major films depicting disability that were viewed in the United States between 1976 and 1986 and reported in *The Monthly Film Bulletin* and *Consumer Reports*. The purpose of Byrd and

Elliot's study was to (a) quantify the number of disability portrayals in American films, and (b) examine the quality of the films as described by film critics and consumers.

Byrd and Elliot found that of 177 total disability portrayals in 136 films, a large number ($n=75$) focused on psychiatric disorders. However, the study's disability categories were ill-defined, which resulted in a flawed study. For example, "cancer," "alcoholism," and "drug addiction" each counted as a separate category, while "sensory disorder" apparently included blindness, deafness, and neural impairments—although such clarifications were not given. Additionally, by creating one category called "cardiopulmonary and chronic illness," the researchers failed to recognize that for an impairment to be considered a disability, it must be chronic (making every disability, by definition, fit into this particular category).

Also, instead of analyzing the quality of the portrayals of disabled individuals in films, the research sought to examine only the film critics' and consumers' opinions of the overall quality of the films. Byrd and Elliot seemingly wanted to find out if the mere presence of disabled characters impacted the public's overall impression of the films. In their conclusion, they stated: "It would seem, however, that in a film viewed positively by both critic and consumer, that the disability portrayal did not detract from the overall quality of the film and perhaps even added to it" (1988, p. 146). Aside from the fact that no logical correlation exists between the overall quality of a film and its presence or absence of disabled characters, the simple notion that the study sought to discover such a correlation again shows how inextricably bound researchers can be to their personal values and judgments.

The collection of disability-related content analyses presented here lends validity to this research in three ways. First, some of the studies provided a firm methodological basis for analyzing data (i.e., Clogston, 1992; Clogston, 1993; Haller, 1993), which can be emulated in this research. Next, the most recently analyzed coverage was from 1991, hence, a need to examine newspaper coverage of persons with disabilities since 1991 exists. Finally, as mentioned throughout this background review, most of the existing research on this topic was, to some extent, problematic. The studies either lacked a guiding theory of mass communication, made use of poorly operationalized variables, overgeneralized study results, approached the research with an unconsciously stigmatizing perspective, or adopted a combination of these research flaws. This thesis attempted to avoid each of those pitfalls and present a timely, well-defined, theory-supported, and sensitive representation of newspaper coverage of persons with disabilities.

III. Methods

A content analysis was conducted using the *New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times* to examine coverage of people with physical disabilities. Three years were selected for analysis—1986, 1990, and 1994—for the purposes of comparing the quantity, type, content, and context of disability-related newspaper coverage over the 8-year time period. The years 1986 and 1994 were selected not only on the basis that they are both equidistant from the passage of the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act, but also because each year provides a sufficient time period to measure long term change of newspaper coverage both before and after the ADA. By analyzing coverage during 1990, a means for comparison can be made in terms of pre-ADA and post-ADA newspaper coverage. Secondly, by including newspaper articles from 1990, study results from that year can be compared with those of similar studies conducted during the early 1990's.

Extensive searches were performed using on-line news resources (i.e., UC MELVYL and LEXIS/NEXIS) to identify and collect every newspaper article within the specified time periods that pertained in some way to people with physical disabilities. Both the *New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times* are indexed newspapers through the MELVYL system, and thus, consistent search parameters were met. Articles were searched by keyword (a pre-coded parameter in the MELVYL database). A comprehensive keywords list was compiled to yield a representative collection of articles related to physical disabilities. Examples of keywords include disabled/disability,

handicapped, blind, deaf, wheelchair, paraplegia, quadriplegia, and so forth. (For a complete list of keywords as they appeared in the searches, with word truncations and Boolean operators included, refer to Appendix A.)

Stories that pertained exclusively to mental disabilities—for example, mental illnesses, developmental disabilities, and learning disabilities—were excluded from this study. In addition, stories that pertained to AIDS or HIV were excluded. Although the Americans with Disabilities Act considers people with AIDS physically disabled, the prevalence of this topic in terms of media attention merits an entire study of its own. Therefore, AIDS or HIV stories were only included if the major focus of such a story directly involved the ADA. Other excluded topics were stories related to worker's compensation and disability insurance—unless they clearly pertained to persons with physical disabilities. Once all articles were collected, examined for inclusion, and coded, a total of 545 stories were quantitatively analyzed in the study.

Coding Process

All relevant articles were coded according to the following criteria: (a) newspaper source, (b) date of story, (c) type of news, (d) length of story, (e) use of graphics within story, (f) story's placement in newspaper, (g) disability model used, (h) news frame presented, and (i) type of disability represented. An examination of each variable is provided in this section.

After each article was read, the type of news story was established. The article was placed into one of the following three categories of news types: hard news, soft news, or straight news/other. Because the characteristics of

news stories often overlap, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish one news type from another. For the purposes of this research, an attempt was made to operationalize news story types. In general terms, hard news stories were defined as those stories in which the main purpose was to convey news. Such stories may have contained some human interest elements, but to be considered hard news, the main focus must clearly have involved events and/or issues (Metzler, 1986; Harriss, Leiter, & Johnson, 1992). Some examples of hard news categories include current events, politics, international relations, education, economics, employment, and so on (Metzler; Harriss et al.).

In contrast, soft news stories presented a more personal and narrative approach. The term *feature* is applied to "a story that is based wholly on human interest—the story that does not quite conform to the rigid standards of hard news" (Harriss et al., 1992, p. 152). Features, personality profiles, and arts and entertainment articles are some examples of soft news stories. Editorials, syndicated columns, and "letters to the editor" were also included in the soft news category since they possess a more narrative tone and usually combine issues with personal elements.

Finally, Metzler (1986) described straight news as the "presentation of unvarnished facts without an attempt to analyze, interpret, or capture human interest," such as reports on weather, deaths, and sports scores (p. 26). Since the crux of this research was to study portrayals in disability-related news articles, greater emphasis was placed upon the hard news vs. soft news dichotomy; all stories that did not represent one of these two types were coded

into the straight news/other category. (Appendix B gives a complete description of what constituted each news type.)

In addition to the news type variable, disability stories were measured in terms of their prominence in the newspapers. Length of news story was defined as the amount of physical space devoted to one particular news article. The length of each story was initially measured according to its number of column inches. This ratio-level variable was later collapsed into the following categories: short articles (1 to 12 inches), medium-length articles (13 to 30 inches), and long articles (more than 30 inches). Photographs, portraits, charts, tables, illustrations, and other graphics were included both in the calculation of total story length and as a separate coded variable. Placement of each story as it appeared in the newspaper was also categorized. The attributes of this variable included (a) front page, (b) front section, (c) non-front Metro/National section, (d) Living/Lifestyles/Leisure section, (e) Business/Finance section, and (f) unknown or other section. A citations list obtained via the MELVYL system provided the length and placement of each news story as well as a list of any graphics that accompanied each article. This information was used to account for the story length, use of graphics, and placement variables.

The next set of variables in the content analysis examined the theoretical disability model of each news story. This research employed the preexisting disability models established by Clogston (1992, 1993). By adhering to Clogston's models and coding methods, each news story subscribed to one of the following models: traditional news coverage or progressive news coverage.

According to Clogston, the traditional disability model typically shows the disabled person or group as deviant, dependent, and/or defective. Disability is described as either an insurmountable obstacle or something that the individual needs to overcome to fit into society. In this research, such depictions were measured as a separate variable: news frame. Thus, Clogston's disability models were coded solely on the basis of news content. For example, news stories within this traditional model focus on medical problems, dependency on government aid, special education, charities, victimization, and so forth (Clogston, 1992, 1993).

The progressive disability model views people as disabled by society, not their physical impairments. "The handicap is society's inability to adapt its physical, social, and occupational environment and its attitudes to disabled persons" (Haller, 1993, p. 170). The news focus here is on minority civil rights, educational integration, criticisms of federal aid programs, and so on (Clogston, 1992, 1993). Each of the two models can be further classified according to the 16 subcategories also established by Clogston (1992, 1993). (See Appendix C for Clogston's classifications for the traditional and progressive models.)

It is important to distinguish between type and model of news story as these variables are independent of one another. A traditional news article may be either hard news or soft news; a progressive news article may be either hard or soft news as well. Here are some examples of how stories were classified:

1. *progressive hard news* - A story about businesses preparing to comply with the new Americans with Disabilities Act. Large firms generally

supported making accommodations for disabled employees, while smaller enterprises expressed concerns about costs (Applegate, *Los Angeles Times*, 1990).

2. *progressive soft news* - A story about disabled skiers. Feature described a variety of adaptive ski equipment that exists for wheelchair users (Lloyd, *New York Times*, 1994).

3. *traditional hard news* - A story about the Supreme Court's ruling that disabled children of poor families qualify to receive government aid (Greenhouse, *New York Times*, 1990).

4. *traditional soft news* - A story about the search for a new Easter Seals Society poster child. Feature explained the process for selecting the perfect disabled child (Kraft, *Los Angeles Times*, 1986).

As Clogston's disability models served to analyze the content of newspaper coverage, the next variable, news frame, accounted for the context of each news story. As defined earlier, a news frame is a stock story type that encapsulates an event or issue to present a story in a particular way. In addition to determining how each story will be packaged, news frames also set the tone of an article. By modifying the five newspaper portrayal categories established by Catlett and Martin (1993) (see Appendix D), the following six categories comprised this study's news frame variable:

1. *The Pity/Sympathy Frame* - Article conveyed an undertone of pity or sympathy toward the person or group with disabilities. News article depicted people with disabilities as either victims, physically weak/unhealthy, or dependent upon the good will of society. The article's tone implied dehumanization or infantilization of persons with disabilities.

2. *The "Different from Us"/Segregation Frame* - Article presented people with disabilities as deviant, defective, or simply different from the cultural normatives. Article described disability groups as either "separate" from the mainstream, adversarial, or unable to assimilate with the status quo. The focus was clearly on segregation of disabled people or groups. Article may have implied a de-valuation or denial of basic rights.

3. *The Super Human/Inspirational Frame* - Article conveyed an undertone of "super humanness." People with disabilities were viewed as having either super human or "special" characteristics which allowed them to succeed where even those with no disabilities may not have typically found success. The article's focus was on overcoming a disability or success "despite" a disability.

4. *The "Just Like Everyone Else"/Integration Frame* - Article represented people with disabilities as having the same rights as everyone else in society—as having the same hopes, dreams, and emotions as anyone else. The article presented disabled individuals realistically, equally, fairly,

and intelligently. Article may describe integration, access, or accommodations as an entitled means to achieving equality or fairness.

5. *The Scientific Research Frame* - Entire article focused on research innovations such as new drugs, treatments, medical procedures, and so forth. It made no references to people with disabilities (other than how the innovation would benefit them).

6. *Other* - Article utilized a frame other than the five described above.

This researcher realizes that a complete distinction between the proposed frames does not exist, and in a few instances, the frames did overlap. However, this variable by its very nature is subjective, thus, mutual exclusivity is not an essential criterion. The study's focus, then, was the *dominant* frame used by the journalist. Therefore, articles were coded according to the contextual frame that best described the way each news story was packaged. Additionally, a few news stories equally exemplified more than one frame; in such a case, the story was coded according to the two frames that best described it. Because the nature of news framing places each story into a neat, easily-recognizable package, this occurrence was rare.

Finally, the specific disability reported in each story was also coded to determine whether a relationship existed between different disabilities and type of news stories, news frames, or time. This variable's attributes included: (a) general - either disabilities in general or a variety of specific disabilities were reported; (b) blind/visual impairment; (c) deaf/hearing impairment; (d) mobility impairment - wheelchair users, amputees, people with diseases

impairing movement (e.g., cerebral palsy); (e) multiple disabilities - people with more than one disability (e.g., deaf/blind people, people with multiple sclerosis, Lou Gehrig's disease, etc.); and (f) other physical disability - leukemia, Siamese twins, facial or body disfigurements, and so forth.

Once all relevant news stories were coded according to the variables defined above, contingency tables were created and chi-square tests were conducted to statistically analyze relationships between variables. Hypotheses were supported if chi-square tests showed statistical significance at least at the 95% level ($p < .05$). The study's findings are described in detail in the *Results* section of this thesis.

Intercoder Reliability

To ensure the accuracy of the coding process, the two coders in this study measured 60 of the 545 articles for intercoder reliability. Since all articles were identified numerically, a table of random numbers was used to determine which articles would be intercoded. The selected newspaper articles were examined in no particular order. Numerical values were assigned to all attributes of the 11 variables used in the study (refer to Appendix E). Data from the intercoded stories was compared in terms of matches and discrepancies in the coding values. For example, 55 matches and 5 discrepancies for one variable translated into an intercoder reliability of 92%. The study's reliability results were as follows: (a) source = 100%, (b) date = 100%, (c) type of news = 93%, (d) story length = 100%, (e) use of graphics = 100%, (f) story placement = 98%, (g) disability model = 92%, (h) model subcategory = 83%, (i) news frame = 85%, (j) second frame = 98%, and (k)

disability represented = 97%. The overall intercoder reliability of all variables combined was 95%.

The Issue of Weighting

Before the newspaper articles were analyzed, a test was administered to determine whether weighting of either newspaper was necessary. Since the size of the *New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times* is identical (8 column inches wide and 22 inches tall), overall size was calculated by counting the number of pages within each newspaper over a period of time.

First, a method for selecting newspapers was established. This research modified the technique used by Keller et al. (1990) to obtain a representative sample of newspapers. A week (7 newspapers) in 1986 was obtained by randomly selecting a Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, and so on. The process was repeated for 1994. Once the dates were established, the appropriate days' newspapers were collected from both the *New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times*. By measuring identical dates for both newspapers, the study avoided the possibility of skewed coverage based upon a particular event. A total of 28 newspapers were measured according to their number of pages. All news, advertisements, classified sections, and announcements were included. Newspaper supplements such as television guides and weekly magazines were excluded. Finally, the daily totals were summed and averaged (see Appendix F). The average *Los Angeles Times* daily newspaper consisted of 123 pages, and the *New York Times* averaged 125 pages. Thus, weighting was deemed unnecessary.

Description of Hypotheses

The main purpose of this research was to determine whether newspaper coverage has changed over the 8-year time period examined, and if so, to what degree. The study attempted to show support for five independent hypotheses:

1. The total number of disability-related news stories will increase over time.
2. The percentage of disability-related news stories categorized as progressive will be higher in 1994 than in either 1986 or 1990, while the percentage of traditional stories will decrease over time.
3. The percentage of disability-related stories categorized as hard news will be higher in 1994 than in either 1986 or 1990, while the percentage of soft news stories will decrease over time.
4. Disability-related news will have more prominence in terms of story length, placement, and use of graphics in 1994 than in either 1986 or 1990.
5. The percentage of disability-related news stories categorized by the "just like everyone else"/integration frame will be higher in 1994 than in either 1986 or 1990.

In addition, informal predictions attempted to show that relationships existed among and between the many variables. More specifically, this

research argued for the existence of a relationship between disability model and news story type, disability model and news frame, and news story type and news frame. If observed, such relationships between variables would confirm the argument that content and context exist independently of one another and should not be assumed as interchangeable. Other research questions included: How did disability coverage differ among the *New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times*? Which story content was reported most frequently (e.g., discrimination and civil rights issues, personality profiles, medical focus, mainstreaming, etc.)? Were certain disabilities reported more frequently than others?

IV. Results

The study's findings indicated significant changes in the two newspapers' coverage over time with respect to some variables and minimal or no change with respect to others. Since an attempt was made to collect all newspaper articles pertaining to physical disabilities—printed in the *New York Times* or the *Los Angeles Times* in 1986, 1990, or 1994—the overall number of obtained articles was relevant. A total of 545 articles were analyzed. Although the size and length of both newspapers were similar enough to discourage weighting, they printed significantly different amounts of disability coverage. Overall, the *New York Times* accounted for 66% ($n = 360$) of all stories in the sample while the *Los Angeles Times* covered the remaining 34% ($n = 185$). In addition, the newspapers experienced fluctuations in their amount of disability coverage over time (see Figure 1).

The first hypothesis predicted that disability coverage would increase over the time period studied. Results showed partial support for this hypothesis (refer to Figure 1). When combined, the two newspapers produced an increase from 160 stories in 1986 to 205 stories in 1990, but then coverage declined in 1994 to 180 stories. Subsequently, since the total number of articles was higher in 1994 than in 1986, an "increase over time" was observed, and the hypothesis was conditionally supported. A chi-square was calculated based on the null hypothesis that no change would occur over time for the newspapers. Thus, expected values were derived by dividing the overall total number of stories for each newspaper by three, since articles were collected

Figure 1. Number of disability stories printed in the *Los Angeles Times* and the *New York Times* over time. Disability coverage in the *Los Angeles Times* was as follows: 1986 ($n = 47$), 1990 ($n = 71$), and 1994 ($n = 67$). The *New York Times* printed roughly twice as many disability stories as the *Los Angeles Times*: 1986 ($n = 113$), 1990 ($n = 134$), and 1994 ($n = 113$).

$\chi^2(2, N = 545) = 7.79, p < .025$

from three separate years. The *Los Angeles Times*' expected value was 62 stories, and the *New York Times*' expected value was 120 stories. The chi-square test revealed a statistically significant relationship ($p < .025$) between amount of news coverage and time. When examining the two newspapers separately, however, only the *Los Angeles Times* supported the first hypothesis. Although the *New York Times*' amount of disability coverage did increase in 1990, the number of disability stories printed in 1994 dropped to the same level as in 1986.

The second hypothesis predicted that the percentage of disability-related progressive stories (relative to the percentage of traditional stories) would be higher in 1994 than in either 1986 or 1990. Calculations revealed a steady increase in the proportion of progressive stories from 39% in 1986 to 42% in 1990 to 44% in 1994. Hypothesis 2 was not supported, however, because a chi-square test rejected the 5% overall increase as statistically significant ($p < .50$). Even though the results showed a slight increase in the number of progressive stories reported over time, the traditional model of news coverage dominated in all three of the years studied.

The third hypothesis predicted that the ratio of hard news to soft news stories would also increase over time. The results showed that newspaper coverage of hard news stories increased from 51% in 1986 to 59% in 1990, then it decreased to 47% in 1994. Because of this overall bell-shaped trend, Hypothesis 3 was also rejected. Consequently, the reciprocal effect was observed in coverage of soft news stories—they fell from 49% in 1986 to 41% in 1990, then rose to 53% in 1994. Straight news stories yielded little significance to the news type variable as only 9 such stories were analyzed.

The overall distribution of news types was as follows: (a) hard news - 52%, (b) soft news - 46%, and (c) straight news - 2%.

The fourth hypothesis predicted that disability-related stories would gain prominence over time in terms of story length, placement, and use of graphics. By 1994, disability stories occupied more column inches, became more dispersed throughout all sections of the newspapers, and included a variety of graphics more frequently (see Table 1). Thus, Hypothesis 4 was supported. However, chi-square tests yielded statistical significance for only two of the three variables—use of graphics held significance to only the 90% level. Table 1 presents the physical characteristics of disability stories in more detail.

First, disability articles increased their prominence in terms of story length. The overall mean story length was 16.1 column inches. When examined over time, the mean length of disability stories climbed from 14.3 column inches in 1986 to 17.0 column inches in 1994. Table 1 collapsed the results of story length into the following categories: short, medium, and long. As shown in the table, the percentage of short articles decreased by 5%, while the proportion of long stories more than tripled during the study's time period.

Although they produced a higher statistical significance ($p < .005$) than changes in story length ($p < .025$), the changes in story placement over time were more subtle and complex (refer to Table 1). For example, disability stories were twice as likely to appear on the front page in 1986 and 1990 than in 1994. Likewise, articles appearing in the newspaper's front sections

Table 1

Distribution of Story Prominence for All Disability Stories Over Time

	1986	1990	1994
Prominence	(n = 160)	(n = 205)	(n = 180)
Story Length*			
(in column inches)			
short (1 to 12)	46%	44%	41%
medium (13 to 30)	49	50	46
long (more than 30)	4	6	13
Story Placement**			
(section of newspaper)			
front page	8%	8%	4%
front section	55	54	37
non-front metro	14	19	26
living/lifestyles	10	8	11
business/finance	2	4	9
other/unknown	11	7	14
Use of Graphics***			
no graphics used	72%	60%	64%
graphics used	28	40	36

* $\chi^2(4, N = 545) = 11.86, p < .025$

** $\chi^2(10, N = 545) = 29.97, p < .005$

*** $\chi^2(2, N = 545) = 5.49, p < .10$

declined over time. While 1994 marked a decrease in stories printed on the front page or front section, these articles were distributed more evenly throughout all sections of the newspapers. In 1994, both newspapers ran more disability stories in the non-front Metro/National sections, the Living/Lifestyles sections, and the Business/Finance sections than in previous years. Specifically, the likelihood of a story appearing in the Business/Finance sections increased fourfold between 1986 and 1994. Thus, disability-related news stories moved from primarily the front of the newspaper in 1986 and 1990 to more overall coverage in 1994.

The use of graphics to supplement news stories also changed from 1986 to 1994. While a chi-square test did not reveal statistically significant changes over time, the analysis of this variable merits some discussion. As shown in Table 1, the majority of disability stories did not include graphics in either 1986, 1990, or 1994. However, an increase in graphics use over time was observed. In 1986, only photographs and portraits accompanied disability stories whereas in 1990 and 1994, a wide variety of graphics (e.g., photographs, charts, illustrations, etc.) supplemented the articles.

The fifth hypothesis examined the framing of disability news stories. It predicted that the percentage of stories marked by the "just like everyone else"/integration frame would be higher in 1994 than in either 1986 or 1990. This hypothesis was supported in part ($p < .05$). The majority (approximately two-thirds) of all disability stories were characterized by either the integration or pity/sympathy frames. As displayed in Table 2, the proportion of integration-framed stories did, in fact, rise steadily from 66% in 1986 to 82% in 1994. Consequently, the number of stories categorized by the pity/sympathy

frame declined substantially over time. The remaining frames were excluded from the statistical analysis because the only evident changes were between the two dominant frames. Over time, the frames marked by segregation, inspiration, scientific research, and other changed less than 4%.

Table 2

Relationship Between the Dominant News Frames in All Disability Stories Over Time

	1986	1990	1994
News Frame	(<i>n</i> = 102)	(<i>n</i> = 138)	(<i>n</i> = 119)
integration	66%	75%	82%
pity/sympathy	34	25	18

$$\chi^2(2, n = 359) = 7.33, p < .05$$

Examination of the study's key variables over time led to the support of Hypotheses 1, 4, and 5. This analysis also attempted to answer the supplemental research questions posed in the *Methods* section. Namely, the study compared disability coverage within the two newspapers as well as their relationships among news frames, news types, disability models, and disability representation.

A strong statistical relationship ($p < .005$) was observed between news frame and type of news. Although the integration, pity, and segregation frames found themselves balanced almost equally between hard and soft news, the remaining frames revealed more dramatic associations (see Table 3). For instance, inspirational stories were nearly always soft news, while

stories framed by scientific research were predominantly hard news. Thus, in some instances, a predictable relationship emerged between the frame (context) of a disability-related story and the type of news it embodied.

Table 3

Relationship Between News Frames and Types of News for All Disability Stories

News Frame		Type of News	
		Hard	Soft
research	(<i>n</i> = 70)	87%	13%
other	(<i>n</i> = 42)	67	33
pity/sympathy	(<i>n</i> = 91)	50	50
integration	(<i>n</i> = 262)	49	51
segregation	(<i>n</i> = 45)	49	51
inspirational	(<i>n</i> = 26)	8	92

Note. The straight news/other stories were excluded as there were too few to analyze statistically.

$$\chi^2(5, N = 536) = 60.63, p < .005$$

The most significant relationship of the entire study was observed between news frame and disability model ($p < .005$). Of the 228 progressive articles collected, 76% used integration as the dominant frame. By contrast, the integration-framed stories accounted for only 30% of all traditional articles. Table 4 presents the relationship between news frames and disability models. Notice that each frame is most frequently adopted in traditional

stories—except for integration. The nuances of the relationship observed between news frames and disability models supports the argument that context is an integral part of content when analyzing newspaper coverage.

Table 4

Relationship Between News Frames and Disability Models for All Disability Stories

News Frame		Disability Model	
		Traditional	Progressive
inspirational	(<i>n</i> = 26)	92%	8%
pity/sympathy	(<i>n</i> = 91)	88	12
research	(<i>n</i> = 71)	87	13
segregation	(<i>n</i> = 45)	71	29
other	(<i>n</i> = 44)	55	46
integration	(<i>n</i> = 268)	35	65

$$X^2(5, N = 545) = 131.86, p < .005$$

In many instances, disability coverage differed between the *New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times*. As discussed earlier, the amount of coverage collected for this research differed greatly—overall, nearly twice as many disability articles were reported in the *New York Times* (*N* = 360) than in the *Los Angeles Times* (*N* = 185). This finding was unmistakably the most significant discrepancy between the two newspapers; however, differences among the other variables merit inclusion in this section as well.

First, a difference was discovered in the type of news covered by the newspapers. While the *Los Angeles Times*' overall proportion of hard news vs. soft news coverage yielded 61% hard news to 39% soft news, the *New York Times* printed relatively equal amounts of hard and soft news. Table 5 illustrates the over time changes in news type for the two newspapers. While the *Los Angeles Times* experienced a substantial bell-shaped trend with respect to hard news over time ($p < .005$), the *New York Times* showed minimal change between 1986 and 1994. Moreover, the *New York Times* maintained a balance between hard and soft news, whereas the *Los Angeles Times* was dominated by hard news in 1986 and 1990 and then by soft news in 1994.

Table 5

Distribution of News Type for Disability Stories in the *Los Angeles Times* and the *New York Times* Over Time

Type of News	1986	1990	1994
Los Angeles Times*	($n = 47$)	($n = 71$)	($n = 67$)
hard news	60%	76%	46%
soft news	40	24	54
New York Times**	($n = 111$)	($n = 133$)	($n = 108$)
hard news	49%	50%	49%
soft news	51	50	51

Note. The straight news/other stories were excluded as there were too few to analyze statistically.

* $\chi^2(2, N = 185) = 13.51, p < .005$ ** $\chi^2(2, N = 351) = 0.15, p < .50$

Stories relating to disabilities held somewhat different prominence in the two newspapers as well. For example, the mean length for disability stories in the *Los Angeles Times* was 15.2 column inches compared to 16.5 column inches in the *New York Times*. Although the average *New York Times* disability story was longer, the *Los Angeles Times* printed a higher proportion of long stories—12% compared to 6% in the *New York Times*. Over time, the proportion of long stories more than doubled in both newspapers, but the changes in the *Los Angeles Times* were more significant (see Table 6). Despite its increase in printing long stories, the overall relationship between story length and time was not statistically significant for the *New York Times*.

A distinction was also observed between the two newspapers' use of graphics to supplement a disability story (see Table 7). Although the majority of all stories did not include graphics for either newspaper; overall, the *New York Times* supplemented 39% of its stories with photographs, charts, and illustrations, compared with only 28% for the *Los Angeles Times*. However, the *Los Angeles Times* did indicate a substantial increase in graphics use over time, while the *New York Times'* changes are not as straightforward. For instance, although the inclusion of graphics with a disability story declined between 1990 and 1994, the latter proportion was still higher than in 1986.

Table 6

Distribution of Disability Story Length in the *Los Angeles Times* and the *New York Times* Over Time

Story Length (in column inches)	1986	1990	1994
Los Angeles Times*	(n = 47)	(n = 71)	(n = 67)
short (1 to 12)	36%	35%	31%
medium (13 to 30)	55	59	46
long (more than 30)	9	6	22
New York Times**	(n = 113)	(n = 134)	(n = 113)
short (1 to 12)	50%	49%	46%
medium (13 to 30)	47	46	46
long (more than 30)	3	6	8

* $\chi^2(4, N = 18) = 12.75, p < .025$

** $\chi^2(4, N = 360) = 3.41, p < .25$

Table 7

Use of Graphics within Disability Stories in the *Los Angeles Times* and the *New York Times* Over Time

	1986	1990	1994
Los Angeles Times*	(n = 47)	(n = 71)	(n = 67)
no graphics used	79%	77%	63%
graphics used	21	23	37
New York Times**	(n = 113)	(n = 134)	(n = 113)
no graphics used	69%	51%	65%
graphics used	31	49	35

* $\chi^2(2, N = 185) = 5.78, p < .10$

** $\chi^2(2, N = 360) = 10.10, p < .01$

The placement of disability articles was fairly similar with respect to the two newspapers. Both showed a general decline in focusing disability articles on the front page or front section, and instead, these stories were dispersed more evenly throughout the newspapers by 1994. For example, the likelihood of disability articles appearing in the Living/Lifestyles or Business/Finance sections in the *Los Angeles Times* rose from 2% in 1986 to 22% in 1994. Likewise, the proportion of non-front Metro articles doubled in the *New York Times* from 12% to 24% over time. Table 8 provides a detailed distribution of disability story placement over time for the two newspapers. Overall, the *New York Times* tended to spread disability articles more evenly throughout all sections of the newspaper. Thus, aside from reporting twice as many

Table 8

Distribution of Disability Story Placement in the *Los Angeles Times* and the *New York Times* Over Time

Story Placement			
(section in newspaper)	1986	1990	1994
Los Angeles Times*	(n = 47)	(n = 71)	(n = 67)
front page	19%	10%	7%
front section	53	56	33
non-front metro	19	24	30
living/lifestyles	0	1	12
business/finance	2	4	10
other/unknown	6	4	7
New York Times**	(n = 113)	(n = 134)	(n = 113)
front page	4%	7%	2%
front section	56	53	39
non-front metro	12	16	24
living/lifestyles	14	12	10
business/finance	2	4	8
other/unknown	12	8	18

* $\chi^2(10, N = 185) = 27.73, p < .005$

** $\chi^2(10, N = 360) = 24.65, p < .01$

stories during the study's time period, the *New York Times* seemed to give disability stories more prominence as well.

The two newspapers expressed some similarities with respect to traditional vs. progressive reporting. Changes over time in the disability models used in news stories did not reflect statistical significance for either newspaper; however, a brief discussion is warranted. Traditional stories dominated both newspapers with 62% representation in the *Los Angeles Times* and 56% in the *New York Times*. Upon closer examination, though, a notable distinction occurred in the proportion of disability coverage over time. Specifically, the *Los Angeles Times* showed a marked increase in progressive news stories—from 32% in 1986 to 38% in 1990 to 43% in 1994. The *New York Times*, however, expressed no change over time in its use of progressive reporting.

The content subcategories within the traditional and progressive models were not analyzed separately by newspaper because of low cell frequencies. General results are discussed here, and a statistical analysis of content subcategories for the newspapers combined will be explained later in this section. Medical-related articles were the most common outlet for traditional reporting for both newspapers. Likewise, stories about discrimination peaked the list for progressive reporting in both newspapers. Between 1986 and 1994, the number of stories categorized by access/awareness and non-disability issues rose in the *Los Angeles Times*, while the *New York Times* expressed an increase in general employment, integrated education, and other integrated program articles. In addition, as the *Los Angeles Times* showed a decline in the number of government support and private support

stories, the *New York Times* revealed an increase in those types of news content.

Finally, the *New York Times* and *Los Angeles Times* revealed further commonality in their use of news frames. Both newspapers packaged stories with the integration frame most frequently—44% of all *Los Angeles Times* stories and 52% of all *New York Times* stories. The only marked distinction between the distribution of news frames was the prevalence of pity stories in the *Los Angeles Times* (25%) as compared to only 13% in the *New York Times*. With respect to changes over time, both newspapers showed a decline in the use of the pity frame and an increase in reporting characterized by the integration frame.

This research also posed the question: Overall, which types of news content were presented most often in disability stories? Results indicated that articles focusing on the medical aspects of disability were by far the most common topic in disability-related news; they accounted for one-fifth of all disability stories. It is important to note, however, that a substantial decrease in medical stories was observed over time—from 44% of all traditional stories in 1986 to 29% in 1994 (shown in Table 9). By contrast, the use of personality profiles to depict disability stories increased significantly over time. Although these two content categories elicited substantial changes, the remaining traditional categories showed little variation over time. Thus, changes in the traditional content categories were not statistically significant.

In terms of progressive reporting, discrimination stories were encountered most often (31% of all progressive articles), but as with medical-related stories, this occurrence diminished over time—from 39% in 1986 to

Table 9

Representation of Disability Model Sub-categories for All Disability Stories
Over Time

Model Category	1986	1990	1994	Overall
Traditional*				
	(n = 98)	(n = 118)	(n = 101)	(n = 317)
medical	44%	33%	29%	35%
government support	11	17	10	13
private support	1	5	4	3
special education	1	2	2	2
special employment	1	1	1	1
special programs	9	11	12	11
victimization	15	18	15	16
personal profile	17	14	28	19
Progressive**				
	(n = 62)	(n = 87)	(n = 79)	(n = 228)
access/awareness	16%	17%	20%	18%
discrimination	39	33	22	31
independent living	0	6	1	3
integrated education	2	5	10	6
general employment	5	3	10	6
integrated programs	3	8	6	6
consumer issues	11	22	19	18
non-disability issue	24	6	11	13

* $\chi^2(14, N = 317) = 16.22, p < .25$ ** $\chi^2(14, N = 228) = 33.79, p < .005$

22% in 1994. On the other hand, several of the other progressive model categories increased in frequency over time (i.e., access/awareness, general employment, integrated education and other integrated programs, and consumer issues articles). Stories about special employment were found least often (only three in the entire study). A chi-square test showed that changes over time in the specific progressive categories were statistically significant at the 99.5% level. Table 9 provides additional distribution of all 16 traditional and progressive model subcategories for analyzing disability news content.

How were different disabilities represented in the newspapers? Overall results showed the distribution of disability coverage as follows: (a) general: 31%, (b) mobility impairments: 23%, (c) other disabilities: 16%, (d) blind/visual impairment: 13%, (e) deaf/hearing impairment: 10%, and (f) multiple disabilities: 7%. Over time, the representation of disabilities shifted significantly (refer to Table 10). In 1986, for instance, mobility impairments were the most frequently reported disability category, comprising 32% of all stories. In 1990, articles about disabilities in general were printed far more often than specific disabilities, accounting for 37% of all stories. In addition, stories involving either hearing impairments or multiple disabilities more than doubled over the study's time period. By 1994, the different types of disabilities shared news coverage more evenly than in previous years. The *Los Angeles Times* and the *New York Times* portrayed most disabilities similarly with two exceptions: the *Los Angeles Times* focused more attention on stories pertaining to hearing impairments, while the *New York Times* tended to favor visual impairments.

Table 10

Representation of Different Disabilities in All Disability Stories Over Time

	1986	1990	1994
Disability Represented	(<i>n</i> = 160)	(<i>n</i> = 205)	(<i>n</i> = 180)
general	31%	37%	24%
mobility impairment	32	19	21
blind/visual impairmt.	14	10	16
deaf/hearing impairmt.	5	13	12
multiple disabilities	4	6	9
other disability	14	16	17

$\chi^2(10, N = 545) = 26.51, p < .005$

V. Discussion

As described earlier, newspaper coverage of physical disabilities changed quite substantially between 1986 and 1994. Many of the study's results can be explained fairly simply; others invite open speculation. Primarily, this research wanted to suggest that because of the Americans with Disabilities Act, 1990 newspaper coverage would be quantifiably different than in prior and proceeding years. Whether or not the ADA was a direct cause, such a distinction in news coverage was clearly observed for many of the study's variables. For example, even though the total amount of disability news coverage declined between 1990 and 1994, it gained prominence in the press in other ways. Between 1986 and 1994, disability articles, in general, grew longer, included photographs and other graphics more frequently, and increased their visibility by appearing in all sections of the newspapers. In addition, the number of articles characterized by pity or sympathy declined significantly while the number of articles framed by integration increased steadily during the study's 8-year time period. Finally, the content of newspaper stories experienced a marked decrease in its proportion of medically-focused stories in favor of a wider variety of disability stories. When examined collectively, these observations indicate that the quality of disability coverage improved over time, but only somewhat. For disability coverage to observe a complete improvement in quality over time, all five hypotheses would have been supported, not only three of them.

By flushing out the most prevalent disability stories reported during the years studied, some interpretation can be given to many of the observed results. In 1986, for example, the most pervasive disability story was the plight of Elizabeth Bouvia. A total of 21 stories were printed in the *New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times* that year with regard to her legal battles for attempted suicide in the hospital. In their treatment of the Bouvia story, journalists often abandoned their objective, concise writing style and instead disseminated glib dramatic presentations of personal tragedy:

A woman, paralyzed by cerebral palsy, helplessly dependent on others for even the most menial of care and with severe pain requiring constant high doses of morphine, begs to stop a hospital from force-feeding her so that she can let her life run the course that she deems natural. . . . This was not a spur-of-the-moment desperate act, but a deliberate attempt to seize control over what was left of her existence. If there was a cure for her condition, she would have sought the remedy, But death appeared, at the least, like sleep at the height of exhaustion—a release from her trap of torment. (Wellikson, 1986, sec. 2, p. 5)

This news segment taken from the *Los Angeles Times* exemplifies the majority of the press' coverage of the Bouvia story. By describing Bouvia's life as a "trap of torment," the journalist implied that living with a disability such as Bouvia's is nothing short of torture. Furthermore, the journalist's mention of no existing cure seems to act as justification for suicide, as if it were a viable alternative for all people with severe disabilities in which no known cure exists. No interviews with doctors, family, or friends were reported. For the most part, the news coverage was characterized by pity and hopelessness.

Partly as a result of this story's pervasiveness, 1986 news coverage was skewed toward medically-focused, traditional, hard news articles classified by the pity/sympathy frame. When the 21 Bouvia stories were excluded, however, the readjusted observations were not significant enough to change any of this study's hypotheses.

Baby Doe stories also attracted noted press attention in 1986. Eight such stories were reported in the *Los Angeles Times* and *New York Times*, which further reinforced the affinity toward traditional content with a pitiful or sympathetic tone.

In 1990, by far the most frequently reported stories were those pertaining to the Americans with Disabilities Act. The *New York Times* acknowledged the magnitude of the newly adopted legislation, and it expressed a positive (perhaps excessively idealistic) outlook for people with disabilities:

This law, called the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, is the most sweeping anti-discrimination measure since the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Mr. Bush's oratory rose to the occasion. As a symbol of freedom, he said, the law is no less than a "declaration of independence." Like the dismantling of the Berlin wall, it opens a "once-closed door to a bright new era." (*New York Times*, 1990, p. A26)

The two newspapers printed a total of 22 stories about the ADA that year. Of these stories, 73% were hard news, 95% were progressive (usually about discrimination), and 73% were framed by integration. Surprisingly, this topic comprised 18% of all *Los Angeles Times* disability articles for 1990, but only 7% of all *New York Times* articles for that year. Thus, the ADA was

more likely to have shifted 1990 coverage results in the *Los Angeles Times* than in the *New York Times*.

Even more surprising is the fact that while the ADA received 11% of all 1990 disability coverage, the Bouvia story comprised 13% of all disability-related articles in 1986. In other words, the personal problems of Elizabeth Bouvia were considered by the press to be equally as "newsworthy" as the passage of disability rights legislation. This finding fuels Johnson's (1993) argument that the media ignores hard-hitting disability pieces in favor of the sympathy angle.

On a more positive note, the ADA was still the most pervasive disability topic four years after its passage. For example, the *Los Angeles Times* ran a story in 1994 about the extent to which the Act has measured up to its expectations:

Nationwide, the ADA has so far benefited only "a small group of people" said Guy Wallace, an employment discrimination specialist with Disability Rights Advocates, a non-profit group in Oakland. With discrimination so deep-seated, he said, "it's going to take a while to make any headway." (Silverstein, 1994, p. D1)

The article recounted instances of the successes and failures of the ADA in assisting disabled people with finding and/or maintaining employment. Again, the articles relating to the ADA were typically progressive, hard news stories classified by the integration frame. In 1994, the ADA accounted for 10% of all disability stories. This observation suggests that although the overall amount of disability news stories declined somewhat after 1990, the legislation and its implications were not forgotten by the press.

High profile stories also tended to skew the results for which types of disabilities received more media attention (e.g., blindness, deafness, etc.). As noted in the previous section, the *Los Angeles Times* reported on deaf/hearing impaired topics more often, while the *New York Times* favored coverage of blindness and visual impairments. This outcome was not coincidental—it arose because of local coverage of specific disability-related events. For instance, a teenager named Joey Bellinger was accused of shooting two deaf brothers, killing one of them, in 1990. Since the crime was committed in southern CA, the *Los Angeles Times* reported 11 stories about the Bellinger incident, while the *New York Times* printed only one story. Second, New York is the home of a prominent non-profit organization called The Lighthouse for the Blind. The Lighthouse has been an active part of the community for decades, and the *New York Times* typically follows the organization's events (e.g., its annual posh clothing sale). The *Los Angeles Times*, on the other hand, did not report any stories associated with The Lighthouse. Finally, since Bouvia has cerebral palsy, this resulted in skewed 1986 coverage toward mobility impairments in both newspapers. Subsequently, the proportion of stories about people or groups with mobility impairments was much lower in later years.

It would appear that the observed improvement in the quality of disability coverage was due, in part, to implementation of the Americans with Disabilities Act. But what if the "big disability story" of 1990 or 1994 had, for example, involved the trials and tribulations of a quadriplegic? Would the press have covered such a story with the same vigor and tragic overtones as noted with the Bouvia incident? Or have journalists learned to cover the

disability angle more positively, as Haller (1993) would have one believe? To truly answer the latter question, researchers will have to wait until the next "big disability story" surfaces. Regardless of the influence of pervasive disability stories analyzed within this study, results did indicate minor improvements in the quality of disability news coverage from 1986 to 1994.

Comparison of Findings

Results of prior research on this topic revealed more conclusive improvements in disability coverage over time than the results of this study did. First of all, Clogston's (1993) content analysis of disability coverage between 1976 and 1991 yielded results that were dissimilar to this study. In terms of the disability model variable, Clogston observed an increase in the proportion of progressive disability stories over time—40% in 1976, 44% in 1981, 41% in 1986, and 57% in 1991. He explained that in 1986, the Elizabeth Bouvia story attributed to the decrease in progressive stories for that year and that by excluding all articles pertaining to Bouvia, the proportion of progressive stories would have been 48% in 1986. By contrast, the present research showed little change in the amount of progressive reporting over time. More specifically, progressive stories comprised 39% of all disability stories in 1986, 42% in 1990, and 44% in 1994. Since Clogston also utilized the *New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times* (as well as the *Chicago Tribune*) for his research, the results of both studies should have been more comparable. This finding suggests that the disability model variable should be better operationalized to prevent misinterpretation.

The other content analysis that examined disability coverage over time was the Haller (1993) study of the Deaf President Now campaign. Like Clogston (1993), Haller noted a general increase in the amount of progressive reporting over time—from 38% in 1986 to 76% in 1988 to 60% in 1990. She attributed the high proportion of progressive reporting in 1988 to the Gallaudet University protest which occurred during that year. She further explained that although the proportion declined in 1990, the continued dominance of progressive stories was the result of journalists' "new understanding to provide less stigmatizing coverage in subsequent years" (Haller, 1990, p. 178). It is not this researcher's contention to directly compare the results of the Haller study with the present one as her content analysis examined deafness alone. However, it is important to note that Haller's evidence of enhanced quality of disability coverage in the press did not mention the Americans with Disabilities Act as a source for improved coverage. By ignoring the fact that the ADA could skew 1990 coverage, Haller apparently assumed that the Act would have no effect on disability coverage. As described in the present study, however, the Americans with Disabilities Act was the most pervasive theme for disability stories in both 1990 and 1994.

Because newspaper coverage experienced changes between 1990 and 1994, the results of other disability-oriented research are subject to time constraints. In other words, results gleaned from studies conducted around 1990 are not representative of present disability coverage (i.e., Catlett & Martin, 1992; Clogston, 1992). Thus, replication of these studies today would lend further insight regarding the extent to which disability news coverage has changed since 1990.

Limitations of this Research

When measuring variables at the nominal level, it is important for a variable's attributes to be both exhaustive and mutually exclusive (Babbie, 1995). For the most part, Clogston's (1992, 1993) disability models and subcategories served this research well in terms of providing an exhaustive list of news content attributes. However, conflicts with mutual exclusivity arose during the coding process. Clogston's studies gave no explanation for how to account for news stories that fit into more than one content category.

For example, the *New York Times* ran an article in 1994 entitled, "A dancer confronts barriers" (Kaufman, 1994). The story chronicled the life of a New York dancer, Barry Martin, who was paralyzed in an automobile accident in South Africa, where he was performing in a dance troupe. The accident occurred in 1983 in the midst of apartheid. Martin remembered an ambulance arriving at the accident, picking up his white colleague, and then leaving him for dead along the roadside because he was black. As a quadriplegic, Martin was forced to give up dancing, so he started his own dance company in New York. Although he has tried to put the discrimination of the past behind him, Martin now faces new obstacles:

"What still bothers me the most," he said. [sic] "I know the theaters are in compliance with the laws on access. They set aside places for people in wheelchairs. But have you ever seen those places? They are all off to the side. I love the theater and I'm trying to make a life there. I yearn for a frontal view and don't see why wheelchairs couldn't be placed on platforms in the back alongside the standing room people."

The problem with coding this article stemmed from the multifaceted nature of the story. On the one hand, the article was a progressive piece that

illustrated the problems of discrimination and restricted access. On the other hand, the purpose of the story was to profile the life of a man with a disability. The personality profile category falls within the traditional model, thus, a conflict of model classification arose. Even though the language and nature of the story was progressive, the article was coded as a traditional personality profile.

To solve the problem of multiple content categories within a single story, the coders in this research examined each news story on the whole. Then they selected the dominant content category—the one that best described the article's content. In some instance, coding for content became merely a matter of judgment. This reality might explain why a discrepancy was observed between the Clogston (1992) study and this research in terms of traditional vs. progressive reporting. For future research on this topic, the disability model (content) variable would benefit from more specific and definitive operationalization.

The results of this research are not intended to generalize to the United States press as a whole. A sample of a wide variety of American newspapers is necessary to successfully achieve generalizability. By analyzing coverage of two prestige newspapers, though, one assumes that smaller newspapers may attempt to emulate the coverage of more metropolitan enterprises, not to mention the fact that they periodically run stories taken directly from the *New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times*.

Areas for Future Research

The notion of quantitatively analyzing disability news frames is still a new one. This research attempted to discover changes in the frames of disability news stories over time. Because a relationship between all six of the disability news frames and time was observed at the 90% level of statistical significance, further analysis of these variables is warranted. This study's conclusions also revealed that researchers must not assume that an analysis of content is likewise an analysis of context. Such a distinction proved valuable to the findings of this research, and it provided for a deeper, richer understanding of disability news coverage. Thus, the practice of distinguishing content from context should prove beneficial for future media analysis of any topic.

A somewhat different content analysis could be conducted to more directly determine the extent to which the ADA was covered in the press. For example, a researcher could analyze the quantity and quality of newspaper coverage of the ADA during 1990 as compared to coverage of other similar legislation (e.g., the Civil Rights Act of 1964). This would allow the researcher to determine more conclusively whether the disability movement paralleled other movements in terms of overall media attention.

Lastly, the topic of disability coverage merits a more comprehensive analysis—one that incorporates several forms of the mass media. This research could be conducted in a few different ways. First, a content analysis could be performed as a means of comparing the overall quantity and quality of disability coverage in newspapers, television, film, and so on. Second, the same comparison could be analyzed over time. For example, a study might

examine disability portrayals in television, film, and newspapers during the 1950's, 1970's, and 1990's, comparing the results for each decade. Third, a content analysis could be conducted to compare U.S. media coverage of disabilities with disability coverage in other countries. The primary research question might ask: In what ways are international disability portrayals similar to/different from those in the U.S. media? As of the writing of this thesis, no research has been published on this topic—subsequently, investigation is certainly warranted.

It is difficult to study a person's attitudes and beliefs about disabilities. It is also difficult to prove that mass media have the power to shape those attitudes and beliefs. At the very least, though, mass media portrayals reinforce or reflect the public's opinions about our society and the people within it. Thus, learning about how the media depict people with disabilities may reveal insight on how the public views them as well.

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VII. Appendices

Appendix A: Database Searches for Disability News

List of keywords used to perform disability news coverage searches on the UC MELVYL News database

kw = keyword
xj = exact journal
and = inclusive, narrows the search to the identification of more than one keyword in an article
or = exclusive, broadens the search to identify one of any keywords in a string
= truncates a keyword so that search identifies any keywords that have the same root

SEARCH 1: find kw (disab# or handicapped or blind# or deaf# or wheelchair# or parapleg# or quadripleg#) and date 1986 and xj New York Times

SEARCH 2: find kw (disab# or handicapped or blind# or deaf# or wheelchair# or parapleg# or quadripleg#) and date 1990 and xj New York Times

SEARCH 3: find kw (disab# or handicapped or blind# or deaf# or wheelchair# or parapleg# or quadripleg#) and date 1994 and xj New York Times

SEARCH 4: find kw (disab# or handicapped or blind# or deaf# or wheelchair# or parapleg# or quadripleg#) and date 1986 and xj Los Angeles Times

SEARCH 5: find kw (disab# or handicapped or blind# or deaf# or wheelchair# or parapleg# or quadripleg#) and date 1990 and xj Los Angeles Times

SEARCH 6: find kw (disab# or handicapped or blind# or deaf# or wheelchair# or parapleg# or quadripleg#) and date 1994 and xj Los Angeles Times

SEARCH 7: find kw (cerebral palsy or multiple sclerosis or spina bifida or amputee or Lou Gehrig#) and date 1986 and xj New York Times

SEARCH 8: find kw (cerebral palsy or multiple sclerosis or spina bifida or amputee or Lou Gehrig#) and date 1990 and xj New York Times

SEARCH 9: find kw (cerebral palsy or multiple sclerosis or spina bifida or amputee or Lou Gehrig#) and date 1994 and xj New York Times

SEARCH 10: find kw (cerebral palsy or multiple sclerosis or spina bifida or amputee or Lou Gehrig#) and date 1986 and xj Los Angeles Times

SEARCH 11: find kw (cerebral palsy or multiple sclerosis or spina bifida or amputee or Lou Gehrig#) and date 1990 and xj Los Angeles Times

SEARCH 12: find kw (cerebral palsy or multiple sclerosis or spina bifida or amputee or Lou Gehrig#) and date 1994 and xj Los Angeles Times

SEARCH 13: find kw (Elithabeth Bouvia or Stephen Hawking or Jerry Lewis or Ron Kovic or Stevie Wonder or Ray Charles) and date 1986 and xj New York Times

SEARCH 14: find kw (Elithabeth Bouvia or Stephen Hawking or Jerry Lewis or Ron Kovic or Stevie Wonder or Ray Charles) and date 1990 and xj New York Times

SEARCH 15: find kw (Elithabeth Bouvia or Stephen Hawking or Jerry Lewis or Ron Kovic or Stevie Wonder or Ray Charles) and date 1994 and xj New York Times

SEARCH 16: find kw (Elithabeth Bouvia or Stephen Hawking or Jerry Lewis or Ron Kovic or Stevie Wonder or Ray Charles) and date 1986 and xj Los Angeles Times

SEARCH 17: find kw (Elithabeth Bouvia or Stephen Hawking or Jerry Lewis or Ron Kovic or Stevie Wonder or Ray Charles) and date 1990 and xj Los Angeles Times

SEARCH 18: find kw (Elithabeth Bouvia or Stephen Hawking or Jerry Lewis or Ron Kovic or Stevie Wonder or Ray Charles) and date 1994 and xj Los Angeles Times

SEARCH 19: find kw (dystrophy or leukemia or meningitis or albin# or Siamese twin# or disfigur# or deform#) and date 1986 and xj New York Times

SEARCH 20: find kw (dystrophy or leukemia or meningitis or albin# or Siamese twin# or disfigur# or deform#) and date 1990 and xj New York Times

SEARCH 21: find kw (dystrophy or leukemia or meningitis or albin# or Siamese twin# or disfigur# or deform#) and date 1994 and xj New York Times

SEARCH 22: find kw (dystrophy or leukemia or meningitis or albin# or Siamese twin# or disfigur# or deform#) and date 1986 and xj Los Angeles Times

SEARCH 23: find kw (dystrophy or leukemia or meningitis or albin# or Siamese twin# or disfigur# or deform#) and date 1990 and xj Los Angeles Times

SEARCH 24: find kw (dystrophy or leukemia or meningitis or albin# or Siamese twin# or disfigur# or deform#) and date 1994 and xj Los Angeles Times

Appendix B: Elements of News Story Types

The following list is a compilation taken from two news gathering textbooks:

Harriss, Leiter, & Johnson (1992) and Metzler (1986):

HARD NEWS

Government/Politics
Trials, Lawsuits
High Profile Crime*
Business, Industry
Education
Employment, Labor
Agriculture
Science, Research
Religion

SOFT NEWS

Human Interest
Arts & Entertainment
Personality Profile
Organization/Project Profile
Editorials/Columns
Letters to the Editor
Reviews/Critiques
Interviews
Sidebars

STRAIGHT NEWS

Weather
Deaths, Funerals
Low Profile Crime**
Accidents, Fires
Natural Disasters
Sports Scores
Weddings, Births

* *High profile crime*: crime that has received much media attention (i.e., in-depth articles, frequent story updates, coverage in newspapers, magazines, and television). Examples include crimes involving public figures or infamous suspects/convicts, an exceptionally brutal murder, a complex and unsolved kidnapping, etc.

** *Low profile crime*: crime that did not receive special attention from the media (i.e., simple, unvarnished report of the incident, mentioned in newspaper one time). Examples include a one-time robbery, vandalism, assault and battery crimes, and so forth.

Appendix C: Theoretical Models for Disability-Related News Stories

The following information was taken from Clogston's (1992, 1993) research:

TRADITIONAL CATEGORIES

Medical - focus on physical aspects, treatments, procedures

Government Support - Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security, etc.

Private Support - charities, church aid

Special Education - special schooling for disabled children/adults

Special Employment - "hire the handicapped"

Victimization - victims of crime or of society

Special Programs - participation by disabled people only (e.g., separate bus systems)

Personal - profile that focuses on a person's disability

PROGRESSIVE CATEGORIES

Access/Awareness - focus is to educate the public

Discrimination - i.e. civil rights issues

Independent Living - non-institutional living

Integrated Programs - activities with participation from both disabled and non-disabled people

Integrated Education - mainstreaming, disabled student centers at colleges and universities

General Employment - disabled persons at mainstream jobs

Consumer Issues - products/aids used by disabled individuals

Non-Disability Issues - disabled person mentioned, but not the main focus of the story

Appendix D: Catlett and Martin's (1993) "Newspaper Portrayal Categories"

Ad Misericordian. Articles conveyed an undertone of pathos or pity for the persons with disabilities. They contributed to a picture of the person with disabilities being "forever a child" or totally depending on the goodwill of society. the logical fallacy applied here was Ad Misericordian - stereotyping of pitiness [sic].

Ad Populum. Articles conveyed an undertone of "super humanness." People with disabilities were viewed as having super human characteristics which allowed them to succeed where even those with no disabilities would not usually found success.

False Dilemma. Articles conveyed an undertone of de-valuation or denial of basic right of the person(s) with disabilities. they were generally viewed as unwanted, a less than desirable segment of society; a surplus group who needs their own place somewhere else, thereby implying segregation. The logical fallacy was the False Dilemma, that is, proposing a choice between two alternatives, while neither may be the best possibility, suggesting or implying that another possibility does not exist.

Ad Hominum. The person or group discussed were [sic] opponents to the "system" or someone was advocating for their interests by challenging the system. The logical fallacy was Ad Hominum - against the person. The logical assumption was that people with disabilities were adversarial.

Normalization. Articles which represented normalization as the "utilization of means which are as culturally normative as possible in order to establish and/or maintain personal behaviors and characteristics which are as culturally normative as possible" (Wolfensberger, p. 306, as cited in Blatt, Biklen, & Bogdan, 1977). Persons with disabilities were presented as having the same goals, dreams, and wishes as anyone else. Included were articles about accommodations or technical or assistive devices that assist the people with disabilities to function in society. People with disabilities were portrayed as real people with the same rights as everyone else in society - that is, the argument was to permit them to function in society, as if they did not have disabilities.

Appendix E: Numerical Assignment for Variable Coding

NEWSPAPER	<i>Los Angeles Times</i> = 1 <i>New York Times</i> = 2
DATE	1986 = 1 1990 = 2 1994 = 3
TYPE OF NEWS	hard news = 1 soft news = 2 straight news/other = 3
STORY LENGTH	indicate # of column inches (if only word count given, then 50 words = 1 inch)
USE OF IMAGES	no images = 0 photograph/portrait = 1 chart/graph/table = 2 other graphic = 3 multiple graphics = indicate # for each
STORY PLACEMENT	front page = 1 front section = 2 (non-front) Metro/National section = 3 Living/Leisure/Lifestyle section = 4 Business/Finance section = 5 other/unknown section = 6
DISABILITY MODEL	traditional = 1 progressive = 2
TRADITIONAL CATEGORIES	medical = 1 government support = 2 private support = 3 special education = 4 special employment = 5 special programs = 6 victimization = 7 personal = 8

PROGRESSIVE CATEGORIES	access/awareness = 1 discrimination = 2 independent living = 3 integrated education = 4 general employment = 5 integrated programs = 6 consumer issues = 7 non-disability issues = 8
NEWS FRAME	Pity/Sympathy = 1 "Different from us"/Segregation = 2 Superhuman/Inspirational = 3 "Just like everyone else"/Integration = 4 Scientific research = 5 Other frame = 6
SECOND FRAME	no = 0 yes = 1-5 (according to above coding)
DISABILITY PORTRAYED	general = 1 blind/visual impairment = 2 deaf/hearing impairment = 3 mobility impairment = 4 multiple disabilities = 5 other disability = 6

APPENDIX F: Comparison of Daily Newspaper Length Between the *New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times*

DATE	DAILY LENGTH FOR 1986 (in number of pages)	
	LA Times	NY Times
17-Jul (Sun)	308	440
18-Jul (Mon)	76	60
7-Jun (Tues)	112	128
14-Dec (Wed)	92	130
25-Nov (Thurs)	146	112
25-Feb (Fri)	146	96
12-Nov (Sat)	104	56
Total	784	922

DATE	DAILY LENGTH FOR 1994 (in number of pages)	
	LA Times	NY Times
17-Jul (Sun)	222	340
18-Jul (Mon)	96	48
7-Jun (Tues)	130	86
14-Dec (Wed)	112	92
25-Nov (Thurs)	148	114
25-Feb (Fri)	150	92
12-Nov (Sat)	82	60
Total	940	832

Mean Total Daily Length for *Los Angeles Times* = 123 pages

Mean Total Daily Length for *New York Times* = 125 pages