



Strathclyde Centre
for Disability Research
and Glasgow Media Unit

Bad News for Disabled People:

How the
newspapers
are reporting
disability

In association with:

**Inclusion
London**

Promoting Equality For London's
Deaf and Disabled People

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Inclusion London provides policy, campaigning and strategic capacity building support to Deaf and disabled people's organisations (DDPOs). Inclusion London aims to ensure a strong collective voice that reflects diversity of Deaf and disabled Londoners and their organisations and addresses the strategic issues that impact on DDPO's ability to survive and thrive. www.inclusionlondon.co.uk

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Main Findings

Inclusion London commissioned the Glasgow Media Group and the Strathclyde Centre for Disability Research to carry out a study to analyse changes in the way the media are reporting disability and how it has impacted on public attitudes towards disabled people. In carrying out the study they compared and contrasted media coverage of disability in five papers in 2010-11 with a similar period in 2004-5 and ran a series of focus groups. The study found:

- There has been a significant increase in the reporting of disability in the print media with 713 disability related articles in 2004-5 compared to 1015 in a comparable period in 2010-11. This increase has been accompanied by a shift in the way that disability is being reported and there is now increased politicisation of media coverage of disability in 2010-11 compared to 2004-5;
- There has been a reduction in the proportion of articles which describe disabled people in sympathetic and deserving terms, and stories that document the 'real life' experiences of living as a disabled person have also decreased. Some impairment groups are particularly less likely to receive sympathetic treatment: people with mental health conditions and other 'hidden' impairments were more likely to be presented as 'undeserving'.
- Articles focusing on disability benefit and fraud increased from 2.8% in 2005/5 to 6.1% in 2010/11. When the focus groups were asked to describe a typical story in the newspapers on disability benefit fraud was the most popular theme mentioned.
- These articles are impacting on people's views and perceptions of disability related benefits. The focus groups all claimed that levels of fraud were much higher than they are in reality, with some suggesting that up to 70% of claimants were fraudulent. Participants justified these claims by reference to articles they had read in newspapers.

- This strength of fraud as a tabloid theme conflicts with the reality of levels of incapacity benefit fraud and focuses public perceptions of responsibility for Incapacity Benefit levels on claimants rather than problems in lack of labour market demand, economic policies or discrimination.
- There has been an increase in the number of articles documenting the claimed 'burden' that disabled people are alleged to place on the economy – with some articles even blaming the recession itself on incapacity benefit claimants;
- Articles that explore the political and socioeconomic context of disability are rare as are articles that explore the impact that the proposed cuts will have on disabled people. There was a decrease in references to discrimination against disabled people or other contextualising issues;
- There has been a significantly increased use of pejorative language to describe disabled people, including suggestions that life on incapacity benefit had become a 'Lifestyle Choice'. The use of terms such as 'scrounger', 'cheat' and 'skiver' was found in 18% of tabloid articles in 2010/11 compared to 12% in 2004/5. There were 54 occurrences of these words in 2004/5 compared to 142 in 2010/11. These changes reinforced the idea of disabled claimants as 'undeserving'.
- Disabled people are feeling threatened by the changes in the way disability is being reported and by the proposed changes to the their benefits and their benefit entitlements. These two are combining and reinforcing each other.

Summary

Inclusion London commissioned the Glasgow Media Group and the Strathclyde Centre for Disability Research to carry out a study to analyse changes in the way the news media are reporting disability and how it has impacted on public attitudes towards disabled people. This research had three main aims:

- To examine how the media are covering disability and to document changes in this coverage.
- To examine how this is impacting on public attitudes to disabled people.
- To consider the impact that any trends identified in the research may have on the lives of disabled people: for example, in affecting attitudes to disabled people or support for or opposition to cuts in benefits accessed by disabled people.

In order to track changes in style or content in media coverage of policy change relating to disability benefits, and thus highlight media responses particular to the recent cuts, a sample coverage was drawn for comparison from two periods:

- The second term of Tony Blair's 'New Labour' Government
- The contemporary Conservative/Liberal Democrat Coalition Government

A large scale detailed content analysis was conducted focussing on five popular newspapers: The Sun, The Mirror, The Express, The Mail and The Guardian. This would determine if government attempts at reconstructing disability as a burden impacted on newspaper coverage of disability issues. Articles mentioning 'disabled', 'disability', 'disabilities' and 'incapacity' were obtained from LexisNexis, for the following time periods:

- October 2004 to January 2005 – 713 documents
- October 2010 to January 2011 – 1015 documents
- March to April 2011 – 548 documents

This content analysis was supplemented by a detailed audience reception analysis. We held focus groups of between 6 and 8 people in England and in Scotland and these were recorded for subsequent analysis.

Findings

Increased coverage of disability

Our analysis has shown that media coverage on disability increased dramatically between 2004-5 and 2010-11 with over 30% more articles covering disability and that this increase was accompanied by a change in the way that disability was covered. Whilst disablist terms such as 'cripple' and the presentation of disabled people as sufferers or victims decreased between the two periods they were still present, albeit only The Sun used the word 'cripple' in the 2010-11 period.

The data from both the content analysis and the audience reception studies are at times confusing and contradictory. There is evidence to support the claim that there has been an increase in coverage of disability as a benefit problem and of disabled people as a burden on the state and there has been an increase in the total number of articles in this category. This shift is one that was recognized by many of our focus group respondents. When asked to describe a typical story on disability in the newspapers today benefits and benefit fraud were by far the most popular topics mentioned. People also have wildly mistaken perceptions about levels of fraud. However whilst general disapproval of benefit cheats was a strong theme in the focus groups people were quick to separate out what they felt were 'deserving' disabled people and frauds. Disabled people were seen by all our respondents as deserving of state support.

The politicization of disability benefits

Our findings suggest that there has been an increase in the politicisation of the media coverage of disability, a shift which reflects the Coalition Government's agenda. Much of the media is supportive of the changes the current Government is trying to introduce and articles critical of the Government's agenda were much less prevalent in 2010-11 compared to 2004-5, when the then Labour Government attempted to introduce some similar cuts in services and benefits. There were of course

differences in the way that various newspapers reported these changes, with The Guardian and The Mirror being much more likely to be critical of Coalition Government policies than The Sun, Express or Mail. Again there was a general feeling of support for this policy shift in the focus groups, although the support was not overwhelming and some concern was expressed about how these changes were being implemented and fears about those who deserved support being denied such support.

Disabled People and Triumph over Adversity

Sympathetic, 'real life' experiences of disability were strongly represented in both the periods that we explored although there was a significant drop in 2010/11 compared to 2004/5. This was also the second most common theme mentioned in the focus groups. Triumph over adversity and the representation of disabled people as inspiring, as 'Super Cripples' were also found in both periods. Again there was a large drop in this sort of coverage. In 2004-5, for example, life experience stories made up over 15% of the Daily Mail's coverage of disability compared to only 7.7% of coverage in 2010-11. In the tabloid press in general such stories fell from 29% to 22%. These shifts, whilst welcome on the one hand, might also be a reflection on the desire of these newspapers to reconstruct disabled people as benefit frauds. It is hard to present disabled people as both inspiring and at the same time as cheats and scroungers. This theme was also present in many of the focus groups.

The reduction in stories representing disabled people as victims and as sufferers was also accompanied by a reduction in the number of articles describing disabled people as being in genuine need of services or experiencing inadequate service provision (a fall from 13% to 9%).

The Deserving and Non-deserving

Linked to this has been a move back to the recreation and re-entrenchment of the idea of the deserving and non-deserving poor. Whilst there was only a marginal difference in the proportion of articles that described incapacity benefit recipients as 'undeserving' – 15.5% in 2004-5 compared to 15.9% in 2010-11 there was a large increase in the *actual number* of such articles (127 in 2010-11 compared to 81 in 2004-5). For example while the proportion of *Express* articles discussing claimants in this way fell from a peak in 2004-5 of 21.4% of its articles (more than any other tabloid), to 15.7% of its articles in the same period

of 2010-11; the actual number of these articles it produced *increased* by 26% (from 31 to 42 articles).

Evidence from the focus groups in this area is complex. Whilst people were quick to accept that fraudulent claimants were undeserving the respondents all felt that the State had a duty to support disabled people. Almost all those we spoke to also had direct experience of disability either through a close family members or close friends, many of whom had tried to get benefits and had failed. One participant for example talked about how hard it had been for her mother 'to get any benefits.' They were all aware of how difficult it is to actually qualify for a benefit and were aware of the low levels of support disabled people received.

Disabled People as a 'Burden'

The period in 2010-11 also saw more discussion of disability benefits in terms of being a claimed drain on the economy and a burden on the state (an increase in the tabloids from 22 articles in 2004-5 to 37 in 2010-11), with some articles even blaming the recession itself on incapacity benefit claimants. The Sun heavily increased the proportion of its articles that defined claimants as 'undeserving' – from 18.8% during 2004-5, to 26.9% in the same three months in 2010-11 – producing more articles on this theme than any other tabloid.

The social and political consequences of the cuts

Debate of the political or social context in which disabled people find themselves became almost entirely absent from the tabloid media and explanation was reduced to individual responsibility and weakened social values. The fact that the cuts are not just affecting those making fraudulent claims, but are negatively impacting on disabled people's lives was largely ignored as were the very real affects that the proposed changes in benefits will have on disabled people. For example, there was an absence of coverage of the effects that the reductions in entitlement, benefit payment levels and time limits will have that are being imposed even on those defined as 'genuine' claimants. In articles that attempted to justify the proposed changes to the benefits system there was some attempt to reassure the public that 'genuinely' disabled people would be unaffected. There was a large reduction in the number of articles in which a *dominant* theme was the idea that disabled people are 'deserving' claimants. While in 2004-5 The Sun had used a dominant 'deserving' claimant theme in 7.9% of its articles, this fell in 2010-11 to

0%. Similarly, The Express showed a fall from 6.2% of articles, to 1.1% in the comparable period of 2010-11. The Daily Mail drop in this category was slight (1.4%-0.8%) as they rarely included this theme as dominant in any period anyway. These findings contrast greatly with both The Guardian and The Mirror both of which carried articles that expressed concern over the impact the proposed changes to disability benefits will have on disabled people.

Disabled People as Cheats

The content analysis also noted an increase in references to incapacity benefit fraud in all papers, reinforcing the idea that disabled people are 'undeserving' claimants. Fraud articles increased from 2.8% of tabloid coverage in October – January 2004-5 to 6.1% in the same period in 2010-11. While the proportion of fraud coverage in The Express doubled from 2.1% to 4.2%, the total number of articles had shot up from six in October – January 2004-5, to 22 articles in the same period of 2010-11, more than any other paper produced. The proportion of such articles in The Mail increased from 0.7% in 2004-5, to 3.8% in the same period in 2010-11, and then rose steeply to 9.2% in March-April. In The Sun fraud stories also increased markedly from just 2% in 2004-5 to 7.1% in 2010-11. This was underscored by the language. Out of the 180 tabloid articles across both periods in 2010-11 (October-January and March-April combined) the word 'cheats' was used in 48 articles, 'fraudster' was used in 10 articles, 'con' in 8 articles, 'fiddle' (the system) in 8 articles¹, as well as many other inventive synonyms. This strength of fraud as a tabloid theme conflicts with the *reality* of levels of incapacity benefit fraud, which the Department for Work and Pension estimates at 2.4% for Incapacity benefit and less than 1% for Disability living Allowance.

Disability as an equality issue

Articles on discrimination against disabled people and their marginalisation also showed significant changes between the two periods. In The Guardian there was a drop of 31.2% in October-January 2004-5, to 29.6% in the same period in 2010-11. Across this same period the proportion of tabloid articles which mentioned discrimination or marginalisation of disabled people fell from 19.5% to 14.4%, the greatest fall occurring in The Express (from 22.1% to 11.6%).

¹ Including variations on these ie. 'conning'/'conned', 'fiddling'/'fiddled' etc...

Differences were also noted in the way that different impairment groups were represented and those with a physical or sensory impairment were more likely to receive sympathetic treatment from the press than other groups. Mental health was mentioned in only 8 of the 25 'deserving' articles which mentioned a disability in October-January 2004-5, a figure that dropped to 2/30 in October-January 2010-11. Mental illnesses and conditions which are otherwise 'hidden' (such as chronic pain), or socially 'unsympathetic' (such as STD's, addiction or obesity), were more likely to be presented as 'undeserving' and people with 'depression' and 'stress' were often portrayed as unworthy of benefit. In articles that explored mental health often tabloids such as the Daily Mail, The Mirror, and The Sun skirted over details about a claimant's background which might provide context and understanding of a particular case. References to learning disabilities were notable in their absence from this debate.

Disabled people as 'Undeserving' Claimants

Two tools were identified as frequently used in framing the news stories which defined individual cases as the 'undeserving' claimant and reinforcing statements of outright critique of the benefits system.

- Use of Pejorative Language

The use of pejorative terms to describe disabled people, increased in all papers between October-January 2004-5 and the same period in 2010-11. It increased from 12% of tabloid articles in October-January 2004-5 to 18% of tabloid articles from the same period in 2010-11. There were 54 occurrences of such words in 2004/5 compared to 142 in 2010/11. In The Guardian the comparable figure rose from 2.6% of articles, to 3.2%. The Mirror also increased its use of pejorative language from 4.3% to 8.8% between these two periods but the greatest increase was found in The Express, Sun and Mail. Terms used included; scrounger, handout, workshy and cheats

- Character Attacks on Claimants

Attacks on the character of the claimant during both 2004-5 and 2010-11 October-January periods sought to portray them as wasteful or indulgent; with 'bad habits' such as smoking, drinking, sleeping around or having a family considered 'too large' (all activities ordinarily considered a matter of private conscience).

Conclusion

This report presents a strong body of evidence to suggest that there has been a significant change in the way that disability is being reported in much of the press in the United Kingdom today. The content analysis clearly demonstrates that there has been a large increase in the number of articles in which disability is the key theme and that this has been accompanied by a significant shift in the emphasis and in the way that the articles are being reported. These findings are also supported by the audience reception analysis. This change in the frequency, content and tone of the articles in 2010/11 when compared to a similar period in 2004/5 marks a new approach to disability.

The detailed drivers for these changes are hard to identify and complex. Three of the newspapers we surveyed are strong supporters of the Coalition Government and these papers have all expressed support for the spending cuts introduced as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review to tackle the Budget deficit. The fact that they are much more reluctant to criticise the current government's policies on disability compared to similar attempts introduced by the last Labour government would suggest that their apparent support for disabled people was at that time contingent. They were, it could be argued, more interested in using disabled people as a means to attack the Labour government than they were in actually supporting disabled people.

The vitriolic approach adopted by articles in some of the papers today and the way they have reported disability and disabled people in the period following the Comprehensive Spending Review adds further weight to these claims. Much of the coverage in the tabloid press is at best questionable and some of it is deeply offensive. The increased focus on benefit fraud with outlandish claims that over 70% of people on disability benefits are frauds is an example of this type of reporting. These claims are made overwhelmingly without evidence and at no point are the media reporting the very low levels of fraud that occurs overall in relation to these benefits. We would further cite the use of pejorative language, the failure to explore the impact of the proposed cuts on disabled people's quality of life, the reluctance to criticise government policy on these issues and the frequent representation of some disabled people as undeserving of benefits as potentially contributing to what could become a highly inflammatory situation.

While there is as yet no direct evidence to support the claim that these reports are leading to the reported increases in hate crimes, newspapers should take much greater care in this area. The increased pejorative coverage of disability may have a long term effect and further work will be needed to monitor this.

The impacts these changes have had on the way that disability is perceived by the population is difficult to determine precisely. Many of the participants had very complex and often conflicting views. Many, for example, believed that there was a high level of fraud but all participants also had personal knowledge of friends or family members who were in receipt of a disability benefit and all talked about how hard it had been for them to obtain that benefit. On the other hand they also knew, or claimed to know, people who were committing benefit fraud. All of the research participants made a clear distinction between those who deserved to receive benefits and those who did not and while they were very quick to vilify fraudulent claimants they were also, in the main, very supportive of disabled people. This could be expressed as: disabled people are not fraudsters and fraudsters are not disabled people.

Disabled people themselves are feeling the effects of this coverage and it is impacting on their own feelings of security and safety. There was a great deal of concern among the disabled participants about the effects that upcoming benefit changes will have on their quality of life, on their ability to participate and also on their acceptance by non-disabled people.

The last 20 years have seen major changes in the way that society treats disabled people. Not only is disability now recognized as an equality issue but it is part of the new Single Equality Act (2010) and as such has equal footing with other groups facing discrimination on grounds such as gender, ethnicity and sexual orientation. Recent changes, representing many years of campaigning by disabled people, have culminated inarguably some of the most advanced equality legislation in the world and key elements such as the Equality Duty place very high expectations on public sector bodies. The UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities has been signed and ratified. No longer are disabled people expected to live their lives in institutions as a matter of course. There is (for the moment) a presumption that disabled children will be educated in a mainstream school, while direct payments and other

forms of self-directed support are now a well established part of community care packages. Put simply, disabled people can expect to be included in the mainstream in most aspects of their lives to a hitherto unknown degree.

This progress is not set in stone, however. In particular, it must be stressed that progress on legislation and rights stands in contrast to a relative failure to transform institutions and institutional practices. On the one hand, equality for disabled people, an idea that was once so contentious and so dubious, is now part of the equality mainstream; on the other hand, the demands for equality have yet to be realised in practice. Thus, critiques of, for example, segregated education, exclusion from work, housing, denial of family life, of the right to sexual expression, to form relationships and to be parents, which appeared so incendiary not so long ago, are now widely endorsed. However this change in attitudes has by no means done away with these practices; whilst there has been a change in the way that we talk about disability, disabled people themselves still face widespread discrimination in their day to day lives. In their recently published triennial review, *How Fair is Britain?*, the Equality and Human Rights Commission provide a substantial body of evidence to support this claim and show how, despite over 15 years of anti-discrimination legislation disabled people are still considerably disadvantaged when compared to their nondisabled peers.

The tenuous and contingent nature of the progress experienced by disabled people suggests that these gains can be easily lost or withdrawn. There is a danger that much of the reporting that we discuss in this report could lay the groundwork for the removal of some of the support structures and processes that are currently in place. This fear was expressed openly in one of the focus groups of disabled people and is one that the press should take seriously. By simply replicating the government's position on disability and disability benefit without checking either their statistics or the basis on which the claim is made the partisan approach they adopt has the danger of further adding to the oppression disabled people are experiencing.

Part 2

Introduction

The general election in 2010 and subsequent formation of the Conservative/Liberal Democratic Coalition Government is proving to have a considerable impact on disabled people. There has been much comment on the unprecedented scale of public spending cuts to which the government is committed (e.g. <http://www.inclusionlondon.co.uk/all-in-this-together>). In particular, the changes in welfare policies the government is introducing or preparing to introduce will hit disabled people harder than any other group. Tests on people who receive employment support allowance (ESA) carried out by ATOS (introduced by the previous administration and continued by the current one) are seeking to reduce the number eligible for the benefit. The introduction of a new Universal Credit benefit, the change in indexation of uprating benefits from the higher Retail Price Index (RPI) to the lower Consumer Price Index (CPI) together with changes to entitlement to Disability Living Allowance (DLA) and a range of other benefits and service cuts will all impact adversely on disabled people. Demos estimate that disabled people will lose £9 billion in welfare support in the next five years (Wood and Grant 2010).

Not surprisingly disabled people and their organisations have expressed considerable concern about how these changes will impact on disabled people. The recently published Triennial Review of Equality in Britain, *How Fair is Britain*, published by the Equality and Human Rights Commission highlights the disadvantage and inequality experienced by disabled people in all aspects of life. It is difficult to see how these cuts in entitlement to benefit and support can do anything other than further disadvantage an already disadvantaged group. These concerns have been well documented, for example in two reports published by Demos (Wood and Grant 2010,2011).

Anger has also been directed at the way that the media itself has reported these cuts and has changed the way that disability and disabled people are represented and discussed. Scope and a coalition of

50 other third sector organisations have suggested that this change has played a role in increasing hostility towards disabled people² .

Up until now there has only been anecdotal evidence to support the claim that the media have changed the way that they are reporting disability. The research that this report presents aims to fill that void. By carrying out a content analysis of newspaper coverage in 2004/5 with a comparable period in 2010/11 it shows how newspaper reporting has changed over the two periods.

²<http://www.disabilityhatecrime.org.uk/index.php/component/content/article/1-latest-news/165-hate-crimes-against-britains-disabled-on-the-rise>

Methodology & Design

In meeting the above research objectives, a structured and pragmatic research design was developed employing both qualitative and quantitative methods and working within our set timetable and resources. This design was flexible enough to respond to emergent trends in the data as needed and incorporated a range of methods including interviews, focus groups, content analysis and the comparative case study approach.

Content Analysis

Scope of the Research & Sample

In order to track changes in style or content in media coverage of policy change relating to disability benefits, and thus highlight media responses particular to the recent cuts, a sample coverage was drawn for comparison from two periods:

- The second term of Tony Blair's 'New Labour' Government
- The contemporary Conservative/Liberal Democrat Coalition Government

A large scale detailed content analysis was conducted focussing on five popular newspapers: The Sun, The Mirror, The Express, The Mail and The Guardian. This would determine if government attempts at reconstructing disability as a burden impacted on newspaper coverage of disability issues. Articles mentioning 'disabled', 'disability', 'disabilities' and 'incapacity' were obtained from LexisNexis, for the following time periods:

- October 2004 to January 2005 – 713 documents (once filtered)
- October 2010 to January 2011 – 1015 documents (once filtered)

Duplicates, stories relating to Republic of Ireland and weekend editions were filtered from the sample. Pictures were not included in the analysis but region and edition of the paper were noted.

Two contemporary changes in policy were highlighted in the early planning stages as significant for a focused analysis of recent media coverage:

- The replacement of Disability Living Allowance with Personal Independence Payment
- The replacement of Incapacity Benefit with Employment Support Allowance.

Therefore the period of study was later extended to include the period when these changes were going through:

- March to April 2011 – 548 documents (once filtered)

The range of documentary evidence included news items, features, opinion, reviews, sport, and letters.

Coding

An experienced coding team of eight individuals were employed during the content analysis stage, supervised by Professor Greg Philo in the Media Group. The research design drew on experience gained through another successful (Department of Health-funded) study, into mental health and the media. The present research began with a project-specific briefing in the Media Group briefed members of the coding team on the specific aims of the project and their role and responsibilities within it. A reliable and purpose-specific coding schedule was developed for and by the coders (See Appendix 1), along with detailed descriptors (See Appendix 2). This was overseen by both Professor Philo and Professor Watson, to ensure categories were generated in accordance with the specific aims of the research. The coding team worked methodically according to agreed procedure, and drew practical insights from early data gathered. These highlighted emergent themes, which were used to further inform the design, and ultimately to enrich later analysis. Coders worked collaboratively, discussing examples and checking each others analysis to ensure a consistent approach. In addition to this, the most experienced coders acted as final checker to monitor for consistent output.

The coding schedule categories (See Appendices 1 & 2) were devised to identify references both to:

- Representations which referenced disability and its unique social context, and how this discourse changed over time.
- Political issues raised in the coverage.

In order to assess potential differences in the coverage, when a disability was mentioned this was noted in 3 broad categories:

- Physical and Sensory Impairments
- Mental Health
- Learning disabilities

Among other things, this was hoped to record any potential differences in newspaper assessments of 'need', or differing portrayals of the legitimacy of claimants (as 'deserving' or 'undeserving'), that might be attributed to types of conditions. All articles were coded according to how prominent a theme was in the article, and these variables were measured on a 5 point scale (ranging from a 'bare mention', to a 'dominant theme' in the article). Both implicit and explicit references were noted, when these appeared in the headline. Specific examples of pejorative language referencing disability benefit claimants directly or indirectly were also noted to enrich later analysis. In order to identify the most frequently cited 'voices' across the body of articles, references attributed to politicians (by political party), charities, carers and disabled people, among other key commentators, were all recorded. The coding period occurred between March and June 2011 and, as mentioned above, the initial scope of the project was extended to include crucial coverage between March and April 2011.

Analysis

Analysis began in July and a researcher experienced in data analysis was engaged during this stage. SPSS software was used to identify statistical trends in the data.

Audience Reception Analysis

We also carried out an audience reception study to determine how the reporting of disability and disabled people was being interpreted by the general public and how it was impacting on their perceptions of

the topic. This qualitative element began in June 2011 and carried on until August. The key aims of this section were to:

- Assess how this coverage is impacting on general public attitudes to disability and disabled people.
- Identify disabled people's views on how public attitudes have changed and how messages are being received.

We used the focus groups to further examine key trends highlighted during the quantitative Content Analysis. They were organised according to the standard audience reception techniques (ESRC 2004) and the agenda for the focus groups and the topic guide were set by the findings from the content analysis.

In this section of the research we carried out five focus groups with non-disabled people and two with people who were disabled. Some disabled people also took part in individual, one to one interviews. Each focus group consisted of between five and eight participants and 42 people in total took part in this element of the research. The participants were all volunteers and were recruited from a range of different organisations and were carried out in both England and Scotland. The participants were recruited from a range of organisations and were selected to ensure variety. These focus groups were supplemented by interviews with six journalists and media commentators who specialise in the field of disability. These interviews allowed us to contextualise both the newspaper reporting and the comments made in the focus groups.

All the interviews and focus groups were taped for subsequent analysis and analysis was based on standard qualitative methodologies. The content of each focus group and the interviews were examined and key themes across the groups and the interviews were identified.

Content Analysis: Results and Analysis

In the sample the total amount of coverage which mentioned disabled people was found to have increased between October - January 2004-5 and October - January 2010-11 (from 713 articles in the first period to 1015 in the second), representing a change in the media profile of disabled people who became a focus of enhanced media debate. Our analysis revealed how coverage relating to disability issues changed in the run-up to the 2010-11 Coalition welfare benefit cuts, which Demos anticipated could cost disabled people over £9 billion by the end of this parliament (Wood and Grant, 8 October 2010). In the light of these estimates that disabled people would be disproportionately affected, we explored whether the interests of disabled people were being represented in this enhanced public debate surrounding the cuts. The content analysis of media coverage identified three key themes and emergent trends central in illustrating change in the discourse relating to disability between 2004-5 and 2010-11 and we will discuss them in the context of relevant social, political and economic developments. These were:

- Political discussion and critiques of policy
- Changes in the profile of disability coverage and 'sympathetic' portrayals
- Changes in the profile of representations of the 'undeserving' disabled claimant

Political Discussion and Critiques of Policy

On 1 September 2004 then Prime Minister Tony Blair announced that he aimed to cut the 2.7 million people in receipt of incapacity benefit by one million listing this within "seven key challenges facing Britain in 2004" (Hennessey, 12th Sep 2004). This followed the resignation of Work and Pensions Secretary Andrew Smith, who it was claimed sought to increase "help, advice and training" rather than bring in cuts, and his replacement by the more amenable Alan Johnson (Hennessey, 12 Sep 2004). During this period New Labour's 'Pathways to Work' pilot schemes were in operation with compulsory work-focussed interviews for new claimants, an 'advice' service and £40 grant as incentive to enter work (Bowers, 3 December 2004). Eventually, in the new Cabinet,

Johnson was moved to the new position of Secretary of State for 'Productivity, Energy and Industry' in May 2005, and David Blunkett took over his role at the DWP. Blunkett presided over what the Telegraph described as a Cabinet "split" following the harder line taken by Downing Street raising concern by some MPs and charity groups (Jones, 31 Oct 2005).

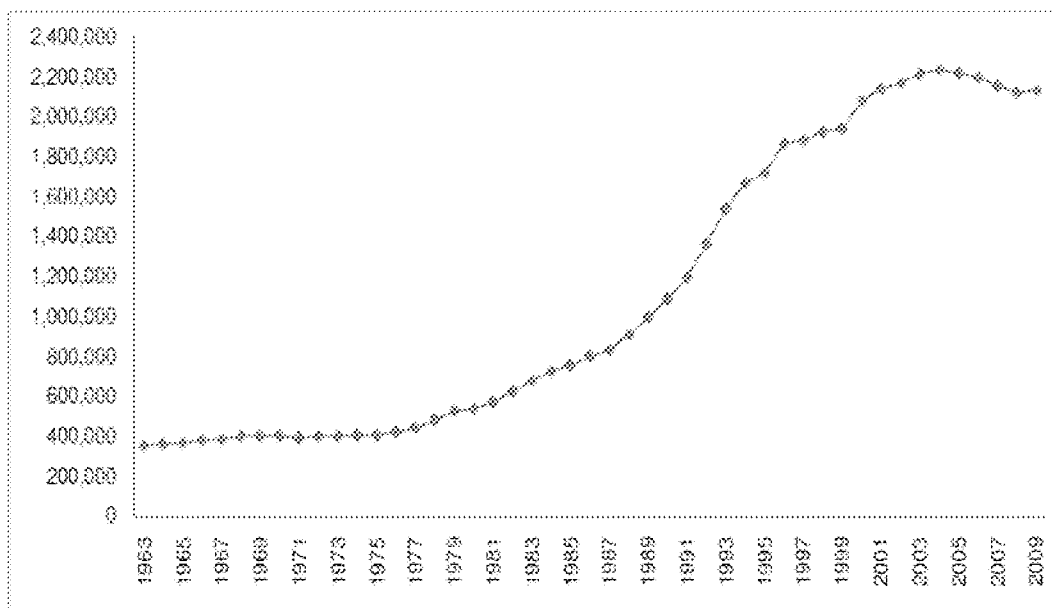
A report by Sheffield-Hallam University's 'Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research' in 2007 argued that government unemployment statistics had concealed around one million 'hidden unemployed' people who have been diverted onto "incapacity benefits" as "anyone out-of-work on incapacity benefits will automatically be excluded from the claimant unemployment figures" (Beatty, et. al, May 2007: 10). They argue in a later report that the dramatic rise in numbers receiving incapacity benefit from 400,000 in the 1970's up to 2.4 million by 2004 (see Figure 1, below) is, in part, a reflection of problems in the British labour market. It may also be due to campaigning by disabled people which succeeded in increasing the focus on disabling barriers and subsequent redefinition of certain 'illnesses', such as cancer, HIV and injuries caused by industrial accidents including back problems, as disabilities. Claimants in Beatty & Fothergill's research were found to have been concentrated in former industrial areas. These were the areas most severely hit by job losses in the 1980's-90's, which had a higher concentration of poor health and injuries and where the labour market never fully recovered (Beatty & Fothergill, 2010). Beatty & Fothergill note that people who "could probably be expected to have been in work in a genuinely fully employed economy" had a financial incentive to take incapacity benefits over Jobseekers Allowance, and "The government liked incapacity benefits because they hid the true scale of joblessness" (2010: 5 & 23). Beatty and Fothergill found while in their 2007 sample 70-74% of claimants had medical reasons for leaving their job (and nearly all felt such factors prevented them working), importantly 60% of their sample of incapacity benefit claimants were found to have no formal qualifications at all (Beatty & Fothergill, 2010: 10). Impairment, poverty and discrimination leading to poor educational attainment are well-known to be mutually associated. Beatty and Fothergill stated that "In a weaker labour market, even a modest degree of ill-health or disability is likely to prejudice an individuals' chances of gaining and holding down employment" particularly if they must seek

low-skill, manual work (Beatty & Fothergill, 2010: 22). They conclude that:

“Where there are plenty of jobs available – a situation that characterised much of Southern England up until the 2008 recession – large numbers of men and women with health problems or disabilities do not hang around on incapacity benefits [...] Where labour supply continues to exceed labour demand, as in so much of older industrial Britain, ill health or disability acts as one of the great discriminators in determining who works and who doesn’t” (Beatty & Fothergill, 2010: 22).

Such research reflects the reality of discrimination and the importance of the disability movement’s case for reasonable adjustments and other equalising measures. It also implies a long-term problem with a governmental focus on diverting people from unemployment figures, thus hiding a weak economy, and doing little to address the real social conditions of disabled people and working class communities.

Thatcher/Major-era Conservative policies were criticised or referenced as context to current policy changes in only three articles in 2004-5, all in *The Guardian*. One *Guardian* article did this indirectly for instance; arguing that Labour had “failed to make a dent in the 2.7 million people on incapacity benefit or severe disability allowance, *many of them men in their 50’s thrown on the scrapheap during the 1980’s and 90’s*” [Our Emphasis] (Elliott, 18 October 2004). Criticism of the former Conservative policies was similarly low in 2010-11 (total of six articles across both 2010-11 samples), when it might have provided counterpoint for discussion of current Conservative policies.



*excluding SDA claimants

Figure 1: Incapacity claimants (6mths+) of working age*, GB, 1963-2009 (from: Beatty & Fothergill, 2010: 4).

During the 2004-5 period newspaper coverage revealed strong attacks on the contemporary Labour Government from all newspapers (in 9.5% of tabloid articles) which will be discussed in detail below. Coverage, as mentioned in the previous section, often emphasised an individual claimant's lack of moral character, or laziness, as an explanation for the increase in claimants rather than structural/policy reasons, disabling barriers or legislative reform. This followed a government trend to 'personalise' the problem. Alan Johnson, on 18 October 2004, said people should return to work quickly like Tony Blair did; he warned doctors to be more careful with who they signed off sick, urging them to end a 'sicknote culture' and putting responsibility on them as 'gatekeepers' to the benefits (The Times, 19 Oct 2004). His comments were of course repeated in the press, one such article in The Express blames doctors outright in the headline, "I'm sick of Sick-note Britain says Minister; Doctors accused of causing benefits crisis by signing off Millions with little reason" and used pejorative language, describing Britain as a "soft-touch" for "work-shy" people who "languish" on benefits (Walker, 19 October 2004). We observed that in The Express articles making the claim that people had been *encouraged* onto benefits as a direct result of government policy increased from 2.1% of articles in October-January 2004-5 to 5.6% of their articles in the same period of 2010-11. Interestingly in a health column a week later the same paper ran a feature by 'Dr Rosemary' who emphasised that

“patient interest” should underpin doctors judgments, not government cuts, and “just because Tony Blair is back at his desk a couple of days after heart surgery doesn’t mean that everyone can do the same” (26 October 2004). Nevertheless some coverage did highlight the absence of jobs as an issue, a letter in The Sun pointed to this, but blamed it on Labour bringing in “cheaper foreign labour” (Letter, 19 October 2004). Some other coverage blamed Labour, for example, The Daily Mail argued that “the cost of sickness and incapacity benefits has soared since labour came to power” (Taggart, 29 October 2004). Yet while an increase can be shown in this period of New Labour it is clearly a longer-term trend (see figure 1 above). Another article, this time in The Guardian, notes this long-term development citing, “a three-fold increase on the number of claimants 25 years ago” (Bower, 3 December 2004).

There was next to no coverage in *defence* of Labour during the 2004-5 period: just two articles, one in The Guardian and another in the form of a letter to The Sun, from a stroke victim’s wife and carer who briefly stated that she didn’t “feel threatened by Tony Blair’s new stance on benefits” as she didn’t think “genuine claimants have anything to worry about” (Douse, 22 October 2004). In The Guardian, attack on New Labour occurred in 6.3% of its articles but it was a low-prominence theme (dominant in only one article). One such example of critique was the investigation mentioned above into child mental health provision in prisons, where The Guardian criticised policies of New Labour and its “immediate predecessors” (Davies, 8 December 2004). The paper states that:

“between 1992 and 2001, the number of children being jailed every year soared by 90% [...] The number of children under 15 sent to custody increased by 800%” and argues that “around 80% of children in custody suffer from at least two mental disorders” (Davies, 8 December 2004).³

Only 1.9% of all tabloids showed any defence at all of the Labour Government or their policies in relation to disability during 2004-5. Interestingly, *no* defence of New Labour policies was found in the traditionally Labour-supporting ‘Daily Mirror’ during 2004-5.

³ The Daily Mail has featured a series of articles highlighting criminality in young children conversely arguing that “As many as 3,000 criminals, including rapists, robbers and burglars, escaped punishment last year because they were too young to be prosecuted” (See Greenwood, 27th June 2011 & Derbyshire, 28th February 2011).

Indeed, the most virulent criticism during this period came from The Express (12.4% of Express articles), the Daily Mail (10.7% of its articles) and The Mirror (7.2% of its articles). With this criticism a dominant theme in the paper (dominant in 5.8% of its articles), The Mirror targeted strong critique at New Labour's claims at the time, that "two thirds of those claiming incapacity benefit are fit enough to work"; the paper defended claimants who it said have "no option" because they "cannot get a job" (Routledge, 17 December 2004). On this issue The Mail also gave a lengthy right-wing critique of New Labour, citing the Conservatives who were attacking "Labour's failure to tackle the spiralling sicknote culture". It argued that jobless figures disguised "nearly eight million people" who were not looking for work, including those on incapacity benefit (Chapman, 16 December 2004). Criticism of the New Labour Government during 2004-5 was noted most often, however, in The Express (6.9% of its articles containing criticism of New Labour government as a 'dominant' theme). One example highlighted the report that the Government's own DWP staff had taken "12.6 days off sick" and cost "taxpayers £100 million", as ironic, having been released "just days after the Government declared war on the workshy" (The Express, 8 December 2004). In contrast to The Mirror, The Express' criticism of New Labour centred largely around how its policies had encouraged 'welfare cheats' to take 'tax-payers' money and unsurprisingly they had a higher reporting of 'undeserving' claimants (discussed fully below). The attack on the benefits system was also strongest in The Express (13.1% of its articles in 2004-5) and the Daily Mail (10% of its articles in that period). This Express attack on the benefits system increased in the comparable 2010-11 period to 17.2%, while the Daily Mail attacks reduced slightly to 7.7% of its articles. In The Sun coverage of this kind similarly shot up from 8.9% in 2004-5 to 14.2% in 2010-11.

This coverage can be contrasted with that accompanying the recent cuts. In October-January 2010- the Coalition Government was both attacked less frequently *and* defended more overall by the tabloids than New Labour had been during the same period of 2004-5 (4.1% of tabloid articles were found to contain criticism of the Coalition and 4.8% contained arguments in defence of the Coalition). The most defences occurred in The Express (15 articles, 5.6% of its articles) and The Guardian (13 articles or 6% of its articles). However, *defences* of the Coalition usually made up only a small proportion of the article (as a

dominant theme this was most common in The Express but still comprised only 1.5% of its articles in October-January 2010-11 and 1.4% in March-April 2011). Where a defence of the Coalition occurred as a dominant theme of the article, this sometimes occurred in the form of a letter or opinion piece contributed by an activist or representative of that party. For example, a letter was sent to The Guardian by Children's Minister Sarah Teather which responded to what it called a "misrepresentation" of the Green Paper on Education and "Special Educational Needs and Disabilities" and defended the policy change as motivated by "parent choice" (14 October 2011). In 28/62 articles in October-January 2010-11, and 27/46 articles in March April 2011 in which statements defending the Coalition were provided these were taken from politicians/civil servants. This was strongest in The Express, which quoted the Coalition nine times during each period.

Journalists voices were recorded as the other main category to which support was attributed, 23/62 times in October-January 2010-11, and 12/46 articles in March-April 2011. When there was an opposing voice, in The Guardian disabled people, their families and carers often provided it, while charities were cited in 14 of the paper's articles in relation to a theme of Coalition Government criticism in the October-January 2010-11 sample. It is important to note that, in addition to the overt comments supporting or defending the Government described here, support of the cuts in incapacity benefit and therefore support of Government policy, is implicit in:

- The *increase* in tabloid articles presenting the incapacity claimant as 'undeserving', both through content and style (ie pejorative language such as 'scroungers', character attacks) in all but the Daily Mail and The Guardian;
- The *increased* tabloid coverage focussing on incapacity benefit 'fraud' and using pejorative language such as 'cheats' especially in The Sun, The Express and Daily Mail;
- The *reduction* in articles claiming claimants are 'deserving' in all but The Mirror and The Guardian.

These trends, which may not always be linked directly to policy, still tacitly support and legitimate it. Findings relating to this coverage will be explored in detail below. Defence of the Coalition rose to 7.8% of tabloid articles in the March-April 2011 sample, despite a drop in this category

by The Guardian, who defended the government in only six articles; there was strong support by The Express (11.6% of their articles) and The Sun (7.4% of their articles).

The polarisation of the partisan press is most clear from those articles including critique of the Coalition. Attacks on the Coalition dominated Guardian coverage comprising 34.7% of Guardian articles from October-January 2010-11 (a prominent theme in 10.6% of the paper's articles). This fell slightly in March-April to 30.3% of articles but in this key policy period there were more articles in which this theme was dominant (17.2% of all Guardian articles). This is also true of The Mirror, which criticised the Coalition Government in 25% of its articles during this period, a figure that rose to 33% in April-March 2011 (See below). One example of such criticism is the strong article in The Guardian written by Rhydian James, a disabled economist and political activist for Plaid Cymru whose criticism, while detailing specific policies and their likely impacts, also emphasised the potential strength of disabled people as an oppositional group. He states,

“The overall impact of these measures is to penalise people for being ill or disabled, as if that were a crime or some form of cheating. However, the coalition has made a mistake if they think they have picked on a group too weak and vulnerable to resist.” (James, 22nd October 2010).

Besides real-life cases such as this, The Guardian also presented its argument through factual articles detailing the wider context of the cuts, and the contraction in support services. For example, one article details information about “redundancies” in charities (including The Shaw Trust, and Solent Mind) and reductions in Day Centres and other services, alongside criticism of Coalition cuts policy:

“The government expects to save £2Bn over five years by encouraging people into work, or pushing them on to a lower-paid benefit” (Gentleman, 30 March 2011).

	Oct 2010- Jan 2011	March- April 2011
Sun	2.0% (4/197)	2.5% (3/122)
Mirror	25% (51/204)	33.0% (38/115)
Express	5.6% (15/268)	3.4% (5/147)
Mail	9.2% (12/130)	18.5% (12/65)
Guardian	34.7% (75/216)	30.3% (30/99)
All Tabloids	4.1% (33/799)	12.9% (58/449)

Figure 2: Proportion of Articles Containing Criticism of Coalition Government

While all-out attacks on the Coalition's plans were rare in The Sun, and in The Express, The Daily Mail was found to criticise the coalition in 9.2% of its articles in October-January 2010-11, and 18.5% in March-April (though due to its total small number of articles mentioning disabled people, this was only 12 articles in each case). In some of these articles there appear to have been measured attempts not to stray too far from possible sympathies of the paper's readership. A more critical line was thus taken when, wheelchair user and woman with MS, Margaret Lynch confronted Prime Minister Cameron and Deputy PM Nick Clegg at a 'Q&A' staged in Nottingham. In a case which would perhaps inevitably draw public sympathy,⁴ Lynch accused them of "picking on the weakest people in society" and described the impact of the cuts on her own life (Thornton, 22 October 2010). Lynch's voice was represented as the dominant one in a short article in the left-leaning Daily Mirror (Thornton, 22 October 2010). But in another, longer, piece in the Daily Mail her arguments were also recounted. This story's language diverged from the majority of the paper's coverage about the cuts (which regularly utilised pejorative language to drive a strong message). The Margaret Lynch

⁴ This relates to the issue of 'visibility' which will be elaborated further below in relation to the 'undeserving' claimant.

story was approached more carefully through framing, voicing the government's responses and explanations for the cuts at length as a counterpoint; it avoided overt 'attack' of her arguments against the Coalition. For example The Mail highlighted Clegg's claim that "in the real world it is the richest that are paying the most - about that there is not doubt at all" and that they too were concerned with 'fairness' (Daily Mail, 22 October 2010).

Criticism of the past New Labour Government was also observed in October-January 2010-11 (4.1% of tabloid articles), and we noted examples where this appeared to be backing up praise of Coalition policies. For instance, in one Sun article, 'Hacking off the Head of the Welfare Monster', in which the 'undeserving' incapacity claimant was the dominant theme, there was a supporting defence of the Coalition Government, evidenced in statements such as "Now at long last the Government is doing something about it", and this was accompanied by an attack on New Labour policy (Kavanagh, 4 April 2011). The article for instance states how the reforms were "picked up by Labour welfare supremo James Purnell but vetoed by Gordon Brown for fear of upsetting hand-wringing lefties" (Kavanagh, 4 April 2011). It also criticises "Labour job creation scams which squandered billions while failing to find work for anyone who wasn't already looking" (Kavanagh, 4 April 2011).⁵ Much of the past New Labour criticism came from The Express (7.1% of their articles in October-January 2010-11, rising to 10.2% in March-April 2011), one article for example criticised a "something-for-nothing culture that was allowed to spiral out of control under labour" (28 December 2010).

There were very few articles in the press which mentioned 'Big Society', especially considering this was Cameron's 2010 flagship policy programme. While this would inevitably have been more topical following its announcement in July-August 2010 (prior to the period of study), its near-absence is still surprising; since this was presented as the Coalition reinvigorating civil society, whose role would then be to provide support as the cuts rolled out in coming months. There were seven in total, all in January-October 2010-11, five of which were from The Guardian. In one example Polly Toynbee in The Guardian attacked the Coalition's 'Big Society' revealing that "out of 40 contracts worth

⁵It also attacked what it called "eye-watering" English prescription charges in the English and NI editions; "one of the barmy consequences of regional government, invented so that irresponsible politicians like the Scots Nats next month can buy votes at election time", yet this was omitted from the Scottish Edition (Kavanagh, 4th April 2011).

between £3Bn and £5Bn, only two went to not-for-profit programmes” with preference going to private contractors who undercut more successful and experienced providers such as Wise Group (5 April 2011). They include a company (Action 4 Employment) founded by Emma Harrison, David Cameron’s ‘Workless Families’ Tsar, and Igneus Deloitte who won seven large contracts (Toynbee, 5 April 2011).

It would have also been useful to examine the role of private companies in the debate around disability issues, particularly the extent to which social and legal reforms such as the Equality Act 2010 are presented as a burden on employers, and the openness of the job market to disabled workers. Amanda Platell’s column in The Mail for instance describes this as “a crude, monstrously politically correct piece of anti-business legislation” which “makes it more difficult and more costly for companies to create jobs” (2 October 2010). In contrast there was one article in The Express entitled ‘Our Social Conscience Matters More than Cash’ introducing examples of ‘Social Enterprises’, including a not-for-profit Cardiff Packaging and Mailing company staffed by a number of people with learning disabilities, though examples of such articles were rare (26 October 2004).

Changes in the Profile of Disability Coverage and ‘Sympathetic’ Portrayals

The content analysis identified a high proportion of sympathetic portrayals in the October-January 2004-5 sample, across the papers. For example, 13.5% of all tabloid articles introduced the reader to information about particular conditions as a dominant theme in the article, and this was most common in the Daily Mail comprising 18.6% of its coverage from this period (For example see Figure 1, below). One example this was the Daily Mail piece, ‘Is this the first drug to help Down’s Children?’ in which it describes results of a trial of an Alzheimer’s disease drug ‘Aricept’ found to boost “language and learning skills” in children with Down’s Syndrome (Hagan, 26th October 2004). It secondarily provides some contextual information about the condition, stating that:

“Two babies with Down’s syndrome are born every day in the UK and about 60,000 people have the condition. It is caused by

the presence of an extra chromosome in a baby's cells and occurs by chance" (Hagan, 26th October 2004).

The story quotes medical experts involved in the trial and, more briefly, The Down's Syndrome Association. Celebrity profiles were one way in which disability issues were made accessible, particularly in the tabloids. For example, The Daily Mail describes singer Daniel Beddingfield's experiences of ADHD in depth, and his treatment (Lower, 9 October 2004). Both The Daily Mail in 'Superhuman to the Very End' and The Sun in 'A Man of Steel' ran celebrity features following the death of Christopher Reeve. They gave descriptive information, and praised his courage and campaigning (Roberts, 12 October 2004 & Hunter, 12 October 2004). But in the comparable figures for October-January 2010-11 there was a substantial drop in the presence of this 'Descriptive' category for the Daily Mail, down to 10.8%. One example of such an article from The Guardian profiles the career of Guy Wilkins an award-winning teacher who worked in The "Marjory McClure Special School", Chislehurst (Crace, 26 October 2004). It delivers first-person accounts of his life within its narrative, such as:

"At least once every two years we have a funeral – you try not to let it get to you too much, and celebrate what the child has done but its hard not to get emotional as you've often formed a tremendously close relationship with the child and their parents" (quoted in Crace, 26 October 2004).

Such descriptive articles with disability as a central theme also occurred frequently in The Guardian, in 14.8% of their total articles in 2004-5; but in 2010-11 this had dropped to 5.6%. The Mirror's use of this theme also fell from 13.8% to 6.9% across these periods.

Examples of sympathetic 'real life experience' accounts of disability or depictions of 'triumph over adversity' by a disabled individual, were also common 'sympathetic' themes appearing strongly among the papers. 'Triumph' featured in 11% of all tabloid coverage in October-January 2004-5, and 10.4% for the comparable period in 2010-11. In The Guardian it fell slightly from 10% to 9.7%. However, these 'triumph' accounts were a *defining characteristic* of 2004-5 coverage in the Daily Mail (15.7% of their coverage) in 2004-5 (See figure 3 below for example).



Figure 3: 'I can't move or speak. But am I happy? You bet!' in *The Daily Mail* (Hardy, 3 March 2011).

In one such article, The Mail presents first-person accounts of two women, with children disabled from birth, both positively rejecting termination or withdrawal of care. One account, by Barbara Bradley states:

“at one point we withdrew treatment, asking ourselves why we were allowed it. Was it that we couldn't face his death? After three days, Colm amazed everyone by coming out of his coma and indicating he was hungry” (Logan & Brandley, 13 October 2004).

The tone of these 'inspiring' stories about disabled people overcoming challenges often conveyed sympathy or tragedy, but could also be uplifting for the reader – celebrating strength of the disabled person. Another 'triumph' article from the sample, this time in The Express,

celebrated 'The Girls Who Give Teenagers a Good Name' at the CosmoGirl Awards (26 October 2004). Their 'Girl of the Year' was Sophie Morgan, paralysed by a car accident only to go on and raise over £40,000 for other wheelchair users. She was described as "brimming with enthusiasm and energy" with an "inspirational attitude" (The Express, 26 October 2004). Lynch & Thomas have pointed to this media trend, saying "media portrayals have emphasised heart-warming portrayals of people who overcame their disabilities while being constantly good-humoured, patient and courageous" (1994: p9).

The content analysis revealed that a physical or sensory disability was also mentioned in 68/77 references to specific disabilities in 'triumph' articles, in 2004-5, a trend that stayed strong in 2010-11 (comparable figure for 2010-11 is 82/100). This demonstrates a clear focus on physical disability in this category of sympathetic portrayal, which presents a highly constructed image of the 'strength' of disabled individuals. Indeed Riley describes it as a "steadfast habit" for journalists to structure a disability narrative in the following way; they begin by "replaying the accident and capitalising on the ooh-ah factor of the medical miracle by which the subject of the story is still around to tell the tale" (2005: p54). In another 'triumph' article, for example, the Daily Mail tells the story of Barry McDermott who, "was planning a career in the army or as a professional boxer, until an airgun pellet blinded him in one eye when he was 15 years old" (Bott, 12 October 2004). Yet McDermott "overcame his disability" and now plays professional rugby; he's quoted saying, "I don't think losing an eye has ever held me back [...] I certainly don't think of myself as disabled" (Bott, 12 October 2004). A similar example can be seen below, drawn from The Mirror during 2011 (Figure 4). Ross in her study of depictions of disability in radio, states that 'tragic but brave' and 'dependent and helpless' are two common representations frequently identified by disabled contributors to media audience research (2003: 134). Lynch & Thomas criticise this media-imposed dichotomy, which makes it "difficult to bring public attention to the real issues facing people with disabilities" (1994: p9). They say these "traditional media portrayals do not cover issues such as discrimination; societal attitudes; and physical, social and economic barriers." (Lynch & Thomas, 1994: 9). Rather than serving the needs of disabled people, the purpose of this sort of coverage is summed up neatly in The Mail article above, Figure 3; it claims an "amazing" stroke victim shows an "optimism in the face of unimaginable adversity", which

“should cast into sharp relief our own gripes and grumbles” (Hardy, 3 March 2011).



Figure 4: ‘Blind Courage’ in *The Mirror* (Smith, 24th March 2011).

The content analysis revealed this dichotomy in the language of the tabloids. There were even occasional mentions of people as ‘crippled’ – to emphasise the helplessness of the ‘victim’ and pathos of the story: eight articles in 2004-5. This occurred three times in *The Express*, three times in *The Sun*, once in *The Mirror* and once in *The Mail*. For example, in an article condemning the treatment of a man with osteoporosis by a train company (who put him in their baggage car), *The Express* use the word to emphasise him as helpless victim (Marsh, 16 December 2004). Likewise, *The Sun*’s article “Crippled Bob Told: Find Job” emphasises the physical helplessness of disabled person Bob Gascoigne in order to highlight the injustice of his benefits being revoked (*The Sun*, 17 December 2004). Interestingly, *The Guardian* issued a correction to one of its articles, which said someone “suffers with” Asperger’s Syndrome, stating that its stylebook instructs journalists at the paper to avoid terms such as “victim of, crippled by, suffering from, afflicted by” (Wainwright, 29 October 2004). Across both periods in 2010-11 (October-January and March-April combined) there were five uses of ‘cripple’, all in *The Sun*.

A study by Ross has found disabled people were portrayed, in one disabled individual’s words, either as “victims” or “superhumans” (Steve quoted in Ross, 2003: 134), and respondents felt these stereotypes were “patronising” (Marilyn quoted in Ross, 2003: 134). Shaban, has argued that this media strategy forces disabled people into one construct or the other, which “rests blame or accolade at the door of the individual: it is personal, not political” (Shaban, 1996). These simplistic media constructions ultimately provide a basis from which distinctions between a ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ disability benefit claimant can

later be built (these themes will be developed further in the next section). Interestingly, some articles which used the word ‘cripple’ described alleged fraud; “crippled” here was used to add weight to each paper’s disapproval, through emphasising the shamelessness of the “welfare cheat” to pretend to be one of these innocent ‘victims’ (Mulchrone, 4 December 2004 & The Express, 8 November 2004).

As observed above with descriptive articles, those characterised by sympathetic ‘real life experience’ accounts fell across all papers: in the tabloid press for instance it went from 29.2% of their articles in October-January 2004-5, to 22.0% in comparable 2010-11 figures. The figure for The Guardian dropped from 26.5% of articles to 21.8%. In the same periods the proportion of Express articles using ‘triumph’ fell slightly from 7.6% to 6%. ‘Triumph’ dropped *dramatically* as a Daily Mail theme from a strong start at 15.7% in 2004-5 to only 7.7% of coverage in October-January 2010-11, and again to 6.1% in March-April 2011. References to ‘triumph’ by contrast *increased* in The Mirror between these comparable periods from 10.1% to 15.7%. Sympathetic coverage was overall less prominent in the 2010-11 sample particularly when this is witnessed alongside the swing away from coverage displaying disability benefit claimants as ‘deserving’ and increased attacks by some papers in support of the Coalition cuts (see below).

Throughout both periods, overwhelmingly, The Guardian was more likely to make references to discrimination or marginalisation of disabled people, and more than twice as often as the tabloid papers in October-January 2010-11 (29.6%) due to a fall in their sympathetic coverage (from 19.5% in October-January 2004-5) to 14.4%. Facilities and resources needed by disabled people were by far most discussed by The Guardian in 2004-5 (26.5% of articles, compared to 13.9% across the tabloids). These findings support the claims of Lynch & Thomas, mentioned above, that the mainstream coverage of this is often lacking (1994: 9). One example of such 2004-5 Guardian coverage was a ‘Special Investigation’ into the dramatic increase of “children in prisons which cannot deal with their mental health problems” (Davies, 8 December 2004). Using statistics, medical and legal expert opinion and a real-life case study, the article describes in detail the inadequate provision and lack of “access to specialist child and adolescent psychiatrists” for children in custody (Davies, 8 December 2004). Another 2004 article from The Guardian contained a strong theme of social and economic

marginalisation in discussing how disabled families fall into “heavy debt” in trying to meet the costs of essential care (Carvel, 5 November 2004). Between October-January 2004-5 and October-January 2010-11, there was a reduction in statements of genuine ‘need’ by disabled people (general or individual) in articles from the tabloid press. This was evidenced by fewer references to ‘Facilities and Resources (including financial)’ recorded in the data (this fell from 13.9% to 9.0%), and figures for The Guardian also fell from 26.5% in 2004-5 to 19% in October-January 2010-11.

Change in the Profile of Representations of the ‘Undeserving’ Disability Claimant

With a climate of debate over New Labour’s benefits changes at the time, the analysis revealed that in 2004-5 discussion of incapacity benefit claimants as ‘undeserving’ of their benefits occurred in 15.5% of tabloid articles (see Figure 5 below); a theme occurring in only 2.6% of Guardian articles. While the percentage of tabloid articles that mentioned this theme during the 2010-11 coverage varied little from these 2004-5 figures, this reflects an *overall* rise in the total number of articles mentioning disability. We can see from the raw data in Figure 4 that there was a large *increase* in the numbers of tabloid articles produced attacking the ‘undeserving’ disability benefit claimant in 2010-11. This figure rose from 81 articles in 2004-5 (a dominant ‘undeserving’ theme occurring in 47 of these) to 127 (dominant ‘undeserving’ theme in 60 of these) for the same three month period in 2010-11.

	Oct 2004- Jan 2005	Oct 2010- Jan 2011	March- April 2011	All 2010- 2011
Sun	18.8% (19/101)	26.9% (53/197)	13.1% (16/122)	21.6% (69/319)
Mirror	5.1% (7/138)	5.9% (12/204)	5.2% (6/115)	5.6% (18/319)
Express	21.4% (31/145)	15.7% (42/268)	21.1% (31/147)	17.6% (73/415)
Mail	17.1% (24/140)	15.4% (20/130)	12.3% (8/65)	14.4% (28/195)
Guardian	2.6% (5/189)	2.3% (5/216)	3.0% (3/99)	2.5% (8/315)
All Tabloids	15.5% (81/524)	15.9% (127/799)	13.6% (61/449)	15.1% (188/1248)

Figure 5: Prevalence of 'Undeserving' Category in Articles

Therefore, while the proportion of *Express* articles discussing claimants in this way fell from a peak in 2004-5 of 21.4% of its articles (more than any other tabloid), to 15.7% of its articles in the same period of 2010-11; the actual number of these articles it produced *increased* by 26% (from 31 to 42 articles). An example of such an *Express* article from January 2011 can be seen in Figure 6, where 75% of incapacity benefit claimants are described as “skiving” (Hall 26 January 2011).



Figure 6: '75% on Sick are Skiving' in Daily Express (Hall, 26 January 2011)

Although, as a *percentage* of all tabloid disability articles, the 'undeserving' claimant as a prominent theme decreased slightly from 9% in 2004-5 to 7.5% in the same period in 2010-11 (see Figure 7 below), this was again due to the large total increase in articles. Figure 7 shows a real increase in the 'undeserving claimant' as a prominent tabloid theme. Out of all 524 tabloids in October 2004 – January 2005 this was prominent in 47 articles (content)/ 36 headlines. And out of all 799 tabloids in October 2010 – January 2011 it was found to be prominent in 60 articles (content)/ 50 headlines.

	2004-5	Oct 2010- Jan 2011	March- April 2011	All 2010- 2011
Sun	11.9% (12/101)	14.7% (29/197)	10.7% (13/122)	13.2% (42/319)
Mirror	2.3% (3/138)	2.0% (4/204)	3.5% (4/115)	2.5% (8/319)
Express	14.5% (21/145)	7.1% (19/268)	17.7% (26/147)	10.9% (45/415)
Mail	7.9% (11/140)	6.2% (8/130)	6.2% (4/65)	6.2% (12/195)
Guardian	1.6% (3/189)	0% (0/216)	1.0% (1/99)	0.3% (1/315)
All Tabloids	9.0% (47/524)	7.5% (60/799)	10.5% (47/449)	8.6% (107/1248)

Figure 7: 'Undeserving' Category as High Prominence in Articles

With the changed government approach to the economy and public spending, there was more discussion of incapacity/disability benefits as a drain on the economy (an increase in the tabloids from 22 articles in 2004-5 to 37 in 2010-11), with some articles even blaming the recession itself on incapacity benefit claimants. For instance, The Sun's article entitled, "Shirker's Paradise; Exclusive: IDS on Benefits Britain, Wagner's one of Million who Claim Incapacity, Work-shy are Largely to Blame for Deficit Crisis" (Newton Dunn, 1 December 2010). The Sun heavily increased the proportion of its articles that defined claimants as 'undeserving' from 18.8% during 2004-5, to 26.9% in the same three months in 2010-11; producing more than any other tabloid. The debate had intensified dramatically with the increased scrutiny on the benefits system and politicised newspaper portrayals of disabled people.

The proportion of Express articles containing references to an 'undeserving' claimant shot up from its October-January figure of 15.7%, to 21.1% in March/April 2010-11 (31 articles just in this two month period). The 'undeserving' claimant also appeared in 8% of tabloid headlines from the sample during the March-April period. Coverage intensified in 2010-11 between October-January, and March-April when 10.5% of all tabloid articles mentioning disability used 'undeserving' claimant as a *dominant* theme in the article, this rose from 7.5% in the earlier period (see Figure 7 above). It became a strong 2010-11 theme overall. Ultimately, out of a total of 188 'undeserving' tabloid articles from both sets of data (October-January and March-April 2010-11), in 56.9% (or 107) of these articles this formed a dominant theme in the article.

We found that the 'voice' making such claims about the 'undeserving' claimant within tabloid articles most frequently was that of the journalist, this was noted 64 times out of total 104 voices within the tabloid press in October-January 2004-5. The next most frequently found was the voice of politicians and government officials, which accounted for 28 tabloid occurrences of which 20 were New Labour. By October-January 2010-11, in the tabloids 98/155 'undeserving' claims were attributed to the journalist (particularly in The Sun – 41 times, and The Express – 33 times), and 25/155 were linked to politicians. In The Sun, during this period members of the public became a strong voice making

references to the ‘undeserving’ claimant: this might be a reflection of the ‘Dear Sun’ readers letters included in the sample. During the March-April 2011 period, this trend continued with The Sun and The Express’ journalist voices together contributing 37/87 total occurrences in the tabloid press of ‘undeserving’ claimants theme. The Express quoted political voices in relation to the ‘undeserving’ 14 times, more than all the other papers put together for this two month period, all of which were ‘coalition’.

We noted that during the 2010-11 period, at the same time as this swing towards ‘undeserving’ portrayals was occurring, there was a growing tendency for newspapers to make small concessions for a ‘deserving’ claimant in articles (often from politicians and journalists), without this comprising a central theme. ‘Deserving’ claimants appeared as a minor theme in 8.5% of all tabloid articles in October-January 2010-11, rising from 3.6% in 2004-5. For example a Daily Mail article entitled, “75% of Incapacity Claimants are Fit to Work” included a statement from the ‘TaxPayers Alliance’⁶ that “It’s really not fair on taxpayers or those who are *genuinely ill*” [Our Emphasis] (Peev, 27 October 2010). Similar articles were found outside our sample, as can be seen below in Figure 8, from the Star, which contains the same ‘Taxpayers Alliance’ quote. In The Express, the ‘deserving’ claimant, as a brief aside in its articles, shot up from 4.1% in 2004-5 to 10.9% in October-January 2010-11; a time when only 1.1% of articles in the paper had a *dominant* ‘deserving’ theme. An Express article, entitled “Incapacity Benefit Tests will Pose no Threat to Disabled” presents a heavy attack throughout on the undeserving claimant and benefit system, yet briefly concedes, “There are, of course, people who are genuinely incapable of working and it is right that the state should support them” (Clark, 12 October 2010). In a vitriolic article in The Sun, the author states:

“How would you like a £91.40 inflation-linked ‘grant’ every week for the rest of your life, just for sitting on your backside? You’d need a £200,000 Lottery win for that sort of income. Yet, more than 1.6Million people in Britain today have won the jackpot by ‘going on the sick’. *Some are genuinely unable to work*. But countless thousands are having a laugh at the

⁶ We noted a rise in the October-January 2010-11 sample in the number of ‘undeserving’ claims attributed to ‘Other Expert’ (10 in total) – many of which would have been quotes by partisan Think Tanks. Far from representing the ‘ordinary’ working taxpayer, The Taxpayers Alliance is a conservative pressure group which aims to lower taxes and spending, and which is supported by large Conservative Party donors such as The Midlands Industrial Council. It has become a major media voice, and, according to The Guardian, as of 9th October 2009, in the last year it had appeared in 517 Daily Mail articles, and 307 articles in The Sun, compared to 29 times in Guardian articles (Booth, 9th October 2009).

expense of Sun readers and others who do get out of bed, turn up for work and pay taxes to fund the £12.5Bn bill for their feckless lifestyles” [Our Emphasis] (Kavanagh, 4 April 2011).

There is no debate of the social reality of disabled people’s lives or the political context in which people have come to be drawing this benefit, or indeed whether it is objectively high given the economic context and prevalence of discrimination. Explanation is reduced to individual responsibility and weakened social values (Kavanagh, 4 April 2011).

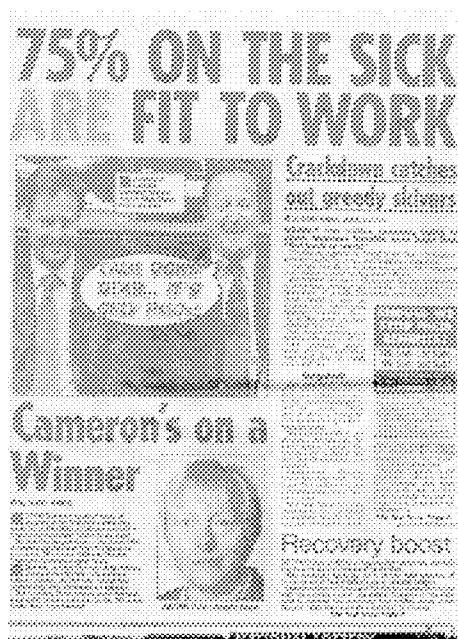


Figure 8: '75% on the Sick are Fit to Work' in *The Daily Star* (Nicks, 28 April 2010).

Such concessions were less common (3.6%) in articles from 2004-5, and appear to be as a result of high-prominence 'deserving' claimant articles being 'squeezed out' (these fell from 3.8% of tabloid coverage in 2004-5 to 1.6% in the same three months of 2010-11). The 'concessions' to the 'deserving' in the 2010-11 sample provide reassurances whilst disregarding the real effects of the changes on disabled people, often not mentioning the reduction in entitlement and time limits that are being imposed even on those defined as 'genuine' claimants. In justifying major changes to the benefits system it was necessary to reassure the public that 'genuinely' disabled people would be unaffected, while building public anger against those being redefined as

'cheats'. The large reduction in the number of articles in which a *dominant* theme was the 'deserving' claimant, for particular papers was a strong theme. While in 2004-5 The Sun had used a dominant 'deserving' claimant theme in 7.9% of its articles, this fell in 2010-11 to 0%. Similarly, The Express showed a fall from 6.2% of articles, to 1.1% in the comparable period of 2010-11. The Daily Mail drop in this category was slight (1.4%-0.8%) as they rarely included this theme as dominant in any period anyway.

As The Sun and Express abandoned the 'deserving' claimant theme, in The Guardian and The Mirror this theme was found to have *increased*. Dominant 'deserving' claimant articles in The Guardian rose from 0.5% in 2004-5 to 3.7% in October-January 2010-11, and comparable data for The Mirror's coverage also showed an increase from 0.7% to 7.3%. Though even these figures are low when we consider both the other papers' decline in 'deserving' coverage and their increased attacks of 'undeserving' claimants. The cuts have effectively polarised coverage of disability politically.

	2004-5	Oct 2010- Jan 2011	March-April 2011	All 2010-2011
Sun	7.9% (8/101)	0% (0/197)	2.4% (3/122)	0.9% (3/319)
Mirror	0.7% (1/138)	7.3% (9/204)	2.6% (3/115)	3.8% (12/319)
Express	6.2% (9/145)	1.1% (3/268)	1.4% (2/147)	1.2% (5/415)
Mail	1.4% (2/140)	0.8% (1/130)	0% (0/65)	0.5% (1/195)
Guardian	0.5% (1/189)	3.7% (8/216)	3.0% (3/99)	3.5% (11/315)
All Tabloids	3.8% (20/524)	1.6% (13/799)	1.78% (8/449)	1.7% (21/1248)

Figure 9: 'Deserving' Category as High Prominence in Articles

Less pejorative voices in some articles also addressed those sections of the public less sympathetic to descriptions of the “scroungers” (Clark, 12 October 2010) by talking of “welfare dependency” (Little, 21^t April 2011) (see detailed analysis below). Such articles echoed Employment Minister Chris Grayling’s argument that the two million claimants now deemed ‘fit to work’, had through a lack of “help”, been “trapped on incapacity benefits” by the failing system (Peev, 27 October 2010). For example, a disabled single parent featured in The Express who experiences daily dislocation of her joints due to Ehlers Danlos Syndrome and “has not had a proper job for a decade”, was quoted as saying her benefits were a ‘trap’ (21 October 2010).

In the bulk of the newspapers there is an absence of recognition that the cuts are not just affecting those making fraudulent claims, but are negatively impacting on disabled people’s lives, themes put forward by the Herald (discussed below, Figure 11 - Alan, 15 May 2011) and The Guardian. The Guardian reported that Coalition policy will see Disability Living Allowance (DLA), which is used by disabled people in overcoming the barriers to everyday life, reduced by 20% when it is replaced by Personal Independence Payment in 2013 (Williams, 22 June 2010). Questions have even been raised over whether the changes to DLA breach human rights law (BBC News, 8 January 2011). In contrast to the tabloids’ claims, a series of articles in The Guardian expressed concern that people might have their benefits stopped if they gain some limited improvement in their ability and have to move from DLA (a non-means tested benefit which is not related to employment status and was originally introduced to compensate for the additional costs of being disabled, such as higher heating bills or buying pre-prepared foods) and instead apply for Employment Support Allowance (an employment related benefit). They describe the new ESA test as “fundamentally flawed” as it does not take a holistic approach nor account for “motivations, social and practical – as well as physical barriers” disabled people face in returning to work (Wood and Grant, 20 October 2010). The Coalition plans are accused of failing to take account of the higher costs faced by disabled people; both in ending DLA mobility payments for people in care homes, which assumes disabled people “no longer need a social life or mental stimulation”, and in introducing a ‘cap’ on all benefits (James, 22 October 2010). This ‘cap’ is Chancellor Osborne’s plan that “No family on out of work benefits will get more than the

average family gets by going out to work” and will apply to those receiving ESA (quoted in Daily Mail, 5 October 2010).

The tabloid debate which defined disability claimants either as (the few) ‘deserving’ or (the majority) ‘undeserving’ of benefit was accompanied by an increase in references to incapacity benefit fraud in all papers, functioning to confirm claims that were being made elsewhere about ‘undeserving’ claimants. Fraud articles increased from 2.8% of tabloid coverage in October – January 2004-5 to 6.1% in the same period in 2010-11 (see Figure 10, below). While the proportion of fraud coverage in The Express doubled from 2.1% to 4.2%, the total number of articles had shot up from six in October – January 2004-5, to 22 articles in the same period of 2010-11, more than any other paper produced. The proportion of such articles in The Mail increased from 0.7% in 2004-5, to 3.8% in the same period in 2010-11, and then rose steeply to 9.2% in March-April. In The Sun fraud stories also increased markedly from just 2% in 2004-5 to 7.1% in 2010-11. This was underscored by the language. Out of the 180 tabloid articles across both periods in 2010-11 (October-January and March-April combined) the word ‘cheats’ was used in 48 articles, ‘fraudster’ was used in 10 articles, ‘con’ in eight articles, ‘fiddle’ (the system) in eight articles⁷, as well as many other inventive synonyms.

⁷ Including variations on these ie. ‘conning’/‘conned’, ‘fiddling’/‘fiddled’ etc...

	2004-5	Oct 2010- Jan 2011	March- April 2011	All 2010- 2011
Sun	2.0% (2/101)	7.1% (14/197)	5.7% (7/122)	6.6% (21/319)
Mirror	4.3% (6/138)	3.9% (8/204)	3.5% (4/115)	3.8% (12/319)
Express	4.1% (6/145)	8.2% (22/268)	7.5% (11/147)	8.0% (33/415)
Mail	0.7% (1/140)	3.8% (5/130)	9.2% (6/65)	5.6% (11/195)
Guardian	0% (0/189)	0.5% (1/216)	0% (0/99)	0.3% (1/315)
All Tabloids	2.8% (15/524)	6.1% (49/799)	6.2% (28/449)	6.2% (77/1248)

Figure 10: Prevalence of 'Fraud' Category in Articles

This strength of fraud as a tabloid theme conflicts with the *reality* of levels of incapacity benefit fraud and focuses public perceptions of responsibility for Incapacity Benefit levels on *claimants* rather than problems in lack of labour market demand, economic policies or discrimination. The government's own review in 2001 revealed that cases of fraud in Incapacity Benefit are very low, stating that incidences occurred so infrequently among their sample the exact figures could not be determined, but,

“it is estimated that the amount of overpayment is less than £19m, i.e. less than 0.3% of all expenditure on cases in receipt of these rates of IB. Similarly, it is estimated that the percentage of all IBST(H) and IBLT cases that are fraudulent is less than 0.5%.” (ONS, 2001: 8.33).

Ten years later a recent government report from 2010-11 has revealed only £20m in Incapacity Benefits was lost to fraud, ie. Only £1 million more than the 2001 figure. It recorded a percentage decrease in the amounts on benefit overpaid (including by official and customer error) from 2.8% in 2009/10 (£170m) to 2.4% in 2010/11 (£130m) (DWP

Information Directorate, 2011). Only one newspaper, The Guardian reported on this during the period under examination.

In contrast to tabloid coverage, The Guardian devoted more space to the criticisms voiced by disability groups and gave real life accounts of people affected by these cuts, demonstrating their living costs and impact of the cuts (Ramesh, 14 February 2011). This can be seen in Figure 11 (right), and more recent coverage detailing the affects of cuts on those with mental health conditions. One such article gave voice to real-life accounts, following a study by the charity MIND, which revealed that “three-quarters of people it surveyed said the prospect of a work capability assessment had made their mental health worse and 51% said it had left them with suicidal thoughts” (Taylor & Domokos, 31 May 2011). Another article points out that the assessment process “fails to appropriately take account of those with mental health issues and fluctuating conditions” and points to a discriminatory labour market that is already struggling

to provide adequate work for nondisabled people (Patrick, 13 October 2010). These real-world needs of disabled people are mentioned far less in the tabloid press, as noted above.



Figure 11: “This Man’s Doctor told him not to Work because of Heart Disease. But benefit officials made him take two tests to see if he was fit enough. His family thinks the stress killed him” in *The Guardian* (Gentleman, 23rd February 2011).

	2004-5	Oct 2010- Jan 2011	March- April 2011	All 2010- 2011
Sun	18.8% (19/101)	12.2% (24/197)	27.0% (33/122)	17.9% (57/319)
Mirror	22.5% (31/138)	18.6% (38/204)	27.8% (32/115)	21.9% (70/319)
Express	22.1% (32/145)	11.6% (31/268)	17.0% (25/147)	13.5% (56/415)
Mail	14.3% (20/140)	16.9% (22/130)	16.9% (11/65)	16.9% (33/195)
Guardian	31.2% (59/189)	29.6% (64/216)	24.2% (24/99)	27.9% (88/315)
All Tabloids	19.5% (102/524)	14.4% (115/799)	20.3% (91/449)	16.5% (206/1248)

Figure 12: Proportion of articles which referred to themes of Discrimination/Marginalisation

It is notable that the 'Discrimination or Marginalisation' category remained strong as a proportion of Guardian articles across the period of study – from 31.2% in October-January 2004-5, to 29.6% in the same 2010-11 sample. In contrast, across this same period the proportion of tabloid articles which mentioned discrimination or marginalisation of disabled people fell from 19.5% to 14.4%, the greatest fall occurring in The Express (from 22.1% to 11.6%). In March-April 2011, as the revelations about the cuts progressed, The Guardian figure fell slightly. It was now a prominent category in 24.2% articles, at a time when papers such as The Sun, The Mirror, and The Express began to include a higher proportion of articles of this nature (The Sun: 27%, The Mirror: 27.8% and The Express: 17% - see Figure 12, above). These themes were also picked up by broadsheet newspapers not included in the sample, such as the Independent and the Glasgow Herald. In May 2011 for instance, the Herald argued that on-going Coalition policy changes constituted a 'War Against the Disabled' (See Figure 13 below), and highlighted figures by the Citizens Advice Bureau that disabled people must wait up to nine months to appeal a decision (Alan, 15 May 2011). Disabled people have

been forced onto the defensive and charities have sought to increase the power of their argument by working together to voice their interests, for example through the 'Disability Benefits Consortium' (<http://www.disabilityalliance.org/dbc.htm>).



Figure 13: 'War against the disabled' in *Glasgow Herald* (Alan, 15th May 2011).

Disability charities and Justice Select Committee MP's have further argued that Coalition plans to cut civil legal aid – for welfare benefits, unemployment tribunals and debt advice – will make it hard for disabled people to appeal a decision about their benefits (See Inclusion London, 19 January 2011 & Commons Select Committee, 30 March 2011). The Guardian was more likely to mention social and legal reforms, such as these cutbacks in legal aid, affecting disabled people during March-April 2011 (dominant theme in 6.1% of articles). But in October-January 2010-11, The Mirror mentioned such developments more than other papers (dominant in 4.4% of its articles). By comparison, across both periods in 2010-11, The Sun mentioned 'social and legal reforms' prominently in just one article.

Interestingly, the data revealed variation between the tabloid articles according to disability, with some disabled claimants more likely to be portrayed as 'deserving' than others within the coverage; predominantly those with 'physical and sensory' impairments. Mental health was mentioned in only eight of the 25 'deserving' articles which mentioned a disability in October-January 2004-5, a figure that dropped to 2/30 in October-January 2010-11. Mental illnesses and conditions which are otherwise 'hidden' (such as chronic pain), or socially 'unsympathetic'

(such as HIV/AIDS, addiction or obesity), are of particular interest regarding their representation by tabloid newspaper articles in which attacks on the 'undeserving' are prominent. References to STD's were less common in 2004-5 and it is important to note that rights under the Disability Discrimination Act were only extended to include HIV from point of diagnosis in 2005 and there may have been some lack of awareness/acceptance during this period of HIV as a 'disability' (Disability Rights Commission, December 2005). Despite this legislation, articles from 2010-11 were more likely to cite obesity, addiction and STD's in narratives about 'undeserving' claimants. One article in The Express argues that "£300,000 was paid to 90 people who claimed that coughs stopped them taking a job" (Shipman, 28 December 2010).

Visual Nature of the Disability

According to DWP data from May 2007 on the medical diagnoses of incapacity claimants, 40% of men and 43% of women had 'mental' or 'behavioural' conditions (including stress, depression and addiction problems) (quoted in Beatty & Fothergill, 2010: 9). Physical injuries, particularly those inflicted through events such as war, or accidents (See Figure 14, below-right), while more frequently associated with the 'undeserving' theme, continued to be mentioned in the small number of articles mentioning the 'deserving' claimant across 2004-5 and 2010-11 (occurring in 17/25 deserving articles that mentioned a disability in 2004-5 and 28/30 such articles in the comparable three months in 2010-11). In one case, when the means testing of war pensions meant some were denied pensions credit, the case of these disabled 'war heroes' was taken up by The Express, as a 'deserving' case, in their strong attack of New Labour (Walker & Dixon, 23 November 2004). References to learning disabilities were notable in their absence from this debate. Yet it was found that 'depression' and 'stress' - where the severity of the condition cannot be visually demonstrated - were often portrayed as unworthy of benefit or not mentioned at all. By March and April 2011 the intensity of the debate over specific conditions appeared to be heightened, the number of times conditions were mentioned in relation to 'undeserving' arguments increased dramatically from 39 in 2004-5 and 58 in 2010-11 to 83 times in a two month period, largely due to a substantial increase in references to 'mental health' as 'undeserving' (40). This was mainly in The Express and The Sun; The Sun article by Kavanagh, mentioned above for instance singled out "the ones who use

fake backaches, drug dependency and fantasy depression as excuses to sit around with their hands out” (4 April 2011). Specific disabilities were mentioned in relation to ‘deserving’ arguments 40 times in March-April 2011, compared to 28 times in 2004-5 and 30 in October-January 2010-11. People with a mental health problem were defended 12 times.

Labour Force Survey Data from 2001 contrasts with this image; it found that while the ‘want work’ rates for all disabled people were strong (52%), this same figure was far higher with just people with mental health problems (78% of those with “depression” or “bad nerves”, and 86% of those with “mental illness, phobia, panics”) (DWP, Spring 2001: 5). The data revealed that a *larger* proportion of people with a mental health problem had a desire to work than among disabled people in general, figures the TUC argues may underestimate the problem (October 2004: 10).

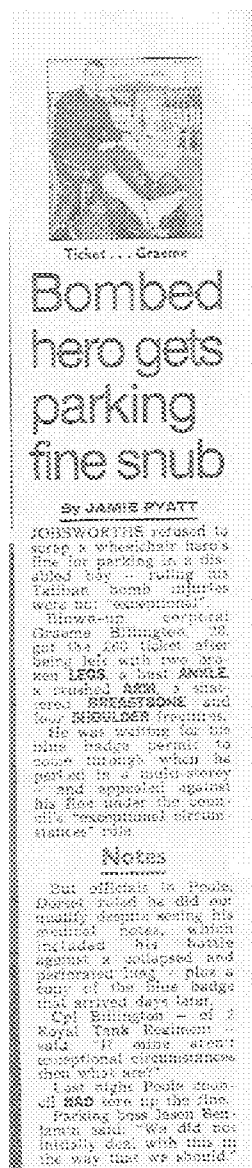


Figure 14: ‘Bombed Hero Gets Parking Fine Snub’ in *The Sun* (Pyatt, 8th March 2010).

The Daily Mail, in an article attacking “benefits Britain” and its “something for nothing culture”, presents as its evidence the “£1.8 Billion” of the incapacity budget that went to people “with stress,

depression and anxiety”, calling it “the biggest growth area for claims” (28 December 2010). It is noteworthy that The Sun reader quoted above, who wrote in defence of Blair’s policies in 2004, felt they were not a threat to “genuine claimants” as “he is targeting those with back pain and stress who are possibly able to work” (Douse, 22 October 2004).

Yet often tabloids such as The Daily Mail, The Mirror, and The Sun skirted over details about a claimant’s background which might provide context and understanding of a particular case, in order to make ‘scrounging’ seem ubiquitous and encompass disability cases into other worklessness; as in the following examples:

‘Stress’

Disability claimant Mike Blake was branded “Sponger Dad” by The Sun (17 November 2004) and described by The Mirror as “Britain’s laziest Dad” (17 November 2004). These papers do not even acknowledge any reason he had been claiming incapacity benefit or details of his life. The Mirror instead points to payments he received being due to his “drink problem” (17 November 2004). However, buried in a longer article in the Daily Mail, which paints a similar ‘undeserving’ picture is the detail that Blake was “taken into care at nine and by the time he was 15 had lived in 30 to 40 different foster homes”, contributing to his social/personal difficulties which he has managed to bring under control in order to dedicate proper care to his own family (Mills, 17 November 2004). He was claiming benefits due to ‘stress’, it states (Mills, 17 November 2004).

The Mail article however, is carefully framed, its opening lines dismissing any notion in the reader that he might not be just like any other man of his age: ‘stress’ is not a serious condition, but something experienced by “any father of six” (Mills, 17 November 2004). Such coverage can have a serious impact on how its targets and other people with mental health issues are treated. The Mirror, in an otherwise similar article, characterised by attack mentions “hate mail” Blake has received. He is quoted as saying “I want to work” and “I received some really upsetting letters saying the most horrible things about me. One letter even said I should be castrated” (Smith, 17 November 2004). Philo, in ‘Message Received’ found that “media representations were [...] a very powerful influence on beliefs about the nature of mental illness” (1999: 55). Philo further points out that the Press Complaints Commission code of

conduct drawn up in 1998 specifies that “...the press must avoid prejudicial or pejorative reference to [...] any physical or mental illness or disability” (quoted in Philo, 1999: 60).

‘Pain’

In a further example, we can compare the cases of two claimants across the sample of tabloids on the same news day in December 2004. Both had been deemed ‘undeserving’ of their benefits by the DWP. In both cases the articles discussed incapacity benefit claimants who, despite continued pain, had had their payments revoked after treatments had enabled them to function well enough to engage in competitive sports. All the newspapers came out in support of the “courage” (Daily Mail; 4 December 2004) of a “brave” disabled teenage footballer (an amputee with a prosthetic limb). The Express saw him as “battling” his condition and “inspiring” to others (Moriarty, 4 December 2004). Subsequent letters pages reflected this, arguing that efforts to overcome the condition and remain active should be commended, and benefits not revoked in such cases.

However, a golfer with arthritis is described very differently by the Daily Mail; as a “fraudster” who was “cheating” the system (Finney, 4 December 2004). The Mirror offers up a similar appraisal, calling him a “greedy fraudster” (Mulchrone, 4 December 2004). Yet at times the condition of this “benefits cheat” (Broster, 4 December 2004) had been so severe as to require hospitalisation and use of a wheelchair. The same press supported his conviction, brought on the grounds that he did not inform the DWP about improvement in his condition or the ‘regularity’ of his golf. Yet, in *neither* this case nor that of the footballer did the claimants inform the DWP about improved mobility. The Daily Mail (Finney, 4 December 2004) also fails to report the statement (included in The Express) by the Golfer’s legal council that his condition was “extreme”, he was “still ill” and had only been able to play with the aid of painkillers (Broster, 4 December 2004). The first case concerns a child, which makes it more immediately sympathetic, with first-hand accounts drawn from the boy and his family: first-hand accounts were lacking in the other case. Yet, another issue is the visibility of both the conditions and treatments. The boy was still using crutches to walk, but the golfer’s claim of chronic pain, overcome through painkillers, is less visually

obvious. It is therefore much harder to prove in court, let alone before the media.

Framing an 'Undeserving' Claimant

Two tools were identified as frequently used in framing the news stories which defined individual cases as the 'undeserving' claimant and reinforcing statements of outright critique of the benefits system.

- Use of Pejorative Language
- Character Attacks on Claimants

Language

The first of these, pejorative language, increased in all papers between October-January 2004-5 and the same period in 2010-11. It increased from 12% of tabloid articles in October-January 2004-5 to 18% of tabloid articles from the same period in 2010-11. In The Guardian the comparable figure rose from 2.6% of articles, to 3.2%. The Mirror also increased its use of pejorative language from 4.3% to 8.8% between these two periods. Given their heavy use of the 'undeserving' theme in their articles, it is perhaps unsurprising that the papers found to use pejorative language in the highest proportion of articles were The Sun and The Express and, again, this increased in 2010-11. The Sun's use of pejorative language increased from 19% in October-January 2004-5, to 21.3% of its articles in October-January 2010-11. The comparable figures for The Express show a massive increase from 16% of its articles in 2004-5 to 25% of its articles in 2010-11. An example from the 2010-11 period Daily Express containing multiple examples of pejorative language can be seen in Figure 6 above referring to "benefit cheats" and "skivers" (Hall, 26 January 2011). The most commonly recorded pejorative words in October-January 2004-5 were as follows:

- Handout – 18 occurrences
- Scrounger – 15 occurrences
- Sicknote Culture/Society – 13 occurrences
- Cripple – 8 occurrences

Whereas the most commonly recorded pejorative words in October-January 2010-11 were:

- Scrounger – 34 occurrences

- Handout – 58 occurrences
- Workshy – 25 occurrences
- Cheats – 25 occurrences

Finally the most commonly recorded pejorative words in April-March 2011 were:

- Scrounger – 21 occurrences
- Cheats – 23 occurrences
- Dependency – 17 occurrences
- Handout – 15 occurrences
- Sponger – 15 occurrences

It is important to remember the last period is only two months, whereas the previous two samples are taken from a period of three months each. The increased use of the word 'cheats' in both 2010-11 periods is particularly noteworthy given the increased occurrence of 'benefit fraud' as a theme in relation to disability in the 2010-11 period (noted above).

In addition to tabloid terms such as 'scrounger', language used by politicians was also picked up and frequently repeated in the press for months after during both periods. For instance in 2004 Tony Blair spoke of people "languishing on benefits" (Tempest, 14 October 2004), which was then picked up and repeated 5 times in 2004-5. The reference to 'sick note culture' by Alan Johnson (DWP, 15 March 2005) and the variation 'sick note society' were popular as noted above. The Child Poverty Action Group back in 2005 thus urged "the Government not to utilise language which appears to criticise recipients of benefits" which it argues are "inflaming a tabloid feeding frenzy" over incapacity benefit recipients (CPAG, October 2005). The data demonstrates pejorative language of this kind was still commonly used by the government and picked up by the media in 2010-11. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) description of Britain as 'Sick Man of Europe' was repeated, and became "the Sick Man of the World" in The Sun (Newton Dunn, 1 December 2010). It was often quoted (11 times in October-January 2010-11) that living on incapacity benefit had become a 'Lifestyle Choice' after George Osborne's repetition of the phrase in a key interview (Wintour, 9 September 2010). More recently an alliance of 50 charities, the 'Disability Benefits Consortium' (<http://www.disabilityalliance.org/dbc.htm>) put pressure on the Government regarding their portrayal of disabled people, which they

argue is “a partial picture [that] feeds the tabloid media’s negative narrative on ‘benefits scroungers’”. They assert that “these releases in turn have an impact on the public – and therefore employers’ – perception of disability and disabled people” (Boffey, 24th July 2011). An article in the Observer (The Guardian’s sister paper, not included in our sample) quoted Jaspal Dhani, Chief Executive of the UK Disabled People’s Council who claims their language, “has led to an increase in hate crimes against disabled people, victimisation and reinforcement of very old stereotypes and prejudices” (Boffey, 24th July 2011). Dhani went on to say that in recent months he had found strangers “are surprised that as a wheelchair user I actually work” and the Consortium argue that the government should be promoting images of disabled people in work (quoted in Boffey, 24th July 2011).

Portrayals of Need & Character Attacks on Claimants

Attacks on the character of the claimant during both 2004-5 and 2010-11 October-January periods sought to portray them as wasteful or indulgent; with ‘bad habits’ such as smoking, drinking, sleeping around or having a family considered ‘too large’ (all activities ordinarily considered a matter of private conscience). For example Mike Blake (mentioned above) was described as having “an overflowing ashtray at his side” (Mills; 17 November 2004). The Sun details this recovering alcoholic’s former intake as “72 bottles of beer a day”, a likely exaggeration, and he is vilified for having a “sixth kid” (The Sun, 17 November 2004). In one article a physically disabled single mum is described as follows “With four youngsters, aged 9 months to 14 years from three different fathers, she *admits* she will be viewed as ‘Public Enemy Number One’ by many” [our emphasis] it goes on to demonstrate that, despite this, even she recognises that disabled people should not be living on benefits (Brooks, 21st October 2010). Vikki Ledger, who has depression, is similarly condemned because she has children from “four different fathers”, a detail irrelevant to her claim (Moore; 8 December 2004). Her request to move to a house big enough to ease the overcrowding in which her children were living was described as the actions of one of the “feckless types” who are bringing the country “to its knees” (Moore; 8 December 2004). As we have noted, ‘undeserving’ portrayals such as this increased in articles from 2010-11, and are likely also to have had greater impact in the overall picture since this was

accompanied by a decrease in sympathetic accounts of disability and articles focussing on the 'deserving' claimant during the period.

Recently, by contrast the case of Chelsea pensioner Elaine McDonald, a "battling ballet star" with an OBE and touch of class and celebrity was taken up by the Daily Mail as a highly deserving 'prima ballerina' denied adequate overnight care support by the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (Doughty & Fagge, 7 July 2011). The article attacks 'cutbacks' and she is quoted saying "I have paid my dues since I was 16 – I am not a scrounger. But now I need care and that is being denied me." (Doughty & Fagge, 7 July 2011)⁸. Another interesting counterpoint here is the celebrity case of 'Wagner' from X-Factor, who was in receipt of incapacity benefit for an old sports injury. Wagner became a very visible figure around which a media crusade against the 'undeserving claimant' could be focussed and fought. Very little voice was given to Wagner himself, and the 'scrounger' narrative of the articles were frequently linked to wider Coalition and media claims to generalise from his case to other incapacity benefit claimants (See Newton Dunn, 1 December 2010).

⁸ Nevertheless Elaine McDonald lost her appeal against Kensington and Chelsea when it went before the Supreme Court in July: <http://www.inclusionlondon.co.uk/londons-richest-borough-denies-human-rights-to-disabled-woman>

Audience Reception Analysis

This section presents the key findings from the focus groups and individual interviews which were carried out in June, July and August 2011.

The first section examines the respondent's views on how the media is currently covering disability. It then moves on to explore how this coverage is impacting on their views about disability and disabled people and finishes with a section looking at their views on benefits and benefit claimants and current government policy in the area.

How is disability reported in the media?

In the first section of the focus group the participants were asked to reflect on how they thought disability was being reported in the media. We also asked if the participants could tell us what they thought would be a typical story on disability in the newspapers at the moment. In general these findings coincided with the findings of the content analysis and three key themes emerged in this section: benefit fraud, equality and services for disabled people. In three out of the five focus groups the first stories that were mentioned were around disability and benefits and in particular on benefit fraud. Other themes mentioned, but less prominently, included the Paralympics, disability hate crimes and harassment of disabled people, articles that discuss the experiences of living with a disability and medical and scientific interventions.

Typical comments on the three most prominent and key themes included, on benefit fraud:

I'd say stories like 'Fiddler on the Roof', you know the story about the slater who was claiming incapacity benefit

There's a lot of negative stuff that's in the media about benefits the now, that's the first thing that comes to my mind.

I think it's all benefits. There was one that's just done a marathon and he was claiming that he could barely even walk and that's dishonest.

On equality

Everyone has a fair chance, whether it's applying for a job or whether it's disabled access in a bar or restaurant

There is lots on access and stuff like that, there have been a lot of changes on this lately.

And on access to services:

There's stuff on benefits cuts, it's the pensioners and stuff, not getting what they need because of cuts.

Stories about dementia and care givers and not getting enough care and help.

Of all the topics discussed benefit fraud was, however, seen as the most dominant topic to be found in the media and this switch was seen by many as a relatively recent occurrence:

There is more focus on benefits than there used to be, much more now than in the last few years.

Only one group, a group made up of professionals who read either the Guardian or the Independent, did not describe benefit fraud or see it as a major part of the media coverage on disability. Most of the articles read by this group were felt to be on access to services and the impacts that the cuts will have on disabled people. In the focus groups and in discussions with disabled people The Guardian received a certain amount of praise, and its coverage was felt by them to be 'good, but not typical'.

Almost all the disabled people we spoke to felt that there was a great deal of negative and unbalanced coverage of disability both in the printed media and elsewhere. These participants reported that they felt there had been a change in the way that disability was covered from one where patronising 'triumph over tragedy' descriptions predominated to a focus on disabled people as scroungers'. One described how for her the shift had simply amplified

‘all the same themes of old – disabled people as dole bludgers and disabled people as victims’.

One respondent described an ‘open season’ on disabled people on benefits and other respondents linked this to other issues such as a description of older people ‘being a drain on resources’.

One of the disabled respondents commented:

The media portrays disabled people as benefit cheats time and time again. The stories that seek to create scapegoats for society’s ills are what sells newspapers.

All of the media commentators we spoke to were clear that there had been a change in the way that disability was being reported. One described what he called ‘a change in the rhythm and the tone’ while another talked about ‘the demonizing of disabled people’. One of the disabled participants commented on how ‘certain sections of the media have taken great delight in finding one case – the one legged roofer syndrome – and because they find one person who is a cheat, then all people are cheats’. This she felt was what was driving the agenda.

The idea that the media ‘like’ to report benefit fraud for commercial reasons was also mentioned in some of the other focus groups:

A woman in the media last week, she’d done the government out of thousands of pounds and she’s been caught skydiving. And the media like they love those sort of stories, they love writing about that sort of thing, they are in the paper all the time.

The tabloids love to run these stories that play against the equality thing.

And

It’s only news when someone does defraud it, deserving claimants don’t get into the paper I suppose.

It was felt, particularly by disabled people themselves but also by others, that such portrayals were related to the current political agenda:

There was quite a lot because of what is happening in Westminster, the cuts in education, in health and in welfare.

By demonising disabled people it was argued, particularly by disabled people themselves, it has become possible to legitimise future benefit cuts, and such tactics were described as a means of 'softening up' the public.

Other reasons for the change included the fact that, as one participant said, disability equality and disability rights are no longer news and the agenda has moved on. Equality is old news.

Views on Disabled People

In the light of our findings in relation to the changes in the way disability is being presented and reported in the media we were interested in trying to find out if or how this change had impacted on and effected people's views of disability and benefits. This topic was a major element of the focus groups and one of the questions we asked the groups to consider was what they thought the percentage of people who were fraudulently claiming disability benefits was. The responses varied from 'about 10%' right up to 70%. The following is a typical example of the responses we received to this question:

Informant 1: I'd say half

Informant 2: Yeah, pretty high

Informant 3: Nearer 70%

Informant 4: Yeah I think it's more than half

When asked to justify where they got their figures from respondents talked about both newspaper articles (for example the informant above who estimated fraud to be at 70% cited the article in the *Daily Express*

discussed earlier in the report) but also referred to their own experiences, with almost all claiming that they knew people who were fraudulently claiming one form of disability benefit or another:

You know people who do it, we've got a neighbour who does it.

People talked about those they knew who they believed were fraudulently claiming benefits and many felt that it was very easy to get benefits on the grounds of disability and felt that this was part of the problem. The following exchange is typical:

Participant A: It's really easy to fake symptoms. Or even bad backs

Participant B: That's the biggest one isn't it, bad back

Participant C: And if you want to defraud then ... people know don't they, they know what to say and how to get round the system, so there's a big increase in people knowing how to defraud the system

However, it was not as simple as this: people did not just accept media messages, they also challenged them and often held two competing ideas in their head at the same time. Almost all those we spoke to had direct experience of disability either through a close family member or close friends, many of whom had tried to get benefits and had failed. One participant for example talked about how hard it had been for her mother to get any benefits and another described the difficulties her partner had faced in trying to get access to the services he required,

This was a view shared, not surprisingly, by all the disabled participants and they all talked about how difficult it was to get benefits. One of the participants described the benefits system as, 'going through a minefield, to get a pittance that sustains you just above the poverty line'. Applying for DLA was they felt 'incredibly detailed and incredibly intrusive'. Some of the assumptions being made are 'quite worrying' and some of the questions on the form 'horrific, really'.

Disabled people also expressed significant anger at some of the press reporting and at the accusations linking disabled people with benefits, scrounging and fraudulent claims.. A number of disabled people

suggested that there was a major issue of disabled people not receiving what they do need. Not only, they argued, was there 'huge unmet need', a great deal of people who were entitled to benefits were not receiving the level of support they required and this was a bigger scandal than fraud. Some of the nondisabled people also made this point, particularly those with personal experience of disability. Disabled people also emphasised that fluctuating conditions can make the process of applying for benefits significantly more difficult, and accusations of fraudulence more likely. It is not uncommon for example for people to be able to walk one day and the next be unable to leave the house.

Views on Benefits and Benefit Claimants

We specifically asked participants why they thought that the numbers on incapacity benefit or its equivalent had increased from roughly 700,000 people in the 1970's to today's 2.6 million. Many reasons were given including: the 'job situation; shifting of people from unemployment benefit to incapacity benefit'; more people 'knowing the system; knowing how to do it'; rises in the cost of living; the rising population; new conditions; better advice, increases in the number of people with mental health problems; and an increase in the number of disabled people living longer and living in the community. One of the disabled respondents pointed out that Incapacity Benefit was mostly claimed in areas of high unemployment and deprivation, which can affect physical and mental well-being. Many of the responses from the focus groups show a high level of understanding about the complexity of disabled peoples' lives and many were able to provide reasons for the growth in the numbers claiming benefit. This level of complexity is surprising given that it is almost entirely absent from the mainstream press.

There was however a great deal of anger at what was felt to be the large numbers of people fraudulently claiming benefit.

Makes you angry for people who work full time and there are loads of people who are scamming it...I mean when you've been scrimping and scrapping and yer man's not too well, you know what I mean?

They get the best of everything...Because they're getting their rent paid....They've learned the system. You know there are people getting Chinese deliveries every night and you can't afford it

It does get your back up, I mean if you're working and stuff, you get a free car if you've got DVLA (sic)

I have three jobs, two cleaning jobs, one in the morning and one at night. Why should I work and others get it for nothing?

All those we spoke to claimed to have first hand knowledge of people who were fraudulently claiming benefit. However the way that disability benefit fraud is being represented in the media is clearly having an impact on the way that disabled people are being received and represented. So for example the following participant described her father's situation:

Most of the time it is this negative stuff, like my dad he's disabled and like there are people who are scamming it, but he isn't and he is embarrassed to tell people he's on benefits. He doesn't want to tell people that he is going on holiday or something because he feels people might think he is taking the piss. He's got that place over there because he was in an accident and he got compensation.

We asked the focus groups for their views on the report by Scope and other campaigners which suggested that Britain's tabloid newspapers should take some of the blame for stirring up hatred against disabled people because of the way they vilify people on welfare⁹. The informants all distanced themselves from these ideas, stating that it was not disabled people they are angry with, it was those who are fraudulently claiming benefit. As one put it:

I don't know any disabled people who are, I just know able bodied who are frauding.

This is a similar line to that taken in the newspaper articles described above, where journalists would always include lines such as 'there are

⁹ <http://www.disabilityhatecrime.org.uk/index.php/component/content/article/1-latest-news/165-hate-crimes-against-britains-disabled-on-the-rise>

some disabled people who need and deserve support'. There was however some ambiguity here and people were reluctant to specify how fraudulent claimants could be separated from the genuine. When we asked how you could tell there was a general lack of comment. People were very aware of hidden impairments, particularly mental health problems,

Just because you can walk it does not mean you are not disabled.

Many of the groups described depression as the 'new bad back' but they were on the whole reluctant to stigmatise or single out mental health as an issue. Again there was a great deal of support for those 'who had a real problem' and provided they had a genuine mental health problem they were not seen as 'scounders' or frauds.

Despite the many criticisms of the benefit systems it was clear from all of the groups we talked to that there is still a general belief that the state should support disabled people:

If you're genuinely disabled you should be entitled to it, we give the money to Greece, to the rest of the world we should give it to those who can't work.

It's ok for us, sitting here fine and fit, but it could happen to us to any of us.

There are the thousands, the tens of thousands who are not entitled to it, they're robbing the people who are disabled.

The key issue here was the separation out of those they saw as 'genuine' or 'real' cases, who deserved support and help from those they considered less deserving. There was a strong idea of the notion of deserving/nondeserving categories in all of the focus groups. Some people for example separated out people with addictions, people with mental health problems and obesity as 'less deserving cases':

a large number of drug addicts get money under these categories and I don't think they public believe them to be disabled

Some of these ideas, when raised by members of the focus groups were challenged by other participants and there was also some support expressed for people with addictions. One of the disabled participants described these issue as 'an irrelevance' while others pointed to the fact that there was a large number of disabled people who did not claim the benefit they were entitled to:

There may be hundreds who are claiming fraudulently, but there are many thousands who should be claiming and are not getting what they need'.

Views on Government Policy

The final section of this report looks at people's views on government policy. There was some sympathy expressed for the government's current approach to reducing the benefit bill, which many thought was too high. Nobody expressed any sympathy for fraudulent claimants and it was felt that any policy that aimed to reduce the number was a good thing. For example some of the participants spoke approvingly of the new tests for ESA and the work of ATOS:

It's a fairly obvious but fair way of cutting away the chancers, you get a private company that are profit driven there is only one that it is going to go.

However there was again some ambiguity as people also felt that these tests might be going too far and that some who deserve benefit might not be getting it:

I read recently they were discussing individual cases, the tests that you run through, the new company are like really, really strict compared top what it was earlier, there are now many people who are not getting what they deserve.

Concern was also expressed that those who were truly deserving may not be getting the support that they currently need and that many of the government's cuts will unfairly attack disabled people and that many disabled people do not receive the benefits or support that they deserve or need. This was a view very strongly expressed by many of the disabled participants, many of whom were very suspicious of the ATOS

tests and other government initiatives introduced to reduce benefit claimants. Many described how this was affecting them and their own wellbeing, so one told us:

'I seem to be accused annually of fraud, even though there has been no evidence (or committing) of fraud in over 20 years of claims. One investigation went on for nine months, with interviews taking place under police caution and on tape, etc. Charges were dropped, though I only found out because I chased the agency... It turned out a member of staff had misread something on the file, so there had never been a case to answer. I had three months in paid work a few years ago and couldn't believe how much lighter I felt, that I didn't have to look over my shoulder all the time. It's not that I am fraudulent; it's that the law is so complicated that I have been misadvised by benefits staff; the fear of being caught out (and presumed guilty) is something I have to live with every day.'

Concerns were also raised about cuts to legal aid and that these would make it more difficult for disabled people to defend themselves when their benefits were under attack. One suggestion, made by more than one of the disabled participants, was that many disabled people avoided asking to have their benefits reviewed, for fear they would have them removed altogether, and were receiving less than they were entitled to as a result.

Conclusion

This report presents a strong body of evidence to suggest that there has been a significant change in the way that disability is being reported in much of the press in the United Kingdom today. The content analysis clearly demonstrates that there has been a large increase in the number of articles in which disability is the key theme and that this has been accompanied by a significant shift in the emphasis and in the way that the articles are being reported. These findings are also supported by the audience reception analysis. This change in the frequency, content and tone of the articles in 2010/11 when compared to a similar period in 2004/5 marks a new approach to disability. There has been a shift from an approach with a largely patronising portrayal of disabled people – where disabled people were mainly presented as tragic but brave individuals – to one where the predominant focus has been on disabled people as scroungers.

The detailed drivers for these changes are hard to identify and complex. Three of the newspapers we surveyed are strong supporters of the Coalition Government and these papers have all expressed support for the spending cuts introduced as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review to tackle the Budget deficit. The fact that they are much more reluctant to criticise the current government's policies on disability compared to similar attempts introduced by the last Labour government would suggest that their apparent support for disabled people was at that time contingent. They were, it could be argued, more interested in using disabled people as a means to attack the Labour government than they were in actually supporting disabled people.

The vitriolic approach adopted by articles in some of the papers today and the way they have reported disability and disabled people in the period following the Comprehensive Spending Review adds further weight to these claims. Much of the coverage in the tabloid press is at best questionable and some of it is deeply offensive. The increased focus on benefit fraud with outlandish claims that over 70% of people on disability benefits are frauds is an example of this type of reporting. These claims are made overwhelmingly without evidence and at no point are the media reporting the very low levels of fraud that occurs overall in relation to these benefits. We would further cite the use of pejorative language, the failure to explore the impact of the proposed

cuts on disabled people's quality of life, the reluctance to criticise government policy on these issues and the frequent representation of some disabled people as undeserving of benefits as potentially contributing to what could become a highly inflammatory situation. While there is as yet no direct evidence to support the claim that these reports are leading to the reported increases in hate crimes, newspapers should take much greater care in this area. The increased pejorative coverage of disability may have a long term effect and further work will be needed to monitor this.

The impacts these changes have had on the way that disability is perceived by the population is difficult to determine precisely. Many of the participants had very complex and often conflicting views. Many, for example, believed that there was a high level of fraud but all participants also had personal knowledge of friends or family members who were in receipt of a disability benefit and all talked about how hard it had been for them to obtain that benefit. On the other hand they also knew, or claimed to know, people who were committing benefit fraud. All of the research participants made a clear distinction between those who deserved to receive benefits and those who did not and while they were very quick to vilify fraudulent claimants they were also, in the main, very supportive of disabled people. This could be expressed as: disabled people are not fraudsters and fraudsters are not disabled people.

Disabled people themselves are feeling the effects of this coverage and it is impacting on their own feelings of security and safety. There was a great deal of concern among the disabled participants about the effects that upcoming benefit changes will have on their quality of life, on their ability to participate and also on their acceptance by non-disabled people.

The last 20 years have seen major changes in the way that society treats disabled people. Not only is disability now recognized as an equality issue but it is part of the new Single Equality Act (2010) and as such has equal footing with other groups facing discrimination on grounds such as gender, ethnicity and sexual orientation. Recent changes, representing many years of campaigning by disabled people, have culminated in arguably some of the most advanced equality legislation in the world and key elements such as the Equality Duty place very high expectations on public sector bodies. The UN Convention on the Rights of People

with Disabilities has been signed and ratified. No longer are disabled people expected to live their lives in institutions as a matter of course. There is (for the moment) a presumption that disabled children will be educated in a mainstream school, while direct payments and other forms of self-directed support are now a well established part of community care packages. Put simply, disabled people can expect to be included in the mainstream in most aspects of their lives to a hitherto unknown degree.

This progress is not set in stone, however. In particular, it must be stressed that progress on legislation and rights stands in contrast to a relative failure to transform institutions and institutional practices. On the one hand, equality for disabled people, an idea that was once so contentious and so dubious, is now part of the equality mainstream; on the other hand, the demands for equality have yet to be realised in practice. Thus, critiques of, for example, segregated education, exclusion from work, housing, denial of family life, of the right to sexual expression, to form relationships and to be parents, which appeared so incendiary not so long ago, are now widely endorsed. However this change in attitudes has by no means done away with these practices; whilst there has been a change in the way that we talk about disability, disabled people themselves still face widespread discrimination in their day to day lives. In their recently published triennial review, *How Fair is Britain?*, the Equality and Human Rights Commission provide a substantial body of evidence to support this claim and show how, despite over 15 years of anti-discrimination legislation disabled people are still considerably disadvantaged when compared to their nondisabled peers.

The tenuous and contingent nature of the progress experienced by disabled people suggests that these gains can be easily lost or withdrawn. There is a danger that much of the reporting that we discuss in this report could lay the groundwork for the removal of some of the support structures and processes that are currently in place. This fear was expressed openly in one of the focus groups of disabled people and is one that the press should take seriously. By simply replicating the government's position on disability and disability benefit without checking either their statistics or the basis on which the claim is made the partisan approach they adopt has the danger of further adding to the oppression disabled people are experiencing.

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Appendix 1: Coding Schedule

ARTICLE

Article number _____

Headline: _____

Article page number: _____

Section (if stated): 1.News 2.Features 3.Society 4.Home 5.Leader 6.Letters
7.Education
8.Opinion 9.Jobs & Money 10. City 11. Sport 12. Special 13. Weekend 14. Obit 15.
T.V

Media: 1. Sun. 2. Mirror. 3. Express 4. Mail 5. Guardian

Edition _____

Region: 0. N/S 1. UK 2. National 3. Scotland 4. NI 5. Highlands 6. Lancashire 7. Yorkshire 8.
TT 9. Wales

Date: (DD.MM.YY) _____

Pejorative language: 0.None 1. Scrounger 2. Hand-out 3. Work shy 4. Sponger 5. Lay-
about 6. Feckless

7. Sicknote society/culture 8.Sick man of Europe 9. Cheats 10.
Other _____

11. Lifestyle Choice 12. Languish 13. Shameless(ly) 14. Dependency
15. 'Milking it'

16. 'On the sick'

Specify Disability 0. N/S 1.Physical and Sensory Impairments 2.Mental Health 3. Learning
Difficulties

CATEGORY/REFERENCES

Political issues:	Prominent in headline? 0. No 1. Explicit 2. Implicit	Level of Prominence in Article scale of 2-6 2 being dominant theme 6 being bare mention	Reference made by 1.Politician (MP, spokesperson, Civil Servant) 2.Disabled individual 3.Family/carer 4.Member of public 5.Charity 6.Employer 7.Editorial/comment piece 8.Medical expert 9.Factual article 10. Other expert 11. Celebrity 12. Legal Expert	PARTY 0.None 1.Lab 2.Con 3.Lib 4.Coal 5.SNP 6.Green 7.UKIP 8.SSP 9.SDLP 10.DUP 11.SFein 12.UUP 13.Other
1. Attack of past Labour govt.				
2. Attack of past Cons. govt.				
3. Attack of contemporary Labour govt.				
4. Attack of Coalition govt.				
5. Defence of past Labour govt.				
6. Defence of past Cons. govt.				
7. Defence of contemporary Labour govt.				
8. Defence of Coalition govt.				
9. Discussion of people encouraged onto benefits as result of deliberate govt. policy				
10. Big Society helping disabled				
11. Big Society not helping disabled				
12. Suggesting alternatives to both existing services AND/OR government reforms				
13. Defining disability benefit claimant(s) as undeserving.				

Explicit or implicit				
14. Defining disability benefit claimant(s) as deserving Explicit or implicit				
15. General financial burden of disability benefits on state/taxpayer - specify figure? -				

16. Stats/procedures of benefit system & its function/explaining changes (whether associated with 'opinion or not)				
17. Attack of benefit system				
18. Defence of benefit system				
Social issues:				
19. Discrimination/Marginalised				
20. Tragic outcomes				
21. Triumph over adversity				
22. Euthanasia/Right to die debate				
23. Descriptive information of specific disability conditions (not cures/treatments/charities)				
24. Real life experience of carers/family/individuals				
25. Disability as outcome of tragic event (medical issues/accident/war/neglect)				
26. Cures or therapies/treatment				
27. Facilities (Individual/Community/National Level) and/or Resources				
				83

28. Facilities (Individual/Community/National Level) and/or Resources (inc. financial) - needed				
29. Media representation acceptable				
30. Media representation unacceptable				
31. Charity/Volunteering				
32. Antisocial behaviour by disabled person				
33. Fraud (specific case)				
34. Social/Legal reforms (not benefits) affecting the disabled.				
Other:				
35. Reference of disability without relevance				

Appendix 2: Detailed Descriptors for Coding & Analysis

- 1) Attack of past Labour govt – 2010-2011 article criticising 1997–2010 New Labour Policy/Ministers.
- 2) Attack of Past Conservative Government – Any article criticising 1979–1997 Conservative Policy/Ministers.
- 3) Attack of Contemporary Labour Government – 2004–2005 article criticising New Labour Policy/Ministers from that time.
- 4) Attack of Coalition govt – 2010-2011 article criticising current Coalition Policy/Ministers (except explicit references to Big Society)
- 5) Defence of past Labour govt – 2010-2011 article defending 1997–2010 New Labour Policy/Ministers.
- 6) Defence of Past Conservative Government – Any article defending 1979–1997 Conservative Policy/Ministers
- 7) Defence of Contemporary Labour Government – 2004–2005 article defending New Labour policy/ministers from that time.

- 8) Defence of Coalition Government – Contemporary article defending Coalition policy (Implicit or Explicit)
- 9) Discussion of people encouraged onto benefits as result of deliberate past/current government policy (Explicit reference)
- 10) Big Society policies discussed as helping disabled
- 11) Big Society policies discussed as not helping disabled
- 12) Suggesting Alternatives to both Existing Services and/or Government Reforms
- 13) Defining Disability Benefit Claimant(s) as undeserving. (Explicit or implicit)
- 14) Defining Disability Benefit Claimant(s) as deserving. (Explicit or implicit)
- 15) General Financial Burden (not specific burden of an individual/location) of Disability Benefits on State/Taxpayer – specifying figure where given.
- 16) Statistics/Procedures of Benefit system & its function/Explaining Changes (Whether associated with 'opinion' or not)
- 17) Attack of the existing benefit system or changes to it (Implicit or Explicit; General or Individual)
- 18) Defence of the existing benefit system or changes to it (Implicit or Explicit; General or Individual)
- 19) Discrimination/Marginalised (General or Individual; Implicit or Explicit; Not Benefits)
- 20) Tragic Outcome as a Result of Provision Failure (General or Individual; Must Be Severe, eg. death)
- 21) Triumph Over Adversity by Disabled (Implicit or Explicit; General or Individual)
- 22) Euthanasia/Right to Die Debate (Must be specific to disability)
- 23) Descriptive Information of Specific Disability Conditions (Not Including Cures/Treatments or Charities)
- 24) Real Life Experience of Carers/Family/Individuals (from the perspective(s) of the individual concerned and/or any other commentators).
- 25) Disability as an outcome of Tragic Event (ie. medical issues/accident/war/neglect)
- 26) Discussion or Description of Cures/Therapies/Treatment

- 27) Discussion of Facilities and/or Resources (inc. financial) at Individual/Community/National level – as not needed or already provided
- 28) Discussion of Facilities and/or Resources (inc. Financial) at Individual/Community/National level – as needed or wanted
- 29) Media representation of disability – discussed as acceptable
- 30) Media representation of disability – discussed as unacceptable
- 31) Charity/Volunteering – Discussion of activities (Must be more than bare mention of a charity organisation)
- 32) Report of anti-social behaviour by disabled person
- 33) Benefit Fraud (general and/or specific cases)
- 34) Social/Legal reforms concerning contemporary disabled/disability issues (not benefits-related) and initiated by govt/other organisations
- 35) Reference of disability without relevance to article/explanation (eg. To engender sympathy)