
Disabled by society, enabled by the legacy?

September 2012

[Dave Clements](#) , [Dr Katherine Runswick-Cole](#) and [Denis Joe](#) introduced a discussion on the changing perceptions of disability and the impact of the Paralympics.



It is widely reported that attitudes towards, and discrimination of, people with disabilities are getting worse. Institutional abuse revealed in recent scandals points to the shocking treatment some disabled people still face. The charity **Scope** argued that London's Paralympics would 'play a positive role in raising the profile of disabled people'.

[Chris Holmes](#)

, LOCOG Director of Paralympic Integration, predicted a 'step-change in attitudes towards and opportunities for disabled people'. Has society become more hostile, as campaigners claim, or are we just more sensitive about the words people use? While the games may lead to greater participation in sport, will they have any impact on wider attitudes or on participation in the public sphere? Has the treatment of people with disabilities really changed for the worse anyway? Are some people still disabled by society?



[Tanni-Grey Thompson](#) , former Paralympic athlete and member of the House of Lords, recalls: 'when I was growing up you didn't see disabled people on the streets... because they were locked away from society'. The disability rights movement played an important role in changing

things by struggling for equality, and a greater visibility for disabled people in society. People weren't disabled by their bodies but by society, said campaigners. But where today is that radical message that the disabled are as able as their able-bodied counterparts and that society needs to change?



It seems that campaigners are more inclined to fight not for access to the workplace, but for the continuation of benefits threatened by welfare reforms; not for the right of disabled people to have their say and participate more fully in public life, but for the censorship of 'offensive' comedians like Ricky Gervais and Frankie Boyle. Thompson is opposed to welfare reform because she argues that instead of having to 'prove what you can't do to get support' the welfare system 'should be about what support you need to be able to do things, so you can get a job, you can contribute, and you can pay tax, and you can be in society in a different way'. This is a welcome sentiment but how can it be realised when disabled people are increasingly portrayed as vulnerable dependents on the state tormented by abuse, rather than as go-getting political subjects able to change the world around them?

Listen again (variable quality)...

Speaker intros and most of the discussion in one go - click on the Play button: {mp3}disability-paralympic-legacy{/mp3}

Some background readings

[Attitudes towards disabled people are getting worse](#) , Scope 8 September 2011

[Let's have a proper debate about the welfare state](#) , by Brendan O'Neill, spiked 18 January 2012

[Tanni Grey-Thompson and welfare reform](#) , by Caroline Crampton, Total Politics 18 January 2012

[The Paralympic Games will help change attitudes towards disability](#) , by Chris Holmes, London 2012 Blog 27 January 2012

[Disabled by Society?](#) by Dave Clements, Huffington Post 19 February 2012

[On Autism: Who Are They Fooling?](#) by Dave Clements, Huffington Post 10 April 2012

[Is autism just another identity?](#) by Sandy Starr, spiked 23 April 2012

[Could exoskeletons help disabled people to be more active?](#) by Alex Rayner, Guardian 12 August 2012

[Behind the Paralympics, the reality for disabled people in Britain 2012](#) , by David Brindle, Guardian 20 August 2012

[Martine Wright: from 7 July victim to Paralympic athlete](#) , Guardian Sport 27 August 2012

[Disability campaigners block road in anger against Atos Paralympics sponsorship](#) , Mule 29

August 2012

[Why the Paralympics must celebrate disabled entrepreneurs](#) , by Robert Craven, Business Zone 29 August 2012

[Paralympics. It's all about the biceps, by Victoria Wright](#) , Independent 29 August 2012

[The disabled: the hardest hit?](#) by Dave Clements, 29 August 2012

[Turning the Paralympics into a political tool](#) , by Brendan O'Neill, spiked 4 September 2012

[Atos is doing a good job – as the government's flakcatcher](#) , by Zoe Williams, Guardian 5 September 2012

[Dave King: Down with the Paralympics! Down with Channel-4-liberalism!](#) Disabled People Against Cuts, 8 September 2012

Venue and Time



In the main hall of [Cross Street Chapel](#) , Cross Street, Manchester M2 1NL. If you're familiar with the area, it's diagonally opposite the Royal Exchange Stage Door.

Please arrive around 6:30pm for a prompt 6:45pm start - expected to finish before 8:30pm. **Tickets are £5**

(£3 concessions) payable in advance, and should be booked online via

Eventbrite

, or by Emailing

events@manchestersalon.org.uk

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